

## Call for book chapters

Proposed Edited Volume:

### **Food and Medicine: A Biosemiotic Perspective**

The ubiquity of food and medicines in their varied forms in everyday life may explain why they became unmissable issues in the history of sign studies. Indeed, a semiotic awareness was key in the first attempts by western physicians to formalize their art, and to this day, medical personnel still speak of *medical semiology* and *medical semiotics*. Food-related issues likewise were present in some early cultural semiological analyses of the mid-twentieth century, where adaptations of fundamental notions from structuralist linguistics to non-linguistic phenomena were instrumental in forging what came to be known as food studies. Considering the ever-evolving character of semiotics and of biosemiotics specifically, considering a keen popular interest in issues relating to food and medicines (fueled by an increasing body of interdisciplinary knowledge), it is relevant and timely that these issues be addressed in a unified book-length study set to appear in the *Biosemiotics* book series.

Our bodies interpret the molecules, enzymes, and alkaloids we intentionally and unintentionally come in contact with according to their pre-existing receptors. Once the body has identified a particular substance, it responds by initiating sequences of semiotic chains that fulfill vital functions for the organism at macro-, meso-, and micro-scales. Human ability to distill and extract the living world into highly refined foods and medicines, however, have created substances far more potent than their counterparts in our historical evolution. Many of these substances also lack certain accompanying proteins, enzymes, and alkaloids that otherwise aid digestion or protect against side-effects in active extracted chemicals. Human biology has not yet caught up with human invention of supernormal foods and medicines that may flood receptors, overwhelming the body's normal shut-off mechanisms.

Different humans react to the same foods and medicines in a variety of ways. As Paracelsus famously recognized, one person's medicine is another's poison. What are the biosemiotic mechanisms behind this? How does the standardization of diets and treatments affect biosemiotically diverse humans for the better and worse? How does biosemiosis impact the interpersonal relations that are so central to medical interventions and situations of commensality? What should we make of the blind spots biosemiotics at the intersection of food and medicine such as fasting, famine, and malnutrition? How can biosemiotics inform problems such as restricted access to medicines, and their abuse and misuse? Finally, a biosemiotic study of eating, sustenance, and medicinal interventions would not be complete without a more global, ecological perspective on the issue. The production of food and medicine also carry biosemiotic consequences, and in this sense fields and laboratories are semio-biospheres in their own right. How can biosemioticians come to terms with these networks of meaning?

This call invites a wide range of topics, including but not limited to:

- ❖ Applications and adaptations of biosemiotic theory to food and medicine

- ❖ Alternative approaches to food and medicine that (explicitly or not) rely on biosemiotic knowledge and capacities, including nonwestern approaches, comparative approaches and neglected historical figures
- ❖ Biosemiotics of disease and interactions between human hosts and nonhuman pathogens
- ❖ Humans as food for other organism; biosemiotic perspectives on food webs
- ❖ Biosemiotic perspectives on social/environmental/epidemiological determinants of health
- ❖ The biosemiotics of food/agricultural systems, sustainability and the relationship between environmental integrity and health
- ❖ Medical ethics related to biosemiotics and/or heuristics
- ❖ The formation of habits related to food and medicine; the biosemiotics of addiction; and biosemiotic analyses of the effects of foods/medicines on the brain, emotions, moods
- ❖ Structural/industrial impacts on food and medicine in relation to biosemiotics
- ❖ Bodies of different capacities (e.g., metabolic rates) and the normalization and standardization of food/medicine from a biosemiotic perspective
- ❖ Epigenetics and the biosemiotics of food/medicine
- ❖ Biosemiotic distinctions between foods, medicine, and drugs
- ❖ Self-medication with food and drugs from a biosemiotic perspective

### Timeline

To be considered for this volume, please submit the title of the proposed chapter, an abstract (500-800 words) including principal references, as well as a short author biography (250 words) specifying title(s) and affiliations by **December 30, 2018** to [alexander@dactyl.org](mailto:alexander@dactyl.org), [yhh@yogihendlin.com](mailto:yhh@yogihendlin.com) and [hope.jonathan@uqam.ca](mailto:hope.jonathan@uqam.ca). Co-authored proposals are welcome.

All abstract submissions received by December 30, 2018

Completed chapters due April 15, 2019

Requests for revisions returned to authors by May 15, 2019

Final manuscripts due July 20, 2019

### Length of final chapters

6,000 – 10,000 words

### Target Audience

This volume will be useful to biosemioticians focusing on interactions between human and other-than-human Umwelten, as well to semiotic scholars working on the book's topics. It will also be useful for sociologists and cultural studies theorists interested in a semiotic approach to the major themes of food and medicine in their fields. Philosophers of medicine and bioethicists will also find the interdisciplinary perspectives of this volume valuable. Given the book's focus on central activities of the human condition, we anticipate broad

interdisciplinary appeal to allied disciplines and the potential for course adoption in both graduate and undergraduate courses.

### Editors

V. N. ALEXANDER is Director of Dactyl Foundation, focusing on art-science research, and is currently a Fulbright Specialist applying biosemiotics and complexity sciences in evolutionary theory.

Yogi Hale HENDLIN is Assistant Professor in the School of Philosophy and faculty member in the Dynamics of Inclusive Prosperity Initiative at Erasmus University Rotterdam (Netherlands). Hendlin's work involves deconstructing the consequences of industrial epidemics and the analyzing the various channels of interspecies communication.

J. HOPE is a professor of literature and semiotics at the Université du Québec à Montréal (Canada) whose current research is devoted to nature-culture relations and the co-construction of human and other-than human worlds.

### About the Book Series

The Springer book series *Biosemiotics* draws together contributions from leading scholars in international biosemiotics, producing an unparalleled series that will appeal to all those interested in the origins and evolution of life, including molecular and evolutionary biologists, ecologists, anthropologists, psychologists, philosophers and historians of science, linguists, semioticians and researchers in artificial life, information theory and communication technology.