

Umwelt Theory and Phenomenology

August 2024 Special Issue of *Biosemiotics*

Edited by Carlo Brentari & Morten Tønnessen

Call for papers

The English term 'phenomenon' relies ultimately on the Greek root *phainein*, 'to appear'; starting from here, phenomenology has explored and continues to explore different research fields, many of which related to the domain of living beings. At its core, Jakob von Uexküll's Umwelt theory pivots on the phenomenological question: 'How do the things of the world appear to living beings?' Today, this issue is approached in different ways according to the specific nature of the considered living entities – related to the sign exchange of humans, animals, plants and fungi, and microorganisms. In the variety of its forms, phenomenology also questions the way in which human perception and semiosis approach organic life, relating it to the phenomena of the inorganic matter on the one side, and, on the other, to the cultural, social, psychological, and ethical sphere. Depending on various philosophical, cultural and religious background coordinates, the phenomenology of the living being can accentuate the separation or, on the contrary, the integration of the human form of life with respect to the natural context.

The planned special issue of *Biosemiotics* will welcome contributions that explore these and other lines of inquiry:

- **How does the natural world appear to human consciousness?** What are its distinctive phenomenological features? How can 'aliveness' be described and defined?
- Besides human consciousness, **what other agencies** develop a subjective world of experience? What are, in our and other species, the relationships between body, perception, and consciousness?
- What **connections** exist **between biosemiotics and philosophical phenomenology?** (Possible examples: the influence of Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism; the presence of the concept of Umwelt in Husserl and other phenomenologists).
- How should we understand **the interplay between different aspects of the Umwelt**, e.g. the Umwelt and the Innenwelt, in a phenomenological context?
- **How can the Umwelt theory be further developed in the context of humans**, to account in more detail, and more appropriately, for the perceptual and behavioural diversity and complexity of the human lifeworld?
- How can a **descriptive phenomenology** be developed in order to study animal behaviour and experience and/or human-animal relations and interaction?

- How can **biosemiotics interact** with other **(in a broad sense) phenomenological perspectives on animal life?** (Possible examples: Wolfgang Köhler's Gestalt psychology; Max Scheler's philosophical anthropology and Helmuth Plessner's differentiation between centric and ex-centric positionality; Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, Georges Canguilhem's, Hedwig Conrad-Martius', or Michel Henry's theory of the living; Adolf Portmann's morphology; René Girard's idea of mimetic desire; Gilbert Simondon's theory of individuation; Thomas Sebeok's zoosemiotic theory, etcetera).

- **How and to what extent can phenomenology be naturalized**, i.e. realigned with empirical sciences? How can contemporary philosophy of science contribute to this process?

- What were **Uexküll's philosophical sources of inspiration?** How can discussing them contribute to a modern understanding of the Umwelt theory as relevant for phenomenology?

The editors welcome contributions along other possible lines of inquiry as well.

Timeline

Abstracts due by June 15th, 2023

Selection of authors by June 30th, 2023

Full papers submitted by December 15th, 2023

Peer-reviews and editors' comments (I) by January 31st, 2024

Revised papers by March 15th, 2024

Editors' comments (II) and peer-reviews (II) (if needed) by April 15th, 2024

Second revision of article (if needed) by May 15th, 2024

All articles sent to production by June 1st, 2024

Published by August 2024

Abstracts between 300-500 words should be sent to *both* carlo.brentari@unitn.it and morten.tonnessen@uis.no

Final contributions of up to 9,000 words (all text included, including references) are welcome.

Biosemiotics is the official journal of the International Society of Biosemiotic Studies (ISBS) and publishes peer-reviewed interdisciplinary research investigating the myriad forms of communication and signification found in and between living systems. The journal provides a forum for discussions at the intersection of philosophy, semiotics, and biology, synthesizing semiotic and linguistic methodologies with natural scientific methods and findings to publish diverse theoretical and empirical research into the questions of how living organisms communicate and make meaning in their environments. The journal has a 1.735 IF (2021) and is ranked 20/63 in History & Philosophy of Science, and 108/830 (top 13%) in Language and Linguistics.

<https://www.springer.com/journal/12304>