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Centro
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Scienze
Semiotiche
"Umberto Eco"



DOTTORATO
IN SEMIOTICA
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CULTURA @ UNIPA



The International Association for Semiotic Studies
L' Association Internationale de Sémiotique
Asociación Internacional de semiótica
Internationale Vereinigung für Semiotik

The Senses of Sensible Processes

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Under the Auspices of the IASS-AIS

CALL FOR SEMINARS

The strength of Algirdas J. Greimas's last book, *On imperfection* (1987), lies in the author's capacity of choosing and analysing texts and discourses that allow us better understanding processes and meanings of the aesthetic experiences. There is a vast literature on this last essay by Greimas. On the one hand, it is much acclaimed for his lucid and original account of aesthetic theories in philosophy and phenomenology. On the other hand, it is attacked for the dense and fragmentary style, which is different from Greimas' usual logical and argumentative style. One of the main challenges of the book is to show that the sensible encounters with otherness are not necessarily exceptional, but take place in the everyday, in the "prose of the world" (Merleau-Ponty), and change human beings. Key moments where something arises and strikes people are pivotal for the assumption of new customs and forms of life. International scholars acknowledged this contribution, but much remains to be said. *The Senses of Sensible Processes* is a seminar that takes Greimas's perspective on the sensory experience as its starting point, as well as his empirical approach to phenomena. The aim of the seminar is advancing research into the **semiotics of the body**. In all the case studies included in *On imperfection*, the physical, cognitive and pragmatic outcomes of the experience count. In Robinson Crusoe, the dazzle of the suspension of time makes the subject waver, causes him an oblique posture of bewilderment, but also lets him imagine being a larva that one day would fly. Palomar, by Italo Calvino, at the sight of the naked bosom, initially freezes, has a flinch, is discreet upon his actions, and finally embodies an "aesthetic of grace". And while the young woman of Rilke's poem and the subject of Tanizaki's narrative text feel the unsustainability of the exorbitant and refuse both the jasmine scent and the shadow's fullness, the protagonist of Julio Cortázar's *The Continuity of Parks* dissolves and ends up totally absorbed in the world of illusion.

Representations of the real and representations of the imaginary form a whole. They cannot be any longer distinguished. A reciprocal impact of objects on subjects and of subjects on objects constitutes the pathemic invariant of aesthesis. Hence, what are the *long-term symptoms* of the aesthetic grip? Surely the body is not a monolith. Rather, it is the result of the reciprocal presupposition soul/body and it consists of movements between what occurs within, in the flesh, and what appears outwards, on the skin. Jacques Fontanille's *Soma et sema* (2004) offered a topological model, the "somatic topic", where the sensory orders are presented in layers of depth, each channel with its own figurative syntax, even if the body's perceptual regime operates through a fundamental synesthesia.

By tesauroising his systematisation and considering other semiotic paradigms on the sensible, we would stress an issue that Greimas tried to capture, but that has not been sufficiently developed: *the transformations which subjects undergo* after the aesthetic experiences.

The overarching objective of the seminar is to investigate the way people get impressed by the exalting power of some events, how they physically reproduce them in their present, as a want-to-be and have-to-be conjoined with them. Bodies, both the *Körper* and the *Leib*, are not natural things, but already culturalised, intersubjective, “social bodies” (Marrone, 2001). As such, they contribute to the constitution of animality, of humanity, dishumanity, transhumanity and subhumanity. Specific experiences, through the dynamics of smells, of silences or sounds, of tastes, of forms of touch, of sight, leave durable traces on corporeality, and establish ideologies of action for action’s sake, that the subjects protensively pursue, for better or worse. What interest us is the *effect of sense* (body, meaning and orientation), as it is torn between nostalgia and hope and that can also explain contemporary extremist behavior. Individuals give images of how and how much are fascinated, invaded, “suggested” (Paolo Fabbri) by phenomena. Live, hybrid and virtual happenings in which individuals are involved affect their senses and polarise their passions. The exploration of these somatic changes can benefit from the extension of the figurative and plastic analysis to all sensory channels, by considering, for example, the frame of a particular sound process, its dimensions, its topological structure, its eidetic and textural figures. Other tools could be useful, such as René Thom’s category of pregnancy and saliency, Viveiros De Castro’s perspectivism, the narrative and the actantial models, the modalities of wanting, having-to, being-able and particularly belief, the tensive structures, the enunciation device. On a methodological level, proponents and research groups are invited to choose specific cases studies to examine with their instruments. They will inquire body exposures that are in the public eye and that establish new aesthetics or revivals of old ones:

- the gestures and actions of the extreme right, of people invaded by doctrines that bring over their skin;
- the asceticism of individuals, who, disgusted by food consumerism, decide to fast;
- the ultras of the environmental activism, who glue themselves to artistic masterpieces or throw paint on them;
- the addicted to Fentanil, who become zombies;
- the extreme-sports enthusiasts, whose bodies’ metamorphose in relation to the natural world;
- the fanatics of body-building and of plastic surgery, so enchanted that they become unrecognisable
- media representations of bodies.

Studying the somatic manifestations of these practices means taking care of our deregulated contemporaneity. “Changing signs into gestures, to prolong diagnoses into prognoses” (A.J. Greimas, *De l’imperfection*, Fanlac, Périgueux 1987). Is this a fulfilled wish?

Official languages of these IASS-AIS Seminars: English, French, and Spanish.

Speakers are invited for IASS-AIS membership.

Our commitment to co-operation across schools results in the **SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (SIG) initiative**. Originally mooted by our former Secretary-General Jeff Bernard in the 1990s, the SIGs bring together semioticians with interests in a particular field, along with the added ingredient that **those SIGs purposely INVOLVE SCHOLARS FROM DIVERSE SEMIOTIC SCHOOLS AND VARIED LOCATIONS ROUND THE GLOBE, WITH A 25% OF EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS**. We support each group to bring their activities to a culmination in the production of **A JOINT-AUTHORED BOOK** (not an edited collection) which will cement the spirit of collaboration.

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION DEADLINE: Sunday, November 15, 2025.