

Mechademia: Second Arc
Vol. 19.1 “Semiosis/Symbiosis”
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In its broader sense, semiosis is the process through which humans interpret and give meaning to the world, allowing communication through languages, practices, media, objects, or discourses (Peirce, Morris, Greimas & Courtés). We are inescapably immersed in a web of significance that we continuously weave, tear apart, and reweave (Geertz).

Sometime in the distant past, we perceived ourselves as part of a plural world, where other living and sentient beings – be it animals or spirits, myths or ghosts, plants or ideas – could understand and make sense of the world just as we do. But when we began considering ourselves to be “modern” (Latour), we started to believe that we were the only ones who could understand and make sense of the world.

But after decades of religious secularisation, the postmodern collapse of grand narratives, and many economic, environmental, and social crises, it is increasingly difficult to recognise an emerging scheme or narrative, aside from the ever-repeating well-worn ideologies with little faith and little sense of purpose.

Yet, in this context, original worldviews emerge from outside of our vision, breaking the rhythm and segregation of our world (Greimas), shaped by human-centric paradigms. They result from accepting and including, once again, the many forms of otherness that we considered meaning-less, extra-semiotic (Lotman). Other living species (animals, plants, the planet itself), other forms of life (spirits, souls, AI), and other intangible meanings (feelings, legends, hopes, desires). Moreover, they emerge by accepting symbiosis, understood as the enduring close relationships established between different living beings or species.

Anti-specism, environmentalism, transhumanism, intersectionality, and critical heritage paradigms, have all shown us a world in which living beings cooperate and communicate to give meaning and keep the world alive. All these paradigms have been implying a different worldview, in which meaning emerges through the living interaction and communication between different life forms, species, and subjects. A space in which new meaning and purpose emerge for all of us: semiosis as symbiosis (Sebeok).

On closer inspection, for a long time popular media in Japan and Asia have been displaying similar worldviews and paradigms: by focusing on non-human characters in future worlds, or by remixing animist beliefs and myths with secularised society; by showing the post-human condition of cyborgs or pure data, or by playing with the life of objects, places, and ideas across the centuries. Above all, they tend to reflect on how we share life and meaning together. The media themselves, metaphorically, could also be seen as a complex living ecology, where assemblages of people, technology, affects, and bodies are increasingly hybridised and converging.

This volume of *Mechademia: Second Arc* seeks essays that address how new meaning-making worldviews emerge out of the interaction between different forms of life, and how indeed, even popular media themselves are entangled and propagate these dynamics. Contributions may focus on non-anthropocentric narratives and storytelling, or explore animation-driven paradigms of animism, investigate representations of the post-human condition, or folkloric or

religious worldbuilding; they may discuss the biopolitical dynamics of media ecology, or any media genre, form, or text that displays the interaction between different domains of life as the source for new paradigms of meaning-making. Contributors are also encouraged to reflect on the metaphor of symbiosis as a way in which media develop and explore new meaning, for example by investigating media hybridisation in relation to remediation and media convergence, or reflecting on the interaction between human/non-human that gives shape to a media ecology, or discussing how media self-narratives and rhetorics interact with the media industry and its biopolitical dynamics.

Authors are encouraged to be bold in applying the lenses of semiosis and symbiosis as tools to explore new paradigms, to present innovative interpretations of the systems of media popular culture, or to discuss specific texts and works under thought-provoking perspectives. Approaches that connect semiotic theories and methods with contemporary media and cultural studies are welcome.

Possible topics for this special issue include:

- Non-anthropocentric storytelling and worldbuilding
- Post-human futures and imaginaries
- Animism in animation, animated animism
- Playful and carnivalesque subversion of species, genres, and media
- Hybrid digital remediation and media convergence
- Media ecology and popular media as a biosphere
- Boundary-breaking mythic and folkloric elements in popular media
- The biopolitical dynamics of the media industry
- Narratives of ecological existentialism
- The political and sociocultural implications of symbiosis
- Togetherness, affect and anti-specism in popular culture

Other topics and approaches are also welcome.

The deadline for submission of essays for this volume is July 1, 2025. All submissions should be sent to submissions@mechademia.net. Please indicate the title of the volume you are submitting to by writing “Submission to SA19.1: Semiosis/Symbiosis” in the subject line. Submit **two copies** of your article as a Word document. One of these copies should be **anonymized**: remove the author’s name from the document properties (look under “Info” in Word) and do not include your name anywhere in the article. Named citations of your own work are acceptable, provided you do not use first-person language to discuss the work in question.

Submissions should be **5,000-7,000** words, including abstract and citations. They should follow the **Mechademia Style Guide**, which is based on the **Chicago Manual of Style**. Figures (and separately submitted captions) are limited to eight per essay; image permissions are the responsibility of authors after acceptance. Please submit your article in Word only, no PDFs. Figures are limited to 8 images and/or tables, at least 300DPI and in either TIFF or JPG formats submitted in a separate file and not embedded in the text, with captions submitted on separate Word document. The Mechademia Style Guide can be found at www.mechademia.net

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