

# **Semiotics and Communicology Around the World**

10TH World Congress of Semiotics  
La Coruña, Spain. September 22nd-26th, 2009  
*"Culture of Communication, Communication of Culture"*

## ***INTRODUCTION***

The present document is a final report on the above titled congress roundtable. It is written by me and represents only my personal views as one of the principal organizers for the roundtable. At the time of the congress, I was a serving IASS Vive President and a member of the congress Scientific Committee.

The report is divided into two parts: (1) the Roundtable Proposal submitted and accepted by the congress organizers; and (2) a copy of the program that actually took place due to the utter disorganization of the program with an incoherent schedule. Three days prior to the start of the congress, I discovered that the online version of the round table (a) did NOT contain the approved proposal, (b) incorrectly listed the roundtable organizers, and (3) listed 28 papers for presentation assigned by an unknown process to be presented in 4 hours 30 minutes (9 minutes per paper!). This was the official schedule printed in the congress Program of events. My attempts to correct the situation by e-mail proved futile.

(signed) Richard L. Lanigan [15 January 2010]

## ***(1) THE PROPOSAL***

### **Session Proposal**

#### **"Semiotics and Communicology Around the World: Toward a Science of Communication"**

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Communication is a concept that does not belong to a single science or discipline and that cannot be reduced to what happens in the field of study that institutionally we call "Com-

munication Studies". Neither can communication be solely understood as the process that describes the movement of information between senders and receivers, given that it has become an element of organization of the biological / social, a principle of complexity and cognitive processes, and recently, a standpoint for observing the world communicatively. However, despite the big efforts that have been made to define its object of study, to establish a general theory of communication or to thoroughly describe the scientific sources that lie in the base of its own history, it has not yet been possible to establish a shared epistemological criterion regarding what makes communication a particular science.

Historically, communication has been studied from the standpoint of Phenomenology, Sociology, Cybernetics, Linguistics, Philosophy, Critical Theory, Economics, Politics or Semiotics, among others. And from each one of those fields, a theory of communication has been proposed which has complicated the situation even further. Nevertheless, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century different groups and researchers around the world have embarked on a new task that consists in integrating different theories, different sciences and points of view that are found in the history of communication itself, in order to construct a new view, a science of communication, which gave birth to Communicology. Communicology is a new scientific proposal for the 21<sup>st</sup> century; a proposal that intends to lay the epistemological foundations of a communication science capable of establishing a dialogue between communication and other sciences. Thus, what is Communicology and how is it related to Semiotics?

Some of the authors from the most important research groups and centers who have begun to explore the possibilities and limits of Communicology around the world have integrated into their proposals different sciences and theories, but the vast majority have included semiotics in their research programs. On the other hand, some of these groups are part of the International Communicology Institute (ICI), an institute that gathers various groups around the world that are interested in the development of a communication science, or Communicology. Therefore, the session herein proposed intends to be a space of discussion where all those different points of view are exchanged with the purpose of recognizing how it is that Communicology has been studied, constructed and developed in different countries around the world, as well as the role semiotics has played in each case.

In synthesis, the International Communicology Institute (ICI) and the Group Toward a Possible Communicology (GUCOM) would like to invite on this session all those independent researchers, research groups or centers around the world that have worked on the development of Communicology, in order for them to expose their own proposals for a communication science, answering three central questions: What is Communicology for each one of them? What sciences integrate the proposal and how do they do it? What is the role of Semiotics in the theoretical proposal? Thus, rather than an attempt to unify all the various theories, the session intends to gather and encourage discussion between researchers and research centers around the world that are working on the development of a communication science from the standpoint of Semiotics.

## **Participants**

**(1) LANIGAN (Ph.D.), Richard L. {Program Chair}**

Director and Fellow, International Communicology Institute (ICI)  
Washington, DC, USA

*"Semiotic Phenomenology as the Methodological Foundation of the International Communicology Institute"*

**Abstract**

Communicology traces its methodological foundation to the phenomenological program of Edmund Husserl (150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is 2009) and the semiotic tradition of Charles Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure, as interpreted by Roman Jakobson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (together with Michel Foucault). My paper traces the intellectual development of human communication theory and cultural practice within this tradition. This background analysis provides an understanding of the current definition of Communicology" and its inclusion in the recently published *International Encyclopedia of Communication*.

**(2) VIDALES (M.A.), Carlos**

University of Guadalajara, GUCOM

*"The Development of Semiotics into the Scientific Program of Communicology: Toward a Construction of an Interdisciplinary Epistemology for Communication Studies"*

**Abstract**

There are many ways in which the history of Semiotics can be reconstructed. We can go from those which focus on a long term period that starts with the Greeks to those centered in what Deely calls «Proper Semiotics», which begins in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with Peirce's semiotics proposal. Nevertheless, the first concern of this paper is to share one of those possible reconstructions, the one that has been carried out within the framework of a scientific program regarding communication, in the proposal of Communicology. Therefore, what the paper shows is not a finished research but the preliminary results of an ongoing research process that has been carried out for the last nine years about the relationship between Semiotics, communication theory, epistemology and Communicology. What is proposed here is an epistemological reconstruction of semiotics as a scientific and historical source for communication studies, paying special attention to the way Semiotics can be related to other scientific sources such as Cybernetics and Phenomenology. The second concern of this paper is to share a theoretical proposal that tries to unify in a single theoretical framework some elements of the proposals made by Manuel Martín Serrano in his communication theory, Soren Brier's Cybersemiotics and the Biosemiotics proposed by the Copenhagen School. As can be seen, the paper shows how semiotics has been integrated to a general theory of communication that integrates cybernetics, semiotics and communication theory to build Communicology, a standpoint for the study of communication.

**(3) AGUIRRE (M.A.), Roberto**

Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, GUCOM

*"General Communicology: Epistemology, Ontology, and Cosmology Grounded in a Communicative Perspective"*

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this talk is to develop the hypothesis that arises from the collaboration between Cybernetics, Semiotics and evolutionary/genetic thought within the axioms of Communicology. The proposal is that Communicology needs a cybernetical Cosmology, an evolutionary Epistemology and a semiotical Ontology. These three appear like points of view that are related through communicological dimensions (expression, dissemination, interaction, structuring and observation) and between them emerge information and communication systems in the species-specific paths of each communicative entity. Communication is possible in the form of the communicative entities' evolution in the universe. The relationships between the proposed Cosmology, Epistemology and Ontology have the logic-symbolic dynamics of semiosis because Communicology is a theoretical approach that relates: (1) the communicative competence of entities within the operational rules of the universe; (2) the evolutionary and operational differences between those entities and; (3) the ability of human knowledge to understand those relations, while being aware that humans are also part of the universe and therefore subject to its rules. Space and Time are the main domains and all relationships are based on them. Later, the talk gives one set of suggestions to look at the current scientific knowledge –not only Social Sciences and Humanities – from the standpoint of Communicology, and highlights the Social Communicology proposal.

### **(4) BECERRA (Ph.D.), Jesús**

Universidad Autónoma de Zacatecas, GUCOM

*"One Thing Can Be Another: The Context Effect in Narrative Communication"*

### **Abstract**

Message understanding consists in the sequential reception of stimuli and their integration in a superior level of meaning, which makes it possible for a part of the message to differ from the whole or even to differ from itself according to the places it occupies in its context. This polisemy activation property can be found more often in narrative than in instructional messages. Nevertheless, it is just a particular manifestation of a general principle of the construction of sense, governing possibly every act of understanding and creation. This paper presents one experiment conducted in order to detect the different processing of one stimulus in two "allocations" in the context, at the brain cortex of a subject reading a comic strip. The resulting evoked potential for narrative understanding renders an empirical proof of the existence of the paradigmatical realm, as a function of specialized and culturalized living matter, capable of humor. A final discussion is provided on how narrative and learning semiotic models should comprise both horizontal or anaphoric and vertical or integrative processing of functions.

**(5) JURADO, (Ph.D.) Alfredo Cid**

President, Latin American Semiotics Association (FELS).  
Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Montrey (ITESM).

*[Panel Commentator]*

**(6) GOMES, William B. (Ph.D.), Daniel ROSEMBERG (MA), Luciano ALENCASTRO (MA), Thiago G. DeCASTRO (MA).**

Institute of Psychology, Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil.

*"Reversibility between Perception and Expression in Cinematographic Experience: The Gestalt Completion in a Multistable Field".*

**ABSTRACT**

The cinematographic experience is a multistable field that brings time, being space a perceptual illusion. So, how does the spectator complete a Gestalt of a film without conversational dialogue, but keeping the tonal (a probable story) and the expositive (a probable context) dialogue? Twenty-six undergrad students of psychology watched an exhibition of a short motion picture (two minutes) called "i", directed by Paulo Zaratia. They were asked to write a reaction report, following the presentation. The obtained reports were considered an expression of the film's message and analyzed through out the triadic criteria of the semiotic phenomenology (description, reduction and interpretation). The description defined the diachronic relations and the synchronic correlations within and between reports as situation, feelings, resolution, and voice of enunciation. The reduction specified the reports as literary genres, chosen as context of expression (short prose, essay or chronicle). The interpretation suspended the reports' suggestive and existential thematic to concentrate in the psychophysical and psychological streams through out Gestalt formation: a structural negotiation between spectator's perception and expression. Ambiguous figure exacerbates everyday relation between procedural cognitive modes of Gestalt formation, as demonstrated by the cinematographic experience, and became and attractive invitation for self-consciousness phenomenal exploration. CNPq/CAPES

Keywords: *Gestalt, cinema, phenomenology, semiotics, communication, "i"*

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*"Communicational Interplay of a Progressive Reflection from Conscious Experience to an Experience of Consciousness: A Semiotic Phenomenological Experiment."*

**ABSTRACT**

Phenomenology was once defined as guidance for thinking well. Thinking is a reflexive dialogue between perception and expression, which could be facilitated by the communi-

cational intersubjectivity between self and other. Nineteen college students, without organic or psychiatric dysfunction were submitted to the Alien-Hand experiment. The task was to follow a straight line on a piece of paper inside a box. However, without their knowledge, they were actually looking, via a special mirror-setup, the experiment's hand drawing a non-straight line. The task, which was repeated three times, induces a failure on consciousness, by confounding visual perception with corporal expression. After each tentative, the experimenter asked to the subjects what was happening and what they feelings on that unusual situation were. The experiment was all filmed and transcribed. The interviews after each trial appeared as a natural semiotic phenomenological progressive reflection: from description, to reduction, to interpretation. That is to say that in the dialogue with the experimenter, the subjects' speech moved from feelings of strangeness, confusion and non understanding (conscious experience); to speculations (mediation), to a right or wrong explanation of what really occurred (experience of consciousness). The Alien-Hand experiment disclosed the inner movement of reflection in the very moment it was occurring and illustrated Pierce's triadic semiotics: object, ground and interpretant; and Husserl's triadic phenomenology: original intuition, exploration and expressed meaning. CAPES/CNPq.

Key words: *Alien-Hand, reflection, consciousness, phenomenology, semiotics.*

## **ABSTRACT**

**(8) FOURIE (Ph.D.), Pieter J.**

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*"An Exploration of the Value of the Concept of the 'Semiosphere' in the Study of Mass Communication: Testing the Value and Feasibility of a Proposed Research Project"*

## **ABSTRACT**

This presentation will seek to gather conference attendants' opinions and suggestions about the viability and possibilities of the following proposed research to be carried out in 2010 during the author's research and development leave (sabbatical).

In the context of postmodern media theory it is argued that information and communication technology together with globalization have brought about a new media environment characterized by diversity and pluralism, but also duplication and fragmentation. Technological developments have brought about media convergence, blurring traditional distinctions between different kinds of media and media genres. It has also brought about unprecedented interactivity and interconnectivity between communicator and recipient. All this has brought about the need to revisit mass communication theory related to the media as a social, political and economic institution, theory related to media content and forms of analysis, and theory related to media audiences.

Despite all these changes, a constant factor remains the media's phenomenological nature to produce and disseminate (abundant and redundant) meaning(s) and through this to create a "*semiosphere*" of meaning.

The purpose of the proposed research project is to investigate the concept of "the semiosphere" (as developed by Juri Lotman, 1984) as a possible binding factor in mass communication theory and a critique of the media as the dominant form of symbolic expression in contemporary society. This will be done by means of an investigation of how and to what extent the media can be seen, described, experienced and critiqued from a semiotic perspective as a *semiosphere* of meaning in

- contemporary mass communication theory (especially postmodern theory and so-called radical mass communication theory)
- contemporary discourses about journalism as representation and the crisis of journalism
- contemporary discourses about media content from the perspectives of social semiotics and the analyses of the media as metaphor

Based on an exploration of this, the project will seek to postulate that the binding factor in the study and research of the (new) media and new media environment (as part of the science of communication) should be to emphasize the media's semiotic role as the producer and disseminator of meaning(s), and the *semiosphere* of meaning created by this. Evidently, questions about the quality of this *semiosphere* (if not its banality) will be raised.

Key words: *semiosphere, mass communication theory, media analysis*

## **Curriculum Vitae**

Pieter J. Fourie is senior professor in Communication Science at the University of South Africa, Pretoria, where he teaches critical media studies and media semiotics. He has published various articles on and a number of textbooks in critical media studies and visual semiotics. He is the editor of the accredited research journal *Communicatio: South African Journal of Communication Theory and Research* (published by Routledge and The University of South Africa Press) and on the editorial boards of a number of related subject journals. He is a fellow of the International Communicology Institute, rated as an established researcher of the South African National Research Foundation, and holder of the Stals Award of the South African Academy for Science for Science and Arts. He has been promoter of various Master's and doctoral students in the field of mass communication theory.

### **(9) MBARGA (Ph.D.), Jean-Claude**

Full Professor, University of Yaoundé I, Cameroon

Vice-President of International Association for Semiotic Studies IASS-AIS

ICI Continental Coordinator for Africa

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*"Communicology: Conceptus of Semiotic Activities in the African Continent"*

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper reports the organization of the "Communicology House" at Yaoundé I University and other related semiotic research efforts in various countries on the African continent.

### **(2) THE ACTUAL PROGRAM**

— Richard L. Lanigan: A profound apology for the disorganization of the session, an announcement that the planned roundtable was canceled, a 5 minute presentation of the goals of the International Communicology Institute, and the decision that each person (28) would have 9 minutes to present their paper in order to allow everyone to speak as simple respect for all who have spent their own money to travel to an international venue.

— Carlos E. Vidales: a 5 minute presentation of the goals of the Mexico research Group "Group Toward a Possible Communicology-GUCOM" and a brief statement of the purpose of the—now canceled—round table: To exchange information on the development of research and pedagogy among new Communicology programs in the universities. Last, participants were invited to submit their papers for possible publication in a special double issue of the electronic journal *Razon y Palabra*. [organized by Vidales]

—Presentation of abstracted papers (all 28 as listed in the published program). The actual order of presentation was changed to accommodate persons who were scheduled in other sessions and persons who had to meet travel deadlines. Persons were asked to exit quietly when necessary, since there was no time to accommodate any breaks. No discussion of papers took place in consequence of the time constraint.