
On the institutional (dis)organisation of semiotics as a discipline*

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Abstract: Semiotics, as the field dealing with the production of meaning-making mechanisms, was supposed to be a holistic project. Semioticians in the 20th century were concerned about providing semiotics an epistemological identity. For instance, semiotics was aimed at following a meta-role (Greimas, 1976) as ‘a metadiscipline of all academic disciplines’ (Posner, 2003, p. 2366). In fact, Sebeok (1976) deemed semiotics as a ‘doctrine of signs’, refusing to call it a science or a theory. Despite this sophisticated terminology, semiotics remained poorly organised in the national academic systems. This lack of organisation in the academic institutions did not allow semiotics to show this allegedly federative role of general knowledge. Instead, semiotics ended up receiving different designations such as ‘esoteric knowledge’, ‘cabalistic language’, ‘formalistic paranoia’, and so forth. This paper delves into the institutional disorganisation of semiotics by addressing two main aspects. Firstly, the lack of interest by early semioticians to accurately organise their field in the institutions, and secondly, how this treatment, as a meta-field, thwarted its aspirations to be considered as a fully-fledged discipline. Thirdly, I engage in a current discussion (Parra, 2020) in semiotics that questions how semiotics has favoured applied approaches to the production of meaning.

Keywords: organisation of semiotics; metasemiotics; semioticians; academic institutions.

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Introduction

Semiotics as it is practiced today, certainly is rather marginal, and just as Gaines (2015) remarks, this is one of its many paradoxes. It is paradoxical because semiotics deals with all aspects of meaning; it is relevant to every field of inquiry (Posner, Robering and Sebeok, 2003) and is applicable to everyday experiences producing meaning. However, even for those in favour of its practice as an academic endeavour, its disciplinary status is rather polemic. In fact, semiotics has a different status according to the context in which it is practiced, namely, in its degree of organisation in national academic systems.

Since my aim is the grounding of semiotics in academic organisations, I will be discussing some aspects of its epistemological development and issues related to the significance of academic labour. The paper is organised in three parts. Firstly, I show how semiotics was organised around two *fundamental discourses* in the twentieth century: Saussure's semiological approach, mainly followed by structuralist and poststructuralist researchers and Peirce's pragmatist approach, which was adopted by semiotics researchers. Secondly, I address how early semioticians in the second half of the 20th century lacked interest to accurately organise their field in the national academic systems. Thirdly, examine some aspects of a current debate in semiotics that questions the stagnation of theoretical semiotics by favouring applied approaches.

1. Two sides of semiotics

In this section I will briefly show that semiotics, as a field of knowledge, has been and continues to be, a product of discourses. I advance one core argument: semiotics was organised as a community of inquiry around two *fundamental discourses*, i.e., discourses that give origin to others (Foucault, 1970): Saussurean linguistics and Peircean philosophy.

As Deely (2015a) argues, Saussure, in the 1910s, without knowing about either of the medieval scholars, such as St. Augustine or John Poincot (1632), who already had written on 'the doctrine of signs', nor Locke (1690) or Peirce, put forward the name of 'semiology' for his new, non-existent science of signs. However, as it is very well known, Saussure (1916) decided to focus on language (*la langue*) and, hence, did not develop semiology. As a matter of fact, not only did Saussure propose a name but a fundamental discourse upon which to found a new science: a model having the linguistic sign as the main concept for the whole theoretical grounding. Badir (2022) maintains that Saussure's *Cours* not only inaugurated semiology but it is interrelated to three main aspects: a denomination, a gnoseology, and an epistemic project.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Saussure's model was set up as the basis of the new science, which was accepted in the East and West alike. The name 'semiology', which Saussure had chosen to designate his model, was accepted by a few communities of practitioners (in the US for example). This is directly linked to an issue which Deely considers a 'coalescence of a community of inquirers on the subject of semiotics' (Deely, 2015a, p. 37). This process explains how diverse practitioners who based their work explicitly on two discourses took up the research of semiotics all over the world. As Foucault mentions, one property of fundamental discourses is their continuity: 'discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again' (Foucault, 1970, p. 57).

The second model of a science of signs involves Peirce who, as Beuchot (2015) maintains, was unaware of Saussure's works. Not only did Peirce come to focus on the idea of semiotics as a possible 'new science of signs', but also formulated an interdisciplinary classification of all sciences in 1903 (cf. Pietarinen, 2006). For Peirce, science had to be understood in broader terms. It was a systematic, institutionalised method of organising human knowledge:

The total activity of a social group whose members devote, as far as they can, their whole being to finding out and helping one another to find out the truth in a certain department into which they are peculiarly well equipped to search (MS 675: 13, 1991, A Sketch of Logical Critic).

Peirce's classification was divided in 'three kingdoms of science'. To him all science was either 'A. Science of discovery; B. Science of review; or C. Practical science' (CP 1.181, 1903). In Peirce's terms, semiotics belonged to the first kingdom (heuristic science, explanatory science), particularly in the realm of cenoscopy (philosophia prima), which simultaneously unfolded in phenomenology (renamed as *phaneroscopy*¹ by Peirce) and normative sciences (aesthetics, ethics and logic). The Peircean theory of signs, 'semeiotic, speculative grammar studies signs in relation to other signs, and is thus the study of relationship between signs and the general conditions of signs being signs' (CP 1.444, c.1986 The Three Categories).

Saussure conceived of semiology as a science that should become empirical and descriptive. Conversely, Peirce's conception of semiotics is *nomothetical* (describing the universal laws of signification). In accordance with pragmatism's precepts, it would become a normative science insofar as it must be able to point out an accurate interpretative scheme (Badir, 2022).

¹ The purpose of *phaneroscopy* is to contemplate universal phenomena and to discern ubiquitous elements of these three categories (*firstness*, *secondness* and *thirdness*) (Pietarinen, 2015, p. 373).

Ironically, Peirce and his work did not really figure in the development of semiotics until the mid-twentieth century. Interest in Peirce's work was confined mainly to small circles of students in the US, and a real interest in Peirce as a semiotic theorist would arrive only later. Deely depicts the challenge to Saussurean canonical discourse, and its 'epistemological foundations' for re-developing a new semiotics that came from the work of Sebeok (1976), rather than Peirce (Deely, 2015b, p. 42). Thanks to the influence of Sebeok, the figure of Peirce in the second half of the twentieth century emerged within semiotics as a central figure, but eventually grew to efface the work and figure of Saussure in the US. Here, we can notice how semiology was superseded by semiotics. In Kuhn's terms, the acceptance of a paradigm affects the structure of the group of practitioners (Kuhn, 1962). The semiological paradigm did not disappear in the US, but it was surpassed by the adoption and conversion of a large proportion of members to the Peircean paradigm. Only then did the Peircean model become a fundamental discourse that positioned semiotics as a modern project.

On the other hand, Lotman, in Soviet Estonia, knowing both Saussure and Locke, was amongst the scholars who initially embraced the Saussurean approach. Nonetheless, Lotman, from the very beginning, adopted the name 'semiotics' for his theory in preference to Saussure's 'semiology'. Something similar happened in France with Greimas, who like Lotman accepted the Saussurean model as developed by Hjelmslev's glossematics. Both Lotman and Greimas gathered groups of researchers concerned with particular aspects of enquiry. In this way, they constituted schools around them (the Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics in the case of Lotman and the Paris school of semiotics for Greimas). The development of a school implied a theoretical or an ideological emphasis around them, as well as the characterisation of an uncritical acceptance on the part of 'disciples' of a leader's ideas (Becher; Trowler, 2001). Personalities may shape and influence, but do not constitute, scientific domains. Personalities' role is purely reduced to a role as 'influence' and the members of a certain discursive community are the ones who control the norms of 'textual production and its perpetuation' (Beacco; Moirand, 1995, p. 32).

2. A (dis)organised community

In the previous section, I outlined the two main dominant discourses in semiotics during the twentieth century. This followed an argument that the epistemological foundations of semiotics were largely grounded on the Saussurean and the Peircean fundamental discourses.

This is not the place to discuss semiotics' four main epistemological shifts whereby it was possible its constitution as a field: semiotics of sign → semiotics

of text → visual semiotics → semiotics of culture → semiotics of media (see Haidar, 2006). I will not discuss scholarly research devoted to applications of semiotics from inter- and transdisciplinary approaches either, that is to say, the process through which semiotics was branched in multiple domains: cognitive semiotics (Zlatev in Kadavá, 2021), biosemiotics (Emmeche; Kull, 2011), cybersemiotics (Vidales; Brier, 2021), socio-semiotics (Cobley; Randviir, 2009), and so forth. In this section, I will rather focus on the current state of semiotics in academic institutions and will delve into the causes for its disorganisation.

2.1 Semiotics in academic institutions

In the last years, we have seen a growing interest in literature addressing multiple aspects on the organisation of semiotics, particularly, on the following topics: the teaching of semiotics (Kull, 2008; Kull *et al.*, 2015), the development of semiotic programmes in higher education (Nöth, 2010; Danesi, 2012; Barros, 2012), semiotics outlets (Kull; Maran, 2013); how semioticians have established a number of associations (Tarasti, 2012; Bertrand, 2014; Cobley; Bankov, 2016; Kull; Velmezova, 2023).

Despite these efforts, the current status of semiotics in society and academic environments is rather marginal, and just as Gaines (2015) remarks, this is one of its many paradoxes. It is paradoxical because semiotics deals with all aspects of meaning; it is relevant to every field of inquiry (Posner, Rohering; Sebeok, 2003) and is applicable to everyday experiences producing meaning –it is consubstantial with human activity (Nadin, 2013). However, even for those in favour of its practice as an academic endeavour, its disciplinary status is rather polemic. In fact, semiotics has a different status according to the context in which it is practiced, namely, in its degree of organisation in national academic systems.

In this manner, semiotics is considered a fully-fledged discipline in Estonia, with chairs, journals, study programmes and research traditions (Torop, 1998; Kull; Välli, 2011; Kull *et al.*, 2011). At the other extreme, in Great Britain, semiotics has no degree of organisation at all. This asymmetry in organisation generates problems when placing semiotics at institutional levels. For instance, as Salupere (2011) pointed out, the Common European Research Classification Scheme (CERCS) locates semiotics as part of ‘philology (H004)’ in subsection H352 Grammar, semantics, semiotics, syntax (‘H’ stands for humanities). The fact that semiotics does not have an official designator as a field and is considered as a branch of philology (not even linguistics), restricts the allocation of resources for grants and research projects.

Another example of institutional constraints takes place in Italy, where semiotics is an institutionally recognised discipline by the national academic system. Every communications department in Italy offers a mandatory semiotics

course at the BA level (Pozzato, 2009), something that contributes to the transmission of the field to young students. Nevertheless, semiotics shares the same disciplinary code with the field of philosophy of language: M-FIL/05 Philosophy and Theory of Language. The implications of sharing the same disciplinary code are that the community of philosophers, larger in dimension and better organised than the semiotics community, would eventually ‘swallow’ the semiotics section and would overcome them in terms of funding opportunities.

Not everything seems to be lost for semiotics in academic institutions though. For example, some years ago Argentinean semioticians managed to organise semiotics in their higher education council, so semiotics in Argentina does have an official designator in the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET): ‘Lingüística, Literatura y Semiótica’. This means that researchers in Argentina can apply for funding to carry out semiotics-oriented research projects.

Globally speaking, the current state of semiotics needs to be understood in relation to the emergence of disciplines in the modern sense at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth century. This process, which contributed to the disciplinarisation and specialisation of different ‘forms of scientific knowledge’, left semiotics out (Foucault, 1966; Becher, Trowler, 2001; Weingart, 2010). Mainly due to the absence of a collectivity of organised researchers who were able to develop valid criteria to get it recognised as a discipline and to integrate it into the university curricula (Rastier, 2001). Disciplines were thus a new mode of organisation and ordering of knowledge that was a direct outcome of the limitations of the classificatory systems of knowledge. In this manner, there was a gradually developing process of academic-disciplinary splitting from which have emerged social sciences, natural sciences, and what we currently know as disciplinarised humanities (Li, 2006).

Nevertheless, at this moment and as Deely claims, modern science became so specialised that academics ‘felt threatened by the entry of semiotics upon the intellectual scene’ (Deely, 2015b, p. 84). Therefore, its holistic, boundary-crossing character did not contribute to its entrance in the disciplinary market. As knowledge became more and more specialised, communities of scholars looked for additional disciplinary organisational modes of science. Thus, the original disciplines were compartmentalised and did not remain any more to be ‘the crucial frames for orientation for the delineation of subject matters and the formulation of research problems’ (Weingart, 2010, p. 12). This takes me to the second aspect of this discussion which addresses *interdisciplinarity*.

Broadly speaking, interdisciplinary research privileges the convergence between disciplines, fields or knowledge bodies, and features: a) the articulation of two disciplines with a simpler research object, as well as: b) its systematicity, i.e., more than two disciplines with a more complex research object (Posner,

2003). Inter- and transdisciplinary research objects emerge due to two main reasons according to Haidar (2006). First, the continuously growing epistemological developments in science obliges a more explicative progress of scientific theories, as well as the complexity of historical, social, cultural and political processes. Second, the continuous ‘flux’ of humanities and natural sciences oblige them to establish a constructive dialogue. Weingart (2010) adds a third factor that lies in the promotion by funding agencies in the interest of linking political goals with the development of certain research agendas. Consequently, interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity are responses to simultaneous epistemological and historical constraints.

A matter that needs to be added here pertains to semiotics’ heterogeneity of research objects and epistemological shifts. To put it briefly, semiotics addresses all objects from the viewpoint of their functioning as a meaning-process and as Posner argues, ‘it has a value-free perspective which also determines a domain that is studied in its totality’ (Posner, 2003, p. 2366). Notwithstanding, this conceptualisation of semiotics ‘– an inherently interdisciplinary project’ (Badir, 2022, p. 107), is at odds with a more rigid understanding of academic disciplines (and knowledge in general) that divides the world in concrete domains, and that encourages the regulation of academic practices in the humanities and social sciences in order to become rigid.

Currently, despite strong political pressure being put to cross disciplinary boundaries –backed by the commercial establishment (Archer, 2008), interdisciplinary research is still regarded as dubious due to a seeming lack of epistemological standards. This finds a response in the prevailing academic model in which excellence needs to be demonstrated. Ironically, as Huutoniemi and Ràfols have pointed out, there is still a need to develop further ways to evaluate the many phenomena of interdisciplinarity: ‘the criteria of interdisciplinary communities are proving insufficient for research that expands, integrates, or challenges the discipline’s own canon’ (Huutoniemi; Ràfols, 2017, p. 499). This means that interdisciplinary research is still being assessed on traditional standards of disciplinarity. Something that endangers fields like semiotics which intend to cross academic boundaries.

2.2 Issues regarding the institutional definition of semiotics

Now, I will discuss the lack of consensus amongst semioticians to define the institutional organisation of the field in national academic systems. Early practitioners of semiotics in the late 1960s and 1970s were concerned with both the foundation of semiotics as an academic field and with the endowment of an epistemological identity (see: Greimas, 1976; Sebeok, 1976; Barthes, 2002; Posner, Robering; Sebeok, 2003; Haidar, 2006). Back then, semiotics received monikers of all sorts that intended to demarcate its scope: ‘the science of human

behaviour' (Morris, 1971 [1938], p. 38), 'the science of communication' (Buyssens, 1943, p. 5), '*a scientific attitude*, a critical way of looking at the objects of other sciences' Eco (1974, p. 251). These practitioners, however, disregarded the organisation of the field in national academic systems and did not really take into consideration how the lack of organisation would affect the practitioners' as well as the field's identities.

On this, I will provide two examples. First of all, I will touch upon an issue that pertains to the institutional organisation of semiotics in France in two academic sections at the National Council of Universities (CNU). This subject has been addressed by Ablali (2007) when explaining how semiotics was compartmentalised in two disciplinary sections at the CNU level (sections 07 language sciences and 71 information and communication sciences). This division hampers the accurate development and recognition of the field inasmuch as researchers are constrained by these sections (Jeanneret, 2007; Beyaert-Geslin, 2018). In fact, Ablali simultaneously frames it as an historical and epistemological problem in which Greimas played a main role. That is, while Greimas was intending to define semiotics as a comprehensive scientific project beyond disciplinary boundaries (Greimas, 1976), he found another theoretical and methodological niche in communication sciences (*Infocom* in French) for anchoring semiotics beyond the realm of the language sciences (discipline he was institutionally attached to).

A second aspect to discuss here is the question of deeming semiotics as a doctrine. As discussed earlier (in Section 2), Sebeok, going beyond Saussure's attempt to establish 'the study of life of signs within society' (Saussure, 1916, p. 33) and heavily drawing upon both the medieval and Peirce's conceptualisation of semiotics as a doctrine – 'the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental variable of semiosis' (CP 5.488), considered semiotics as a 'doctrine of signs' and refused to call it a science or a theory (Sebeok, 1976). By choosing this term, Sebeok intended to establish semiotics as a comprehensive, 'global' approach (see Deely, 2015a and Cobley *et al.*, 2011) that was way beyond disciplinary constraints. Nevertheless, as Bouissac (2021) has contended, this treatment of semiotics is ineffective since 'doctrines do not endeavour to create new knowledge as they claim to embody authoritative truths and exclude the eventuality of counter-intuitive results that would challenge them'. Semioticians can agree or not with this treatment of semiotics as a doctrine –in fact, every semiotician holds her own conception of semiotics (be it a discipline, a point of view, a metatheory, a sensibility to make sense of the surrounding reality, and so forth). Yet, considering semiotics a doctrine is not institutionally useful or valid since the national higher education systems are organised around a disciplinary structure following nineteenth-century criteria. Thus, this treatment would have direct impact on the institutional organisation of the field.

The third aspect of this discussion points the way to practitioners' attempts to assign a universal status to semiotics due to its research object – the study of all types of sign processes. Hence, semiotics was defined either as a 'metascience' (Kristeva in Dubois *et al.*, 1973, p. 426), or as having a character as 'universal discipline' (Morris, 1971 [1938], p. 80). Semiotics was thus supposed to fulfil an explicative and federative role as 'a *metadiscipline* of all academic disciplines' (Posner, 2003, p. 2366). Correspondingly, both Greimas and Lotman conceived of semiotics as a scientific project that encompass all manifestations of meaning. The former in the form of a 'science of meaning' whose main aim was supposed to provide a link between all the humanities and social sciences so that a scientific revolution could take place in science (Greimas, 1976; Greimas; Courtés, 1983). The latter as a presumed 'method of the humanities' (Lotman, 2000, p. 4). In this manner, semioticians strove to assign a meta-status to semiotics amongst other academic disciplines, as well as to federate its practice.

Despite these attempts to endow semiotics with a federative role in the social sciences and humanities, it became ultra-disciplinarised, abstract and full of jargon, a place where semioticians themselves, as well as other researchers from neighbouring disciplines, have sought to elaborate perennial systems (Badir, 2022). Moreover, the conceptual structure of several branches, or 'type-semiotics' (Rodríguez Higuera, 2020) differs considerably, and their models as well as conceptual structures are in a continuous process of formation. Therefore, semiotics lacks a single metalanguage that sets an encompassing dialogue for all its branches.

At this point, semiotics remains poorly organised in the national academic systems. In consequence, it has been assigned a different status in each country that is far from the status of an institutionally recognised discipline. Unfortunately, semiotics has received heavy criticism, ending up receiving different designations: 'esoteric knowledge', 'cabalistic language', 'formalistic paranoia', 'immense crystal castle' (Blanco in Fontanille; Darrault-Harris, 2022, p. 3), amongst others.

3. Problems in theoretical and applied semiotics

The relationship between theory and practice has always been present in epistemological debates. In semiotics, both Hjelmslev (1961) and Eco (1976) set the ground to open a discussion on the coherence of theory as well as the boundaries of semiotics. Eco defines 'political' and 'natural' boundaries, with the former addressing interdisciplinarity and the state of semiotics in relation to its research objects, the latter deals with non-semiotic areas where semiotics cannot go. Hjelmslev, on the other hand, based on a metalinguistic notion, conceives of

the idea of a *metasemiotics*, i.e., a language to speak about language. A decade later, Pelc (1986) proposed the term *metasemiotics* as a ‘theory or science which examines semiotics and its separate field from a higher level. This higher level is called metatheoretical or metascientific’ (Pelc, 1986, p. 901).

I do not want to divert myself here since the issue does not concern metasemiotics,² but the relationship between theory and its applications. Already in the twenty-first century, semiotics is still struggling to find its own discursive position in the disciplinary market, either as part of the language sciences, or as a catalyst agent between humanities and social sciences, and even amongst natural sciences as well. During the last decade, several researchers have been trying to elucidate the role semiotics should play in the twenty-first century. In this way, we could list two main types of up-to-date concerns.

On the one hand, it is possible to point out historiographical inquiries that propose to highlight the achievements accomplished by some semiotic school or tradition (on the Paris School and its expansion in other countries see Hénault, 2012; Lindenberg Lemos *et al.*, 2012; Broden, 2017; on the development and organisation of the Tartu–Moscow School of Semiotics see (Waldstein, 2008; Kull *et al.*, 2011; Salupere; Torop, 2013; Velmezova, 2015; Pilshchikov; Trunin, 2016), amongst others. On the other hand, there is a diversity of epistemological concerns in the present-day state of semiotics either as a single discipline (Fontanille, 2008), an interdiscipline (Li, 2006; Klinkenberg, 2012; Badir, 2022) or from a transdisciplinary approach (Haidar, 2006; Salupere; Torop, 2013; Brier, 2013). From a global semiotics perspective, Li (2006) claims that semiotics might be regarded as the most accurate theoretical and methodological tool for the modernisation of the humanities. Fontanille (2008) and Klinkenberg (2012) question the roles played by semiotics in civil society, beyond the university, and how semiotics might be useful for societies in the current century either as a methodological instrument or as an academic stance. Amongst this type of inquiries, there have been self-reflexive attempts to trace the most important challenges for semiotics (Kull, Velmezova, 2014).

This last preoccupation is the one I would like to address here. Kull & Velmezova (Bundgaard; Stjernfelt, 2009; Kull, Velmezova, 2014) carried out a survey on the greatest challenges for semiotics in the context of the 12th World Congress of Semiotics. This survey shed light on several semioticians’ concerns regarding the current state of the field. One of the most mentioned sources of disquiet had to do with ‘the stagnation’ of theoretical semiotics’ (Kull; Velmezova, 2014, p. 532). This discussion, however, is not new. Sebeok (1986) had already conducted a survey inquiring the goals of semiotics. This survey also pointed out

² For a discussion on metatheory in semiotics see Rodríguez Higuera (2020).

to the division between theory and practice as an essential issue for semiotics, more concretely this debate has been around since the 1980s.

More recently, Castañares (2017) and Parra (2020) have relaunched the debate by raising the question of why this stagnation in semiotic theory occurs. While Castañares argues that semiotics has leaned towards discourse analysis, Parra mentions that semiotics became a *toolbox* for many researchers, a device to draw on that is used at the researcher's will, a disposable tool that can be returned to the same place it was found. A situation that seems to replicate all over the world, at the expense of semiotics, a field that remains elusive and not-so-well organised. Both authors reach the same conclusion: semiotics has favoured applied matters over theoretical ones, which *per se* does not represent a big problem insofar as the renovation of theory comes from analytical experiences. Yet, epistemological research into the conditions of knowledge has been replaced. A great deal of semiotic analysis is carried out as mere theoretical adequations of a semiotic model, and proponents do not really address the problem behind this or that phenomenon. The novelty of some analyses simply becomes limited. Especially when a certain amount of applied semiotic approaches transforms into a sophisticated device to help global corporations how to do their work under the banner of 'cultural branding' or 'analysing cultural trends'.

Final remarks

Even though semiotics, as the field studying everything which can be addressed from the optics of its functioning as sign processes, has been endowed with an epistemological identity and has subdivided in domain-based subdisciplines, it remains poorly organised in the academic institutions. Several practitioners argue that everything can be a sign, or are still squabbling about the relevance of the Saussurean or the Peircean model for analysing culture. The development of semiotics as a whole does not follow a single, unified, metalanguage, but it rather goes in the opposite direction, towards diversity and dispersion (Pelkey, 2022), which is positive for the sake of science's creativity. Still, semioticians need the ability to maintain a common language to address signification as a whole, which lies at the very heart of semiotics.

Only then semiotics could retake its place in the disciplinary market as 'a fundamental science' (Nadin, 2013).●

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Sobre la (des)organización institucional de la semiótica como disciplina

 CHÁVEZ HERRERA, Eduardo

Resumo: La semiótica, como el campo que lidia con la producción y reproducción de los mecanismos de producción del sentido, estaba destinada a ser un proyecto holístico. Los primeros semiólogos del siglo XX se preocuparon por dotar a la semiótica con una identidad epistemológica. Por ejemplo, la semiótica estaba destinada a seguir un papel “meta” (Greimas, 1976) en tanto que una meta-disciplina de todas las disciplinas académicas” (Posner, 2003, p. 2366). De hecho, Sebeok (1976) la denominaría como “doctrina de los signos”, rechazando considerarla una ciencia o una teoría. Apesar de esta sofisticada terminología, la semiótica siguió estando pobremente organizada en los sistemas académicos nacionales. Dicha falta de organización en las instituciones académicas no le permitió mostrar ese presunto papel federativo sobre el conocimiento en general. En lugar de ello, la semiótica terminó recibiendo una serie de designaciones, como son: “conocimiento esotérico”, “lenguaje cabalístico”, “paranoia formalista”, etcétera. Este artículo examina la desorganización institucional de la semiótica a través de dos aspectos principales. En primer lugar, la falta de interés de los primeros semiólogos para organizar adecuadamente su campo en las instituciones, y, en segundo lugar, cómo este tratamiento, en tanto que meta-campo, frustró sus aspiraciones para ser una disciplina plenamente establecida. Por último, atraigo la atención a una discusión actual dentro de la semiótica (Parra, 2020), la cual cuestiona el estancamiento de la teoría semiótica, al favorecer enfoques aplicados a la producción del sentido.

Palavras-chave: organización de la semiótica; meta-semiótica; semiólogos; instituciones académicas.

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