



BASICS OF COGNITIVE SEMIOTICS

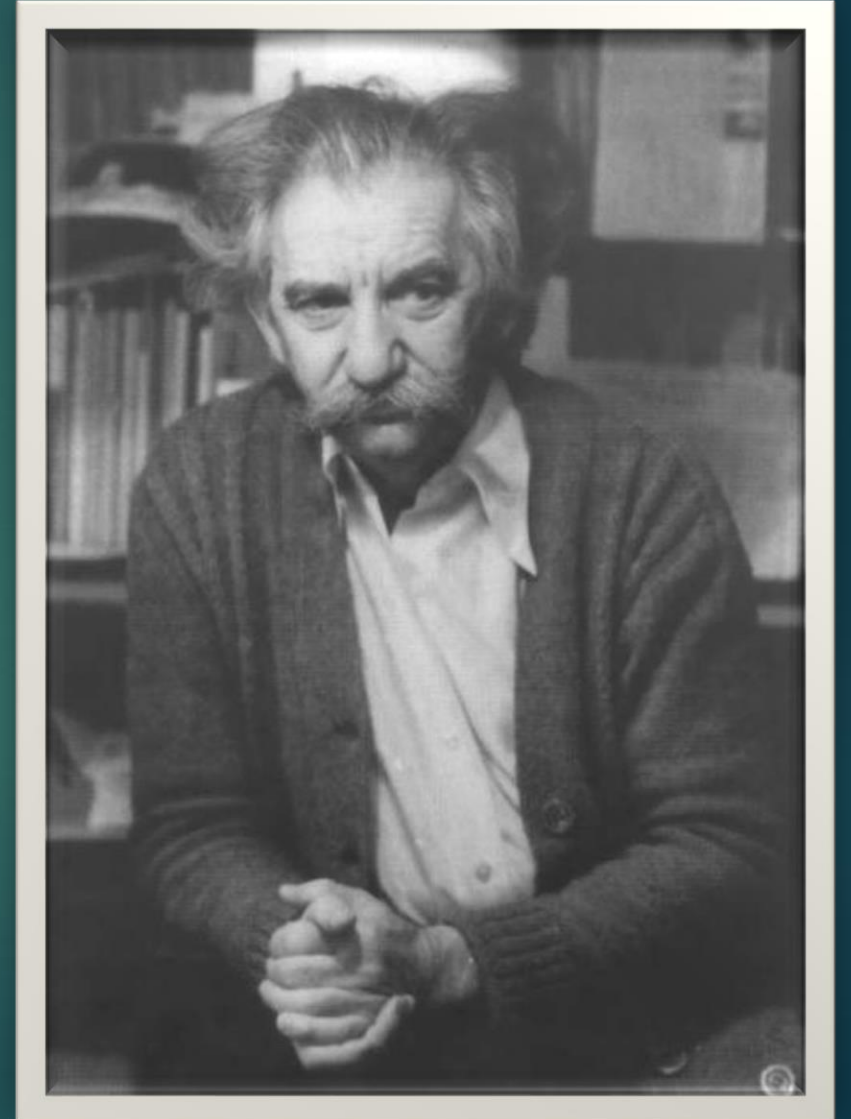
02 ⇨ DELVING DEEPER INTO SEMIOTICS PROPER

ON TODAY'S LECTURE

- ▶ Lotmanian semiotics
- ▶ Sebeok's semiotics and the recapitulation of other paradigms
- ▶ Phenomenology and semiotics

LOTMANIAN SEMIOTICS: background notes

- ▶ Yuri Lotman, 1922—1993, born in Saint Petersburg, Russia.
- ▶ First interested in literature, his interest expanded into cultural dynamics.
- ▶ Member of the so-called Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, he produced most of his work while in Tartu, Estonia.



THE TARTU-MOSCOW SCHOOL

- ▶ A group of like-minded semioticians represented mostly by Yuri Lotman, but based in both Moscow, Russia and Tartu, Estonia.
- ▶ Spearheaded the development of the *Semiotics of Culture*.
- ▶ Culture is a universal object; semiotics is a universal method.
- ▶ Culture can be understood as *information*.

SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE

- ▶ Nominally simple to explain!
- ▶ When we talk of culture as *information*, we mean that it is processed, exchanged and stored.
- ▶ The support of this human activity lies in *sign systems*.
- ▶ If we can study sign systems, we can have a unified approach to the study of culture.
- ▶ Culture is partly defined in opposition to “non-culture.”

CULTURE IN OPPOSITION

- ▶ Culture as the “sphere of organization (information) in human society and the opposition to it of disorganization (entropy).” (Ivanov et al. 1998: 34)
- ▶ The non-culture part of the dichotomy is defined through culture, meaning that it's not a uniform concept.
- ▶ This opposition “is the minimal unit of the mechanism of culture on any given limit.” (Ivanov et al. 1998: 36)
- ▶ Culture can incorporate elements from the outside it sees as similar.

MODELING SYSTEMS

- ▶ In order for us to make sense of the world, Lotman thinks we *model* it somehow.
- ▶ For us to make these models, we have systems in place that do the leg-work of representation.
- ▶ A modeling system is then a representational capacity of the world at different substrates. We need a *primary* modeling system in place upon which we can build.
- ▶ For the Tartu-Moscow semioticians of the time, the *primary modeling system* in humans is *language*.

MODELING SYSTEMS, cont'd.

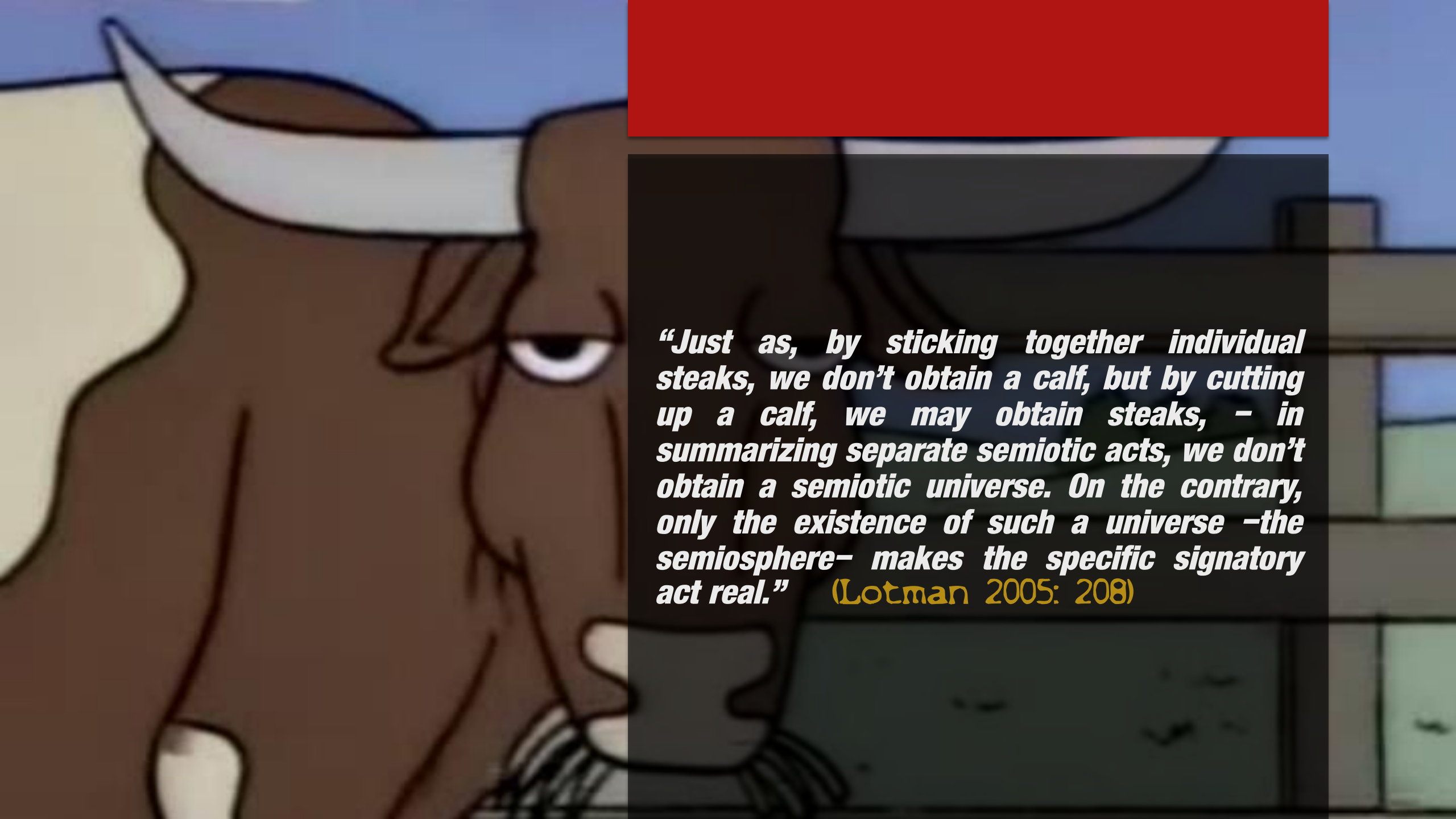
- ▶ A “structure of elements and rules of their combination, existing in a state of fixed analogy to the whole sphere of the object of perception, cognition, or organization. For this reason, a modelling system may be treated as a *language*.” (Lotman 2011: 250)
- ▶ A primary modeling system is then the cognitive substrate that gives sense to the world as we perceive it.
- ▶ A secondary modeling system is built upon the primary modeling system, but it incorporates external elements. Art is a secondary modeling system.

TEXT AS A UNIT OF ANALYSIS

- ▶ The concept of *text* is of foundational relevance to Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school semioticians. They take it to be the *basic unit of analysis* of semiotics.
- ▶ A semiotic text is *not* a linguistic unit.
- ▶ A *text* is a significant and coherent unit that has some value within culture.
- ▶ Me yelling “boy am I hungry!” would not, by itself, constitute a text.
- ▶ The appearance of the sentence “boy am I hungry!” within this presentation, however, makes it part of a text.
- ▶ This is what Lotman calls the double coding of the text (1988).
- ▶ What do you do with a text then?

THE SEMIOSPHERE

- ▶ “In reality, clear and functionally mono-semantic systems do not exist in isolation.” (Lotman 2005: 206)
- ▶ “The semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages.” (Lotman 2001: 123)
- ▶ There is no *semiosis* outside of the semiosphere.



“Just as, by sticking together individual steaks, we don’t obtain a calf, but by cutting up a calf, we may obtain steaks, – in summarizing separate semiotic acts, we don’t obtain a semiotic universe. On the contrary, only the existence of such a universe –the semiosphere– makes the specific signatory act real.” (Lotman 2005: 208)

THE SEMIOSPHERE cont'd: its constitution

- ▶ Center
- ▶ Periphery
- ▶ Boundaries
- ▶ Outside

There's a dynamic movement within and without the semiosphere (Nöth 2015).

BUT IS THIS ALL RIGHT?

In summary, we have:

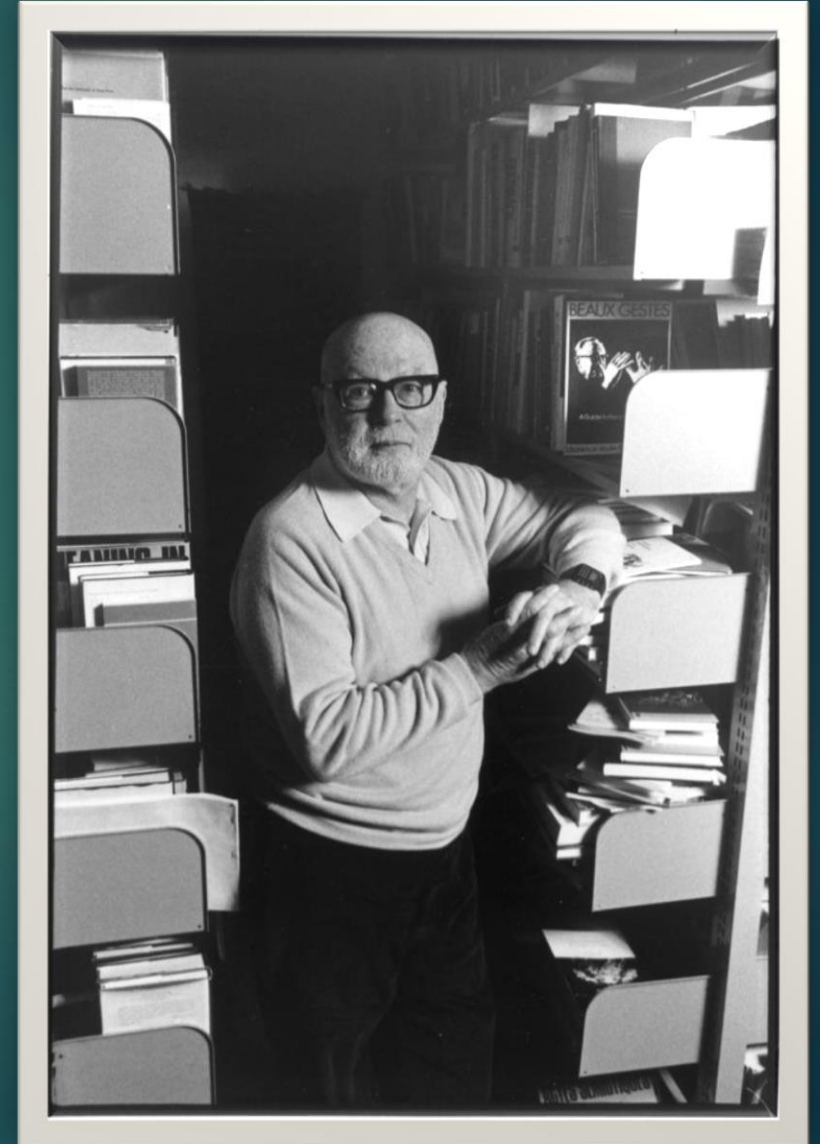
- ▶ Modeling Systems
- ▶ Texts
- ▶ Semiosphere

How useful are these concepts?

And more importantly, are they actually correct?

THOMAS SEBEOK

- ▶ Born in Budapest in 1920.
- ▶ Emigrated to the US in 1937, studying under Charles Morris and earning a BA in linguistics.
- ▶ He later obtained an MA in anthropological linguistics and a PhD from the dept. of Oriental Languages and Civilizations



SEBEOK'S SEMIOTIC PROJECT

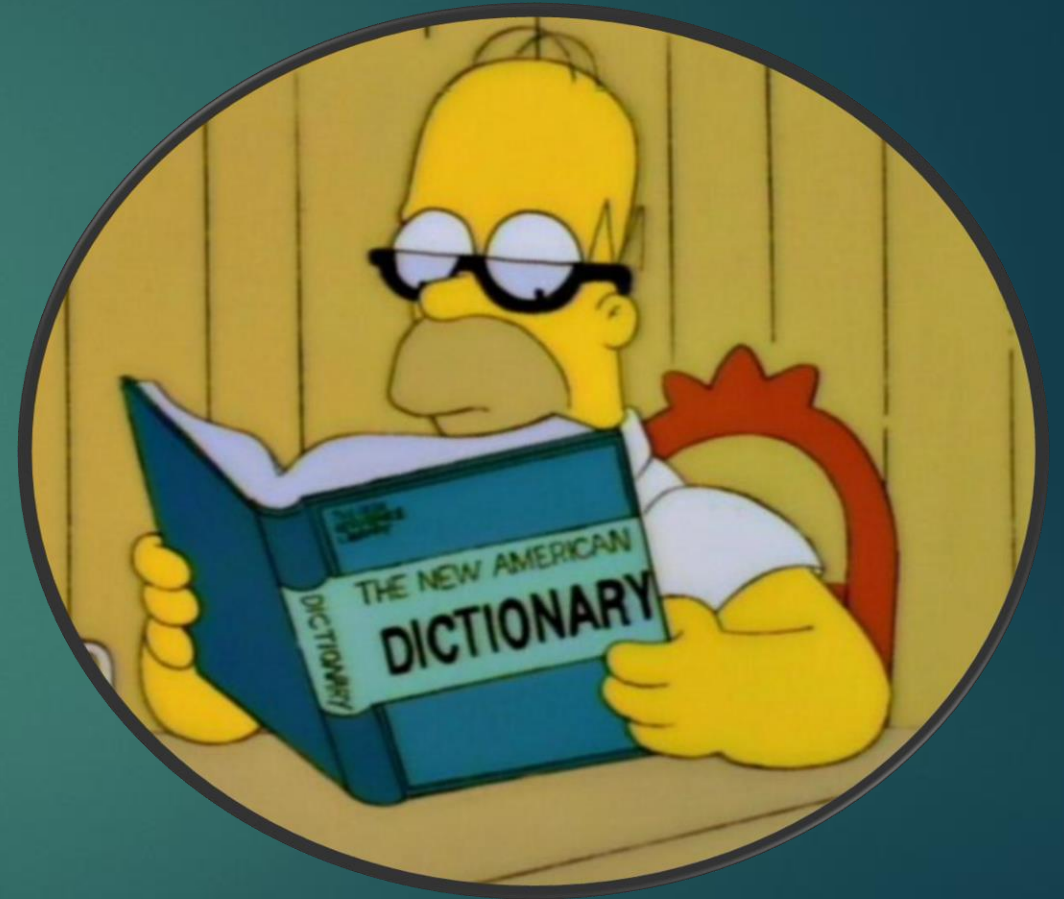
- ▶ Sebeok was interested in a general semiotics that is not limited to human meaning-making.
- ▶ He calls this “global semiotics,” based on the idea that there is a global network of communication in the biosphere at all levels of life (Kull 2003: 54)
- ▶ This is derived from the idea that **life and semiosis are coextensive**.

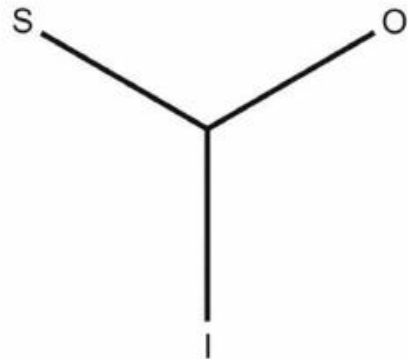
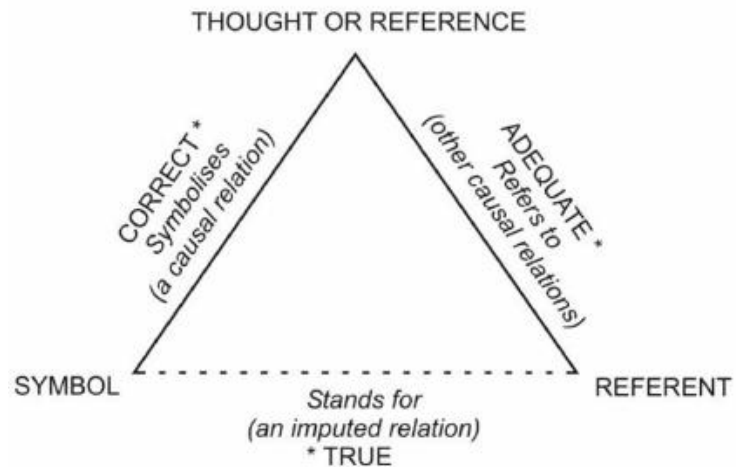
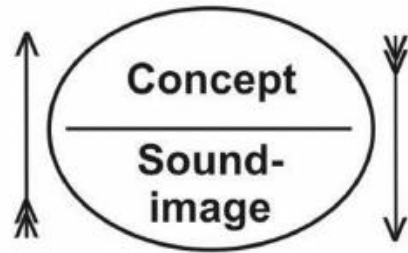
SEBEOK'S PEIRCEAN INFLUENCE

- ▶ Sebeok's ideas on semiotics are clearly influenced by C. S. Peirce's philosophy.
- ▶ This means that his conception of semiosis and the sign is fundamentally triadic.
- ▶ This leads him to having an idea of signs as *general*, that is, they are abstract relations that can be applied across realms without a need for human signification.
- ▶ And this plays out with his interest in animal communication and what he would call *zoosemiotics*.

BUT WAIT!

- ▶ What is a Peircean sign?
- ▶ What is semiosis?
- ▶ Why should we care?





THE SIGN

SAUSSURE, OGDEN & RICHARDS,
PEIRCE

(NÖTH AND JUNGK 2015)

A BRIEF EXCURSUS ON BASIC PEIRCEAN CONCEPTS

Parts of the sign:

- ▶ Object
- ▶ Representamen/Sign
- ▶ Interpretant

Types of signs:

- ▶ Index
- ▶ Icon
- ▶ Symbol

BACK TO SEBEOK'S GLOBAL SEMIOTICS

- ▶ The biological foundations of communication are at the center of signification in humans and animals.
- ▶ A global semiotics requires us to think of sign action in all areas of life and communication.
- ▶ In his view then, if we want to talk about human semiosis, we need to build through a couple of steps in our theories.

UEXKÜLL REVISITED

- ▶ The Peircean distinction between object and representamen makes Sebeok consider Uexküll's idea of the *Umwelt* as useful to represent semiotic principles of the perceived world for organisms (1991: 17).
- ▶ For Sebeok, this means that the act of modeling or creating models of the world is a biological function.
- ▶ Semiotics can be explored scientifically because of its biological foundations:

The *Umwelt* is then the crucible of the animal's informational relationships, perforce the 'meaningful' ones, with the environment. In fact, for the animal, the environment *consists in* these sign relationships, with conspecifics, with predators and prey, with shelter, weather and terrain, and with odors, sounds and silence (1988: 22).

LOTMAN REVISITED

- ▶ In his exploration of signification at different levels, he takes Lotmanian theory to be useful in describing sign action in the human sphere.
- ▶ Lotman talks about the cognitive faculty of sign usage and what is built upon it in order to make more meaningful and complex interactions in culture.
- ▶ But there is a fundamental flaw in Lotman's theory: *primary modeling systems*.
- ▶ Let's remember what a *primary modeling system* is according to Lotman.

LOTMAN REVISITED cont'd.


- ▶ Sebeok's Uexküllian thinking means he can't accept language as a *pm* system. Animals, as semiotic beings, are modeling their world, but they don't have access to language.
- ▶ The conclusion is that language is simply not a *pm* system, but instead it's a *secondary modeling system*.
- ▶ Therefore, art would be a *tertiary modeling system*! (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005: 204)

UMWELT AND SEMIOSPHERE

- ▶ Sebeok believes we can include non-human signs in the semiosphere (Kull 2004: 9).
- ▶ If the semiosphere is the semiotic space where meaningful activity takes place in an interconnected matrix (so to speak), this semiotic space is not only bound by human activity, but by *all* semiotic activity.
- ▶ The umwelt may represent a *level* of semiotic activity: That of the interaction between an organism and its environment.
- ▶ If the umwelt is modeling the world, it is appended to this level the act of modeling further.

SEMIOTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ What do we mean by *phenomenology*?



PHENOMENOLOGY IS THE STUDY OF STRUCTURES OF CONSCIOUSNESS AS EXPERIENCED
FROM THE FIRST-PERSON POINT OF VIEW. THE CENTRAL STRUCTURE OF AN
EXPERIENCE IS ITS INTENTIONALITY, ITS BEING DIRECTED TOWARD SOMETHING, AS IT
IS AN EXPERIENCE OF OR ABOUT SOME OBJECT. AN EXPERIENCE IS DIRECTED TOWARD
AN OBJECT BY VIRTUE OF ITS CONTENT OR MEANING (WHICH REPRESENTS THE
OBJECT) TOGETHER WITH APPROPRIATE ENABLING CONDITIONS

(SMITH, DAVID WOODRUFF 2018)

PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ So what does phenomenology do?
- ▶ And how do we do it?

SEMIOTIC PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ How can phenomenology be semiotic then?



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