

Introduction to the Issue

Paulius Jevsejevas

Vilnius University
paulius.jevsejevas@ff.vu.lt
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5762-1882>

The thematic orientation of this issue of *Semiotika* stems from the conference “Meaning in Perception and the Senses”, organized in 2021 at the Faculty of Philology of Vilnius University by the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies (NASS). I wish to thank the authors for sending in their articles, the translators for being up to the task, the reviewers of the articles and also the people responsible for the publishing-related work. We seem to have made a rather diverse issue in terms of what semiotics is all about and how the discipline or the outlook might aspire to contribute to the understanding of perception, corporeality and sensibility.

In the following I will briefly present each of the articles comprising this issue.

The first article of the issue is by Göran Sonesson (1951–2023) who passed away last year. The article was published by *Intellectica* in 2012, and translated for this issue of *Semiotika* by Ieva Tomaševičiūtė. It is a work of semiotic phenomenology: Sonesson attempts a phenomenological solution to a semiotic problem, namely, the question what a sign is. Taking perception as his point of departure, Sonesson considers carefully what kinds of things

experienced in perception can arguably be called signs. He also provides a minimal definition of a sign, consisting of five criteria. This allows for criticism towards the Peircean and the Saussurean traditions, since, according to Sonesson, neither has provided a definition of the sign. If we consider this more broadly as a question relating to conditions of access to meaning, it should be applicable to sign-wary structural semiotics as well: we could, for example, inquire into the conditions under which the productivity of structures of meaning is actuated. It is also worth noting that Sonesson discusses briefly his views on Paul Grice's notion of meaning, thus introducing the notion into semiotic discourse.

The article by Michele Cerutti is a contribution to current discussions in cognitive semiotics. Cerutti takes on the theoretical problem of enactivist basic cognition, with semiotics serving as a perspective from which an interpretation of the enactivist notion of cognition is attempted. The discussion is carried out using Peircean concepts: Cerutti presents us with an overview of how the enactivist notion of cognition is first associated with *dicisigns*, then with *indexes*, and, in the interpretation suggested by Cerutti himself, with *diagrams*. Interestingly, in the end we are transported back to the problem of defining the sign, because the allegedly direct sensorimotor interaction of the organism and the environment as proposed by enactivism is not supposed to be mediated by signs, at least not in the generally intuitive sense of the term.

The article by Jacques Fontanille, translated into Lithuanian by Lina Perkauskytė, is a thorough presentation of a structural typological model for corporeal meaning. I would describe Fontanille's theoretical style as a dynamic structuralism of the body: there is much consideration of corporeal energy and motion, while modeling elementary relations of basic types of movement. The model has a claim to be constitutional in the Greimasian sense, i.e. it's an attempt to comprehensively and exhaustively describe the bases of meaning of the body in experience. According to Fontanille, it is a cartography of the sensual that ought to be tested in analyses of particular cases.

The article by Fontanille is suggestively related to two other, otherwise quite different, articles in the issue. The article by Izabelė Skikaitė, which is a semiotic interpretation of *Flights*, a novel by the Polish author Olga Tokarczuk, is directly concerned with the body and its meanings. In keeping with the Greimasian tradition of discourse semiotics, Skikaitė presents us with a thorough investigation of the textual semantics of the body, wherein the novel is treated as a semantic universe the constitution and structural coherence of which is grounded in primary distinctions of corporeal meanings, constituting a sort of typology of figures of the body. Skikaitė demonstrates how the structural relations between these figures correspond to relations between different ideologies of the corporeal which in their turn are related to philosophies of bodily movement. This way the text of the novel is revealed as an intersection of texts that narrate, describe and comment upon the body, its states, fates, and practices. A juxtaposition of the articles by Skikaitė and Fontanille provides food for thought on what the connections between meaning of the body in experience and meaning of the textual body could be.

The article by Audrey Moutat presents a theory of the constitutive structures of sensory meaning. Moutat takes us through a step-by-step construction of a model of perceptual semiosis, from the contents of the act of perception to the percept, from the percept to the concept, and further on. This article by Moutat, together with the article by Fontanille, represents one of the orientations of contemporary Greimasian semiotics, characterized by theoretical inquiry into the structural nature of meaning in experience rather than text. In the article by Moutat this concerns basic structural categories of sensory meaning making up complex structures of the morphology of perceived objects. Moutat takes her examples from the discourse of wine tasting and attempts to approach sensory experience, defined as a primary level of meaningful phenomena, via the wording and the comments by professionals, defined as a manifestation of the intelligible or conceptual, secondary level of meaning. This approach to perception is a Greimasian

structuralism wherein semantic categories of sensory meaning are considered to constitute a framework for perception itself rather than a linguistic basis for the description of the perceptual world.

The paper by Ieva Rusteikaitė presents us with an inquiry into historical decorated paper. This article is also representative of Greimasian semiotics as much as it is an inquiry into plastic features, considering these to be an important constituent of the meaning of a book. Rusteikaitė suggests that we consider ornaments as a plastic discourse, which is a novel direction of inquiry since usually the inquiry into decorated paper is dominated by technical considerations and formal description. With the plastic as a point of departure, the author conceptualises the meaningfulness of ornament in the spectrum between monotony and diversity, i.e. between continuity and discontinuity, in the usual Greimasian terms. It seems that ornaments that are neither too monotonous nor too diverse are the ones that are “effective”. Rusteikaitė also ties this notion of effectiveness to the metaphor of liveliness. Perhaps, then, the liveliness of an ornament is one of the guises of its sensory meaning? Another kind of meaning as distinguished by Rusteikaitė is constituted by a mimetic rapport of decorated paper to various fabrics and other luxury materials which is established by representing the qualities thereof.

The plastic dimension of meaning is also the main focus of the article by Fred Andersson. Andersson presents a broad critical commentary of views on plastic meaning in visual semiotics which is where the concept was created in the first place. Synoptic and critical articles focused on plastic semiotics are scarce and I am glad we are publishing one in this issue. Andersson provides us with a synopsis from the beginnings of plastic semiotics in the works of Jean-Marie Floch and Greimas, through a reformulation in the *Traité du signe visuel* by Groupe μ , to his own invitation to reconsider some of the works of art historian and theoretician Meyer Schapiro in this light. Pictorial plastic semiotics nowadays would do well to give more thought to Schapiro’s notion of image field, which brings forth the non-mimetic but semiotic functioning

of the flat surface and definite boundaries of a picture as well as some psychological features of these elements.

Fred Andersson has also written an obituary to Göran Sonesson who passed away last year. It is revelatory of the impressive scope of Sonesson's activity as well as the lasting impact of his personality to his students and colleagues.