

Semiotics continuing to astonish... again and again: A brief survey of the journals *Sign Systems Studies* and *Semiotica* in 2023

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We all remember the wonderful book on the legacy of Thomas A. Sebeok, published in 2011 and *Semiotics Continues to Astonish* (Cobley et al. 2011). Today, more than a decade later, we might add: “Yes, indeed it does. Again and again.” The astonishing texts published in 2023 in the semiotic journals *Sign Systems Studies* and *Semiotica* were so diverse in terms of their content that it would be extremely difficult to reduce all their breadth and thematic richness to even a few more or less general topics. Nevertheless, for this survey, we did manage to identify the following large thematic groups:

- (1) semiotics in the service of our contemporary world (solving or describing contemporary problems and using semiotics);
- (2) reflections of a biosemiotic nature;
- (3) semiotics of literature and art (understood in a broad sense of the word);
- (4) language, communication and translation through the prism of semiotics;
- (5) “great names” in semiotics and its history;
- (6) “metasemiotics” vs theoretical semiotics (looking at semiotics as science).³

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³ Let us, however, emphasize that the boundaries between those groups are somewhat subjective – to the point that, dividing articles into thematic groups, every now and then we thought about Jorge Luis Borges’ famous “Chinese encyclopedia” from his 1942 essay “The analytical language of John Wilkins”, where all animals were divided into 14 categories: those belonging to the Emperor, embalmed ones, trained ones, suckling pigs, mermaids, fabled ones, stray dogs, those included in this classification, those that tremble as if they were mad, innumerable ones, those drawn with a very fine camel hair brush, et cetera, those that have just broken a vase, those that from afar look like flies. May we be forgiven for this analogy: despite the conventional character of our proposed thematic division, we still hope that it carries more meaning.

Beyond these, both journals also organized special thematic issues in 2023. These addressed the topics of semiotics and religion – *Sign Systems Studies* 51(2), prepared and introduced by Thomas Andreas Pöder and Matthew L. Kalkman (2023); and “inhuman horizons” of semiotics and subjectivity – *Semiotica* 254, organized and prefaced by Martin Švantner and Ondřej Váša (2023). However, also the articles published in these issues within these overarching categories demonstrate attention to the themes we identified above.

1. Semiotics in the service of the contemporary world

This thematic block of articles contains considerable diversity when it comes to the particular topics of interest found in the texts.

Some of them concern children and teenagers: for instance, Silva H. Ladwig and Lena Hotze (2023) deal with the slapping movement used by German children in the age range of four to six. Such movement has particular communicative functions and the authors distinguish between different degrees of abstraction, from action as such to a gesture in a semiotic sense.

Colin Symes (2023) conducts a semiotic analysis of government school badges in New South Wales, Australia. Such school badges have not been the subjects of much analysis before now, which makes the study quite innovative. In most cases, Australian school badges turn out to refer to local cogency and significance – as do their counterparts elsewhere in the world.

Of course, it would be difficult to speak about the contemporary world without mentioning the circle of problems connected with artificial intelligence. Semiotics turns out to be useful here, too: for instance, in the article by Jin Young Lee and Sung Do Kim (2023) about the emergence of the so-called post-narrativity in the “era of artificial intelligence”, that concentrates on writing machines and robot authors, offering a new vision of the concept of ‘narrative creation’. Similarly, Daria Arkhipova and Auli Viidalepp (2023) analyse the cultural dynamics of AI-generated video art in the semiosphere, applying some tools and categories of Lotmanian semiotics of culture, and demonstrating that the works of famous thinkers of the past such as Lotman can help us look at the emerging issues in the contemporary world in a novel way. Also Merit Rickberg (2023) addresses the

Unfortunately, in this publication we will not be able to review and even mention absolutely *all* the papers that were published in the journals *Sign Systems Studies* and *Semiotica* last year – of course, this in no way detracts from the merits of the texts that we have not been able to write about. Any review is inevitably subjective and, in a way, reflects the reviewers’ own academic interests.

intellectual legacy of Juri Lotman, studying how various approaches to teaching history can influence different strategies for dealing with uncertainty – a crucial skill for the contemporary world. The researcher draws a parallel between three types of historical pedagogy and three kinds of modelling systems going back to Lotman’s general theory of the semiotics of culture (myth-type modelling, scientific modelling, play-type modelling). On the other hand, reading of Roland Barthes’s works has allowed Marcelo Santos (2023) to offer a new look at two contemporary “myths”: those of “free internet” and of “user activity on digital social networking sites”.

Video games constitute an important part of our contemporary world. This becomes perfectly manifest in the article by Yunus Luckinger (2023) in which, using the example of the video game *Player Unknown’s Battle Grounds*, a semiotic approach is used to achieve a better understanding of the process of creation of “possible worlds” in video games in general. The notion of sign acquires an important place in these reflections. Václav Janoščík (2023) investigates, from a post-Marxist perspective, gaming as a contemporary phenomenon related to monetization, insisting particularly on the fact that the most successful games today in fact do not use “pay-for-product” models, but instead utilize more complex and even aggressive modes to monetize their content. Jakub Marek (2023) discusses the rapidly spreading epidemic of boredom in contemporary society, in particular focusing on the phenomenon of scrolling, and distinguishing it from other forms of distraction “in the age of boredom” while also considering the consequent “semantic reduction” which can have far-reaching semiotic consequences.

The social aspect of contemporary life is also touched upon in several articles. Baal Delupi (2023) offers an analysis of activist masks in Latin American social protests, which have generated new signs circulating in the semiosphere (physiognomy, representation, evocation). Katarina Damčević (2023) analyses the media discourse around the World War II fascist salute *Za dom spremni* (‘Ready for the Homeland’) which followed two national commemorations that took place in Croatia in 2020. Tomáš Kobes’ (2024) study of the process of formation of images of inhumanity in Slovak Roma settlements shows the social aspect as inevitably present as well.

Some articles deal manifestly with applied aspects of semiotics. Chuanyou Yuan and Huishu Cao (2023) offer a polysemiotic study of legal discourse through the prism of multimodal discourse analysis applied, in this concrete case, to the study of attorneys’ closing arguments. The article by Zekai Ayik (2023) proposes a “systemic functional approach to pedagogic semiosis”, discussing the role of gestures in the “semiotic construction” of scientific knowledge and exploring the types and role of gestures in this context. Taking into account the considerable

place of gestures in pedagogy, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of this article. Pedagogy and semiotics in the modern context are also discussed in the study by Mahdi Kermani and Zahra Baradarankashani (2023), suggesting the use of some categories of social semiotics to the study of women's educational opportunities – speaking, more precisely, about the education of young Iranian girls. Even theoretical study of the semiotics of stereotypes through the key idea of enunciation, undertaken by Claudio Paolucci, Paolo Martinelli and Martina Bacaro (2023), can, in perspective, acquire practical importance, as their article concerns the sensitive topic of stereotypes of persons with disabilities.

Finally, some studies deal not just with modernity in a broad sense, but also with crucial problems actually facing humanity at the moment, such as preserving the balance between nature and culture in order to maintain a sustainable environment for humanity. The article by Murat Kalelioğlu (2023) offers a semiotic view on this in terms of the subject's role in the sustainability of natural and cultural heritages of Latmos. Likewise, Hyeong-Yeon Jeon, Jang-Geun Oh, Chi-Hyun Wang and Sangwon Kim (2023) reflect on the necessity for an ecosystem approach based on relational systems in investigating South Korea's cultural industry. Once again, semiotics becomes an invaluable instrument in approaching the complexity of the contemporary world. Timo Maran's (2023) study speaks about the global ecological crisis, addressing the degrowth movement and semiotic acceleration, the latter constituting a semiotic aspect of the former – a pertinent concept in the world today.

2. Biosemiotic reflections: (bio)semiotics continuing to Estonian ☺

Biosemiotics is becoming increasingly more important in the modern academic world, and reflections of a biosemiotic nature are present in many of 2023's semiotic investigations throughout the world. (It is worth noting that, interestingly, most of the works dealing with biosemiotics were published in the Estonian journal *Sign Systems Studies*: in this sense, biosemiotics continues to... *Estonian*, again and again!).

These works often address “biological meanings”: in particular, Marc Pharoah (2023) discusses biological meaning in terms of the evolution of signification and objectivity. Importantly, he concludes: “At every opportunity, [...] we should seek to reaffirm our commitment to address meaning as directly and sensitively as we are able because every physical action is the consequence of meaning, not vice versa. And we need to reject causal determination and consider evolutionary

theory cautiously, because it is a sterile objective worldview in which meaning is only of incidental importance.” (Pharoah 2023: 164)

The vital biosemiotics category of the ‘umwelt’ was also front and centre in 2023: it is umwelt (or, roughly, ‘*self-world*’) which is ontologically primary, while its internal division results in the appearance of organisms with their environments – this is the conclusion arrived at in Silver Rattasepp’s (2023) article, based on the theoretical background proposed by John Dewey, Gregory Bateson and Gilbert Simondon.

Finally, we can also find case studies in biosemiotics flourishing. Focusing on the 2010 Mt Merapi eruption in Indonesia and its consequences for the villages on its slope, Muzayin Nazaruddin and Riin Magnus (2023) look into the changes in “human–non-human animal relations” in order to analyse how natural disasters may crystallize transformations which have already begun to take place within the framework of a particular society. In a case study addressing liminal species in the city of Tartu, Estonia, Pauline Delahaye (2023) maps out the shared urban ecosystem and promotes the emergence of the concept of ‘resistance of the semiotic relation’: according to her, some relationships of a semiotic nature seem to resist anything that could contradict them, illuminating the subject of symbolic relationship from a biosemiotic perspective.

3. Semiotics of literature and art

The works published last year and related to the semiotics of literature are very diverse in their content. To begin with, John Hopkins (2023) speaks of the Jamaican poet Ishion Hutchinson, trying to understand the mechanisms of his poetical work particularly through Michael Riffaterre’s semiotic theory of poetry and paying special attention to the category of “modern poetic texts”. Qian Zhao (2023) discusses the metaphorical meanings of symbols (numbers, dreams and animals) in the texts of Milan Kundera, demonstrating by this analysis the semiotic axiom that meaning appears in interpretation. Magdalena Maria Kubas (2023) analyses the spatial representations of the Blessed Mary in Italian poetry at the time of the Second Vatican Council, observing them in terms of semiotic categories.

In some cases, the analysis of literary texts is accompanied by the study of illustrations to them, which allows us to address semiotic multimodality. In this vein, Christian M. I. M. Matthiessen and Francisco O. D. Veloso (2023) write about the “real” and “imaginary” worlds in a particular version of Margery William’s well-known tale *The Velveteen Rabbit, or How Toys Become Real*, where the corresponding theme is approached both linguistically and pictorially.

Works on film semiotics were also present among last year's publications. Using a "social semiotic approach", Muhammad A. A. Taghian and Ahmad M. Ali (2023) discuss the subtitling of emotive feelings in the Arabic version of the American film *Homeless to Harvard* (2003). A multimodal discourse analysis is proposed in the study based on semiotics, clearly demonstrating how fruitful the application of semiotic categories to the analysis of films can be. Another example confirming this is the article by Marc Bekaert and Maarten Coëgnarts (2023), in which the famous Peircean categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness are used to offer a new model for the analysis of ocularization in film, with Steven Soderbergh's film *Kimi* (2022) presented as a case study. Michael Betancourt (2023) analyses the role of intention in the identification of encoding arising for non-lexical objects of semiosis (such as "still" and "moving" images).

Considering animation as a special genre of popular art, Francesco Piluso's (2023) article studies the roles and positions of "Disney villains" in the narrative framework of animated films and popular culture, paying particular attention to the evolution of their representation, applying the tools of Greimasian text analysis and Lotmanian theory of the semiosphere.

Other artistic media and genres did not go unnoticed, either. Ayse Ece Onur and Erdal Aygenc (2023) analyse the "existential signs" ["signs during the creative stage of one's self-development" (Onur, Aygenc 2023: 235)], encountered in speaking about the "existential being" of the ceramic artist Alev Ebuzyiya Siesbye. Written within the framework of ethno-visual-semiotic approach, the article by Silvia Barbotto (2023) studies works of portraiture selected from the photographic exhibition "Living Pictures: Photography in Southeast Asia" which took place at the National Gallery in Singapore. Federico Bellentani (2023) studies the "meanings" of the face in monuments and memorials, distinguishing between several historical periods in this regard and offering a typology of the uses and meanings of faces. The first among the cases analysed in the article is the monument (a sculpture-fountain) to Juri Lotman unveiled in Tartu in 2007.

Sometimes the reflection turned to completely new forms of art. For example, Raffaella Scelzi and Nicola Difino (2023) write about the new concept of '*gastrofonia*', a cultural form combining food and music. Indeed, starting from the semiotic idea that the meaning is always determined by our interpretations, the authors analyse *gastrofonia* by examining sound as a possible connection among visual and material arts.

Taking a more theoretical approach (or a meta-approach), Jui-Pi Chien (2023) discusses the terms '*Kunstwollen*' and '*Stimmung*' as they appear in the works of the art historian Alois Riegl in the framework of cognitive and evolutionary aesthetics. Vladimir Feshchenko (2023) studies artistic communication as a type

of semiotic interaction in the discourses of art, paying particular attention to the models of the aesthetic sign and the corresponding models of semiosis with regard to artistic systems.

Finally, partly continuing what was said in the previous section, let us emphasize that, in light of the rapidly developing state of biosemiotics today, it is gratifying that many art projects are directly related to this promising branch of semiotics. To provide just one example: Martin Charvát (2023) refers to the project of contemporary Argentinian artist Tomás Saraceno as aiming to break out of the anthropocentric understanding of communication and coexistence with other animal organisms. In this article Charvát insists on the importance of using modern visualization frameworks and their modalities in the animal world – in particular, the example of spiders is proposed for discussion.

4. Discussing language, communication and translation issues through the prism of semiotics

Many of the works in this volume reflect various linguistic and cultural “traditions”, as well as different theoretical frameworks.

Jiangping Zhou (2023) proposes utilizing the category of entropy to measure the complexity of grammatical metaphor as introduced by M. A. K. Halliday. The article raises the question of how to consider the very notion of entropy in terms of semiotic categories. Sergio Torres-Martínez (2023) reflects on the semiotics of motion encoding in early English, proposing a “renewed construction grammar analysis” (Torres-Martínez 2023: 55) in a diachronic perspective. Basing his study on the theory of the Agentive Cognitive Construction Grammar (supposing that language reflects some “bodily-acquired” non-linguistic information referring to the processes of energy exchange and conservation, which are semiotico-biological as to their character), Torres-Martínez analyses the patterns of association between verbs, the particle ‘up’ and argument structure in Old and Middle English, and comes to the conclusion that “embodied cognition” evolves by facilitating the “ontogenic mental alignment” (Torres-Martínez 2023: 82) among human beings. Elnara Dulayeva, Fatima Mamedova and Agnur Khalel (2023) discuss greeting and farewell speech formulas in Turkish and Arabic, considering them as relevant to identify important linguo-cultural meanings and concepts with the use of conceptual modeling. Kyung Hye Kim and Yifan Zhu (2023) examine the Korean translations of a Japanese work, *Joshi no rongo*, which is a modern interpretation of the classic Chinese text *The Analects*. The study shows how such paratexts as peritexts and epitexts have influenced the reception of the text in the target

culture. Dealing with humour in contemporary publicity discourse, the article by Annabelle Seoane and Montserrat López Díaz (2023) shows that it is a privileged mechanism of multi-channel and plurisemiotic communication which changes commercial discourse into active communication practice.

In a more theoretical way, Lauri Linask (2023) analyses autocommunication in crib speech and private speech, insisting on the fact that autocommunication [“communication with oneself” (Linask 2023: 67)] is distinct from communication with the “other” both in form and function. Speaking about the development of thinking in small children (where autocommunication plays an important role), Linask distinguishes the concepts of ‘private’ and ‘crib’ speech providing a semiotic analysis of the latter in terms of the Lotmanian concept of autocommunication.

(Relatively) new notions also find their place in the past year’s reflections. For instance, Marie-Hélène Hermand’s (2023) article offers a perspective allowing a description and interpretation for communicational analysis of the so-called “textscapes” (the theoretical framework of the study is based on the textscape theory and on Linguistic Landscape Studies). The semiotic notion of ‘linguistic textscape’ is tested to analyse the “staging” of languages in organisations’ web communication.

5. On the “great names” in semiotics and its history

Of course, semiotic research would be impossible without studying the intellectual heritage of famous scholars of the past, whose works could be used to study even the most ancient texts. For instance, Giovanni Manetti (2023) analyses Philodemus’ classic text *De signis* which he considers to be of considerable semiotic interest, as it reports on the debate between Epicureans and Stoics on semiotic inference.

Sometimes studying the past helps us understand better what is taking place in today’s semiotics. Thus, Shawn Normandin (2023) appeals to the importance of studying semiotic history, insisting in particular on the fact that the careful study of the intellectual heritage of Algirdas Julien Greimas makes it possible to refute many influential criticisms of semiotics pronounced by Paul de Man.

Of course, the modern semiotic horizon is unthinkable without Charles Sanders Peirce: anyone speaking (in particular) of biosemiotics will immediately recall Peirce. Steven Bonta (2023) analyses some implications of the Peircean universal ‘ontological Categories’ (Firstness, Secondness, Thirdness) with reference to the physical universe. These give rise to a triadic and immanently representational phenomenological model, the “Book Universe”. Sometimes Peirce’s intellectual

heritage helps us look at the scientific heritage of other famous figures of the past in a different way – as shown, for example, in the article by Dan Neshet (2023). Reflecting on Kant’s Transcendental epistemology, Neshet criticizes Kant’s three Critiques, demonstrating that they are unable to solve the problems to which Kant strived to find an answer. On the contrary, according to the author, Peircean pragmatism can be used to “save” the theory of knowledge from the dogmatism of the metaphysical realism and from the lack of consistency typical of the phenomenologists and holists. In general, this reading of Kant’s work through the prism of Peircean texts seems a very promising approach, making Peirce valuable not only for contemporary science, but also for studying the intellectual heritage of the past.

Ferdinand de Saussure is often considered to be Peirce’s theoretical “opponent” in semiotics – not least because of his concept of the sign. However, as Zdzisław Wąsik (2023) shows in his study, we can talk about not only one, but two distinct models of Saussurean depictions of the linguistic sign: the first one (a “bilateral” conception) is widely known from his *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure 1916), while the second one (a “unilateral” conception) could be deduced from the Saussurean understanding of the *parole*, “where an idea establishes itself in a sound and a sound becomes the sign for an idea” (Wąsik 2023: 513).

Juri Lotman’s legacy also helps to solve many of today’s academic problems. Thus, Remo Gramigna (2023) refers to Lotman’s famous article “On the semiosphere”, where Lotman identifies the principles of symmetry, asymmetry and enantiomorphism as important aspects of the semiosphere’s semiotic mechanism. Gramigna shows the relevance of applying Lotmanian theories to approach specular phenomena and mirror reflections. In the article by Randall Lewis Johnson (2023), two Lotmanian “symbolic concepts” – “the vast semantic capacity of simple symbols, and their dual nature as invariable/variable entities” (Lewis Johnson 2023: 638) – are used to discuss the Fighting Poland Symbol (*Znak Polski Walczącej*), created in 1942 by the Polish Underground State as a propaganda tool. Published in the *Sign Systems Studies*’ special issue “Religion in the semiosphere”, the article by Thomas Andreas Pöder (2023) considers the possibility of applying the Lotmanian categories of semiotic explosion and unpredictability both to descriptions and to self-descriptions of religion in culture. In the same issue, Laura Gherlone (2023) reflects on “decolonial critique” on the basis of Lotman’s culturological exploration moving toward the concept of ternarity; while Ivo Iv. Velinov (2023) applies Lotmanian semiotic methods to the study of a specific location – a Bulgarian religious monastery, which allows him to reflect on the Bulgarian metahistorical tradition. Another researcher represented in the same issue, Jenny Ponzo (2023), reformulates some semiotic categories forged by

Lotman with regard to the models of the saint and the modern intellectual in contemporary culture.

Research into the heritage of the “classics” of the past can go hand in hand with the historiography of scientific institutions with which they were associated. This tendency is clearly shown in the article by Stefan Kirschner (2023), considering “the institutional fate” of Jakob von Uexküll’s Umwelt theory at the University of Hamburg. As shown in the study, the Institute for Umwelt Research at the University of Hamburg, founded in 1928, to a great degree depended on external and personal factors, while being at the same time a unique institution from the point of view of academic research.

Sometimes the well-known names discussed in the research published last year are today associated not with semiotics, but rather with other disciplines – however, as it turns out, their work could also have important semiotic implications. For instance, at present Karl Bühler’s name is known primarily to historians of psychology and language sciences; however, as James McElvenny and Clemens Knobloch (2023) show, his unpublished manuscript “Pocketbook on Practical Semantics” deserves attention as it testifies to Bühler’s attempts to transform his (today well-known) *Sprachtheorie* into a contribution to “applied semiotics”. This research attempt was directly connected with the events of Bühler’s life: his emigration from Europe to America and his attempts to find an “intellectual niche” there.

Finally, this is not to say that “great names” are connected only with the past of semiotics: they also exist in the present, as can be seen from the article by Kalevi Kull and Ekaterina Velmezova (2023) dealing with the works of the well-known contemporary semiotician Paul Copley, president of the International Association of Semiotic Studies in 2014–2024. The article also contains Copley’s bibliography as well as an interview where he shares his opinions about contemporary semiotics, its evolution and unsolved problems, his own “history” in semiotics and his view of his own contribution to the field.

6. On “metasemiotics” and theoretical semiotics

The content of articles united in this category was, too, very diverse.

To begin with, it is clear that terminology is important in theoretical semiotics – that is why Martin Oja’s (2023) article specifically dwells on the importance of delimiting the terms ‘mode’ and ‘modality’, which are frequently employed interchangeably in multimodal cultural studies.

The importance of discussing theoretical models, modelling and theoretical frameworks cannot be overestimated, either. An original cognitive-semiotic

framework for the analysis of polysemiosis is proposed in the article co-authored by Jordan Zlatev, Simon Devylder, Rebecca Defina, Kalina Moskaluk and Linea Brink Andersen (2023), who studied more than 20 video recordings of sand drawing performances on Paama, Vauatu, and 20 “sand stories” of the Australian Pitjantjatjara. At the centre of the study we find the thesis that human communication is polysemiotic by default, supposing a combination of several semiotic systems with language, gesture and depiction being considered as the most important ones. Mohammad Ali Mahmoodi and Fatemeh Savab (2023) offer a model for a “semiotic ladder”, making it possible to depict the meanings of the deep structure of a narrative as dynamic. Prisca Augustyn (2023) proposes a view of Viktor von Weizsäcker’s *Gestaltkreis* model as a reinterpretation of Jakob von Uexküll’s *Funktionskreis*, which seems particularly important for contemporary biosemiotic studies.

In a more general way, L’udmila Lacková (2023) argues against the polarization of the semiotic discipline, where there exists a “traditional” view according to which Peirce’s sign model is incompatible with structural semiology. According to Lacková (who, in this respect, studied in particular the works of Charles Sanders Peirce, Louis Hjelmslev and Lucien Tesnière), on the contrary, structural linguistics is not necessarily dyadic, while Peircean doctrine of the sign could be considered as “perfectly structural”. Related to this, Martin Švantner’s (2023) reflections concern the relationship between the human and the non-human using two parallel discourses: the perspective of “general semiotics” and the perspective going back to Peirce’s logicist theory of the sign and his pragmatist metaphysics. While seemingly incompatible, these two perspectives are in fact largely complementary, in particular for the reflections on “the structural human and semiotic animal”.

Priscila Borges and Juliana Rocha Franco (2023) discuss the pragmatic implications from the ordering of the ten trichotomies in Peirce’s late semiotics. The order of these trichotomies is discussed concerning the mode of being of the immediate and dynamical objects or, more precisely, the relationship between the sign and “its” objects. A theoretical model proposed in Kalevi Kull’s article (2023) is aimed at describing a living being not only through its subjectivity, but also through its capacity to create meanings. Elaborating this model, Kull sets himself the goal to combine into a “more coherent whole” (Kull 2023: 171) several recent theoretical achievements in semiotics in general and in biosemiotics in particular, dealing with arbitrariness, semiotic fitting, *umwelt*, and choice, as well as extended theory of evolution. His colleague Alec Kozicki (2023) bases his theoretical constructions on the works of Kull himself, trying more particularly to show how to model immersive virtual environments using Kull’s ecosemiotic model of four degrees of nature. The article by Matthew L. Kalkman (2023) undertakes to bridge the divide

between science and religion with the help of semiotics: trying to solve this problem, the scholar reflects on the categories of “theosemiosis”.

In this section, we can also mention some works of a review character. Han Xiao and Lei Li (2023) offer a holistic overview of social semiotics (quite rightly considered as one of the leading contemporary research areas in semiotics) from 2001 to 2020. Their analysis is based on the data presented in the Web of Science core collection database of the corresponding period and investigates, in particular, the publishing tendencies and works of the most productive researchers. Several particularly innovative and contemporary themes presented in the social semiotics of the past 20 years are distinguished in this study. Bent Sørensen, Torkild Thellefsen and Amalia Nurma Dewi (2023) revisit the semiotic journals published in the world, offering a new list as of 2023: in 2023, there were 66 “active semiotic journals” in the world, their number having increased by more than ten since 2012 (Kull, Maran 2013). Finally, the articles by Remo Gramigna and Mari-Liis Madisson (2023a, 2023b), presenting the semiotics of 2022, as it was reflected on the pages of the journals *Sign Systems Studies* and *Semiotica*, can also be considered metasemiotic as to their nature.

Concluding remarks

Even though our survey covers works published over a relatively short period of time (just one year), it still allows us to speak about noticeable trends or even traditions that are emerging or have already developed around scientific journals. For example, most of the articles on biosemiotics were published in the journal *Sign Systems Studies*. This academic periodical is published at the University of Tartu, where the biosemiotics research tradition has been very strong for decades and is clearly developing quite actively even now.

If a less prepared reader looks at what was published in our two semiotic journals in 2023, they might get the impression that the articles are not always necessarily related to semiotics – indeed, some of them may even contain no direct references to semiotic terms or categories in either their abstracts or keywords. However, the richness of semiotics as an interdisciplinary tool and even as a language allows one to see its relevance in a hugely diverse spectrum of topics, even if only implicitly. This is yet another sense in which semiotics continues to astonish.

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