

Special Issue: The Play of Signs/The Signs of Play

Introduction

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This special issue of *Language and Semiotic Studies* showcases the work of eight American semioticians who are current members of the Semiotic Society of America. Earlier versions of these articles were presented at the 42nd Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America held in Puebla, Mexico, October 25-29, 2017 (with the exception of Vincent Colapietro's essay). As then Vice-President and Chair of the conference programming committee of the Semiotic Society of America, I was delighted to organize the conference under the chosen theme, "The Play of Signs/The Signs of Play." This theme sought to celebrate our vibrant conference host country, Mexico, as well as highlight the long-standing importance of the concept of play to the field of semiotics. From Charles S. Peirce's "play of musement" to Jacques Derrida's "play of signifiers," to Vygotsky's foray into the semiotics of play in learning and development, the articles that follow testify to the fact that the phenomenon of play continues to be an essential concept in semiotic theory and practice. As a Society with interdisciplinary appeal, papers at the annual conference were presented from a variety of fields: psychology, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, music, communication, visual design, game theory and much more.

Most of the papers included herein were presented on two Communicology panels, organized and chaired by Isaac E. Catt. Combining the continental traditions of phenomenology with American pragmatism, semiotics, and culture theory, Communicology interrogates communication practices as embodied discourse (Eicher-Catt & Catt, 2010). Delivering essays on the panel entitled, "Hermeneutics, Logic, and the Aesthetics of Play," were Ronald C. Arnett, Richard L. Lanigan, Felicia Kruse, and myself. Essays presented on the second Communicology panel entitled, "Sign

Boundaries at Play in Lived Experience” were written by Frank J. Macke and Isaac E. Catt. To complete this eight-essay special issue, I was honored that Vincent Colapietro, newly-inducted Thomas Sebeok Fellow of the Semiotic Society of America, accepted my invitation to publish in this issue. I was also pleased that Thomas M. Alexander, who presented a keynote address (with the same title) at the conference, agreed to contribute.

Vincent Colapietro begins this special issue with a discussion of “Peirce as Playful/ Play as Pivotal.” As past President of the Semiotic Society of America and Fellow of the International Communicology Institute, he is Liberal Arts Research Professor Emeritus at Pennsylvania State University and currently affiliated to the University of Rhode Island through the Center for the Humanities. Insightfully weaving together Peirce’s central concepts of play and habit with a Derridean celebration of play, in this piece Colapietro argues that for Peirce, everything turns on play, since all signs function as hinges that open us to the world of signification and meaning. Ronald C. Arnett’s piece, “Gadamer: Ethics and the Dialogic Character of Play” follows. As professor and chair of the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies and the Patricia Doherty Yoder and Ronald Wolfe Endowed Chair in Communication Ethics at Duquesne University, Arnett also serves as Fellow of the International Communicology Institute. In this essay, he re-asserts the importance of the life world constituted between interpreter and text. He suggests that the dialogic play that resides within this interpretive horizon is one that should be approached with respectful seriousness. The next essay, “The Play of Signs in a New Mexico Landscape,” is written by Felicia E. Kruse. Felicia recently served as Visiting Scholar at Southern Illinois University at Carbondale and has several manuscripts published in the well-known American publication, *Transactions of the Charles S. Peirce Society*. Her essay draws upon Mark Johnson’s theory of the bodily grounding of metaphor to show how the music of Michael Mauldin’s *A’ts’ina: Place of Writings on the Rock* exhibits and enacts a “play of musical signs.” Frank J. Macke contributes the next article. He is Professor of Semiotics, Rhetoric, and Communication Theory at Mercer University in the USA and is Fellow and Founding Member of the International Communicology Institute. In addition, he completed a M.F.T. (Master of Family Therapy) in psychotherapy and psychoanalysis from the School of Medicine at Mercer University. His piece, “Playing Inside the Lines: The Fold, the *Dispositif*, and the Return Home,” skillfully examines the dynamic of play, boundary negotiation, and the human experience of limits, borders, and scaffolds within the “fold” of family structure. This essay thus questions what it means to be outside and inside the family fold and the semiotic and phenomenological consequences of each existential sign condition.

Distinguished University Scholar and Professor of Communicology (Emeritus) at Southern Illinois University, Director and Fellow of the International Communicology Institute, Washington, D.C, USA, and past President of the Semiotic Society of America, Richard L. Lanigan offers us a thorough communicological interrogation

of the American communication theorist Gregory Bateson's now famous description of the double bind. His essay, "Communicology Chiasm: The Play of Tropic Logic in Bateson and Jakobson" critiques Bateson's theoretical explication by offering a more insightful quadrilateral model (with the help of Jakobson) that accounts for the play/work (being) versus leisure/labor (having) distinction. He thus illustrates the tropic (phenomenological) logic (semiotic) of play. The next article, "Border Work in Precarity and Boundary Play in Communicology" is written by Isaac E. Catt. He is currently serving as Visiting Scholar, Simon E. Silverman Phenomenology Center & Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies Duquesne University. He is Fellow and Founding Member of the International Communicology Institute and past President of the Semiotic Society of America. In this piece, he considers borders as symbols of precarity and the possibility of re-framing them through what he calls boundary play. He specifically argues against the either-or thinking that prevails in *bordering* and *othering* by focusing on the semiotic phenomenological relations of homeland, homeworld, and lifeworld that possibilize play at the boundaries of conscious experience. An earlier version of Thomas M. Alexander's essay, "Mythos and the Semiotic Reconstitution of Self, Culture, and World" was delivered as a keynote address at the Society's conference held in Puebla, Mexico. With a Ph.D. from Emory University, he is past President of the Society for the Advancement of American Society. As a widely-published author, his research focuses specifically on the thought of John Dewey. In this piece, he explores the relational identities of self, of group, culture, and world through what he calls the mythoi of experience. He contends that these mythoi must be embodied experientially in cultural habits, actions, rituals, i.e., praxeis, in order to renew and reconstitute a sense of meaning and value in existence. As such, much of the "play of signs" in cultural creation lies in exploring, clarifying, and even antagonizing these relations as ways of deepening the world of meaning. I end the issue with my essay, "Enchantment and the Serious Play of A(musement)." As Professor of Communication Arts & Sciences at Pennsylvania State University, York, I am honored to be currently serving as President of the Semiotic Society of America. I am also Fellow and Founding Member of the International Communicology Institute. In this article, I explore the phenomenological experience of enchantment as a playful sign process and find that current enchantments in America take primarily two forms: amusement and musement. Drawing specifically from the work of Peirce and Gregory Bateson, I contend that our current enchantments or habits of play, as I call them, have serious epistemological consequences for cultural life.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my contributors for agreeing to be a part of this special issue, for their timely responses to my editorial queries, and for writing such stimulating and insightful essays. It has been an honor working with all of you. I would also like to give heartfelt thanks to Jun Wang, Editor-in-Chief of *Language and Semiotic Studies* and Professor of Linguistics and Chair of the English Department at Soochow University. It has been a pleasure working with you on this guest-edited issue

on play and semiotics for the Association of Language and Semiotic Studies in China. I hope we have opened avenues for possible future collaborations.

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Reference

Eicher-Catt, D., & Catt, I. E. (Eds.). (2010). *Communicology: The new science of embodied discourse*. Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press (Rowman and Littlefield).