



SEBEOK'S RAZOR AND THE SIGN OF THREE:  
HOFFMEYER, CHOMSKY AND MANDELBROT

GATHERING IN BIOSEMIOTICS 2023



# ANIMAL BIOGRAPHIES

TOWARD A HISTORY OF INDIVIDUALS

ÉRIC BARATAY

*Translated by Lindsay Turner*

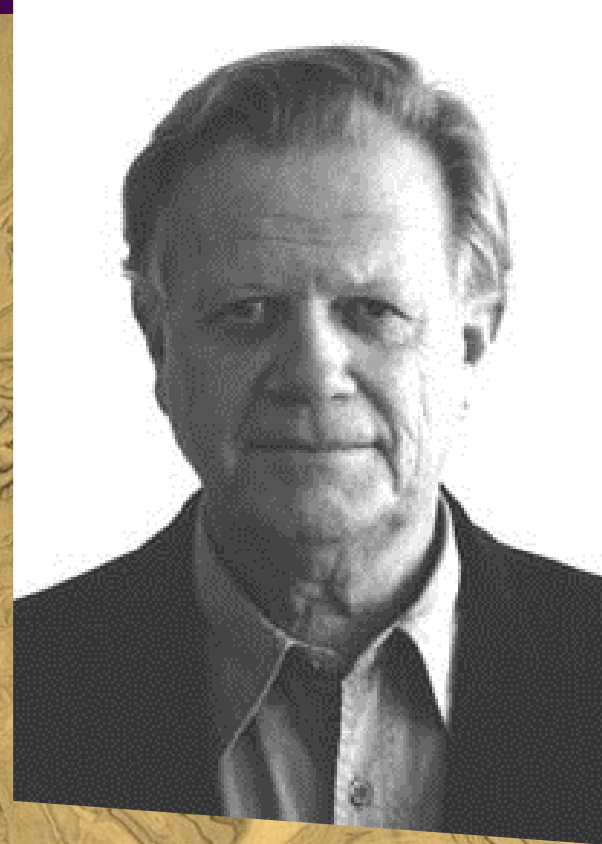
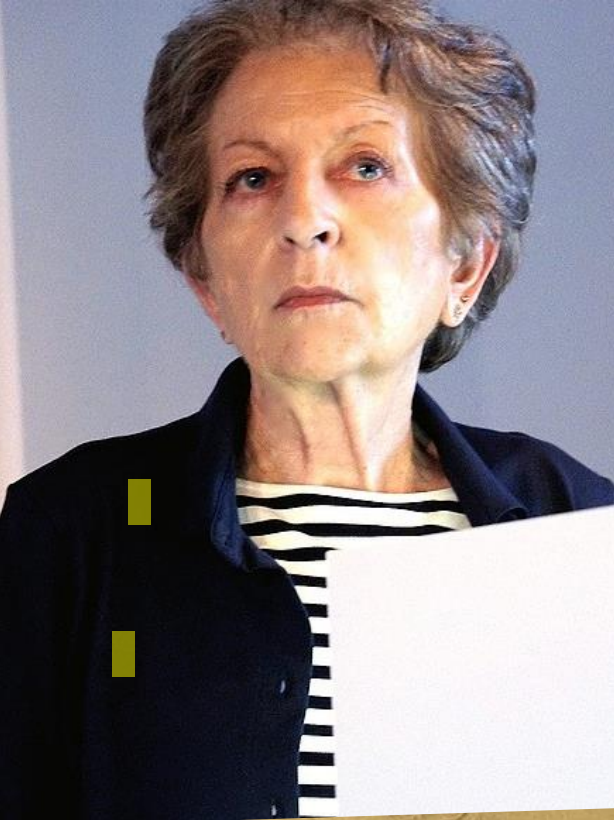
ÉRIC  
BARATAY

# LE POINT DE VUE ANIMAL

Une autre version de l'histoire

L'UNIVERS **UH** HISTORIQUE  
SEUIL





# History of Consciousness

## UC Santa Cruz

# PRIMATE VISIONS

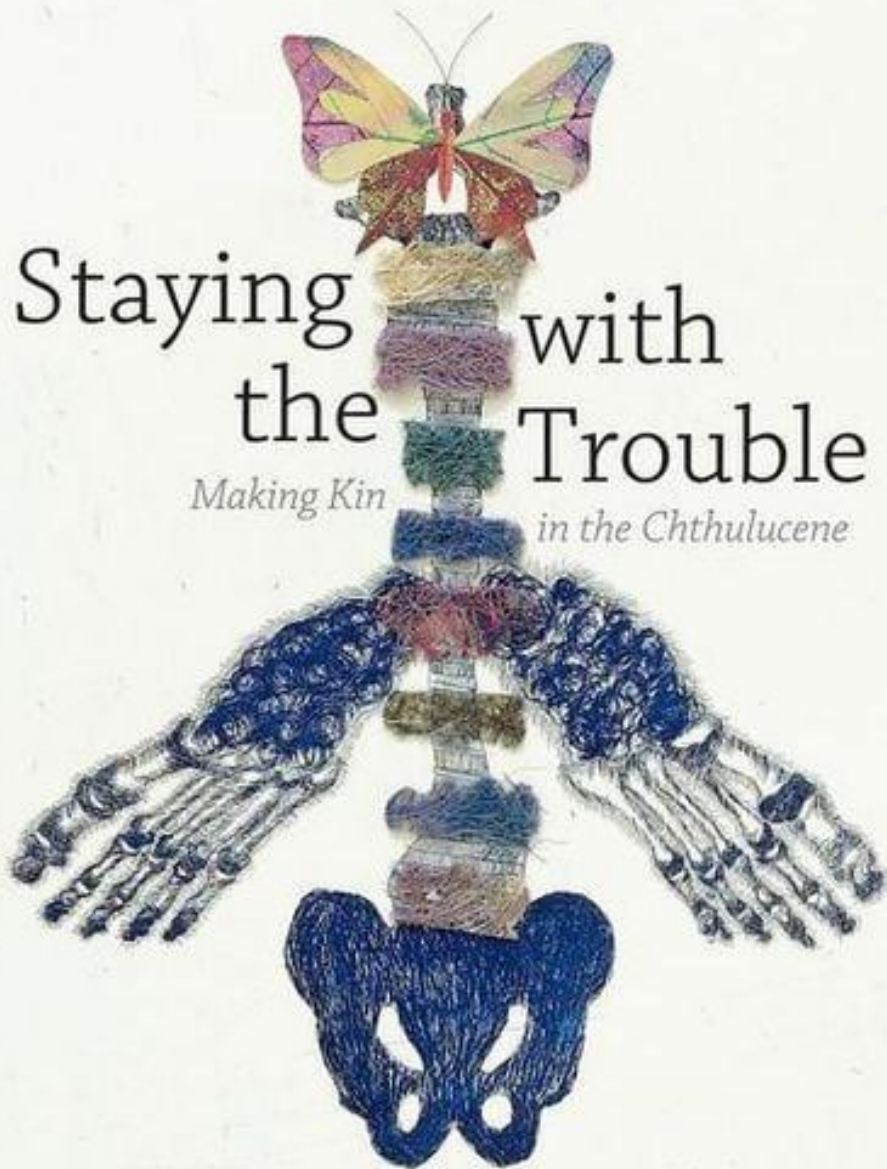
Gender, Race, and  
Nature in the World  
of Modern Science



DONNA HARAWAY

# Staying with the Trouble

*Making Kin* *in the Chthulucene*



DONNA J. HARAWAY

Donna J. Haraway

Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.  
FemaleMan<sup>®</sup>\_Meets\_OncoMouse<sup>™</sup>



Feminism and Technoscience

Copyrighted Material

THE COMPANION  
SPECIES MANIFESTO  
DOGS, PEOPLE, AND  
SIGNIFICANT OTHERNESS

# The Content of the Form

*Narrative  
Discourse and  
Historical  
Representation*

HAYDEN WHITE





# My Thesis

From Zoosemiotics to animal sciences in the 1960s

# Thesis Preliminary Defense

## Questions Raised

---

' (...) to think about not just the intellectual contexts and debates in which his actors were swimming (and against the current) but also give more time and attention to **excavating the political and economic contexts**, which no-doubt played their part in the successes and challenges the actors met.'

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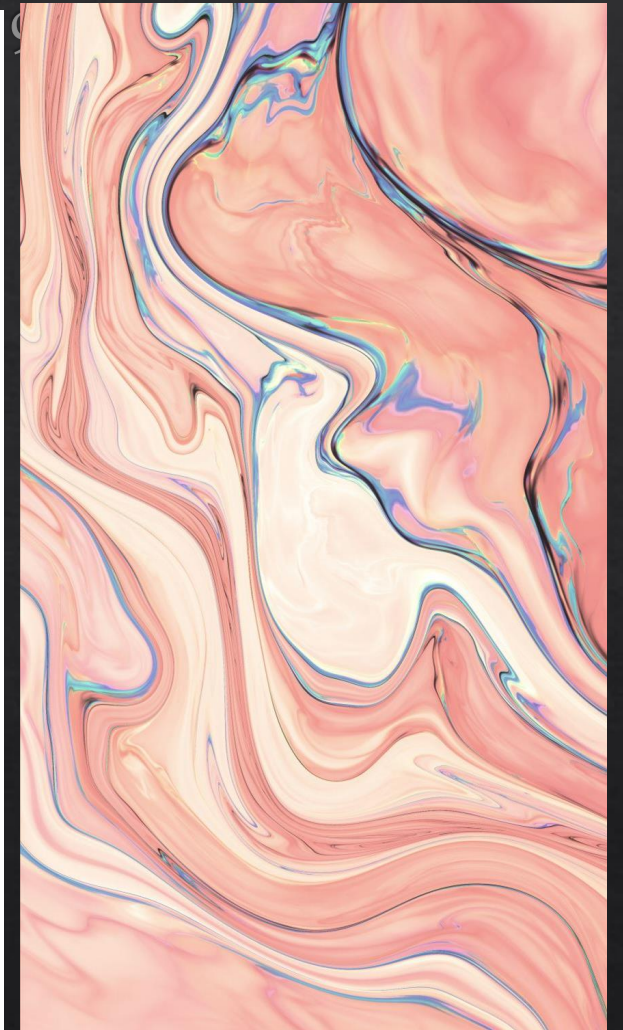
' (...) understanding the history of biosemiotics, or using this history to argue **something broader on the history of science**'

---

' (...) can the **thematic shifts** of each chronological chapter be amplified such that they can fulfil both the logic of chronological narration and indicate their own complementarity on a conceptual level'

---

To make this a simpler question: are there currently **themes on the horizon** that, like the 'little hands', may deserve elevation to their own chapter if sufficient material is found? (...) I wonder if there is not an argument to be made for leaning even further into the **linguistic turn** and paying closer attention to the **poetics of biosemiotics**, or **the poetics of animal sciences more broadly** – not just the role and nature of scientific discourse, but the particular aesthetics and creative aspirations encoded in the speakers' self-imagination and expression.

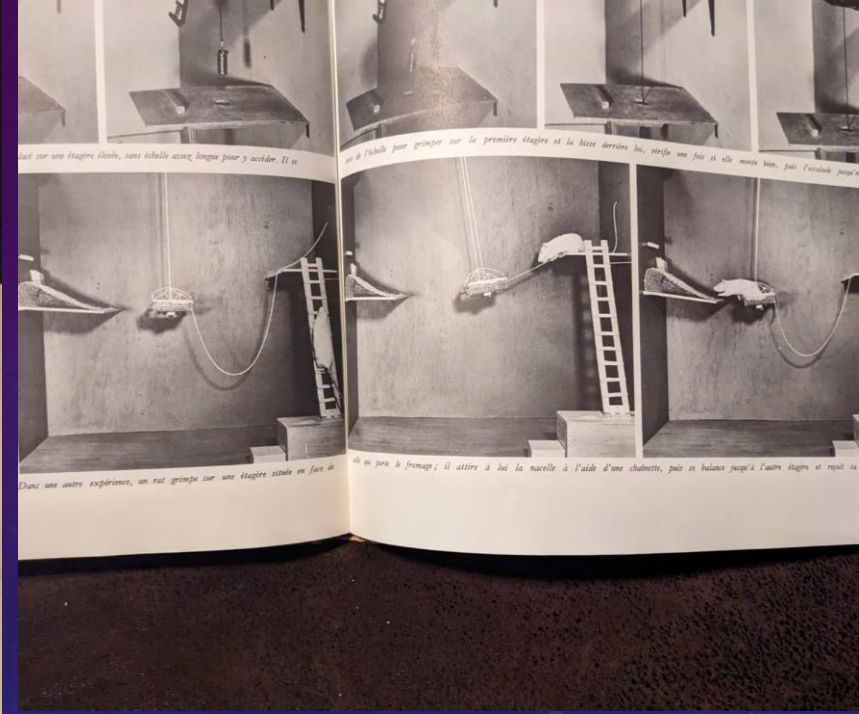
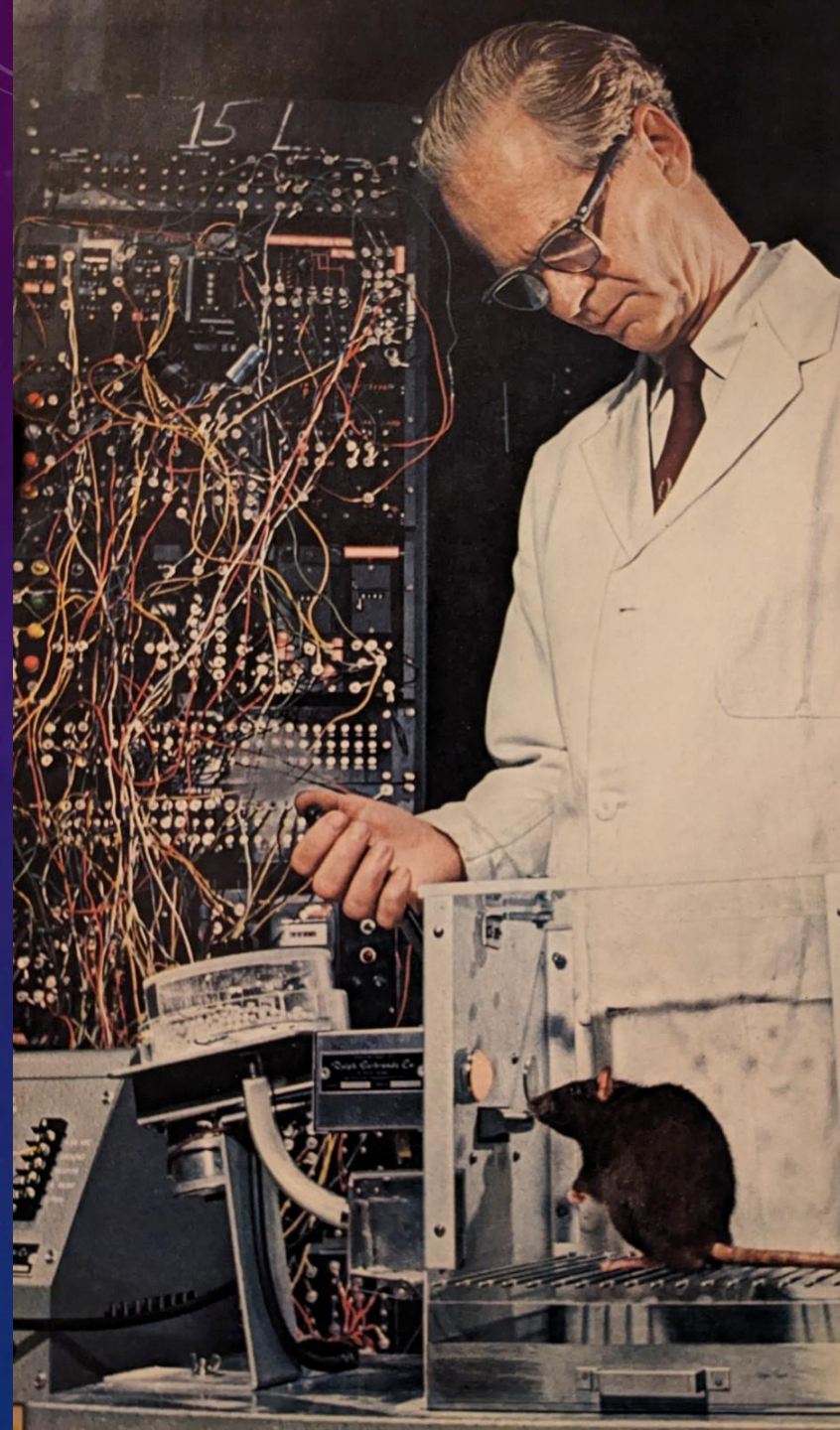




## Alternative chapters

- Political Context (Cold war, Decolonisation, Academic Context)
- Moral status of animals, History of emotion, sensitivity/sensibility.
- Poetics of life
- Centering animal in research (zoo)
- Access to animals, access to awe.





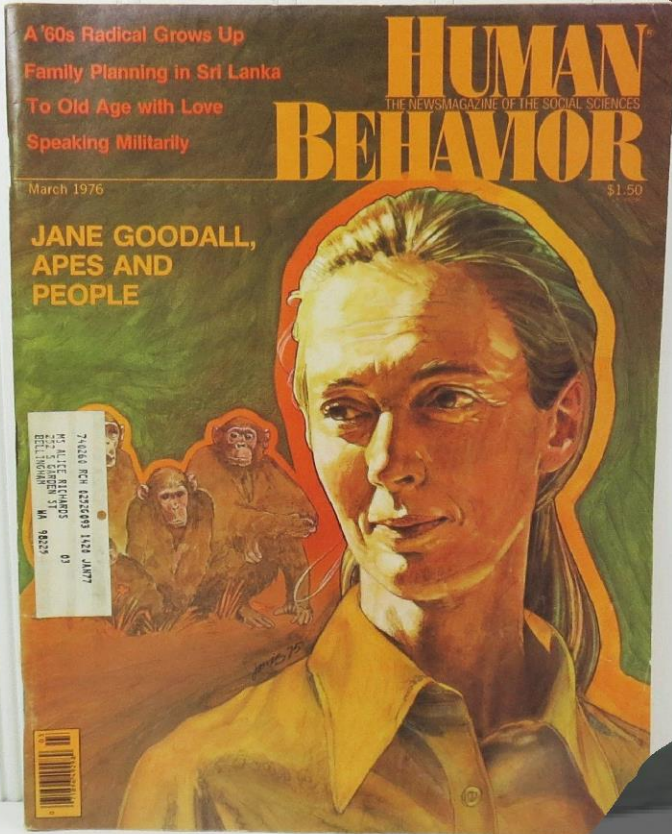


Photo courtesy of the Great Ape Trust



Political, Academic and Economical Context

# Sebeok's Razor

Klára Dán von Neumann



Mary Allen Wilkes





Science

MINI UNIVERSITY 1985

Sunday, June 16 - Friday, June 21

*Returned to R.W. Haller 2-20-85*

INSTRUCTOR: Thomas A. Sebeok

5-6193

COURSE TITLE: E.T.: Echoes from the Extraterrestrial

PERIOD CHOICE (If possible, check several):

Period

- |                                     |   |                                     |                          |    |                                      |
|-------------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 1 | Monday, June 17, 10:00-11:30 a.m.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 7  | Wednesday, June 19, 10:30-11:30 a.m. |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | 2 | Monday, June 17, 1:30- 3:30 p.m.    | <input type="checkbox"/> | 8  | Wednesday, June 19, 1:30- 3:30 p.m.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 3 | Tuesday, June 18, 9:00-10:15 a.m.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 9  | Thursday, June 20, 9:00-10:15 a.m.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 4 | Tuesday, June 18, 10:30-11:30 a.m.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | 10 | Thursday, June 20, 10:30-11:30 a.m.  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 5 | Tuesday, June 18, 1:30- 3:30 p.m.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | 11 | Thursday, June 20, 1:30- 3:30 p.m.   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | 6 | Wednesday, June 19, 9:00-10:15 a.m. | <input type="checkbox"/> | 12 | Friday, June 21, 9:00-10:00 a.m.     |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            |   | Any Morning                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |    | Any Afternoon                        |

COURSE DESCRIPTION: *This presentation aims to introduce and discuss the concept of "intertextuality," and to exemplify it in application to Steven Spielberg's well-known movie, "E.T."*

Recommended Publications for Mini Bibliography and IU Bookstore Display:

Author	Title	Publisher
<i>William Kottzwinckle</i>	<i>E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial</i>	<i>G.P. Putnam's (1982)</i>
<i>Thomas A. Sebeok</i>	<i>The Play of Museum</i>	<i>Indiana U. Press (1981)</i>

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT NEEDS:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Lectern         | <input type="checkbox"/> Overhead Projector                    |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Blackboard      | <input type="checkbox"/> Slide Projector                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 16mm Projector             | <input type="checkbox"/> Special Room Arrangements             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Projectionist              | <input type="checkbox"/> Piano                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cassette Tape Recorder     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <i>check + error</i> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reel-to-Reel Tape Recorder |  |

OFFICE USE ONLY

PERIOD: \_\_\_\_\_ COURSE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_ SECTION: \_\_\_\_\_

DATE:

ROOM: \_\_\_\_\_

# The Method

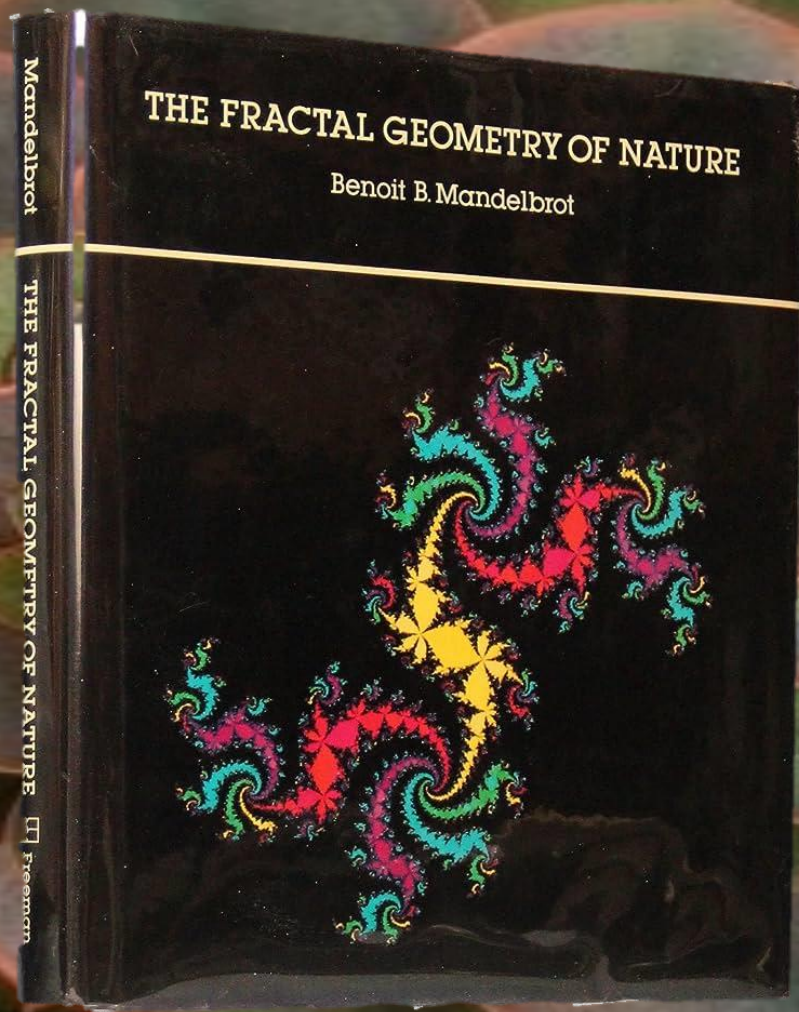
- ◇ ***You Know My Method: A Juxtaposition of Charles S. Peirce and Sherlock Holmes.* Thomas A. Sebeok and Jean Umiker-Sebeok 1981**
- ◇ **Empiricism and Literary criticism**
- ◇ **Part of Skeptic Association**
- ◇ **Principle of the Ockham Razor and the symbol of gendered academic practice.**



SEBEOK- MANDELBROT CORRESPONDENCE

MAY 1961





THE FRACTAL GEOMETRY OF NATURE

Benoit B. Mandelbrot

Mandelbrot

THE FRACTAL GEOMETRY OF NATURE

Freeman

International Business Machines Corporation

IBM

Thomas J. Watson Research Center  
P.O. Box 218  
Yorktown Heights, New York

Telephone: WG 5-3000 1712

May 16, 1961

May 11, 1961

Dear Dr. Sebeok,

Enclosed find the requested reprint?

May I inquire about your current interests? As you know, mine have gone quite far away from linguistics, except for the two shortly forthcoming papers, one in the Jakobson Symposium of the Math Society ( the Structure of language and its mathematical aspects ); the other in Information & Control ( my criticism of Simon, with full detail -- rather gruesome -- )

Yours very sincerely

*Bm*  
Benoit MANDELBROT

Dr. Benoit Mandelbrot  
P.O. Box 218 -- IBM Research Center  
Yorktown Heights, New York

Dear Dr. Mandelbrot:

Many thanks for your reprint and covering letter. I would be sorry indeed if your interests were to shift away from linguistics and hope the "deviation" is but temporary.

My recent interests have centered on the use of computers in linguistic analysis, and the first of a multivolume work resulting from this research will appear in August. This first Volume, which is entirely in the realm of lexicography, is fairly primitive, but I needed to display the data in order to extend the work into problems of syntax and metrics. (I had, incidentally, a very fruitful discussion about my project with Abraham Moles -- of all places, in Warsaw, where we spent ten days together last August.)

I have also developed an interest here at the Center concerning the evolution of signalling behavior and have done a lot of reading recently of pertinent materials in zoology. I have completed a draft of a paper which I send you here enclosed. This is not the final version and I would much welcome your critical comments; you will note that I quote you on pp. 19-20.


With best personal wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Thomas A. Sebeok

TAS/ib

P.S. Morris also enjoyed your review of Herdan, but wonders about that small group of linguists whose interests include graphology.



1992-1994

# SEBEOK-HOFFMEYER CORRESPONDENCE

official address, telex and telephone no:  
University Institute of Biological Chemistry B  
83, Sølvgade  
DK 1307 Copenhagen K, Denmark  
Tel: (45) 3311 1655, Fax: (45) 3314 5058  
Date and place of birth:  
February 21, 1942  
Slangerup, Denmark

Nationality:  
Danish

Education (*degrees, dates, universities*)

Cand. Scient. in biochemistry at Copenhagen University, January 1967

Career/Employment (*employers, positions and dates*)

1967 - 68: NATO Science Fellowship at Institut de Biochimie Générale et Comparée, Collège de France, Paris  
1968 Associate Professor at Institute of Biological Chemistry B, University of Copenhagen  
1977 - 83: Membership of the Academic Council, University of Copenhagen  
1978 - 80: Director of the Institute of Biological Chemistry B  
1983 - 85: Associate teacher at Nordic Institute for Studies in Urban and Regional Planning, Stockholm  
1991: Organizer of the international workshop "Biosemiotics and Biotechnology", Tisvildeleje, Denmark, October 30 to November 2. (Funded by the Danish Governmental Biotechnology R & D. Program).

Specialization (*specify*)

- (i) main field Biochemistry of Nucleic Acids  
Biochemical and genetic regulation of purine nucleotide metabolism in *Salmonella typhimurium*
- (ii) other fields Theory of science. Science and Technology. The nature-culture relation in its historical development
- (iii) current research interests  
Semiotics of nature. Bioanthropology

Honours, Awards, Fellowships, Membership of Professional Societies  
The 1991 Mouton d'Or award for the article "From language to nature: The semiotic metaphor in biology,"  
SEMIOTICA 84 (1/2), 1-42 (with Claus Emmeche)

Member of the Scandinavian Association for Semiotic Studies

Publications (*list selected publications on page 2*)

- Number of papers in refereed journals: 1
- Number of communications to scientific meetings: 5
- Books: 3

(continue on

Jesper Hoffmeyer  
*University Institute of Biological Chemistry B*  
83, Solvgade, DK 1307 Copenhagen K, Denmark  
Tel.: (45) 33 111655 Telefax: (45) 33 145058

May 4, 1992

Dear Jean and Tom

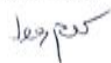
Enclosed is a copy of the application in the exact form it was mailed to NATO.

Also, as I told Jean in an e-mail, I enclose a group-picture from the Tisvilde meeting and a picture of myself for The Semiotic Web 1991. Four of the people from the proposed Center (SANS) are present in the group picture: Claus Emmeche has no. 12, Frederik Stjernfelt no. 9 and Peder Voetmann Christiansen has position no. 6. Mogens Kilstrup, who is a biochemist and research fellow at this institute, and who has some ideas about making experimental biosemiotics on archeobacteria is no. 2. He has struggled hard to get the chains of biochemical processes to fit into the sign concept. I guess he will send Tom a paper he has worked on for a very long time.

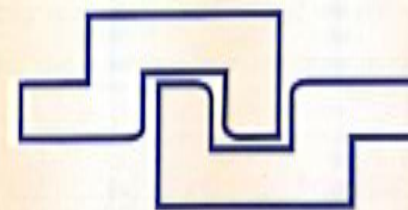
I hope I can be present in Glotterbad for the session on saturday June 20.

With best wishes,

Sincerely



# NATO and Science



An Introduction  
to the Programmes  
of the NATO Science Committee

#1 10-SEP-1992 06:14:14.17  
From: P01::"HOFFMEYER@bkb.ku.dk"  
To: umikerse@ucs.indiana.edu  
CC:  
Subj: HFSP 1

Hi Jean. I am sorry for being so slow in my response to the application question. The thing is that I am trying desperately to finish the manuscript for a book, which I promised my publisher to deliver in July. Now, the book has to be in the bookstore well before Christmas and I still haven't finished the last two chapters. The publisher is prepared to hasten the manuscript through all steps, but time really is running out. The subtitle will be "On the natural history of signification" (the main title is untranslatable), and unfortunately the book is in Danish. It is addressed to the informed lay audience and attempts connecting the birth of the universe to the birth of ethics. The key of course is biological semiosis.

Press RETURN for more...

MAIL >

Tom SFBLOK



NATO International Scientific Exchange Programmes

# ADVANCED RESEARCH WORKSHOP

Scientific Affairs Division - NATO - B-1110 Brussels Belgium

## APPLICATION

This form should be completed in two copies in as much detail as possible after reading the "Notes for Applicants" and the "Conditions of Award" attached to it. Deadlines for consideration at one of the three selection meetings each year are 15 January, 15 April and 15 July, though applications can be submitted at any time.

### 1. Proposed Advanced Research Workshop

Title: **Biosemiotic models: New aspects to rehabilitation as a main task of contemporary medicine**

Location: **Clinic for Rehabilitation Medicine** Dates: June 10 to 12, 1993  
(site and country) **Glotterbad of the Landesversicherungsanstalt Württemberg** Number of working days: 3 (Dates chosen to antecede the related NATO Advanced Study Institute, proposed for June, 13-26, 1993 in Helsingør, Denmark)  
**D-7804 Glottertal, Germany**

Objective: (concise scientific goal of meeting)  
1) promote the development of biosemiotics through the exchange of relevant research models; 2) present the applicability of biosemiotic thought in epistemology, making possible a new understanding of biologic events as networks of sign-processes;

Type of Workshop: (mainly invitation: wide advertising for participants; other - specify) **mainly invitation** 3) bring together scientists from areas as far apart as medicine and mathematics who are involved in research on problems of biosemiotics; 4) permit the exchange of new knowledge between biosemiotic researchers in NATO countries and those in East European and former Soviet countries; 5) form linkages with the proposed following NATO Advanced Study Institute on "Biosemiotics: Current Advances".

### 2. Applicant (i.e. Proposed Director)

(name, position, official address, telephone no., telex no.)  
**Jörg Michael HERRMANN**  
Professor of Medicine (University of Freiburg, Germany)  
Director of the Clinic for Rehabilitation Medicine Glotterbad of the Landesversicherungsanstalt Württemberg  
Chairman of the Medical Society Glotterbad (MGG) // Founding member of the International Biosemiotic Society (IBS), D-7804 Glottertal, Germany  
(Tel) 0049 - 7684 - 809110 (Fax) 0049 - 7684 - 809199

### 3. Content: (Brief outline of major themes, with names and affiliations of key speakers. For each non-NATO speaker please provide on a separate sheet the full name, nationality, institutional affiliation, specific expertise and lecture title(s), as well as a brief justification why each such key speaker is needed and expected to provide a contribution which cannot be given by someone from a NATO country.)

Indicate the degree of key speakers' commitments: firm +++, tentative ++, not yet contacted +  
Major themes: 1) Biosemiotic models: A new approach to health care problem; 2) Semiotics of Ageing; 3) Placebo - effect as a quintessential semiotic problem; 4) Semiosis crossing inside / outside boundaries.

Claus Bahne **BAHNSON** +++ (Univ. Calif. Med. School of San Francisco, USA);  
Vilmos **CSANYI** +++ (Dept. of Ethology, Lorand Eötvös Univ. Budapest, Hungary);  
Alastair **CUNNINGHAM** +++ (The Ontario Cancer Institute, Toronto, Canada);  
Sergei V. **CHEBANOW** +++ (Semenov Institute of Evolutionary, Physiology and Biochemistry, St. Petersburg, GUS);  
Eleanor **DONNELLY** +++ (School of Nursing, Indiana University, Indianapolis, USA);  
Claus **EMMECHE** +++ (DASY, Institute of Computer Science Copenhagen School of Economics, Denmark);  
Jesper **HOFFMEYER** +++ (Institute of Biological Chemistry B, Univ. of Copenhagen, Denmark);  
Olaf **DIETRICH** ++ (Commission des Communautés Européennes, Bruxelles, Belgie);  
→ \* ANNEX 2

### 4. Scientific Codes and percentage of discipline content:

(See classification of scientific subjects in the Annex of Notes for Applicants)

Code	%	Code	%	Code	%
1603	60	4301	20	4401	20

### 5. Key Words: Ageing, Anthropology, Biology, Communication, Interpretation, Linguistics, Pain, Psychosomatic Medicine, Rehabilitation Medicine, Semiotics.

6. Grant requested: TOTAL 37.880 US \$ \*



SEBEOK-  
CHOMSKY

1977-1978



March 15, 1978

Professor Noam Chomsky  
Department of Linguistics and Philosophy  
Massachusetts Institute of Technology  
Cambridge, Mass. 02139

Dear Noam:

I would like to proceed with your talk--to be explicitly so labeled-- as follows: give it, including your insert, some light, mostly technical editing, have the whole thing retyped according to Semiotica style, and send this version back to you either for your approval-as-is or emendations. Then return this ms. to me for transmittal to the printer. You will, of course, also get proofs.

It occurred to me, as I was reading your letter--with not a little amusement, I am bound to report--that it might be instructive (if perhaps a trifle malicious) to publish an anthology of scientific articles that argue contra the Gardners, etc. Off the top of my head, I can think of a piece by Bronowski and Bellugi, another by Roger Brown, several excellent ones by Lenneberg (especially his "Of Language Knowledge, Apes, and Brains"), the recent piece by Limber from the American Psychologist. Perhaps you would contribute a new, more detailed article. And I would like to place the story in the widest setting of the Clever Hans Fallacy and the Pathetic Fallacy working together. There might be other contributors I have overlooked.

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
DEPARTMENT OF LINGUISTICS AND PHILOSOPHY  
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139

Oct. 18 1977

Dear Tom,

Don't know if I have written ever to tell you how much I have been enjoying the fine papers you have been sending on semiotics and related matters. As you guessed, I did particularly enjoy the footnote on the chimp mania. I thought I had invented the observation that it is a case of the pathetic fallacy, but see that you have priority -- maybe I remembered it from your earlier paper. However, I guess it will last longer than dolphins. Psychologists don't like to get wet.

Best,



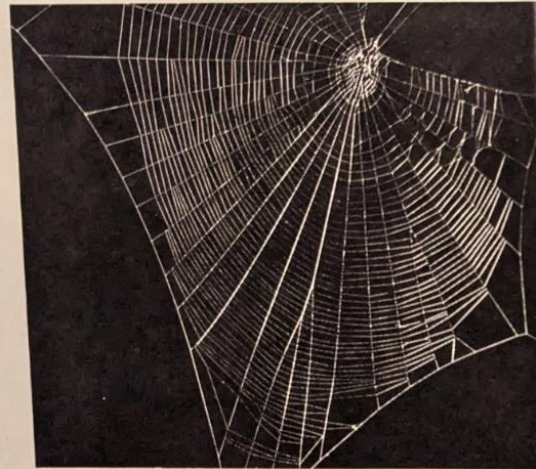
CHOMSKY

“Perhaps because primates are past their prime, media attention has focused on ostensibly nattering kinky, like elephants and seals, cases about which I am bedevilled by never-ending long-distance calls, asking not so much my opinion as for a quotable endorsement.”

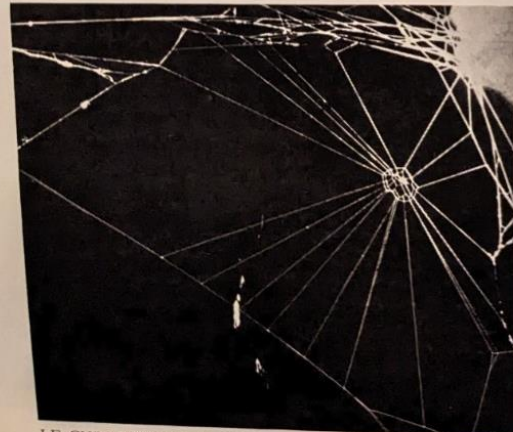
Thomas A. Sebeok. *I think I am a Verb* 1986



DROQUANT UNE ARAIGNÉE, le Dr Witt dépose une goutte de liquide qu'elle prendra pour un insecte. Il peut très bien aussi doper le sujet en lançant une mouche droguée dans sa toile.

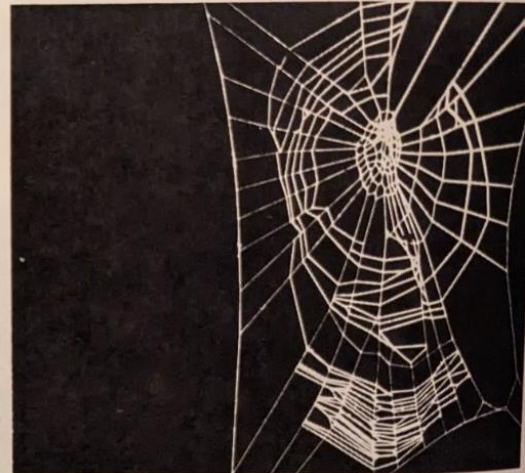


UNE TOILE d'araignée normale a une architecture familière. Piège efficace, elle présente néanmoins de très nombreux défauts.



LE CHLORALOSE, le « Mickey Finn » des barmen, endort l'araignée, alors qu'elle n'a achevé qu'une petite partie de son travail.

toile peut permettre de déterminer avec précision le type de drogue, beaucoup plus vite que ne peut le faire une analyse de laboratoire, toujours très longue.



LA PERVITINE rend l'araignée trop impatiente pour entourer le centre, aussi ne tisse-t-elle que sur une petite surface.

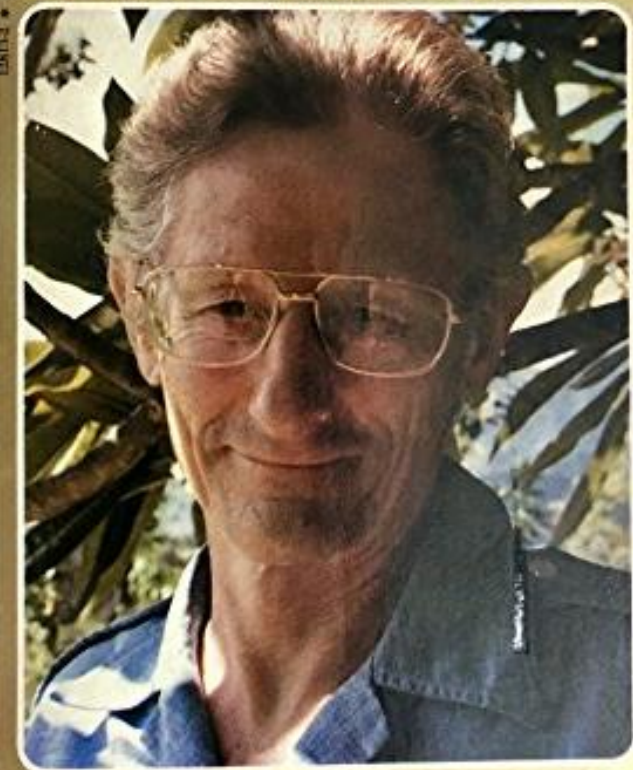


LA CAFÉINE A SUR L'ARAIGNÉE le même effet que sur un être humain et lui fait tisser un réseau désordonné.

# THE SCIENTIST

A NOVEL AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY THE AUTHOR OF  
THE CENTER OF THE CYCLONE

JOHN C. LILLY, M.D.





# Visualising Biosemiotics



THANK YOU