Ignasi Ribó
Mae Fah Luang University, Thailand
ignasi.rib@mfu.ac.th

Timo Maran, *Ecosemiotics: The Study of Signs in Changing Ecologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 70 pp.

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Stemming from the work of Peirce and Saussure in the early 20th century, the modern discipline of semiotics, or the "doctrine of signs," has always been on the fringes of literary criticism and theory. Cultural semioticians like Charles Morris, Juri Lotman, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Umberto Eco, and others, were often engaged in research that was central to the development of structuralist and poststructuralist theory, while at the same time being sidelined from the broader debates that these developments inspired throughout the humanities and the social sciences. Something similar happened after semioticians, under the guidance of Thomas Sebeok, widened their scope beyond human symbolic meaning-making and began to study all the different signs and sign systems found in nature. Since then, new fields of semiotic research, such as zoosemiotics, biosemiotics, phytosemiotics, and so on, have been advancing far-reaching ideas and concepts, which have nonetheless remained marginal to the general conversation in the environmental humanities, and particularly within the field of ecocriticism. This book by Timo Maran, a short—alas, too short!—introduction to the key contributions and insights of ecosemiotics, might well correct this ostracism and help to put semiotic research back at the center of environmental criticism and theory.

A Professor of Ecosemiotics and Environmental Humanities at the University of Tartu, the author is no outsider to this conversation. It is perhaps no exaggeration to describe the small Estonian city of Tartu as the spiritual, or at least intellectual, home of semiotics. It was in this same university that Jakob von Uexküll carried out most of his research on the *Umwelten* of nonhuman animals, one of the foundations of modern biosemiotics. And it was also here, right after the Second World War, that Juri Lotman and his colleagues developed what came to be known as the Tartu-Moscow school of cultural semiotics. The Department of Semiotics in Tartu, led in turn by Igor Černov, Peeter Torop, and Kalevi Kull, has continued this tradition, establishing itself as the foremost research center for cultural semiotics and biosemiotics in Europe. Having worked during the best part of his academic career in such an environment, where he carried out pathbreaking research on the semiotics of mimicry and played an active role as editor and contributor to some of the most significant publications in zoosemiotics of the past decades, Timo Maran became the head of the Department of Semiotics in 2018 and is now one of the leading advocates for a wider and more inclusive form of ecosemiotics.

This book, which is part of the Cambridge University Press series Elements in Environmental Humanities, co-edited by Maran himself, is an attempt to present in the most synthetic but also comprehensive way the foundations, scope, and ambition of current research in ecosemiotics. This transdisciplinary field is defined at the outset as the "branch of semiotics [that] emerged in the mid 1990s to scrutinize semiosic or sign-mediated aspects of ecology (including relations between human culture and ecosystems)" (Maran 1). The book is divided into three main sections. The first section lays out the foundations of ecosemiotics, by outlining some of the key contributions that have allowed semioticians to conceive ecosystems as complex interactions between organisms which are bound, not just by exchanges of matter and energy, but also of meaningful signs. The second section develops the implications of this semiotic understanding of ecosystems for the analysis of the problematic relations between human culture and nonhuman nature. The argument is further elaborated in the final section of the book, where Modelling Systems Theory (MST) is used to advance an original interpretation of the forest ecosystem, as one possible ground for the semiotic modelling of what posthumanists would call the culturenature continuum.

As a synthesis of some of the key ideas that have emerged in the past few years in the field, including contributions by the author himself, the book is clear and accessible, not assuming any familiarity with semiotic scholarship on the part of the reader. Throughout the book, there is a constant effort to bring semiotic tools and concepts, which elsewhere are often articulated in a parochial and technical manner, beyond the confines of semiotics, highlighting their relevance for researchers working in other areas of the environmental humanities, and most especially in literary ecocriticism. In a book so brief, however, such an ecumenical ambition means that many of the ideas brought up are treated somewhat superficially, without engaging in the kind of close discussion that semioticians or other scholars familiar with semiotic literature might appreciate.

In sum, this book is a good place to gain a first and up-to-date understanding of the field, which is no doubt the purpose of the series where it is published. Leaving aside its value as an accessible introduction to ecosemiotics, the aspect of the book that might be more appealing to ecocritics is perhaps its ethical ambition. Throughout its pages runs an optimistic undertone, the conviction that the looming ecological catastrophe brought about by the progressive distancing of humans from their environment is not inevitable. Maran recognizes that the "causes for this Anthropocenic condition are largely semiotic—based on our striving toward symbolic hegemony and preference of closed semiotic systems" (59). But he also believes that there is a semiotic path that could allow us to overcome the nature/culture dualism and by engaging in mutually respectful dialog with all the other species with whom we share the earth.

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