Introduction

Throughout June 1981 the Second International Summer Institute for Semiotic and Structural Studies was hosted by Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The first Summer Institute had been held in 1980 at the University of Toronto (Toronto, Canada) and had been a great success. The second Institute saw some 120 students and faculty, mostly from the United States and Canada (but also from Australia, Denmark, France, and Hungary), descend on the home of country music with the expectation of working in specific areas of semiotics and structuralism and also of obtaining an overview and an introduction to this interdisciplinary field. If these expectations were only partially met, the experience was nevertheless a positive one, continued at the third Summer Institute, held in June 1982, once again in Toronto.

The second Summer Institute was sponsored by the Vanderbilt Structuralist Research Group with the collaboration of the Toronto Semiotic Circle and Le Groupe de recherches sémio-linguistiques (A. J. Greimas, Director). It was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Mellon Foundation, and Vanderbilt University. The director of the Institute was Daniel Patte, Professor of Religious Studies, Vanderbilt University.

Of the 120 participants present at various points during the Institute, there were approximately 40 who took part in the activities from beginning to end. Most were housed on the Vanderbilt campus; and while the standard of meals and housing were perhaps not up to what could be expected, there was ample opportunity for lively and interesting discussion.

Just before arriving in Nashville, participants learned that more than half the courses listed officially in the brochure would not be given. In fact, only six of 13 courses were offered. Had courses in the semiotics of law, cinema, painting, and nonverbal communication — to name only
certain areas — not been announced, and had certain participants not come to Nashville specifically to work in these fields, the disappointment would not have been too great, for the program of courses, research groups, and colloquia was quite rich, despite an understandable but regrettable predominance of a particular theory of semiotics, that put forward by Greimas and his followers. This orientation was not too surprising given the ties between the Vanderbilt Structuralist Research Group and Le Groupe de recherches sémiologiques.

In this report, we would like to review some of the highlights of the Institute, providing descriptions of selected courses, colloquia, research groups, and seminars. In our conclusion we offer a certain number of criticisms and recommendations designed to aid in planning future Institutes.

Courses

There were six courses given at the Institute.

David Savan’s course, ‘Introduction to C. S. Peirce’s semiotic’, had as its aim the presentation of the fundamentals of Peirce’s semiotic system. Some 25 students attended the course, demonstrating the interest in the semiotic of Peirce and the necessity for such a course at the introductory level. These students found the course particularly useful; however, as the course essentially repeated the one that had been given the previous summer in Toronto, some participants felt it would perhaps be more useful to alternate this introduction to Peirce with a course providing applications of Peirce’s theories to particular fields or with one further developing Peirce’s thought and theory.

Vilmos Voigt, the chairman of the Folklore Department at the University of Budapest, gave a course entitled ‘Social semiotics: Methodology for the analysis of folklore and folklife’. A general survey of the originators of social semiotics was provided in the first part of the course and students thereby gained valuable first-hand information about current and past research in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Emphasis was placed on the differences in theory and methodology between the East and the West. To illustrate his lectures, Voight referred extensively to the folk culture of his own country. As the course progressed, general issues in historical semiotics and culture theory were presented and discussed.

Charles Scott’s course, ‘Michel Foucault: The structures of conflict and order’, explored Foucault’s way of understanding epistemic, cultural, and institutional orders of historical development. Basing his lectures on
Language, Counter-Memory, Practice; The Order of Things; Madness and Civilization; and The Birth of the Clinic; Professor Scott emphasized how Foucault substantiates his claim that 'knowledge' must be understood as the 'development of knowledge' and not as some kind of transcendental subjectivity. Questions of methodology received particular emphasis in both seminars and lectures.

'Introduction to semiotic/structural analysis of literary texts', taught by Daniel Patte, served as an introduction to the practice of semiotic analysis as developed by Greimas. Through lectures and demonstrations, the deep 'semantic and syntactic components' of a sample text were scrupulously mapped and analyzed. Collateral readings included texts by Barthes, Chatman, the Group of Entrevernes, Patte, and Scholes. The course provided a reliable guide to Greimasian semiotics.

Paolo Fabbri offered a lively and stimulating course on the 'Semiotics of didactic discourse'. Professor Fabbri's main concerns were the concepts of act and passion, which represent a further development of the Greimasian theory of modalities. However, this distinctive account of a theory of passions was not tied exclusively to the Greimasian model. A number of approaches and theoretical traditions — ranging from Aristotle to Bourdieu, Goffman to Halliday — were engaged in an often thought-provoking way. The starting point for Fabbri's approach was that the text transforms not only its content, but also some image of the sender and receiver in discourse. The types of modal constraints that operate on the notion of subject-in-process were shown to be relevant here. One of the underlying purposes of this approach seemed to be to generalize the notions of act and passion for a general semiotic theory in order to investigate how the subject is transformed and manipulated in the production and reception of discourse.

In the absence of Lubomir Doležel, the course in the 'Semiotics of fiction' was taught by Linda Waugh, Hans-Georg Ruprecht, and Larry Crist. Waugh presented a lucid exposition of the principles of Jakobson's linguistic theory, focusing on his theory of the poetic function. Ruprecht continued the course by elaborating on Stanzel's heuristic efforts to account for the narrative situation in the novel and in particular on the sender/receiver communication axis. The work of Greimas, Genette, Lotman, Grice, and others was referred to in order to build up an overall picture concerning such concepts as modal competence, intertextuality, and presupposition in relation to a theory of narrativity. Crist concluded the course with a Greimasian analysis of modalities in Maupassant's Deux Amis. Inescapably, the course suffered from the lack of common criteria and terminology underpinning the different approaches.
Colloquia

During the Institute, three colloquia took place centering on the work of particular semioticians — Greimas, Sebeok, and Eco — and one colloquium was held on 'Semiotics and the classics'.

The colloquium devoted to Greimas might have been expected to delineate his thought and engage it in a critical confrontation with other theories of the production of meaning. However, little account was taken of different methodological and theoretical assumptions, and there was no real attempt to focus on some of the central problems of semiotic theory. Because of the absence of an operational context, there was always the implicit danger that the discussion would amount to little more than self-justification. Many participants felt there should have been a more substantive attempt to relate the text (as individual message) to the larger system of communicative relationships that generate texts in our culture. One possible starting point would have been to consider which types of contextual relationships are involved in the production of a range of sign-types. Still, a significant dimension of Professor Greimas's discussion concerned the semiotic study of didactic discourse. In this regard, important distinctions such as semantic competence and modal competence were referred to with regard to the acquisition, transfer, and manipulation of values in the subject. These and other key concepts could have been more carefully examined in order to establish the methodological criteria used, so that specific problems concerning the generation of texts could be made more amenable to informed critical discussion.

The second colloquium featured Thomas A. Sebeok, who centered his participation in the Institute around signs in the physical world and their relation to the observer who both creates and observes the phenomena. In his lectures and in informal discussion groups Sebeok stressed the practical applications for semiotics.

During his colloquium, Umberto Eco gave two formal lectures and participated in several panels, research groups, and courses. Eco stressed the importance of interpretation in semiotics and argued against a purely analytical approach. Following Peirce, Eco maintained that the sign is inferential in nature and that it takes the form of a set of instructions about how to deal with the interpretability of the external world, which he said is structured like a labyrinth, a web in which any point can be connected to any other. Nevertheless, there are shapes (in)forming this network, and thus there is a constant dialectic between form and openness.

Eco's presence and active participation in various aspects of the Institute were felt to be particularly stimulating; all the more so as his
position provided a definite alternative to the one that had tended up to that point to dominate the discussions.

The papers of the colloquium on 'Semiotics and the classics', organized by Nancy Rubin (University of Georgia), will be published in a special double issue of *Arethusa* in Spring 1983. The colloquium demonstrated that the process of rethinking the discipline of classical studies in light of modern literary, linguistic, and semiotic theory is well under way.

John Peradotto (SUNY at Buffalo), in a vigorous opening address, 'Texts and unrefracted facts: Philology, hermeneutics and semiotics', took issue with his more traditional colleagues who remain imprisoned in outdated philological methodologies. He also argued for the necessity of a thoroughgoing critique of power relationships within the professional ranks of classical studies. The two papers that followed (Ann Bergren, UCLA — 'Language and the female in Greek thought', and Marilyn Arthur, Wesleyan University — 'The dream of a world without women: Poetry and the circles of order in the *Theogony* poem') dealt with the ways in which the women of classical texts become signs and enter into sign relationships. Myth types was the subject of Rubin's paper ('Hunting and sexuality in myth and epic') and of Charles Segal's paper (Brown University — 'Greek myth, semiotics, and the problem of tragedy'). In response to these two presentations, Paolo Fabbri raised an important question for myth study in general: are the myths we identify and talk about in literature pure abstractions? or do our mythic constructs in fact inform texts at some deeper levels? Gregory Nagy (Harvard University) gave a highly original paper ('*Sema* and *Noësis*: Some illustrations') that broke new ground in classics and semiotics by exploring the question of how the Greeks perceived and interpreted their own sign systems. In a similar way, Bruce Rosenstock (Stanford University), in an illuminating study of 'Plato's poetics', clarified for analysts of narrative the distinctions between 'mimesis' and 'diegesis'. The final paper was presented by Bernard Fischer (UCLA) on 'The code of the Wise Old Man: The iconology of Epicurus' Portrait-Statues'.

**Research groups**

Much of the most interesting discussion during the Institute took place in the research groups, where the participants had opportunities to present their own research and center their interests upon specific problems in semiotics.

The Research Group on Comparative Literature, led by Hans-Georg Ruprecht and Sanda Golopentia-Eretescu, met eight times in three-hour

The Architecture Research Group met 11 times under the overall direction of Manar Hammad, who gave lectures on his research on the Japanese garden and house, suggesting the possibility of a semiotics of space broader than an architectural semiotics, involving the study of elements used to manipulate characters in space. Bill Widdowson gave two presentations on the interpretation of architectural facades and their evolution, showing the values transmitted and the reasons for their use. Roger Joseph illustrated architectural constants in Persian and Arab countries with his study of the Islamic mosque. Tetsuo Kawama adopted a Peircean interpretation of signalization in public places, such as airports and railway stations. The consensus of the group was that semiotics is a means of understanding but not producing architectural space; there was overall agreement that the only way to interest architects is to show how semiotics can be integrated into the production process. Hammad suggested the evaluation of specific projects as one way out of this problem.

Guided by Norman Petersen and Robert Polzin, the Research Group on Biblical Studies convened nine times to discuss common readings and research projects in progress, emphasizing methodological and theoretical options. Composed of 12 literary and biblical scholars, the group considered the following works: Adrian Howard, ‘Semiotic structures in the Gospel of Peter’; Daniel Patte, Syllabus for ‘Religious studies: The New Testament’ and his and Aline Patte’s Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice (1978), chapters 3 and 4; Norman Petersen, ‘When is the end not the end? Literary reflections on the ending of Mark’s narrative’, Interpretation 34 (1980); Gary Phillips, ‘Matthew 13: Narration, parables and discourse’; and Robert Polzin, Moses and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomic History (1980), chapters 1 and 2. The group regularly discussed the differences and similarities
between historical-philological criticism and semiotic approaches, particularly as each of these relates to hermeneutic questions.

Although there were only a few classicists at the Institute, a lively group led by Nancy Rubin met regularly. Early meetings were devoted to Stoic theories of signification and the ways in which modern semiotic theory can be applied to the study of classical texts. Stimulating discussion centered especially on Peirce's notion of the sign. After the Classics colloquium, the group decided to look closely at two of the papers presented at the colloquium (Gregory Nagy's paper on 'Sêma and Noêsis' and Ann Bergren's on 'Language and the female in Greek thought'). The last two meetings of this group dealt with quarrel and communicative breakdowns in the *Iliad*.

The Research Group on Anthropology met 12 times during the Institute. After an initial organizational meeting during which historical antecedents were discussed (Vico, Lévi-Strauss, Ardener, Crick), the following papers were presented: Eleanor Dougherty, 'The locus of meaning'; Michael Herzfeld, 'Introduction to terminology and the problems of translation', 'Negative reciprocity: The semiotics of theft and abuse' (Linda Waugh, discussant), 'Questions about questions; The ethnographer in context', 'Semiotic illusions — The structure of familiarity' (Vilmos Voigt, discussant); Roger Joseph, 'The grammar of ritual' (Manar Hammad, discussant), 'The semiotics of exchange; An ethnographic interrogation' (Paolo Fabbri, discussant); Roger Joseph and Terri B. Joseph, 'Primitive intertextuality: The anthropology of poetry'; Nancy Rubin, 'Initiation rites in Classical Greece'; Hans-Georg Ruprecht, 'Le Formant intertextuel: remarques sur un objet ethno-sémiotique' (Sanda Golopentia-Eretescu, discussant); and Paul Thibault, 'Text and context revisited'. In addition, there was a panel discussion with Umberto Eco on the cultural context, moderated by Paolo Fabbri and Roger Joseph.

### Seminars

In addition to the regularly scheduled courses, colloquia, and research groups, two smaller seminars were created during the Institute when it was discovered that several people shared common interests. The first group, led by Linda Waugh, grew out of the course 'Semiotics of fiction' and discussion centered on issues in poetics. The second seminar, organized by Clive Thomson, was devoted to the subject of literary parody. Formal presentations were given in the latter seminar by Sanda Golopentia-Eretescu ('The grammar of parody') and Gabriela Naus ('Parody as a problem of communication').
Conclusion

Though we feel the Institute provided a good opportunity for the initiation into and discussion of issues in semiotics, we should like to conclude this report with recommendations aimed at making future Institutes still more rewarding.

(1) The uncertainties of financing, coupled with an inadequate advertising program, contributed significantly to organizational problems that resulted in the cancellation of many courses. Future Institutes would appear to need a more secure financial base if they are to be reasonably sure of organizational stability.

(2) The cancellation of more than half the courses officially announced was extremely disappointing. If future Institutes are to retain their credibility, every effort should be made to ensure that courses announced are in fact given.

(3) Future Institutes should provide at least one course on the semiotics of the visual media.

(4) No effective distinction was recognized between those people seeking to undertake advanced work and those with only a beginner’s knowledge of the field. As a result, many of the courses seemed to err too much on the introductory side. Some clear selection criteria are necessary so that both groups can be more effectively served.

(5) The research groups provided an admirable setting to develop a workshop atmosphere. It is a pity that this kind of atmosphere was not more evident in courses and colloquia so that work could have been undertaken and shared in a more openly self-critical context.

(6) With the notable exception of Eco, the potential for addressing the fundamental options in semiotic theory was too rarely actualized. A more dynamic and committed use of the colloquia might have helped to focus more clearly the overall aims of the Institute.

(7) Since two of the courses and three of the research groups were led by Greimasian semioticians, the Institute took on a distinctive methodological orientation. The three-day visit of Greimas himself solidified this perspective. Many participants felt that East European semiotic and French poststructuralist achievements were particularly skirted in the general course of studies. Future Institutes should attempt to provide a variety of semiotic approaches.

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