

## For a civilisational semiotics

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The notion of civilisations has been central in our understanding of humanity. At the same time, a civilisation also represents a modality of the relation that a spatially situated people develop toward their world. A people deploy semiotic systems to model their topological relationship to the world. By doing so, they not only form and reflect upon their *topoi* (Greimas [1976] 1986) but this semiotic sub-system of modelling the world (cf. Lotman in Semenenko 2012) ultimately comes to define them as a civilisation. From a semiotic perspective, civilisations can be approached as a topological semiotic concept, with a semiotic analysis having a task distinctly different from that of archaeology or anthropology (cf. Posner 1988).

Yet, being modalities of human-environment interaction, civilisations also pose existential implications for the trajectory of humanity, representing one confluence between semiotics and existentiality as a dynamic and long-term movement (cf. Tarasti 2024). When the environment, being a major generative principle of human meaning, changes radically, the core meaning of a civilisation changes as well. It is during such transitional moments that a civilisation is confronted with its existential trajectory: given its semiotic systems, how will it negotiate and survive, if at all, radical topological changes? A redefinition of humanity's resilience from an existential standpoint is therefore implied in such a semiotic inquiry to civilisations.

This talk will present a recently commenced attempt to (re)define a theory of civilisational semiotics. I will touch upon semiotic theories that substantiate this approach, notably Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics, the topological semiotics of A.J. Greimas, and Yuri Lotman's and Thomas Sebeok's works on cultural and bio semiotics. I will subsequently (re)introduce and discuss a new type of semiotic sub-system pertaining to civilisations as existential modalities of inhabiting the natural world (cf. Choay 2006). I will conclude by highlighting the importance that such approach represents for reintroducing human sciences to a civilisational theory that is currently empirically overdetermined and lacking the very notion it represents: humanity.

### References

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