

“SIMION STOILOW” INSTITUTE OF MATHEMATICS OF THE ROMANIAN ACADEMY

A semiotic account of modelling: mediating between the biological and the digital

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Abstract: Drawing on recent research in semiotics I construe learning as modelling (pragmatization of the environment). From this perspective, learning, as sought for in educational settings, is not contrasted to the phenomenon of adaptation. For instance, Charles Peirce considered that reasoning is not a peculiarity of humans, but a continuous phenomenon of signification that started in the geologically distant past. This implies a non-logocentric understanding of humanity and a non-anthropocentric understanding of learning. I argue that semiotic scholarship in several semiotic schools confirms Marshall McLuhan’s anticipation (in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) that the “electronic age” will resemble pre-alphabetic societies more than the age of modernity, which was dominated by “alphabetic technology”. The digital age reveals that our modelling of the environment retains the principles of modelling, in a scientific sense. I shall explain some of the main theoretical concepts in biosemiotics, ecosemiotics, edusemiotics, semiotic research on multimodality and the recent semiotic approach to digital humanities to account for this statement. Semiotics is particularly insightful in this regard because such a theory retains the general mechanisms of modelling found in life in general. This was mentioned in recent scholarship on digital humanities modelling (Ciula and Marras 2016) and it accounts for the relevance that research along these lines has for digital literacies (Bezemer and Kress 2008) and for the analysis of digital texts and discourses (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001).