

About The Biosemiotic Glossary Project

Why compose a biosemiotic glossary? As Emmeche et al. write (2002:25), “at a certain point of the development of [biosemiotics] certain more formal explications unavoidably must take place.” The biosemiotic glossary project is an endeavor in this tradition.

Emmeche, Kull and Stjernfelt (ibid, 25–26) are very much correct in noting that the emergence of biosemiotics in many cases necessitates modification of existing definitions within both semiotics and biology, since a number of established terms originated long before biosemiotics developed.

The article in progress is part of a series of review articles addressing biosemiotic terminology. The Biosemiotic Glossary Project is inclusive and designed to integrate the views of members within the biosemiotic community based on a standard survey and related publications.

This first review article was intended as a standard-setting article establishing the format of the biosemiotic glossary project. Each review is prepared on the basis of a term-specific survey in the biosemiotic community and follows a similar structure, including an Appendix published as electronic supplementary material which presents survey findings in more detail.

Each of the surveys includes a questionnaire which is distributed to a wide range of biosemioticians through email, list servers, blog posts, and public web pages. Articles are expected to describe the results of the survey in a systematic and unbiased way. We intend to engage the biosemiotic community in all phases of the glossary project and make it a true community effort.

Since this will be an ongoing, distributed writing process, the goal will be twofold: (1) solidifying and detailing established terminology, and, (2) where appropriate, to contribute innovatively in the theoretical development of biosemiotic theory and vocabulary.

As a reviewer of [the first review] article [in this series] points out, “there are well-known ontological disagreements among the respondents”, and one could claim that “it is hardly meaningful to pool replies from people working from wholly contradictory positions.” Importantly, this implies that the survey presented in this review article should primarily be considered as a qualitative study, not a quantitative study. The actual interpretation and application of terms – and differences in views – is ultimately what is of interest.

The biosemiotic glossary project aims to bring underlying fundamental differences, such as the one just mentioned, to the surface. The goal of the project is not necessarily to get everybody to adopt the same definitions (though consistency in term usage could prove to be highly beneficial for our field), but just as much to reveal, describe and address important disagreements in a process involving mutual exchange of ideas.

REFERENCES:

Emmeche, C., Kull, K., & Stjernfelt, F. (2002). A brief biosemiotic glossary. In C. Emmeche, K. Kull, & F. Stjernfelt (Eds.), *Reading Hoffmeyer, Rethinking Biology* (Tartu Semiotics Library 3) (pp. 25–30). Tartu: Tartu University Press.

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