

# Prologue

This book was originally meant as an introduction to semiotics for our students at Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Over the years, we gradually became more and more deeply involved with the teaching of semiotics, a discipline which was in fact responsible for bringing us together in the first place, though we came to it from very different directions.

The male half of the present couple of authors, Alexandros, trained in Greece and in France as an architect-engineer, planner and social anthropologist before becoming professor of urban planning in the School of Architecture of Aristotle University. In the late 1970s he developed a course on the semiotics of space which he taught until his retirement in 2005. The female half, Karin, studied comparative and mediaeval literature in the United States and eventually became professor in the School of English of Aristotle University, where she taught literary theory with special emphasis on structuralism and semiotics from the early 1980s up to her retirement in 2015. Both of us were among the founding members of the Hellenic Semiotic Society in 1977. Together we developed and taught a series of postgraduate courses in semiotics, and eventually gave in to the repeated demands of our students for a written text to accompany the seminars.

About a year later, we were surprised to discover that there was enough interest in the topic to warrant an English-language edition. With the encouragement of Paul Copley and Kalevi Kull, who mediated between us and De Gruyter, we have produced an English version which we hope will live up to their expectations.

The book was originally designed as an introductory textbook. However, there are many good introductions to semiotics available in English and little would be gained with the publication of one more. We have thus taken the opportunity to make corrections, amendments, extensions and some rather substantial additions to the English edition. Although it presents the basic concepts of the field, it is not meant as a general introduction. It is a critical presentation of the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure and the canonical narrative model of Algirdas Julien Greimas, including the contributions of other scholars (notably Hjelmslev, Barthes and Eco) as we deemed them to be relevant and with some excursions to later developments. It is written for scholars and advanced students, not only in semiotics but also in the language sciences, communications, cultural and media studies, anthropology and sociology, as well as for interested researchers in related fields. Our goal has been to present a coherent theory and methodology, with special emphasis on applications for textual analysis.

A few words should be said about terminology. There are many excellent English-language sources on Saussure and his work; we have generally used the translation by Roy Harris (Saussure [1916] 1971), though we have occasionally preferred our own readings. Things are more difficult with Greimas. There are very good English translations of *Sémantique structurale* (Greimas 1966) and *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Greimas and Courtés 1979); the *Dictionnaire* also suggests English terminology for all its entries. Still, translating Greimas into any language is a challenge.

We are, in fact, well aware that we are not ideally positioned to present Greimasian narrative theory to an English-speaking audience. There are many scholars – notably of course the original members of the Groupe de Recherche Sémio-linguistique at the École Pratique des Hautes Études – who could with greater justification undertake to do so, and many of them have indeed published extensively on Greimasian narratology, but in French. We, who both grew up in places where the local language was neither French nor English, feel that Greimasian narratology is both a powerful theory and a particularly valuable method of textual analysis, and that it needs to be made more easily accessible to non-Francophone scholars. We hope that our French-speaking semiotician friends will forgive us and find our version satisfactory.

Finally, we would like to thank the many people who have contributed to the making of this book, first and foremost our students and colleagues. Many thanks also to Dr. Dimitris Drakoulis, architect and planner, and our daughter Katerina, artist, for their essential help in preparing the visual material of the book. We also owe warm thanks to the publisher of the original Greek edition, Stefanos Patakis, for his generosity in changing our initial contract and transferring the rights of the English translation to us so as to allow its present publication by De Gruyter.