Great intellectual excitement was fomented in the university community and the San Francisco Bay Area by the preparation for and anticipation of the Fifth Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies on the University of California, Berkeley campus. Curiosity as to what semiotics is and does heightened in the local media and newspapers with the expectation of ever broader representation of participants from around the globe.

Compared with the history of universities internationally, and indeed on this continent, the University of California at Berkeley is a newer founding, born a mere century and a quarter ago, when the pioneers of the Gold Rush era had the foresight to require of their infant government "the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral and agricultural improvement" of the people in their so-called Golden State.

The city encasing the University was named in 1866 after the Irish philosopher George Berkeley, and the site of the Congress, the Clark Kerr Campus of the University of California, Berkeley, is named after a professor of Industrial Relations who became Berkeley's first Chancellor and later President of all nine campuses in the University of California system. Short though the history of this University may be, Berkeley has always been exciting and innovative, from the early admission of women students within two years of its founding, to the establishment of the science research center at the Lawrence Hall of Science, to the birth of the Free Speech Movement, and beyond.

In his welcoming address to Congress participants on the evening of June 12, 1994, Provost for Research Joseph Cerny stressed how aptly the Congress theme “Semiotics Around the World: Synthesis in Diversity” interlaced with the ambiance that is the University of California, Berkeley: “We thus view the convening of the Fifth Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies on the Berkeley Campus as most appropriate, and as a contribution to the intellectual and cultural life of this leading public institution of learning in the United States. Your convening here is fitting and intellectually enriching because your proclaimed ‘Synthesis in Diversity’ not only reflects the interchange of the diverse humane and natural sciences which, by your research contributions, your inherently open paradigm of semiotics cultivates, but because ‘Synthesis in Diversity’ instantiates the co-mingling of 49 diverse countries and cultures represented in your presence.”

A pre-Congress symposium, “Signs and symbols in everyday life,” aimed specifically at introducing the Bay Area public to the nature of semiotics. This introduction was aided by factors such as the recall of a headline in the “This World” section of the Sunday edition of the San Francisco Chronicle (February 1987) that read “Semiotics sells” with regard to advertising the picture of a Volkswagen Beetle displayed with the reverse psychology caption “lemon.” Reference to the word “semiotics” in the May 1993 issue of the popular Gentlemen’s Quarterly, which spoke to the “semiotics” of the dress clothes of a star athlete such as San Francisco’s Joe Montana, and Time magazine’s re-
port (1994) which mentioned the “semiotic” display of entertainer Madonna’s visit with TV’s “Late Show” David Letterman, viewed throughout the Bay Area, further elucidated semiotics as a *vox populi* concept.

Each of these three media scenarios could be shown to be rich in iconicity, indexicality, and symbolism. Madonna’s smoking of a cigar while wearing a long dress with combat boots and sitting at a right angle to David Letterman with her eyes cast to the ceiling, could hardly have been more paradigmatic of Peirce’s equation of the human being with the sign. In no dictionary is the picture of the VW Beetle a defining feature of the word “lemon,” yet the metaphorical extension between the two could be universally conceptualized with ease. A similar incongruity was evoked by the sight of Joe Montana in street clothes rather than in the expected football uniform, suggestive of the interpretation “California-casual wear” much like the ubiquitous blue-jeans associated with Americana.

Into this cultural ambiance some 700 semiotics scholars, students, and Bay Area public convened for a week-long sojourn to present, hear, and exchange research centering in the sign, “the mother of meaning,” so designated by Peirce. Over 150 sections were required to accommodate the rich array of research papers. Not a small number of participants organized valuable sessions concentrating on special topics. The leitmotiv session “Semiotics Around the World,” which featured the state of semiotics in the various countries represented, opened each morning’s presentations, acting like a quasi international handshake.

Two plenary papers per day punctuated the wealth of presentations. Congress participants graciously shared in the task of chairing sessions. It was an impressive, enriching international effort, the first congress of the IASS to convene since the end of the Cold War.

Indeed, so central was the aim of integrating semiotics scholars from newly independent nations, from previously non-accessible countries, and from developing lands that the topic “Signs and Symbols of Emerging Democracies in Eastern Europe” was singled out for a day-long post-Congress symposium held on June 19. Speakers from Eastern Europe presented fascinating eye-witness accounts of the dynamics at work in a medley of signs, e.g., flags, currency, strategies employed in the ongoing establishment of their nationhood.

Thus it happened that the intractable identity question of semiotics so central to the first four congresses of the IASS over the past twenty years (1974, 1979, 1984, 1989) yielded to the Fifth Congress embrace of *diversity* instantiated in the plurality of presenters from 49 countries as well as in the plurality of topics and approaches. Certainly, Eco’s expressed hope that there never exist a single unified theory of semiotics was proven prophetic by the Berkeley Congress.

We thank all participants and contributors to the Fifth Congress and we thank the IASS for choosing the University of California, Berkeley campus as the site for the Fifth Congress.
of its first congress on either American continent. Many offices of the University lent their support in various ways—the Clark Kerr Conference Center, International and Area Studies, the Office of the Chancellor, the Office of the Provost and the Vice-Chancellor, the Office of the Provost for Research, the Office of the Dean of Humanities and the Townsend Center for the Humanities. Particular appreciation is offered to the several offices of the Dean and Associate Dean of the University Extension which helped manage the everyday operations of the Congress before, during, and after it took place. The generosity of California wineries in providing a bounty of California wines contributed greatly to the conviviality of the opening reception on June 12. We could not have wished for a more splendid organizing committee of the Berkeley Congress: Honorary Congress President Thomas A. Sebeok, Alain J.-J. Cohen, Frank Johnson, W.G.Kudszus, William Watt, Lihua Zhang. Finally, we thank the publishing house of Mouton de Gruyter for preparing and disseminating an exciting Congress poster and for its attractive publishing of the Congress Proceedings, which assures the Fifth IASS Congress a place in the history of semiotics and the world of learning.

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Berkeley, CA.
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