



Semiotics of Contagion: Models and Media in a Synergistic Epidemic

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GUEST EDITOR: Gary Genosko

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Semioticians, linguists, cultural theorists, communication and media thinkers have long been fascinated with scientific models. Philosophers of science have generated theories of models that address the relationships between theory, models, and the world. Today, in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the role of models has been heightened and the stakes have been raised on a global scale. We are living with an abundance of models of fraught futures: epidemiological projections of waves of infection; meteorological predictions of climate crises; and speculative economic visions of post-pandemic recovery.

The sustainability of our interrelationships, not only to other humans, but to immediate and distant environments, to animals and other organisms, rely on our capacity to address climate change and income inequality, racism, sexism, ageism, and speciesism. The COVID-19 pandemic is more than governance by medical models that attempt to retrofit older mathematical constructions of epidemics using the broad brushstrokes of S(susceptible)-I(infected)-R(recovered) categories. Recent reflection on the nature of the pandemic suggests that syndemic would be more appropriate term, one that captures the dynamic interactions between social dimensions of vulnerable minority populations subjected to structural violence and warehoused elderly citizens, with economic disadvantages, and the political ecologies that exacerbate pandemic transmission, as can be seen starkly in the US, Brazil, and elsewhere. COVID-19 does discriminate for it preys on those already overburdened by other co-occurring epidemics.

The inadequacy of a purely biomedical solution should be obvious, yet these models are used to rather hastily formulate policies and regulations. What new models of virality and contagion are necessary to address this current predicament in the age of living life online? What would a socio-semiotic of contagion include? Viral capitalism? Transmission of affective intensities? Signals without significations? Contributions may wish to address these and other related issues:

- governance by medical models
- semiotics of modelling, de-modelling and meta-modelling
- encoding and decoding epidemics from pandemic to syndemic
- new gestural rituals, haptic repertoires, and hygiene practices
- socio-semiotics of social distancing and the contested skinscape
- codes of quarantine and regimes of vaccination
- reconceptualizing spreading and transmitting
- theories of virality
- affective contagions
- masks and meaning
- the medium is the model
- rhetorics of Covidization
- new models of surveillance (formal and informal)

Prospective authors should submit an abstract of 250-300 words by email to the editor, **Gary Genosko** (Gary.Genosko@uoit.ca), including their institutional affiliation and contact information. Acceptance of the abstract does not guarantee publication, given that all research articles will be subjected to peer review.



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