

Dr Roland Posner

Eight Historical Paradigms of Cultural Studies and Their Semiotic Explication

In Europe, reflections on the substance and the function of the humanities have a history which goes back to the Homeric epics and to classical Greek philosophy. During this history the humanities were re-invented several times: In the Greek city states of the 5th century BC, the humanities took the form of *paideia*; its task was to prepare the young males for manhood and citizenship. For the Romans of the first century BC, the goal of education was *humanitas*, the formation of humans who could play a role in public communication on forums and market places. In late Antiquity, education was centered around the *artes liberales* and provided the skills needed for a Christian life as a free person. In the age of Renaissance, the wealthy citizens of Italian city-states conceived of education as *studium humanitatis*, which consisted in the reading of ancient secular texts in addition to the bible. In 18th century France, the canon of texts to be read was extended to include texts (“belles lettres”) written by enlightened contemporary authors. In Romantic Germany (around 1800), the humanities were re-conceptualized as studies of the human spirit (French: *esprit*, German: *Geist*) and focused on the activities and results of human work. In the heyday of colonialism around the turn of the 20th century, the question of what is a *culture* became prominent. In the context of globalization at the turn of the third millennium, many European universities are now re-organizing the humanities into faculties of cultural studies grouped around *media studies*. A comparison of these conceptions shows that each of them was motivated by trying to account for new types of signs and sign processes that had become necessary for a successful life in its time.

Roland Posner is Professor of Linguistics and Semiotics and Director of the Research Center for Semiotics at the Technische Universität Berlin. Born in Prague in 1942, he studied philosophy, comparative literature, linguistics, and communication theory at the Universities of Bonn, Munich, and Berlin. After having received his Dr. phil. in linguistics, he habilitated in linguistics, general literature, and philosophy of language. He has published numerous books, most recently *Semiotics: A Handbook on the Sign-Theoretic Foundations of Nature and Culture* (4 vols, 1997-2004) and *Atmosphären im Alltag* (2007).. Having founded the German Association for Semiotic Studies (DGS) and established the quarterly *Zeitschrift für Semiotik* (1979ff), he served as President of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS) (1994-2004), of which he is now Honorary President.