

Semiotics, Communication and Cognition



Edited by
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Volume 18

Semiotics and its Masters



Volume 1

Edited by
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DE GRUYTER
MOUTON

ISBN 978-1-5015-1175-2
e-ISBN (PDF) 978-1-5015-0382-5
e-ISBN (EPUB) 978-1-5015-0374-0
ISSN 1867-0873

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book has been applied for at the Library of Congress.

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available on the Internet at <http://dnb.dnb.de>.

© 2017 Walter de Gruyter Inc., Boston/Berlin
Typesetting: fidus Publikations-Service GmbH, Nördlingen
Printing and binding: CPI books GmbH, Leck
♻ Gedruckt auf säurefreiem Papier
Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com



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Gianfranco Marrone

Farewell to representation: text and society

Abstract: Cultures develop the criteria to construct and recognize their texts and pose them as normal, usual, ‘natural’. For us a book is a text; in the Middle Ages, for everyone a city was a text. But when it is necessary to critically inspect such a culture by analyzing its texts, it becomes necessary to understand those texts’ conditions of possibility and their functioning. So, from the semiotic point of view, the text is something that needs to be *recognized* and *constructed* at the same time; that is to say, *invented* according to the double meaning this word has for the ancient rhetoric (*recovering*) and for modern science (*creating*) (Marrone 2014). This is true for the semiotician who searches for the fundamentals of any possible social and cultural meaning but, before that, for any subject, individual or collective, looking after his own identity. On one side, the text is the starting point of any semiotic investigation, a model produced to examine and interpret a given cultural reality; on the other, such a cultural reality exists because it is textually formed. This is very briefly the thesis that I will try to demonstrate in this paper, from which it hands down a new role for the semiotic analysis of text: that of a *new way of criticizing culture*.

Key words: Text, analysis, society, configuration, culture

1 Text and society

“A science which studies the *life* of signs as part of social *life*”. When, in the early 20th century, Ferdinand de Saussure (1917: 16, my translation) was looking for a new scientific object of linguistic knowledge, he proposed this definition for the *semiology* or *science of signs* that would play a very important role in the history of culture from then on. What strikes the reader about this definition more than the appeal to science is the double reference to *life*: of signs and of society at the same time. That is probably because – as the brilliant linguist must have thought – they are basically the same thing. Many later authors severely criticized structuralism, accusing it of having an abstract nature and being closed to the outside world. Here, at the very beginning of our history, we can see instead dynamic signs of dynamic society in need of a science to explain how they work and to understand

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DOI 10.1515/9781501503825-006

what their reasons are. Languages, discourses and signs are social processes: their formal nature underlines, confirms and proves it.

What happened after that? At first, since authors such as Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco adopted and developed the Saussurean concept, the focus on sociality was essential. At that time, the rising mass culture with its peculiar communication media, the emerging consumer society, design, but also literary and artistic experimentation, the renewed logical-linguistic attention of philosophy and the development of an autonomous epistemology of human sciences, brought with them the need for a careful and disillusioned theoretical perspective that would be able to set up a *formal method of analysis of society*, free of any underlying ideology.

Semiotics – as Saussure’s chimera was called – addressed that need. At the mid-point of the century it was born as an individual science, with its own authors and its own institutions. Books like *Mythologies* (Barthes 1957) and *Apocalypse Postponed* (Eco 1964) best testify to the attention of the science of signs toward everyday social life and the vocation to *criticism* – in every sense of the word – that such a study perspective could not lack, focused as it was on systems and processes of signification. In order to study television or advertising, popular songs or comics, journalism or fashion, artistic avant-gardes or experimental novels, food mythologies or wrestling matches, it was necessary to gradually learn to look at them combining linguistic competences and sociologic interest, methodological attention and critical sensibility, formal vocation and a philosophical in-depth perspective.

However, the semiotics of the following period has mainly abandoned that original trend. The science of signification of the European tradition chose a different direction. The European science of signification focused, on the one hand, on a kind of semiotics that would investigate the whole culture, sharing its research field with human sciences such as folklore, ethnology, comparative linguistics, religion studies, narratology, historiography, psychoanalysis and sociology. This kind of semiotics would aim at building *general models* allowing an accurate study of anthropological mechanisms. On the other hand, semiotics focused on an analysis of non-verbal ‘languages’ – such as images, gestures, audiovisual material, everyday-life objects – that would propose accurate methods of analysis of *any particular work of expression and communication*, with the same success as structural linguistics.

Authors such as Algirdas J. Greimas and Yuri M. Lotman were able to walk both ways, and to go from the creation of a general cultural model to the accurate analysis of a single work. Thus the semiotic models allowed cultural anthropology to provide fodder for literal and artistic criticism, they allowed philology and iconology to give themselves an ethnological aspect and media studies to use

linguistic methodologies. At that time, however, the critical verve of the formal analysis of social facts got lost. And so did the hypothesis that any linguistic, communicative, expressive or semiotic phenomenon had a social basis, as Saussure – prophet of pure differences – had seen so clearly. This kind of analysis focused on *particular works* (such as novels, short stories, poetry, movies, paintings, pictures, ballet, advertisements, TV programs, newspaper articles, architectural works, objects), and anything that in our culture could be called a ‘text’ has entered the field of investigation for semiotics. The ‘text’ is here regarded as *any expression medium able to convey certain meanings*, with specific characteristics and clear boundaries, with its own processuality and so on.

The science of signification has gradually expanded the notion of text and used it as a tool to study not just semiotic entities using non-verbal expression-substances, but also different kinds of cultural phenomena that can have the same basic properties as a book-text (biplanarity, closing, stratification of levels, processuality, and so on) without its general bearing. Thus, even that which is not regarded as a text *from an empirical point of view* is analysed as such *from a methodological point of view*, as the same formal properties of texts can also be found in it. Such an analysis can be performed, for example, on TV shows, advertising campaigns, information streams, communication platforms, oral conversations, web interactions, marketing strategies, rituals, meals, subway stations, buildings, even whole cities. In this perspective, *the text is not a thing* anymore, it is not an empirical object *but a theoretical model acting as a tool for description* that, given certain requisites and certain explicit epistemological conditions, is able to retrace, at different levels, the formal devices of any object of knowledge of the science of signification.

A useful analogy can be suggested. As everybody knows, the concept of *narrativity* has been reached by gradually expanding the analysis of actual narratives (e.g. fairy tales, myths, novels, short stories and many other literary works) in order to explain seemingly non-narrative discourses (e.g. advertising, political, journalistic or philosophical discourses, culinary recipes, and so on). In the same way the concept of *textuality* has been built using actual texts (e.g. novels, poetry, pictures) as a tool to explain the structure of meaning of seemingly non-textual semiotic manifestations (e.g. urban spaces, supermarkets or airports, methods of cooking, scientific experiments and so on). *The text is, from now on, the formal model that can explain all human and social, cultural and historical phenomena.* That is the reason why Greimas used to repeat ‘Outside the text no salvation!’ and why many semioticians still refer to their specific object of study as ‘text’ whatever its nature is.

Hence the ‘new wave’ of *sociosemiotics*, proposed by Paolo Fabbri (1973) as a methodological perspective for the study of all sociological phenomena. It

was on this base that authors such as Jean-Marie Floch (1985, 1990, 1995), Eric Landowski (1989, 1997, 2004) and many others set out to explore a semiotic study of social facts, such as advertising, brand strategies, political and journalistic communication, fashion, design, cookery, public spaces, everyday life, objects, that was focused on their social and cultural values and their discursive implications. Since sociosemiotics did not analyse only given works, but something less well determined – such as situations, practices, habits, sensorial and corporeal experiences, flows of information or media interactivity –, *the dichotomy between ‘text’ and ‘context’ had no more reason to exist*. Many so-called *contextual facts* (e.g. that are ‘out’ of the given works’ text), *can also have a semiotic pregnancy of its own*, within a coherent description project.

While the linguistic perspective, even on its pragmatic side, differentiated linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena, according to sociosemiotics this difference is not given *a priori*, since both matters and situations could be at the same time meaningful and social, communicative and factual, textual and experiential. From the sociosemiotic point of view, we can call ‘context’ only *what is not relevant to the analysis anymore*; and it is actually the culture that determines if something is or is not relevant, even before the analysis itself. The text, on the other hand, is no longer the material base for interpretations that could integrate it, or even justify its existence, but the *formal device through which the meaning builds up its structure* and thus shows itself, the device through which the meaning spreads in society and culture.

The text is therefore *the specific object of study for the semiotician*, who analyses it and tries to retrace forms and dynamics, internal structures, levels of relevance, inputs and outputs. *The text is not a given entity*, nor phenomenal evidence; *it is the result of a double construction: a socio-cultural configuration* before and *an analytic re-configuration* afterwards. The text, in this perspective, is necessarily *negotiated* within cultural dynamics that, in creating it, come into existence and interlace in an unending chain with other texts, other matters, other languages. *The text is not closed in itself but easily remodelled and configured in other textual forms*, easily *translated into other languages* in the never-ending inter-textual, inter-discursive chain of the semiosphere.

2 Farewell to representation

So the base for any sociosemiotic study perspective is the fact that the concept of *representation* is not relevant either from the methodological or from the theoretical point of view. If, within the text, expression and contents are in reciprocal

presupposition, and if text and context define each other both in social culture and in textual/socio/semiotic analysis, the idea that texts are not actual realities but, at most, a ‘representation’ of reality, fades away. It is the same idea that lies at the base of statements that a novel ‘represents’ a certain portion of the world, a movie ‘represents’ a certain social reality, an advertisement a certain life-style, but without being any of those things. And it is this idea that leads to thinking that it is more productive to study ‘actual reality’ than to focus on textual forms that are just a ‘representation’ of that reality.

This idea, inheritance of a positivistic epistemological position naively realistic, has already been left behind by most philosophical – mainly phenomenological and hermeneutic – studies but also by ethno-anthropological and social researches, by sociology and ethnography of science including, of course, semiotics. Yet, for many obvious reasons, *it is still alive and well*: with the support of common sense, it comes back as long as the defence against it is low; sometimes it even appears in semioticians’ writings and debates.

Let us go back once again. First of all, the text is not a representation of the world because, simply enough, it includes the world itself within its boundaries as a content and, at the same time, it is part of the world and acts in it as a social force. To study the text – but more than that, to read it and enjoy it – does not mean to focus just on formal-expressive surface elements speaking of an outside reality; it means, instead, to understand how contents and expressions are created together and act in society.

That is the reason why, when Greimas needs to study certain social and cultural phenomena, he looks into *exemplar texts* – explaining of course the reasons for his choice. His book about Maupassant (Greimas 1976), for example, is not, or not only, about *Deux Amis* as a tale, but it is about everything that is narrated in it: the Franco-Prussian war, everyday life in late 19th century Paris, the French feeling of peace, how French people never take themselves seriously as opposed to German people, who have rigid morals, and so on. In more detail, when Greimas analyses the dialogues between the two main characters, rich with clichés and commonplace opinions, he does not mean to study the literary dialogue but everyday conversation in general. Similarly, when he examines the useless attempts of the enemy general to get the password for entering the city, he means to study rhetorical and hermeneutical techniques of manipulation, persuasion, interpretation and contra-interpretation, etc. Moreover, by analysing how Maupassant (following the realist directions of the impersonality of the author and the refusal of any internal point of view of the characters) accounts for the *cognitive dimensions* of the characters, that is never explicit but always inferable from their behaviours, Greimas tries to retrace a global (or a real) cognitive space. In this way, a so-called fictional tale becomes a tool that gives access to the

understanding and explanation of a set of facts and phenomena it presents as its content but that, at the same time, transcend it.

Similarly, in *On Imperfection*, where he means to study in a semiotic sense the sensorial and perceptive processes of the body, Greimas (1987) does not describe those processes directly (as a psychologist would do) but studies how they are narrated in some literary texts (by Tournier, Calvino, Rilke, Tanizaki, and so on). From those texts, or even from fragments of them, Greimas extracts *discursive models* that in his opinion can be considered as examples and lead to a generalisation: this can be verified by applying them to other phenomena and other texts.

On closer scrutiny, we realise that this proceeding is not only an idea of Greimas, nor specific to semiotics. Yuri Lotman also shows how some (literary and non literary) texts can have an exemplary role in helping to understand some historical period, some cultural asset (Pushkin and Leopardi *are* Romanticism). Clifford Geertz (1973) does the same thing when he describes Balinese culture by examining a long passage from a novel by the Danish author Hans Jacob Helms. It is also what historians do when they read Marcel Proust's work to understand late 19th century French society. It is what consumes sociologists when they look into Emile Zola's novels for the social value of the first shopping centres. It is what scholars of conversation do when they try to retrace the laws of presupposition through Ernest Hemingway's famous dialogues. It is what urban sociologists do when they read Don De Lillo's novels in order to understand the sense of the American metropolis. It is what Marx basically did, when he looked into Balzac's work for the explanation of the social psychology of capitalism. And, let alone literature, it is the same thing archaeologists do when they progressively retrace from small fragments of objects, buildings or bodies, a whole culture or historical period: they just interpret and analyse texts. It is the only thing they can do.

Texts are also, and above all, documents, regardless of – or in spite of – the intentions of their authors, who, still, have to be considered in the sociosemiotic analysis. When we study a set of advertising campaigns in order to understand how everyday life-style has changed from the advent of the mobile phone (or of any other modern technology: from GPS to iPad, from notebook to the web), we have to take into account what kind of advertisement they have, what its strategic goals are, what is the intentionality of the text, as Ricoeur (1989) would call it, that is completely patent and explicit (see Marrone 1999).

Text-documents have, among others, a very important characteristic: they are *attested*, they exist and can be experienced concretely *regardless of the needs of the analysis*. They were not produced to be analysed but for other goals, with other intentions that – once identified – do not represent a problem for the analysis. On the contrary, other verbal texts and experiential circumstances (interviews, tests, focus groups, laboratory experiments) produced *ad hoc* for the anal-

ysis, lack that characteristic, both because their circumstances of enunciation are affected by the observational and scientific intentionality of the researcher and because they circulate in culture just as documents for research and so they have no social value but to be witnesses of the academic working. Consequently, if we examine an advertisement and a casual interview on the street, the first one appears to be more spontaneous and natural than the second, while the second is more factitious than the first. In other words, although from a social and communicative point of view the advertisement is constructed while the interview is instinctive, from the sociosemiotic research point of view it is exactly the opposite. Once more it is a question of *relevance*. This is the reason why the distinction between ‘field’ work and ‘desk’ work is no longer useful and appears to be just a strong hypostatisation of epistemological thoughts as commonplace as non-existent, basically positivist. Any serious social research is made up by both field and desk work: every field observation is textual analysis or presupposes it; every textual analysis is field work or presupposes it (Marrone 2001).

So, sociosemiotics can work both on ‘text’ and ‘non-texts’, (i) because the latter are also texts when they have some meaning, (ii) because the former already have, as their content, the world researchers mean to describe, (iii) because the one and the other are social actors acting in the world, often along with other social actors with their own pragmatic and passionate competences, cognitive abilities and referential values. On the other hand, analysing the so-called ‘practices’ as if they were not texts but some other fact that is thought to be ‘pure’ and immediate, means to fall back into forms of textuality without identifying them, and consequently without being able to control them – with bad results at the knowledge level.

3 Basic criteria

On those matters it seems superfluous, today, to discuss them further. It would be useful, instead, to enumerate some *basic criteria* for the building – or finding of – sociosemiotic textuality. The current list of these criteria is partial and temporary, since it has its origins in the necessity of fixing some point and encouraging discussion.

a) Fundamental is the principle of *negotiation* that gets rid of any ontologism. There is no text with a favoured expressive substance or conformation. Given certain conditions, even a small sign, a symbol, a logo can become an actual text, as well as, in other given conditions, they can become just parts of a larger textual occurrence, for instance an entire brand strategy. Sign and its minimal elements

are polar entities changing their role from time to time: a word can bear a meaning in itself (and it becomes text), but it is sometimes the union of morphemes and phonemes, and sometimes else a single entity within a sentence, which, in turn, is the minimal element of a whole discourse. Similarly, the relationship between the text and its parts, and between text and macro-text, is variable and depends on the relevance they acquire from time to time. Everything in the text is negotiated.

Its boundaries are both spatial and temporal, physical and semantic. Opening and closing themes, picture frames, book covers and curtains at the theatre, those boundaries are entities we are not used to questioning, but they have also been negotiated and, in any moment, can be called into question again by social subjects (e.g. actors suppressing the curtains and coming among the audience) or in the relationship with the 'empirical' object of knowledge and the scholar (e.g. if s/he decides to take into account an entire genre rather than a single work). Similarly, in a conversation there are norms regulating the turns of the speakers, there are also norms regulating the opening and closing of the speech, being negotiated *in praesentia*, as when someone closes a phone call by saying 'I only have three minutes left', 'Sorry, but I have got to go' while the other speaker wants to go on talking.

This process works also with places: although they have internal articulations and preset boundaries, there are people living within them, who change their meaning by *renegotiating* their map and physical boundaries. A city, for example, is the result of one process after the other where the actors are social forces often contrary to each other. Through their political-contractual relationships they determinate the actual text of the city, its internal articulations, its system of accents and marks, of valuing places, the production of socialisation centres or of company towns, and so on (see Marrone 2013).

b) Negotiation is a constitutive concept of textual reality because the main characteristic of texts (of languages and of semiosis in general) is *bipolarity*: the reciprocal presupposition of two planes, the one of expression and the one of contents, each of which is made up of a matter (quite irrelevant) and a form (constitutive). It is the *solidarity* between the form of expression and the form of content that creates the text by letting signification come out and become concrete. In other words, it is not the matter used (sonority, visuality etc.) nor the themes chosen that give rise to signification. It is the relationship between the two elements instead, that can be given only when matter and themes are articulated, manipulated and actually formed. So there is no more sound matter alone but a precise expressive configuration generating and being generated by the parallel movement. According to such a movement, there are no general themes, but just ways of discussing them, dealing with them, forming them. Afterwards,

when the two operations have taken place simultaneously and in reciprocal function, the human and social meanings appear. This shows once again the reason why *the text is not an objective entity but a (dynamic) formal construction*: it is the process relating two simultaneous operations of formation, which is arbitrary at the beginning but necessary for the structure of the text itself and, for this reason, it is always changing in a process of negotiation.

Let us take product design, for example: it does not plan objects and their technologies, but the relationships between those physically given things and the social meaning they have or can assume (social meaning also includes their practical functions) (Mangano 2011). They do not design some glasses but a way of showing (or hiding) the face (Marrone 2010a). The same goes for architecture: they do not design an apartment, but a way of living in it and therefore a certain idea of the family that will live there. What I said above is just another way of saying that text is not the physical book, but what comes out when that book is read.

c) The third principle, *textual closure*, also derives from negotiation. Closure is never given, but takes place in custom communicative canons, where it can be more or less marked. A ceremony, for instance, has its well defined boundaries with specific performative acts marking the beginning and the end of it. A social event, as a carnival, has less marked boundaries instead. In general, as for semiotics, textual boundaries are always variable in order for circumstances of enunciation and production to become part of the text if needed. This happens, for example, in the so-called interactive, cross-media texts in which the answer of the addressee contributes to the authorial construction of the text itself. But it also happens in many mass media products in which, for example, if a certain director or actor works in a movie, this pre-determines the plot and gives rise to certain expectations about its results (Marrone 2013).

Many misunderstandings have arisen around the concept of textual closure that structural analysis saw as a categorical imperative. However they disappear if we consider closure as a weak property, as something negotiable (as implied by the French term *clôture*) and not as a strong property, not as an ultimate fixation (as implied by the French term *fermeture* that is never used for this property of the text).

If we consider closure like this, it becomes clear that, though textual boundaries are not ontological ones, they must be there anyway to mark, at least, the constitutive discontinuity and the basic perception of difference allowing signification to exist. There must be boundaries – being among them Romolo's plow furrow, the Berlin wall or the road sign with the city name – for a city to exist as an object of meaning and to be perceived as such. That is the reason why many scholars of contemporary widespread phenomena of diffusion and partition of

cities affirmed that the city itself is going to disappear. As for the principle of biplanarity, closure, if not expressed, is always signified. In the example of the city, this happens when a guide said ‘here begins the actual city’ pointing at a building or crossroads that otherwise would look like any other.

d) More important than closure, then, is the *holding* of the text, here understood in the sense of the famous Saussurean structuralist slogan according to which in a language *tout se tient*. The holding of the textual whole generates at the same time the internal articulation of the text (its structure) and its boundaries (that are not necessarily sharp but can exist). Formal *cohesion* and semantic *coherence* of textual linguistics can be considered as part of this basic principle avoiding, in this way, falling into the *a priori* theoretical regulation and fixation that could be recalled by those two elements.

From this point of view, textual holding requests internal changing and intrinsic *processuality*. In fact, in addition to its own systematic organisation (the paradigmatic one), a text has also a syntagmatic development that can appear as temporality in linguistic communication or in some audiovisual material, like spatial development of visual elements in an image, like the actual narration – in which, however, strict rules are given and due to them what is found at the beginning is not what is found at the end. In spite of any supposed circularity (as in some folklore genre, for example), the perceptions of elements, and therefore their semantic value, changes continuously along the narrative. There are of course cases in which the content is *inverted* at the beginning, and then *given* only in the end, as Greimas (1970) pointed out in its study of Lévi-Strauss’s *Mythologiques*; other cases in which this does not happen, as in certain fixed images. In any case the text has its deep narrative organisation where a pragmatic/passionate programme and a clash of subjects bring about a subjective transformation that can be both individual or common.

e) This leads to yet another important point, the *multiple levels* of the text, that is to say that the whole semantic configuration of a text can be understood both in a simple and in a complex way, in an abstract or in a concrete way. Greimas defined this principle as *generative trajectory of meaning*. It is meant to describe deep narrative structures and surface discursive structures where textualisation can take place any time at any level. In general, both in life experience and in textual analysis, the same meaning can be expanded or condensed, it can be understood by unfolding it in many intricate elements or summarized in a few defining lines. Each text is retold and can be retold again (as in Peirce’s unlimited semiosis) thanks to the innumerable ways in which it can be translated.

There are two levels of relevance at which, internally already, it can be explained: the *deep narrativity* level, that acts as a common background and interpretive grid for any human and social signification; and the *discursivity*

level, that is the way in which an enunciating subject (enunciator and enunciatee) places the text in a social communication allowing it to circulate, because it exists ahead of the text and at the same time uses it.

f) We now get to the idea that inside every text there is its content, but also the image of its communication (or *enunciation*): the principles for its functioning, the criteria of its production and reception, in other words its *instructions for use*.

Beyond its real sender and addressee, within the text there are also their simulacra, the *enunciator* and the *enunciatee*, who are abstract agents that can become actors in different ways. Between *sender* and *enunciator* and between *addressee* and *enunciatee* there are biunivocal relationships because, though the latter are the simulacra of the former, created to their image and likeness, they can also determine them and act in reality more than them. A brand is the *communicative image of a firm* and more or less corresponds to its productive situation – but, on the market, it ends up by being more informative than the firm itself, since it does things and makes others do things, proposes projects of meaning and communicative scenes, constitutes actual communicative processes. Similarly, the target is *the image of consumers* but ends up by creating them, instructing them with the aim of adapting their consumer habits and changing their life-style (Marrone 2007). The image of the audience of TV programs produces receptive behaviours of audiences; the idea of a listener of our discourse produces it; a certain building or apartment causes people to behave the way an architect had in her mind when she designed such a space. The possibility of a position overturn is perfectly plausible as well, so that, as de Certeau (1980) used to say, it is the *practice of consuming* that constitutes the meaning of texts. It is the fruition technique that overturns the molar structures through which texts propose certain messages. In any case, the level of enunciation and all its consequences about inside and outside the text is to be found within the text itself, but it always looks outside of it, to the cultural world that in some way will retell it in other texts.

g) From this derives the last principle I want to mention, the one of *intertextuality* and *translation*. If the inside and the outside of the text define each other, the relationship between two texts is an element of the identity of both, that is as fundamental as their own internal division into levels of meaning. *Textual closure does not mean isolation of the text*, the text is not a monad that does not communicate with other closed texts, but quite the opposite. According to Barthes (1970), every text is a *perspective of quotations* because in it there can be found what Fabbri (2001) calls ‘invitations’ to read other texts. Jorge Luis Borges used to say that every writer creates his predecessors. In other words, intertextuality is not a philological going back to sources, nor a hermeneutical history of the effects of reading, nor even a post-modern link to authors and literary traditions of the past.

It means instead that other texts are already present in the text as it is written (what Eco 1979, 1984 calls *encyclopaedia*), that is to say that *the text has a discursive base inscribed 'naturally' into a culture* through a net of references putting as the centre of the text configuration the process of translation – inter-linguistic or intra-linguistic, inter-textual or intra-textual, inter-discursive or intra-discursive.

It should be clear now why Greimas affirms that *textualisation is not to be considered at the end of the generative trajectory* (Greimas and Courtés 1986). Textualisation is the moment when discourse meets the plane of expression, and would give rise to problems of linearisation (in written texts), temporalisation (in oral texts), topological disposition (in images), synchronisation (in audiovisual), etc. But we can have textualisation at any level of the generative trajectory: the fundamental one, the anthropomorphic one, the discursive one, and so on. The semiotic square, says Greimas, is the “visual representation of the logical articulation of any category” and therefore it has both expression and contents. In this way, as we go down the steps of the trajectory and we go, for example, from textual to discursive structures, we do not leave the substance of expression behind, in fact *we find another one*, that maybe similar or different to the first, but is another substance anyway.

It is indeed impossible to go out of the text to a ‘pure’ semantic abstraction, just on the plane of content, as they often say. *Another text is built instead* – through unlimited semiosis (Peirce 1937), transcodification (Lotman 1977), transposition (Greimas 1970) or translation (Fabbri 2001) – a text that involves the discourse made by the first one, giving up its plane of expression *and building a new one*. This second text can be built *ad hoc* by the theory as a formal model and being a ‘scientific metasemiotic’ aiming at explaining a preexistent textual configuration. Or it can be already there in a particular culture as a metatext given in relation to the first.

According to Lotman (2009) metatexts are texts themselves, circulating in the same culture as the texts they talk about and interlacing with them. A declaration of poetics is a metatext in relation to the poetry of which is the theory and is a text in relation to the culture in which it circulates. A taxonomy of genres is a metatext in relation to the drama, novel or epic poem it classifies, but it is a text in relation to the culture that produces and transmits it. The same can be said of a journalistic opinion piece and the news story next to it on the newspaper page; the Catechism book and the prayers in it; the interview to advertisers and the advertisement they made; an essay of textual semiotics and the narrative analysis it aims at explaining.

Cultures are built and change due to an endless textual, inter-textual and meta-textual production. Every text links to other texts using the same or other substances of expression, the same channel or another. So, remake and remix

practices are not a prerogative of our cultural condition, they are, in a way, the rules supporting the semiosphere (see Dusi and Spaziante 2004). The *generative trajectory is one of those practices of textual remake* that is methodologically coherent and controlled on the theoretical and epistemological level.

In this inter-textual thread, of course, not all texts are equal, nor they have the same social function or the same value. Some texts are more important than others; some talk about other text's narrative structures; some texts present themselves 'naturally' as discursive products (e.g. instruction manuals), thus becoming relevant matrix for the creation of other texts, for starting new meaningful practices that will relate to them as direct, institutional expressive manifestations. It is now possible, to think of (inter- and intra-semiotic) *translational intertextuality as the logic of culture working together with the generative trajectory of meaning*.

This allows us to leave behind the idea of two different generative trajectories – of content and of expression – meeting just on a few happy occasions. It also allows us to see that between the different levels of relevance of meaning inside a text and the intertextual chains inside a culture there can be a strong *homology*. If the levels of the trajectory are all textual dimensions, crossing the trajectory itself means to go from one text to the other (every text having, of course, a different value and a different function).

Taking this position does not imply forgetting about the matter of the upstream creation and the downstream use of a text and everything this brings about in terms of subjective, pre-subjective and inter-subjective experiences, of activation and passivation of the body, of social practices and existential livings, of effects of meaning and symbolic effectiveness. In fact, if in relation to a given text these phenomena are placed upstream or downstream, in a wider cultural context *they are placed into other texts*.

Rather than facing the question of the origin of meaning, or that of its dissolution, by talking about an 'experience' of meaning as something blurry and methodologically uncontrollable, it would be more useful and productive to widen (or narrow, depending on occasions) the focus of analysis, as Lotman says, concentrating on a single text (without necessarily recalling the context), on another (understood as a possible metatext of the first) or on a wider intertextual net (in which the relationship between the texts finds its functioning rules).

So, studying somatic experiences and social practices by analysing how they have been told on the plane of contents in some texts, does not mean taking into account their 'representation' in those texts. It means, actually, to retrace, from the role they play in the semantic organisation of texts, linguistic and *social discursive model* explaining the meaningful articulation of those experiences and practices and of others in the future. That is what Greimas (1987a) did when he

wanted to study sensibility and aesthesia by analysing Tournier, Calvino, Rilke, Tanizaki and Cortázar. That is also what Landowski (2004) does when, in order to retrace experiences of inter-somatic contamination, he talks about advertisements of Brazilian beers. Or again what Fontanille (2008) does when, to go beyond texts and work on practices, analyses *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. And it is what I aimed at when I used *A Clockwork Orange* to work on the social body and life forms of drug addicts (see Marrone 2009).

In conclusion, identifying *once and for all* some basic formal criteria for the constitution of the semiotics of text is as useful as it is risky, because it could imply once more a prescriptive and ethnocentric image of meaning. What I list above are, undoubtedly, crucial concepts and categories for a semiotic analysis that is a critical – in every sense of the word – analysis of society and culture. The risk exists, though, of *hypostatizing* them and of falling back into a theoretic perspective naively and unconsciously linked to a specific and limited cultural asset, with its values and ideologies, its naturalising assumptions and its small truths. In other words, it could be as impossible in facts as desirable on an epistemological point of view, to jump over this perspective to an abstract meta-semiotic level, defying any rigorous analysis of cultures and thus being able to explain *textual specific mechanisms* through which any specific cultural asset is built and survives, often in function of other complementary or opposite assets.

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