The Glocal View: Semiopolitical Definitions

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Summary. The aim of this essay is to define some key concepts of the semiotics of culture. In particular, we aim to present the main rethinkings of Jurij M. Lotman's work within the new tradition that goes by the name of s e m i o p o l i t i c s and show the implications for this field of research. To this end, the essay is divided into two parts. The first part focuses on the fundamental concepts of semiotics of culture and their current rethinking. The second part focuses on the field of research on islands.

Keywords. Semiopolitics, culture, translation, glocal, island

Zusammenfassung. Ziel dieses Aufsatzes ist es, einige Schlüsselbegriffe der Kultursemiotik zu definieren. Insbesondere sollen die wichtigsten Überlegungen zum Werk von Jurij M. Lotman innerhalb der neuen Tradition S e m i o p o l i t i k vorgestellt werden und die Auswirkungen auf diesen Forschungsbereich aufgezeigt werden. Zu diesem Zweck ist der Aufsatz in zwei Teile gegliedert. Der erste Teil befasst sich mit den grundlegenden Konzepten der Kultursemiotik und ihrer aktuellen Neuausrichtung. Der zweite Teil konzentriert sich auf das Forschungsfeld der Inseln.

Schlüsselwörter. Semiopolitik, Kultur, Übersetzung, „glocal", Insel

> *Dialogue precedes language and generates it*
> *Jurij M. Lotman*

> *[The meaning] is, in its primary acceptation,*
> *the translation of a sign into another system of signs.*
> *Charles S. Peirce*

1.   Introduction

The aim of this essay is to define some key concepts of the semiotics of culture. In particular, we aim to present the main rethinkings of Jurij M. Lotman's work within the new tradition that goes by the name of s e m i o p o l -

i t i c s and show the implications for this fields of research (Sedda 2012a).[1] What is the mark of this perspective? Before answering this question, let us begin by answering another one that is bound to pop up in any dialogue about our discipline, namely "is semiotics necessary to life?", which in turn is preceded by the more fundamental question "what is semiotics?".

Let us start from the latter by relaunching the definition given by Ferdinand de Saussure, re-translated by Paolo Fabbri: the science that studies systems and processes of signification within the framework of social life (Fabbri 1998). In semiopolitics this relation of semiotics to "life" is duplicated in the idea that semiotics "is placed upstream and downstream of our living *in* meaning" (Sedda 2012a: 36). Upstream, because "the semiotic point of view is always present in human actions and consciousness" (Lotman 2006: 73). Downstream, because "semiotics is part of a broader historical and scientific movement to explicate the mechanisms that govern our daily lives" (Sedda 2012a: 37).[2] In short, semiotics aims to "expand the very knowledge of knowledge" of man through "a return to the forms of content and expression that structure our lives and shape our subjectivity" (*ivi:* 37). For this reason we can say that man is a semiotic being and that semiotics is doubly necessary to life.

These are the foundations on which the semiopolitical approach is based, reviving not only the scientific vocation of semiotics but, as Greimas stated, also its t h e r a p e u t i c   d i m e n s i o n: that is, knowledge and at the same time the transformation of individual and social semiosis (Greimas 1987). On this path, semiotics can "reaffirm its status as an art of living, of poetics and poietics of everyday life", and the "semiotician reaffirms himself as a political subject" (Sedda 2012a: 38). "The fact that semiotic doing is a political doing, which is immersed in the world and can affect the world", implies acknowledging the limits and potentialities of the semiotic approach, that is, claiming both its "being situated" and its "power". A position reiterated by Eco when he points out that:

> in the humanities one often runs into an ideological fallacy that consists in considering one's discourse immune to ideology and, on the contrary, "objective" and "neutral". Unfortunately, all research is in some way "motivated" (...). Anyone who wants to know something does so in order to do something (Eco 1975: 45, in Sedda 2012a: 39).

This is without forgetting that "the Subject reveals itself *a posteriori* because it is constructed within the text, through its own research that has more or less directly put it into question" (Sedda 2012a: 40). Therefore, Sedda glosses recalling Geninasca: "semiotics is the science that transforms those who do it" (*ivi:* 40).

Even semiotics itself has been transformed and from a new or renewed perspective – that is, less objectivised and more situated within the problematic fields of contemporaneity – it has woven new dialogues and horizons of investigation. To give a few examples, consider the trajectory of research on globalisation marked by the dialogue with authors such as Robertson (1992) and Appadurai (1996).[3] A study of the forms of the world

that, by developing the idea of the semiosphere as a glocal device (Sedda ed. 2004), outlines an eco-semiotic theory of glocality that analyses the physical, somatic and anthropic roots and horizons of planetary becoming (Sedda 2014), and comes to include the glocal analysis of the Covid-19 pandemic (Sedda 2020b). It is in this long period of research that semiotic theory not only broadens its scope but also gains recognition for its heuristic power from one of the fathers of glocalisation studies (Robertson 2020). The same can be said of studies on i s l a n d s (*infra*, Sedda ed. 2019a; Sedda and Sorrentino eds. 2020), the c i t y (Sedda 2012a; Sedda and Sorrentino 2019) and political discourse (Sedda and Demuru 2018), which within the semiopolitical perspective reveal their intimate g l o c a l i t y.

The identity politics of states, territories and nations may fall within the area of semiotic competence.[4] One thinks of Paolo Fabbri's research project on t h e   i m a g e s   o f   E u r o p e, its symbols and discourses that mark the limits, borders and destinies of the "old continent" (Mangiapane and Migliore 2021). However, studying national identifications does not mean limiting oneself to an analysis of the arts of propaganda and governance. We need only think of research such as *Translating Tradition*, which penetrates the tensions and changes in Sardinian national consciousness by following the transformations of traditional Sardinian dance (Sedda 2019b). And again, the way in which in sports and its ceremonies – from the World Cup to the Olympics – go beyond pure competitive spirit and reveal complex geopolitical dynamics (Cervelli et al. eds. 2010). Or how a style of play can become a ground for national identification (Demuru 2014). Then finally to the way in which the analysis of game actions can help to clarify the relations between the (im)predictability of culture and the explosion of meaning (Sedda 2010a).[5]

Thus, politicalness has been recognised and claimed even where it was not thought to exist: In the poetics of everyday behaviours that encompass the shaping of identities and the emergence of new forms of sensibility (Lotman 2006; Sedda 2015). In the analysis of food that has profound implications for understanding the dynamics of sense and taste (cf. Marrone 2016). In clothing practices where, according to Lotman, aesthetic and political dimensions are intertwined (Pezzini and Terracciano eds. 2020; Sorrentino 2020). In the arts of tattooing and body care whereby the paths of self-definition are defined (Marrone and Migliore eds. 2019). In work cultures and the dynamics of organisations (Sorrentino 2019) which can be seen again, in the interactions between the animal and human s p h e r e s (Marrone and Mangano eds. 2018).

This is why the semiotics of culture must make its point of view explicit when dealing with fields of dizzying complexity, such as world history, the life of mega cities, the conflicts and contradictions of a culture, the re-framing of media images and narratives, the transformations of the major categories of subjectivity. Or also when semiotics rethinks its concepts by weaving a dialogue between its masters and those of the other sciences with whom it shares the intellectual discourse.

2.   Semiopolitics of culture

We begin this brief survey of the semiotics of culture by starting with the definitions of its object of study. In Franciscu Sedda's essay *Imperfect Translations*, which picks up the legacy of Jurij M. Lotman to relaunch it within the semiopolitical perspective, culture is defined as a singular-plural being (Sedda 2012a).[6] It is

> at once one and multiple, coherent and contradictory, systemic and processual, regular and irregular, hierarchical and fluid, striated and smooth, ordered and chaotic, culture challenges our ability to understand it (*ivi*: 11).

What characterises culture is therefore not one or the other element, but the complex relationship between the terms. To put it better, culture is the very "possibility of relation", the becoming of a web of relations that develop and thicken, box and overlap or disperse in the different levels and modes of semiotic existence (Lotman 2012a; Paolucci 2020). In this light, culture takes on the aspect of "a world of semiotic formations in constant correlation and translation". Thus, finally, it is

> this semiotic universe/pluriverse of which we ourselves are part, which we ourselves produce, which we constantly feed on to become what we are (Sedda 2012a: 12).

It is the character of imperfection that defines culture, just as imperfect is any translation that attempts to describe it. Thus, for example, if we thought of it in the singular as a s e m i o t i c s o f c u l t u r e, we would grasp the theoretical generality and an abstract homogeneity, but we would not see its concrete vitality; if we observed it in the plural as a s e m i o t i c s o f c u l - t u r e s, would appear a dense, multiple, corporeal, vital heterogeneity, but not the relationship that articulates it and holds it together, that "which gives some unity to the multiple, enabling it to mean something for us" (*ivi*: 13).

We need to assume a stereoscopic view that is open and turned in opposite directions, able to keep in co-presence a multiplicity of vision planes, at least global and local at the same time. At a methodological level this view is equivalent to the double movement of analysis and catalysis suggested by Hjelmslev, whereby in order to understand the value of a singularity the researcher is obliged to "encatalyze" the globality that transcends it (Hjelmslev 1961). Where, globality is not closed but is a set of relations perceived as "internal", which force us to encatalyze other relations (patterns and uses), which appear "external" to us. Hence, using a canonical example, in order to understand the meaning of a fragment of pottery we should imagine the jug or vase of which it was part, its value in daily life, the civilisation that incorporated it, and so on.

This perspective is in line with Lotman's when he reminds us that in analysing languages, history and the life of culture it is necessary to

> look at history in the mirror of the *byt* [everyday life] and illuminate with the light of
> the great historical events even the small everyday details, which sometimes seem
> disjointed" (Lotman in Burini 1998: 147).

It is therefore this circular relationship between the parts and the whole, between the micro and macro dimensions, that is at the heart of the life of culture.

It is no coincidence that semiopolitics speaks of "an intimate glocality of the semiosphere, of that space in which the possibility of the life of meaning is given" (Sedda 2012a: 14). A formal and methodological glocality that helps us understand how

> the definitions and positions of locality and globality are to be grasped in relation,
> in their constitution in reciprocal dependence, and are in turn dependent on the
> point of view from which we look at this relation, on how we situate ourselves in it
> and through it (Sedda 2012a: 14).

After all, what is the global to someone is the local of the other.

It is with this principle of method that the semiopolitical view is proposed to the curiosity and creativity of the researcher, of those who, through its concepts, models, tools, epistemological visions, wish to explore the space of communication and culture, without dispersing its complexity.

3.   Imperfect translations

At the beginning of his essay on the S e m i o s p h e r e (1985) Jurij M. Lotman poses the problem of the relationship between global and local. Indeed, it seems that the Russian thinker's entire work is oriented towards questioning the way in which the relationship between the micro and macro cosmos has been thought of up to that point. It is precisely this theoretical knot that makes the semiotics of culture an approach capable of responding to the current challenge of the living sciences to build conceptual dispositives capable of overcoming the dualistic relationship between the parts and the whole.[7]

But let us proceed with order and recall that the Tartu master's proposal for the study of the forms and dynamics of meaning in culture is characterised by an overturning of Western semiotic traditions. We refer to the trajectories of Peirce, Morris and Saussure, which – as Pezzini and Sedda point out in the first Italian encyclopaedic entry dedicated to the semiosphere – are characterised by the

> centrality attributed to the concept of sign. An approach that then led to considering the whole as the sum of its parts and division as a heuristic necessity (Pezzini and Sedda 2004).

As we know, Lotman opposes this atomistic approach with a holistic vision, according to which each partition of the whole is capable of meaning "only if it is immersed in a semiotic continuum full of formations of different types located at various levels of organisation" (Lotman 1985). According to Lotman, in this semiotic complex "it is not this or that brick that plays a primary role, but the great system called semiosphere", the "semiotic space outside of which the existence of semiosis is not possible" (Lotman 1985: 58).[8] It is precisely the vision of the semiosphere as an entity endowed with its own organisation that distinguishes Lotman's thought from other theories of the sign, which on the contrary see "the globality of meaning in terms of a nebula or a network of infinite and indefinite references" (Pezzini and Sedda 2004).

Now, the structure of the semiosphere is found both in global space and in a local portion. Hence the two necessary features of delimitation and irregularity of semiotic space. The semiosphere must be circumscribed with respect to another space, described as extra-systematic or belonging to another semiosphere, so as to manifest a form of homogeneity, a "semiotic personality". In this sense, the structure of the boundary, a place of disjunction and conjunction of the semiotic space is necessary. The border, homologous to the membrane of a cell, is

> the sum of the semiotic filters of translation. Passing through these, the text is translated into another language (or languages) that lie outside the given semiosphere (Lotman 1985: 59).

This process is regulated by agents characterised by simultaneous belonging to different cultural spaces. Lotman, referring to the Russian medieval tradition, gives as an example the priest, the miller, the executioner. In the current media sphere, the following are figures of translation expertise: the expert, the reporter, the correspondent.[9] To these we can add artificial intelligences, media algorithms, material technologies, all the human and non-human actors who operate invisible translation movements between the spheres.

3.1 The relationship between world and meaning

In Lotman's definition of the border, it is the text that is the object of translation.[10] And it is always the text that is used by Lotman and Uspensky to show the two cultural models of the "relationship between world and sense", which can be summed up in the phrases: "the world is a text", "the world is not a text" (Lotman and Uspensky 1973: 33–35; Sedda 2012a: 42–49).

For the first model, the world presents itself as already endowed with meaning: an utterance of which to discover the language and author. This model is repeated in different cultures under different guises. Thus, the author of the world-text, that is, the instance capable of creating its structures and legitimising the values it contains, can take different names: *God*,

Nature, *Being*, to which are related the custodians of the laws of the world: the believer, the scientist, the philosopher, but also the romantic poet. In other words, those capable of translating the opacity of the world into an accessible language, of interpreting a reality "saturated with traces to be deciphered". The sacred texts are exemplary guardians of the meaning of the world, but in order to be effective they need translation operators: institutions and people who allow a popular appropriation of the original message. This is how, more generally, the great discursive formations function, establishing from within the subjects who are the custodians of the "sense of history", such as political ideologies.

For the second model, on the other hand, the world acquires meaning "by transforming the non-text into text", that is, "by giving the world the structures of culture" (Sedda 2012a: 42–49). In this act of culturalisation, the concept of text is equivalent to all those social and semiotic practices that "acting in and on the world make it significant and meaningful". Thus, following Sedda, the world becomes a "sign of *the* social", "through an action that transforms the world into an utterance addressed to the social".[11] The world thus becomes a form of expression correlated to a form of content, a structure capable of manifesting articulations of positions and values, of defining fields of subjectivity. An example of the conversion of non-text into text is the foundation of the city (as opposed to the countryside) or the cultivation of fields (as opposed to the forest).[12]

An example of the topicality of the two models can be found in the dispute over the definition of *landscape*.[13] Between those who see it as a given language whose decipherment constrains action on it and those, on the contrary, who imagine it as an arbitrary process of anthropiation that legitimises free and creative intervention. Those who read the l a n d s c a p e a s a t e x t will also find their language in the dimension of the built environment, so that urban stratifications, suburbs and even terrain vagues can also be subject to valorisation. On the contrary, those who imagine the l a n d s c a p e a s a n o n - t e x t will see an "environment which, left to its own devices, transforms itself without purpose" (Sedda 2012a: 45), which legitimises sensible human intervention. It follows that any action on the landscape betrays subjectivity and "partial" values, a way of conceiving the relationship between the world and meaning.

We can therefore return to the concept of text, which is not an *a priori* static quantity, but a "portion of matter rendered capable, more or less temporarily, of generating, accumulating and transmitting meaning" (Sedda 2012a: 49).

3.2 *The field of tension between sense and non-sense*

The two models of the relationship between world and meaning defined by Lotman and Uspensky, in Sedda's reinterpretation, are translated into two polarities that circumscribe a field of tension. In the first pole, man is placed

in a situation of passivity, of receptive objectification, in the position of recipient of a text addressed to him by a destinant who is both producer and guarantor of the universe of values transmitted. In the second case, man is placed in a situation of activity so as to become a recipient, producer of meaning and values for himself and others in the role of recipients.[14]

In the life of the culture, the two positions follow each other, intersect, overlap, as two examples show. The first is taken from Stanley J. Tambiah's research (1990) on rice-growing rituals in Asia. In these rituals, the subject seems to place himself in a passive situation insofar as he asks the gods for protection, when in fact he believes that it is "his own activity, guided by culturally sanctioned competences" that shapes the world. The second case is science, which formulates new laws on the functioning of the cosmos. It does not renounce thinking of itself as an active subject, even though it inscribes its action in a process of discovery of something whose rules it makes explicit (cf. Stengers 1996–97; Bastide 2001). Taking the cases to the limit, two extreme positions can be identified. If we see the world as a text and the subject in a condition of passivity, we are d o u b l y   o b j e c t s: fragments of the text and instruments of its explication. On the other hand, if the world were not a text and we were active actors, we would be d o u b l e   s u b j e c t s: interpreters of the meaning that we "produce and accumulate while transforming the world" (Sedda 2012a: 51).

It has to be said that in the real dynamic of cultures things are more tangled. The very idea of transformative action is linked by common sense to a more or less radical change, an affirmation of the new. An utterance of transformation that sanctions the passage of the subject (S1) from one state of being to another (S2) through a doing (Greimas 1983). However, common perception forgets what narrative logic shows, namely that "doing can be aimed at re-establishing a situation". From this point of view, according to Sedda, "we should be aware of how many actions we perform to keep things as they are". This tension between transformation and preservation is exemplified both in everyday life, where the construction of new relationships is succeeded by attention to keeping them alive, and in the care of the body, aimed at counteracting the action of nature. It can be seen, therefore, that doing is often an interweaving of "actions carried out to ensure that S1 does not become S2" and remains in its being.

What Sedda brings out, starting from the rethinking of Lotman and Uspensky's typology, is the

> paradox whereby it is always we who hypothesise that the world is or is not a text[15], that sense is already given or that we find ourselves immersed in a sea of non-sense (Sedda 2012a: 53).

And again that

> the role of languages in relation to the world is always defined from language itself, within the social discourses that we mobilise daily, those fields of sedimented prac-

tices and representations[16] that define the 'thinkable' and the 'doable' in a given cultural space-time[17] (Sedda 2012a: 53).

What the paradox emphasises is the "capacity of languages and cultures to generate conflicting effects of sense and truth from within".[18] Including the non-sense that surrounds and passes through us, however risky, paradoxical and imperfect its manifestation may be. Thus, with reference to Floch (1995), it is proper for languages to manifest both a referential and a constructive property of the "real" (and of its relative neutralisation and conversion). On the other hand, it is enough to quote Greimas when he reminds us that "discourse is the fragile place in which truth and falsehood, lies and secrets are inscribed and read" (Greimas 1983: 103, in Sedda 2012a: 54).

In conclusion, it is useful to emphasise how the two forms of the relationship between world and sense – both the form in which sense is to be found insofar as it is already given by another instance, and the form in which sense is to be posited insofar as the absence of form opens up space to the creative instance of the subject – are always "conceivable as acts of cultural translation (...), of transformation of forms of expression and content" (*ibidem*).

3.3 Saying, doing, thinking: identity in cultural configurations

One way to deepen the semiotic dimensions of life and translation is to study the correlations between saying and doing. The path begins with Eco's re-reading of Peirce in his *Lector in fabula*, which leads him to note that "reality is not simply a Given, it is rather a Result" (Eco 1979: 43, in Sedda 2012a: 55). In other words, "it arises from the interpretative work of a Community"[19],

> a work that is not simply fixed in knowledge but also in habits, tendencies to a given behaviour, which can become real habits, that is, regularities of behaviour that make the action itself a (potential) sign (Sedda 2012a: 56).

It is no coincidence that according to Peirce "a man's identity consists in the consistency between what he does and what he thinks" (2003: 5.315). This links Peirce's thought to

> a pivotal point of current semiotics: the performative character of language and the linguistic character of practices. *Expressive acts* and *active expressions* (Sedda 2012a: 56).

It follows that "signs", before representing something, "give themselves as actions on the world", as tactics and strategies that operate on a cognitive, pragmatic, patemical, and aesthetic level (Fabbri 1998).

It is to this interplay between different semiotic substances that the semiotics of culture must refer in order to reconstruct the intelligibility of cultural configurations. On a theoretical level, it may be fruitful to trace this game back to the correlation between two series: r e p r e s e n t a t i o n s and p r a c - t i c e s. An example is offered by Paolo Fabbri's analysis of the life of Shabbetaj Zevi, the rabbi who, after gaining recognition as the Messiah by the Jewish community, died an apostate not before converting to the Muslim faith. The curious aspect is that Zevi is recognised as the Messiah because he performs a series of transgressions, of "strange acts", such as the abolition of fasting and the celebration of "incorrect" sacrifices. Fabbri observes that it is "by working on the dimension of ritual, not on the history of representations" that Zevi brings about a "change in the rhythm of religious life". In other words, "it is an attempt to change a faith", giving it "another syntax" (Fabbri 2000: 92, in Sedda 2012a: 57).

In general, it should be emphasised that on the one hand, the relationship between practices and representations can take different forms, at least: "traditional, translative, confirming, critical or subversive". On the other, that in their relationship of translation they are, "from time to time, one expression of which the other is content". This becomes clear in the fact that Zevi's transgressions can be recognised by the rabbis as "pertinent", and therefore credible and effective, because in the texts of Jewish self-representation it is written that "the Messiah will transgress the law" (Sedda 2012a: 58). As if to say that culture can provide for a paradoxical form of "traditional betrayal", however exceptional the figure legitimised to perform the act.

On a theoretical level, Fabbri's analysis also helps us recognise the ways in which the faith of a form of life is transformed. That is to say, any community that identifies with a "principle of organisation", with a system of beliefs that founds a universe of values, symbols and practices (Lotman 1993). In short, it can change by working both on active expressions, the narratives and self-definitions used to guide action, and on expressive actions, the acts that substantiate values and provide a narrative-in-act of the collective.[20]

In conclusion, in terms of method, it is useful to remember that while trying to disimplicate forms, one must "remain sensitive to the heterogeneity of reality" (Sedda 2012a: 59). It is no coincidence, says Sedda, that when Lotman analyses the form of life of the *Decabrists* – in order to identify the forms of expression and content that made existence, actions and choices significant – he tries to recreate a set (a corpus) of behaviours, words, gestures, fashions and etiquette situations, but also of fictional, pictorial and theatrical references (Lotman 2006). It is by unravelling the dense web of relations that unites these heterogeneous semiotic formations (texts and textuality)[21] that Lotman can reconstruct the meaning of a life, a collective, a culture, an era.

3.4 Translation as a capture strategy

Semiotics has developed a large number of concepts that help us to grasp the chains and correlations between sign systems, that is, the great web of relations that constitutes reality. Let us now take up the concept of 'translation' as it has been articulated in recent years from the point of view of the semiotics of culture.

The concept of 'translation' can be considered "the pivotal process of meaning generation" (Sedda 2012a: 60; Lotman 1993). It runs transversely through the works of the major scholars of semiotics.[22] For example, Greimas in the introduction to *Du Sens* maintains that

> signification [...] is nothing but this transposition of one plane of language into another, of one language into a different language, while meaning is simply this possibility of transcoding (Greimas 1970: 13).

Again, according to Peirce not only "the meaning of a sign is the sign it has to be translated into" (C.P.: 4.132), but there would be no "genuine thought" without the translating movement:

> But a sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed. Thought requires achievement for its own development, and without this development it is nothing. Thought must live and grow in incessant new and higher translations, or it prove itself not to be genuine thought (C.P. vol. 5: 594).[23]

On the operational level, the author's thinking finds a common denominator in the distinction between an internal translation within a sign system, e.g. endolinguistic, an external translation between two languages, and an inter-semiotic translation between different semiotic systems, as in the exchanges between art and life (Jakobson 1963). In order to reflect on these conceptualisations, Sedda takes up the case of Maurice Lennhardt's translation of the Gospel into the Melanesian language and culture of New Caledonia (1902–1926). This is an exemplary case studied by James Clifford (1982). The story is presented as a translation between languages and, at the limit, inter-semiotic, since it takes place in the transition from writing to orality. Moreover, "the dialogical process that Lennhardt puts into play to arrive at an effective translation of the text is based on necessary intra-linguistic translations" (Sedda 2012a: 62).[24] In fact, between the missionary and the natives there is a common search for equivalences and correlations between signs, a work of reformulation and paraphrasing within the reciprocal languages, aimed at finding expressions that are "not simply more accurate but more meaningful". According to Clifford, this dialogical process produces an effect that is both existential and political. A translation destined to change both the missionary's vision and the Melanesian world.

This example confronts us with a case of translation both within a language, and between two languages and between partially different semiotic systems. But there is more. The case allows for a deeper reflection on the relationship between cultures, on the theoretical value of translation and on the question of semiotic effectiveness. Sedda shows us this through a few examples described by Lennhardt. The first concerns the translation of the French expression *parole*, the *logos* in Greek, the *verb* in Italian, the *word of God* in English. In the Caledonian language, this word becomes *Nō*, a term that indistinguishably means both 'words', 'thought' and 'action'. Thus, for example, if someone behaves like an adulterer or a leader is found to be inadequate to lead the tribe, it is said that "he does not have a good *Nō*". Thus, "the word of God" through the Melanesian language "regains a fullness of thought-word-action that was lost in the original". Following Sedda, this shows that

> the different articulation of the forms of the content of the two languages makes it possible to render concrete and united what would otherwise be abstract and divided (Sedda 2012a: 64).

This means that the translation process, while allowing entry into another semiotic sphere, produces a return effect in the source culture.

The second example concerns the translation of *God* that Protestant Melanesians called *Long God*. This expression, apparently picturesque, will lead Lennhardt to discover both the totemic status of Melanesian culture and the complementary duality at the bottom of their semio-religious system. In short, the missionary deepened the meaning of *Long God* and discovered that it is linked to two entities dependent on each other: *Bao*, the spirit of the "chief" in which the male lineage and the value of 'power' flows; and *Kanya*, the "totem" in which the maternal lineage and the value of 'life' flows. Here, the search for a sign equivalent to Lennhardt's Christian god brings out the dual complementarity of the values of masculinity and femininity, of power and life, at the heart of Melanesian culture. However, following Sedda, the translation, although effective, was still imperfect. Both because, according to Clifford, the Christian god went from masculine – *Him, Lord, God* – to "more androgynous". And also because, the correlation created the conditions to make "God" shift from the Trinitarian system, *Father, Son* and *Holy Spirit*, to a dual system, that is different in quality and quantity from the original structure.[25] In short, the translation grasped the traits of 'transcendence', 'sacredness' and 'power', but missed other relations: the semantic forms of which the signs are the terminals. On the other hand, even if these relations remained "untranslated and untranslatable", the translatability of *God-long* created the conditions for the generation of the new, of a third language, of a complex structure of structures (Sedda 2012a).

The example shows a case of inter-discursive translation that takes place between the Christian religious discourse of the Protestant Lennhardt and the traditional totemic discourse of the native Melanesians. Generally

speaking this correlation is the condition for the structure of each discursive formation to emerge. In this sense, translation moves from the figurative dimension (unity of objects and concepts) towards that of semantic relations (networks of positions and definitions), which are generally unexplored. Now, it should be stressed that discursive formation should not be equated with culture *tout-court*. In fact, even in the case of dominant discourses it should be kept in mind, that every semiosphere is necessarily multidiscursive.[26] This implies that the articulation of another point of view can change the power of relations and centrality of a given discourse. As is the case, Sedda explains, in New Caledonia where the emergence of a correlation between religious and national discourse is linked to the affirmation of Kanak political identity.

The last example concerns the translation of the Christian redemption. A process full of failed translations that made the concept and the story incomprehensible to native Melanesians. In the end, the word *nawi* was chosen, which refers to the ritual of planting a tree on land 'corrupted' by a calamity. This is how the meaning of redemption sounds after this correlation:

> Jesus was thus the one who has accomplished the sacrifice and has planted himself like a tree, as though to absorb all the misfortunes of men and to free the world from its taboos (Clifford 1982: 84, in Sedda 2012a: 68).

The interesting aspect is that "in this case the translation takes place between two stories, which are resonated and interpolated, as in a sort of narrative metaphor (Fabbri 1998), until a new story is created" (Sedda 2012a: 68). It is even more important to note that through the translation between the signs of different languages, the linking-concatenation of a social practice, of a fragment of the Melanesian natural world, takes place. In this case, the effectiveness of translation lies precisely in its power to capture (and weld with) the forms of a practice that is dense with meaning and deposited in everyday life.[27] On a theoretical level, one can ask whether every translation between signs is not also the immersion of the sign in a discourse, in the forms of the natural world, in the world of common sense (Greimas 1970).

3.5 Sense-making

The concept of prehension of meaning[28] elaborated by Geninasca (1997) to describe the processes of transformation of the object into a text, that is into a signifying totality for a subject, is linked to semiotic capture. Geninasca distinguishes in the first instance between a molar prehension, based on the logic of sign-reference, and a semantic prehension, based on the logic of signifying sets. Let us try to explain the differences with the example: "there is no smoke without fire".

Molar prehension operates on the basis of associative knowledge deposited in common sense, which identifies a network of sign-objects in reality.

That is to say, a grid of discrete and identifiable quantities through the process of interpretation of the subject who establishes the reference from one quantity to another: if SMOKE then FIRE. The truth of the statements is based on a pragmatic rationality and on reference to circumstances, i.e. on conformity between the grids put into discourse and shared knowledge. In Eco's words, the molar prehension functions against the background of the portion of an encyclopaedic network, which in its totality would be potentially infinite and contradictory (Eco 1975). Thus, other subjects could actualise other referrals with other magnitudes: if I SMOKE then TOBACCO or LONDON or CANCER or VANITY and so on. All this without excluding the possibility of original references or those capable of making us explore the encyclopaedia.

Semantic prehension is not based on the terms (like smoke and roast) but aims at the underlying relation that in fact constitutes them (as effect and cause). According to the example, therefore, it aims at capturing the causal link, which is valid in the abstract regardless of the smoke and the roast. Thus the positions constituted by the relation can be occupied by other quantities: IF FIRE THEN HOT. Following Hjelmslev the signs-phenomena exist and make sense because underneath there is the relation that keeps them afloat. Like a spectacle with respect to the apparatus that produces it thanks to multiple relations.

Now, one could say that causality is a concept (quantity) that can be mobilised within the chain of the sign-referral, both as associative knowledge that holds the referral, and as an utterance that serves as an example: if "there is no smoke without fire" then "principle of causality". This is because, according to Geninasca, the two prehensions are integral and independent: we could not "access semantic representations without the mediation of figures" and these "would have no meaning if not in virtue of the signifying structures" (Geninasca 1997: 97).

This does not mean that each level does not lead to different results. Geninasca shows this in the symbolist poetic text where at the level of molar prehension there seems to be pure chaos, the semantic prehension shows how the quantities become the deposit of relational virtualities that in their configuration develop unspoken discourses. It is not by chance that Geninasca speaks of mythical rationality, to indicate the space of a creativity that goes beyond the schemes of established knowledge.

We can now mention the rhythmic prehension identified by Geninasca, intended both as a further logic of the sense and as the heart and engine of the other two. The emergence of meaning is conceivable as a correlation of rhythms: the sign function is constituted by the co-selection of at least two rhythms, one in function of the content plane and the other of the expression. The text itself is traversed by multiple rhythms. In the same way, the semiosphere is interwoven with currents, flows of texts, discursive formations, which, by entering into correlation with each other, generate dialogues, intersections, waves, avalanche effects, explosions. A fluid vision of cultural life that does not, however, forget the presence of "structures that guarantee the local holding of rhythms" (Sedda 2012a: 75). In this sense,

the cultural memory plays a fundamental role, recording those rhythms that co-emerge and structure themselves until they become devices (Greimas and Fontanille 1991). Like musical standards that do not stop making us dance, but neither do they stop trying to de-structure, to merge, to search for new rhymes and new rhythms.

3.6 Border crossings: forms of otherness

The rethinking of the semiotics of culture involves the b o r d e r as a key concept in Lotman's thought for the emergence of the new. Lotman's path, the concept of periphery, "abstract space that can manifest itself anywhere", plays a fundamental role. Everywhere the intersection of bodies, stories and memories, pulling us out of passivity and automatism, puts culture back into motion. It is a space "for the destructuring of the given sense – of the feeling of the givenness of sense – and the prefiguration of a sense to come" (Sedda 2012a: 81). Of stories which, placed at the margin, act for their own emergence and self-definition.

Marked by the relationship with the outside, the amorphous, the periphery lives a dynamic of necessity and conflict with the centre, the space of stable and dominant languages and meta-descriptions that draws lifeblood from the periphery. A contradictory tension of culture that in its effort to generate a space of determination and certainty is forced to create spaces of marginalisation and otherness. The space that makes meaning possible fatally threatens its very existence, leading to moments of discomfort and fear, turbulence and explosion. Yet it is precisely through this dynamic tension that culture can regenerate its forms of the world.

There are many examples that show how the suburbs, de-structured from the point of view of the "centre", at a certain point

> begin to speak with their own voice, to outline their own physiognomy, to define their own history [...] which can become a model for other lives and other worlds (Sedda 2012a: 81).

An emblematic example is the island space which takes on the features of a desert, paradisiacal and primordial, or becomes a space of passage, detention and military outpost, but which suddenly turns out to be an open space, full of plural relations, stories and memories, capable of experimentation and the future (*infra*). The island is the prime example of how border spaces in their cognitive and emotional tensions prove to be "indispensable for the emergence of the new" (Sedda 2012a: 81).

The border is a paradoxical device that connects and separates at the same time.

> It unites, in the sense that it connects and makes possible other experiences that can change one's way of life. It separates, in the sense that the border operates

as a generator of reflexivity, of necessary self-definition and self-consciousness (Sedda 2012a: 82).

In this sense, "it is the encounter with the other that changes us and simultaneously makes us ourselves". From the point of view of self-description, "being aware of oneself means becoming aware of one's own specificity and of one's opposition to other spheres" (Pezzini and Sedda 2004). The dynamic of identification generates forms of otherness; an external environment felt as chaotic, primitive and threatening, which in reality is the place of another semiotics. Thus, for example, if in Latinity it is the civilised *vs* uncivilised relationship that defines the figure of the barbarian, in Modernity it is the opposition corrupt vs. illiberal that structures the myth of the good savage.[29]

The study of otherness must recognise the contradictions that run through the forms of representation, camouflage strategies, actions and passions, woven in relation to the system of definition.[30] It is therefore necessary to look at the paradoxicality of the border in order to avoid missteps on the subject of collective identities.[31]

In the same way, it is necessary to know how to look for the border even within the single individualities, to know how to probe the intimate complexity that makes them something more and different than closed and compact universes (Sedda 2012a: 83).

One thinks of the anthropological research on the conflicting articulation of the pragmatic and ideological dimensions of identity – such as the anti-American feelings of those immigrants who struggle to live as Americans (Appadurai 1996) – which reproduces the two levels of the border. Also, to the way in which semiotic research studies the correlations between the dimensions of the real and the true.[32] To Greimas's studies on the universes of belief and knowledge with their relations of mutual convergence and divergence, reinforcement and contestation (1983). To Geninasca's studies on the implications of the thymic and predicative components of belief in the processes of defining identity, its crises, splits and re-compositions (1997).

3.7 The semiosphere

As we draw to a close, we return to the redefinition of the semiosphere. To the eye sensitive to translation, to the border, to self-consciousness as collective self-definition, the semiosphere is configured as a glocal device: "a continuous proliferation of worlds in the world"; and, at the same time, as an "accordion" or pulsating mechanism: "operating in a constant movement between flatness, elevation and flattening" (Sedda 2012a: 105).

In order to account for this, let us start from the Lotmanian assumption that the semiosphere needs an outside, a non-culture – the foreign, the unthought of, the unknown – with respect to which it defines itself. In this

sense, it functions as a language, a form, which filters and regulates the translation of the non-semiotic into something sign-like. However, this outside made of amorphous matter is a space that encompasses, surrounds and crosses the semiosphere (Fabbri 1998). Lotman, on several occasions, "lets this unstable, energetic, pulsional background shimmer, which continually presses, dynamises, frays the order of things" (Sedda 2012a: 105).

The semiosphere captures this ground on which it rests and translates it into its forms. Paradoxically, however, it is the semiosphere itself, that reproduces irregularity. Every text, according to Lotman, generates zones of translatability and untranslatability, of systematicity and unsystematicity: "[culture] does not limit itself to fighting against external chaos, but at the same time it needs it, it not only annihilates it, but constantly creates it". This chaos "is by no means original and homogeneous, nor always the same as itself, but represents an equally active human creation in cultural organisation" (Lotman 2006: 109).

It should be added that chaos does not lie along the outer boundary of the semiosphere but in its semiotic formations. It inhabits them in their voids, ambiguities and contradictions, in their intended or unintended indeterminacy. This irregularity is the flat bottom of the semiosphere that Lotman calls "real semiotic paper". It is in this space that the semiosphere operates a continuous

> mixing of that order which each time rises from this bottom through the forms, the regularities, the structuralities, which the work of culture introduces into the world (Sedda 2012a: 107).

Formations, languages, texts build correlations that always raise other levels above the level of the actual semiotic map,

> until they reach that of its ideal unity, of its self-description and self-consciousness, which by expelling contradictions provides culture with a powerful source of orientation and self-modelling (Sedda 2012a: 107).

However, while some texts are propelled by the elevation movement and rise to the level of self-consciousness,

> in the reality of the semiosphere, the hierarchies of languages and texts usually break down: they interact as if they were on a single level. Texts appear to be immersed in unrelated languages and may lack the codes capable of decoding them (Lotman 1985: 63).

Thus, social and everyday semiosis reproduces the flattening movement of culture, which transforms a hierarchical and articulated space into a flat space[33]; a space of connection in which texts can break into semiospheres that are not their own and generate implosions and explosions of meaning.

Let us now move on to the even more vertiginous point that in principle the semiosphere is formed by other semiospheres of potentially infinite number, like a kind of matryoshka. Following Lotman's thought experiment, the semiosphere of human culture itself can be the text of an even larger semiosphere. This proliferation of semiospheres means that the interplay between regularity and irregularity, systematicity and chaos, is multiplied to the nth power. This implies that

> if every semiosphere is therefore made up of semiospheres, what we are dealing with is a glocal device in which each entity is at one level, a globality, and at another, internal to a larger globality (Sedda 2012a: 108).

It is in this sense that every being in this space is a singular-plural (Nancy 1996).

This interplay between the parts and the whole accounts for what Lotman calls vertical isomorphism: "what guarantees the tightening of correlation links between texts and languages, and thus a certain degree of order in the space of culture". Now,

> the tightness of these links is given by their depositing and permanence in the memory of culture, and since this memory is by definition 'non-hereditary' it becomes a stake, the field of a struggle, fought through the continuous production (and destruction) of texts (Sedda 2012a: 108).

Every cultural space-time seems to define its isomorphism. And yet, the overlapping of cultures, their very heterogeneity and contradiction, the movement of people, objects and texts, the mixing of languages, make the links precarious. Thus, the correlations disappear and with them the possible joints and boxing. As when the separation between civil and religious power, on which the secular state is based, breaks down. As when the boxing between Individual, State, International Community, Humanity, which emerged in Modernity becomes difficult because some people are not recognised as citizens or states stop acting in concert (Robertson 1992).[34] As when relations between states and nations break down. When the many identities we carry within us can no longer be composed and our allegiance begins to be disputed.

4.   Islands and islanders

Semiotic research always starts from a cultural manifestation, an emergence of meaning (and non-sense) that occupies the space of communication. An example of this approach is the reflection in the introductory chapter on the semiotics of island space in *Isole. Un arcipelago semiotico* (Sedda ed. 2019a), which starts with the emergence of plastic islands. A perturbing case because it forces us to dis-articulate our conception of

islands from the trait of naturalness and at the same time offers us the opportunity to be able to reflect on the impact of humans on the environment (Sedda ed. 2019a, Sedda 2020a).

Garbage islands seem to be the true symbol of the Anthropocene much more than atolls submerged by rising waters and icebergs drifting in the ocean. They are so because they are made of plastic from our own waste, and this makes clear the relationship between our daily lives and its global consequences. At the same time, the fact that in the media narrative these accumulations of rubbish are described as blobs, mush, whirlpools,

> brings us back to the mythical roots of the islands, to their indistinction from the sea, their continuous floating, their being glimpsed and immediately lost; and again, it seems to renew their utopian status, of human creation, of imaginary presence, of political phantom that traces the outlines of a society to come, which today nevertheless takes on a dystopian, if not apocalyptic, value (Sedda ed. 2019a: 10).

Therefore, it is always the islands we encounter when we look at the great global crises that condense the tangle of climate, war, migration, poverty, inequality and solidarity. Turning our gaze to migratory flows, Sedda says, we find ourselves faced with new forms of insularisation: from Lampedusa to Lesbos, from Libyan lagers to the boats of smugglers, from NGOs to States. The Mediterranean is

> an archipelago that reminds us that insularity is not necessarily synonymous with isolation and that the former is more an effect than a fact: an effect that can sometimes save and sometimes kill (Sedda ed. 2019a: 10).

These are processes that remind us once again that "the border is a semiopolitical construct before being spatial", subject to different levels of impermeability and "bearer of a charge of novelty, whether destructive or creative" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 10).

It is by following the complex relationships between islands and the continent that we can glimpse the sensitive geopolitical dynamics. The case of Brexit is significant, with Great Britain becoming an island state once again, abandoning Europe. A movement of separation-recreation that activates mechanisms of insularisation and archipelagisation with Scotland strengthening its independence process and Ireland divided between violence and dreams of reunification of the island. On the other side of the world, the relationship between the Chinese giant and the island of Hong Kong shines a spotlight on the territoriality of human rights, on the ambiguity of jurisdictional arrangements that allow apparently incompatible civil, political and economic models to coexist; on the existence of islands that are city-states to which the metropolises feel closer than their respective hinterlands. Here the tensions between continents and islands, between state and sub-state organisations, bring us back to the disunity of the world. Or rather, Sedda explains, to its

complex, heterogeneous unity, in which global and local are never really separa-
ble, in which mosaic and network, chaos and spheres (and spheres within spheres...)
continuously coexist and conflict (Sedda ed. 2019a: 12).

We come to the artificial islands that offer us another key to access the
forms of the world we inhabit. This trajectory includes all those islands that
are built as instruments of action on the world and thanks to which they
communicate their power on a global level. An example of this are the islands
built in the Arab Emirates as spaces to house large hotels and internation-
al museums. They are modelled on the same shape as the world, as if to
show one's ability to manipulate the planet. On the other hand, they remind
us of the fascination that the utopia of the island exerts on man, and at the
same time, that his desire to possess and shape a world to his own mea-
sure is always ready to overturn into a far less desirable dystopia.

Finally, on the islands we never stop finding traces to rethink "our biolog-
ical history, our history as a species, as a species among species, as part of
the planet and the cosmos" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 14). The main example described
by Sedda is the discovery of a pile of bones on the island of Luzon that led
to the discovery of Homo luzonensis who "seems to have the teeth of Homo
and the feet of Australopithecus" (*ibidem*). A story that reads like a rebus:

Did man therefore leave Africa earlier than we imagined? Was there an earlier
wave than the one hitherto thought to be the oldest that brought the ancestors of
Homo erectus to Asia 2 million years ago? Or do these bones tell us about the
ability of islands to form ecological niches that by increasing randomness and adap-
tive pressure generate unpredictable diversity? The answers are yet to come. The
point is that they are islands that question us and, once again, surprise us (Piev-
ani in Sedda ed. 2019a: 14).

5.   A typology of islands: four vectors of signification

The starting hypothesis is that if we want to grasp the meaning of being an
island and of the condition of isolation, we must articulate "the material that
geographical, historical, linguistic and imaginary reality has bequeathed to
us and that it continually produces". In this sense, looking at the fragments
of the island discourse leads us to distinguish "four vectors of signification
which, like a compass, allow us to orient ourselves within it". On the other
hand,

the uncertain root of the Latin word insula seems to allusively refer precisely to this
unresolvable dimension, to this finding of the island always on the edge between
infinity and finitude, this seafaring border between the two extremes (Sedda ed.
2019a: 16).

5.1 The island and the sea

The definition of the island as 'land surrounded by sea' tells us nothing about the condition of connection/disconnection by which the sea seems to define the island's destiny. On closer inspection, the sea appears much less defined than one imagines.

It can be seen as a border that in some seasons connects and in others separates, as a road for those who know it or a forest where one can get lost, as an unknown place that terrifies or as an opportunity for wealth, the space invented for touristic purposes. Think of the different forms the sea can take depending on the roles and psychological attitudes of those who look at it: from the deep-sea fisherman to the migrant, from the farmer to the chauvinist politician. The sea changes statute in relation to geographical, geopolitical and technological conditions, situations that range from its pontability (Baldacchino 2019) to the embargo and the introduction of low-cost flights. In the cultural history of the islands there is a continuous mobility between feeling at the centre or at the periphery of one's own sea, such as the studies and attempts to give centrality to the Mediterranean (Cassano 1995). Again, think of the tourism that makes Pacific atolls much more connected hubs than continental hinterlands. The history of Japan's islands shows how isolationism is more a choice than a destiny, a product of a political-cultural construction but also imposed by means of military action.

What these examples show us is that the relationship between the island and the sea is not equivalent to "the relationship between an interior and an exterior marked by a sharp edge". Boundaries can be more porous: "the sea can become part of the island or the island a fragment of the sea". Thus,

> if geography has its weight, history – i.e. technology, institutions, cultures, interactions, narratives – can lie lightly or severely on top of it: they can go along with its presumed articulations, they can even elevate it as a model, or they can oppose it, reorient it and even materially modify its face (Sedda ed. 2019a: 18–23).

5.2 The island and the continent

Another vector of signification of islandness is generated in the relationship between the island and the continent.

A first access to the problem can be opened by observing how the island collective uses the term 'continent' to refer to the "non-insular part of the state to which one belongs" and continental to indicate "a fellow citizen or compatriot". Thus, Sardinians and Sicilians are likely to use the terms to refer to Italy but not to France or Spain, just as a Corsican would call France continent but not Italy. These linguistic usages betray unresolved knots in political identification, forms of accommodation between different identity

structures. Hence the terms *continent* and *continental* can coexist, overlap and clash with others: in Corsica, for example, with *Métropole* or *France*.

It is clear how an apparently neutral term takes on a marked value and ends up leading to a more or less conflicting view of "the relationship between the island and the land that is not an island" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 23). This opens up a trajectory of research into the lexicon and rhetoric developed by islanders to manage their relationship with the continent. Think of some of the terms that have translated the idea of the continent, such as *Terraferma*, *Terramanna*, *Mainland*. The first, *terraferma*, refers to the tension between an instability of the island and an order of the continent. The second, *terramanna*, in use in the *Carta de Logu*, the fourteenth-century Sardinian code of laws, refers to the relationship large *vs.* small, situating it in the tension between a legal sphere that is its own and a foreign one (Sedda 2019b). Finally, the English term *mainland* brings us back to the opposition – not only dimensional but also political – between a main term and a subordinate or dependent one. This dynamic is found in the Icelandic sagas, in which one never refers to one's own territory as an Island but always as a Land, hence the name Iceland (Lozzi Gallo 2019). A strategic operation that in the medieval context emphasises the independent status of the new entity with respect to Norway, the motherland of the colonisers. On the other hand, the political relationship emerges more clearly if one thinks of the definition of the mainland as "the principal island of a group", in which "the hierarchical datum definitively overrides the geographical and dimensional one" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 24). Finally, the dominant role in the system assumed by the main island emerges in cases where it is defined as mainland by the other smaller ones.

> Returning, then, to the relationship between island and continent, it allows us to become aware that one of the main problems in the study and experience of islands is that of the potential relationship of dependence on another land, which can lead to forms of heterodefinition and the consequent assumption by islanders of a continental view of themselves. A point of view, as Baldacchino points out, in which size counts above all, which always perceives the sea as an obstacle or a factor of vulnerability, which considers the island as the hinterland of the mainland: from time to time an unsuccessful copy of the continental model, a political and social laboratory for the use of the centre, an exotic holiday paradise, a place of dumping and confinement of people, things and undesirable practices (Sedda ed. 2019a: 23–27).

5.3 The island and the other islands

The asymmetry between island and mainland can also spill over into the relationship between islands. This may be due to the assumption of a mainland point of view, the disparity in geographical dimensions, but also to a

distinct division of roles within a given imaginary. This is the case in the Icelandic sagas where, unlike the mainland, the off-shore islands are the space of the hero's trial.

This example opens up the theme of the archipelago. A reality rendered invisible by colonialism and European Modernity which, with their narrative and utopian apparatus, shape the idea of the island as a "world in itself, enclosed and delimited". It is nevertheless true that in the contemporary cultural rethink, many islanders have reinvented their identity on the model of the archipelago. This is a condition that values interconnectedness, equality and openness, and is a harbinger of multiple archipelagic visions.

The first example comes from the Aegean and Greek culture. A tradition which, passing through Deleuze and Guattari (1980), de-constructs the relationship between the sea and the land. A meridian thought (Cassano 1995) that replaces the conception of a land squeezed by an open sea with the vision of a sea-boundary a sea-between-lands, inherited from the Greek name of the Mediterranean, *Mesogaios*. On the other side of the world, thanks to his experience in the Caribbean archipelago, Édouard Glissant created his *Poetics of the Diverse* (1996). The idea is that the opening of the Caribbean Sea would have favoured that "unpredictable generation of the new that is creolisation". Far from geographical determinism, it would be the intertwined and stratified histories of natives, conquerors and slaves that would make the Antilles a model of openness to the different and the new.

From a typological point of view, archipelagic visions can be distinguished between terrestrial and marine dominants. An example of the first model comes from the Icelandic sagas where the journey from Norway is described as the weaving of a network between lands. That is, between interconnected lands, as suggested by the names *Iceland*, *England*, *Scotland*, *Gotland* and so on. Of course, there are place names that refer to the island dimension, such as the names of the *Orkneys* or the *Faroes*. But the point is that in the Icelandic sagas, islandness refers to otherness and to a dimension of passage.

In contrast, a marine-dominated archipelagic vision is that expressed by Epeli Hau'ofa in his *Our Sea of Islands* (1993). His idea is based on the affirmation of the "consubstantial relationship between the oceanic populations and the sea". An identification, present in the name of the archipelago, which led him to remark: "We are the sea, we are the ocean". The assumption of a de-colonised point of view will lead him to re-evaluate mythical knowledge, the harbinger of a model of trans-insular civilisation that the forces of globalisation are paradoxically reviving.

It is from this model and its innumerable visions that a thought made of movement and interdependence emerges. A thought of courage and confidence with the sea.

5.4 The island and itself

The last vector of signification amounts to the relationship between the island and itself.

In this case, Sedda's argument takes its cue from Deleuze's essay on the causes and reasons for the desert island (Deleuze 1953). Deleuze argues that "man is the pure consciousness of the island" and as such should be formed in a double movement of separation and recreation. However, as we have seen, the vectors of signification of isolationism do not all reproduce the same movement, the same dynamic of constituting the meaning and value of the island. Moreover, each model harbours within it complex nuances of meaning, all the more so when it is translated into a specific semiosphere.

Yet the movement highlighted by Deleuze leads us to the other models, bringing us back to the island's relationship with itself, to the self-consciousness "of its being a universe in itself, distinct and original". In this sense it is as if the island were a spatial model that for Deleuze is a prototype of the collective soul: an archetype of form. It is, in Lotman's words, that I-I communication that establishes self-consciousness – the meta-model – through the constitution of a level of ideal unity (Lotman and Uspensky 1973; Lotman 1985). A gesture of self-definition of the semiosphere that in a double sacralising movement manages to give itself a unitary image and to neutralise the plurality that inhabits it and exceeds it (Sedda 2012a). Even an atoll has some rocks left over, let alone England, Japan, Cuba, etc. From this point of view, what makes an island is

> the movement that affirms the presence of a border that allows one to establish
> one's own model of the world inside and a more or less strong relationship of (in)
> translatability with the outside (Sedda ed. 2019a: 35).

To exemplify, let us take two translations that put the double movement into practice: the island-Utopia and the island-State.

Taken to paroxysm, the separation-recreation movement can result in the real or imaginary production of utopian islands: completely separate and rigidly organised islands, utopias that can turn out to be dystopias. There is a monological dream that drives this model. From More's Utopia to Robinson's Island, it is always a rule that defines the form of life governed by a value (e.g. equality, property). The island-utopia is often associated with an external, continental and objectifying point of view, which finds expression in myth, literature and ethnography. A point of view generally assumed by islanders in forms that on the one hand accentuate "the ideas of nativism, purity, authenticity" and on the other betray "blatantly the internal complexity". The monological model in its extreme dimension "can be found in the dualism between the island-paradise and the island-hell, the sacred island and the prison island". On the one hand, we see it in the dream of the island

in which to cram, confine and contain the diversity – be it represented by criminals or migrants – that disturbs us and compromises our desire for stability and security (Sedda ed. 2019a: 37).

On the other hand, we find it in the "dream of the island for the rich only", a place of escape and entertainment. Both are

fictions of a pure order, of a perfect world, broken nevertheless by the necessary presence of an alterity – the jailers, the waiters – which is ourselves (Sedda ed. 2019a: 37).[35]

Unlike the island-utopia model, the island-state model brings us back to the here and now of the island condition. As island studies show, island territories coincide with only 1.47% of the landmass, but correspond to 22% of sovereign states. These data, Sedda argues, highlight "a powerful link between islands and statehood". Everything happens as if the island were looking for the key to its originality in political distinction. This is a fact full of glocal paradoxes, since independence can only take place following a "global recipe". This means that statehood presents itself as a form that on the one hand allows the island to make its movement of separation and recreation, but on the other leads it to transcend this condition. This happens both because statehood generally unites multi-island geographical spaces and because it leads them to homologate to international institutional models. In short, the path of the state seems to lead the island towards an oxymoronic condition of relational separateness and shared originality.

5.5 Insulophobia

We could end our trip here if it were not for the fact that our guide leads us on a dive into the sea of islands.

We have seen how the "model of the island with itself" is not a harbinger of definitive closure. If framed from a relational epistemology, it reveals its constant openness, with its ambiguities, harbingers of risks and potential.[36]

One of the openings of the island-model is given by its possibility of making room for other models. Thus, if with respect to the outside, the model constitutes an apparently all-embracing globality, in relation to its interior it can be thought of as a space of a-hierarchical movement or divided between zones of order and chaos, as in the original relationship between land and sea. Again, it may be hierarchically structured according to the scheme of centre *vs* periphery, as in the island/continent relationship. Or, it can take on an archipelago form in which each part can reproduce the whole or create with its specificity a totality that is different from the sum of its parts. Finally, it can produce a concentric refraction of itself by constituting the island as a meta-model. We can therefore imagine studying states "accord-

ing to their way of articulating themselves internally" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 39). by assuming "one or more of these dominants".[37]

Now, what Sedda himself wants to highlight is that in this complex and

> risky game of folding and simultaneous opening up of the island onto itself, one can see a trait of existential precariousness that deeply inhabits the meaning of islands (Sedda ed. 2019a: 39).

This is beautifully recalled in the legend of Colapesce, who transforms himself into a column to prevent the island from sinking. Braudel argues that islands are "hungry worlds", always exposed to natural and political contingencies. A condition that, according to Matvejevič, makes the islanders "constantly waiting for information and events that, coming from beyond the horizon, can suddenly change their destiny" (Sedda ed. 2019a: 39). Finally, this is suggested by "the wave motion that makes the coastline move and undefinable". The island-form thus appears to be a space that is as protective as it is exposed. A space besieged by the risk of being sucked in by the currents, both on the vertical axis and on the horizontal axis, by human and non-human factors. For this reason:

> If in the dominant perception, probably connected to the continental point of view, one cannot help but fall victim to insulomania, it is not to be excluded then that, from the internal point of view, forms of insulophobia develop. Fear of losing the island, fear of the island condition, fear of calling oneself an island (Sedda ed. 2019a: 41).

It would therefore be this contradictory attitude that could become a matrix of the islander's character: a state of mind in which he is "proud of his space" and at the same time "nostalgic for its loss". A cliché summed up in the idea of the island-continent: a mark of the islander who feels the world encompasses him and at the same time symptom of an inferiority complex, of a desire to escape, of a mimicry that would finally take him beyond his precarious, limited, subordinate condition.

This is the condition that Sedda brings up from the depths of his island, Sardinia, where the idea of the island-continent correlated with a movement that saw the land of the Sardinians as a prison.[38] It is precisely this tangle of histories, actions and passions that leads the island to prefer autonomism and thus renounce its own movement of separation and recreation.

Notes

1 Franciscu Sedda (University of Cagliari) is one of the leading experts on the work of Jurij M. Lotman, the father of the semiotics of culture, who edited the anthology of essays *Tesi per una semiotica delle culture* (Lotman 2006). The aim of this article is to retrace the main developments of the semiotics of culture starting from the essay *Imperfect Translations. Semiopolitics of Cultures* (Sedda 2012a).

2 For an approach to forms of meaning in relation to everyday life see Pezzini 2008.

3 Authors such as Robertson and Appadurai have insisted on these issues since the 1990s. In the same vein, and at Robertson's urging, Sedda developed his reflections on the glocal. On this subject, see the essays in Sedda ed. 2004, starting with the essay by Robertson and White that opens the volume (*Glocalisation revisited and elaborated*), the essays in Robertson's volume (2014, ed.) including *Forms of the World: Roots, Histories, and Horizons of the Glocal*, and the issue of the journal *Glocalism* edited by Sedda and Dessì (2020) which hosts an essay in which Robertson is acknowledging the heuristic contribution of semiotics for the theory of glocalisation.

4 For a semiotic study of the idea of nationhood see Sedda 2017b.

5 On the issues of (im)predictability and explosion, see the seminal Greimas 1987, Lotman 1993, Landowski 2005, Sedda 2010b.

6 For a recent dialogue between semiotics and anthropology, see Sedda and Padoan 2018.

7 This trajectory includes the call for a departure from the separation between the natural and cultural spheres. In such a discursive regime – whose reference goes to authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari 1980, Isabelle Stengers 1996–1997, Bruno Latour 1991, 2005, 2013, Philippe Descola 2005 – the leaps between inorganic and organic do not imply sharp breaks but rather permeable boundaries. On a deeper epistemological level, the relationship between global and local relates to the current debate on ontology. For an in-depth semiotic discussion see Marrone 2011, Fabbri 2012 and Sedda 2017a, 2018.

8 The name given to the *semiosphere* by Lotman emphasises its homology with the *biosphere* system described by Vernadsky (1998), with which it shares elementary structures and mechanisms.

9 On the figure of the *expert*, see Marrone and Migliore eds. 2021.

10 For a more detailed discussion of the concept of *text*, see Marrone 2010 and 2011; Pezzini 2007.

11 On the reflexivity of the social body see Landowski 1989 and Marrone 2001.

12 Please refer to Fabbri's semiotic reinterpretation of Michel Foucault's prison studies (Fabbri 2008).

13 On the concept of landscape in a semiotic key, see Pezzini 2012.

14 On the attitudinal relationship between the Recipient/Recipient see Greimas 1983.

15 This structural paradox was taken up in Sedda 2012a where it is stressed that in the face of diversity "all [semiotic positions] elaborate their vision of nature and the natural in relation to semiotic space through language (...) and discourse" (Sedda 2012a: 53).

16 On the relationship between practices and representations see Sedda 2012a, chapter 4 and Sedda 2015.

17 Reference is made to Foucault 1968.

18 On the relationship between languages (media), truth and reality see chapter 5 in Sedda 2012a.

19 Sedda's reference here is to C. S. Peirce 2003: 106 and 109, 5311 and 5316; Eco 1997: 79; Geertz 1973. For an introduction to the semiotics of culture from an interpretative perspective, cf. Lorusso 2010.

20 In other words, as much about representations of rituals as about rituals of representation. The theme of the correlations between practices and representations brings semiotics closer to Deleuzian reinterpretation of Foucault's theory of culture (Deleuze 1986), "where the 'formations that constitute the social emerge from the interlinking of discursive and extradiscursive practices" (Sedda 2012a: 59).

21 Semiotic rings in the language of Deleuze and Guattari (1980).

22 Restricting to the contributions and semiotic debates developed at the beginning of the 2000s on the theme of translation, see Torop (1995); Dusi and Nergaard (eds. 2000); Fabbri (1998, 2000); Calefato et al. (eds. 2001); Bianchi et al. (eds. 2002); Eco (2003); Sedda (2003). The theme of translation is at the heart of all Sedda's work; for a theoretical rethink of it see Sedda 2018.

23 The Peircian passages are taken from Sedda 2012a, which in turn quotes Eco's 1979 re-reading of Peirce. Eco reworks Peirce's idea of signification as translation in his theory of the encyclopaedia and of the asymptotic taking of meaning (Eco 1984). On Peirce's idea of "holding together" as a relation of transduction see Paolucci's reflections on synecism 2010.

24 The case is part of the cultural-historical process of translation of the gods, cf. Assmann 1996.

25 An *imperfection* far more interesting and generative of meaning.

26 On the polyphony of reality see Bakhtin (1981 [1975]).

27 For a semio-cultural exploration of the Delucian concept of *capture* see Lancioni 2015 and 2020.

28 Also known as grip (*saisie*).

29 For an in-depth study on the construction of otherness in cultural dynamics see Lancioni 2020. For a study on otherness in relation to fascism and Roma migration see Cervelli 2020.

30 On the strategies of *camouflage*, see Greimas 1976 and Fabbri 2017: 123–139.

31 On collective identity in relation to the brands of enunciation see Fabbri 2021: 196–207.

32 On this relationship in the relations between media, images and culture, see Sedda 2012a, chapter 5.

33 A *striated* space in a tendentially *smooth* one, cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1980.

34 For a semiotics of citizenship, see Sedda 2012a, chapter 3.

35 The same movement, according to Sedda, can be seen in Sloterdijk's *Theory of insularisations* contemplating atmospheric islands that cast their gaze elsewhere and peer into the uncharted future: envisioning greenhouses, ships, airplanes, space stations, and the prospect of (post)human settlements in distant cosmic realms.

36   The same author highlights the limitations of an "island epistemology" for under-
      standing island identity dynamics, see Sahlins 2010.
37   The same author points out how this macro-model brings the study of islands clos-
      er to the theme of *spatiality* understood as a modelling language capable of struc-
      turing consciousness and experiences in the same way as *natural language*, cf.
      Sedda 2010b and 2017a. For an introduction to the theme of spatiality in semiot-
      ics see Cavicchioli 2002, Pezzini 2012, Giannitrapani 2013, Pezzini and Finocchi
      eds. 2020.
38   For a detailed analysis see chapter 5 in Sedda 2002. For a more in-depth analy-
      sis on Sardinia, see also Sedda 2017b, Sorrentino 2020a.

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