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Semiotics of Space, Semiotics of the City

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Summary. The paper will provide an overview of the semiotics of space as it has been investigated in Italy in the last twenty years. After identifying the semiotic relevance in the study of space, the distinction between objectivating and subjectivating conceptions is recalled, stressing how these two kinds of spatiality are such only by virtue of effects of meaning constructed by and in texts. We then examine two macro lines of research on which semiotics has focused: those on spatiality described and constructed in various types of narrative (space in the text) and those on experienced spatiality (space as text). The second part of the contribution is dedicated to a spatial text that, due to its centrality and extension, has been the object of numerous investigations: the city, a complex entity, which has been read from a political, gastronomic, tourist, commercial and cultural point of view.

Keywords. Spatiality, semiotics, city, texts

Zusammenfassung. Der Beitrag bietet einen Überblick über die Raumsemiotik, wie sie in den letzten zwanzig Jahren in Italien praktiziert wurde. Nachdem die semiotische Relevanz der Erforschung des Raumes identifiziert wurde, wird die Unterscheidung zwischen objektivierenden und subjektivierenden Konzeptionen hervorgehoben, wobei betont wird, dass diese beiden Arten von Räumlichkeit nur aufgrund von Bedeutungseffekten, die durch und in Texten konstruiert wurden, existieren. Anschließend werden zwei Hauptforschungslinien untersucht, auf die sich die Semiotik konzentriert hat: diejenigen, die sich mit der räumlichen Darstellung und Konstruktion in verschiedenen Arten von Erzählungen befassen (Raum im Text), und diejenigen, die sich mit der erlebten Räumlichkeit beschäftigen (Raum als Text). Der zweite Teil des Beitrags widmet sich einem räumlichen Text, der aufgrund seiner Zentralität und Ausdehnung Gegenstand zahlreicher Untersuchungen war: der Stadt, einer komplexen Einheit, die aus politischer, gastronomischer, touristischer, kommerzieller und kultureller Sicht gelesen wurde.

Schlüsselwörter. Räumlichkeit, Semiotik, Stadt, Texte

1. Foundations

The omnipresence of space in human life has led numerous scholars across a wide range of disciplines within the social sciences and the humanities to investigate the nature of this foundational dimension of existence. The semiotic reflection on the theme began as far back as the 1970s[1] to then reach its peak in Italy between the end of the 1990s and the first years of the new millennium. A renewed attention to the subject was first attested by a special issue of *Versus* (1996) edited by Sandra Cavicchioli and gave rise to at least three works that are now considered cornerstones for the semiotics of space in Italy and beyond. These are Gianfranco Marrone's analysis of a Palermo university building, preceded by a substantial theoretical section on the relevance of semiotics for the study of spatiality, in his book *Corpi sociali* (2001: 287–368); Sandra Cavicchioli's book *Lo spazio, i sensi, gli umori* (2002), a collection of general essays and close analyses of the representation of space in literary texts; and, finally, *Leggere lo spazio, comprendere l'architettura* by Manar Hammad (2003), in which semiotics is rigorously tested in the investigation of seminar rooms, Japanese houses where the ritual tea ceremony takes place, gardens, carpets, and so on. The significant fact that this last volume was published in Italy ahead of its publication in France – the author's adoptive country – confirms the Italian revival of the semiotics of space.

Reading these three works together helps us form an idea of the different lines of research that were developed in the semiotic approach to spatiality, which have been intertwined since their publication. These include studies focussing on space as the main object of analysis (a direction that has become prevalent in Italy also thanks to the affirmation of branches such as sociosemiotics and ethnosemiotics); research examining space as it is framed in texts in their traditional acceptation (for example literature, television, etc., following the classic adage of the semiotics of the text); studies in which spatiality has been used as a model to explain broader cultural categories (drawing upon the semiotics of culture).

As we can easily surmise, these are areas that can only be distinguished in principle and for the sake of a clear exposition: indeed, the considerable points of contact make the task of classifying the scholarly contributions in one area or another rather difficult; also, analytical tools and explanatory categories are generally transversally applicable to one or the other form of spatiality. Nevertheless, the several types of spatial texts that may be considered (physical places, descriptions, literary tales, imaginary spaces, spatial cultural models) and the countless aspects that may be explored in each of them (cognitive investments, passionate aspects, narrative structures, valorisations, intersubjective relationships, corporeality) share an element that beckons the semiotic gaze and makes it pertinent: it is s i g n i f i c a t i o n , that is, their being significant and endowed with meaning by those who read them.

2. Semiotic pertinence

The first steps of the semiotics of space, with the progressive identification of the object of study and of a system of inter-defined models and concepts, consisted in the definition of what semiotics should not be, thus taking a stance, on an epistemological level, with respect to other disciplines. Functionalism, or at least a certain notion of it, was firmly discarded: the meaning of spaces cannot be reduced to their (practical) function. While it is true that, in principle, a library is used for reading and a classroom for teaching, it is also true that the functions attributed to spaces often go beyond their first meaning and that this polysemy cannot be classified according to hierarchies of values (with the identification of practical "primary meanings" and symbolic "secondary meanings" – see Marrone 2001).[2] Closely linked to this conception is the anti-determinist stance: while it is true that each space contains the instructions for its use and a model user already inscribed within it, this should not induce us to postulate indisputable results on actual spatial practices (a square is not necessarily a place of social gatherings, a football field is not necessarily the scene of a sports competition, etc.). The enunciational subjects of space, as we shall see, do not necessarily coincide with the empirical users (see Marrone 2001). Finally, the rejection of essentialism (Hammad 2003), that is, of the notion that meaning lies in things and not in the relation of signification. Essentialism, in fact, by "flattening the signified on the signifier" (Hammad 2003: 45), naturalises meaning, whereas the latter is clearly the result of a cultural construction. The task of semiotics then is to reveal this kind of mystification, recovering the critical vocation of the science of signification, which Barthes (1957) powerfully invoked.

Once what the semiotics of space should not be was defined, its object of study was identified in the 'text', a fundamental unit of analysis for any kind of investigation. According to Marrone (2001: 294–303), the link between space and utterance can be expressed in three possible directions.

1. There is the s p a c e o f t h e t e x t, that is, an inscription surface in which a certain text is concretised and made manifest (the page of a book, the canvas of a painting, etc.). A support which, as has been demonstrated, is never neutral, but contributes to the definition of the genre and the customary use of a certain work (to admire a very large painting we will have to stand at an adequate distance; the differences between a magazine and a newspaper are also marked by the format and type of paper used).[3]
2. Then there is the s p a c e i n t h e t e x t, that is, the representation of settings, territories, landscapes within different types of stories, from paintings to artistic photographs, from novels to tourist guides. The analysis of the various forms of description of places may yield implicit meanings, narrative organisations, profound values of the stories in question.

3. Finally, there is the space as text, in the sense that places, with their articulations and the experiences that populate them, can be interpreted and analysed as a textual form.

This last point is linked to the reflection on spatiality as a language and, consequently, to the positing of a homology between spatial configurations and the so-called natural languages.[4]

All recent and less recent studies agree on the fact that space, as a language, is biplanar, that is, endowed with an expression plane (usually manifested through dimensions such as heights, sizes, depths, demarcations, etc.) and a content plane (the often socially motivated meaning conveyed by those configurations) in reciprocal presupposition (there is no expression without content and vice versa). Therefore, it is clear that space is a language that speaks of something other than itself (Hammad 2003), that is, that speaks of us, of our habits, our relationships and, more generally, our forms of social and cultural organisation. However, these relations of signification are not given once and for all, since we also know from our daily experiences that a vital dynamism crosses spaces, making them change over time or in relation to the narrative programmes of the subjects who populate and cross them – for instance, until recently a demarcation line in a shop signalled a boundary not to be crossed in order to protect people's privacy, and more recently to respect social distancing measures related to the Covid pandemic.

Moreover, spaces themselves do not represent mere backdrops to our actions; they are not, if considered on a narrative level, mere objects, but they play a variety of actantial roles: they may be an object of value, such as a tourist destination; a helper, such as for instance a waste sorting centre; a manipulator who seduces, such as a shop window; or a subject, such as an elevator taking us upstairs or downstairs. Marrone (2001) describes these cases as subjects enunciated in space. Spaces assign modal values – for instance, a low architrave limits the possibilities of action of the subject, who has to duck under it to go past it; a glass surface affords the ability to see through it but prohibits physical contact with what lies beyond (Hammad 2003) – and triggers a certain kind of 'passion', as in the case of the university building studied by Marrone where the indefinite spatial configuration was shown to effectively cause acts of vandalism by the students who did not feel represented by the place.

3. Subjectivity and subjectivisms

In the wake of what had already emerged from phenomenological studies (Merleau-Ponty) and, going farther back, from the theories of several philosophical currents (Aristotle, Descartes, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Heidegger etc.), semiotics has established how space always exists in relation to some subjectivity that inhabits it, traverses it, animates it. Space and subjectivity confer meaning to each other; individual and collective identities are partly

determined by the places we live in. On the other hand, by using a space, subjects give it meaning and value. As regards this point, Cavicchioli (ed. 1996) emphasises how there cannot be pure space used at a later stage, but rather the opposite is true: space is always experienced, perceived, or studied by a subject, while objectivity is rather an effect of meaning constructed by and in the texts that bring it into play. In other words, it is a matter of enunciative strategies, of ways of articulating and presenting space: sometimes, more or less intentionally, the enunciator and the enunciatee are discernible (the simulacra of the person who has shaped a particular place and of the one to which it is addressed), while at other times the two figures, albeit presupposed, are hidden. In the first case, there will be an effect of subjectivating spatiality (for instance, turnstiles and spacers that reveal the presence of someone who wanted to regulate traffic, maps with indications on the routes to be taken), in the second case, there will be an objectivating spatiality (anonymous places without directions, maps that rely on classic traffic codes). Even the spaces that seem to us the most obvious and objective, realities given once and for all, are indeed the result of discourses, narratives, values that revolve around them and that construct them in different ways every time. This is the case, for example, of the Mediterranean, a place we take for granted but which, under the semiotic lens, reveals multiple and sometimes contradictory facets and identities. Political, commercial, tourist and culinary aspects intersect in the various stories that circulate around it, each time showing it to us from alternative points of view, building many "different" notions of the Mediterranean, in fact (Lorusso and Violi, eds. 2011).

The process of spatial aspectualisation, or the definition of a space is always oriented, directed by a subject – real or virtual, actual or presupposed – that frames, animates, and crosses it, pursuing its own narrative programmes and valorisation strategies (Cavicchioli ed. 1996). In short, the centrality of the notion of point of view – borrowed from literary theory and endorsed by the semiotics of space – is revealed. A viewpoint has a pragmatic side, linked to the subjectivity that animates the perceptive process, but it also has a cognitive side (linked to knowledge) and an affective side (related to sensations) (Cavicchioli ed. 1996). It belongs to an observer whose activity occurs in conjunction with the presence of another actantial figure, the informer-object of the gaze. Their variously cooperative or conflictual interaction accounts for the reciprocal and negotiating composition of the elements in play in every vision activity. The body then becomes fundamental, external to but at the same time incorporated in space, a mediating and paradoxical entity of this flow, at once perceptive and constructive (Marrone 2001).

In this deep correlation between space and subjectivity, the anthropomorphic grid that is often projected onto territories, assigning them the features of the human body, does not seem entirely random. We talk about the "heart" of a city, a mountain "backbone", the "foot" of a hill, and so on. But the opposite is also true, since the human body is often associated with spatial concepts (the body has "central" and "peripheral" parts, but one can

also be “over the moon” or “downcast” (Violi 1991; Cavicchioli ed. 1996; Magli 1996; Marrone 2001). Common (and therefore ingrained) expressions such as these make it clear how language becomes a model for space (whose alternating parts – full and empty, high and low – express phrasing and punctuation), and space becomes a model for language (which resorts to dimensional concepts to express social meanings; on the relationship between language and spatiality, see also the monographic issue of *Filosofi(e) Semiotiche* edited by Chiricò ed. 2017; and Tani ed. 2014).

Body/space relationships are the object of study of proxemics, founded by Hall (1966) and regarded by Eco (1968) as part of the semiotics of space. On the one hand, proxemics studies the way in which different cultures conceive their spaces (from cities to private homes), focussing on apparently obvious details and therefore perceived as natural. For instance, think of the way the setting for the kitchen in private homes has changed over the centuries, from a hidden and relegated room to an exhibited centrepiece. Such change on the architectural expression plane mirrors a parallel transformation on the content plane, since also the perception of culinary practice has changed: no longer a means, a preparatory act to offer the other a gustatory-gastronomic experience, but a performance in itself, a central practice with respect to which tasting is rather configured as a form of approval (Giannitrapani 2013a).

However, proxemics, understood as the “branch of semiotics that studies the significant structuring of human and non-human space” (Fabbri 2020: 185), also focusses, from a micro point of view, on intersubjectivity: friendly or formal relationships and specific communication contexts alike involve abiding to a series of implicit and internalised rules based on a ‘correct’ use of distances, heights, and so on. Think of rituals (Hammad 2003), of etiquette or ceremonials, that is, systems governed by a set of rules dictating ways of using space to express social relations. Whether they involve human or non-human actors is not relevant, as in architecture the arrangement of different spaces is full of significance, just as types and models of interaction can be inferred from the positioning of bodies in relation to each other. On a university campus, the arrangement of different buildings and their placement along a main route or a secondary lane is indicative of a certain way of understanding the role of a given faculty with respect to the system of knowledge – for instance with faculties placed in a central position to show their preponderance and others tucked away, designed to intrigue passers-by and challenge traditionally more established disciplined (see Brucculeri et al. 2010). Similarly, the fact that in the past the church and the town hall overlooked the main square of the city indicated an equal confrontation of religious and political power. But think also of a whole series of urban transformations operated in Rome during Fascism: the creation of a new road that connected Piazza Venezia – chosen as the seat of the government – and the Colosseum was functional to establishing a facing relation and therefore a direct link between Roman times and Mussolini’s power (Cervelli 2020). Thus, Fabbri’s teaching (2020: 187) on proxemics invites us to

> go beyond the changing face of perceived behavior, the illusory play of signs on a manifest sensory plane and go beyond the 'world's surprises' towards immanent structure (Fabbri 2020: 187).

4. Narrated Spaces

A line of research of no small importance has focussed on the spaces in the text (Marrone 2001), or on the representation of space in the most diverse types of narratives, literature in the first place. These studies have highlighted – in the wake of Bertrand's observations (1995) – how the reproduction of environments, landscapes, scripts is not mere aesthetic ornament but plays an active part in a narrative.

This line of studies is based on the re-evaluation of descriptive syntagms. Far from being a suspensive pause with respect to the narration, description is an integral part of it (Cavicchioli 2002) and helps to create an enunciation strategy, to define a communicative pact that binds enunciator and enunciatee, to construct interpretative paths and encourage reading patterns (Marsciani 1989). Not surprisingly, Eco (2002) wrote that hypotyposis – a particularly vivid description – is a typical example of "interpretative cooperation", as it requires a precise authorial vocation and a parallel interpretative work on the part of the reader. Enlivening descriptive syntagms, giving the reader a referential illusion, does not necessarily mean filling the text with a wealth of details aimed at increasing the figurative density of the scene, but rather selecting pertinent traits, choosing what to highlight and what to play down (Cavicchioli 2002).

Therefore, spatiality is not simply an expressive augmentation immediately recognisable at the discursive level, but rather the result of a generative path that takes on profound value investments, modal and actantial distributions and which, by figuratively enriching the story, confers uniqueness to the texts. Marsciani (1989) demonstrated this in his analysis of Renzo's journey to the Adda in *I Promessi Sposi*, highlighting how the progressive change in the landscape and in its perception parallels the character's transformation. Barcellona (2002) also addressed the question in his analysis of some passages from *Pinocchio*, showing the way in which simple spatial syntagms convey deeper investments (the crossroads is a figurative translation of the choice; following someone is the result of the subordinate relationships between the actors of the story).[5]

Equally emblematic is the analysis of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* developed by Pezzini (1996). On the one hand, the story is a perfect example of what the Russian formalists, and Sklovsky in particular, understood as "estrangement", that is, a change in the usual perspective on things capable of provoking new visions and questioning mechanisms that are only apparently obvious, predictable, automatic. On another level, it speaks of humans and non-humans, challenging their confines and revealing their relational ambiguities. In perfectly structuralist terms, and in a sort of chain

reaction, the protagonist's transformation causes a change in the viewpoint on space and a consequent distortion in the perception of the self and of intersubjective relationships. The ensuing inevitable thymic and pathemic alterations affect the apparently stable world of intimacy and family affections.

Even in the poetic text, spatiality can prove to be a fundamental element for understanding the profound articulation of meaning proposed by a poem, all the more so since the spatiality described in the enunciated world (space in the text) plays with the spatiality posed on the expression plane (space of the text); that is, with the metric structure, the system of rhymes, pauses and caesuras that convey further effects of meaning (Marsciani 1996).

The same reasoning applies to spatiality on the web (see some of the essays in Del Marco and Pezzini eds. 2017; Bertolotti and Pezzini eds. 2021), in cinema (see for example Eugeni 2006, but also Ricci 2016 in which the representation of Rome in cinema is analysed) and in television. For instance, in television broadcasts the script gives us precise indications on the type of programme and content that will be offered to us. Among the entertainment programmes, for example, there will be framing spaces, which amplify the spectacular dimension, and lounge spaces, typical of talk shows and characterised by the recreation of more intimate and informal environments (Calabrese et al. 1989). In political talk shows, the way in which the studio is set up, animated and traversed by the subjects, gives an idea of the role attributed to the presenter and of how the debate among the exponents of various political parties is conceived (Giannitrapani 2013b): if a presenter constantly moves between two parallel rows of guests facing each other, he or she will assume the role of a mediator who facilitates the debate between opposing factions, while by standing in the middle of the TV studio, he/she will conceive his/her role as central in orienting the debate, and so on.

Similarly, in cooking shows, the way the kitchen is set up and connected to other parts of the set (the pantry, the dining table, the station where the judges are) is an indication of a certain notion of nutrition and culinary practice, as well as an interpretation, once again, of the communicative pact with the audience: some programmes will emphasise the game dimension, others the educational one, and so on (see Giannitrapani 2014). Not to mention how news programmes themselves talk about space and the conflicting dynamics that inhabit it, also providing glimpses and geopolitical interpretations of what is happening in the world (Pozzato 2004).

In TV series too, the way of experiencing places and spatial settings tells us a lot about the characters and the narrative investments proposed by the texts (Dusi and Grignaffini 2020). In *Inspector Montalbano* (Marrone 2018), for example, the organisation of spaces responds to precise axiologies and characterisations: the protagonist, who is generally resistant to change, is equally not inclined to move and this determines a concentric space in which, as we move away from familiar places, the environment

takes on increasingly dysphoric characteristics. Investigation activities are restricted to the immediate vicinity of Vigata – an imaginary Sicilian town where the events are set – and in any case, never cross Sicilian borders; possible career advancements are refused precisely to avoid transfers and even the protagonist's love life is often put to the test by his attachment to his birthplace. However, this TV series, extremely popular in Italy, provides further examples of the fundamentals of the semiotics of space. The success of the series, in fact, has led some Sicilian municipalities to seek identification with the invented town in which it is set, and political administrations have been embroiled in legal battles to gain the right to use the name Vigata. This is because, as we said at the beginning, it makes no sense to distinguish between represented spaces and lived spaces; these are both the results of often interrelated discursive processes. Not only do the spaces of the world find expression in the stories (of whatever type), but the spaces of the stories go beyond the boundaries of the page and of the screen to have a tangible effect on 'real' places.

5. Urban Semiotics

The study of space as text has been the primary focus of Italian semiotics in recent years. The texts analysed were extremely varied in terms of size and type: roads (Accardo et al. 2015; Bertolotti and Pezzini eds. 2019), sidewalks (Bertetti 2008), places of worship (Pozzato 2010; Mangiapane 2010; Mangano 2011) health centres (Galofaro 2015; Marsciani 2007), shops and museums, neighbourhoods, and entire cities (see below). We shall devote the rest of our discussion precisely on the semiotics of the city, which in recent years has been the focus of considerable research[6], in the awareness that many of the following considerations, by virtue of the transversality and generality of the semiotic methodology, are also valid for other spaces.

A first step in the analysis of an urban text is the definition of boundaries, which – albeit arbitrary – is necessary for the purpose of delimiting the object of study (on this topic, see also Montanari 2008). This preliminary operation, although taken for granted in principle (each city has 'precise' administrative borders), is not really that simple: what about the way in which citizens animate the city and inhabit its marginal areas? What about the continuous crossings that actually turn those strong boundaries into weak thresholds? (Marrone 2010a). The same reasoning may apply to a restaurant, a shop or a museum, where the practice of stopping in front of the entrance before entering or lingering outside after leaving (not to mention any smells that may emanate in the vicinity entering through doors and windows) actually expand their boundaries beyond the access point. Indicating the limits of a spatial text, among other things, does not mean delimiting it once and for all, but identifying a pertinence principle from which to define the text and the co-text, the latter being what is around the former and responds to the same logics and conditions as the object of analysis.

The text, to be such, needs to be isolated, so to speak (Fabbri 2017; Marrone 2010a).

Once it has been isolated, we must understand how it is structured, what happens inside and what are the figures that populate it. And here lies one of the peculiarities of the semiotic approach to space: rather than focussing, like other disciplines, on the motivations, psychological dispositions, and peculiarities of the subjects, semiotics is concerned with the figures of enunciator and enunciatee, textual simulacra, presupposed instances producing and receiving the text. In a city like Dubai, for example, entire areas built around broad multi-lane roads, with sparse underpasses and pedestrian crossings, postulate an enunciatee that moves mainly by car (Sedda 2008b); a hypermarket consisting of long parallel corridors bordered by high shelves implies a consumer who is not interested in wandering around but inclined to follow standardised paths (Agnello and Scalabroni 2010); a no-parking sign presupposes an enunciatee who will not park in that street (Mangano 2008).

Of course, this does not mean that model users will necessarily coincide with empirical users[7] – thereby at the risk of falling into determinism – because those who actually live in a place will either accept or reject their image projected onto the space, that is, they will be able to choose whether to adhere to the type of use that is proposed to them or (re-)invent a different one. Hence the semiotics of space does not just study places as they have been ideally and strategically designed (defining model users), but is also interested in practices, observing how city users effectively interact with environments, use them tactically and sometimes reinvent them (an interesting collection of case studies on urban practices is that by Codeluppi et al. eds. 2010; for a critical look at the study of urban practices, see Volli 2009). The semiotic approach to the city, and more generally to spatiality, is to always consider spaces as full constructs, animated by the presence of objects and subjects that make them come alive, starting from their interrelationships. This approach implies a theoretical assumption – firmly maintained by that branch of the science of signification which is ethnosemiotics (Marsciani 2007) – consisting in the rejection of any claims of 'objective' results, and the correlated acceptance of the observer/analyst's subjectivity as an integral part of the analysed scenario. In a semiotics based on the observation of practices, whatever the size or type of the spaces analysed (it could be a bathroom or a supermarket, the process of buying a pair of shoes or a walk in a city centre, Marsciani 2007), there is always a subject/observer who frames a scene in which he is involved in some way.

Furthermore, lived space can be thought of in figural terms. With this expression we mean a way of synthesising the essence of places not so much according to a map view, but through an abstract and minimal representation that accounts for the way they work, a sort of "spatial matrix" (Barcellona 2002) encompassing their articulations, paths, and the ways in which they are experienced. Thus, for example, we can say in general terms that usually a hairdresser's shop has a circular space not because it has a round floor plan, but

because it is a place without internal segmentations, in which the gaze can seize the complexity of the salon – a possibility often amplified by mirrors and large windows that multiply chances for looking in from the outside – and in which the opening rhymes with the relationship, also open and flexible, that exists between operator and customer as they are involved in negotiating a certain intervention on the hair (Marsciani 2007). Figural spatiality is, in other words, an abstract spatiality that accounts for the type of articulation of places, the regimes of vision and the relationships that develop within them.

Studying urban practices means uncovering interesting semiotic dynamics, such as enunciative practice (Fontanille and Zilberberg 1998), which can be found where unforeseen uses, if widespread, are incorporated in the system and steadily redefine the meaning and function of places. An example of this is Piazza Magione in Palermo, once an abandoned and forgotten corner of the city: here young people began to gather on summer evenings and recreated flexible places of socialisation by bringing drinks, food, musical instruments and sitting on the lawn that makes up the pavement of the square to spend the evening there. Subsequently, this spontaneous way of using the spaces was given a structure, with kiosks selling snacks and drinks popping up. Finally, the opening of nightclubs around the square added to the usual way of experiencing the area places traditionally designed for socialisation (Brucculeri and Giannitrapani 2010). Similarly, in Rome, immigrants have in recent years played a fundamental role in relaunching abandoned urban sites (Cervelli 2016).

Phenomena of this kind indeed provide an account of how urban spaces change over time: they do so by macro processes (decided by the institutions) or micro processes (social practices that establish themselves by contagion), suddenly (as in the case of traumatic events that immediately force us to rethink the city) or as part of a process (small and progressive transformations that can only be grasped in the long term) (Pezzini ed. 2009). Places which – at a certain moment of their history – appear meaningless, *terrain vagues* devoid of a precise function and possibly populated by subjects marginalized by society, over time can become centres of aggregation, transforming their neutrality into its opposite and turning into outposts of identity and experience (Granelli 2008; Ciuffi 2008). It is precisely what happened at the Foro Italico in Palermo (Marrone 2013), once an integral part of the urban fabric as the city's seaside promenade, later turned into a large waste ground following heavy bombing during World War II. This area was frequented by migrants and occasionally by children when the funfair stopped there, until a project by *Italo Rota* enclosed it within precise boundaries and turned it into a new green space in the city. Today it is fully regenerated as an integral part of the city. The same spatial configuration has thus become something else through the logical articulation of transitions within the nature/culture category.

A *terrain vague* is not necessarily located in the outskirts of the city – on which the semiotic gaze has indeed been cast (Cervelli 2008); it can also be found near densely populated and lived-in urban areas, configur-

ing itself as an authentic “central periphery” and making its surroundings emerge by contrast as a normalised place designed to perform specific functions, as a full and significant centre (for an analysis of an area characterised by urban decay, see also Del Marco 2014). This leads us to another general consideration: centre and periphery do not have ontological meaning, but they define each other reciprocally (a centre is such on the basis of the identification of a peripheral element and vice versa); they are the results of processes of valorisation and devaluing of spaces (Cervelli 2008). Therefore, these entities are not stable but subject to continuous variations that convey specific concepts on the urban structure and on the power relations that form within it (on this topic, see also Pezzini 2019). Furthermore, the centre of a city is that which can be defined primary in relation to some dimension considered relevant: a business centre will be different from a tourist centre, and the latter in turn may not coincide with a centre in terms of trade or local administration, and so on.

However, it is in the alternation of solids and voids, of past and present, of transformations between these states, that the semiotic essence of the city is found: a complex network of relationships holding everything together, a layered and ever-changing weave in which the conflictual dimension is, in a certain sense, unavoidable (Volli 2005). The city gives itself as a city-effect, as an effect of meaning, the result of discursive practices and relationships that bring together spaces, objects and subjects (Marrone 2010a). Think also of the rhythms of travel, of the journeys that are made within its confines and the different possibilities of movement: choices regarding the layout of new urban arteries (and therefore allowing new forms of continuity between spaces) are never neutral, as they determine new relationships between the areas that are connected as a result; similarly, frequent connections between two neighbouring towns are as much an indication of as a stimulus for greater economic and social relations between the inhabitants. Moving around by bike highlights a play of sensations that work synergistically with each other (contact with the ground, smells, close observation, etc.) (Brucculeri 2009). Moving around the city by car rather than on foot or by bus (Gaudio 2019) changes not only the speed of the journey, but also the type of contact with places, enhancing possibilities like covering long distances in a short time, and neutralising others, such as noticing the particulars of a street for example. In addition, as Marrone (2013) has shown in his analysis of a 1950s Walt Disney cartoon, travelling by car is very different from walking, since the subjectivities at play, the way of interacting with the other, the plans of action and passionate configurations are redefined. The subjects that move across space are often ‘hybrids’: not just ‘people’, but individuals who undergo a transformation by combining with other ‘objects’. Think of the so-called “smombies” (smartphone zombies), often engaged and concentrated on the space of the screen rather than on that of the cities they cross (Giannitrapani 2017). In other words, the rhythm of the landscape is, as Fabbri (1998: 46) argues, the product of both “an organization of the territory and a syntax of vision”.

The rhythm of a city does not stem solely from roads and means of transport, but also from the fluctuating gazes that are cast on it. There are upward, disordered gazes, so to speak, that establish a direct dialogue with the inhabited space and in which the loss of global configuration is matched by a better localised understanding. There are downward, ordering gazes which afford mastery of the urban text by understanding its broadest articulation, at the expense of a loss of details and perception of the concrete ways of experiencing places. This dialectic, introduced by authors like Barthes (1967) and De Certeau (1990) and re-examined and problematised by the most recent semiotic studies (Giannitrapani 2017; Marrone 2010a; Pezzini 2018) has in fact shown how these two perspectives on the city cannot be considered *a priori* as more or less truthful, but as different ways of 'practising space' and relating to the city. For instance, it is from a broad, panoramic gaze that the plasticity of the urban text emerges, shaped by contrasts that delineate semi-symbolisms capable of synthesising identity traits (see Pezzini 2018). Chromatic, eidetic, and topological organisations are therefore not a sheer matter of aesthetics, but ways through which profound forms of city organisation are expressed (Sedda 2016).

In this case too, the close connection with represented space returns, since an analysis of urban texts cannot overlook the stories that are made of them. A semiotics of the city entails not only the analysis of spaces, but also of 'exemplary texts' that speak of it (Sedda 2006, 2014; Sedda and Sorrentino 2019). For example, the various seals, emblems and, later, logos that over the centuries have summarised the identity of Rome speak of the past and make it actual according to different pertinences; they refer to different 'recipients' and trace an evolutionary line of the essence of the Eternal city (Sorrentino 2016). Similarly, the Genius of Palermo (Marrone 2013), a little big city emblem, taken from various representations within the city, is tasked with translating and bringing back to the city streets some 'temperamental' traits of the Sicilian capital.

In this complex web of meaning that is the urban text, there emerge some thematic isotopies that cross it, punctuate it, run through it, bringing out interpretative keys. Without claiming to be exhaustive, we shall identify the main ones below.

5.1 The City and Tourism

If it is difficult to delimit the field of study of urban semiotics and assign boundaries to the city, it is also because urban space is not simply a grid of streets, cities, and squares. It is not even a grid of streets populated by subjects – human and non-human. It is in fact an open discursive field, in which many discourses are spoken simultaneously with the polyphony of voices that alternate within it. Urban semiotics includes administrative, political, economic, tourist, food discourses, and so on. Each of them is expressed in certain portions of space, or at certain times becomes a central and char-

acterising element of the city's identity, or in some moments fades to the background until it disappears.

Think of the crucial importance of the tourism discourse for some territories, of the branding of a destination, the creation of themes and values designed to underpin communication on a specific destination (Brucculeri 2009), with all the stories and spaces that revolve around it – from tourist guides (Giannitrapani 2010; Giannitrapani and Ragonese eds. 2010) to travel diaries, from villages (Marrone 2013) to hotels (Giannitrapani 2020) – and which postulate a different way of experiencing tourism. There will be those who travel accumulating what we might describe as monuments-logos (Pezzini 2006), a sort of synecdoche that instantly summarises the (tourist) identity of the city (the Colosseum for Rome, the Eiffel Tower for Paris, the Statue of Liberty for New York, etc.) (see also Ferraro 2006). On the other hand, there will be those who, despising this way of doing things, will go in search of places off the beaten track, claiming the reputation of informed and expert travellers (Giannitrapani 2010). There will be some who prefer travelling by train (Del Marco 2016), a means that allows them to gradually appropriate the new space-time with which they come into contact; and some by plane, a vehicle that instantly catapults the tourist into a new dimension by erasing the gradual transition between the place of residence and that of destination (Landowski 1996); those who project their cultural grid onto their destination and those who love to discover themselves as the other (Landowski 1996).

The problem, as always, does not lie in the places themselves, but in how they are told, represented, experienced; constructing themselves now as mass attractions, now as elitist places. It turns out, in short, that the touristic nature of a place is not an ontological reality deriving from any intrinsic characteristics of the space, but an effect of meaning produced by the discourses that circulate around it and which vary over time and within space. This notion, affirmed by the first studies in semiotics of tourism (Culler 1981; MacCannell 1976), was incorporated in further analyses by more recent contributions that have devoted growing attention to the field (Addis 2017; Lorusso and Violi eds. 2011; Pezzini and Virgolin eds. 2020).[8]

Think also in this sense of the whole question of overtourism, the 'excessive' tourist load that affects many destinations, driving experts to seek strategies for countering seasonality. Phenomena of this type, which have given rise to talks of "Disneyfication" of the city, underpin processes of gentrification and, in the most dystopian perspective, the hypothetical uniformation of historic centres, increasingly populated by identical franchises and indifferent to the specificities of the territory. With the risk of spreading experiences built uniquely for tourism, aimed at creating a stereotypical typicality that matches the expectations fuelled by the images of the territory and inculcated through official communication channels or social networks (Addis 2020; Carbone 2020; Landolfi Petrone 2020; Sedda and Sorrentino 2020; Terracciano 2020a).

5.2 The City and Trade

We thus connect to other essential nodes for the semiotics of the city, including that involving commercial spaces which relate in various ways to the reality that encompasses them. Places of exchanges and purchases, increasingly refined and aestheticised, whose spaces are often expertly designed and set up by skilled staff seeking to make them attractive for potential customers. Places that offer interesting challenges to the semiotic gaze, since the movement and continuous exchange of subjectivities that alternate within commercial spaces in fact involves them in continuous negotiations on what their meaning, their boundaries, their 'right' use are (Boero 2016). The way a shop is set up (the use of lights and materials, of perfumes, furnishings and displays) is less and less left to chance and is, in any case, a producer of meaning. For instance, spotlights pointed towards a certain object single it out as top of the range in a given collection; soft lighting pointing upwards helps to characterise a cosy area in which the customer can relax (Baldassarri 2006; Teotti 2006; Cervelli and Torrini 2006). A well-designed shop is not so much one that aims to amaze at all costs through eccentric choices, but rather one that manages to transfer into its spaces the values of the brands that it promotes (Baldassarri 2006; Marrone 2007a).

Entering a shop means yielding to the seductive manipulation that the shop window puts into effect by inviting customers in, accepting the contract proposed by this complex semiotic device (Mangiapane 2008), whose evocative power – masterly described by Emile Zola in *Au bonheur des dames* – views as an instance of what Walter Benjamin called the "sex-appeal of the inorganic" (Benjamin 1982) (Pezzini 2020). A threshold which, like all thresholds, marks a junction, a transformation resulting from a crossing and reconfiguring the thematic role of those who implement it (crossing the threshold of the shop window transforms passers-by into potential customers).

Going through the space inside the store is tantamount to living a complex experience, 'appropriating' the objects on display according to a variable sensory involvement and a variously close gaze regime (Marsciani 2007), letting oneself be carried along the suggested paths or inventing new ones, getting entangled in the web of modalities (in terms of duty, will, power, knowledge) that the place proposes (Terracciano 2020b). But it also means letting oneself be involved in experiences that go beyond the purely commercial sphere, if it is true that shops increasingly incorporate 'other functions': bars, exhibition halls, spaces for relaxing or playing, and so on.

Although it is clear that each shop, with its internal sub-articulations, furnishings and ways of displaying the objects for sale, determines certain uses of the space (a bottleneck limits one's action, the presence of stairs and elevators proposes two possible actions, see Terracciano 2020b). In line with an anti-determinist viewpoint, semiotics has expressed a highly critical stance on the alleged depersonalisation induced by the experience of visiting a shopping centre (Cervelli and Pezzini eds. 2006). In fact, it has shown how such places are experienced by users in a variety of ways: for

example as gathering places for young people, as places to spend one's free time, etc. (Agnello and Scalabroni 2010). Hence the dissent towards the concept of non-place (Augé 1992), a kind of space that *a priori* would constitute the realm of anonymity, and where people would lose their individual characteristics to become predefined users.[9]

5.3 The City and Food

Peculiar commercial spaces, which therefore deserve a separate mention, are the places of food consumption – an umbrella term that encompasses all those places dedicated to the supply, preparation and consumption of food.[10] In this case, too, it is a question of investigating a field that lies between two discourses, that of space and that of food, and finding out how the two languages interact, revealing broader social dynamics (Giannitrapani ed. 2021b). Restaurants, markets, kitchens, dining rooms, but also supermarkets and shops line city streets, seamlessly succeeding one another, revealing the tastes and consumption habits of city users, but also, in some cases, the disciplinary structures that underlie them.

For example, the supermarket, the inevitable and identitary space of any populated area – the larger and more densely populated, the more imposing the supermarket – is a familiar and everyday place which, upon close analysis, not only speaks of multitudes of juxtaposed products through which to satisfy primary needs or sudden desires, but of a precise idea of society, populated by people who are not always trustworthy and functioning on the basis of hardly concealed power structures (think for example of the dynamics of the hostage coin to be placed in the cart in order to temporarily appropriate it) (Pozzato 2021). And perhaps it is not by chance that the structure of the supermarket reproduces that of a city, with main arteries and secondary streets, openings and bottlenecks: a microcosm made in the image and likeness of the space that incorporates it, and which suggests different dispositions towards social interactions – in the aisles, for example, relationships are limited, the main relationship being between subject and product, while in the open spaces in front of the counters there is interaction with staff and other customers (Marsciani 2007).

But we also think of the important role that street markets have historically played in cities, not only in terms of food supply, but also as meeting places. Recently, many have been redesigned so as to combine the traditional activity of grocery shopping with that of food consumption: more and more often, people go to markets to nibble some snacks, or even to consume a full meal. This change has led to the creation of hybrid places (halfway between a restaurant, a street market and a supermarket) that hold particular appeal for tourists and strongly characterise the identity of the city: among them, *Eataly* (now widespread all over the world) Lisbon's *Time Out Market*, the *FI.C.O* experiment in Bologna, which attempts to showcase the entire food chain (from production to consumption) in a large and complex space (Marrone 2021).

As regards restaurants, not only have they increasingly diversified, exploding into a myriad of formats, but over time they have also interpreted their relationship with the city in very different terms, gradually opening up to it and incorporating urban space as the backdrop for convivial performances: next to traditional restaurants – well shielded from the city and contained within their interior environment – there are more and more places that reach towards the outside, with outdoor tables that allow you to look around or shelves that act as a pretext for a sociality that fans out in the streets of the city. Therefore, if need be, benches, sidewalks, and flower beds can become an integral part of the places where food is consumed and assume the same role that tables, chairs and shelves play in a traditional restaurant-space (Giannitrapani 2021a).

5.4 The City and Culture

The aestheticisation of the consumer experience, the attention to display criteria, the trend towards multi-sensory involvement, the skilful orchestration in the use of materials are general principles that apply to places such as shops, restaurants and bars, as well as to other fundamental places that characterise the city: museums. And indeed, as has already been argued (Cervelli and Pezzini eds. 2006), we can observe an ever-increasing similarity between art objects and consumer objects – cult products to be venerated and ready to be transmuted one into the other. It is not a novelty that museums themselves have become brands and are managed according to marketing dynamics. In museums, on the other hand, bookshops and cafeterias play an increasingly central role, demonstrating how different urban spaces often exist in ways that, in Jakobson's wake, we could define as poetic, and in which potential paradigms unfold within the same syntagm.

These developments and the process of transformation that the museum institution has undergone in the last fifty years have aroused considerable semiotic interest. Already for the simple fact that the museum system, in its selection, preservation and display of certain objects, expresses systems of cultural valorisation and contributes to their dissemination in society (Marsciani 2021), offers to the public a project of meaning, a point of view and a gaze on the world – no matter whether past, present, or future.

In this general framework, various analyses have taken into consideration specific cases. One such was conducted by Manar Hammad (2006) on the Centrale Montemartini in Rome, an old thermoelectric power plant turned into a museum as part of the Capitoline Museums system. Not only do the author's fine and precise observations highlight general principles for the semiotic analysis of museum spaces, they also manage to bring out the profound mechanisms that create "the conditions under which meaning can be grasped", to use a famous Greimasian expression. Considerations on the exhibits, layout, and architecture (and on their interrelations) form the basis for a precise discourse to emerge which the museum enun-

ciator addresses to the visitor, talking about the city of Rome's past, its territorial expansion, and its development over the course of the centuries. This discourse is articulated by the colours used in the setting (which semi-symbolically are tasked with conveying the spatial or temporal origin of the exhibited objects), the types of supports and devices used to valorise the statues (variously raised, variously 'framed', and therefore variously valorised), the syntagmatic combinations of the artefacts on display (which create homologous groups for some pertinence criterion), the very structure of the building (with a markedly basilica style floor plan in some rooms that predetermines the way visitors will move along the various corridors). But perhaps even more interesting is the innovative character of this museum in comparison to traditional archaeological museums, as the collection is displayed in an old thermoelectric power station whose imposing machinery still stands, forming the backdrop to the ancient Roman statues and archeological artefacts. This produces an innovative syncretic narrative that unfolds along an unprecedented pragmatic and cognitive path, thanks to which visitors can admire examples of both industrial and artistic archeology side by side.

In this sense, the Centrale Montemartini represents a formidable example of what can be defined as "new museums" (Pezzini 2011), spaces that – from the Beaubourg museum onwards – have represented a new way of conceiving museum institutions, regardless of the nature of their exhibits.[11] Taking as a point of departure Zunzunegui's research (2003), Pezzini (2011) identifies a turning point in the way of conceiving spaces and itineraries, which in turn refer to a new understanding of the role of museums and of the interaction with visitors. If the traditional museum is characterized by recommended visitors routes almost channelled in advance (and therefore by a manifest enunciational structure) and by a hierarchical communication pact in which the institution is responsible for transferring knowledge and a certain interpretation with respect to the exhibits; in the 'new museum' interiors are emptied to make way for flexible and changing settings equipped to host ever new events, as well as multiform itineraries by visitors who are seduced by the opportunity of a personal encounter with the works, in a communicative pact with equal intentions. Thanks to constant new proposals, installations, temporary exhibitions and events, the enunciator of the new museum is increasingly not only the tourist but also the citizen, driven to visit the same place several times precisely because they are always ready to live ever changing experiences.

New museums aim at exhibiting in an innovative way and involve visitors in itineraries that, in some cases, may focus on an aesthetic and pathemic side (as happens for example at Berlin's Jewish Museum, designed by Libeskind; Pezzini 2011). They open up to the city, thanks to transparent surfaces and panoramic spots, contemplating the view of the city as if the latter were the work to be admired (Pezzini 2011). Not only that, they have a great impact on the territory also from an aesthetic point of view, since the architecture that houses them is more and more often a work to

be admired itself, designed by an *archistar* and able to impose itself on what surrounds it, at the risk of overshadowing the exhibits. A case in point is the Guggenheim in Bilbao (Pezzini 2011), which radically transformed the city's identity by stimulating unprecedented tourism growth. Similar examples are the exhibition facilities located in the outskirts of cities, which tend to redeem such locations by elevating them to cultural destinations.

Many musealisation processes are linked to questions related to memory, another theme dear to semiotics (see Mazzucchelli's essay in this publication). Suffice it to say, for the moment, that a memorial does not represent exclusively an attempt to safeguard the past and to make it memorable, but more profoundly it is a construction of history responding to precise identity strategies, a guided reading that reverberates on the present and draws lines of development for the future (Violi 2014). From Auschwitz to the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia, the visitor – whether a tourist or a citizen – is called upon to explore itineraries which, on the one hand, aim at achieving the identification with trauma, while on the other are the results of selections of pertinent traits (Violi 2014). Such examples raise thorny ethical questions: what about the bookshops of these museums which blend cultural and commercial spaces, sometimes commodifying trauma? What about the playful use practices of these places, which debase the sacredness of trauma (Pezzini 2011)? And again, what should we think of a tour that combines trips to agreeable shopping centres and visits to places of memory (Violi 2014)? On the other hand, there is a whole literature that refers to the idea of erasing the memory of the city (Leone 2009a), as well as in everyday life a series of practices that aim to reconfigure its meaning. From the devastation caused by wars or natural cataclysms to reconstructions and restorations, there is an attempt to de-semantize and attribute (new) meanings in a sometimes unintentional strategic framework (Mazzucchelli 2010).

5.5 The City and Politics

The political dimension of the city is so pervasive that it emerges transversally in almost any observation on urban space. That is, if by politics we do not (only) mean a world made up of parties, governments, and political allegiances, but of relational principles of organisation of collectives (composed of humans and non-humans, cf. Latour 1999).

On the basis of what we have discussed thus far, monuments, memorials, and museums build a cultural identity linked to some aspects of the city, to some of its functions, to some representative figures by building interpretative lines, historical paths that do not correspond to a presumed reality but only to one of its possible discursive articulations (just think of what happened recently with the Black Lives Matter movement, see Vannoni 2021). Conversely, there are places that build their own identity from scratch, as happened to the Costa Smeralda, the famous 'locality' of the

Sardinian coast designated to host luxury seaside tourism which in reality does not correspond to a precise administrative and geographical entity, but rather to an entrepreneurial project that rationally endeavoured to build a place suitable for tourists, even at the cost of undermining its ties with the native population and its traditions. This instance of utopia, or rather Foucaultian heterotopia, situates this territory in a suspended space-time, in a not-here (compared to the rest of Sardinia) and in a not-elsewhere (in no other specific part of the world), branded and yet evanescent (Addis 2017). In this case too, economic, touristic, and political reasons intersect, and the semiotic task is not so much that of judging the effects, but rather of revealing the mechanisms underlying this construction.

If the Costa Smeralda case is a clear example of how the identity of a place is defined on the basis of discourse generated about it, the same reasoning can be applied to an apparently opposite case: Rome. With its millenary history, the city of Rome has been constantly reread, redefined, and its identity renegotiated, beginning with the political events that have shaped it (Sedda and Sorrentino 2019). Thus, for example, if in the Rome of the Popes the urban space reproduced in a certain sense the celestial space, with the basilica of San Pietro, emblem of religious power, well separated from the rest of the city, during Fascism a whole series of urban interventions (involving the road system, but also monuments and buildings) aimed at reconstructing a past, a history functional to the present, in order for the Fascist regime to reverberate the glories of the Roman Empire (Cervelli 2020). The urbanistic discourse, acting in syncretism with the medical-scientific and linguistic ones, has contributed to the definition of a certain idea of a cohesive society, built, in structural terms, in opposition to a "system of outcasts" excluded by and at the margin of society, similarly to what happens today with migratory waves (Cervelli 2020).

Processes of this kind cannot fail to recall the kinds of cultural dynamics that led Lotman to speak of space as a primary modelling system, or rather as a language capable of explaining and imagining culture. The mechanism just described, for example, has created a fracture, that which Cervelli calls an "internal frontier": a spatial threshold that was sometimes empirical (think of ghettos) at other times metaphorical, but that in any case created an 'us' in opposition to the 'other'; forms of inclusion/exclusion that, as soon as they are posed, define collective identities, characterised by internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity.

The definition of groups implies boundaries, however arbitrary, permeable and porous. From Lotman and Uspensky (1975) onwards it is clear that every society is established on the basis of an opposition between an interior (own) and an exterior (of others) and is in turn divided into zones, organised into centres (institutionalised and entrenched hard cores of culture) and peripheries (less organised margins in which contact with the outside takes place and in which changes can penetrate more easily). In the Lotmanian conception, intercultural relations are made possible precisely on the basis of these frontiers which, on the one hand, delimit the respec-

tive identities, but on the other, being porous, are a continuous source of contact and change. These dynamics have been the focus of recent scholarship in Italy (see in particular Cervelli 2014; Cervelli and Sedda 2006; Sedda 2003, 2006. And, below, the chapter by Paolo Sorrentino).

6. Conclusion

The semiotics of space in Italy is underpinned by an approach straddling linguistics, anthropology, and phenomenology, drawing upon the work of authors (Benveniste, De Certeau, Deleuze and Guattari, Foucault, Hall, Ricœur) who provided cases, methods, and theories which over time were assumed and adapted to the emerging branch of the discipline (see Pezzini and Finocchi eds. 2020). The pioneering works of Greimas, Barthes, Eco, Lotman, as will also be deduced from this overview, have paved the way for the studies of the last twenty years. These have shed new interest into topics that seemed to have fallen into the background (as in the case of proxemics, discussed above, recently revived by Paolo Fabbri, 2020, and returned to the spotlight also following the pandemic[12] which has radically changed its basic tenets, see Migliore 2021) or have focused on new topics resulting from emerging social transformations (as in the case of the connection between space and food, which became central following the explosion of 'gastromania', see Marrone 2014 and, infra, Mangano).

Clearly, it is not a matter of providing predefined formulas or recipes with which to analyse space, since it is the text itself that suggests the more suitable categories of analysis, as Hammad (2003) has also reiterated in one of the fundamental volumes we have mentioned. Nevertheless, some of the steps we have identified, such as the segmentation and identification of continuisation/discontinuiaation systems, narrativity (with the recognition of action programmes involving space, modal values and actantial roles), the enunciational structure (distinguishing the enunciator and the enunciatee and their reciprocal relations), the concepts of observer/informer and point of view, figurativeness and expectation, the uncovering of plastic contrasts and possible semi-symbolic systems, the correlation between discourses of and about space, certainly constitute ductile and transversal grids, to be shaped on the basis of what each individual analyst is faced with. What can also be surmised is that the science of signification can prove useful not only in defining and bringing out the processes of creation and circulation of meaning, but also in providing operational suggestions for administrations, architects, and urban planners to design places with greater awareness (on this direction see for example Pezzini and Savarese eds. 2014).

It is also clear that the language of space is interconnected with other languages, with which and of which it speaks; and that the larger the investigated place, the more the different isotopies that traverse it will intersect with each other. As it also emerged with regards to the main paths that we

wanted to trace when talking about the city, memory intersects tourism, not to mention politics; commercial activities are increasingly intertwined with cultural ones; food is found in commercial activities, but it is also an increasingly important tourist attraction, and so on. Finally, it is not a question of identifying oppositions, but of accounting for the complexity of reality, of that reticular effect that confirms that in the city, in spatial texts, and more generally in texts, 'tout se tient'.

Notes

1 An interesting excursus on the birth of semiotics of space, on the challenges that the science of signification has had to face, on the structuring of a method by trial and error can be found in Hammad (2015: 1–71).

2 Similar considerations derive from Eco's theories (1968), but they have surpassed what, at the time, was a conception still linked to the difference between denotation and connotation: "Since it would be awkward from here on to speak of 'functions' on the one hand, when referring to the denoted *utilitas* and of 'symbolic' connotations on the other, as if the latter did not likewise represent real functions, we will speak of a *primary function* (which is denoted) and of a complex of *secondary functions* (which are connotative). It should be remembered, and is implied in what has already been said, that the terms primary and secondary will be used here to convey, not an axiological discrimination (as if the one function were more important than the others) but rather a semiotic mechanism, in the sense that the secondary functions rest on the denotation of the primary function (just as when one has the connotation of 'bad tenor' from the word for 'dog' in Italian, *cane*, it rests on the process of denotation)" [Translation in Neil Leach ed. 1997: 179].

3 On this topic cf. Tiziana Migliore and Marion Colas-Blaise (eds. 2022).

4 Indeed, Greimas and Lotman's theories share the recognition of this close connection between language and space. Greimas pointed out how the natural world is constantly translated into other languages, while Lotman developed the notion of modelling systems, themselves forms of translation between languages. (Sedda 2008a).

5 On these topics see also the monographic issue of *Ocula*, edited by Francesco Galofaro and Antonella Mascio (eds. 2004) featuring, among others, many essays on the analysis of spatiality in pictorial texts. Further analysis on spatiality in literary texts can be found in Marrone and Pezzini, eds. 2008 (see in particular the essays by Marrone, Galofaro, Panosetti).

6 On urban semiotics in general, see Marrone and Pezzini (eds. 2006, eds. 2008); the monographic issue of *Lexia*, edited by Massimo Leone (ed. 2009b); Marrone (2010, 2013); Tani (ed. 2014) and, in particular, Isabella Pezzini (2014) who identifies the peculiarities of the semiotic approach to the city and the main theoretical and methodological tools with which to address the analysis; Volli (2005). On the analysis of specific urban realities, see at least De Oliveira (ed. 2017); Marrone, (ed. 2010b); Pezzini, ed. (2016); Sedda (2008b). Also worth mentioning is the recent collection by Isabella Pezzini and Riccardo Finocchi (2020) which, alongside unpub-

lished essays, has the merit of tracing a proto-history of the semiotics of space and of the city, republishing its foundational writings and going even further back to a series of studies (by Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, De Certeau etc.) which, albeit not strictly related to the discipline, have nonetheless greatly influenced its direction.

7 Marrone (2001) describes three types of subjectivity correlated to spaces: there are subjects enunciated in space (see below), enunciational subjects (enunciator and enunciatee), social subjects (i.e., empirical ones).

8 Proof of this is that the 2021 conference of the Italian Association of Semiotic Studies was dedicated to tourism.

9 Augé thought of airports, motorway restaurants, large shopping centres as places in which standardised behaviours are affirmed (often underlined by signs and writings prescribing routes or suggested uses) and which welcome travellers, motorists, customers conforming to their role and to what is suggested by the organisation of the area in which they are immersed. For a more detailed critique of this concept, see Marrone (2007b) who, through an analysis of Steven Spielberg's *The Terminal* (USA 2004), argues how even the most irregular spaces (such as airports) may undergo continuous redefinitions that cannot be predicted *a priori*.

10 On this topic see also Mangano's essay within this volume.

11 A 'new museum' is not one that contains modern or contemporary art exhibits (it is no coincidence that the Centrale Montemartini is a 'new museum' despite being an archaeological museum), but one that embodies, as we shall see, a new way of conceiving spaces, the relationship with the visitor, the very role of the museum in relation to the city.

12 Some of the essays included in the issue of *E|C* (2021) *Come cambia il senso del luogo. Spazi urbani e ambienti mediali*, edited by Isabella Pezzini and Riccardo Bertolotti are devoted to the radical spatial transformations caused by the pandemic.

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