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Introduction

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Accidents and Explosions in Semiotic Research in Italy: Introductory Notes

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Summary. A history of Italian semiotics has yet to be written. This issue therefore has completely different aspirations: more than a history, or even less a geography, its intended goal is that of self-analysis of, roughly speaking, the last twenty or twenty-five years. Something like this: let us stop for a moment, let us see where we have sown our seeds, and what we have reaped, what we still need to plan, and in which direction we will proceed. The essays collected here do just that: they outline the conceptual map of semiotic research in Italy, combining research themes, methods of investigation and, when they may overlap, research centres scattered throughout the country. So, Italian semiotics has experienced euphoric intellectual growth in recent years: it has reaffirmed its programmes of action and passion, has equipped itself with the appropriate tools of investigation, has passed tests and counter-tests, has achieved numerous results and is receiving, in hushed tones, the recognition it deserves.

Keywords. Italian semiotics, history of semiotics, semiotic research, text, discourse

Zusammenfassung. Eine Geschichte der italienischen Semiotik muss erst noch geschrieben werden. Diese Ausgabe verfolgt jedoch einen höheren Anspruch: Sie soll mehr sein als ein historischer Abriss oder gar ein reiner kartographischer Überblick. Das Ziel besteht darin, eine Selbstreflexion der letzten zwanzig oder fünfundzwanzig Jahre zu ermöglichen. Halten wir einen Moment inne und betrachten, was wir gesät und geerntet haben, was wir noch planen müssen und in welche Richtung wir gehen. Die hier versammelten Aufsätze erfüllen genau diese Aufgabe: Sie skizzieren die konzeptionelle Landkarte der semiotischen Forschung in Italien, indem sie Forschungsthemen, Untersuchungsmethoden und über das ganze Land verstreute Forschungszentren miteinander verbinden. Die italienische Semiotik hat in den letzten Jahren einen euphorischen intellektuellen Aufschwung erlebt: Sie hat ihren Aktionismus und ihre Leidenschaft bekräftigt, sich mit den entsprechenden Untersuchungsinstrumenten ausgestattet, Tests und Gegentests bestanden und zahlreiche Ergebnisse erzielt. Nun erhält sie in aller Stille die Anerkennung, die sie verdient.

Schlüsselwörter. Italienische Semiotik, Geschichte der Semiotik, semiotische Forschung, Text, Diskurs

A history of Italian semiotics has yet to be written (as indeed of semiotics in general). Scattered throughout various kinds of magazines and books, many different studies, explorations, summaries, chronologies, and bibliographies can be found.[1] Nothing comprehensive, from a historiographical point of view, or exhaustive, from a theoretical one. It is by no means certain, moreover, that the time has come to issue such a challenge. When a discipline begins to look back on its own history, it is almost certainly in crisis. And this is not the case with semiotics today in Italy, where, on the contrary, in all likelihood we find ourselves in a moment of strong growth, from both the point of view of the propulsive trends in research and from the more institutional, academic and generally cultural point of view. Notwithstanding the inevitable (corporate? ideological? political?) resistance to the development of the paradigm of studies on meaning and signification, on signs and discourse, on texts and on socio-cultural models (resistance dating back several decades yet remaining perennial), Italian semiotics has experienced euphoric intellectual growth in recent years: it has reaffirmed its programmes of action and passion, has equipped itself with the appropriate tools of investigation, has passed tests and counter-tests, has achieved numerous results: and is receiving, in hushed tones, the recognition it deserves.

This issue therefore has completely different aspirations: more than a history, or even less a geography, its intended goal is that of self-analysis of, roughly speaking, the last twenty or twenty-five years. Something like this: let us stop for a moment, let us see where we have sown our seeds, and what we have reaped, what we still need to plan, and in which direction to proceed. To do this, the strategies to follow may be numerous and varied, yet connected to each other.

First of all, every time you try to discover something like an identity, you have to deal with the outside, with otherness, and therefore, in our case, with other research perspectives, with other study traditions, other learning institutions. Is there a specificity of Italian research on signification? If so, how does it differ from other research on the same (or similar) object of study? The essays that make up this volume mostly answer these questions implicitly, between the lines, or in passing, which is why we will try to say something about them, a little later on, in this introduction.

Secondly, the need emerges to map out and delineate an internal articulation of Italian semiotic research, the field of study within which it is practised, and the theoretical and epistemological wagers that it proposes within its own laboratory. What have been, in the recent past and in our present time, the privileged objects of analysis, reflection, and methodological elaboration of Italian semiotics? What types of thinking have been practised, which intellectual gestures, what increases in knowledge? In what terms have semiologists (self-styled or considered as such) thought about, as well as practised, their own work? Along which tracks, based on which scientific assumptions, in view of which objectives? In the current academic scene, increasingly fossilised and bureaucratic, where the hateful principle of "publish or perish" is aimed above all else at accumulating titles and fawning to publishers (strictly Anglophone), these kinds of questions, precisely because they are being evaded, appear pressing as well as crucial. A little self-analysis, in fact, helps in this sense. The essays collected here do just that: they outline the conceptual map of semiotic research in Italy, combining research themes, methods of investigation and, when they may overlap, research centres scattered throughout the country.

The number of clarifications and distinctions that these opening words might necessitate are many: what is a research centre? How (and why) is a team set up to work around a theme? What forms of aggregation – or conflict – can be established between academic institutions scattered throughout Italy? To what extent is research done in universities and in what terms also elsewhere? How are its results disseminated? Does the media, when reporting them, absorb them internally and to what extent? And finally, how should we draw the boundaries of this national territory within which semiotics moves? Does a mapping of scientific research conducted separately between countries still make sense? In the semiotic field, for example, there are many national semiotic associations (the *Italian Association of Semiotic Studies*, celebrates its fiftieth anniversary in 2022) and there is an international association that groups them all (the *International Association for Semiotic Studies*, also with more than five decades behind it). However, there are also other forms of association, such as that encompassing the semiologists of Latin America or, more recently, that grouping the research centres that operate in the Romance language (called *FedRoS*, or the *Romance Federation of Semiotics*), launched from the idea that, outside of Anglo-Saxon semiotics, there are study perspectives on signification with different peculiarities. All important and delicate issues that we are unable to discuss here.

Thirdly, to return to what was mentioned at the beginning, in addition to relations with otherness and to internal articulation, in order to reconstruct the identity, however dynamic and changeable, of Italian semiotic research, it is necessary to be aware of – if not its history and less so its origins – at least its genealogy. Obviously in the Nietzschean and Foucauldian sense. It is known that semiotics was born in the intersection between different fields of knowledge, between different registers of thought, between different discursive genres. The reflection on the linguistic and non-linguistic sign (in rhetoric, in poetics, in logic, but also in gnoseology, in metaphysics and so on) is as ancient as it has long been misunderstood, just as the innumerable practices of signification (from medicine to divination, from emblematics to the arts, from military strategies to legal arguments, etc.) have a distant as well as recent past. It is customary to distinguish the philosophical-cognitive side from the linguistic-empirical side of semiotics, as two distinct currents with few tangencies and even fewer overlaps. In Italy it was also – and in some ways still is – like this. But in our country the fields of knowledge which contributed to the construction of the discipline that deals with signification, within a very precise historical-cultural context, have been numerous, and of various descent and authority: from philological textual criticism to literary – even militant – analysis, from aesthetics in search of theoretical renewal to the critical study of media, with, in fact, important contributions from structural and textual linguistics, narratology and information theory, pragmatics of communication and filmology, as well as the history of art and iconology, architecture and design, and psychoanalysis. And we could go on. The genealogical intertwining, oblivious of all origins and any possible pedigree, is therefore configured as the path to take. Also in this case, the essays collected here do not tackle this third question head on, even if they sometimes refer to it. We should therefore say something about it in these introductory notes.

Let us go back to the question of the potential specificity of Italian semiotics compared to that of other countries. Many have expressed their opinions by trying to provide definitions, outline physiognomies, draw lines of continuity, or hazard comparisons. For example, when questioned on the subject in an interview with Marin Mincu (ed. 1982), Cesare Segre argued that Italian semiotics is "little inclined to formulas and doctrines", shuns "universal keys and dogmatisms", and is therefore closer to an "empirical" attitude towards its object of study: the text (*ivi:* 48). Segre, a philologist and linguist, is talking above all about semiotics focussed on history and literary criticism and considers the notion of text from that specific point of view: "Italian semiological critics prefer to start from concrete cases and problems, leaving the footholds in view for subsequent developments on other texts and other eras. Theorising is never carried out in the abstract but is the result of the work on the texts" (*ibidem*). Theorising, in short, *suivra*. In general terms, this position is substantially still valid, albeit revisable. Even if in fact there were already more general philosophical-epistemological reflections during those years (suffice to name Eco and Garroni); in our country semiotics has tended to deal with concrete textual objects, whether they be from literature, the visual arts, mass media, folklore and so on. Where, for example in France, textual and discursive analysis has been, and still is, mostly aimed at the elaboration of general theoretical models (in search of the "grand bleu", as Greimas said ironically), in Italy it was, and still is, quite the opposite. As Paolo Fabbri (1998) has often repeated, the text is the semiologist's "savage", his main object of investigation: and it is starting from the resistance it opposes to the methods already elaborated that the theory can move forward, to invent (in the double sense of the term) other finer and more effective instruments.

A further prerogative of Italian semiotics is derived from a comparison with the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The latter, while making constant reference to Peirce's pragmatism, generally tends to annex ever new objects of study (including those which are traditionally the prerogative of the hard sciences: biology, ethology, etc.), progressively widening the territory of reflection to include topics and often heterogeneous problems, while usually neglecting to identify a unified point of view from which to consider them, with little interest in the unity of the discipline. In Italy, on the other hand, that which Fabbri himself (2021) called a “marked semiotics” has been practised, one that is attentive to the non-scholastic elaboration of a method, a theory, and an epistemology consistent with each other and with the empirical objects subjected to analysis. From this point of view, as the essays in this volume also demonstrate, this has been conceived as belonging to the domain of the human and social sciences – renouncing however the aspiration Greimas’s early work expressed to pose as their general methodology.

Regarding the question of the genealogy of semiotic research in Italy, I will limit myself to sketching out some demarcation lines, and then some passages, which for the sake of exposition I will separate into phases: logical rather than temporal moments, since that which is typical of one phase often remains in another, or recurs after having been considered decisively surpassed.

The moment when semiotics appeared in Italy – during the Sixties of the last century – obviously preceded its construction as a discipline. The study of signs, as it was called back then, participated instead in that general aspiration towards critical, methodological, philosophical, and intellectual renewal that emerged after the Second World War, and which led to the introduction of highly heteroclite currents of thought such as phenomenology, existentialism, Marxism, or logical neo-positivism into our culture. The common enemy, equipped with quite different weapons, was idealism, first Gentilian and then Crucian, and along with it, historicism.[2] Moreover, the latter was shared by Marxism, but strongly rejected by the nascent structuralism, a label under which semiotics found a rational – however convenient – refuge, often times allowing itself to be assimilated. Thus, the so-called disciplines of the spirit in the idealist and Dilthey’s tradition were gradually replaced by the human and social sciences, which invoked a different form of scientificity, a new epistemological vision. Anthropology, psychoanalysis, sociology, religious comparativism, linguistics and, indeed, semiotics were presented as numerous fields of knowledge which, going beyond reassuring and pacifying historicism, severely criticise the dialectical materialism that aspired to take its place. The too easy dichotomy that opposed structure to superstructure, reviled in words, re-emerged almost everywhere, bringing with it a mechanistic (simplifying and reductive) interpretation of history, society, and culture (always in the singular). The study of signs, information, communication, and signification, therefore, has been above all polemical, so that semiotics is defined first and foremost in the negative: we do not understand exactly what it is, but we know what it is working against. In this respect, as in other countries such as Russia or France, the emphasis on the linguistic and semiotic dimension goes hand in hand, often finding vital support through artistic experimentalisms and literary avant-gar-des. Like Jakobson with Mayakovskij, or Barthes with Robbe-Grillet, Eco (1962) from the outset with Berio and Balestrini, Manzoni (Piero) and Antonioni.

The emergence of structuralism, which soon became (to its great misfortune) an unexpected cultural trend, was concomitant with the widespread diffusion of mass media: so that the first provided the intellectual and methodological tools to grasp the meaning, as well as the constitutive mechanisms, of the second. Where the apocalyptists of the *Frankfurt School* (Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse) found in mass media the ultimate outcome of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, and with this an enemy to fight every inch of the way, semiologists like Barthes in France, and Eco (with many others), in Italy, went further: they underlined that the media have their own languages, their own forms of communication that should be taken into account, thereby recovering ancient poetic and rhetorical theories. If advertising is the persuasive technique of our times (Corti), live television uses the narrative *topoi* of Attic tragedy (Eco). This gave rise to more misunderstandings, and consequently somewhat confusing debates, as if comparing *Carosello* to Aristotle (Calabrese) from the point of view of forms would mean assimilating their semantic values.

The negative definition of semiotics thus began its transformation into a more defined and positive physiognomy.

On the one hand: since structuralist semiotics is a highly transdisciplinary intellectual gesture, the boundaries between fields of knowledge crumbled, and with them the asphyxiated specialisms of academic practice. The semiotic gaze, interested in form rather than substance, cut across disciplines and their canonical objects of study, once again provoking the raising of shields in defence of the traditional systems of science. Just to give an example: a reader like *Letteratura e semiologia in Italia* [Literature and semiology in Italy] edited by Caprettini and Corno (eds. 1979) collected some of the most representative writings of Italian literary semiotics of the Sixties: and there we find a medievalist like D'Arco Silvio Avalle analysing a text by Eugenio Montale, an aesthetician like Umberto Eco discussing the *Beati Paoli*, an anglicist like Marcello Pagnini writing about *A Zacinto* by Ugo Foscolo, a Romance philologist like Cesare Segre analysing Samuel Beckett's *Acte sans paroles*, and a historian of language like Maria Corti with a Proppian reinterpretation of Italo Calvino's *Marcovaldo*. But that was the norm then. And at the end of day, very few were alarmed: even the media, which today are so moralistic and conservative, back then extolled semiotic structuralism *très à la mode*.

On the other hand, the introduction of semiotic-structural themes from France (but also from Russia and the USA) required a kind of resizing and filtering. Thus, De Mauro (1968) interpreted the arbitrariness of the sign according to Saussure in a strongly historical-sociological sense, while Eco (1968) warned of an all-encompassing structuralism while distinguishing between the ontology and the methodology of forms. In turn Segre and Corti opposed French semiotics, which they claimed was excessively formalistic, with the Soviet semiotics of Lotman, Uspensky and the others, who were more attentive, they argued, to history and society. In short, the still prevailing Marxism diluted the results of semiotics, adapting it to the Italian cultural context. The wide-ranging dissemination of semiotics required its ideological re-dimensioning. And this is how the first Congress of the *International Association for Semiotic Studies* came to be held in 1974 in Milan (with Cesare Segre as President) and the third, ten years later, in Palermo (Antonino Buttitta as Secretary General).

It was literature, at this juncture, that received greater attention from semiologists to the point that the science of signs and literary semiotics seemed to coincide. There was much discussion about literariness and poetry, the poetry of art and para-literature, artistic codes and media texts, and the specificity of languages. But the study of signs found a place in almost all fields of human and social research: from philosophical aesthetics to film theory, from theatrical studies to architecture and design, from folklore to mediology, from the history of music to that of painting. It was the period of *emes* (phonemes and monemes, but also *cinèmes* and *gustemes* ...), of double articulation almost everywhere, in other words, of the predominance of the linguistic model to be applied in any so-called code. And it would be easy to expose the naivety of such research perspectives.

Seen as a trend, at a certain point, structuralism inevitably fell fatally out of fashion. And while, internally, research on the sign and its codes gave way to that on signification and the text, on narrativity and discourse, elaborating new categories and new models of analysis, criticism of semiotics increased; sometimes as the result of the notorious post-structuralism and de-constructionism, at times by virtue of a creeping return to historicism, or the emergence of the cognitivist paradigm. The main accusation was that of "imperialism", or rather, of pervasiveness, of indiscriminate multiplication of the objects of study. The misunderstanding is clear: the omnipresence of signification was reinterpreted as the omnipresence of the discipline that was concerned with it.

The trend of semiotics was thus followed by speaking ill of it. Right at the moment when, first with the creation of the *DAMS* in Bologna and then courses in Communication Sciences in various universities in Italy, semiotic studies tended to acquire university recognition, the teachings of this discipline multiplied and, in general, the study of artistic languages and media communication received academic legitimacy. Semiotics was suffering from a crisis of overproduction. A strange fate – if in the previous period everyone had professed to be semiologists to be chic, now they did it to find a university position. With bad results for the discipline, from the point of view of its, so to speak, epistemological authenticity, and exceptional results, from the point of view of its institutional standings. Many semiotics manuals were published and the students studying them multiplied. Semiotics was now recognised as a field of knowledge in its own right, earning high public esteem but losing the transdisciplinarity that characterised its beginnings. What Barthes had prophesied occurred: the criticisms of today's myths become myths themselves, the anti-stereotype becomes a stereotype – obviously without realising it. And many, like Monsieur Jourdan, are semiologists without knowing it.

This brings us to today, or, rather, those last twenty or twenty-five years which, as has been said, the essays in this volume deal with. Passions have more or less cooled. Semiologists, on the one hand, have widened their interests while, on the other, do so starting from several dominant theoretical tendencies. Among these, that of socio-semiotics, a field of knowledge that, in dialogue with certain sociologists, is attempting to critically reinterpret some of their objects of study, especially in the field of media (information, advertising, television, etc.), as well as political discourse, urban spaces, technological artefacts, cooking and food (Marrone 2001). In what sense "critically"? First of all, in a polemical sense, in order to detect, rather than ideological mystifications, the discursive complexities, the narratives of veridiction, the enunciative devices that link, mediate, and re-mediate, the mass media with their public. But the term "criticism" must be understood in a more technical sense, linked to the Kant of *The Three Critiques*: rather than working directly on social phenomena, socio-semiotics in Italy (but following here the teachings of scholars such as Eric Landowski and Jean-Marie Floch) seeks to identify the conditions of possibility, the semiotic devices of their discursive functioning, the cultural models that bring them into being. Hence the link between socio-semiotics, semiotics of culture and ethno-semiotics. The very notion of text, a model of analysis rather than an object of study, whose immanence the semiotician reconstructs each time on the basis of the specific objectives of its description, is thus strongly rethought. In this sense, the text is not only what the various cultures – always with different anthropological meta-mechanisms, as Lotman demonstrates (2022) – refer to us as such (*etic* approach), but also what is re-invented as such starting from the models and purposes of the analysis (*emic* approach). From this point of view, the notorious distinction between text and context has nothing given, nothing predetermined, since it varies from situation to situation, from historical period to historical period, from culture to culture. Each element of (so-called) context that becomes significant is thus integrated into the text and becomes such in all respects. The context being only, in the eyes of the semiologist, that which is not pertinent in a given textual analysis. "Il n'y a pas de hors-texte", said Derrida, something upon which Greimas and Lotman, for different reasons, can only agree, on condition to be clear: beyond the text, one does not lose signification at all, but one meets the semiosphere, which is perpetually textual in nature.

The essays collected here illustrate this kind of problem, seeking to offer an overview that is as exhaustive as possible – albeit not complete[3] – of semiotic research in Italy over the last two or three decades. In order to detect identities and internal differences, lines of continuity and points of fracture, forms of coherence and theoretical controversies. In view, needless to say, of future research. This volume, not without a certain collective pride, is a mine of information, insights, observations, reconstructions, and ideas that would be superfluous to list here. Thanking all of the authors for their excellent work is the only way to wish each other – reciprocally – more accidents, more explosions. And not just for the next twenty years.

Notes

1 See for example: Avalle (1970), Corti and Segre (eds. 1970), Segre (1971, 1977), Segre (ed. 1965), Fabbri (1973), Ponzio (1976), Corti (1977), Caprettini and Corno (eds. 1979), Mincu (ed. 1982), Marrone (ed. 1986), Marrone and Ruta (1989), Bertetti (ed. 1999), Mirabile (2012).

2 In his critical edition of Saussure's *Cours* De Mauro (1968) is very clear in this sense: if the unrepeatability of the linguistic act is for Croce a point of arrival, for Saussure it is a starting point.

3 Design is missing, for example, on which Italian semiotics has conducted various studies over the last twenty years (Marrone and Landowski eds. 2002; Mangano 2008, 2014, 2019, 2021; Mangano and Mattozzi eds. 2009; Ventura Bordenca 2021) and other fields of study on which, on the other hand, critical efforts have been partially eased: politics (Pezzini 2001; Cosenza 2012); journalism (Marrone 1998, 2001; Pozzato 2004; Lorusso and Violi eds. 2006), literature (Pezzini 2007; Fabbri and Pezzini eds. 2012; Panosetti 2015; Piga Bruni, Ragonese and Schmid eds. 2021).

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The Glocal View: Semiopolitical Definitions

Paolo Sorrentino

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 litics 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 therapeutic dimension: 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 islands (*infra*, Sedda ed. 2019a; Sedda and Sorrentino eds. 2020), the city (Sedda 2012a; Sedda and Sorrentino 2019) and political discourse (Sedda and Demuru 2018), which within the semiopolitical perspective reveal their intimate glocality.

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 the images of Europe, 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 spheres (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 semiotics of culture, 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 semiotics of cultures, 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 Semiosphere (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 landscape as a text 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 landscape as a non-text 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 *doubly objects*: 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 *double subjects*: 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 nonsense (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: representations and practices. 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 border 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 separable, 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 international 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 measure is always ready to overturn into a far less desirable dystopia.

Finally, on the islands we never stop finding traces to rethink "our biological 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 adaptive 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 (Pievani 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 "according 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 understanding island identity dynamics, see Sahlins 2010.

37 The same author points out how this macro-model brings the study of islands closer to the theme of *spatiality* understood as a modelling language capable of structuring consciousness and experiences in the same way as *natural language*, cf. Sedda 2010b and 2017a. For an introduction to the theme of spatiality in semiotics 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 analysis on Sardinia, see also Sedda 2017b, Sorrentino 2020a.

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Italian Semiotics of Memory: Genealogies and Current Perspectives*

Francesco Mazzucchelli

Summary. The article gives an overview of the development – in Italian semiotic research of the last fifteen years – of a semiotics of memory, as a specific subfield of a semiotics of culture. After a brief account of how memory has usually been defined in the different semiotic traditions (generative, interpretive and, above all, cultural), and after a focus on Eco's theorisation on memory (and its parallels with Aleida Assmann), the article presents some recent semiotic studies on the subject in Italy – mainly, but not exclusively, in the context of a research centre at the University of Bologna (TraMe), dedicated since 2009 to the study of memory from a semiotic and interdisciplinary perspective. Memory (especially cultural memory) has also been a relevant field of investigation for several Italian semiotic scholars that have explored different aspects related to a semiotic approach to cultural memory.

Keywords. Cultural memory, Umberto Eco, semiotics of memory, Aleida Assmann, cultural semiotics

Zusammenfassung. Der Artikel bietet einen Überblick über die Entwicklung einer Semiotik des Gedächtnisses in den letzten fünfzehn Jahren innerhalb der italienischen semiotischen Forschung. Dieses spezifische Teilgebiet gehört zur Kultursemiotik. Zunächst werden verschiedene semiotische Traditionen (generativ, interpretativ und vor allem kulturell) in Bezug auf das Verständnis von Erinnerung kurz umrissen. Dabei wird insbesondere auf Ecos Theoretisierung der Erinnerung und deren Parallelen zu Aleida Assmann eingegangen. Im Anschluss präsentiert der Artikel einige neuere semiotische Studien zu diesem Thema, die hauptsächlich, aber nicht ausschließlich, im Kontext eines Forschungszentrums an der Universität Bologna (TraMe) durchgeführt wurden. Seit 2009 widmet sich dieses Zentrum dem Studium der Erinnerung aus semiotischer und interdisziplinärer Perspektive. Erinnerung und Gedächtnis, insbesondere das kulturelle Gedächtnis, sind auch ein relevantes Untersuchungsfeld für mehrere italienische Semiotiker:innen, die verschiedene Aspekte eines semiotischen Ansatzes für das kulturelle Gedächtnis erforscht haben.

Schlüsselwörter. Kulturelles Gedächtnis, Umberto Eco, Semiotik der Erinnerung, Aleida Assmann, Kultursemiotik

1. A new (but old) field of study

For semiotics, memory is an anomalous object. On the one hand, it could be argued that it represents a subject that perfectly, almost inevitably, fits its scientific horizon. If we accept Lotman's assumption that memory is just another name for culture[1], a semiotics of memory (at least with respect to some of its senses) coincides completely with a semiotics of culture. On the other hand, any attempt to reconstruct the development of a semiotics of memory inevitably corresponds to an operation of tracking down something that has been in some sense 'repressed', in the psychoanalytic sense: memory is a key in semiotics, but its presence and role is to some extent often implicit and 'silent'. With the exception of some authors – and perhaps due to a certain co-extensiveness of the processes of memory with the processes of semiosis in general – memory has sometimes been neglected in semiotic studies, or at least has been left in the background, as something that is not explained (in the sense of 'taken for granted').[2]

More generally, it could be argued that any act of enunciation or interpretation has something to do with memory in some sense, since any semiotic code or system is an intersubjectively stable – albeit dynamic – form. Indeed, the relative stability of semiotic systems is guaranteed by the possibility that they are 'durable', that is, that they can persist over time.[3] This, of course, includes first and foremost natural language (and all languages in general), which is to be regarded as a primary system of shared memory[4], persistent over time while being subject to ceaseless change and transformation: natural language is memory and could not exist without (the possibility of) a collective memory. On the one hand, natural language (and any semiotic language) is in part a memory, both as a structure that enables relative stability in the transmission of textual processes and ensures their interpretability (languages ensure not only communication but also, to some extent, diachronic transmission), and as a system in which each synchronic stage retains some memory of the preceding diachronic stages, even within the evolution and continuous change of languages.[5] On the other hand, the converse is also true: memory can be considered as a language (at least as a sum of languages: of different semiotic systems and substances), with its own 'syntagmatics' (the grammars that regulate the production of a valid memorable or memored 'statement'[6], in other words the 'discourse of memory') and a 'paradigmatics' (repertoires of narrative motifs, discursive configurations, parts of encyclopedia[7] that make up the system of memory that can be actualised in processes).

In other words, there is no memory without semiotics and vice versa: memory needs languages and semiotic systems to be shared and shaped, and no communication system can prescind from the possibility of a collective (and intersubjective) memorisation. There is no semiosis beyond the possibility of saving and storing (but also selecting and erasing) meanings in order to transmit them.

However, even though many 'fathers of semiotics' have dealt extensively with the study of memory – not only Lotman and the Tartu School, but also, among others, Umberto Eco himself, who has repeatedly returned to the functioning of memory from a semiotic point of view, as I will show in the rest of this essay –, memory (both as a cultural and as a cognitive process, whose levels should be closely interwoven in a semiotic epistemology) has hardly constituted an independent topic in semiotics or represented a field that has been studied in its full depth. As Cristina Demaria has rightly pointed out in a work (Demaria 2006) that can be considered seminal for the future development of memory semiotics in Italy:

> One could almost say that cultural semiotics and sociosemiotics have actually always been concerned with memory in their investigation of the processes of signification in a given culture and the ways in which the social dimension itself is auto-represented and constructed. Yet, only in rare cases have they selected and addressed it as a specific object of study (Demaria 2006: 13, my translation).

Thus, assuming that this operation makes any sense at all, it is not easy to clearly identify a point in time that marks the emergence of a semiotics of memory, whether as a branch of general semiotics or as a subfield of cultural semiotics.[8] Nor would it be correct to speak of a sudden encounter with an object of study that had previously been neglected in the semiotic field. If anything, the reason why we speak of a semiotics of memory today lies in the fact that in recent years (cultural) memory has been rediscovered as an exciting field for theoretical investigation from a semiotic (and narrative) perspective. And indeed, in the last decade, semiotic research (especially Italian) has increasingly dealt with topics and issues closely related to memory.[9] If, on the one hand, the development of a consolidated branch of research on memory must be associated with a more general, renewed interest in the subject (as evidenced by the development of new theoretical fields such as Memory Studies)[10], on the other hand, these recent research interests find their place in an already well-defined and established theoretical and disciplinary horizon, that of the sciences of the systems and processes of signification. Indeed, semiotic research finds fertile ground in the field of memory, where it implants and continues the same theoretical concerns (e.g., about the processes of production, exchange, and transmission of meanings) that have animated the scientific project of modern semiotics since its inception. In this direction, several Italian semioticians have focused their studies on the main themes of cultural memory in an entirely new way, examining in particular texts, spaces, and practices that express, represent, transmit, and finally textualise shared memories.

The purpose of this paper is to trace the Italian semiotic debate of recent years on the subject of memory, paying particular attention to a research group at the University of Bologna, called *TraMe*, that has recently been especially active in this field. Indeed, thanks to the Italian semiotician Patrizia Violi and a number of collaborators who have established a special research centre on this topic, a kind of *Bologna School* of semiotics of memory has emerged and developed. *TraMe*, however, was not the only place in Italy where interest in a semiotic theorisation of (especially cultural) memory was sparked. Other important works on related topics were published by Valentina Pisanty, Franciscu Sedda, Ugo Volli and Isabella Pezzini, among others.[11]

However, before summarising recent developments and approaches, it is useful to briefly return to some 'sources' of semiotic memory research in Italy, in order to sketch a genealogy and present some key concepts from which Italian semiotics of memory has drawn inspiration. Particular attention will be paid to Umberto Eco's reflections on memory, which play a central role both in his semiotic theory and in the subsequent development of Italian memory semiotics.

2. On some (recent) origins of contemporary Italian semiotics of memory

I have already pointed out how difficult it can be to identify in semiotic disciplines a precise point in time or a particular body of work from which memory was explicitly recognised as a full-fledged object of interest in semiotics. Apart from Lotman and the School of Tartu (and, as I will show below, Umberto Eco), few semioticians have specifically and comprehensively studied memory. The main reason for this is that memory – both as the epistemic backbone of any cultural system and as a particular discursive genre[12] – has always inevitably been in the background of most semiotic inquiry. But what kind of memory has semiotics traditionally studied? In what sense of the term "memory" is semiotics interested? In fact, "memory" is a polysemous term that subsumes diverse and multiple processes and phenomena that are studied and addressed differently by a variety of disciplines. The term "memory" has different meanings when studied by a philosopher, a neurobiologist, a cognitive scientist, a psychologist, a historian, a sociologist, an anthropologist, an archaeologist, and so on.

A semiotic view does not necessarily advocate one or the other of these theoretical understandings of the concept; however, the difference of a semiotic perspective is that it argues for an interpretation of the memory phenomenon as a 'semiotic fact', i.e., as something having to do with the production, interpretation, and transmission of meanings that are supposed to be durable over time, transferable and preservable through various forms of inscription in more or less permanent carriers. A convincing formulation of this theoretical position is proposed by Patrizia Violi, who responds to the same question ("what kind of memory is semiotics interested in?") in these words:

> How can semiotics say anything definite about memory, a subject that has always been researched and studied by a wide variety of disciplines, from psychology to history to philosophy itself? I would say that the most important feature of a semiotic approach is to consider memory not as a faculty of the mind, but rather as the result of that faculty (Violi 2015b: 263, my translation).

What is the result of the memory? Violi speaks here of the "externalised signs of memory"[13] or, in other words, of the "texts"[14] through which memory is expressed and through which it manifests itself in various media, supports, discourses, and spaces, but which, in a certain sense, also guarantee its permanence and transmissibility.[15] Thus, the memory studied by semiotics is first and foremost the so-called "cultural memory" as it has been defined (in very similar terms) by Jan Assmann:

> Cultural memory is a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent. They may be transferred from one situation to another and transmitted from one generation to another. External objects as carriers of memory play a role already on the level of personal memory. Our memory, which we possess as beings equipped with a human mind, exists only in constant interaction not only with other human memories but also with "things", outward symbols (Jan Assmann 2008: 111).

The similarity between the positions advocated by Violi and Jan Assmann (whose works, incidentally, were also inspired by the theory of Jurij Lotman) should not be surprising.[16] In fact, there is a strong connection between the intellectual tradition of the study of collective and cultural memory of the 20th century and most of the culturological schools of thought of semiotics. These similarities can already be seen in the pioneering definition of collective memory by Maurice Halbwachs (1925, 1941, 1950), who was the first to thoroughly and originally explore the collective dimension of memory, incidentally at a time when memory was being intensively researched but rather with a strong focus on its individual aspects (from Bergson's memory theory and vitalism to Freud's psychoanalytic approach, which is mainly a theory of memory). Halbwachs, a student of Durkheim, introduces the notion of "social framework of memory" focusing on the cultural, structural, and semiotic aspects of memory, emphasising the supraindividual and intersubjective qualities of memory, which in his writings is thought of as a truly semiotic system/language that, like a primary model system according to Lotman, shapes and generates individual memories (the meaning of which is ultimately acquired exclusively within the "social system" of memory).[17]

However, is semiotics of memory exclusively interested in memory in its "social" dimension? An interesting comparative concept comes, for example, from the outstanding work on memory, remembering, and forgetting by Paul Ricœur (2000), who, starting from a phenomenological theory of remembering, examines the relationship between individual and social memory. This monumental book by this great hermeneutic thinker focuses on the idea of representation and explicitly invokes a semiotic theory capable of examining the discourses and representations of memory, which is constantly reshaped by narratives and raises similar yet different questions.

Certainly, recent semiotic research on memory has privileged a line of research that has many parallels with some of the key concepts in the study of cultural memory, viewing memory as both a system (language and semiotic structure) and a process (texts produced within a discursive grammar). In general, it could be said that recent semiotic studies of memory can be located at the intersection of three main theoretical coordinates, three macroconcepts that correspond to so many possible semiotic approaches to the study of memory (although they are more often combined): Lotman's idea of Semiosphere, Eco's notion of Encyclopedia, and the Greimasian Theory of Narrativity. These three key concepts denote three different (not exclusive, but complementary) forms of semiotic engagement with memory: as culture (Lotman), as a basic mechanism of semiosis (Eco), as a (collective form of) narrative (Greimas).

While Eco's and Lotman's theories tend to insist on the "systemic" aspects of memory (although Lotman's research is always also characterised by a marked interest in the analysis of specific case studies), the semiotic notion of narrativity can be applied to the study of memory processes along with its analytical methods for identifying narrative structures and discursive and enunciative strategies. This means that a semiotic approach that combines the systemic and processual dimensions of memory can prove useful in offering an analytical perspective and method for analysing the "external manifestation" (texts, discourses, spaces, practices) of cultural memory.

3. The place of memory in Umberto Eco's semiotic theory: the model of Encyclopedia

Since the aim of this article is to illustrate the development of a semiotics of memory in Italy, I will focus primarily on one of the aforementioned approaches, namely Umberto Eco's theoretical views on memory. Indeed, Eco's theory has strongly influenced recent advances in Italian semiotics of memory and, as I will show, initiated its development. In addition, the article repeatedly refers to the work of Lotman and Greimas, which are other important sources of recent memory semiotics. In these pages, I will not attempt to explore the entirety of Eco's work in order to trace the development of his thought on memory (which would be an enormous task and would risk diverting my discourse from the goal of this article)[18], but I will instead draw attention to some aspects of his theory that have influenced later memory scholars, looking in particular at his recent writings.

Indeed, memory has always been a central theme and pervasive concern in Eco's theorising, overt in some places, more hidden in others. If one goes through Eco's *oeuvre* as a whole, his constant interest in the mechanisms of individual and collective memory becomes a visible feature. This is true of both his philosophical and literary work: novels such as *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (2004) – but also, to a lesser extent, *The Foucault Pendulum* (1988) and *The Name of the Rose* (1980) – contain countless references to the way we try to remember and forget, to the role of memory in our interpretation of the world, to the cultural character of individual memories. Many of his literary works are about characters who get lost in the labyrinth of their memories or delve into the depths of the encyclopedia. In *The Mysterious Flame*, Yambo has lost his autobiographical memory, but still remembers what he has studied and read (his semantic memory) and is forced to rummage through the material objects and books of his childhood to recover his own memory.[19] But it is not just about Yambo: many of Eco's characters embark on a journey through their personal memories (which, however, are always "made of culture"). The fates of Jacopo Belbo, one of the main characters in *Foucault's Pendulum*, are above all fates of memory, of his private and forgotten memories. By the end of the novel, Belbo's past life (and his forgetting) becomes key, and it almost seems as if all of Belbo's obsessions are merely mechanisms to cope with the repression of forgotten memories of his youth. Similarly, memory metaphors are prevalent in all of his other novels: what else represents the monastery's library in *The Name of the Rose* or Belbo's computer, which can search through thousands of texts at incredible speed[20], if not a figurative translation of his most popular concept of Encyclopedia?

All these examples from Eco's fictional worlds testify to his constant attraction to the major philosophical questions related to memory[21], but his theoretical writings, on the other hand, contain an implicit (but articulated) theory of semiotic memory that runs through his theoretical production, even if it is subject to several reformulations and rearrangements. Thus, if it is true that memory is not one of the most obvious research topics in Eco's work, one could at the same time say that memory is always central in his reflections.

A theory of memory and culture as memory is contained in the most original and influential concept of his semiotic theory, that of the Encyclopedia, which I have already anticipated. Eco introduces the concept of Encyclopedia in his *Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 1975) by criticising the models that propose a "dictionary-like" account of meaning, according to which the meaning of a concept can be broken down into its "analytic components", that is, into a collection of semantic primitives. He contrasts this componential approach with the Encyclopedia model, in which the meaning of each "cultural unit" is defined by its connections to other cultural units that do not necessarily belong to the verbal language and interpret and translate the first cultural unit. A very illustrative example to explain this is provided by Eco himself: In a dictionary model, the meaning of the term "dog" would be determined only by some semantic features such as /animal/ + /mammal/ + /vertebrate/, while the fact that a dog barks or is domesticated is considered part of the knowledge about the world and not a necessary property of the language. Encyclopedic models reintroduce this knowledge about the world into the representation of meaning, but most importantly, they abolish the tree hierarchy (the most typical representation of the dictionary model) in favour of a dynamic structure of interconnected terms belonging to different semiotic languages (in this model, verbal language no longer takes precedence over other languages, since nodes can also exist in non-verbal form).[22] In this way, at the risk of oversimplifying the subject, the Encyclopedia recalls the idea of the memory of an everlasting, boundless collective mind.

This model, as is well known, contains assumptions based on Peirce's pragmatism and, in particular, on his famous notion of Interpretant:

> A sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign (Peirce C.P.: 2.228).

Eco takes two Peircean concepts – interpretation and unlimited semiosis – and adapts them to make them the basis of his Encyclopedia model. Although he does not explicitly mention it in the first formulations of the concept, this model is not only about interpretation and meaning production, but also about memory. To understand this, it is enough to consider another important influence that helped Eco shape the concept and give it a clear structure, even visually: Ross M. Quillian and his model of semantic memory (Quillian 1968), which thanks to Eco will become known among semioticians as Model Q (Eco 1975, English translation: 122–125). In Eco's description, Model Q

> is based on a mass of nodes interconnected by various types of associative links. […] As can be seen, this model anticipates the definition of every sign, thanks to the interconnection with the universe of all other signs that function as interpretants, each of these ready to become the sign, each of these ready to become the sign interpreted by all the others; the model, in all its complexity is based on a process of *unlimited semiosis* (Eco 1975, English translation: 122).

Quillian, who wanted to find the representational structure of semantic memory, provided Eco with the first "visual image" with which he sought to represent the interconnected and anti-hierarchical structure of the Encyclopedia. After all, it is an infinite semantic memory in the broadest sense that is contained in Eco's Encyclopedia: the immeasurable memory of a limitless collective brain that records everything that has ever been said and interpreted in every semiotic form and language, and "plays" with these memories by ceaselessly searching and interconnecting them. It is significant that Eco received this important inspiration for describing the Encyclopedia not from a linguist or a philosopher of language, but from a cognitive psychologist who was trying to study how memory works. This shows once again the central importance of memory in his model of the Encyclopedia.

In later writings, Eco revises and reconsiders this concept. In the Italian version of *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language* (Eco 1984), following a Borgesian imagery, he intriguingly describes the Encyclopedia as

> the sum of all interpretations ever made, objectively conceivable as the library of all libraries, library meaning also the archive of all nonverbal information somehow registered, from prehistoric cave paintings to film archives" (Eco 1984: 109, my translation).[23]

In this new definition, the Encyclopedia encompasses and registers all meanings ever produced and interpreted in all possible formats, interconnected and "connectable" in a labyrinthine structure that constantly generates new meanings and interpretations. The map of interconnected nodes of Model Q is now complemented by the idea of the rhizome borrowed from Deleuze and Guattari (1976, 1980), which explains the self-contradictory and non-coherent structure (a poly-structure?) of the Encyclopedia. However, to understand the extent to which the Encyclopedia is a model that explains cultural memory and its functioning, it is necessary to take into account the more recent reconceptualisations of this notion proposed by Eco in 1997 and especially in 2007, where he introduces different dimensions of the Encyclopedia and draws a distinction between a Maximal Encyclopedia, which is a "hypothetical compendium of all the knowledge available to a given culture" (Eco 2007: 49), the "Median Encyclopedias", which are "the contents of a given culture" (*ivi*: 73), i.e., the knowledge shared approximately by all members of a community in a given time, and the "Specialized Encyclopedias", which are accessible to members of some specialised communities (e.g., scientific communities).[24] It is important to emphasise that Eco points out that the existence of a Median Encyclopedia does not mean that every member of the community has the same type and amount of knowledge, but that the knowledge contained in the Median Encyclopedia is virtually "shareable" and accessible to all members of that community.

Thus, a simple equivalence between Encyclopedia and cultural memory would not be entirely correct; Maximal Encyclopedia would be something more than a collective memory: rather, it is the global semantic (or better, semiotic) space into which cultures are immersed and of which they are made. Maximal Encyclopedia is what a culture's collective memory produces, but it is immensely more extensive than that. In Eco's words, it is a "postulate" (though its existence should be considered real) that is never accessible in all its virtual immensity, but only through "local representations" (Eco 1984: 43, English translation) (Fig. 1).[25]

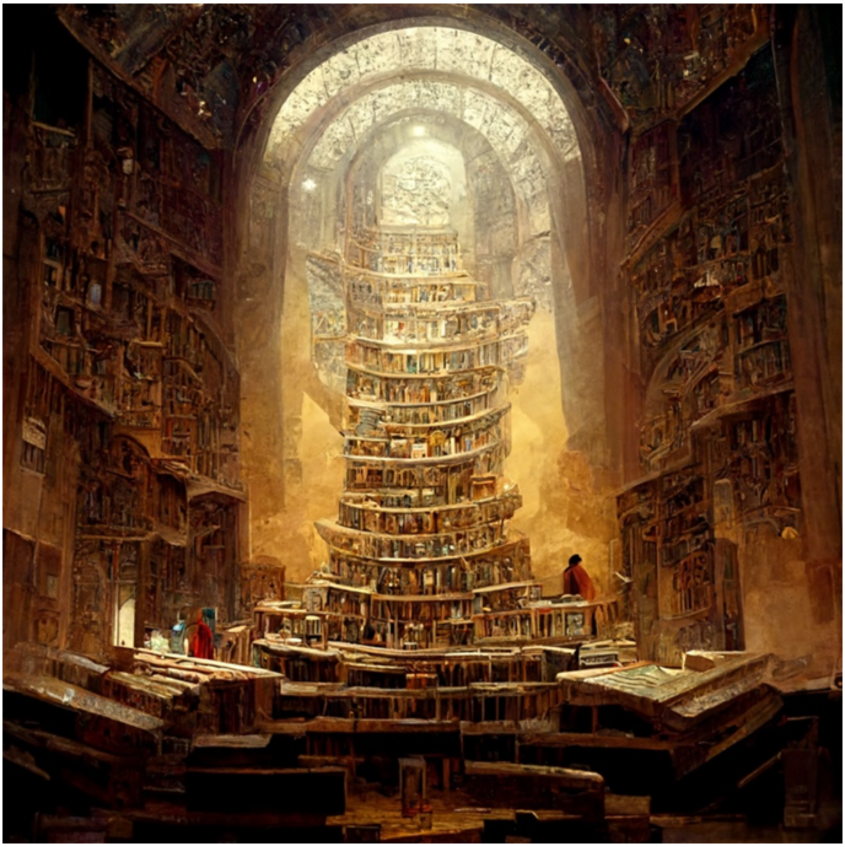

Fig. 1. Umberto Eco formulates his idea of Encyclopedia as the endless semantic memory of a culture: a “library of all libraries”. The image is the answer of the AI image generator Midjourney to the input “Library of Babel”.

4. The Encyclopedia as a model for collective memory?

To understand this point, it may be useful to compare this idea with another prominent theory of cultural memory proposed by Aleida Assmann, which is very much in line with Eco’s model (Assmann 1999).[26] Assmann contrasts the idea of memory as *ars* (a technology for storing information) with the idea of memory as *vis* (a living and transformative force). In her vision, cultural memory is a dialectic between (active and passive) remembering and forgetting. On the side of forgetting, the active form corresponds, for example, to voluntary material destruction, censorship, taboos, and waste, while the passive forms of forgetting are represented, for example, by what is neglected, disregarded, scattered in forgotten repositories, or ignored as meaningless relics.[27] On the side of remembering, she instead identifies two figures, the *Canon* and the *Archive*, as an active and passive form of remembering, respectively. While the Archive is the result of a passive accumulation and storage of information, the Canon is a process of active selection: a working memory *versus* the reference memory of archives. An *Archival* versus a *Functional Memory*, to use Assmann's terminology. There are certainly many points of contact between Eco's and Assmann's models: Functional Memory described by Assmann seems to function in terms of "local parts and sections" of a Median Encyclopedia, while the Archival Memory, which stores everything beyond its meaning or importance, looks like a Maximal Encyclopedia in which everything is registered, regardless of its usefulness, veracity, or relevance (on this, see also Salerno 2020).[28] However, what makes Eco's Encyclopedia more interesting from a semiotic point of view is the fact that it not only reveals the mechanisms of storage, recording, and reuse of memories, but also introduces the idea of interpretation, which is precisely what determines the ceaseless production of new information and the recombination of the semantic space of the Encyclopedia through unlimited semiosis. The advantage of the Encyclopedia is that it explains the dynamics and functioning of cultural systems as open structures whose constituent feature is the fact that it stores information (not in material form, Eco speaks of meaning) and interprets it incessantly in an unlimited semiosis. Thus, one could say that all information circulating today is related in some way to all information that has ever circulated: Every new meaning is created through the semiotic reprocessing of previous encounters, which are never erased and constitute the potential reservoir for new semiotic inventions.

On the one hand, the Encyclopedia (in its Maximal version) is much more than the collective archived memories of a culture: it encompasses the entire culture in all its possible past (and potentially alternative) existences, a "semantic metaverse" in which everything a culture has ever produced and known in terms of meanings can be connected to everything else, a self-contradictory structure in which all cultural entities, meanings, and interpretations ever socially expressed coexist: "We never know where it stops; the fact is that it also potentially contains what it actually (today) no longer contains" (Eco 2007: 88). This rhizomatic semantic space is thus not simply the archival memory of a culture, in which the forgotten and unnoticed are also preserved, but it is the "archive of all archives" that transcends a single given, historically situated cultural system and contains, above all, the mechanism that enables the making of new connections and the generation of new meanings, i.e., interpretation. On the other hand, the Median Encyclopedia represents the current and active state of the Encyclopedia in a cultural system (a Functional Memory, in Assmann's terms): rather than a local part of the Maximal Encyclopedia, it should probably be considered as a particular (and temporary) "state of existence" of the Encyclopedia in a particular time, with a particular condition of accessibility, but which can be locally cut and criss-crossed in an unceasing dynamic.

The other concept to which the Encyclopedia is often compared is, as I have already anticipated, Jurij Lotman's Semiosphere, another important theoretical model that takes into account the dynamics of memory in a cultural system.[29] Of course, the two concepts are closely related, and both express similar views about the functioning of cultures, and both share a compatible epistemological vision that might be called "dynamic structuralism" (both Eco and Lotman attempt to go beyond structuralism in different ways).[30] The links between the two thinkers are very close, and Eco was very interested in and certainly influenced by Lotman's theories on typologies and models of cultures, and vice versa. Indeed, Eco himself did much to popularise Lotman's works in Italy and to make him known in Italian semiotic and intellectual circles: he encouraged Italian publishers to translate his writings (Eco dedicated a preface to some of them) and invited him to conferences in Italy.[31] Despite the many similarities between the concepts of the Encyclopedia and the Semiosphere, it is Eco himself who highlights some differences. In Eco 2017, he notes that Lotman's concept of the Semiosphere seems to identify with the "territory of a culture that has established rules to distinguish a Median Encyclopedia from the Specialized Encyclopedias" (Eco 2007: 73, note 39), which is then a subset of the Encyclopedia as he describes it. If one adopts this reading proposed by Eco, a Semiosphere would be something quite different from the Maximal Encyclopedia, since the former describes the topology of a cultural system in a given time (and indeed it has boundaries, can connect with other semiospheres, has a centre and a periphery).[32] In other words, on the one hand, the Encyclopedia shows how the processes of semiosis take hold and leave traces that can be used and interpreted later, so that they can become memory, while Lotman aims to describe a topological model of culture that implies memory (in which culture is memory).

A revealing example to illustrate the difference between Eco, Lotman, and Assmann is provided by themselves: the museum as a metaphor of memory. For Lotman, the museum is the visual image of the Semiosphere itself: a space in which various texts, objects, paintings, statues, signs, and visitors with their own "semiotic world" exist simultaneously and interact in mutual translation and generation of new meanings (Lotman 1985: 213–214). This example illustrates once again the absolute coincidence of memory and culture in Lotman: culture is based on memory, but also produces it by selecting, translating, and incorporating its past texts into new structures of meaning in the present. In Assmann, the metaphor of the museum is used to explain the distinction between Functional and Archival Memory: museums store items and objects in their repositories (Archival Memory), and only a part of them is exhibited and "actualized in the present" in the museum's collections and exhibitions, which are open to the public. This is the difference between the Canon, through which a past is made present (Functional Memory), and an Archive, in which the past remains past.

It is noteworthy that the image of the museum is also used by Eco, in a way that, on the one hand, summarises the two examples of Lotman and Assmann and, on the other hand, illustrates the difference of Eco's view from the other two. The museum is used along with the library and the archive to illustrate a crucial aspect of the Encyclopedia's functioning that Eco introduced in 2007: the notion of latency, which, along with the other paired notion of filtering, is one of the most interesting developments of the model and further specifies its functioning in relation to cultural memory. The figure of the museum as a "collection of all possible things" (Eco 2007: 25) – just like the library as a collection of all existing volumes – becomes for Eco a metaphor for the mechanisms not only of remembering but also of forgetting that regulate the Encyclopedia, similar to the Canon/ Archive model proposed by Aleida Assmann, but with some differences. Similar to Assmann, Eco also attaches special importance to the mechanisms of forgetting and the role of forgetting in the production of a memory (as already argued by Assmann, Lotman, Todorov, Ricœur). Eco, however, focuses primarily on the structural processes of the Encyclopedia through which the immense wealth of its information is managed. As might be expected, this is done through an impersonal mechanism of filtering: the information contained in the Encyclopedia is continuously filtered in the Median Encyclopedia, retaining only what is deemed important and forgetting all details that would cause an overload of collective memory. In this context, Eco recalled Borges's (1944) short story about *Funes El Memorioso*, who developed a prodigious memory after falling off a horse: he was condemned to remember every experience of his life, no matter how small, and was completely incapable of forgetting them and leading a normal life. Similarly, society must forget and filter information in order to evolve. The function of cultural memory is precisely to filter what needs to be remembered and omit what is deemed unnecessary:

> It omits an infinite amount of information that the collective has suppressed because it was no longer considered useful or relevant. For example, it provides valuable details about the course of the Battle of Waterloo, but does not mention the names of all those involved-and so on and so forth (Eco 2007: 85).

Eco cautions, however, against viewing filtering as the result of a voluntary act: Rather, it is "an impersonal process that arises from a kind of inertia" (*ivi*: 86).[33]

What is forgotten, however, is neither erased nor lost forever, and this aspect is explained by Eco in terms of "latency", the mechanism by which some of the excess information, to use his term, is "deeply-frozen" until the experts (moving through a Specialized Encyclopedia) can "unfreeze" what is useful. Eco adds that latency is represented by the model of the library and museums, which are "containers" in which information can be stored, even when it is not available to the public, and made available again (by transferring it from the Specialized Encyclopedia to the Median Encyclopedia).

As can be seen, the version of the Encyclopedia included in Eco 2007 is the one that moves more decisively toward understanding the mechanisms of remembering and forgetting, testifying to Umberto Eco's interest in these topics, which was growing during this period.[34] But Eco had been thinking about these aspects of memory for many years (and probably throughout his life). To name just a few other important writings (from his extensive body of work), in 1988[35] he had published the article *An Ars Oblivionalis? Forget it?* in which he demonstrates that it is impossible to develop a technique of forgetting that functions as a reversal of an *Ars Memoriae*, since any mnemonic is basically a semiotics based on "making the absent present", whereas an *Ars Oblivionalis* would have to make the present absent, which is impossible. These considerations are developed along with his numerous works on the *Artes Memoriae* in Eco 2007, as can be seen. In 1991 he gave a lecture at the Biblioteca Braidense in Milan (later published in 2006) in which he proposes to distinguish three different types of memory: the organic memory of our human brain, made of flesh and blood; a mineral memory, which developed with the invention of writing, when the first supports were clay tablets, or architectures and monuments, from the pyramids to the obelisks of the cathedrals, which were used as supports for writing, and then the vegetable memory, that is, the memory of books. Eco says that the vegetable memory of the book implies a kind of personal, if "absent" dialogue with the author of the book, while before the inscriptions, for example of an obelisk, one does not wonder who the author is. These different forms of memory thus imply different forms of dialogue and relationship with the past. One of his most touching reflections on memory is contained in a short documentary by Davide Ferrario and Vincenzo Trione, shown for the first time at the Biennale di Venezia 2015, in which Eco summarises his views on memory: "When we as humans say I, we mean our memory. We are memory and memory is our soul".[36]

After this brief overview, it is undeniable that Eco shows a recurring interest in the themes of memory, but is this enough to speak of an articulated semiotic theory of memory? Certainly Eco's theories contribute to describing some general mechanisms of cultural memory, but Eco does not seem interested in defining a precise theoretical framework to study its "processuality" (for example, how are specific and local parts of the Encyclopedia activated and what is the result?).[37] Nevertheless, Eco's positions have strongly influenced the consolidation of a collective reflection on the possibility of talking about memory from a semiotic point of view, as I will show in the next sections.

5. From Eco to a "School of Bologna" of semiotics of memory: the birth of the research centre TraMe

In 2006, at the suggestion of Umberto Eco and Patrizia Violi, doctoral students in the semiotic disciplines of the doctoral cycle XXI were assigned a collective research project on memory. As I have shown, in those years memory was at the centre of the research interests of Umberto Eco, who was about to publish the book *From the Tree to the Labyrinth* (Eco 2007), the first chapter of which proposed a partial reformulation of his concept of

Encyclopedia and of his ideas about the functioning of the semantic spaces that structure a culture. A two-week seminar was held by Eco himself as an inaugural event for the academic activities of the doctoral students. The most important advances in the presentation of the concept of the Encyclopedia (later incorporated in Eco 2007, as I have shown in the previous section) were initiated by his recent reflections on the functioning of memory and, in particular, by the ideas of filtering and latency. All the dissertations of the doctoral students in this cycle dealt with the topic of memory and its possible "semiotiation". They all covered very different topics and subjects, but the thread that connected all these works was the fact that they were strongly influenced by a kind of "Eco's imprint".[38]

This theoretical imprint is clearly evident in a joint paper by the same group of PhD students: during the same period, under the attentive supervision of Patrizia Violi, Anna Maria Lorusso, and Claudio Paolucci, they wrote a joint article that was, in a sense, the culmination of all the seminars, workshops, and intense discussions that took place within this group on the theoretical possibilities of studying memory from a semiotic point of view. The article was programmatically entitled *Memoria culturale e processi interpretativi. Uno sguardo semiotico* [Cultural memory and interpretative processes. A semiotic view] (Violi et al. 2008) and was published in a special issue of the scientific journal *Chora. Laboratorio di attualità, scrittura e cultura filosofica*. The special issue was entirely dedicated to the theme "Memory without trace, traces without memory" and included, among others, contributions by philosophers such as Carlo Sini and Rossella Fabbrichesi, as well as other exciting articles such as an interview with Umberto Eco (on the relationship between individual and cultural memory, starting from some comments in the novel *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana*)[39] and another with Paolo Rossi, a renowned historian who has long studied the links between memory and science in the epistemological framework of intellectual history.[40]

This joint article should not only be understood as a fixed point of all the research and discussions of this group in those years, but it represents above all a milestone in the process of constituting a structured semiotic research group within the University of Bologna dedicated to the study of memory through a semiotic approach. In a way, this article could be read as a kind of programmatic manifesto for a semiotics of memory. Moreover, rather than limiting itself to the formulation of a theoretical proposal, it strives to outline an attempt at the empirical application of the concepts discussed in the first part, through the analysis of a specific case study: the aesthetic choices made in heritage conservation practices as different ways of "codifying" and producing an externalised memory (in particular, the cases studied are different examples of restorations of monumental historic architecture).[41] I will return to this particular case study in the next section when I illustrate some different applications of recent semiotics of memory. In what follows, I will instead focus on the two main assumptions that structured the proposed theoretical approach and influenced the subsequent development of this research group. These two basic assumptions, introduced as a starting point for rethinking memory *sub specie semioticae*, are externalisation and, again, filtering.

The concept of externalization was introduced earlier in this paper: The memory studied by semiotics is an externalized memory, that is, a memory that is "recorded" and transcribed in objects, spaces, or carriers of various kinds to enable its preservation and transmission to future generations (as well as communication within the present generation).[42] Although the emphasis seems to be on the materiality of memory, this idea of externalisation should not be understood as the process by which memory is "deposited" and stored in material carriers. Rather, this notion argues for a re-conceptualisation of externalised memory as a "system of cultural units" that must be codified, reinterpreted, and translated – in other words, animated through semiosis – in order to function as memory.[43] This conception of externalisation is also reminiscent of Leroi-Gourhan's idea when he speaks of the externalization of memory as the means by which a social memory is created through the projection of symbolic concatenations (Leroi-Gourhan 1970).[44] Exteriorisation, then, is here to be understood as synonymous with textualisation, where the text is not an inert material depository or memory store, but – according to the semiotic definition – both the basic unit of cultural systems and the model of their functioning.[45] As noted in the previous section, this position avoids any "substantialization" of collective/cultural memory, characterising it instead as an evolving process structured and animated by operations of interpretation, translation, and the continuous renegotiation of meanings.[46]

On the other hand, the view presented in this article aims to include also the larger "logic of culture" (to use the expression of Eco 1975) within which collective memories circulate and form the backbone of culture itself. In the framework outlined by this theoretical stance, memory becomes a homeostatic mechanism that governs (according to Lotman and Eco's conceptualisation) any cultural system, ensuring its permanence (but also its dynamism and constant possibility of mutation)[47] through strategies of transmission of knowledge and cultural schemas. These processes of self-regulation make it possible to transform an inactive stock of texts into a living memory.[48] The article then highlights the processes of "filtering"[49] that identify precisely this internal and impersonal mechanism of culture through which memory is ceaselessly stored, searched, selected, omitted, forgotten, and then reinterpreted, retranslated, and finally rewritten (re-produced). The processual and systemic levels overlap in the model presented in this article, in which intra- and intertextual, structural and interpretive paradigms are fused and interwoven.[50]

Less than a year after this publication, in 2009, Patrizia Violi and a group of colleagues and collaborators[51] founded TraMe, a research centre for the interdisciplinary study of cultural memory and trauma.[52] TraMe's research lines further develop some of the themes already discussed in the joint article mentioned above. Since its inception, the centre has taken a semiotic approach and has been in constant dialogue and exchange with other disciplines working on similar topics (from cultural sociology to psychology, from cultural geography to history). The research areas that the centre aims to cover are diverse and include, as stated in the first version of the mission statement on the centre's old website[53], "the study of genres, representational practices, and sites of (individual and collective) memory in conflict and post-conflict situations, violence, and collective trauma".

This focus on conflict and post-conflict memories has already been discussed in the aforementioned book by Cristina Demaria (2006), *Semiotica e memoria. Analisi del post-conflitto* [Semiotics of memory. Analysis of post-conflict], which represents the first attempt to make cultural memory and post-conflict a specific object of semiotic studies, opening the ground in semiotics for this type of research.[54] She proposes case study analyses of the use and misuse of memory in conflict and post-conflict situations, focusing in particular on the discursive genre of testimony and on media representations of torture and violence.[55] Traumatic memories and cultural trauma are a specific topic that TraMe has always been interested in since its beginnings. It has dealt with testimonies and discourses of victims (Violi 2006; Demaria 2006; Lorusso 2009), with narrative translations in media, films and series (Demaria 2012, 2014; Salerno 2016; Lorusso 2017; Demaria and Violi 2020), with conflict and post-conflict cultures (Salerno 2012; Demaria 2020), but above all with sites of memory such as monuments, memorials and urban spaces in post-conflict contexts, as we will see in the next section. Indeed, an important part of TraMe's research is mainly dedicated to the strategies of narrative reappraisal of "troubled pasts" in cultures that have experienced collective tragedies and political violence, as well as to the "discursive spaces" (media, literature, art, heritage, etc.) and their texts, practices, spaces, and objects through which collective traumas are managed and described, in other words "semiotised".[56]

6. An important area of research: the spatiality of memory

In the last decade, memory semiotics has found fertile ground through the application of semiotic theories (both cultural and narrative) to a variety of objects. In the following sections, I will sketch a map of the main areas and objects of inquiry in which the semiotic method has proved fruitful. The new semiotics of memory has indeed proved to be very much alive: In Italy, the ongoing debate on topics related to memory is very fruitful and involves many scholars, not only from the TraMe research group, even if the core of this line of research can be traced back to it. It will be impossible to give a complete picture of the rich advances in Italian memory semiotics, and I will limit myself to showing links with some of the most important publications in the most active research areas.

One of the most interesting topics is the relationship between memory and space. Semiotics of memory has produced some of its most interesting results when applied to the analysis of places and sites of memory, a topic that is also frequently addressed in contemporary Memory Studies and Critical Heritage Studies. The notion of narrative is frequently used in the latter two fields, and in ways that bear many analogies to the interests and methods of narrative semiotics. The idea that a memory site embodies and mediates a narrative is shared in much of memory research with the semiotic views that assume that significant organisation of space can be correlated with narrative processes (Marrone 2001). Following an already established research tradition on the semiotics of space (Greimas 1976; Hammad 2003)[57], the semiotic method proves particularly heuristic in its ability to unpack the "black box" of narrativity when analysing the spatial dimension of memory and to articulate more precisely the effects of meaning mediated by memory sites. Objects analysed in research in this area include museums, monuments, urban spaces, spatial practices and rituals of commemoration, everyday practices that deposit and reoccupy layers of memory in practiced spaces, etc.

The spatial dimension of memory is the focus of the book *Urbicidio, Il senso dei luoghi tra distruzioni e ricostruzioni in ex Jugoslavia* [Urbicide. The sense of place between destruction and reconstruction in ex Yugoslavia] (Mazzucchelli 2010), in which I analyse the processes of rewriting collective memory in some cities of the former Yugoslavia after its violent collapse in the 1990s, observing the changes in the urban palimpsests of Belgrade, Sarajevo and Mostar, where I consider the changes in these cities caused first by the destruction of the wars (which were animated by an "urbicidal logic" that targeted cities as landscapes of memory) and then by the reconstruction and restoration work that can be seen as a moment of reconfiguration of collective identities and strategies of collective self-representation (and representation of the Other).

A few years later, Patrizia Violi published a book that became one of the most important works in the field, summarising years of research on the subject. The book, entitled *Landscapes of Memory* (Violi 2014), focuses on what the author calls "trauma sites", that is, in her own words, those places

> that elaborate an existing trace and emerge in the place where atrocities and butcheries took place on a large scale; concentration, prison, and torture camps that were later transformed into museums and opened to the public (Violi 2014: 14).

Violi applies a semiotic perspective to the analysis of various trauma sites (the Cambodian Museum of Thuol Sleng, the Memorial Hall in Nanjing, sites commemorating victims of dictatorship in Chile and Argentina, the Ustica Museum in Bologna). These sites are considered not only as "material memory" (although their traces have an "indexical relation" to the events that took place there), but as mediators and active producers of memory that reshape their materiality, "indexically" linked to a collective traumatic event, in different ways and generate spatial narratives of it.

Apart from the differences in topics and foci, these two books share a common epistemological background and a similar approach, focusing on the spatial and narrative dimensions of memory and the materiality of places and sites of memory, which are analysed in terms of their semiotic and narrative strategies and processes of valorisation (and de-valorisation). A similar approach regarding spatiality as a "semiotic vehicle" for the processes of memory has been used by several researches that have focused in particular on issues related to the so-called "difficult heritage" (Macdonald 2009) and conflicting memories, from the analysis of monuments (Bellentani and Panico 2016; Panico 2018) to spaces of conflict between contested narratives (Mazzucchelli 2021), "terror sites" (Van der Laarse et al. eds. 2014; Demaria and Violi 2020; Mazzucchelli 2017a), and strategies of re-semanticising difficult heritage (Panico 2019; Mazzucchelli *forthcoming*). A forthcoming anthology by Patrizia Violi and Cristina Demaria will present a semiotic methodology for the analysis of memory spaces, collecting writings by various Italian semioticians (some of them belonging to TraMe) on the links between memory and spatiality (Demaria and Violi eds. *forthcoming*).[58] The new language of museums and the strategies for transforming memory into heritage and narratives about the past are analysed by Isabella Pezzini in an influential book published in 2011 entitled *Semiotica dei nuovi musei* [Semiotics of New Museums]. In it, Pezzini describes a method for analysing museums through an innovative reinterpretation of the classic categories of narratological and spatial analysis of generative semiotics.

7. The discursive genres of memory and the prevalence of a cultural semiotics approach "in the sign of Lotman"

As mentioned earlier, Jurij Lotman is a key figure in semiotic reflection on memory and in memory studies in general. Indeed, there has been a recent movement of rediscovery of Lotman's works within memory studies, although he was not completely unknown in the field.[59] Nevertheless, the recent publications of some of his writings, translated into English for the first time (Lotman and Tamm 2019), have created new conditions for memory studies to engage with cultural semiotics and rediscover its approaches. On the other hand, Lotman has also been re-read within semiotics to define a semiotics of memory. In this section, through a brief overview of some recent semiotic research, I will illustrate how certain themes and questions raised by Lotman (about the dynamics of cultural systems, the mechanisms of translation between and within cultures, the definition of events, the political mechanisms of forgetting, the regimes of temporality, the relationship between the discourse of history and memory, etc.) have positively influenced recent developments in the semiotics of memory. Another fruitful research direction in Italian memory semiotics concerns the different "discursive genres" of collective memory and the interactions with other discursive domains[60], and very often these analyses have been carried out under the sign of a semiotics of memory and culture.

The relationship between history and memory (already explored in Jorge Lozano's seminal work on historical discourse, Lozano 1987) is at the heart of the research of Daniele Salerno, who has written significant pages on this topic, reflecting on the semiotic procedures by which something is defined as an "event".[61] The links between discourses of history and memory are more recently explored by Salerno in an article dealing with the narrative re-semantisations of Campo Fossoli (Salerno 2021) and, again in collaboration with Jorge Lozano, in a special issue of the journal *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* dedicated to "The Future, a Time of History" (Lozano and Salerno eds. 2020).[62]

Incidentally, memory research inspired by the work of the Estonian semiotician (and the principles of cultural semiotics) has always been one of the most productive. Franciscu Sedda is one of Lotman's most important followers in Italy and has also promoted the Italian translation of some of Lotman's unpublished writings. Sedda edited an anthology that begins with a long essay in which he emphasises the central role of memory in Lotman's theory. His research has consistently addressed questions about the construction processes of cultural memory, emphasising its role in the self-representation of collective identities in culture. In his main study, *Tradurre la tradizione* [Translating Tradition], analysing the role of a collective dance in Sardinian identity and culture, he proposes to rethink the usual concept of tradition through the lens of Lotman's notion of translation: tradition is not the mere repetition of a static past, but a dynamic moment of re-production and re-figuration of a past read through the present: an "invention between difference and repetition" (Sedda 2006: 2) in which the collective imagination plays the most important role.[63] Instead of the act of remembering, memory is then again thematised as the primary language of culture through which collective identities are fabricated and social meanings of intersecting temporal regimes are established.[64]

A comparable reinterpretation of the assumptions of cultural semiotics to recast memory in semiotic theory is proposed by Anna Maria Lorusso, an acute interpreter of the thought of Lotman and Eco. In her book *Cultural Semiotics* (2015), Lorusso illustrates the theoretical coordinates of a semiotics of memory by mixing classical references (in addition to Eco and Lotman, Bourdieu, Geertz, and Peirce, especially in relation to his theory of habits) and making interesting connections with some of the most important authors who have written on the subject: from Jan and Aleida Assmann, Halbwachs, Nora, and Ricœur to more recent contributions by Nünning (on the role of the memory narrative in the consolidation of national identities) and Rothberg (who is known for his concept of multidirectional memory). This combination of different but highly compatible positions leads Lorusso to formulate an original semiotic approach to memory, which she defines as "ecological" Memory.

> [It] is not located in objects or subjects, but circulates in dynamic and heterogeneous configurations with multiple actors who are interconnected (Lorusso 2015: 104).

This Foucauldian emphasis on discursive formations and collective expressions prompts her approach to turn particularly to the cultural, social, and also political dimensions of memory, as she does in her analysis of the case study of the "Madres de Plaza de Mayo" (Lorusso 2015: 105), where she observes the development and stabilisation of the collective subjectivity of this political group (whose identity is based on a traumatic legacy and then on a narrative reconfiguration of the past) from its beginnings, when this group of relatives of victims spontaneously came together, to a political subject with its own agency. The progressive emergence of a subjectivity is associated by Lorusso with an increasing lexicalisation and grammaticalisation of its behaviour (which then turns into a text, as Lotman would have said).

Another important and influential author active in the Italian field of semiotics of memory is Valentina Pisanty, who too has explored at length the connections between discourse of history and memory, mainly in relation with narratives (and counter-narratives) of Shoah. One of her most important works (Pisanty 1998) analyses and de-constructs the rhetoric strategies of Holocaust deniers. After revisiting the narrative of the Shoah, this time examining it from the perspective of its "abuses", she has recently published a thought-provoking book (Pisanty 2020) in which she critically reflects on the unexpected short-circuits between the dominant and mainstream discourse of Shoah commemoration and the xenophobic and neo-racist counter-narratives.[65] According to Pisanty, contemporary far-right racist discourse paradoxically feeds off the hegemonic cosmopolitan discourse of memory and human rights, adopting and distorting its rhetoric of victimisation and functioning as a quasi-resistance counter-narrative, an enantiomorphic image (to use Lotman's term) of a narrative based on the duty to remember and respect human rights.

8. Future perspectives: a semiotic theory of memory or a theory of semiotic memory?

The different ways of dealing with memory pointed out in the previous pages have some common features (the theoretical consequences of which, however, remain to be discussed):

1. Memory is a semiotic construct, observable in external manifestations that are coded, interpreted, translated, and narrated.
2. Memory is dynamic and renegotiable: it is not a memory of the past, but always a discourse about the past. The past is always reconstructed, recombined, reinterpreted, translated.

3. Memory, although not a language, is a condition for the possibility of languages to function: It is a structuring and, in its local and historical actualisations, a structured semiotic system that can be analysed both at its systemic level (if not in its totality, at least limited to some of its local grammars and modelling acts) and in its processual dimension (the immaterial "acts of memory" expressed in texts, performed in practices, and embodied in spaces and materiality).

A wide horizon is still open and unexplored, and many challenges await the semiotics of memory. The list of open research topics yet to be explored can easily become long: the definition/construction processes of cultural heritage[66], the role of materiality in the various forms of externalisation of memory, the exploration of the various narrative genres and discursive domains of memory, the transformation of memory in the digital age[67], the aesthetic dimension of memory (including the mediation of the body in memory processes and the role of passions and emotions), the controversial and unresolved question of the relationship between individual and collective memories, etc.

In conclusion, some questions arise. Is memory semiotics an independent field, a 'specific semiotics', a subfield of cultural semiotics? What is the nature of its objects of inquiry? (Or better, is its existence tied to a class of 'memory objects'?) And most importantly, do we need to delineate a theoretical perimeter? If we follow Umberto Eco's suggestion to consider semiotics not as a discipline but as a field (Eco 1984), memory semiotics is a subfield of semiotics, since it encompasses a set of questions rather than identifying a class of 'objects' to which semiotic protocols and methods can be applied. And the main question, at least from a semiotic perspective, is probably not "How do we remember?" but rather "How do we recognise something as a memory?" i.e., how do some signs/texts convey 'marks' of being memorable (or 'memorated') or are interpreted as such? So it is about enunciation, but also about narrative and thematic roles (who remembers? Who narrates the memory?), but also about axiologies, epistemologies and deontologies (what is the right – true? – memory? Who can claim rights on memories? What should we remember and what should we forget?) and, above all, a narrative theme (and here, among all the usual and predictable questions, the most general might be: How do we time travel and jump back and forth between different time regimes in our everyday lives? How do the semiotic mediators we build for this purpose work?). To answer these questions, do we need a semiotic theory of memory, or do we need to re-conceptualise the semiotic features of memory?

Notes

* I would like to thank Mario Panico, Patrizia Violi, and Anna Maria Lorusso for reading the first draft of this article and giving me suggestions and critical comments to improve the text. However, as usual, all errors and unintended omissions are my own.

1 This position is expressed in many places in Lotman's work (and in many of his writings in collaboration with Uspensky). The definition of culture as "the non-hereditary memory of the community" is found in Lotman and Uspensky 1978: 213–214.

2 It seems relevant to point out that there is no entry for memory in the Greimas and Courtés (1979) *Dictionary of Semiotics*.

3 On 'durability' of signs, see Zinna and Darrault-Harris eds. 2015.

4 Lotman and Uspensky (1975) used to refer to natural language as a primary modelling system.

5 What Greimas and Courtés considered processes of de- and re-semantisation (Greimas and Courtés 1979).

6 With the word statement I refer here to the basic element of a semiotic system, as the *énoncé* for Foucault.

7 I refer here to the concept of Umberto Eco, which is presented in detail further on in this article.

8 The distinction between a general and a specific semiotics goes back to Umberto Eco (1984), but is contested mainly by theorists who belong to the generative paradigm of semiotics, which sees itself as a general method for analysing the semantic articulation of any text, regardless of the substance of the textual manifestation.

9 Recent examples of theoretical contributions from Italian memory semiotics will be presented in detail below. Convincing theoretical approaches to a semiotics of memory were also proposed by Parret (2017) and Bouissac (2007). For a sociological perspective interested in a semiotic view, see Zerubavel (2004).

10 Memory studies should not be seen as an extension of cultural studies, but represents an original and stimulating approach in the current landscape of the humanities. For an overview, see Erll and Nünning 2008. For a disciplinary manifesto, Olick et al. 2017. For a theoretical proposal open to a possible dialogue with semiotics, Erll 2011.

11 See, in particular, Pisanty 1998, ed. 2006, 2012; Sedda 2002, 2003, 2006; Volli 2010, 2022; Pezzini 2011.

12 Following Marrone's proposals for a "semiotics of discourse" (Marrone 2001), the discourse of memory is one of the main objects of investigation of a semiotics of memory.

13 I will explain this notion in more detail in the following pages.

14 Of course, text must be understood here in its semiotic sense (Marrone 2014). Another textualist approach to the study of memory was proposed in Pozzato ed. 2010: memory is often used to refer to objective facts, while facts are constructed semiotically.

15 This approach obviously has many points of contact with the theory of "documentality" proposed by Maurizio Ferraris (2009), which describes the ontology of the

social world. For Ferraris, "social objects" are social actions inscribed and recorded on a support. This "iconological" model is criticised by Paolo Fabbri (2021), who contrasts it with a semiotic theory of traces. For a semiotic discussion of the notion of trace, see also Parret 2017; Mazzucchelli 2010; Violi 2014.

16 In this passage, the relationship becomes even clearer: "Cultural memory refers to one of the exterior dimensions of the human memory, which initially we tend to think of as purely internal – located within the brain of the individual, and a subject of encephalology, neurology, and psychology but not of historical cultural studies, the contents of this memory. However, the contents of this memory, the ways in which they are organized, and the length of time they last are for the most part not a matter of internal storage or control but of the external conditions imposed by society and cultural contexts" (Jan Assmann 2011: 5).

17 The semiotic significance of Halbwachs's concept of collective memory emerges clearly from his own words, where he remarks both the systemic (social frames) and "external" nature of memory: "Most of the time, when I remember, it is others who spur me on; their memory comes to the aid of mine and mine relies on theirs […]. There is no point in seeking where they [these memories] are preserved in my brain or in some nook of my mind to which I alone have access: for they are recalled to me externally, and the groups of which I am a part at any time give me the means to reconstruct them, upon condition, to be sure, that I turn toward them and adopt, at least for the moment, their way of thinking […]. It is in this sense that there exists a collective memory and social frameworks for memory; it is to the degree that our individual thought places itself in these frameworks and participates in this memory that it is capable of the act of recollection" (Halbwachs 1992: 38).

18 Moreover, other articles in this special issue delve into these authors in relation to recent developments in semiotics in Italy. See in particular Sorrentino's article on understanding Lotman's reception in Italian cultural semiotics, which is closely related to the field studied here.

19 Stefano Traini has recently proposed an interesting reading of this novel, namely as a narrative of Eco's theory of subjectivity as produced by the Encyclopedia, but also as a reappearance of that individual subject that in Eco's theoretical works is suppressed under the historical and cultural subject of the Encyclopedia (Traini 2021: 205).

20 Belbo is particularly fascinated by the incredible storage capacity of the computer, which makes the user forget what can be stored in this "externalised device".

21 Eco was also very fascinated by mnemonics and the *artes memoriae* (see, among other writings on this subject, Eco 2013).

22 This is how Eco explains the dissolution of semantic trees into an encyclopedic structure: "if we follow its inner logic, the tree of genera and species, however constructed, explodes into a swirl of accidents, into a nonhierarchizable network of *qualia*. As a result of internal tensions the dictionary dissolves of necessity into a potentially orderless and limitless galaxy of elements of knowledge of the world. It becomes, in other words, an encyclopedia, and it does so because it was already in fact an encyclopedia without knowing it" (Eco 2017: 36).

23 Oddly enough, this definition, which is very common in the Italian community of Eco scholars and gives a very vivid picture of this concept, is not included in the

English translation of this book (Eco 1984) and, to my knowledge, is hardly known in the Anglo-Saxon world of semiotics scholars.

24 The concepts of Median and Specialized Encyclopedia are the further development of some ideas already presented in Eco 1997, where Eco distinguishes between Nuclear Content (NC) and Molar Content (MC) to indicate different set of interpretants to represent the meaning of a term, e.g., an ordinary person will have some simplified ideas to explain what an atom is, unlike an atomic scientist who has access to more detailed information.

25 For a compatible reading, at least in some respects, of the parallels between Eco and Assmann, see Salerno 2020. Salerno also suggests a comparison with another pair of terms in Lotman: informative and creative memory. On this point, see also Tamm 2019.

26 On the global/local levels of Encyclopedia and their dynamics, see Paolucci 2010; Violi 2015a, 2017a.

27 This point is very similar to the difference between active and passive destruction described by Lotman and Uspensky (1975), who distinguish between forgetting as "involuntary forgetting" of some texts that once belonged to a particular semiosphere, and the forcible expulsion of texts from it through voluntary destruction as a form of imposed forgetting.

28 Salerno (2020) claims that Assmann's Functional Memory resembles Eco's idea of Local Encyclopedias. I agree with this interpretation and further suggest that Eco's notion of Median Encyclopedias (with their "local cutouts") should be considered closer to Assmann's idea of cultural (and then functional) memory.

29 See Sorrentino's article in this special issue for a detailed discussion of this topic. Some parallels between Encyclopedia and Semiosphere have also been suggested and discussed in Paolucci (2010), Lorusso (2015), Volli (2010), Violi (2017a), Salerno (2021).

30 See Paolucci 2010 on this point.

31 according to some voices, the first city Lotman visited in Italy outside the Iron Curtain was Palermo (where he had been invited to attend a conference of the *Italian Association of Semiotics*), others say Milan. See Belpoliti (2022) for an account of Lotman's conference at Palazzo Sormaini in Milan in 1987.

32 A similar opinion is held by Patrizia Violi, who states that "a semiosphere is never a global or maximal encyclopedia, it is always local. Moreover, a semiosphere is always organized around some centre" (Violi 2017a: 232).

33 In general, Eco insists on this impersonal property of forgetting, which is then an internal mechanism. While he suggests some examples of voluntary acts of memory erasure (such as *damnatio memoriae*), he does not believe that they effectively produce forgetting (on the impossibility of an *ars oblivionalis*, see also Eco 1988 and Mazzucchelli 2017b for a reading of this theme through Eco's other theories of the modes of sign production). In Lotman and Uspensky we find a stronger emphasis on the voluntary destruction of memory and collective memory as a battlefield on which fierce battles are fought (Lotman and Uspensky 1975).

34 During this period, Eco was deeply engaged with issues of cultural memory, as reflected in his decision to dedicate the lecture he was to give at the United Nations on October 21st, 2013, to the topic of collective memory. The title of the lecture was

On the Loss of Memory and illustrated the two ideas of filtering and latency that he later used to readjust some aspects of his Encyclopedia model.

35 However, the article was presented at a symposium on semiotics and memory at the Centre *for Semiotics and Linguistics* in Urbino in 1966, when Eco was already interested in the topic of memory and mnemonics (in a note of the article he declares to be indebted to the works of Paolo Rossi and Francis Yates on the art of memory (Rossi 1960; Yates 1966).

36 From the documentary *Sulla Memoria*, by Davide Ferrario, 2015.

37 I owe this observation to Patrizia Violi (personal communication).

38 To give an idea of the variety of topics addressed in the theses, they range from the relationship between cognitive science and semiotics, applied to the mechanism of remembering a movie (Odoardi 2009), to the memory gaps of terrain vagues studied as a result of practices of meaning renegotiation (Granelli 2009). Some of the theses were later published in revised form (e.g., Mazzucchelli 2010; Salerno 2012).

39 To the question "In your opinion, what contribution could semiotics make to the study of memory?", Eco answers sardonically: "I knew it, but I can't remember". (Cappuccio and Paolucci eds. 2008: 6).

40 See in particular Rossi 1991.

41 This part about the preservation of cultural heritage as a practise of codification and invention of a memory, as well as the analyses, were written by myself and further developed in my later works.

42 See the reflections on the category of "posterity" proposed by Lorusso (Lorusso 2020).

43 This idea, of course, was strongly influenced by some recent approaches in cognitivism that mix phenomenology and pragmatism, such as the paradigm of the extended mind (Clarke and Chalmers 1998), distributed cognition (Hutchins 1995), etc. All these aspects have been introduced in the theory of semiotics and further developed by Claudio Paolucci (see Lobaccaro's article in this issue). A stimulating attempt to establish a dialogue between semiotics and cognitive science on these issues can be found in Fusaroli et al. (eds. 2011). An interesting cognitive semiotic approach to memory is proposed in Sönesson (2015). Another convincing proposal for convergence between semiotics and neuroscience by adopting biological and evolutionary models can be found in Bouissac (2007).

44 On this point, see in particular Mazzucchelli 2010: 19 (for the connection between Leroi-Gourhan's notion of externalised memory and the process of textualisation in semiotics) and Violi 2014: "externalized memory is none other than a semioticized memory, that is to say one textualized and set within a system with Expression and Content" (Violi 2014, English translation: 20).

45 For a semiotic definition of text, see Marrone 2014.

46 Eco's notion of Encyclopedia provides a model for dealing with these dynamic features of memory (see Lorusso 2013), but similar positions are unsurprisingly found in Lotman, who explains very well how the notion of text of memory takes into account the moment of interpretation and renegotiation. In a passage in his book (Lotman 1992: 25), he describes the text's dual relationship to memory and temporality: the text is like a still image artificially suspended between past and future, and the text conveys a "past" to its readers through a tension between the "direct memory" embodied in the text's internal structure and the "extra-textual memory"

to which it is connected. In this tension, the viewer is seen as playing an active role (as in Eco's theory of the model reader, 1979). Franciscu Sedda, in particular, has explored these ideas of Lotman in order to develop a semiotics of memory, especially the category of translation in Lotman's sense (Sedda 2012).

47 Lotman's (1992) idea of cultural explosion takes into account this aspect of dynamics, change and discontinuity of cultural systems.

48 Aleida Assmann would speak of memory as *vis* in contrast to memory as *ars*, as described in the previous sections.

49 See previous paragraph for this notion introduced by Eco.

50 This conception can be compared with a recent theoretical proposal by Daniele Salerno, in which he speaks of memory as both "form" and "movement" (Salerno 2021).

51 Just to mention some of them: Cristina Demaria, Anna Maria Lorusso, Claudio Paolucci, Daniele Salerno and myself. Later Mario Panico joins the group. Many other members of the group belong to other disciplines, like sociology, anthropology, history, philosophy, psychology and so on.

52 The name TraMe was chosen as an acronym for Trauma and Memory because much of the research is devoted to the study of traumatic and stressful memories and their symbolic reprocessing. However, the centre has always been interested in all facets of memory from a semiotic and interdisciplinary perspective.

53 The new website of the centre is at this address: https://centri.unibo.it/trame/it. TraMe is active in the Department of Philosophy and Communication Studies of the University of Bologna. It is probably worth noting too that the MA program in Semiotics, active in the same Department, offers a course on semiotics of memory. To my knowledge, this is the only chair in the world on this subject.

54 Demaria's book is not exclusively concerned with post-conflict memory, but redefines the terrain of semiotics for memory research by opening up a new line of research, albeit one already rooted in semiotic theory and discourse analysis. In particular, the introduction reviews the literature on semiotics, hermeneutics, and philosophy and develops an effective conceptual toolkit for the scholarly project of a renewed semiotics of memory. In these pages, Demaria sketches a kind of theoretical family tree that shows the kinship between the main thinkers of memory studies and culturological semiotics and promotes an interdisciplinary translation of concepts by relating the works of Halbwachs, Jan and Aleida Assmann, Paul Ricœur, Pierre Nora, Tzvedan Todorov, etc., to semiotic theories.

55 The texts analysed by Demaria included testimonies for the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission* in South Africa, the Valech report about the violences and tortures perpetrated in Chile during the Pinochet regime, the media representation of the Abu Ghraib tortures in relation to gender stereotypes.

56 Under this line of research, TraMe has conducted two European Commission- funded projects on this topic, *Memosur* (MSCA-IRSES) and *Speme* (MSCA-RISE), which explore how the difficult legacy of the past (in Latin America and Europe) should be preserved and transmitted to promote better awareness of the past, a culture of human rights, and post-conflict reconciliation processes. In general, TraMe has conducted research on the transmission of the trauma of the Argentine dictatorship (through the study of sites such as former detention centres, monu-

ments, parks, and memorial museums, as well as through the study of audiovisual materials) and on the forms of post-conflict witnessing and communication in the Colombian context. Two special issues of the semiotic journal *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* (founded by Umberto Eco) were directed and edited by members of TraMe (TraMe 2013; Van der Laarse et al. eds. 2014).

57 For an introduction, cf. Giannitrapani 2013.

58 A forthcoming special issue of the journal *Lexia*, edited by Mazzucchelli, Vitale and Leone, investigates the semiotics and politics of cultural memory in urban spaces. On this topic, see also Cervelli 2020.

59 Jan and Aleida Assmann have acknowledged Lotman's influence on their work; but other memory researchers, e.g. Astrid Erll (2011), had already introduced his thinking into the "canon" of memory research.

60 The semiotics of discourse and the processes of translation between different discursive domains has also been studied by sociosemiotics (Landowski 1989; Marrone 2001), but rarely in relation to collective memory.

61 Salerno (2018) is working in particular on the analysis of the case of the Ustica massacre and on the evolution of the media, juridical, and historical narratives of this event over time. For Lotman's ideas about the semiotic nature of the event see Tamm 2019.

62 This issue contains an unpublished writing of Lotman and marks the richness of Lotman's approaches to the semiotic study of memory.

63 In the words of Sedda, memory is "something present that unravels from the present, takes up the past and pushes us towards a certain future. It is not a deposit of relics, but an engine of experience anchored in the deep levels of the subject's body" (Sedda 2002: 2, my translation).

64 The aforementioned special edition of *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* (Lozano and Salerno eds. 2020) and the recent special edition of *E|C* (Giannitrapani and Lorusso 2020) take up this theme and update the reflections on the question of temporality in the context of collective memory, considering also the role of the processes of imagination and the conception of a future in the narrative definition of the past.

65 On the "abuses" and instrumentalisation of the Day of Commemoration of the Victims of the Shoah, see the thought-provoking book by semiotician Ugo Volli (2022).

66 Together with Francesco Mangiapane, I am currently working on a redefinition of a semiotic view on cultural heritage, through a series of seminars organised by *Circolo Semiologico Siciliano* and TraMe at *Museo Internazionale delle Marionette Antonio Pasqualino*, on the topic *Ereditare. Semiotica del patrimonio* [Inheriting. Semiotics of heritage], (Palermo, April–December 2022) and a forthcoming book on the same topic, titled *Ereditare. Relazioni semiotiche tra cultura e territorio* [Inheriting. Semiotic relations between culture and territory] (Mangiapane and Mazzucchelli eds. *forthcoming*).

67 A forgotten semiotic contribution on memory and the digital revolution was Maldonado 2005. Among the many publications on this topic, I refer here to Paolucci 2013, Violi 2017b, and Treleani's work on digital archives (2017).

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Filmography

Sulla Memoria, dialogo con Umberto Eco (ITA 2015, directed by Davide Ferrario, with Vincenzo Trione).

Image source

Fig. 1. Umberto Eco formulates his idea of Encyclopedia as the endless semantic memory of a culture: a "library of all libraries". The image is the answer of the AI image generator Midjourney to the input "Library of Babel".

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Semiotics of Religion

Jenny Ponzo

Summary. This paper provides an overview of the main research lines developed in the 2000s in Italy in the field of the semiotics of religion, with a focus on the studies carried out at the University of Turin, where religious cultures have provided fertile ground for semiotic reflection in the last few decades. This contribution therefore takes into consideration the texts, signs, and practices that have been the subject of analysis (sacred texts, artworks, material culture, communication strategies, interpretative styles, and rituals) and the related methodologies, as well as the concepts and categories most frequently discussed and utilised, such as the notions of transcendence, mediation, and secularization.

Keywords. Religion, sacred, transcendence, secularization, ritual

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Beitrag gibt einen Überblick über die wichtigsten Forschungslinien, die in den 2000er Jahren in Italien auf dem Gebiet der Semiotik der Religion entwickelt wurden. Ein besonderer Schwerpunkt liegt dabei auf den Studien, die an der Universität Turin durchgeführt wurden. In diesen Studien wurden religiöse Kulturen als fruchtbarer Boden für semiotische Reflexion betrachtet. Dieser Beitrag berücksichtigt daher die Texte, Zeichen und Praktiken, die GegenstanDer Beitrag berücksichtigt die analysierten Texte, Zeichen und Praktiken, wie heilige Texte, Kunstwerke, materielle Kultur, Kommunikationsstrategien, Interpretationsstile und Rituale. Zudem werden die angewandten Methoden sowie die am häufigsten diskutierten und verwendeten Konzepte und Kategorien, wie die Vorstellung von Transzendenz, Mediation und Säkularisierung, behandelt.

Schlüsselwörter. Religion, heilig, Transzendenz, Säkularisierung, Ritual

Introduction

In the last few decades, Italian scholarship has contributed significantly to the field commonly known as the “semiotics of religion”.[1] In particular, the semiotics of religious cultures has been a prominent research line for the semiotics group working at the University of Turin.[2] In what follows, I will sketch an overview of the Italian research into religious cultures by focusing on the texts, signs, practices, and communicative styles that have been the subject of analysis, as well as the concepts and categories most frequently discussed and utilised.

1. Sacred texts

The semiotic study of sacred texts, and the Bible in particular, was one of the first lines of inquiry to determine the international development of the semiotics of religion.[3] In Italy, semiotic analyses of sacred texts are often directed at pointing out the features of specific semiotic ideologies that can be detected in the Scriptures. In particular, over the course of the 2000s Ugo Volli has extensively studied the Torah and formulated a specific approach to the semiotic study of the Bible which he proposes in the Premise of his book *Domande alla Torah* (2012a). This approach

> […] has by no means the ambition to explain or comment on the Bible […]. Its main goal is to show to the Western reader that there is a thought or, we could say, a philosophy of the Torah (both an implicit thought in the biblical text and a thought that takes this as its subject of reflection), to practice this thought in its interrogative dimension, which Western philosophy and the Jewish tradition from the Talmud onwards share: to ask questions of the Torah […]. It intends to do so […] by using the tools of semiotics […], especially by inquiring into this tradition's self-understanding, the way in which the same tradition that produced the books of the Bible has understood its meaning. This entails an encounter between the culture of Jewish commentary – which dates back at least two millennia – and one of the most contemporary of the human sciences… (Volli 2012a: 11–12, my translation).

Volli therefore proposes studying the Scriptures in relation to specific cultural contexts and with increasing attention to the comparative study of their interpretations. This focus on the study of interpretative models is prominent in Volli's latest monograph, significantly entitled *Il resto è interpretazione* (2019), the Premise of which reads:

> […] in the long term of the *semiosphere*, the text lives and communicates according to interpretative models that decide how their sense should be understood. And this is the task of a semiotics of the *Scriptures*: understanding how and why the texts have been interpreted according to certain patterns and, hence, to deduce a grammar of the interpretation *inside that culture* (Volli 2019: 15, my translation).

These theoretical premises are concretely applied in works such as Volli (2008a), which analyses the verses of the *Exodus* (3:1–18, 6:3–7, 34:6–7) addressing the direct enunciation of the names of the divine. Starting from the Scriptures, Volli reconstructs “the implicit theory of the names in the Torah” (Volli 2008a: 29) and Hebrew culture more broadly. *Exodus* 3 is also at the centre of the linguistic, semiotic and philosophical investigation in Volli (2017), a volume that points out the paradoxical aspectuality of God’s eternity and identity (both “imperfect and progressive”) in Jewish culture.[4]

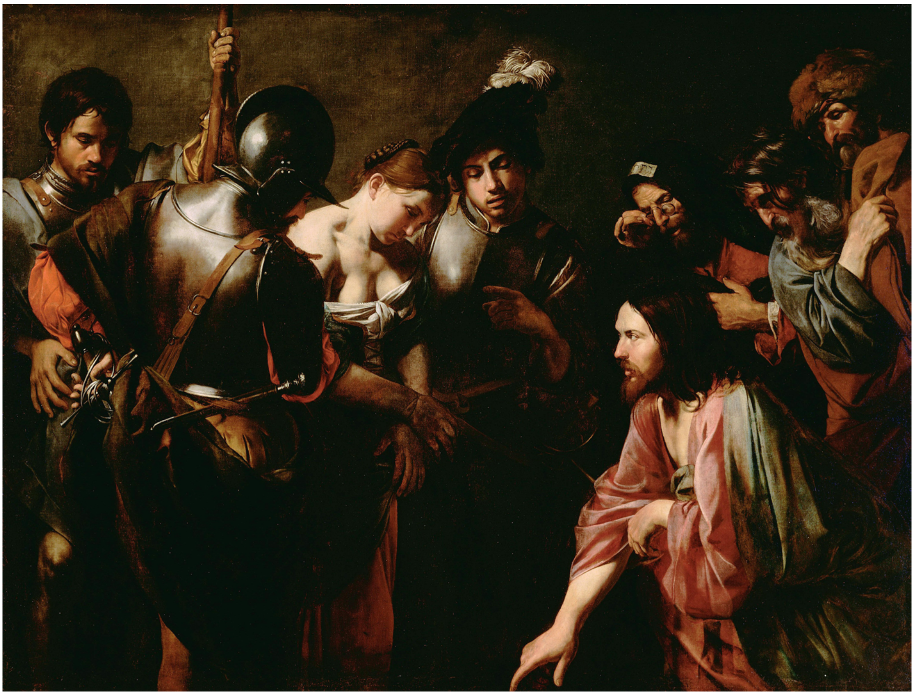

Fig. 2. Valentin de Boulogne, Jesus and the adulterous woman, 1620, oil on canvas, 167 × 221.3 cm, Los Angeles, Paul Getty Museum. Public Domain.

Massimo Leone has also developed this method in several publications. His approach in this kind of research is characterised by taking into consideration not only the exegetic literature and general cultural context, but also iconography. For instance, Leone (2021) proposes a new interpretation of the famous *Pericope of the Adultress* (*John* 8:6–8) in which Jesus traces mysterious signs on the ground. Leone compares similar customs found in several cultures, such as Greek and Arab ones, and analyses the iconography of this Pericope (for instance, Valentin de Boulogne’s *Jesus and the adulterous woman*, Fig. 2). He then concludes that Jesus’s gesture corresponds not to writing but to unwriting fundamentalist and intolerant law. Leone interprets Jesus’s action of doodling as a semi-symbolic system in which the traditional written Law is replaced by a form of non-verbal contract which grants a more immediate relationship with transcendence. The meaning of mysterious signs is also the subject of Leone (2013a), which focuses on the graffiti mentioned in *Daniel* 5: Leone looks into Talmudic and later Jewish interpretations, comparing them with Christian interpretations and iconography from the Middle Ages to modernity as well as with intertextual transpositions. He concludes that all these interpretations and re-mediations of the story meet the specific semiotic and aesthetic needs of a community but, at the same time, they also share a common narrative kernel (condemning the arbitrary use of power). As these brief glimpses clearly indicate, this approach also makes possible an intercultural comparison that limits the risks of ethnocentrism so common in the field of religious studies.

Apart from the Bible, another kind of text connected to the religious sphere[5] which has been the subject of research is myth. Guido Ferraro, especially in his book *Il linguaggio del mito* (first published in 1979, new edition released in 2001), offers a critical reading of the classic studies of folklore and myth and proposes a number of case studies from disparate cultures, including the South-American Bororo and Matako. An articulated theorical-methodological discussion of the semiotic study of myth can also be found in Volli (2015a).

2. The arts

As mentioned above, Leone has carried out extensive research into religious iconography. Leone (2020a) claims that images are fundamental to understanding religious cultures, even those images that negate and forbid iconic representations of the sacred. Indeed, Leone is particularly interested in the limits and paradoxes of religious visual texts. For instance, Leone (2015a, 2016c) explores the paradoxical iconography of Christian iconoclasm in the missionary encounter that is expressed in the motif of "saints smashing idols"; Leone and Finol (2021) analyse the trifacial representations of the Christian Trinity (especially by the Pictorial School of Cuzco) as a way of offering a visual representation capable of resolving the logical contradictions of the Christian mystery; and Leone (2013b) looks into the imaginary of the soul by comparing Greek models of visual representation of *psyché* embodied in a number of beings (such as birds and butterflies), the Jewish idea of vital breath, which negates any iconic representation, and the Christian theology of the soul, which tries to combine both its depiction and its irrepresentability.[6] This interest in the issue of the thresholds of representability is also displayed by other authors studying religious images, such as Maria Giulia Dondero and Omar Calabrese, who have made key contributions to this field, in particular with their works on the representation of the sacred in photographic images (Dondero 2007, 2008a, 2008b) and on the Christian iconography of passion and death (Calabrese 1991).[7]

Another significant research line focuses on religious themes in literature. For instance, Leone has studied the dynamics of religious conversion in a corpus of chivalric poems (Leone 2014d), as well as Goethe's poems devoted to Hāfez read through the idea of inter-religious "aesthetic hospitality" (Leone 2010a).[8] Ponzo (2019a) focuses instead on recurring religious themes in Italian contemporary novels published after the Second Vatican Council. She outlines, for instance, clashing semiotic ideologies concerning the origins of language, the semiotic features of the literary representations of rituals[9], and recurring thematic roles (concerning e.g. the figure of the saint and the pope).[10]

Cinema has also been the object of scholarly attention; for example, Leone (2014e) analyses the representation of religion in *Amour* by Michael Haneke, and Leone (2005) compares Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Pier Paolo Pasolini's *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew*.[11]

3. Material culture

Italian semioticians have also conducted studies about objects, artefacts and sensorial perceptions. Regarding objects, extensive research has been carried out about the veil. Starting from the Greimasian idea of *enveloppment*, the semiotic, cultural, aesthetic, socio-political, and anthropological implications of veiling have been explored in reference to a number of case studies from different religious cultures (especially Muslim, Christian and Jewish) and chronological periods, and through a plurality of media, from sacred texts and exegetic literature (Leone 2012b) to cinema (Leone 2016a) and photography (Leone 2020b: chapter 4, 119–138).[12] Besides considering the veil as a device for the semioticisation and cultural construction of the human body (Leone 2010b), the mechanism of wrapping has also been explored in relation to other objects, especially relics. A particularly significant example of this line of inquiry is Leone's study of reliquaries: Leone claims that, while coverings often aim to bestow an erotic aura on their contents (this is the case e.g. of books and the packaging of merchandise), the main goal of the reliquary is to point towards transcendence by attenuating the indexical value of the relic that would otherwise risk triggering idolatry and fetishism. To do so, reliquaries use visual and verbal signs that mediate the gaze of the observer, thus contextualizing the relic inside an aesthetic text and surrounding it with meaning (Leone 2014f).

Further studies about aspects of material culture have been centred on the (re-)codification of sacred space. For instance, Ponzo (2022 *forthcoming*) focuses on semiotic issues related to the re-use of deconsecrated churches, especially in contemporary Italy, Pozzo (2020) studies the relationship between theology and architectural theories in the Renaissance, Leone (2013d) reflects on the relationship between ascetic practice and space emptiness and fullness in the construction of sacred space and the pertinence of the materials out of which religious space is formed for the efficacy of religious practices, and Ponzo (2020b) proposes a semiotic analysis of *ex voto* with particular attention to their spatial organization (Ponzo claims that the *ex voto* surrounding a sacred icon form an *archive* of collective memories, although in present times these archives are becoming ever more de-contextualised and musealised, with significant consequences for their meaning). In-depth studies of material culture have also been proposed by Rambelli (2007, 1999) in relation to Japanese Buddhism.

Attention has also been devoted to the codification of sensuous perceptions. Leone (2012c) proposes a "sensuous semio-geography" understood as a method for studying the articulation of religious belonging through signs involving all the senses, such as sight (e.g. architecture, clothing) and hearing. Leone focuses on the latter and, more specifically, the *soundscapes* characterising different religious groups in multicultural cities and their related intercultural relationships, while Leone (2012d) focuses on taste, showing the impact that the introduction of chocolate from America had on Italian dietary habits and collective passions and its repercussions on theological debate, in particular Italians' resistance to Jansenist rigor. Ponzo (2020c, 2021a *forthcoming*) focuses instead on smell in a semiotic analysis of the Catholic idea of *osmogenesis*, a charisma or divine gift characterising many saints and consisting in the capacity to emanate celestial perfumes. In Catholic imagery, these perfumes are imagined as a halo surrounding the saint and lingering in the places through which they have passed as well as on the objects they have touched. Indexes of the saints' spiritual essence, these perfumes can be considered the olfactive equivalent of visual manifestations such as the nimbus and aura, manifestations that many cultures depict as visible and coloured.

4. Rituals and practices

A further subject of study is represented by rituals and religious practices in general. A useful introduction to the semiotic approach to worship is provided by Volli (2012b), while a variety of essays have been devoted to specific case studies. Leone, for instance, has proposed a semiotic discussion of religious processions in the Catholic tradition, showing how processions enlarge the sphere of sacred space thanks to the formation of collective agency, thereby carrying transcendence outside the ordinary boundaries of places of worship (Leone 2014g, 2011a).[13] Buddhist practices have been studied by Ferraro (2012), for instance, showing how the ritual of "Tranquility and Insight" brings about a temporal suspension of the linguistic and conceptual faculties that are ordinarily used as a form of mediation between us and the world, the inside and the outside; by Garofalo (2019) as part of an inquiry into anthropopoiesis in two Japanese Buddhist currents, and by Stano (2012), looking into the ways in which the Buddhist tradition of the food offering to the Buddha is changing in the contemporary age.[14] Food practices are moreover studied in Leone (2015c), a comparative investigation of practice of chewing in Jewish and Christian cultures, and in Leone (2013e), about practices of fasting in Jainism.[15] The study of Japanese religious traditions from a semio-anthropological and ethnographic perspective has been pursued in particular by Tatsuma Padoan in extensive research into the semiotics of ritual space and pilgrimage (see e.g. Padoan 2022 *forthcoming*, 2021, 2018, Padoan and Sedda 2018).

Another research line in this field consists in the analysis of religious practices related to digital media. For example, Leone (2014h) – from mainly a theoretical-methodological and philosophical perspective – explores the influence of the progressive de-materialisation of interpersonal relationships brought about by the evolution of the media on religious practices and ideas, while Leone (2011b) and Dos Santos (2020) present analyses of specific case studies concerning religious experiences in virtual reality.[16]

5. Communicative strategies and styles

A considerable body of research has been devoted to inquiry into the communicative strategies and styles adopted by religious groups and individuals. Concerning strategies for communicating with the deity, several works explore the semiotic features of prayer. Volli (2012b, 2015b), for example, explains the meaning of the Jewish word and practice of *tefillah*, a kind of reflexive prayer entailing *acceptance* of divine will, rather than a request aimed at influencing God's will to bring it more in line with human interests. Leone (2012e), after offering general remarks about the semiotic philosophy of prayer, focuses on the Christian tradition of the rosary. Prayer and repetition are also at the core of the litanic genre examined by Ponzo et al. (2020).[17] A further type of divine invocation, glossolalia, is the subject of an in-depth semiotic and historical analysis by Alessandra Pozzo (2013) and is also taken into consideration by Leone (2014b: 551–562, 2008) and, transversally, by Ponzo (2019b).

The latter analyses apologetic literature issued by exponents of the Conservative Evangelical movement on one hand, and Charismatics on the other, to respectively condemn and promote the practice of glossolalia. Ponzo (2019b) shows that the argumentation of the two groups is based on the same New Testament verses, but that these verses are interpreted in different ways and according to different semiotic ideologies to legitimise the group's opposite positions. Communication strategies in inter-religious dialogue are also the subject of various studies by Leone. For instance, Leone (2018a) proposes a typology of the changes in religious signs in circumstances of persecution and censorship and focuses on the strategies enacted by the *Kakure Kirishitan*, the Japanese Christians persecuted by authorities in the Modern period; Leone (2011c) looks into the verbal and visual strategies of enculturation of 16th-century Franciscan missionaries; and Leone (2019, 2017) reflects on the problem of the symbolic presence of the Other in pluralistic societies.[18]

A further important branch of studies carried out by Leone concerns extremism. The study of the rhetorical strategies (in both verbal and visual texts) and the use of media in the framework of fundamentalist propaganda[19] is at the centre of a semiotic approach that is significant, not only in theoretical-methodological and cultural terms, but also by virtue of modelling social engagement, in that it provides a critical perspective with which to oppose religious extremism and violence and think about the socio-cultural premises that might lead to the peaceful coexistence of different traditions in contemporary pluralistic societies. The main premise for such a goal is exquisitely semiotic: Leone (2016d) argues that preserving shared codes and heuristic parameters that limit the proliferation of possible interpretations is the necessary condition for ensuring social cohesion and even the capacity to use language, the capacity that most characterises human beings. Semiotics according to this perspective forms the connective tissue between different approaches, as Leone claims in one of his main publications about jihadist propaganda:

> An interdisciplinary approach composed of history and anthropology of religion, cultural and media studies, religious and visual studies, security studies and law, with cultural semiotics and rhetoric acting as interdisciplinary sinews among them, is […] proposed to develop a common protocol in order to collect present-day jihadist propaganda materials, analyze them through interdisciplinary methodology, and compare and contrast them with texts, messages, and media of violent confessional persuasion in other historical epochs, sociocultural contexts, and religious traditions (Leone 2015e: 2).

In a philosophical discussion drawing on the thought of Luigi Pareyson, Emmanuel Léevinas and Hans Urs von Balthasar, Leone (2018c) claims that spiritual life has an aesthetic and formative nature and that transcendence manifests as transparency, revelation, and light shining through the veil of language and communication. This conceptual foundation, according to Leone, leads to the rejection of evil as an aesthetic and the search for the revelation of transcendence in the face of the Other, which mirrors the absolute.

6. Transcendence and Mediation

Leone (2011d) suggests that the capacity to imagine the infinite and transcendence is a distinctive feature of human beings and that religions provide grammars that regulate the imagination of the infinite. A focus on the concept of transcendence and the ways in which it is mediated through signs is at the core of many works, starting with the Supplement to volume 2 of *Signs and Society* edited by Massimo Leone and Richard Parmentier (2014). In the opening article, the two authors analyse ancient Egyptian sacred statues and the Medieval Eucharist as metasemiotic texts channelling transcendence through materiality.[20] Volli (2014a, 2021) identifies a similar metasemiotic function attributed to angels in the Bible and Jewish culture. The most recent contribution to this reflection on transcendence is the volume edited by Yelle and Ponzo (eds. 2021) that proposes to over-come the scepticism surrounding this term as a result of its being abused in the field of philosophy and religious studies and to instead consider transcendence a transversal human idea, the comprehension of which is fundamental for understanding religion, as declared in the introduction:

> It is not only possible but necessary to recuperate this category for a properly anthropocentric study of religion and culture. Indeed, without some such category as Transcendence, we declare that it would be impossible to account for the dimensions of human experience, expression, and behavior that are commonly labeled as religious (Yelle and Ponzo eds. 2021: 1).

The dialectics between mediation and immediacy is instead the focus of the volume by Ponzo, Yelle and Leone (eds. 2021), drawing on the idea that

> most religious cultures conceive places and moments where the barrier between immanence and transcendence is suddenly abolished, thus allowing apparently immediate and unmediated contact between them", but that they also "tend to structure spiritual immediacy into ritualized formulas, which are not exceptional any longer to the extent that they can be shared by a community and handed down by a tradition (Ponzo et al. 2021: 4).

The apparently immediate experience of transcendence is actually the subject of numerous works carried out in the 2000s. The most extensive of these is Leone's book about annunciations, which charts the ways in which human beings in different times have believed that they have received divine revelation and narrated this experience (Leone 2014j), and the issue of *Lexia* devoted to ecstasy (Leone ed. 2014a) in which Volli, for instance, focuses on the tension between ineffable mystical experience and the need to narrate it in culturally codified ways (Volli 2014b).[21] Leone (2009d) argues that the capacity to presentify an absence – or to provide a concrete representation of something abstract – is a feature shared by both religion and language. Consequently, Leone proposes a structural comparison between them based on applying linguistic and semiotic theories to religion, especially in relation to themes connected to inter-religious communication and translation.

A further research line concerning narrations of a specific spiritual experience that posits the encounter with transcendence, namely religious conversion, has also been developed by Leone. In particular, Leone (2004) proposes the idea of vertigo to define the destabilisation of the Self in its encounter with religion, an encounter that causes a radical change. Leone thus studies religious conversion as a story,

> which converted people constantly recount to themselves in order to consolidate their identity and eliminate the feeling of vertigo which seizes everyone who has lost one's own spiritual equilibrium (Leone 2004: xii).

7. Law and exemplarity

One significant and original branch of inquiry developed in Italy, and Turin in particular, is research at the intersection of the semiotics of religion and the semiotics of law. General themes addressed in this field include the impact of technologies on religion and law, ideas of authoriality in religious legal systems, and the sacred foundation and liturgical features of the Western institutional order, respectively the subjects of a volume edited by Leone, Patrícia Branco, Nadirsyah Hosen, and Richard Mohr (eds. 2018), an issue of the *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* edited by Leone (ed. 2013f)[22], and several works by Paolo Heritier, in particular Heritier (2013). Moreover, Leone (2010c, 2013g) also develops the above-mentioned idea of semio-geography in studying legal controversies about places of worship (and other issues of cohabitation) in multicultural cities. One of the reasons for the difficulty of pluralist coexistence is the scarcity of semiotic resources (for instance, in terms of codes, channels, and audience): this assertion leads Leone (2009b) to borrow the idea of "sustainability" as used in discourses about ecology and apply it to cultures. Evaluating the sustainability of religious cultures in pluralist contexts constitutes a further possible social application of semiotics and one which, according to Leone (2009c), can also have a "therapeutic" effect on religious law, by using a semiotic approach to intervene in situations of social tension and, in so doing, suggesting new and alternative meanings to the ones causing today's inter-religious clashes.[23]

Another research line in the field of the semiotics of religious law is represented by studies of the Catholic regulation of sainthood and canonisation procedures. Ponzo (2020d) argues that, even though exemplary figures channeling models of behaviour meet a universal human need, the peculiarity of Catholicism consists in its formulation of a normative apparatus defining what constitutes sainthood and under what rules it can be officially recognized. This latter recognition is based on a unique judicial procedure, the cause for canonisation, which is similar to a post-mortem trial.[24] Saints as models of lived perfection and the related notions of exemplarity and figurativisation of norms are studied in particular in the research project *NeMoSanctI: New Models of Sanctity in Italy (1960s–2010s) – A Semiotic Analysis of Norms, Causes of Saints, Hagiography, and Narratives.*[25] Further studies concerning the worldview and codes conveyed by key religious figures are Traini (2015, 2017) about the construction of Jesus's figure and message by Paul of Tarsus and later interpreters, and Ponzo (2020e) about the representation of the Virgin Mary in the intercultural discourse between Christians and Muslims.[26]

Conclusion

Beside its cultural and social relevance, another significant aspect of the study of religious discourses and phenomena is that they can serve as touchstones in two different ways. On the one hand, religious communication has specific features, the study of which is useful for testing general semiotic theories and understanding them from different angles, including in relation to ideas and methodologies formulated in other disciplines. For instance, Ferraro (2015: 228–234) analyses a Tibetan-Buddhist myth to challenge the undiscriminated application of formalist and structuralist schemes for the analysis of narratives produced by different cultures; Leone (2018d) shows the reciprocal influence between Peirce and Suzuki, who spread Zen culture in western countries; and Ferraro (2008) inquiries into the relationship between the idea of sign and that of the sacred in Durkheim's thought. Furthermore, the study of religious phenomena leads scholars to develop innovative methodologies and concepts such as the above-mentioned idea of semio-geography proposed by Leone or the theo-semiotics proposed by Leone and Finol (2021) as the study of the various manifestations of the divine in discourses, stories, rituals, actors, spaces and times.

On the other hand, the study of religions can also shed light on trends involving the broader semiosphere. This aspect is clearly visible in research on the phenomenon known as "secularisation", namely the exportation of religious models outside the traditional religious sphere. For instance, Stano (2012) and Volli (2002) have applied the category of "cult" to explain facets of food consumption and offering and to talk about television, Leone (2011e) has highlighted the similarity between rituals and routines (stemming from their repetitive and unchangeable structure and supposed transcendental origin, thus shaping the sense of belonging), while Ponzo (ed. 2018) presents essays applying the idea of martyrdom to cases located both inside and outside its original religious contexts.[27]

It is reasonable to hypothesise that, over the next few years, research in the field of the semiotics of religion will continue to delve into semiotic ideologies from a comparative perspective, the semiotic issues at the basis of inter-religious clashes and their possible solutions, interpretative and communicative strategies characterising past and present religious cultures, the changes in the religious experience brought about by the increasing use of digital media, AI and virtual reality, and the adoption of religious models on the part of secularised cultures. Research in all of these areas meets a shared need for knowledge in an age in which secularisation, extremism, religious revivals, new religiosities, and consolidated and/or updated traditions coexist in ever-more pluralist communities.

Notes

1 For a broad overview of this field, its origins and currents, see Leone (2022 *forthcoming*). Exponents of the Turin semiotics group are cautious in using the expression "semiotics of religion" due to the difficulty of defining what constitutes "religion" and the undesirable connotations, prejudices and ethnocentrism associated with that word; for an in-depth reflection on this subject, see this interview with Ugo

Volli: (URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzIggLFxxkM&list=PLSTiiR_8LfD-KQBkA8iGF6dNIv4mwEmE85&index=3, retrieved May 10, 2023).

2 A chair in semiotics was introduced at the University of Turin in 1969 and assigned to D'Arco Silvio Avalle, followed by Gian Paolo Caprettini in 1974. Ugo Volli, chair of semiotics between 2000 and 2019, founded CIRCe, the Interdepartmental Research Center on Communication and, together with Massimo Leone (currently the chair of semiotics at the University of Turin), he renewed and relaunched the international semiotics journal *Lexia*. During its history to date, Italian semiotics has produced several valuable works that fall under the umbrella of the semiotics of religion – for instance Caprettini (1974) – but this paper only sketches the main research lines developed in the last twenty years in Turin, with references to the broader Italian semiotic milieu, without pretentions of exhaustivity. Some attention is also devoted to the work of Italian authors who are currently carrying out their research abroad.

3 In particular, starting from the 1960s, a field of biblical semiotics was developed in Lyon by the members of the CADIR. In relation to this field see Bertetti (2004), who is currently also editing an anthology of texts from the Lyon school.

4 Further examples: Volli (2011a, 2008b, 2010). See also the analysis of the biblical theme of the *confusion linguarum* in Eco (1993: chapter 1).

5 For a critical reflection about the possibility of connecting the (western) ideas of sacredness and belief to other cultures' myths, see Ferraro (1979: 15).

6 Further research on religious iconography can be found in Leone 2014c, 2013c). On the "semiotics of the soul" see especially the monumental work Leone (2012g).

7 See also Marino (2020) and Fabbri (2000) about the Turin Shroud, which Catholics venerate as bearing the print of Jesus's body, and Traini (2016) about God's concealing in the Book of Esther and in the episode of Jacob's fight against the angel narrated in the Genesis. On the representation of Jesus's pain and death, see also Eco (2007: chapter 2).

8 On the contrary, on issues of interreligious translatability, see Fabbri (2003: 85–102).

9 On which see also Ponzo (2020a, 2017).

10 On which see also Ponzo and Ferraro (2018).

11 Further cinematographic case studies can be found in Surace (2018) and Leone (2016a). See also Fumagalli (2011) about religious themes in Italian TV series.

12 On the veil, see also Leone (2016b, 2009a, 2007, 2020b: chapter IV), Volli (2016), Stano (2010).

13 See also Leone (2015b) about the ambivalent attitude of Christianism towards game, analysed through the gamification theory.

14 Stano (2012) and Ferraro (2012) are collected in a monographic issue of *Lexia* devoted to "Worship" (Leone ed. 2012a).

15 Further reflections about fasting, with a focus on the Christian tradition, can be found in Pozzo (2021) and Ponzo (2021b). See also Migliore (2021) about the complex semi-symbolic relationship between good and bad taste on the one hand and good and evil from a moral perspective on the other hand.

16 See also Petrini (2021) regarding virtual religious practices during the pandemic.

17 For further semiotic reflections on the litanies, see also Galofaro (2020, 2018), Galofaro and Kubas (2016).

18 Further research in the field of communicative strategies and styles concern: prophetic discourse (Volli 2011b); the encyclopedias of saints and martyrologies as genres systematising knowledge about saints according to different gnoseological premises (Ponzo and Marino 2021); and the liturgical and linguistic reform of the Roman Catholic Mass (Ponzo 2019c). The essays collected in the volumes edited by Dusi and Marrone (eds. 2008) and Lorusso and Peverini (eds. 2017) represent further significant contributions to the study of religious discourse across different traditions and media.

19 See Leone (2018b, 2014i) regarding jihadist propaganda. Leone (2015d), which presents essays by many prominent Italian scholars, instead proposes a typology of the reactions and opinions following the terrorist attack on Charlie Hebdo (January 2015) expressed in social media, and Leone (2012f) a discussion of the idea of authoriality that characterises fundamentalism. Paolo Fabbri has likewise taken a stance on ISIS and extremism in several academic and divulgative publications about Islamic extremism, see e.g. Fabbri (2014).

20 See also the above-mentioned work on reliquaries (Leone 2014h).

21 On mystical literature, see also Luciano (2011).

22 In this issue, I would cite Volli's contribution about the authoriality of Jewish Law (Volli 2013).

23 A further work developing the semiotics of religious law is Leone (2010 d).

24 See also Ponzo (2021c) and Turco (2021) for an approach to the canonisation procedure that also takes into consideration gender issues, in particular in relation to the theme of motherhood.

25 NeMoSanctI is a research project carried out at the University of Turin, Principal Investigator is Jenny Ponzo. It studies how models of sanctity have changed after the Second Vatican Council. To this end, it applies a pioneering methodology based on semiotic theory to a wide corpus of normative, judicial, and narrative texts. This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 757314). For more information and a publications list, see nemosancti.eu.

26 See also Paolo Fabbri's discussion about different types of "maestro" (master, teacher) and associated ways of conveying knowledge (Marrone 2016).

27 See also Volli (1997) for a broad reflection about fetishism, Ponzo (2019a: 121–161, 2019d, 2020f) and Marino (2021) about secularised models of sanctity, Ponzo (2017) about the similarity between religious and civil processions, Ponzo (2021d) about the similarity between religious and artistic epiphanies, Padoan (2012) about railway policies and ritual aesthetics in today's Japan.

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The Gospel According to Saint Matthew (ITA 1964, director: Pier Paolo Pasolini).

Image source

Fig. 2. Valentin de Boulogne, *Jesus and the adulterous woman*, 1620, oil on canvas, 167 × 221.3 cm, Los Angeles, Paul Getty Museum. Public Domain.

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Sociosemiotics: Theories, Explorations, Perspectives

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Summary. This essay will shed light on the theoretical assumptions of contemporary semiotics that lay the foundations of sociosemiotics as a specific current of the theory of signification. It will also provide an overview of the main contributions produced in this field in the last twenty years, beginning with the publication of a key text for the development of sociosemiotics, *Corpi sociali* by Gianfranco Marrone (2001), which will be the subject of in-depth examination. At the end of the essay, a connection between the principles of sociosemiotics and the orientation of Descola's and Latour's anthropologies of collectives will be proposed.

Keywords. Sociosemiotics, text, discourse, meaning, body

Zusammenfassung. In diesem Aufsatz werden die theoretischen Annahmen der zeitgenössischen Semiotik beleuchtet, die das Fundament der Soziosemiotik als spezifische Strömung der Zeichenlehre bilden. Darüber hinaus wird ein Überblick über die wichtigsten Beiträge gegeben, die in den letzten zwanzig Jahren auf diesem Gebiet entstanden sind, beginnend mit der Veröffentlichung eines Schlüsseltextes für die Entwicklung der Soziosemiotik, *Corpi sociali* von Gianfranco Marrone (2001), der Gegenstand einer eingehenden Untersuchung sein wird. Am Ende des Aufsatzes wird eine Verbindung zwischen den Prinzipien der Soziosemiotik und der Ausrichtung der Anthropologien der Kollektive von Descola und Latour vorgeschlagen.

Schlüsselwörter. Soziosemiotik, Text, Diskurs, Bedeutung, Körper

1. Understanding society: a semiotic project

What is *sociosemiotics*? The name might suggest a synthesis between semiotics and sociology, an interdisciplinary approach in which sociology would use the tools of semiotics, or conversely, semiotics might incorporate social research techniques. But this is not the case: as we will seek to show, at least in its Italian incarnation, it is a particular way in which semiotics conceives social reality and the set of analyses and studies derived from this perspective. It is indeed possible to identify and define a theoretically and methodologically consistent field – albeit vast and varied – of Italian sociosemiotics. This essay will shed light on the theoretical assumptions of contemporary semiotics that lay the foundations of sociosemiotics as a specific current of the theory of signification. It will also provide an overview of the main contributions produced in this field in the last twenty years, beginning with the publication of a key text for the development of sociosemiotics, *Corpi sociali* by Gianfranco Marrone (2001), which will be the subject of in-depth examination.

In some ways, the term *sociosemiotics* is a *pleonasm* (Latour and Akrich 1992). In the introductory chapter of *Corpi sociali*, Marrone argues that "semiotics is inherently a sociosemiotics insofar as it is the science of signification, and signification is a collective phenomenon" (2001: XIII). The study of social meaning is indeed a semiotic project that dates back to the foundation of the discipline: when positing the need for a new science which he named semiology, Ferdinand de Saussure defined it as "the study of the life of signs within society" (1922). Both Saussure's and Louis Hjelmslev's structural linguistics studies (1959, 1961) stress that language is based on the dialectic between subjectivity and sociality, between individuality and collectivity. The individual linguistic act is regulated by collective codes, without which there is no communication; in turn, these social codes are set in motion and transformed by individual speech.

It is precisely on these structural linguistics studies that generative semiotics, later developed by Algirdas Julien Greimas (1966, 1970, 1983) is founded. The sociosemiotics we deal with in this essay indeed belongs to this structural and generative framework.

Despite the shared objectives of sociosemiotics and semiotics, sociosemiotic analyses were not carried out nor openly referred to until the 1990s, first in France with Eric Landowski's studies (1989, 1997) and then in Italy, where the establishment of communication sciences degree courses lay the ground for academic research on media and social phenomena also through the teaching of semiotics. Advertising, branding, journalism, television, consumption, and new media, among others, became the object of semiotic analysis and reflections.

Before then, in the decade between 1950 and 1960 several scholars conducted social analysis using the tools of semiotics, showing how and to what extent the theoretical apparatus of this discipline is able to contribute to the understanding and critique of social realities. It suffices to think of Roland Barthes, who examined everyday life objects and myths using the methods of semiology. By analysing photographs, national dishes, fashion, advertising or automobiles, Barthes effectively scrutinised and set forth a critique of society, establishing semiology as a social research method (Barthes 1957). From the 1960s onwards, Umberto Eco investigated advertising and the developments of the mass culture, focussing for example on the issue of the decoding of television messages and hypothesising an "aberrant decoding" phenomenon (1968) and the idea of "semiological guerrilla warfare" (1973). For Eco, the issue is not only the passage of information but the way in which the competencies of the communication actors, sender on one side and audience on the other, interact, meet, and eventually collide, right within the communication flow:[1] an inherently socio-cultural problem. In a seminal and foundational essay for the theory of signification published in 1973, Paolo Fabbri uses the term "sociosemiotics" to refer to semiotics as a science of mass communication (Fabbri 2017a [1973]). In his view, sociology and information theory are no longer adequate to analyse the communication flows that come from the press, TV, radio, and advertising; a science of signification is needed that takes into account not only the means (overdetermined by McLuhan 1964) and messages (merely the conveyance of information, according to the information theories of the time) but also the structures of production and reception that interact and define each other through those messages (for example, the public, on one side, and the television broadcaster, on the other). Around the same period, Greimas (1976) develops the notion of a scientific semiotics in order to understand the whole range of the various discourses that make up society (scientific, legal, media, urban, historical, literary ones). The goal is to delineate semiology

> as a metalanguage of the human sciences, if such metalanguage is defined as constituted by disciplines of signification, that is, the way in which human beings organize systems and articulate processes of meaning (Fabbri and Perron 1991: 218).

For Fabbri and Perron, who introduced Greimas's essay in Italy, sociosemiotics would be a 'missing link'[2], an intermediate level in general semiotics, that is, a methodology that links the epistemological and textual levels. Indeed, precisely because understanding society requires an incessant work of analysis, semiotics is at once an empirical and philosophical science (Fabbri 1998; Marrone 2001, 2010, 2011). Sociosemiotics, in particular, is understood as

> a theoretical gesture aimed at constructing that missing link between the philosophy of language and the analysis of social phenomena (Marrone 2001: XIV).

While semiotics and sociosemiotics share the same goals because, since its origins, semiotics has set itself the objective to study the ways in which social meaning emerges, is structured and circulates through a variety of discourses, sociosemiotics must be thought of as a bridge between the philosophical-linguistic level and the methodological-empirical one of the discipline (Marrone 2001).

Thus, in the last twenty years the socio-semiotic gaze has been exercised on various forms of textuality and different concrete manifestations in the fields of media and branding, politics and spatiality, design and technologies, fashion and gastronomy. It did so by holding firm a precise epistemological perspective, in which the semiotic methodology, that will be illustrated in its basic concepts in the following pages, has been anchored, with different and at times more or less successful results. Indeed, to understand society it is necessary to turn one's gaze to the heterogeneous communication products and socio-cultural phenomena that construct it, cross it and transform it; however, it must be done using a specific theoretical apparatus and drawing upon the same way of conceiving the emergence of the social.

2. The social as an effect of meaning

This common perspective is what distinguishes semiotics from other social sciences: the different epistemological level that places semiotics at a "meta" level and which leads to a different approach in the construction of the object of analysis.

Eric Landowski (1989, 1997, 1998a; Landowski and Fiorin 1997), whose reflections have been an important inspiration for Italian sociosemiotics, writes:

> The empirical object of sociosemiotics is defined as the set of discourses and practices that intervene in the constitution and / or transformation of the conditions of interaction between subjects (individual and collective) (Greimas and Courtés eds. 1979: *ad vocem*).[3]

This means that sociosemiotics is not an applied semiotics, a sort of toolbox to be used when necessity arises and then possibly discarded (Marrone 2001), but a different perspective on the social, because it has a different conception of it: not as a fact, but as a set of procedures for which something is presented as a sociality and, at the same time, as obvious and natural. Semiotics is tasked with investigating such procedures of naturalisation and institution of the social, which are procedures of signification. It is, in clearly Kantian terms:

> a discipline that does not directly study the social but its conditions of possibility. Semiotically, in fact, the social is not a simple empirical datum whose more or less hidden laws are to be revealed, but an effect of meaning of which we must identify the procedures that brought it into being (Marrone 2001: XVII).

Society is not intended as a pre-existing object whose languages and discourses must be examined (for example, advertising, fashion or design) but as a temporary and situated product of these same discourses. Sociosemiotics deals with understanding the ways and forms with which advertising, fashion or design speak of society and contribute to founding it, defining it, and transforming it. For the sociosemiotic gaze, in fact, society is the result of a set of processes: the outcome of the ways in which it regards itself and is reflected in texts, discourses and stories (Landowski 1989, Marrone 2001).

Understanding the social as an effect of meaning does not imply that there is a reality, on one side, and an image of it, more or less truthful, on the other: the problem, for example, is not whether the media project a false, misleading idea of society or if they are the perfect mirror of it. This type of question is not relevant to the sociosemiotic gaze. In fact, what is relevant is how media discourse produces, on the one hand, a certain image of the community and of its values by appropriating and re-proposing them in the form of media products (TV programs, advertising, social content, journalism, etc.); on the other, how it is effective and acts on the subjects, influencing them, defining them, transforming them. For instance, the question is not whether advertising gives a distorted version of reality or whether news broadcasts tell the truth about the facts of the world, but how, in both discourses, society itself defines the world of brands, with its economic, commercial, cultural values, and the journalistic universe, with its information, truth and objectivity values. In this perspective, advertising and journalistic discourses are not predetermined worlds but products of meaning. The semiotic analysis has to reconstruct their underlying meaning processes.

How does society define and produce itself in its own discourses? And how do the latter, in turn, create a certain idea of society? In the world of politics, for example, the figure of public opinion has been questioned by Landowski (1989) who has exposed its constructed character in newspaper news and, through narrative analysis, revealed the sometimes contradictory actantial roles with which this media figure has been invested. Thus, he has shown the manipulative use by the media and political subjects, on the one hand, and the potential impact on the orientation of the public, on the other.

By studying photography (Mangano 2018) and in general the images circulating in a given community (Pezzini 2008; Pozzato 2012), sociosemiotic analysis shows how through them we can trace the ways in which a culture and a community perceives itself: photographs of animals, for example, give us an idea of the notion that humans have of pets and therefore also, more generally, of what is, in a certain community and at a certain historical moment, the dominant idea of the relationship between humans and animals (Mangano 2019; Bertrand and Marrone eds. 2019). In the field of food trends, the increasing popularity of food free of something (gluten-free, sugar-free, lactose-free, etc.) from a sociosemiotic point of view is both the realisation of a general pre-existing dietetic trend in society and one of the factors that drives this same trend: it is precisely because consumers are assailed by advertising campaigns and packaging loudly proclaiming that they are “without something” that the perception of dietary food as preferable to other types of food is reinforced (Ventura Bordenca 2020).

Essentially, for semiotics there is no reality on one side and its representations on the other, no society as something separable from the languages that circulate within it, nor a context that could be separated from the texts: the world is already a semiotics (Greimas and Courtés eds. 1979) and texts and discourses act on the society (Fabbri 2017b). This conception of the relationship between reality and signs clearly distinguishes semiotics from other disciplines of language, including linguistics: for semiotics, in fact, there is no extra-linguistic, there is no assumed concrete and non-linguistic reality on one side and signs on the other as an *a posteriori* addition. Languages are real because they are able to act and be effective, and on the other hand, the real is itself significant.

3. A seminal text

Sociosemiotics is rooted in the history of semiotics. However, as we have stated above, sociosemiotics entered the debate as a methodology of the human sciences only after Paolo Fabbri's seminal text of 1973, *Le comunicazioni di massa in Italia: sguardo semiotico e malocchio della sociologia* [Mass communications in Italy: semiotic gaze and the evil eye of sociology] (Fabbri 2017a [1973]), followed by the afterword to Greimas's *Semiotics and social sciences* (Fabbri and Perron 1991). In France it was with Eric Landowski (1989, 1997) that the sociosemiotic project took hold and gave rise to numerous surveys on contemporaneity. Also in the 1990s, the French semiologist and advertising consultant Jean-Marie Floch published two fundamental texts, *Semiotics, Marketing and Communication* (1990) and *Visual Identities* (1995) in which detailed and fruitful analyses on brand campaigns and daily life objects[4] demonstrated how the tools of semiotics can be used to analyse heterogeneous phenomena (logos, advertising, spaces, knives, fashion looks) and, through them, understand the value systems of a given society. In those same years, again in France, Andrea Semprini published *L'objet comme procès et comme action* (1995), later translated into Italian, in which he put forward the idea of a sociosemiotics of everyday objects: things which in themselves do not make sense but acquire it in the relation they bear with the subjects; in which one can find the reflection of social signification and of the values of the collective imagination. "The object is constituted, defined and offered for use only and exclusively within an authentic intersubjective relationship" (Semprini 1995: 99). Semiologists look wherever they see human and social meaning.

If sociosemiotics and, in general, a semiotics exploring consumer society made headway in the panorama of French studies, in Italy it was not until 2001 that a key text was published which introduced a systematic perspective on sociosemiotic methodology and a series of applicative analyses attesting its heuristic fruitfulness: this is the book *Corpi sociali. Semiotica del testo e processi comunicativi*, by Gianfranco Marrone.

Although the word *sociosemiotic* does not appear in the title, the book is an exercise in method and opens with a paragraph entitled "the sociosemiotic field". Marrone's message is clear: sociosemiotics can only be a semiotics of the text. The set task of understanding the communication processes that govern and articulate our society indeed requires a precise theory and a rigorous methodology. The book is divided into six chapters dealing with "some of the main topics in sociology of communication and culture from a semiotic point of view" (Marrone 2001: XXXVI), namely fashion, television, information, advertising, politics and spatiality. In the extensive introduction, Marrone clarifies the tenets of semiotics that act as a compass for the analysis. Marrone's idea is that of a continuous interchange between analytical practice and theoretical reflection, thus accepting Landowski's (1997) invitation to "speak semiotics". If on the one hand sociosemiotics is the empirical crux of semiotics, in that it consists in the analysis of social experiences, on the other, its practice is also a way to exercise a philosophical-critical perspective as regards so-called social concreteness. According to Marrone, it is precisely the 'meta' role of sociosemiotics that makes us understand the constructed character of such concreteness. Which models does sociosemiotics use to question the sense of obviousness and naturalness of social reality, which in fact needs to be retraced? The book lists three of them, which represent the key notions underlying Marrone's theoretical reflection and related analytical practice: *text*, *discourse* and the *body*.

3.1 Textuality

The text is defined as any sociocultural construct that can be articulated in a plane of expression and a plane of content, and that produces some form of social meaning. Marrone (2001, 2017a) draws on Fabbri's reflections (2017a [1973]) on mass communications: to *content analysis*, which considers messages as composed of lexical units each capable of producing meaning in isolation, Fabbri opposes a *semiotics of the text* that brings together the units in broader relationships and syntagms. It is in the overall cultural framework that the meaning of a communication product is understood, and its underlying semantic structures are identified. Adopting the notion of text as a *transphrastic* unit not only in verbal language but in other languages such as the audiovisual for instance has multiple advantages for the study of media: it links the signifying plane to that of the signified; it broadens the field of inquiry to all possible expressive languages besides the verbal one; it goes beyond an analysis of signs taken individually and also that of the text as a closed and isolated block of data that would pass from a source to a receiver.

As a matter of fact, the notion of text that stemmed from Fabbri's considerations on mass media undermines two fundamental assumptions underpinning media studies up to the 1970s:

a. The opposition between codes and the message, since texts do not simply repeat pre-existing codes but retell, transform, and re-propose them;

b. Source and receiver are not pure technological agents who exchange data, but social subjects in all respects, whose identities can be described through the analysis of the texts that they circulate.

For instance, when Marrone analyses journalistic discourse (1998, 2001), he shows how each newspaper does not merely transfer neutral information by reproducing pre-existing journalistic codes, but rather appropriates it, in order to tell the same story differently. In doing so, each creates an image of the journal itself (sender) and of its audience (recipient).

What exactly is *text* in semiotics? The text is not an ontological reality, it is not an object, but it is "a formal model for the explanation of all human and social, cultural and historical phenomena" (Marrone 2010: 6). And, more importantly, it is "constructed according to the socio-cultural reality in which one intends to operate" (Marrone 2001: XXII). In fact, the science of signification has progressively expanded the notion of text from the traditional idea of a work by an identifiable author, mostly in verbal language and created with the intention of transmitting a message, to the concept of text as a *methodological model*. Thus the definition of text may encompass novels, films, paintings, ballets, TV programmes, commercials, objects, but also phenomena with more blurry confines like television schedules, advertising campaigns, entire cities, oral conversations, and so on (Marrone 2010, 2011). Therefore, thanks to this model Marrone (2001) shows how the underlying narrative arguments of a weather report or the value system at a given moment in the history of technology (the late 1990s) implicit in a phone company ad can be revealed by analysing them as texts. In a broader perspective, the notion of text as a tool in the analyst's hands can be used to study larger portions of the sociocultural universe: an advertising campaign, a newspaper, a clash between political parties or the spatial articulation of a university faculty. The issue of the boundaries of the text is central to sociosemiotic analysis.[5] In the chapter of *Corpi sociali* about fashion, Marrone draws upon Barthes's studies (1998) on the significance of dress as a kind of endless text whose significant units have to be limited. The idea is that a garment is not endowed with meaning because it is in itself a sign, but acquires its meanings in a structure within which it maintains syntagmatic relationships (the length of a skirt with a certain blouse and décolléte shoes) and paradigmatic ones (all the skirts or sweaters or shoes that might be part of that same look).[6] Marrone looks at Barthes because the French critic questioned the idea of a clothing lexicon: it is not the single garment that counts but its relationship with all the other pertinent elements. The garment is thus constructed by fashion and by the analyst, just like the text.

From this point of view the difference between the textual and the real is no longer pertinent since, according to Landowski (1989), for sociosemiotics 'the real' as an object of study are the socially constructed conditions of discourses and actions to signify. That means, for the French semiologist, nothing but another form of textuality. The so-called context is already something sensible that can be analysed as a text, while the text itself carries with it the social meanings tied to the context (it is in this sense that Greimas said that "outside the text there is no salvation").

This notion of the relationship between text and context marks a further difference between semiotics and the other social sciences, sociology *in primis*: if the context, that is, the socio-cultural values and the subjects involved, is already inherent to the text – intended as a model of analysis through which such values and subjects can be identified – it follows that the context is not that which is around and outside the text (as if they were two distinct ontological entities). From the point of view of semiotic methodology, context is all that is not relevant to the analysis. In other words, anything that analysts decide should not be considered within the boundaries of their own textual model, a decision taken on a case-by-case basis depending on research needs and other factors (Marrone 2011, 2017b).

3.2 Discursivity

The abandonment of the opposition between text and context leads us to the second theoretical model presented in *Corpi sociali*, that of *discourse*. To clarify the concept of discursivity in semiotics we must refer to Benveniste (1971) and to his notion of enunciation. For Benveniste, enunciation is "the putting of language into discourse" whereby the former loses the fixity of its rules to be realised in the speakers that make it work: by producing discourse, language constitutes the subjectivity of the protagonists of the communication process and therefore is intrinsically an intersubjective phenomenon. By placing the categories of subject, space and time, in fact, the enunciation establishes the communicative relationship between the speakers, of which it produces the respective images: the enunciator and the enunciatee. Thus, the rules for its production and those for its reception lie within the text itself. The social, cultural, situational context is already within the text. Furthermore, the model of discursivity enables us to keep together and observe the way in which the relations between the rules of language and their implementation unfold:

> from a different perspective, discourse is also the set of socio-cultural constraints which, so to speak, act on language, permeate it and reconstitute it, with all the weight of the entities consolidated by shared and repeated semiotic uses, of those stereotypes that reshape linguistic codes by limiting the expressive freedom of the single individual (Marrone 2001: XXV).

Therefore, compared to that of text the concept of discourse allows us to make progress in defining the differences between semiotics and other social sciences with respect to the notion of context: if the text is in fact a product, discourse can be seen as the set of rules and procedures for its production.

Thus, if a newspaper article is a text, the journalistic discourse is the set of themes, enunciative procedures, genres, and modes of relationship between the enunciator and the enunciatee that are specific to it and that distinguish it from other discourses – political, religious, scientific, and so on. In fact,

> while the text must be considered in its double plane of expression and content, for discourse the plane of expression is relatively indifferent (ivi: XXIV).

Discursivity is an eminently semantic notion as a unit based on a set of texts of different expressive substances. Hence, Barthes (1977) speaks of a *discourse of love* as made up of words, gestures, behaviours, rhetoric, amorous *topoi* of various kinds; Landowski (1989) discusses *political discourse* taking into account the totality of strategic moves by political exponents that manifest themselves in various expressive substances, such as rallies, interviews, declarations, strikes, parliamentary speeches, and so on; Marrone (2007) speaks of *brand discourse* referring to the set of manifestations produced by brands, understood as enunciative instances that offer value proposals to consumers, coherently conveyed at an expressive level by a heterogeneous set of texts (logos, products, packaging, shops, websites, social accounts, brand extensions etc.). *Food discourse*, therefore, includes not only food but also objects, kitchen tools, practices, behaviours, recipes, the media that talk about it, books, websites[7] (Mangano 2014a, 2014b; Marrone 2014a, ed. 2014b, 2016; Giannitrapani and Puca 2020). It is thus also possible to define a *design discourse* (Mangano 2009; Mangano and Mattozzi eds. 2009) as the set of technologies, projects, objects, spaces, fashions, magazines, events, which together construe a shared universe.

The basic idea underlying every sociosemiotic study is *the irrelevance of the concept of representation*:[8] the text is not intended as a representation of cultural and social phenomena that it simply reproduces; it in fact contains them and puts them into practice since, in a more or less conscious way, it was built upon their foundation. Moreover, the text acts in society as a social force. The distancing from representation explains why, in sociosemiotics, concrete practices and texts that speak of them, subjects and the media that reproduce them can be analysed on equal terms. Therefore, studying how we talk about nutrition and cooking on TV, for example, means discovering in what ways a culture promotes food and gastronomic practice (Giannitrapani 2014). Studying how slimming diets are advertised, analysing recipe books and manuals, investigating the dynamics between prohibited foods and permitted foods, examining the types of dishes proposed, allows us to identify how a particular society views the body, its forms of control, food science, and the role of experts (Ventura Bordenca 2020, 2021a). There are no virtual representations, on one side, nor a concrete reality understood, on the other, conceived as separate monads, but social discourses made up of the relationship of one to the other. Accordingly, a given social reality and its representations are not pre-existing conditions but the result of the “meaning effect of discourse”.

3.3 Corporeity

The third pivotal theoretical notion in Marrone's book is that of the b o d y, whose relevance for sociosemiotics may not be immediately apparent: why deal with corporeality in order to investigate social signification? But above all, how does semiotics conceive the corporeal dimension? Semiotic theory considers signification as articulated in different dimensions: cognitive, pragmatic, passionate and somatic. Among these, the somatic dimension is fundamental as it is the sensorial substrate on which meaning rests: even before perceiving and grasping articulated meanings, even before meaning unfolds rationally and the subject understands it fully, we experience flashes or hints belonging to the realm of aesthetics. The aesthetic dimension, in fact, is not limited to the enjoyment of art, but as Greimas argues in *De l'imperfection* (1987), can be found in everyday life experiences. Moreover, it is intersubjective: even before rational subjects form a relationship with each other, bodies that are immersed in a network of other bodies interact. Think of the phenomena of c o n t a g i o n (Landowski 1998b) in which collective reactions result from transmitted sensations between subjects who are first and foremost bodies. "Just as the subject is primarily a body, intersubjectivity is primarily intercorporeity" (Marrone 2001: XXIX). Consequently, in order to understand collective phenomena such as advertising, politics, fashion, and others, we must consider sensory dynamics, which are only apparently unrelated to the rationality of the social contract.

The body in which sociosemiotics is interested is not the natural body as pure physical substrate, but rather the s o c i a l b o d y – hence the title of the book, demonstrating the centrality of both the somatic dynamics in the functioning of the community and the sensory dimension for semiotics in general. With this oxymoron (the body, the most personal and private possession, is at the same time social, exposed, shared with everyone) on the one hand, Marrone draws on Merleau-Ponty's reflections in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) on the ambiguity of the human body, which is, at one and the same time, part of the world and a viewpoint on the world: the subject simultaneously experiences the paradoxical condition of intimacy and exteriority, nature and culture, of being one's own body and having a body. On the other hand, Marrone posits a fundamental homology between the logics of the somatic and of the social: just as signification emerges as the articulation and organisation of meaning, which is its unutterable and pervasive corporeal precondition, the social, with its rules and institutions, is based on a deeper, more intimate and collective regime of the body.

Finally, it should be clarified that the social body is not an empirical reality, but is a model: semiotics is concerned with the l o g i c s o f t h e b o d y, that is, the set of human, cultural, and social meanings that are activated through sensory and somatic manipulation and stimulation.

In particular, Marrone highlights the relevance of this model for the interpretation of phenomena concerning politics and spatiality. By way of example, in the chapter on political discourse he draws on and expands

Landowski's (1998a) analysis of the death of Diana Spencer, whose impact on the British monarchy, the population and the media cannot be explained unless we surpass the rationality of politics and acknowledge the existence of a "real collective sensoriality and affectivity" (Marrone 2001: 272). It is in fact the latter that underpinned "a social aesthetic experience" (*ivi*: 273) of the events that surrounded the death of the princess. In the same way, to explain social phenomena such as vandalism, in the chapter on spatiality (not surprisingly entitled "The spatial action") Marrone analyses the meanings generated by vandalised places. Places that first and foremost are containers of bodies, produce sensory stimuli, act effectively through a series of expressive categories (open/closed, central/peripheral, high/low, etc.), and as such behave as many forms of subjectivity.[9] Human bodies and spatial bodies interact in configurations of meaning that are analysed on all levels: pragmatic, cognitive but also somatic and passionate.[10]

4. Some field of analysis

If in the first chapters of *Corpi sociali* (Barthes and fashion, Eco and television) Marrone presents studies that combine sociology and nascent semiology, whilst the following chapters (information, advertising, politics, spatiality) consist of semiotic analyses based on an already mature and established discipline conducted on traditionally sociological fields.

The chapter on fashion retraces through Barthes the affirmation of semiology as a social research methodology starting from the assumption that both clothing and language are systems of signification. In examining Barthes's work prior to the publication of *Système de la mode* (1967) Marrone illustrates the French semiologist's quest for a method that distinguished the sociological study of fashion from a study of fashion as a cultural object and phenomenon of signification. At first, Barthes borrows the methodological instruments of Saussure's linguistics *(langue/parole; diachronicity synchronicity; signifier/signified)* and then he proposes the development of semiotics as indispensable to the sociologist. Even before explaining how something works, semiotics indeed shows that the sign is precisely there where society tends to hide it and to naturalise the semantic dimension of things. This seminal work revealing meaning in fashion established Barthes as a leading figure in the advancement of the project of a contemporary sociosemiotics.

The chapter on television focuses on Umberto Eco's research on a socially relevant theme, the development of the television medium. Eco's studies on television, writes Marrone, are a way to observe the progress of semiotics as a separate discipline in the study of mass communication. Indeed, if the development of sociosemiotics was propelled by the emergence of new phenomena and especially by the media, the birth of television was particularly important. Marrone discusses some central themes in Eco's early work on the media[11], such as the issues of reception of codes and sub-codes and that of the aesthetic values of television. In the 1960s, Eco and other semiologists including Fabbri sought to adopt a new disciplinary perspective to deal with the evolving problems and stakes posed by the television medium (Eco 1965). The need for a semiological study aimed at analysing television messages stems from the fact that in the presence of a varied audience with different skills, "aberrant decoding" becomes the norm, Eco argues in firm opposition to information theory and McLuhan's hypotheses. In fact, an advertising or informative text can be composed of a plethora of codes and sub-codes that make its reception complex and divide the audience. These issues equally occupied emerging semiotics and the sociology of communication. It was in the 1970s that Eco, in a shift from a semiotics of codes to textual semiotics, proposed for the study of television "that perfected form of sociology that is the semiotics of culture" (1977: 274). The Vaduz experiment[12] (1976) was one of the first studies to show how "the interpretation of the text depends above all on the way in which the text predisposes the public" (Marrone 2001: 52): it is the television enunciator,

> not the empirical spectator that consumer sociology and ethnography seek to capture, but its simulacrum constructed within the television enunciation, that semiotics can therefore reconstruct *(ibidem)*.

A simulacrum which from a semiotic and more specifically a media social semiotic perspective is not purely an image without effects, but on the contrary a highly effective actant of communication.

The third chapter of *Corpi sociali* is devoted to the procedures governing the creation and circulation of journalistic discourse. Marrone notes that, up to the time of his writings, information has been the subject of two types of inquiry, namely general studies on journalism and analyses of specific cases. What is lacking, Marrone argues,

> is the elaboration of formal theoretical models that are general enough to reconstruct the overall characteristics of the current journalistic discourse and at the same time specific enough to analyze local or temporary information processes. It is here that sociosemiotics of information comes into play (*ivi*: 66).

Such a sociosemiotics does not limit itself to an analysis of the language used by newspapers (considered at times obscure and impenetrable, or full of linguistic stereotypes) but aims at an overall analysis of the newspaper-text. In fact, the media channel as such (a newspaper, a radio or a television news broadcast, etc.) can be understood as text: the meanings of a piece of news do not lie in the piece of news itself, but in the way in which it is presented – in terms of image, title, captions, article, etc. – and in the relation to the other elements on the same page – for instance what news appear alongside, come before or after the one analysed, the size of the headlines, and so on.[13]

However, the most important aspects of the sociosemiotic approach to information are at least three:

- the idea that journalistic objectivity is not an indisputable reality, but a meaning effect that can be reconstructed starting from the analysis of the enunciative strategies used[14], so that each newspaper defines its own identity in the dynamics between objectifying style or subjectivating style[15];
- the idea of news as a translation of the world: if reality is already a semiotic (Greimas 1970), then the journalistic narrative can only be a form of translation of the world's discourses;
- among the dimensions of meaning involved in journalistic discourse, there is not only the cognitive (the transfer of knowledge between newspaper and reader)[16] and pragmatic (the way in which, for example, news influence the audience's behaviour), but also the pathemic.[17] News is full of emotions, encapsulated both in the subject of the journalistic story (e.g. fear of vaccines or of a flood warning in a weather report) and in the delivery of the news itself (anxious, reassuring, emphatic, monotonous etc.).

> [Thus] the resulting notions of communication and language are very different from the traditional ones: the criterion of truth of an enunciate is not given by its relation of correspondence to external reality, but by the relationship between enunciator and enunciatee that lies within the enunciate itself (Marrone 2001: 109).

The idea that 'truth' is the outcome of an intersubjective relationship is exactly the type of sociosemiotic reasoning on media communication. The fact that it is necessary to consider intersubjective pacts rather than values does not imply that the latter are less strong and effective; on the contrary, they are even more effective because they are within a certain belief system: I believe in something because I have faith in the enunciator of that message.

This issue is fundamental in the chapter on advertising, in which Marrone presents models for the analysis of the advertising text that are no longer eminently linguistic and rhetorical but logical-narrative: the aim is not to study the "rhetoric" of advertising language, nor the image taken in isolation, but to identify the "textual structures that lie beneath signs and make their existence and functioning possible" (2001: 156), whether they concern a single text (an ad, a commercial, etc.) or a broader configuration of meaning (an advertising campaign, a brand). On that account, sociosemiotics applied to advertising uses a narrative approach: just as in the theory of narrativity the object of value is only such for a subject, products have no value in themselves but acquire it through a semantic investment effected by the brand and/or the community. Among the models that reflect this approach in sociosemiotics of advertising is Jean-Marie Floch's axiology of consumption values (1990, 1995), which has a narrative mould and focusses on valorisation processes rather than on single values (for example, environmentalism is a value that can set up a utopian valorisation, therefore existential for some, but also a critical valorisation, and therefore one of convenience, for others).[18]

Concerning political discourse, Marrone notes that despite the fundamental semioticity of politics[19], very few systematic semiotic studies on this topic have appeared since Eric Landowski's pioneering research (1989, 1997), some themes of which (the theatre metaphor, the issue of contagion, the strategic use of political discourse) are discussed in *Corpi sociali*. As with journalism and advertising, semiotics must not deal with verbal language taken in isolation (the so-called "politicalese") but with political communication in a broad sense. In order to incorporate reflections on other languages such as that of politicians' gestures, photographs, or clothing, "we must adopt the perspective of the study of discourse and semiotically reflect on the entire sphere of politics" (Marrone 2001: 225). Most studies centring on political communication are largely based on the premise that political activity and its communication are in fact separate. Conversely, the notion underpinning political sociosemiotics is that communication is just as pragmatic, effective, and transformative as political practice (namely, decisions, pacts, alliances, expulsions, etc.), and that the latter is already significant and communicative in itself. Public opinion, for example, is not merely an image of the people manufactured by the media but a political subject in its own right: as a spokesperson, it conveys the demands of citizens and politicians and plays a different actantial role each time.[20] We should therefore speak of

> a political discourse as a structured flow of strategic moves, some of which take on a linguistic-communicative form, others the form of somatic actions, others an intermediate form (Marrone 2001: 226).

The sociosemiotic gaze does not set out to describe what is political and what is not, but to identify the criteria that in a given society define as political a certain action, a certain phenomenon or a certain group.

> It is a matter of reconstructing the general criteria by which a given society, reflecting itself in its own discourses (political and metapolitical), considers a certain activity as strictly political and another as unpolitical (*ivi*: 234).

Returning to the example of Diana Spencer's death, although at first glance it does not seem a traditionally political event, if we consider the affective and somatic dimension of meaning it proves part of the British political machine and of the transformation dynamics that affected the monarchy in those days.

The last chapter of *Corpi sociali* focusses on spatiality. After explaining why space is a language and a pertinent object of social analysis[21], Marrone examines a case of vandaliation of a university faculty by students. It emerges that the spatial organisation of the faculty establishes a relationship with the people who experience it in such a way, as to build a deceptive pact with the students. A pact that does not stand up from a narrative viewpoint but unleashes p a s s i o n s (in particular, anger) that turn into violence on the space itself by specific groups of students. To explain this phenomenon, Marrone draws upon Lévi-Strauss's notion of "symbolic efficacy" (1958) attributing to signs the ability to transform subjects starting from a bodily response.

The sociosemiotic idea underpinning this analysis is that unlike disciplines such as psychology or sociology – which would have surveyed only human social actors perhaps through interviews, and kept spatiality in the background as a surrounding but substantially mute environment – the semiologist questions space as a signifying text. In other words, the semiologist does not stop at the level of voluntary c o m m u n i c a t i o n (interviewing people, asking about motives, preparing awareness campaigns) but deals with the broader level of s i g n i f i c a t i o n , which may be involuntary, unconscious but above all is detached from human actuation: spaces and people together generate meaning. Places hold meanings for the people who pass through them and who are then able to re-semantise them, to activate some paths of meaning and narcotise others.

Drawing his analysis to conclusion, the sociosemiologist argues that rather than a communication campaign aimed at encouraging students' responsibility, preventive action may be taken by reconstructing the chain of processes and actors that have led to a certain destructive situation originated by passions and precisely by the spaces themselves:

> The best way to act on socially negative behaviour is to identify the semiotic systems and procedures that have brought it into being as an effective process: reasons that in our case are addressed to a micro-society in which things, spaces, entrances, doors, gates, corridors act for and more than man. Working on them would transform their meaning, and consequently also their effects (Marrone 2001: 368).

5. Sociosemiotic surveys

What happened in the twenty years following the publication of *Corpi sociali*? Subsequent contributions dedicated to sociosemiotics will illustrate its developments in the fields of advertising, media, spatiality, fashion, design, and gastronomy. Some of these fields are addressed in *Corpi sociali*. New ones have emerged precisely out of the mission that sociosemiotics has set for itself, to respond to the pressures of new social forces such as "foodmania" and the rise of new media, for instance. A mission that is not simply a desire to chase the latest fad, but to observe the change from within a theoretical paradigm and articulate it in some way, in order to make it more understandable.

Below we shall attempt a survey of the contributions that constitute a sort of "sociosemiotics of contemporaneity". It is not an exhaustive list –

neither from the point of view of the fields of study nor from the point of view of the contributions, which may well be much more numerous considering all the semiotic analyses that are not explicitly presented as such, but in fact adopt the principles of sociosemiotics.

Published soon after Marrone's volume, *Lo sguardo sociosemiotico* [The sociosemiotic gaze] (Semprini ed. 2003) edited by Semprini gathers contributions on brand (Landowski, on beers), news (Marrone, on spatiality on TV), political communication (Pezzini, on electoral posters), advertising (Codeluppi, on Ferrero Rocher ads and Ferraro, on Adidas commercials). In 2006 *Scene del consumo* [Consumption scenarios], edited by Pezzini and Cervelli (eds. 2006), was published, in which the link between spatiality and consumption practices is discussed mainly by probing the transformations that have affected two types of consumption: the commerce, through the analysis of flagship stores, and the arts, through the analysis of new museums.[22] In 2007, Marrone's *Il discorso di Marca* [Brand discourse] analysed the phenomenon of branding, identifying brand communication as an enunciative meta-instance that absorbs and re-stages social themes and values by appropriating and transforming them for its own commercial purposes. There is no principled opposition between commercial discourse and other social discourses – political, artistic, medical and so on; on the contrary, branding is considered one of the many discourses with which society constructs itself and views itself as such. The theme of consumption is intertwined with that of hedonistic pleasure, lifestyles and aesthetic forms, but also with the counterpart of bodily excesses, diseases, toxic addictions. These are the topics explored in Marrone's books *Il discorso della salute* (*verso una sociosemiotica medica*) [Health discourse, towards a sociosemiotics of medicine] and *La cura Ludovico* and *Sensi alterati* which all appeared in 2005.

A field deeply explored by sociosemiotics is that of the visual. Drawing on considerations on perception by Eco (1997b) and Greimas (1984), Pezzini (2008) emphasises the cultural dimension and the conventional – and thereby social – status of images, both in terms of production and circulation as well as reception. For the visual field, semiotics "hypothesizes a culturally acquired reading grid and therefore subject to variability and reformulation"(Pezzini 2008: 16). Pezzini shows the connections between sociosemiotics and semiotics of culture[23] by putting the concept of semiosphere (Lotman 1985) in relation to that of discursivity, and highlighting the intrinsic intertextuality of the visual. According to Pezzini, the texts of a culture are *syncretic* made up of different expressive substances (verbal, visual, sound, etc.) and are the product of *intersemiotic translations* (Jakobson 1987), whose underlying structures (on the level of content) semiotics seeks to reconstruct.

As regards film and the audiovisual field in general, studies were conducted on television and seriality (Pozzato and Grignaffini 2008; Dusi ed. 2019; Giannitrapani and Marrone 2020), and on the various audiovisual formats (Pezzini ed. 2002; Peverini 2004; Pezzini and Rutelli eds. 2005; Dusi and Spaziante eds. 2006; Santangelo 2013). The musical and artistic branding discourses have attracted much scholarship (Calefato et al. eds. 2007; Spaziante 2007; Pozzato and Spaziante eds. 2009; Marino 2020). The issue of political strategies has also been reviewed especially with regard to the war (Montanari 2004) and terrorism discourse, which gained a hold around the 2000s (Fabbri 2001).

As sociosemiotics broadened its gaze and produced a variety of studies, the need to take stock in terms of theory and method emerged.[24] Pozzato's *Foto di matrimoni e altri saggi* [Wedding photos and other essays] (2012) is a collection of essays on subjects ranging from customs (on wedding photos, on cooking in men's magazines, on fitness and dietetics), to consumption (shopping at supermarkets, packaging), television (on series and prize programs) and architecture (the refurbishment of three churches in Modena). The volume puts forward the sociosemiotic method as a "reasoned bricolage" between different disciplines (the anthropology of Lévi-Strauss and Geerz, the historiography of Carlo Ginzburg, among others) which share "the same purpose of discovering meaningful relationships rather than actuality ontologically intended" (Pozzato 2012: 7). This means reiterating the irrelevance, for semiotic studies of the social, of the opposition between 'high' and 'low' culture: for the purpose of understanding the "swarm of human interactions" (*ibidem*), it may be interesting to examine photographs of spouses over time to reveal, behind the changing poses and aesthetics, different representations of society and of the family; to study the branding phenomenon it may be useful to survey supermarket shopping patterns or the communication of detergent labels[25]; to determine the idea of the body held by a given society it may be good practice to visit gyms, and/or research how fitness is talked about in men's magazines.[26] It is the anthropological density of a phenomenon, argues Pozzato, that attracts the sociosemiotic gaze.

Mangano (2019), in *Ikea e altre semiosfere* [Ikea and other semiospheres] analyses food design, photography, advertising, with a special focus on Ikea, posing the important methodological question of corpus in sociosemiotics. Unlike sociology, which is based on the principle of statistical representativeness, in semiotics, where "we do not analyze opinions or individuals but texts, trying to reconstruct the way they generate meaning" (Mangano 2019: 22), the representativeness of texts or exhaustivity of the samples are not relevant criteria *a priori*; however they acquire relevance when the semiologist has identified, like the linguist or anthropologist, the transformation rule that underlies the variability of a phenomenon. For example, to study food advertising, in consideration of the vast array of possible examples, the corpus will be built gradually identifying the underlying rules, the recurring semantic forms, taking as a starting point the use of models that are thus subjected to verification. This will be done following a criterion consisting in the "exhaustion of the model" (Greimas and Courtés eds. 1979, entry "corpus").

6. Revivals and perspectives: from sociosemiotics to semiotics of collectives

In the 1990s the anthropologist of the contemporary and philosopher of science and techniques Bruno Latour proposed a redefinition of the social through the inclusion of non-human entities: Latour and his colleagues of the "actor-network theory"[27], believe that the opposition we are accustomed to between humans – endowed with conscience and culture – and non-humans – mute representatives of reality and nature (objects, spaces, means of transport, writing instruments, small and large technologies but also trees, meteorological forces, microbes, viruses, nanoparticles, enzymes, and other invisible entities such as spirits and supernatural beings) – is the result of a typically modern thought, and not the only possible ontology.[28] His idea of the social world may be profitable for contemporary sociosemiotics, above all because it takes into consideration forms of agency that are not necessarily human but are equally effective in building social networks. Perhaps even more effective because they are usually considered simple tools, trivial objects, mute things. Latour shares with the anthropologist Philippe Descola (2005) the notion that the "great divide" between culture and nature to which we are accustomed is just one of the many ways in which existence is articulated and that it is the result of a process of continuous hybridisation and subsequent concealment of this hybridisation. Culture and social rules, in order to exist, lead humans to make constant use of non-humans and it is to them that they delegate many social and moral tasks, forming hybrids: an artificial road bump (Latour 1992), an automatic door closer, or a special key (Latour 1993), for example. For Latour the social is not made up of relationships between human subjects alone, but of collectives, assemblages of humans and non-humans on which the action is differently distributed. More than one human culture opposing one nature of things, societies are made up of different natures-cultures compositions. The same idea is reflected in Descola's four ontologies (2005) and the ways in which the collectives in each ontology are made up. Let us review them.

The ontology which Descola defines naturalism, according to which there is a common physiological basis between humans and non-humans to which correspond differences in subjectivity, culture, and language (physical continuity and discontinuity of interiority), is the typical paradigm of Western and modern cultures: collectives are only human, are divided into languages and customs (cultures) and exclude everything that exists independently of them (nature). As Descola argues, different ontologies dominate in other cultures, that is, different ways of articulating the differences between nature and culture. There is animism (continuity of interiority and physical discontinuity), according to which humans and non-humans (animals, plants, divinities) have a common soul beyond the differences in physical manifestation: everything that exists has a social life regardless of its appearance, and humans and non-humans form relationships of affinity. Analogism (physical discontinuity and discontinuity of interiority) is the ontology according to which the world is a set of differences and singularities which, however, form relations with each other through vague similarities based on the most disparate criteria. Therefore, a thing is similar to another because they are both hot, or because they share the trait of femininity, or because they somehow influence our personality and behaviour (as in astrology): here the collectives of humans and non-humans, according to Descola, are distributed in a single collective (the world) organised in hierarchical segments (e.g. lineages). Totemism (continuity of interiority and physical continuity), on the other hand, presupposes a similarity in terms of soul and, equally, of exterior appearance between things, human beings, animals, divinities: in a totemic group all beings, living and not, share a certain characteristic (temperament, a physical trait, a substance, etc.). In this case the collective is the manifestation of a pre-existing totemic class.

What do Latour's theories on hybrids and Descola's on ontologies have to do with sociosemiotics? Both perspectives broaden the reflection on the social domain by reasoning about collectives whose actualisation, human or non-human, is not the main point of interest. Over the past twenty years, Italian sociosemiotics has evolved to incorporate non-human actors into the study of the social, such as objects, technologies, and animals. In the same years that saw the emergence of sociosemiotics, the project of a "society of objects" was put forward by Landowski and Marrone (eds. 2002) as a further and fruitful field of analysis in the study of society:

> the semiotics of objects fits into a more general sociosemiotic inquiry, where the observation of the internal structures of the object is tied with that of its external relations with the subject (Landowski and Marrone eds. 2002: 30).

The semiotics of design (Mangano and Marrone 2002; Deni 2002; Mangano and Mattozzi eds. 2009; Mangano 2009, 2010, 2019) has shown how social and human meaning is articulated and circulates within and through objects, not as an addition to their technical functions but on the contrary as a product of their design, their insertion in society and their use. As regards the animal world, by studying how animals are viewed in a certain culture, zoosemiotic studies[29] have shed light on the way in which that same culture perceives itself. Research in this regard has focussed on representations of animals in advertising and television (Mangano 2019; Marrone 2019), animalist campaigns (Giannitrapani 2018; Ventura Bordenca 2018), cartoons (Mangiapane 2020), abstinence from meat (Ventura Bordenca 2019).

Italian sociosemiotics, as it has been practiced in recent years, can be considered a semiotics of collectives, insofar as it aims at identifying meaning that is generated, disseminated and reflected in multiple discourses produced by humans and non-humans: people, media, objects, animals. A search for meaning conducted in the spirit of a marked semiotics, with which Fabbri (2021) referred to a specific project for the construction and establishment of semiotics as a human science: a project that has "tactical value in relation to other genuine or purported semiotic theories", these being heterogeneous and epistemologically approximate theories that constitute the unmarked semiotics (pop philosophy, cultural studies, philosophy of language, the revival of referentialism, the reaffirmation of naturalism and ontology) [a project that has an additional] strategic value with respect to the project of a semiotics 'with a scientific vocation' that is the legacy of the best structuralism (linguistic, anthropological, philosophical, sociological) and falls into the science of signification developed by A. J. Greimas and from his school (Marrone 2021: 387).

Notes

1 Umberto Eco's interest in television and its ideologies has consistently informed his theoretical and journalistic work (see Eco 2018).
2 On the levels of semiotics cf. Greimas (1966); on the idea of "missing links" in semiotic theory and practice see Fabbri (1998, 2021), Marrone (2011, 2021).
3 "Sociosemiotics" entry in Greimas and Courtés (eds. 1979).
4 For an analysis on advertising and sociosemiotics see Boero's chapter in this volume (153–170).
5 Marrone will take up this issue again and establish a number of basic criteria underlying textuality (2010, 2011), among them that of the negotiation of the boundaries of the text as the object of analysis.
6 For a sociosemiotics of fashion see the chapter by Terracciano in this volume (171–194).
7 See the chapter on gastronomy in this volume (133–152).
8 On this topic, see among others Marrone's article (2017b).
9 For an overview of the sociosemiotics of space, cf. chapter by Giannitrapani in this volume (195–224).
10 Semiotics has developed an apparatus of models to explain passionate phenomena. The semiotic perspective conceives passions as meaning effects of discourse, whose conditions of existence and generation can be investigated through textual analysis. Unlike psychology and other human sciences, semiotics of passions does not conceive the affective side as opposed to the cognitive one, nor does it consider it as an entirely individual phenomenon, but connects it to cultural codes and identifies rules of functioning and deployment. The main contributions in this field are: Fabbri and Sbisà (1985); Fabbri and Pezzini (eds. 1987); Greimas and Fontanille (1991); Pezzini (ed. 1991); Fontanille (1993).
11 On this topic see Eco (2018).
12 This experimental inquiry carried out by RAI in 1974, based on a concept by Eco, was an important example of verification of the textual model: three different versions of an invented but plausible piece of news on political-religious clashes in Vaduz, Liechtenstein, were reported to communities of viewers, each time giving a different interpretation of the facts. The experiment aimed at verifying how each text-news predisposed the recipient's reception.
13 Marrone delves into the thematizing procedures (see Livolsi ed. 1984; Calabrese and Violi 1984; Eco 1997a; Marrone 1998), with which a certain theme is created, more or less voluntarily, by combining news concerning similar events: for example, when several news reports about young people who died from drugs are

featured on the same page, the theme ‘drugs lead to death among young people’ will be created, even if it is not explicitly written anywhere. Sociosemiotic analysis is not so much interested in understanding the way in which the drug problem is reported in newspapers, as in understanding how the media contribute to building the social issue recognised as ‘the drug problem among young people’.

14 There are more objectifying newspapers, which tend to use an impersonal style, and others more subjectivating, which instead explicitly express their point of view on the facts of the world (Landowski 1998a): objectivity or subjectivity become values that are to the reader’s liking, or not.

15 “Just as there is no such thing as a faithful or unfaithful translation of a text, but only a good or bad translation depending on the communication purposes that have been preliminarily set, there is no journalistic objectivity but rather a good or bad ‘move’ in the world depending on the communication purposes” (Marrone 2001: 91). From this point of view, “the distinction between ‘news’ and ‘comment’ also falls away: it is not a question of keeping information and opinion separate but of thinking of a different meaning effect that (...) the newspaper’s discourse can sometimes produce” (*ivi*: 91).

16 On governing knowledge flows, see Fontanille (1987).

17 See Calabrese and Volli (1995); Marrone (1998) on passions in journalistic discourse.

18 For an explanation of this model, see Boero’s chapter on advertising in this volume (153–170).

19 For studies in political semiotics, see Fabbri and Marcarino (1985); Pozzato (1997); Pezzini (2001).

20 Landowski (1989) reconstructs the profound logic of political narrative by identifying the actantial role of the Sender towards the rulers in public opinion. The Sender is the actant who establishes the system of values directing action (Greimas and Courtés eds.1979; Greimas 1983). From an analysis of French newspapers, however, a more complex combination emerges: depending on how the relationship between rulers and public opinion is constructed in the news, the latter can take on the role of Sender (‘the political class follows public opinion’) or its opposite, anti-Sender (‘the political class disappoints public opinion’), as well as non-Sender (‘the political class faces public opinion’) or non-anti-Sender (‘the political class challenges public opinion’).

21 On spatiality cf. Giannitrapani’s chapter in this volume (195–224).

22 On new museums, see Pezzini (2011).

23 On semiotics of culture, see Sorrentino in this volume (15–47).

24 Ferraro (2012) proposes a “neoclassical” sociosemiotics, that is a semiotics that does not seek new models but draws on the tenets of classical semiotics. In Fabbri (2017b) there are important clarifications on some central sociosemiotic issues: belief, effectiveness, translation.

25 On the semiotics of packaging see also Ventura Bordenca (2014).

26 On sociosemiotics of dietetics, see Mangano and Marrone (eds. 2013) and Ventura Bordenca (2020).

27 For further study on the relationship between Latour and semiotics see Landowski and Marrone (eds. 2002); Mattozzi (ed. 2006); Mangano (2009); Peverini (2019); Mangano (2021); Latour (2021); Ventura Bordenca (2021b).
28 Latour (1991, 1999, 2005, 2013).
29 On the issue of animality, see the recent semiotic bibliography: Martinelli (ed. 2010); Marrone (ed. 2017c); Marrone and Mangano (eds. 2018); Giannitrapani and Mangiapane (eds. 2018); Bertrand and Marrone (eds. 2019).

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Semiotics of Food

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Summary. "Good to think with." The potential of a semiotics of food, as well as its cultural value, is perfectly expressed by this famous statement from Claude Lévi-Strauss. It affirms the importance of food in defining identity on various levels, from entire peoples to individual families or even individuals, and thus emphasises the immediate ritual value that every aspect of nutrition assumes. It is not merely a matter of stating that food inherently conveys something else, that gastronomy becomes the carrier of meanings that go beyond it and have no connection to its nutritional function, but rather of demonstrating its systematic nature. The relationship between food and language, upon careful consideration, can be understood in two different ways: there are discourses that have food as their object, the discourses on food, as well as those of food that employ food as an expressive medium to signify something specific. However, it is not sufficient to claim that bread signifies something in a certain tradition to make it semiotically relevant; one must argue that bread is capable of articulating a broad range of concepts. This possibility is what the semiotics of food investigates.

Keywords. Semiotics, food, gastronomy, food meaning, identity

Zusammenfassung. „Good to think with". Diese berühmte Aussage von Claude Lévi-Strauss bringt das Potenzial einer Semiotik des Essens und ihren kulturellen Wert perfekt zum Ausdruck. Sie bekräftigt die Bedeutung des Essens für die Definition der Identität auf verschiedenen Ebenen, von der eines ganzen Volkes bis hin zu einzelnen Familien oder sogar Individuen, und damit den unmittelbaren rituellen Wert, den jeder Aspekt der Ernährung hat. Es geht nicht nur darum, zu behaupten, dass das Essen an sich von etwas anderem spricht, dass die Gastronomie zum Träger von Bedeutungen wird, die über sie hinausgehen und nichts mit ihrer Ernährungsfunktion zu tun haben, sondern darum, ihren systematischen Charakter aufzuzeigen. Die Beziehung zwischen Essen und Sprache kann, wenn man es genau nimmt, auf zwei verschiedene Arten verstanden werden. Es gibt die Diskurse, die das Essen zum Gegenstand haben, die Diskurse über das Essen, aber auch die Diskurse über das Essen, die das Essen als Ausdrucksmittel benutzen, um etwas Bestimmtes zu bezeichnen. Aber es reicht nicht aus zu sagen, dass Brot in einer bestimmten Tradition etwas bedeutet, um es semiotisch relevant zu machen, sondern es muss argumentiert werden, dass Brot in der Lage ist, eine breite Palette von Konzepten zu artikulieren. Diese Möglichkeit wird in der Lebensmittelsemiotik untersucht.

Schlüsselwörter. Semiotik, Lebensmittel, Gastronomie, Bedeutung von Lebensmitteln, Identität

1. Beginnings

"Good to think with". The potential of a semiotics of food, as well as its cultural value, is perfectly expressed in this famous phrase by which Claude Lévi-Strauss summarised the enormous anthropological question linked to food (Lévi-Strauss 1962). Gianfranco Marrone would make clear just how much is owed to the great scholar in the footnote to the introduction of a book which, not surprisingly, uses these same words as its title (*Buono da pensare*, Marrone ed. 2014d). Lévi-Strauss's idea is as simple as it is laden with consequences: the enormous differences found in the food systems of different peoples can be explained only if it is assumed that choices are made not so much on the basis of utilitarian criteria or environmental variables, but above all under the pressure of apparently less-concrete needs. If the availability of certain ingredients, the presence of certain tools or the knowledge of certain transformation techniques provide a set of possibilities from which to process raw food – which is incidentally extremely broad – it is the cultural – and therefore mental, cognitive, and semantic factors – which create the conditions for producing a dish and, in a broader sense, a way of eating. Hence the importance of food in defining identity on various levels, from that of entire peoples to single families or even individuals, and therefore the immediate ritual value that every aspect of nutrition assumes. If, *a priori*, gastronomic choices are arbitrary due to the wide range of variables that influence them, *a posteriori* they become necessary, as part of that gastronomic imaginary that plays a fundamental role in the perception of ourselves and each other. For this reason, the chips Barthes (1957) spoke of, in what is one of the first examples of the semiotic gaze applied to food, can be considered mythological in the same way as the more traditional party dish: both eventually come to signify the culture which produced them.

Barthes talks explicitly about food as a form of communication in an essay shortly after his famous *Mythologies* entitled *Toward a Psychosociology of Contemporary Food Consumption*, in which he addresses the question of the semiotic value it assumes (Barthes 1960). It is not simply a matter of affirming that food intrinsically speaks of something else, that gastronomy becomes the bearer of meanings that go beyond it and that have nothing to do with the nutritional function for which, in principle, it is intended, but of showing the systematic nature of it all. The "ease" – Barthes writes – "with which all the facts concerning food form a structure analogous to other systems of communication" (Barthes 1960 in Marrone and Giannitrapani eds. 2012: 49–50). In other words, what makes food semiotic is not the meanings it can carry but, as we shall see, the possibility it has of articulating a set of messages and relationships not only through food in the strictest sense, but also thanks to that enormous set of objects and practices that accompany its production and consumption. Contrary to what one might think, therefore, the task of a semiotician is not to reveal partially hidden meanings of food, but to reconstruct the system of signification of which dishes, together with much more besides, are part.

Thus, when Algirdas Greimas chooses the recipe for *Soup au pistou* [pesto soup] as an example to demonstrate the way in which objects of value are created, highlighting how narrative models allow one to effectively articulate the meaning of even a simple cooking recipe, he is in fact confronting a profound dimension of culture that the analysis precisely reveals (Greimas 1983 in Marrone and Giannitrapani eds. 2012). The sequence of operations described, the tools involved and the transformations they produce, do not simply make it possible to prepare that particular dish, but give meaning to a set of raw materials (and also of objects and elements such as fire) which in themselves may mean very little, ensuring that the fundamental leap is made between the state of nature and that of culture. The recipe makes explicit the coexistence of two levels within the food object – one of a material order and one of an abstract order – that follow the distinction between expression and content on which any language is based.

The third author who we consider fundamental is Jean-Marie Floch, who a few years later inspired further reflection on food by studying the famous French chef Michel Bras, and one dish in particular, *the Bass with whey and alpine fennel with Malabar nightshade and quenelle of sage bread* (Floch 1995 in Marrone and Giannitrapani eds. 2012), showing how a gustatory identity can be designed by strategically manipulating food materials. In his work, Bras seems to take into account both the gustatory dimension and the axiological signification of the ingredients, which the semiologist traces back to the mythology of herbs and spices in ancient Greece. But what makes Floch's work important is the fact that it shows how it is possible to visually translate all this into an image like the one Bras uses in his logo, conveying his brand identity through it. Gastronomy, then, not only signifies itself but, as we shall see, produces further signification.

2. Languages of food

So far, we have mentioned some of the essays now considered classics collected in a book edited by Gianfranco Marrone and Alice Giannitrapani (eds. 2012) which rekindled the semiotic reflection on food in Italy that began in 2000 with *Frammenti di un discorso culinario* [Fragments of a culinary discourse] by Piero Ricci and Simona Ceccarelli (Ricci and Ceccarelli 2000) and was subsequently revived in *Semiofood* (Manetti et al. 2006). Remaining in Italy, the impact of Jean-Jacques Boutaud's *Le sens gourmand* – published in 2005 and translated into Italian in 2011 with an afterword by Pierluigi Basso Fossali (2011) – should also be acknowledged. Since then, a real line of studies has developed which in the last 10 years has focused on various phenomena related to food production and consumption and which, it must be said, has been more far-reaching in Italy than in other European and non-European countries. Not only is the number of contributions that we can ascribe to a semiotics of taste greater in this country than in others, but they analyse textual types that go beyond dishes or recipes, involving many other artefacts that become part of the discourse around food. It is therefore surprising to note the absence of this field of study in surveys such as the recent *La sémiotique en interface* (Biglari and Roelens eds. 2018), which explores the relationships between semiotics and other research domains, from the social to the natural sciences. A common element of the various works of which we will offer an overview here is the idea that food can be considered a language. But what exactly does it mean to think of food as a language?, asks Marrone (2016). How is it possible to combine the set of products and practices that revolve around food with the language proper? And again, what relationship does it have with other languages such as visuality and spatiality?

The relationship between food and language, carefully thinking, can be understood in two different ways (Marrone 2014b). First of all, there are the discourses that have food as their object. Those of cookbooks, guides, specialised magazines, but also newspapers, books, television broadcasts and of course the infinity of texts derived from the Web ranging from blogs to websites, through to social networks and YouTube. This is what is commonly understood by enogastronomic communication, which has seen a huge boom over the last fifteen years, flooding our daily life, and which Marrone, who has analysed the sociosemiotic phenomenon, has dubbed nothing short of *gastromania* (2014a). It is not about the fact that gastronomy, explains the semiologist, has been a fad for a while, like others in the past, but that this time it has managed to seep into unrelated areas, pervading a large part of our lives. Emblematic in this sense is the role of the chefs, who from reserved creators hidden away in the secrecy of their kitchens have become all-round public figures, real media stars appearing on television and in newspapers to comment on any topic, from politics to the environment, from art to the economy.

It goes without saying that all this talk has changed the way we think about food, and therefore also how we prepare and consume it. Thanks to blogs, for example, in a short time detested housewives have become influencers capable of imposing, in addition to their recipes and their techniques, also an implicit set of culinary values. Often, of course, without having any experience but only riding the wave of easy online success measured in clicks. And if on the one hand this has led to an epic of various interpretations of 'grandmother's kitchen', ending up naturalising traditions that are often somewhat improvised (Marrone 2014a), on the other hand it has raised issues (and therefore trends) of every kind: from the philology of the typical to an obsession with nutritional aspects, passing through various possible ethical impulses, from that of zero kilometre food to practices that exclude certain foods from the diet. Not only what we eat has changed but also the way we eat it, and of course what we drink. A few years of media bombardment were enough to transform carefree drinks with friends into serious tasting experiences to be quickly translated into a series of blog posts on the web. All anxiously awaiting those likes that, in an instant, can transform an anonymous drinker into a feared and acclaimed critic.

From a semiotic perspective, it is evident that all this discussion did not happen solely through verbal language. First of all, let us consider photographs and the way in which they have flooded social networks, especially dedicated channels like Instagram or Pinterest, ending up overtaking and overwhelming all other commentary. For us it is not just a matter of detecting the tendency to exhibit the appearance of cakes, sandwiches, soufflés and so on, but of reflecting on how this way of relating to what we eat gives meaning to food (Marrone 2012a). We will come back to this.

But the relationship between food and language can also be understood in another way, perhaps less intuitive but therefore often more interesting: not the discourse *on* food but that *of* food (Marrone 2014b). In fact, preparing a dish involves acting on an expressive material – the so-called raw materials – which is presented to man as inarticulate. There are many edible plants and animals, but among these only a few are selected as pertaining to a certain culture and to be actually eaten. Furthermore, in most cases this does not happen directly. A tomato is first harvested and then, as appropriate, cut, peeled, chopped, squashed, boiled, fried, etc. First of all, it had been planted, nourished, and therefore also selected from many species, that are far from natural, being the result of hybrids created by man. The proof of this is the red colour which we usually associate with the tomato, which is by no means the only one that it can assume, but simply the one that has ended up imposing itself on our imagination. The raw materials are thus transformed into ingredients and subsequently further transformed in complex and articulated ways of creating that gastronomic unit with a deeply cultural connotation that is the dish. Just as happens in language, one does nothing but give *shape* to an initially inarticulate *material* in order to produce a *substance*. What is interesting is that even starting from a rather small set of raw materials and actions, an enormous variety of results is produced, often very different from each other such as the unleavened bread of the Jewish tradition compared to the French baguette.

However, the possibility of such a combination alone is not enough to make food semiotically relevant. For it to do so, it is necessary that the expression plane enters into a relationship of reciprocal presupposition with an equally complex content plane. It will not suffice to say that bread signifies something in a certain tradition, it must be argued that it is capable of articulating a broad set of concepts. Thus, for example, the many and varied ways of making bread in the different regions of Italy (even in the different provinces and individual towns) end up signifying – starting right from their characteristics (type and duration of leavening, ratio and consistency of crust and crumb, quantity of salt, any seasoning, etc.) – not only the identity of those who produce it but also, more generally, other peculiarities of the gastronomy that characterises that place. Like the unsalted Tuscan bread, which is ideal for enjoying the cold cuts that are produced in abundance in this region.

But the relationships between linguistic structures and gastronomic structures are manifold. Marrone (2014b) shows, for example, how the dog-eating custom that survives in some areas of China can be traced back to linguistic categories. There are in fact three levels of proximity that the enunciative system distinguishes, indicating them with demonstratives: an intimate zone, indicated in Italian by *questo* [*this* in English or *ici* in French]; a near one, indicated by *codesto* [*this/that* or *là*]; and a distant one, to which *quello* [*that* or *là bas*] refers. These spaces then act as an implicit basis for distinguishing between domestic, courtyard and exotic animals, of which only the former are normally considered edible. The point is then that in some communities the dog is not seen as a pet as it is in the West, but as an animal to be kept at the same distance as chickens and rabbits. A thesis that was demonstrated when, thanks to globalisation and the Internet, in China dogs began to be thought of as pets and therefore welcomed into homes. A short time later a movement was founded to ban dog meat from the table.

3. Gastronomy as a semiosphere

What is particularly interesting about this second type of discourse in which food itself articulates a form of conceptual reflection, are the issues that emerge. One need only to semiotically analyse the evolution of haute cuisine, for example, to realise how chefs – through their own dishes – reflect on perception and the relationship between the senses, presenting a vast repertoire of deceptions and surprises. The greatest chefs, meanwhile, go even further, transforming food into a veritable metalanguage. Massimo Bottura, for example, created his *Compressione d'una pasta e fagioli* [Compression of pasta and beans] as a tribute to one of the most traditional dishes of Italian cuisine, managing to problematise both the relationship with the past (and with different Italian traditions) and with the great European schools of cuisine, namely French and Spanish (Mangano 2013).

Often it is not the dish that is analysed, but as suggested by Greimas, one or more recipes. The recipe is in fact an object of meaning that lends itself well to being de-constructed through semiotic tools; being in fact the textualisation of the competence necessary to make the dish, it ends up conveying its deep meaning (Marrone 2014b; Giannitrapani and Puca eds.

2021). This comparison, as the analysis of the *risotto alla Milanese* by Marrone (2013a) illustrates, makes it possible not only to highlight the differences between the various ways of preparing the same dish, but also the complexity of translating the sensations of those who cook and eat into words and pictures. And if, as in this instance, one of the recipes comes from the pen of a writer like Carlo Emilio Gadda, whose aim is to parody both the textual genre and the dish itself (not surprisingly called *risotto patrio*), the search for expressive forms is perfectly combined with those of content.

Thus, through food, we end up facing fundamental problems for the sciences of signification such as those related to perception and sensation/aesthetics, aesthetics, and the translation between languages and the way in which linguistic and semiotic models allow us to recognise the semantic complexity of food and its profound logics. Such as those that lead Marrone to identify two different languages in the case of nutrition, based on those of visual semiotics regarding images (Marrone 2012a). Looking at a painting or a photograph, in fact, it is possible to focus on two different dimensions: the figurative, which depends on being able to recognise figures from the world such as a tree or a house, and the plastic, which takes into account the effects of meaning produced by the essential traits which make up the image (position, colour, and shape together with all the other, often difficult to name, sensible qualities they present). The same happens with food. Our first introduction to the tasting experience, which the semiologist describes as tasty, is based precisely on the recognition of gustatory figures, flavours that we have learned to recognise since being weaned, distinguishing a bite of veal from one of cauliflower. A slow education, which has led to the construction of a vast encyclopaedic competence of which we are rarely aware, linked as it is to a specific culture, to the ingredients that are used in it and to the way in which they are combined. The verbal language lends itself well to translating these bundles of sensations by naming ingredients and flavours such as a *ragù* or a *minestrone*. However, not only is it possible to unpack this sort of cumulative perception by putting aside learned cognitive schemes, but also to focus on aspects of food that, although perfectly tangible, cannot be described other than by constructing an *ad-hoc* metalanguage. To give an example: the *tannic* flavour that sommeliers speak of in their jargon, to indicate that sensation of astringency experienced when drinking a red wine and which is often described as ‘dry’.

Here we cannot strictly speak of flavour and therefore of taste – it is no coincidence that to convey the idea we refer to touch – yet it is a quality that characterises the experience of drinking and which, therefore, identifies a wine. So, this entire series of such important stimuli are of pertinence to another level of meaning that Marrone calls flavourful. Think of the crunchiness of a tart, the consistency of a mayonnaise or the creaminess of a pureed soup, impossible to describe except through similes, metaphors, and synaesthesia according to an intersemiotic translation mechanism. Think too, of that study in contrasts which is produced precisely at this level, by combining different states of materials and different sensations, giving rise to semi-symbolisms that haute cuisine in particular makes extensive use of.

It should be clear at this point that in everyday experience the discourse around food and that of food are constantly overlapping. The most obvious example is at the table itself, be it at home or in a restaurant, where while tasting the food, one invariably ends up talking about it, sometimes discussing how it was prepared, or evoking other meals, other recipes, other moments. The great chefs know this well and would never dream of bringing a dish to the table without accompanying it with a story that prepares the diner to experience it. The product of all this is conviviality, which on the one hand is about intersubjective relationships between diners mediated by food, on the other it concerns subject-object relationships with food.

Nutrition can therefore be thought of as a specific semiosphere, according to the apt expression that Lotman coined in response to Vernadsky's biosphere. But if the biosphere is the set of creatures and processes that allows biological life, and the semiosphere instead is the set of texts and languages that allows intellectual life, we can think of gastronomy as a dimension that brings together and coordinates them both. This is confirmed by the variety presented by gastronomic systems and the different ways they presuppose to relate to the environment on the one hand and to other human beings on the other. In short, the idea that you eat to feed yourself is just as reductive as the idea that you dress to cover yourself. If fashion, with its continuous renewal, clearly shows the importance of the meanings we give to what we wear, gastronomies remind us the extent to which identity also passes through what we eat.

The book *Forme della cucina siciliana* [Forms of Sicilian cuisine] edited by Alice Giannitrapani and Davide Puca (2021), semiotically reconstructs a specific gastronomy such as that of Sicily. Italian cuisine, as is well known, is anything but uniform within the country, being the product of very different regional traditions, which at the end of the nineteenth century were (at least in part) collected in a recipe book, the famous *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* [Science in the kitchen] and the art of eating well), with which Pellegrino Artusi effectively 'unified' the country gastronomically. For semioticians, it is not a question of historicising a gastronomic tradition, nor of sanctioning what does and does not belong to the 'real' Sicilian cuisine, but of questioning those processes in the *invention of tradition*, in the words of Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), which allow more or less recurring uses to impose themselves, thus entering the gastronomic system. A process of affirmation that obviously finds its opposite in the decline of certain dishes, the way they are prepared or the use of certain ingredients. As a language, gastronomy is in fact a dynamic entity, which is affected by socio-cultural transformations and reflects them in such a way that every dish, and every variant of it, carries with it an implicit memory of the processes that produced it. Processes that semiotics is able to reconstruct by analysing the different recipe books in which the regional gastronomic imaginary is affirmed time and again and therefore, in fact, constructed.

It is no coincidence that the index of *Forme della cucina siciliana* is presented as a menu, in which there are first, second and dessert courses, as well as dishes that do not find their place in this distinction, as is the case of the *caponata*, and reflections on cooking methods such as “fried”, from which actual classes of dishes descend. These are exemplary gastronomic objects, which are treated in the same way in which Lévi-Strauss treated myths: trying to identify the deep structure that characterises them beyond the many variations that occur (Lévi-Strauss 1968). The form referred to in the title is thus the semiotic one, henceforth understood as a profound logic starting from which the chain of transformations is put into action that makes a *sarda a beccafico*, *cous cous*, an *arancina* or a *cassata* the expression of a gustative identity that is socially and culturally determined internally but also effective externally. Not only because it renders this tradition recognisable to non-Sicilians, but because it is continually imitated, remade, reinvented, modified, betrayed, praised, and denigrated but hard to ignore. The semiotic boundary of a semiosphere, Lotman (1985) argued, is the sum of the linguistic filters of translation towards other semiospheres: those of other gastronomies but also those of other languages (Stano ed. 2015a); a constant process on closer inspection which Simona Stano also deals with in *Eating the Other: Translation of the Culinary Code* (Stano 2015b).

Similar in character is also *Su porceddu. Storia di un piatto, racconto di un popolo* [Story of a dish, tale of a people] by Franciscu Sedda (2020), in which the author focuses on a single dish, the *suckling pig* cooked in Sardinia. Sedda shows well how it is possible to reconstruct, starting from a single culinary text, an entire culture in all its facets, from political to religious, according to the Lotmanian principle whereby every cultural system produces artefacts (literary, artistic but also, as in our case, gastronomic) to which it entrusts the possibility of signifying its overall articulation.

4. Food and media

The panorama of media products that revolve around food is vast and varied. Not only because food, despite everything, continues to be in fashion, managing to get people to talk about it on television, in newspapers and in digital media, but because it is itself a medium, a means of communication. Rather than conveying messages, as we have said, it is in a literal sense the place of mediation, of an encounter that is about sharing but also a premise for the emergence of individuality. Semiotic analysis then becomes a way to understand which image of food is offered by the media in each case, how much of the complexity of this cultural phenomenon is preserved and how much is lost, but also which strategies are followed to talk about it.

Let us take, for example, television cooking shows (Giannitrapani 2014a). They range from entertainment programmes, in which you are catapulted into the kitchen of the expert of the moment to follow the preparation of a dish in every detail, to competitions of all kinds, in which food becomes a battlefield between individuals willing to undergo the harsh judgment of severe critics in order to be called chef for a day (Marrone 2013b). And maybe write a recipe book to add to the hundreds that are on display in bookshops. If on the one hand the implicit model is Julia Child, who with her television show taught the techniques of French cuisine to an American audience, thus importing a refined palate into a country that was not used to it; on the other hand, global successes such as *Masterchef* make food into something different: no longer a product to be eaten, perhaps enjoyed in company, but a performance to be evaluated in small bites, only for weighing up its strengths and weaknesses but not for actually eating. And, of course, an object to look at, maniacally taking care of the final telegenic presentation of the dish, as well as aestheticising the stages of its preparation (*ibidem*). For semioticians, everything in these broadcasts signifies an idea of food: the television studio, the choice of presenters and judges, the type of direction, the visual identity of the programme, what is said about food but also everything that happens around it. After all, every show does nothing but manipulate a pre-existing image – yet by doing so, it continually regenerates it, changing and adapting it to the constant change of perspective that a living culture cannot fail to produce. It is not surprising then, that after all the cooking shows that have appeared in recent years, even at a domestic level, more attention is paid to the presentation of dishes than ever before, and that sales of pastry cutters and syringes have increased significantly.

Cinema has also dealt with gastronomy on several occasions, offering interesting examples of how food not only crosses genres but can take on actual roles within narratives (Mangiapane 2014a; Marrone 2014a; Marrone 2015b). Thus, if in *Babette's Feast*, just to give one example, food can be considered a co-star of the story, if not even the starring role alongside the woman who prepares it, the cook Babette Hersant (Mangiapane 2014a; Marrone 2014c, 2015b), in the animated film *Ratatouille*, produced by Disney for a completely different type of audience, cooking (knowing how to do it or not knowing how to do it, but above all being able to do it and wanting to do it) becomes the activity around which the whole story revolves (Marrone 2014a). The meaning of food serves the narration and, conversely, the narration further articulates its cultural value. So, it turns out that a 'simple' animated movie and a refined auteur film basically thematise the same thing, namely the symbolic effectiveness of food in all its complexity. Another interesting example is that of the television adaptation of *Gli arancini di Montalbano*, an investigative story by Andrea Camilleri which is part of the successful series starring the famous police inspector from Vigàta (Marrone 2012b). Here too the food is not a side dish to the story, a simple note of local colour that adds to an already strongly connoted Sicilian atmosphere, but plays a key, active and central role, offering the narrator the opportunity to show, through talking about food, what it never shows, that is the mental process by which the inspector understands who the culprit is. In short, getting inside Montalbano's head is equivalent to knowing how that "beautiful ball" – the arancino – is made.

If there is a media product that is forced to articulate gastronomic imagery, it is undoubtedly advertising (Mangano 2014b, 2020). It is a textual typology often discussed in semiotics, describing the way in which within consumer society, through the micro-narratives of commercials and billboards, the meaning of the products has been constructed, strategically comparing their merits. In the case of food, looking at advertising does not simply involve observing the different communication strategies implemented – systematising the different ways in which it is suggested to think about it and then oscillating between the two opposites that sometimes see it as nourishment, and therefore a means to live, and other times as an existential goal – but to reconstruct the imagery that precedes all of this. When a commercial or advertisement states how the consumer should understand pasta, a mozzarella, or a snack, they do so within a broader and more systematic perspective, albeit completely implicit. This can be seen clearly when switching from a synchronic comparative perspective to a diachronic approach. Within a few years, not only does advertising speak differently about the same product, relying on other values, displaying it differently and accompanying it with different descriptions, but even those to whom it is addressed change a great deal, those enunciatees that the world of marketing calls "target". In fact, when we talk about gastronomic imagery, we must not focus only on food, on what it signifies at a given moment, but also on people, the ideal consumers, or those who are presupposed to consume it, as well as on the reasons that are meant to push them to do so and on the way in which a meal fits into that other project of meaning which is everyday life. Hence the semiotic value of food products such as snacks (Marrone 2013b), a real invention of the contemporary world thanks to which a system of breaks from daily activities is institutionalised. Does the break come first or the food you fill it with? Here advertising plays an essential role: not only must it promote the product, present, and make it attractive, but also place it in the space and time of the many possible daily activities of an audience that, needless to say, should ideally be as wide as possible. If meaning is not given to the moments that are not dedicated to eating, one cannot give meaning to those that are. The communication strategy is therefore not a way of getting a product noticed, making it 'attractive' and therefore appealing, but a way of giving meaning to the whole of life as a function of food. Thus, when advertising talks about milk, it ends up confronting its symbolic importance that reminds one of nourishment *par excellence*, but which also evokes an important erotic dimension which it regularly uses (Marrone 2015a). A selection of figures derives from it in which this substance takes the most diverse forms and does the most varied things, being continuously re-semantised in order to render it a sort of food joker, good for everything and everyone.

Even a simple logo is then able to tell us something about food if it is put in the condition of signification through analysis. That of the quintessential fast food McDonalds (Agnello 2003), yet also that of Slow Food (Marrone 2011b), a cultural movement launched to defend "good, clean and fair" food, according to the successful slogan invented by Carlo Petrini, which has become a hallmark to be affixed, suitably revised, on various types of food products but also on books and various events where there is something to eat and drink. Slow food is a pure brand since there isn't a company that produce food behind it but only an organization that over-labelproducts to certify their quality. A way to implicitly denouncing the inconsistency of other forms of labelling such as those of the many denominations of origin (DOC, DOP etc.) but also to affirm the need to give an identity to products through communication (Puca 2021). Brand logics that are inscribed in those essential forms that logos present and which, under the lens of semiotics, express their complexity and the set of significations they carry.

Finally, there is the Web, an ocean into which everything we have talked about so far flows and is channelled but also rewritten, rethought, transformed, adulterated, and translated into other languages (Mangiapane 2014b). And if the many culinary blogs, some of which are so popular as to become full-blown authorities, re-propose the recipe book model, hybridising it with the lifestyle magazine and visually enriching it as much as possible with photographs of all kinds, the thematic channels on YouTube not only re-propose television models, but continually invent new ones, while trying to carve out some visibility. A heterogeneous mass of texts which not only talk about food, but where the food itself talks, articulated as a dimension of existence in relation to others. And so successful blogs end up being inundated by brands that go to great lengths to use them as showcases for their products. All that remains for semioticians is to work comparatively on what they considers texts, and therefore, in accordance with the etymology of the word (the Latin *textum*), complex and composite structures such as fabric. From their threads emerge once again the communication strategies of the various blogs which, through semiotic tools, are not only identified but also inter-defined, recognising a deep level of signification in which the culinary values that are proposed time after time are articulated (Mangiapane 2014b). But above all, what emerges is perhaps the most relevant feature of Web-mediated communication, namely that the goal of any discourse, however formulated, is to construct the image of the speaker, that enunciator whose subjectivity for linguistics is altogether impossible to conceive outside of language. The blogger does not talk to someone about food, he talks about food to be someone.

5. Gastronomy without food

Gastronomy, we have said, is not only in what you eat but also in the many discourses that take it as an object. More often than what is commonly observed, however, such discourses are not held by means of words or images but by that entire set of objects without which, if you think about it, the transformations necessary to produce a dish or its experience of consumption could not be achieved. We are talking about cooking tools; knives as well as pots and pans or cutlery, but also about restaurants.

Let us start at the end. For a discipline that focuses on the processes of signification, a restaurant is not a simple support, a space in which to ingest a good or bad meal, it is something that plays an active role in the complex process on which, ultimately, this judgment depends (Giannitrapani 2014b; Giannitrapani ed. 2021). It is not just a matter of putting the diners at ease, of not disturbing them while they concentrate on the dish and of making sure that they can communicate with their table companions, but of contributing to the meaning that the food will assume for them. A dish is judged as typical not only on the basis of how it is made, but also by the place where it is eaten, on the way in which the space evokes figures and values or, on the contrary, decides to negate them. On the other hand, the McDonald's logo we were talking about earlier does not refer to food (as Burger King's does) but to the consumption space, those golden arches that were intended to welcome the customer into the magical world of fast food: easy, playful, carefree, even childish and, as we later learned, extremely dangerous to health.

But a restaurant is itself a complex object, a macro text whose meaning is determined by the interactions between many parts. If the first contact with it occurs at the entrance, there are many ways to manage this rite of passage, as fast as it is effective, which separates the tasting space from that of the city. Unless it does not separate it at all, as in those restaurants that showcase their guests (Giannitrapani 2014b; Giannitrapani ed. 2021) or in the case of street food (Ventura Bordenca 2021). And then there is the dining room, its possible environments, the table – also a variously configurable space (Boutaud ed. 2004) – right down to the plate. Not to mention the invisible spaces such as that of the kitchen, which remains hidden from the eyes of the customer until, as happens more and more often, it is decided to show it. Or even to host a table in there, as happens in some of the most prestigious starred restaurants, with only one condition: the table in the kitchen cannot be reserved. Only the chef can invite a customer to occupy it. It goes without saying that eating in the kitchen, next to those who elaborate what will be tasted a moment later and interacting with them is not the same as being in front of the finished work of art. We use the term deliberately to evoke the sphere of art with which gastronomy has always been confronted (Marrone 2014c; Mangano 2013); after all, eating in the kitchen can be likened to an artistic performance by both the chef and the diner. In short, as the context changes, as is obvious, the perception of food changes. The problem then is to what extent the idea of context as something that is 'outside' the text continues to be effective in explaining the effects of meaning that food produces. The semiotic approach based on the notion of text solves the problem: the gastronomic text is that unit of variable size and composition, with its own internal structural organisation, by which the meaning of a food experience is determined. The kitchen takes value from the room and the dish from the kitchen. If instead of granting exclusive access to the kitchen you make it visible, perhaps through a glass wall or a monitor, you are intervening on those variables that allow you to activate a dish. As is well known, it was Nelson Goodman who used the expression “activation” with respect to works of art, thus alluding to all those elements which, although not part of the work, contribute to giving it meaning, ranging from the museum building to the caption under the painting that it houses (Marrone 2014c). Even an object as small as a wine glass, therefore, can be thought of semiotically as a synaesthetic machine that helps to make sense of the fragrant liquid it contains (Galofaro 2005).

The transition from consumption to production, as mentioned, is short. A knife is an indispensable object in the kitchen; it serves to transform what we take from the environment, to separate what we consider useful from what is not, to give it a different physical form to prepare it for further transformations, or to even transform it into that unit of gastronomic meaning that is the bite-sized portion. For many it is therefore a mere tool in which, as the design mantra states, form follows function. One need only look at the knives produced by different cultures, however, to realise how the form can change enormously. And not because some peoples do not know how to make knives well, but because the transformative function they must perform is mediated by the gastronomic cultural factor. A Japanese *yanagi*, for example, is totally unsuitable for cutting steak but is excellent for accurately filleting raw fish. Semiotically analysing the design of objects allows us to reconstruct the implicit transformative logics it presupposes. In short, even a knife can be considered a text and therefore put in a position to signify the gastronomy that created it. The same happens with pots and pans and even with those ultra-technological tools that have recently begun to pass from professional kitchens into those of ordinary homes (Mangano 2019a).

But if design is a semiotic act, then cooking and design may have something in common. After all, for some years now, food design has become part of the galaxy of specialisations that the theory of design encompasses. But what does this practice consist of? Is it a somewhat explicit form of decorativism? And what relationship does it have to cooking, and therefore to gastronomy as a cultural practice? These questions are some of the starting points for the reflections found in the book *Che cos’è il food design* [What is food design?] (Mangano 2014a). After semiotically analysing various examples, it shows how food design requires a profound rethinking of food in terms of experience and not in terms of individual dishes. Here then lies the difference between a chef and a food designer: if food is the focus of activity for the former, the latter must take into account all those artefacts that make the food experience effective both for the individual and commercially. An activity for which knowledge of the processes of signification related to food is crucial (Mangano 2019b).

6. Ethics and politics of meaning

As we have seen, thinking about the processes of signification linked to food leads to progressively widening the gaze beyond what is actually ingested. One would think we were eating signs. In reality it is something more complex, because deciding what – or what not – to eat, indulging in the pleasures of gluttony or deciding not to, evaluating the nutritional characteristics of a food or systematically ignoring them, is an activity that, albeit limited in our individual lives, ends up touching upon several aspects. The dietary regime, commonly known as diet, is not a circumscribed practice but, as Foucault writes, an art of living (1984). For the French philosopher, dietetics began in ancient Greece as a way of conducting one's existence, problematising one's behaviour not only in terms of nutrition, but in the way one lives with others in society. Until the early eighteenth century, in fact, medical books not only offered food advice but also instructed on how to behave at the table like etiquette manuals. Eating correctly not only helped one to feel good but also to be regarded as better people (Marrone and Mangano eds. 2013). In short, food proves to be indispensable to existence, not because of the need to introduce calories into that machine that is the body, but because it subsumes and articulates multiple dimensions of individual and collective existence, qualifying itself as the place *par excellence* in which that fundamental opposition for the human being is resolved: the relationship between nature and culture. A relationship in which the first of these concepts is anything but primal, lacking spontaneity or purity; on the contrary, it exists as the opposite of that state of culture into which the human being, unlike any other animal, is inevitably born. A philosophical question of great complexity that we find ourselves addressing entirely implicitly even in a wholly everyday object such as the packaging of organic biscuits (Marrone 2011a). Images, materials, transparencies, graphic solutions, and colours only signify nature, unless proven, under the lens of semiotics, that these very different ideas are constructed to deny the industrial origin of these products.

It is not a question of using semiotics to analyse gastronomy, but of recognising that food and everything related to its production and consumption are themselves semiotic activities that serve to give meaning to something else, to everything else; even to ecology. The method serves to systematise a reflection, to identify the different levels of pertinence, to understand the links that exist between ethics and aesthetics, between body and mind, between doing and being. Diet, explains Ilaria Ventura Bordenca (2020), is a regime of meaning. The many possible dietary regimes, with their privations and their concessions, with their rituals, with the perspectives they impose on nutrition and, through it, on the entire existence, are social discourses which, by thematising the relationship with food, end up articulating the whole of life. In this regard, theory speaks of form of life, meaning by this the possibility that a dimension of existence expands beyond its own borders, eventually extending its logic to areas very different from it. A vegetarian is not just someone who does not eat meat, he is also someone who speaks a certain way, who dresses in certain clothes, who carries out certain activities, who reads certain books, who buys certain products, and we could go on and on. But above all, he does not look kindly on those who eat meat, and speak, dress, read, act, or buy differently from him. Of all the dimensions of living, that of food is the one that demonstrates the greatest capacity for expansion, as if its logic could translate any other within itself. Thus, if on the one hand it is inevitable that we talk about diets everywhere, on television and in advertising, in the design of tableware and food for children, in newspapers and on the Web, as shown by Ventura Bordenca's analyses, on the other it is necessary to question the function of food. Food is politics. It does not politicise; it is politics itself. It is so precisely because it translates social relations internally, giving them body and signifying them externally (Montanari ed. 2020). In short, food is politics because it is a language.

This long overview of studies carried out in Italy concerning the semiotics of gastronomy allows us at this point to reflect once more on the food-language relationship and on the simplification that transposing a system of signification to language often hides. We like to think that fashion, design, mathematics, computer coding and even music are languages, only to realise that they do not have the same characteristics as the language *par excellence*, that is natural language. Often because compared to the latter they are not as flexible, being specialised in conveying certain meanings and not others. This is why linguistics distinguishes between primary modelling systems and secondary modelling systems, assigning natural language to the first type due to the possibility it offers of translating the other sign systems within it. A good writer can easily illustrate a landscape with words, but also describe a space or evoke a melody. Without the structuring power of language considered as the supreme "stereotyping device" (Lotman and Uspensky 1975: 42) it would not be possible to make sense of other sign systems. The secondary modelling systems then rely on the primary modelling system, which is natural language, drawing from it the necessary articulatory capacity of the phenomena they concern. The hypothesis, that studies on the semiotics of food seem to support, is that even in the case of gastronomy we can speak of a primary modelling system as with natural language. "Food" – writes Marrone – "does not signify only what is said by the verbal language, but what it says regardless of it" (Marrone 2016: 187), imposing its structuring logics also on what food is not. Tell me what you eat, and I will tell you who you are? Much more: the thought of who we are is not only articulated in the brain but also in the stomach and in all that set of activities that are functional in the creation of something worth swallowing. That is why, once the intoxication of gastromania, foodies, Instagram pages full of photographs of food, gourmet supermarkets, starred chefs and recipe books is over, it finally becomes possible to "rediscover the truth of food" (Marrone 2019: 7). A truth that resides in it being a total semiotic phenomenon.

It will be clear at this point what are the many possible repercussions of a semiotics of food. If the importance of proper nutrition education to prevent health problems has been understood for some years – think of the communication campaign promoted by the Obama administration in the United States against obesity – it is now clear that education relating to food and wine is not just about physical well-being. Food is a fundamental part of the cultural heritage, and therefore of the identity of a people, but also an extraordinary tool for integration and exchange. A centrality that immediately translates into the economy, as evidenced by the constant growth of this sector or phenomena such as food and wine tourism. Not surprisingly, in Italy, in addition to degree courses in Gastronomic Sciences, high schools (which in the Italian system precede university studies) specifically dedicated to this area, such as the high school in Communication and Culture of Enogastronomy, have recently been founded. In particular, the establishment of the first of these high schools, that of the Florio Institute in Trapani, is based on a project conducted by this institute together with several European universities, including that of Palermo, entitled Culture and Communication of Taste (www.cucota.eu), with a homonymous manual among its products. Semiotics plays a central role in this educational environment as the tools at its disposal make it possible to restore the complexity of food, reconstructing the mechanisms and conditions that make it a system of signification. Before being able to think strategically about communicating the cultural heritage of enogastronomy, in fact, it is necessary to understand how it produces meaning.

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Sociosemiotics of Advertising: Experiences, Themes and Perspectives

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Summary. This paper aims to retrace the main stages of sociosemiotics of advertising in Italy, from the influence of French semiotics to the interdisciplinary dialogue with marketing and sociology of consumption. Furthermore, the paper focuses on the main research themes explored by the sociosemiotics of advertising in Italy, such as: the language of food, in its multiple and complex dimensions; the representation of family models; the semiotic analysis of practices and, in particular, of consumption practices; the study of crisis communication, with specific reference to the Covid-19 pandemic. The paper then shows how, over the last ten years, sociosemiotics in Italy has been characterised by a particular attention to the analysis of social texts and how these studies are connected to the structuralist and generative approach of Greimasian semiotics: hence a series of tools to identify the dominant values, the narrative and discursive structures recurring within the texts, with the aim to grasp the representations of the social, the images of everyday life, the changing interactions between society and advertising texts.

Keywords. Semiotics, sociosemiotics, advertising, consumption, text analysis

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Artikel hat zum Ziel, die Hauptetappen der soziosemiotischen Werbeforschung in Italien nachzuzeichnen, beginnend mit dem Einfluss der französischen Semiotik bis hin zum interdisziplinären Dialog mit den Bereichen Marketing und Soziologie des Konsums. Darüber hinaus liegt der Fokus des Artikels auf den zentralen Forschungsthemen, die von der soziosemiotischen Werbeforschung in Italien untersucht werden, wie beispielsweise die Sprache der Nahrung in all ihren vielfältigen und komplexen Dimensionen, die Darstellung von Familienmodellen, die semiotische Analyse von Praktiken, insbesondere von Konsumpraktiken, sowie die Untersuchung der Krisenkommunikation mit speziellem Bezug auf die Covid-19-Pandemie. Der Artikel verdeutlicht zudem, wie sich die italienische Soziosemiotik in den letzten zehn Jahren durch eine ausgeprägte Beachtung der Analyse sozialer Texte auszeichnet und wie diese Studien mit dem strukturalistischen und generativen Ansatz der Greimaschen Semiotik verknüpft sind. Hierbei kommen verschiedene Methoden zum Einsatz, um dominante Werte, narrative und diskursive Strukturen innerhalb der Texte zu identifizieren. Ziel ist es, die Darstellungen des Sozialen, die Bilder des Alltagslebens sowie die sich wandelnden Wechselwirkungen zwischen Gesellschaft und Werbetexten zu erfassen.

Schlüsselwörter. Semiotik, Soziosemiotik, Werbung, Verbrauch, Textanalyse

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of the Sixties, the science of signification has shown a great interest in advertising, for its communicative objectives as well as for the linguistic and expressive mechanisms that regulate it. The first semiological studies were interested in analysing the rhetorical strategies implemented by advertising. The linguistic and semiological gaze on advertising, supported by the notions of rhetoric, goes beyond the idea of commercial communication as a hidden persuasion. We recall the first analyses conducted in this regard by Roland Barthes (1964) and, in Italy, by Umberto Eco (1968).[1] In these studies, the rhetorical devices are considered as techniques for multiplying the meanings of the text, and for placing next to the denoted content, which is provided by the linguistic code, many other possible connotated meanings, that refer to cultural universes or sub-codes of ideological, anthropological, or aesthetic types. The use of rhetoric in advertising allows us to process the advertising text as a machine that has different levels of meaning, the linguistic and the visual, interacting with each other but different in terms of communicative effectiveness.[2]

Starting from the Seventies, the rhetorical models are replaced by logical-narrative models, which in the advertising field began to spread also in Italy at the beginning of the Nineties, thanks to the studies of Jean-Marie Floch (1990). In fact, there is a need to replace the semiological analysis adopted in the Sixties and Seventies, that identified signs to be classified in appropriate rhetorical rubrics, with a semiotic gaze that searches for the text structures that lie beneath the signs, to reconstruct the internal logic and the components of the entire advertising communication. Thus, the advertising text does not present as many messages as there are expressive substances used by it, but it emits a single message that grounds its unity in the deep structures of the narrative type of text. Advertising is not so much a rhetorical form of persuading the consumer to buy certain products, as a procedure for enhancing both the products and the brand-image that supports them. The concept of value becomes central:[3] the consumer attributes values to the products and, in the same way, the consumer's identity is determined each time on the basis of the valorisations associated to the objects.

Towards the end of the Eighties, another approach to the study of advertising begins to take shape. Advertising is no longer seen only as a textual mechanism, whose functioning and internal structuring criteria must be identified, but as a discourse able to act in the reality that surrounds it, interacting with it. Advertising is part of social reality, one of its constituent components and actively contributes to determining the dynamics of society. Therefore, the path of a sociosemiotics of advertising begins to be followed, for which advertising is a social discourse among other social discourses, such as the political, journalistic, economic discourses, and so on. We no longer dwell on how advertising represents reality, because it is part of reality, acts in it and transforms it. Advertising must be thought of as a discourse that “says” and “does”, that represents and modifies, where every word is a strategic move, and every action has a significant value (Marrone 2001: 154). Consequently, we do not bother to analyse the advertised products from the point of view of their material components, but we focus on the intangible and symbolic components of the objects, on those aspects that can be enhanced by potential consumers.

In this essay we will try to retrace the main stages of the sociosemiotics of advertising in Italy, from the influence of French semiotics to the contacts with sociology of consumption and marketing. Further, we will focus on the main themes explored in Italian sociosemiotics of advertising, to then conclude the paper with an overview on the most recent trends related to the spread of digital marketing and advertising on social networks.

2. The influence of French semiotics

As prefigured by Greimas in several of his writings (Greimas and Courtés 1979), sociosemiotics asserted itself in France thanks to some works by Landowski (1989) and in Italy following the studies of Ferraro (1999), Marrone (2001), Pozzato (2001), Semprini (2003), Pezzini (2008). These studies laid the foundations for what would become the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising.

In particular, the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising can be placed in the context of the “spectacular semiotics”[4], interested in studying the way in which society is reflected in the texts and, by observing itself “in the mirror”, it changes. The basic idea is that between social reality and the discourses that represent it there is a mirror-image relationship of reciprocal influence. The theoretical presupposition of “spectacular semiotics” is that social phenomena are considered to be languages in all respects. Sociosemiotics is not interested in verifying the way in which society is reflected in the language, or the way in which language accounts for society. Rather, it focuses on social phenomena – media, fashion, advertising, new technologies, spaces, politics, etc. – as mechanisms of signification, articulated universes of meaning. In other words, social phenomena must not be translated into language, but they must be considered as languages, entities already endowed with meaning (Marrone 2001: XVI–XVII). In these terms, the sociosemiotics of advertising will be the analysis of the consumption models proposed by the advertising texts. As stated by Marrone (2001: 176), product and consumer are constituted in their reciprocal relationship, a relationship that is proposed by the advertising story in different ways each time, on the basis, on the one hand of the economic conditions of the market, and on the other of the wishes circulating in the imagination social of the moment.

Therefore, the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising is in continuity with the studies on sociosemiotics conducted in France by Landowski, many of which are contained in the book *La société réfléchie: essais de socio-sémiotique* (1989). As pointed out by Landowski (1989), the advertising discourse is a privileged place for staging certain social relationships. In the advertising text, a company or a public institution must configure its audience and stage the type of relationship they want to establish with it. With precise enunciative strategies, a sender can enter directly into the message, or he can prepare an apparently neutral and objective text. Indeed, advertising portrays both the "desirable" objects and the "desiring" subjects. The text constitutes the identity of its audience by giving shape to its desires.

Analysing a corpus of institutional advertisements, Landowski (1989: 137) notes the presence of two discursive logics: the "logic of purchase", which, like brand communication, intends to propose objects to be purchased, and the "logic of the contract", which instead tends to create cooperative relationships between sender and receiver. If the first is based on a commercial activity (it technically specifies the customer's needs and the products to be offered), the second builds a discourse based on the idea of "being". The two communication logics can coexist, or the institution can communicate with its public choosing one of them, depending on the contexts and strategies. According to Landowski, indeed, two types of customers can be imagined and therefore inscribed in the institutional advertising discourse: an independent clientele, already informed, which is therefore driven by a purchase request; and customers who are uncertain and in search of their own identity, dependent and to be informed, therefore sensitive to the call of a partnership bond based on the discourse of "being", rather than that of "doing". By setting up the advertising discourse in one way or another, the institutions create narrative grammar and stage intersubjective relationships. Most of the time, Landowski notes, the two logics coexist because the simulacrum of the public that one intends to inscribe in the discourse, and therefore to "manipulate", is not always clear. In these cases, advertising systematically oscillates between the two options.

Landowski's sociosemiotics is the basis of the study conducted by Semprini (1996) on Benetton communication. Semprini identifies different phases of Benetton advertising: the "prehistoric phase" (1966–1983), the "cycle of difference" (1984–1985), the "cycle of equality" (1986–1991), the "cycle of death" (1991–1992), the "cycle of truth" (1993), and the "cycle of blood" (1993–1994). According to Semprini (1996), the Benetton advertising campaign directed by Oliviero Toscani can be read as an attempt by the advertising discourse to occupy positions within the social discourse that were previously foreign to it. A similar trend is already visible in the Benetton press advertisements and posters of the mid-Eighties, in which ethical and social issues, such as racial differences and integration, begin to be represented. These advertisements arouse amazement in a social context such as that of the time, dominated by contrary communicative tendencies, aimed at amusing, surprising and spectacularising everyday life. However, it was in the two-year period 1991–1992 that Benetton advertisements reached the culmination of this communication path, in the phase that Semprini calls "the cycle of death". The images are aggressive, violent, show pain, death and desolation. A realistic code of representation is chosen through agency photos that show images of bloody, dramatic and "real" events: the desperation of refugees forced to abandon their means of transport, a soldier gripping a human thigh bone, a burning car, a man murdered in the street by the mafia. With this campaign, the brand renounces to bring an ideal world to life and focuses on those events in front of which all men are equal: life and death. These advertisements aroused harsh controversy. The most contested image was that of a young American, terminally ill with AIDS, photographed dying in his bed, surrounded by a crying family.

The Benetton campaign can be analysed from the point of view of its positioning in the social discursive system and it is interesting to note how in this case the advertising discourse has attempted to invade themes and values (political, medical, religious values) that traditionally belonged to other discursive regimes such as for example the journalistic one. In this game of erosion of spaces and re-negotiation of discursive boundaries, the overall system is modified. For instance, the journalistic could be hybridised by an advertising style. To stand out and be successful, however, a statement must defeat difficult attacks. This is why the sociosemiotic gaze must analyse the metadiscursive conditions through which the remarks are legitimised in the space of social discursiveness. There are "true" statements that fail to legitimise themselves as social discourses and "false" statements that manage to impose themselves in the semiosphere. Semprini (2003: 22) states that the history of communication is full of examples of this kind. Often more than "what is said" counts "who said it" and "how it is said": the performative effect is much more linked to the legitimacy of the enunciator than to the truth of the utterance.

If it is true that brand communication today is characterised by a substantial lack of specificity, as it moves further and further away from the product and stages possible worlds that are considered attractive, it should be noted the cases of some big brands that impose themselves in the discursive universe with absolutely innovative strategies. An example is the Adidas "I kiss football" campaign, built around the character Sonny, a young football fan, born in Africa and became famous in Europe thanks to his passion for this sport. It is, as Ferraro (2003) argues, an intermediary campaign, in the sense that it makes the television video interact with the website on the net. The video begins with images of Sonny in Africa (he is filmed while playing with a ball on the beach), then his contacts with the world of European football are described, followed by his notoriety in the media. Lastly, the Adidas brand took the stage to sanction its real and media success by choosing Sonny as its testimonial. Beyond the technical aspects, Ferraro chooses the Adidas case to say that the big brands no longer produce the advertising event but use their power and their economic capacity to bring to attention something that has developed autonomously. According to Ferraro (2003: 179), the logic of the operation conceived by Adidas is quite clear: gaining visibility for oneself by working on the visibility of something or someone whose existence and value is (or pretends to be) completely independent from the brand. The brand assumes "the discourse of others": it does not build advertising but makes use of discourses that circulate in the semiosphere, decides to sponsor, to feed to organise, and to distribute them. Adidas shows the power of choice, of selection, and does so semiotically by installing itself in the discourse as an actor able to sanction and to exhibit power.

A recent example is an advertisement of the "Made in Bangladesh" campaign, launched in 2014 by the clothing brand American Apparel (Boero 2017). The protagonist of the campaign is a 22-year-old model of Bangla origin, Maks, who fled her country at the age of four. In the photo, the girl is wearing only a pair of jeans; her naked breasts are only partially covered by the words "Made in Bangladesh", in black and in bold. The photo has a neutral and bare background, which highlights the represented subject. The main textual part, characterised by the words "Made in Bangladesh", is based on a linguistic game of polyvalence: on the one hand it indicates the geographical origin of the model but, on the other, it draws attention to Bangladesh and the exploitation of indigenous workers of the manufacturing sector, forced to work exhausting shifts and with negligible wages. Below, in the body copy, the company has chosen to include Maks's personal story: from when, as a child, she decided to leave her country until arriving in California, where, according to the girl's words, she found her own identity. The "Made in Bangladesh" advertising campaign is part of a corpus already marked by numerous advertising operations widely contested by the public opinion: from shots portraying children as highly "sexualised" subjects to the mannequins exposed with false pubic hair. In this case the advertising discourse tends to overlap the ethical and religious one, passing from provocation to social denunciation. The complaint is aimed primarily at the precarious conditions of the workforce in Bangladesh, the first country in the world for the large-scale production of bras and the second largest producer of clothing in the world. Secondly, the selection of a young immigrant who fled Bangladesh and its religious restrictions as a brand ambassador testifies to the company's desire to support the fight against Islamic fundamentalism and promote individual freedom in all its expressions, including sexual freedom.

The sociosemiotic gaze is therefore fixed on the social inscription of meaning, on the construction of meanings as objects of social conflict, power, constitution, or dissolution, of groups and positions, on the permanent battle to be able to assume, legitimise and make a discursive position true, on the relationship between discursive formations and systems of belief, value, ideology. In this sense the sociosemiotic gaze has as its vocation the critical analysis of current society, where the main object of the analysis is no longer the traditional categories of historicistic, political or sociological analysis, but those of the communicative universe (Semprini 2003: 23). The construction of legitimacy is particularly important for the corporate world and in particular for the world of brands, where it is essential to gain a place in the social discourse system and maintain a certain level of credibility (Traini 2008).

3. Contacts with marketing and with the sociology of consumption

Since the early 2000s, the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising has established a fruitful dialogue with both marketing and sociology of consumption. Hence a series of contributions interested in investigating the possibilities of intersection with the disciplines mentioned above. Indeed, as highlighted by Codeluppi (2020: 79), advertising is a complex language and to analyse the meanings expressed by this type of communication it is necessary to resort to the contribution of different disciplines.

As for the relations with the marketing field, we can trace the bases in some works by Jean-Marie Floch, who at the beginning of the Nineties collected a series of interesting studies on this subject in the book *Sémiotique, marketing et communication. Sous les signes, les stratégies* (1990). We can remember in particular the essay *"J'aime, j'aime, j'aime..." Publicité automobile et système des valeurs de consummation* in which, applying the tools of generative semiotics to a set of advertising texts in the automotive sector, he shows the possibility of dialogue between semiotics and marketing: this opens the way to what would become the semiotics of advertising and consumption. At the basis of these studies there are the theoretical and analytical tools made available by Greimasian semiotics, such as the semiotic square, through which it is possible to reconstruct a typology of the possible forms that advertising communication uses to enhance the objects it must advertise. Hence the axiology of consumption values[5], which still today, after thirty years, is the basis of numerous investigations conducted on advertising from a semiotic point of view (Boero ed. 2020). In this regard, we recall the works of Grandi (1994), Ceriani (2001, 2007, 2018), Bianchi (2005), Finocchi (ed. 2006), Bianchi and Ragonese (2013), Peverini (2017), who developed Greimasian methods and tools for the analysis of advertising and marketing communication. Marrone (2007) extends these reflections to the semiotic study of the brand, suggesting going beyond the idea of schematic narrativity, on which many analyses of semiotic application to advertising and marketing discourse have also been based, to look at forms of subjectivity and experience more related to affectivity, esthesia, corporeality, or towards the sphere of forms of life and the rhythms of transformation of social behaviour. Recently, Bianchi and Cosenza (eds. 2020) edited a volume dedicated to digital communication, collecting a series of contributions centred on the possibilities of dialogue between semiotics and digital marketing, from Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) activities to new branding strategies in business communication.

If on the one hand semiotics looks at the world of marketing, at its objects of study and its methods of investigation, on the other it is the world of marketing and business communication that focuses on the descriptive language and investigation tools of semiotics. We find some examples in the works on consumer experience by Ferraresi and Schmitt (2007), on brand communication by Musso (2005), on consumption practices and new marketing trends, also with reference to local brands, by Qualizza (2006). The advertising universe thus reveals itself as a large machine that takes from the collective imagination already existing situations, desires or needs and transforms them internally for its own specific communication objectives, translates them in stories of Subjects that, in order to realise themselves, go in search of the most diverse Objects, in which the most diverse social values are inscribed. The semiotic analysis of advertising thus becomes a real social investigation into the motivations of consumption, with the task of finding underneath this apparent diversity of the world, a series of narrative constants, of invariant forms of enhancement of Objects by Subjects.

In addition to marketing, sociosemiotics in Italy maintains a fruitful dialogue with the sociological studies, because they share a common interest in investigating the consumption system. One of the scholars who most traveled the path of dialogue between sociology and sociosemiotics is Vanni Codeluppi who, in various books and papers (2001, 2010, 2020), has shown interest in the semiotic method for analysing social and cultural phenomena. In particular, Codeluppi has deepened the discourse of consumer practices in various works, as well as the study of advertising in an analytical perspective, able to grasp the potential benefits deriving from an interdisciplinary dialogue. Thus, in the essay *Semiotica e pubblicità: il problema della marca* (2020), he recognises the usefulness of the sociosemiotic approach in the study of advertising, an approach that considers texts as expressive tools, capable of producing representations, but also as discourses able to act on reality and to produce symbolic meanings. This leads to an analysis of the role actually played by texts in society, in other words, the ability of the texts to act and contribute to the process of building social reality. We also recall the works by Fabris on the postmodern consumer (2003) and on societing (2008), where often there are references to semiotics and to the need to extend the sociological gaze towards the semiotic metalanguage, and those of Polesana (2016, 2020), who conducted investigations very close to the semiotic field, insisting on the relevance of the concept of value in brand communication policies.

Precisely by virtue of this convergence of interest in the same objects of investigation, sociosemiotics has sometimes been confused with sociology. Marrone (2017), in the introduction to the essay *Le comunicazioni di massa in Italia: sguardo semiotico e malocchio della sociologia* by Paolo

Fabbri, specifies the difference between the two approaches. If on the one hand, in various ways, the methodological theme is present in the sociological discipline, and on this the dialogue with semiotics could at least in principle be easier, what keeps the two approaches distant, requiring the construction of adequate connections, is the question of the object: given as evidence for sociology, and constructed as a heuristic problem, instead, for semiotics (Marrone 2017: 13).

This distinction can be summarised by the passage “from facts to meaning”. As explained by Fabbri (1973), when sociology turns its attention to mass communications it is forced to deal with the problem of meaning, which in communication processes is constitutively present. In other words, upstream of the processes of communicative transmission there are also procedural mechanisms for the construction of meaning, whose coding and decoding agents are social subjects in all respects. Only in these terms it will be possible to speak of a sociosemiotics, that seems to be the normal continuation of a sociology of the media based on the structural principles of semiotics.

So even if the two disciplines maintain interest in the same objects of investigation, the approach with which they address them changes. Two disciplines, consequently, close together, able to work synergistically but with distinct approaches. It follows that sociosemiotics does not study the social directly, as sociology does by dealing with empirical phenomena linked to lived life, but deals with social phenomena as effects of meaning: semiotically, indeed, the social is not an empirical datum, the more or less hidden laws of which must be revealed, but an effect of constructed sense of which it is necessary to identify the constitutive procedures (Marrone 2001: XVI–XVII).

Therefore, the concreteness of social reality, for semiotics, is anything but immediate and the hypothesis is that it always has to do with constructed objects. If on the one hand sociosemiotics turns its gaze towards the empirical concreteness of social experiences, on the other it diverges from the social sciences considering empirical concreteness as rigorously mediated. Ultimately, the context is a language like any other: without privileges, ontological primitives or logical priorities, it is culturally constructed in the interaction with other languages (Traini 2008: 169). According to this perspective, the social is made up of texts and discourses that are translated and that, when translated, are reconstructed, each translation depending on the relative strategies of specific languages. For example, newspapers can talk about a day on the stock exchange, or a religious event, or a fashion event, but by telling it they translate it into a language that has specific rules and that responds to precise strategies. Similarly, a television program can talk about the consumption practices of a community, or a series of decisions made by the government, and in this way, it translates texts into its specific language.

The same thing happens for advertising. It can tell something about the society in which it is produced, placing itself as a text and translates other texts with other specific languages. The idea that there are real events on the one hand and discourses on events on the other is replaced by the hypothesis that there is a continuous textual exchange that creates social meanings. The texts are the centre of these exchanges, in the sense that both events and discourses about events are considered languages with meaning. The central nucleus of sociosemiotics is therefore the social space of signification.

4. Themes

The sociosemiotics of advertising in Italy has been directed towards some predominant research themes. The survey that we present in this paragraph does not intend to be exhaustive of all the research lines undertaken but intends to provide an overview of the most explored areas over the last ten years.

A first research field undertaken by Italian semiologists is that of food: food – in the specific sense (particular foods) or in the broad sense (mealtimes) – represented by advertising texts; commercials about food; behavioural practices that revolve around the time of meals or the preparation of dishes. One of the first studies was conducted in this regard by Semprini and Musso (2001). The authors analysed a corpus of Barilla pasta advertising, proposing a reinterpretation of the Greimasian generative trajectory of meaning. The goal was to highlight the changes in the discursive and narrative elements of the brand's advertising communication, despite the stability of the underlying values over time. Such changes, from a sociosemiotic point of view, are explained precisely by the need to follow the changes in society and, sometimes, to anticipate them. Indeed, advertising and society interact and influence each other. All the representative codes of an era are found in advertising texts and, consequently, advertising becomes a testimony of the society of that era. From this point of view, the preparation of pasta becomes a moment of conviviality around which interpersonal relationships are outlined, families, groups of friends gather, thus also communicating a specific idea of family and society. Barilla advertisements were also at the centre of a semiotic analysis by Stano (2012), who found out that advertising also contributes to the construction of a specific idea of Italianness, and by Zannin (2003), who proposed a reinterpretation of the Greimasian generative trajectory of meaning, highlighting the fundamental role of passions in advertising narration. In this regard, more recently, Paris (2020) has reflected on the ways of representing Italianness in the world, through the analysis of an advertising commercial in the automotive sector.

Still on the theme of food, in continuity with the studies by Marrone (2014) and the research group on the semiotics of food and taste of the University of Palermo (Marrone and Giannitrapani eds. 2013), Ventura Bordenca (2015) conducted an investigation concerning the role of food within advertising narratives. In her essay, children's food advertisements are considered as a mirror of culture and consumption, of the nutritionist philosophy that has characterised the last fifty years. The same nutrients, says the author, change in value depending on the historical period. In the Sixties, pasta for children was sold with the addition of gluten or milk, in the belief that these two elements were more energetic for the intellectual or physical development of the child. Today, many products, even for children, are sold gluten-free, under the opposite belief that this protein is not entirely good for the body, and snacks are multiplied with the addition of vitamins and mineral salts, such as those made with milk or yogurt. The phenomenon of "gluten-free" is a clear example of the fact that the boundary between scientific certainties and social trends is constantly questioned.

In the essay *Gusto, esperienza, testualità: la pubblicità del cioccolato* (Boero 2019), food is considered as a real language, as a signifying system capable of communicating cultural values and identities; at the same time, the sense of taste naturally refers to the somatic, perceptive, corporeal dimension, but also to the practices of purchasing/consuming food, in which the experiential dimension has an increasing importance. From the analysis of a series of chocolate commercials, it emerges that the recurring elements on which the communication of taste-experience is based on are the pleasure centring; the individuality of the experience, which takes on an intimate and personal connotation; the use of synaesthesia to summon the sense of taste; the predominance of playful enhancement. There is therefore a significant change with respect to the language with which the advertisements of the same brands used to communicate in the past: if a few years ago the use of irony, sketches, family sagas based on good feelings prevailed, now the advertisements stage the sense of taste through different narrations, which combine the search for experience with attention to quality and the production process. Sociosemiotic analysis makes it possible to grasp similar changes, in the background of a more general trend in advertising in the food sector, which increasingly associates the exaltation of polysensory with a return to the "truth" about food, represented more and more often in its practical and constitutive characteristics.

The description of the first thematic area of study introduces the second area of investigation which in recent years has characterised the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising. This is the representation of the family in advertising, from the analysis of emerging models to that of the roles of the various components. Ventura Bordenca, in the aforementioned essay, already stated that it was useful to analyse the role of children in food advertising by considering the set of interactions within the context of the family represented. In 2018, Traini in the essay *The slow pace of change in advertising: new family types in advertisements for people carriers*, analysing a series of commercials in the automotive sector, focuses on the way in which family models are represented by advertising texts. The research shows the prevalence of the traditional, classic family, represented in a compact way around the car. Even when we depart from the classic model, the result is a reassuring representation of family, without a change in the underlying values. From disaggregation we almost always move on to unity: the members of the family find themselves together in the house or in the car, just as – metaphorically – the disaggregated pieces of the car come together in a technological compositional unit. Lonely fathers are expected in the house by their wives; single women only temporarily escape from the classic family ménage and, even when families are clearly de-constructed, the basic values of the tradition remain firm: unity, harmony, affection. In another essay, Traini (2020) observed the most recent trends by selecting some commercials of family cars over the period 2015–2019. The findings of his research show that there are other types of more meaningful valorisations of family in advertising, with respect to the particular historical phase, but the representative codes of the traditional family continue to prevail. Advertising changes slowly, with great caution; it does not propose radical innovations, but gradually innovates, always maintaining an anchor with tradition.

In the book *La famiglia della pubblicità. Stereotipi, ruoli, identità* (Boero 2018) these first surveys are taken up and expanded, extending the gaze beyond the automotive sector to analyse the ways in which the family is represented in Italian advertising in the period 2007–2017. Although some texts have begun to show new family models, the predominant representative code is always that of the traditional patriarchal family. This also happens for the representation of the different family members: if the woman struggles to deviate from the classic stereotypical representations that see her mainly as an "Angel at the Hearth", even in the case of men, children and grandparents, simplified representations are present and divergent with respect to the changes that have taken place in reality. An example is the case of grandparents, always represented as wise and smiling, when in contemporary society the concept of seniority gradually begins to be separated from that of being grandparents. The results of the analysis confirm the hypotheses of Eco (1968), who had spoken of advertising as a "consolatory art" that does not invent new codes but re-elaborates what is already in circulation. Advertising is more a static than an innovative language, a social language that introduces novelty in a very gradual way. It is true that from a sociosemiotic point of view, advertising – as a "mirror" of society (Landowski 1989) – forces society to rethink itself and to change, but it does so extremely slowly, accepting new things with great moderation. If fathers are starting to appear on television alone, as the protagonists of sporadic but encouraging commercials, this happens because something in family relationships is changing and the brands are ready to grasp such a change, to re-propose it in advertising, contributing in part to social change.

Another area of investigation undertaken in recent years is the study of consumption practices within the advertising texts (Boero 2017). Advertising, in fact, proposes through its discourses some consumption models that are constantly evolving. An example is the nostalgic model, at the centre of the advertising discourses of the last twenty years, or, more recently, of the health-conscious or environmentalist model. Advertising proposes values in which the receiver can recognise himself and inscribes specific consumers profiles in its texts. From the sociosemiotic point of view, consumption is therefore seen as a language, as a system of signification and communication guided by its own logics, whose meanings become a means for understanding cultural processes and changes. Advertising also inscribes consumption practices in its discourses, which refer to a specific way of conceiving the relationship between consumer and objects in the sales spaces. Advertising, from a sociosemiotic point of view, proposes consumption models and at the same time presents itself as a story of those models already present in society. As stated by Polidoro (2020), media texts and other forms of communication typical of our age are often considered as simple or simplified texts, suitable for quick, disposable consumption. Semiotics can help us understand how, behind many consumption texts, there can be a deep stratification of meanings and a solid coherence between levels.

Another topic at the centre of advertising research is the crisis. Recently, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, advertising becomes a story of society in this particular historical period (Lorusso et al. eds. 2020). As highlighted by Spaziante (2020) in a recent essay on advertising communication at the time of the lockdown, if some brands have strongly focused on the corporate dimension, going back to the sources of their value pact, and enhancing the company identity, others have given greater emphasis on the dimension of consumers, describing their lifestyle habits in times of the lockdown. Some brands have considered it appropriate to eliminate the presence of products from the commercial content, others have chosen to keep it in subliminal forms, others have not worried at all. But beyond the strategy, more or less focused on the corporate dimension, a more general question arises – whether or not it is legitimate to associate commercial content with a social emergency. In a critical article in the New York Times, Amanda Hess (2020) confirms that in the commercials of the Covid-19 period the products tended to disappear, but instead a dimension usually hidden in advertising reappeared, namely the production phase of the goods. Many commercials showed cranes, transport, assembly lines, in general, people intent on productive work, who were then labeled as “heroes”, often associated with health workers on the front line in the battle against the virus. Hess recalls that the workers of industry and logistics were not volunteers driven by heroism, but people who did their job in a necessary way, so portraying them as heroes leads to hiding reality, and to placing them in a role that is not always pleasing to them. The legitimacy with which a brand can name a dramatic and emergency existential dimension therefore appears questionable, placing it under the sign of its own commercial banner.

The author concludes by inserting the analyses carried out in the context of a trend that goes beyond the Covid period and which more generally concerns the role of the brand and advertising language in the contemporary world. In the early months of 2020, there has been a rapid and growing awareness in relation to ethical and social issues by the brands’ world. An orientation that has already emerged in the wake of the protests for climate change and the “Fridays for Future” movement promoted by Greta Thunberg starting from the end of 2018, and then continued with the Covid-

19 emergency. In such a context, several organisations seem ready to do anything, even to suspend or strongly reduce their traditional advertising actions, to replace them with as many communication actions, decidedly of greater impact. Perhaps it is in this key that the current trend in advertising must be read: an extraordinary phase that could create an epochal, or at least significant break, accelerating the process of transformation of the role of the advertising language in the contemporary world.

5. Conclusions

At the end of this journey into the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising, we can trace a partial balance of the main elements that emerged.

First of all, as we have highlighted, the sociosemiotics of advertising has been affected by the influence of French sociosemiotics and in particular of Landowski's (1989) studies on semiotics as a "mirror of society". At the same time, it is possible to identify two different in-depth paths that have characterised the Italian research context: on the one hand the dialogue with the field of marketing and business communication, on the other that with the sociology of consumption, disciplines that share with sociosemiotics the interest in some themes, even in the diversity of the approaches and analysis tools used for their study. We then identified some topics around which the sociosemiotic studies of recent years have been directed: from food to the family representations, from consumption models and practices to ethical, environmental, social and crisis communication.

As far as the type of approach is concerned, it should be emphasised how the Italian sociosemiotics of advertising has distinguished – and is increasingly distinguished – itself by an analytical tendency, thus deepening the empirical vocation of sociosemiotics. Indeed, the proposed studies not only represent speculative moments, but are characterised by the use of the analysis of one or more texts with the aim of identifying trends. The reflections reached by sociosemiotics of advertising scholars therefore derive from the results of the analysis of a more or less extensive corpus of texts, representative of specific research fields.

We can therefore say that over the last ten years socioemiotics in Italy has been characterised by particular attention to the analysis of social texts:[6] if on the one hand the objective of the most recent studies is to grasp the changing relationship between society and discourses that represent it, at the same time, to carry out this type of survey, a pragmatic approach is spreading in which text-analysis plays a fundamental role.[7] As we have seen, these studies are connected to the structuralist and generative approach of Greimasian semiotics: hence a series of tools to identify the dominant values, the recurring narrative and discursive structures within the considered texts, with the aim to grasp the representations of the social, the images of everyday life, the changing interactions between society and advertising texts. This analytic tendency does not imply the abandonment of the philosophical vocation of semiotics but represents a strengthening of the equally important empirical vocation of the discipline. In fact, the analyses are not auto-referential but have the objective of rigorously describing the effect of meaning that derives from the interaction between reality and the discourses that represent it, as well as of grasping the effect of meaning that derives from the interaction among different social discourses.

Precisely by virtue of this interest in analysis, one of the main challenges is to study new forms of advertising, such as social media advertising, which call into question some innovative tools and categories. Sociosemiotics in the coming years will therefore have to deal with a constantly evolving communicative scenario, monitoring the changes in the advertising discourse in the semiosphere.

Notes

1 Like the word, the image also has two levels of interpretation: the strictly advertising level of a connotative type, and the visual one of a denotative type, linked to the fact that the image is there as a representation of something else.

2 Alongside the purely linguistic message, semiotic research begins to consider the problem of analysing that part of the advertising text that makes use of expressive substances of a visual type. The study of advertising images inaugurates a semiology of visuality.

3 A story, according to the semiotic hypothesis, is always the story of a Subject who goes in search of an Object. The latter, however, is not important in itself but for the fact of being desired, for the values that the Subject projects into it.

4 In the context of the practical applications of sociosemiotics, Pozzato (2001) identifies two trends: spectacular semiotics and sociosemiotics as a theory of action-manipulation.

5 The enhancement of the Object by the Subject is subdivided into four large classes in which the possible forms of rationality consciously adopted by consumers when purchasing certain products are collected: practical, playful, critical and utopian valorisation.

6 With this expression we intend to indicate that set of texts able to tell something about the society in which they are produced.

7 Rolle (2014) has collected a series of semiotic analyses in his volume *Semiotics in practice*, highlighting how one of the characteristics of semiotics in Italy is precisely the tendency towards analysis.

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Semiotics of Fashion

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Summary. This contribution aims at systematising the various works in the field of Italian fashion semiotics, proceeding by topicalisation, from the general to the particular, starting from the moment in which it is defined as a language by Umberto Eco, passing through its eminently sensible repercussion on the body with Paolo Fabbri, and arriving at styles, trends, connections with other disciplines, objects and places, thanks to some of the prominent exponents of the Italian scientific community. During the review of these various perspectives, some parallelisms will be made with the contemporary world to trace their influence on the analysis of the most recent phenomena in the fashion system.

Keywords. Fashion, body, objects, places, trends

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Beitrag zielt darauf ab, die verschiedenen Arbeiten im Bereich der italienischen Modesemiotik systematisch zu erfassen. Dabei erfolgt eine strukturierte Gliederung von allgemeinen Aspekten bis hin zu spezifischen Themen. Beginnend mit der Konzeption der Mode als Sprache durch Umberto Eco, wird die Bedeutung der Mode auf den Körper und die Sinneswahrnehmung durch Paolo Fabbri betrachtet. Anschließend werden Stile, Trends, Verbindungen zu anderen Disziplinen, Objekten und Orten im Kontext des Modesystems unter Einbeziehung einiger herausragender Vertreter der italienischen wissenschaftlichen Gemeinschaft untersucht. Im Rahmen dieser Betrachtungen werden auch Parallelen zum zeitgenössischen Kontext gezogen, um den Einfluss auf die Analyse neuerer Phänomene im Bereich der Mode aufzuzeigen.

Schlüsselwörter. Mode, Körper, Objekte, Orte, Trends

1. Fashion as semiotics' field of choice

Fashion semiotics focuses on the signified, produced and generated by the relationships between the objects that belong to its system. It is a theoretical field of research that provides an object of knowledge to be constructed, analysed, and understood through a set of methodological tools, which make it possible to go beyond, without stopping at a mere phenomenological description, since semiotics requires, by constitution, to go deeper. Analysing fashion in semiotic terms does not mean giving a detailed account of how the garment is made or what poses the models assume. It is much more than that.

In Italy, perhaps because of structural peculiarities of national bias, almost all semioticians have encountered fashion during their analyses.[1] Some scholars have written extensively about it and have included it among their primary research interests, also because, as Roland Barthes has always stated, fashion is certainly one of the most fertile areas for the application of semiotics because it is homologous to the discipline in terms of structure: both are made up of paradigmatic [or ... or] and syntagmatic [and ... and] relations between objects and states, between actions and volitions. An outfit, a total look, is nothing but a sum of elements chosen to produce meanings, to make an abstraction concrete. These elements must be harmonious, and their arrangement must be implemented neatly, following certain codes and rules. On the practical and functional side, one cannot wear two pairs of shoes at the same time, nor a coat and a cloak at the same time. Even, according to the changing seasons and the various spirits of the time, certain colour combinations or specific garments can be banned because they are “out of fashion”.

The low number of structured courses in Italian universities has probably slowed down the frequency of publications in this field compared to other research fields. However, Italian fashion semiotics has maintained a constant liveliness in one way or another and has distinguished itself for its many branches.

This contribution aims at systematising the various works in the field of Italian fashion semiotics, proceeding by topicalisation, from the general to the particular, starting from the moment in which it was defined as a language by Umberto Eco, passing through its eminently sensible repercussion on the body with Paolo Fabbri, and arriving at styles, trends, connections with other disciplines, objects and spaces, thanks to some of the prominent exponents of the Italian scientific community. During the review of these various perspectives, I will make some parallelisms with the contemporary world to trace their influence on the analysis of the most recent phenomena in the fashion system.

2. Fashion is communication

Once one begins to explore the field of fashion semiotics, the world is no longer the same.

It is no coincidence that Umberto Eco writes that semioticians, or lovers of the subject, can hardly pick up clothes and accessories randomly,

> without having the distinct feeling of making an ideological choice: or at least, of drafting a message, an open letter to passers-by, and to those they will meet during the day (Eco 1972: 7, my translation).

Even if Eco refers to a tie, his point is clear: “clothing is communication”, but it must be considered “in the context of an associated life” (Eco 1972: 8). As Algirdas Greimas and Jacques Fontanille would say, in the context of a “form of life”.

If everything is communication, then clothing can function as a signal. Eco proposes a very up-to-date example, especially in the contemporary world, of fashion shaming, i.e. considering the garment as the cause of the effect, which unfortunately is not always pleasant.

> She has a miniskirt: she is a flighty girl. In Catania.
> She wears a miniskirt: she is a modern girl. In Milan.
> She has a miniskirt, in Paris: she is a girl.
> In Hamburg, has a miniskirt at Eros: perhaps he is a boy
> (Eco 1972: 22, my translation).

The miniskirt is not only a fashion object, but it can communicate a given semantic value proportional to the culture and the point of view from which it can be observed; conveying belonging, way of being, and age. This overall view, *tout court*, is the prerogative of semiotic ambition, or rather of its being able to explain not a single phenomenon but its entire system. Roland Barthes, to whom Eco refers for a more in-depth study of the semiotics of fashion, also uses the miniskirt to highlight how garments can tell a story and therefore should not be catalogued only under the uncovered/covered body category.

Eco is aware that Barthes sets limits to the analysis of fashion by restricting the corpus to the verbal text, and he predicts, although far from the inception of Instagram, the need to analyse it as a “properly articulated visual language”.

There are objects intended for physical and communicative functions, but when they lose their functionality they become signs, and this occurs in the fashion system, where codes and conventions apply. Fashion is built on a “solid grammar”, enforced by the so called “fashion police”, although there are also weak codes alongside this robustness because they change and disappear quickly. This is what Barthes defined as a p r o c e s s of signification that corresponds, as Gianfranco Marrone also points out, to the transformative moment which produces fashion, bringing the world towards (syncretic) language and vice versa (Marrone 2001: 24). The grammar of fashion may admit controlled variations in the range of seasonal trends, or the dress code is so structured that it must be respected under threat of stringent sanctions. For example, in 2021, Kim Jong-un banned skinny jeans, piercings and unconventional haircuts in North Korea to defend the nation from the spreading Westernism. These fashion items and practices are considered acts that communicate a non-verbal reactionary way of thinking, and their use is punishable by 15 years imprisonment in a labor camp or even death.

Here it emerges how fashion can be the elective field of semiotic theory because clothing is a language that, like the verbal one, transmits meanings through signifiers, which also serve to convey ideologies and value systems. Ideologies and values, as well as symbols, fluctuate depending on their context, therefore Eco encourages to analyse the weak dress codes at the time of their manifestation during their discourse. Society also talks through the garment; one must learn to listen.

2. From French to Italian Fashion Semiotics

Although the semiotics of fashion has been codified “recently” within French structuralism, first by Algirdas Julien Greimas’s doctoral thesis (1948) and then by Roland Barthes’s *Le système de la mode* (1967), much has been written about fashion in various disciplinary fields where it has been explored from its birth and diffusion to its plurality.

An interdisciplinary spirit characterises the first Italian anthology entitled *Semiotics of Fashion*, edited in 2005 by Massimo Baldini (ed. 2005a). More than a collection of semiotic contributions, the volume covers various perspectives, especially the sociological one. In addition to international semioticians whose studies on fashion have been foundational, such as Jurij Lotman, Pëtr Bögatirev and Roland Barthes, as well as the Italians who had written most about fashion in those years – Ugo Volli and Patrizia Calefato – Baldini tries to collect a variety of points of view on characteristics, power, and language of fashion.

A year later, in 2006, Gianfranco Marrone curated and partly translated a collection of essays by Roland Barthes (Marrone 2006) focused on the semantic universe of clothing and the various forms of manifestation of its meaning: garments, body, accessories, designers such as Chanel and Courrèges, and forms of life that complete the horizon already traced through the analysis of magazines with the fashion system.

If Eco in 1972 affirmed that clothes “talk” the man, Marrone points out that “clothes are told in many ways”: from literature to television, from advertising to gossip, the garment takes the floor at home, in the street, in the places of consumption. Marrone compares Barthes’s fashion system with that of the new Millennium, where the boundary between the telling and the speaking of clothes is increasingly blurred. Barthes is interested in the written fashion, in the way of motivating its arbitrariness, trying to reconstruct – starting from the printed paper – a social mythology. As it is well known, Barthes focuses exclusively on the verbal text, on articles and descriptions, excluding the image from the corpus of analysis. However, the images role seems to be of fundamental importance in the new Millennium, as Marrone points out, also because of the increased expertise of the reader of the fashion magazine. Given the progress of research on signification, Marrone highlights another change in the fashion system compared to the era of Barthes, that is, the progressive evolution of trends that do not last just one year but expand over a more extensive time period. Trends are no longer determined by the oligarchy of the fashion group but by the instances of consumers, by the identity demands of forms of life (Marrone 2006: XI).

Starting with Barthes, Marrone also tries to end the long-standing opposition between the sociological study of costume and the semiotic analysis of fashion, clarifying that the disciplinary division serves as a tactical function and derives from an analytical difficulty. At least in the semiotics of fashion, Barthes made a practice of the compilation of the inventory of invariant vestimentary forms to be validated with the commutation test, i.e. the verification of the actual correspondence of changes in signifieds depending on changes in signifiers. The change is achieved through modifications that affect the articulation of meaning, or its redundant expressive elements (Marrone 2006: XIX). The problem is that the expression plane and the content plane are not conforming; therefore, no automatic connection between signifiers and meanings can be established. Thus, it is necessary to work on that semiological system called "myth" by Barthes (1957), on narrated fashion. So, the difference between sociology and semiotics lies in the work on the text, on the various types of discourse that nestle in the fashion system.

Here Greimas helps with the selection of the global semantic field of micro-universes on which to apply the theory of narrativity and from which to identify variants, invariants, idiosyncrasies, and pertinences (Marrone 2006: XX). The recovery and translation in Italian of the main concepts discussed by Greimas in his doctoral thesis *La Mode en 1830* are owed to Isabella Pezzini, who began a more in-depth study of the volume in conjunction with the implementation of the course of Semiotics of Fashion at Sapienza University of Rome, the only professorship in Italy with such specificity (Pezzini 2017, 2020a).

Greimas, even before Barthes, selects from magazines the objects and forms of fashion and their denominations because, being subject to perpetual and rapid changes that are reflected in the correspondent designating terms, they turn out to be an unmatched field of linguistic and semiotic analysis (Greimas 1948: 6). As Isabella Pezzini points out, Greimas is the one who invented the semiotics of fashion and recognised its linguistic innovations. Communicating fashion does not consist of the mere description of objects, but includes establishing the norms of dressing according to the spirit of the times, by formulating rational explanations of style changes that would otherwise be incomprehensible. Being fashionable begins with the verbal text, so much so that locutions like "season must-have" function as qualifying designations that exalt the value of the object from the point of view of a "pure" state of style. Pezzini notes that Greimas does not consider his fashion lexicon a collection of words but an organic totality.

"Greimas sets the semiological direction that will later be the starting point of Barthes' work" (Pezzini 2020a). Hence, anyone in the world becomes a witness to the permanent evolution of the lexicon of the fashion system, increasingly, at least for non-English and French speakers, dominated by foreignism. If until the 1970s, the dominance of the French language was undisputed, with the establishment of the U.S. as the decision-making pole of trends, the dictionary of fashion has undergone a linguistic change still in progress. Greimas had anticipated this, remarking that in the lexicon of fashion, stable terms are rare, and in general, there remain those that are more generic or concern the essential traits of civilization (hat, shirt, etc.), or the techniques of manufacture (sequins, bouclé), the names of metals, precious stones, and the most common fabrics.

Starting from these premises aiming to continue Pezzini's studies, I analysed Greimas's classification of neologisms, trying to build a dictionary of contemporary fashion[2] (Terracciano 2019: 133). Greimas points out the existence of "passive" and "active neologisms", considered a cognitive effort to create the lexicon most suitable to *Zeitgeist* and its innovations. Passive neologisms arise because their form changes gradually, without affecting the naming, making only the meaning evolve, as in "leggings", a term used to refer first to spats and then to soft, tight pants. Even changes in the function of garments and accessories can determine passive neologisms because their status remains stable: this is the case of undergarments that become externalised, such as the slip dress or the bralette. On the other hand, Greimas divides the active neologisms into two categories, namely of "word" and of "meaning": the first ones represent an innovation also from the phonetic and morphological point of view, the others requalify and re-semantise with a new meaning an already existing garment or accessory (Terracciano 2019: 134). Arbitrariness characterises neologisms of form, declined into onomatopoeic – "frou-frou", from the sound of swishing – or borrowed from foreign languages as in anglicisms or arising from the addition of functional prefixes and suffixes that, by analogy, change the sense of pre-existing words. This leads Greimas to the neologisms of signification created through the juxtaposition of nouns or adjectives ("faux fur") or locutions composed by coordination, dependence, improper derivations or figurative expressions, the latter obtained by stylistic procedures such as synecdoche, metaphors, and metonyms (Terracciano 2019: 141). The discussion on these theoretical conceptualisations has been systematised by Pezzini and me in the first anthology entirely dedicated to the Semiotics of Fashion published in Italy, conceived for students and professionals (Pezzini and Terracciano eds. 2020).

In the study of contemporary fashion, one must consider that if in the epoch of Barthes and Greimas the creation and construction of metalanguage were entrusted mainly to magazines, today the daily annotation regarding outfits has moved to social networks, which now preserve the traces of changes in specialised terminology, denoting, also thanks to hyperbole and redundancy, the continuous quest for new words of greater expressive value and evocative power, which break the barriers of a closed vocabulary, opening the way to terms that are a source of metaphorical correspondence and hypotyposis.

3. Fashion trajectories and marks

Paolo Fabbri defines fashion as something most evident to the eye and most individual to the subject, whether in space or time. For Fabbri, time and space have equal importance in the fashion system because the former regulates its rhythm, while the latter determines the point of view. Although, besides the obvious issue of trends, a problem of code, the immediate level of the "evenemential" should also be analysed (Fabbri 2001). The factual level emphasises the importance of the present of fashion, then punctually aspectualises its transformative efficacy.

According to Fabbri, fashion goes in a spiral because it brings marginality to the core, the eccentric to the norm, operating a centripetal movement. Fabbri certainly had Lotman in mind when formulating this conceptualisation, especially considering what happens at the confines of the semiosphere, porous enough to incorporate innovation from the outside, from alterity, and carry it to its centre, translating it from its identitary nucleus (Lotman 1984).

For Fabbri, the paradoxical process of standardisation of difference describes the essence of fashion, which promises to be different and the same simultaneously. One thing is the total look, which imposes a way of dressing, a posture, an attitude; another is what Fabbri defines as the "partialization" of bodies, in other words, the bricolage-style known as "mix & match". If one analyses fashion from this dual perspective, it is clearly necessary to distinguish forms from substance, which is often forgotten. Fabbri suggests the example of punk, whose forms repudiated the optimistic tendency of the hippies, replacing their polychromy with black, the non-colour of the "no-future", and its fluid and light fabrics with heavy materials such as metal studs, plastic, leather, culminating in the violation of human flesh through piercings and tattoos. Fabbri notes how much, in contemporaneity, clothing features have been translated straight onto human flesh, sculpted in the gym, by the surgeon or through piercings, body paintings and tattoos. Tattooing fascinates Fabbri because it gives him the opportunity to apply a "marked semiotics" to the *artification* of the body, analysed both on the expression plane and the content plane. The practice of tattooing is a trend that has denied its original meanings of marks of belonging and signs of the criminal world, re-semantising them in a pure expression of identity, in the narration of being (Fabbri 2021). Tattooing makes the body, turned into art, cross over into the signification of fashion: it is enough to observe the evolution of tattoo trends over the last few decades to understand that their trends have been evident, as demonstrated in the Nineties by the graphic and plastic supremacy of tribals and the Celtic armband, followed by the explosion of pictograms in the old-school style inspired by sailors. Present in the background, as an invariant trait, remain verbal texts (aphorisms, names of loved ones) and Japanese-style tattoos, in which Geishas and carps predominate.

At this stage, one can assert with Fabbri that fashion does not mean just any kind of body, but a model of a body (Fabbri 2001). Fashion can be entirely sensory as it is the bearer of synaesthesia, even if some senses stand out above the others in relation to different eras.

On this subject, I would like to refer to Fabbri's considerations on the discourses of social fashion, enjoyed via the smartphone screen since they are purely visual. Think of Instagram stories, where any object of the fashion system – jeans, t-shirt, bag, shoes – is promoted by an influencer who incorporates it into their everyday life, showing its performance in reality (Terracciano 2017).

Wearing a fashionable object corresponds to manipulating the Addressee-followers in order to make them desire it, to modalise them according to the "wanting to do" mentality. Through Instagram stories, the Addressers-influencers are also in charge of transmitting competencies regarding everyday fashion. By performing simple and common actions they enable Addressee-followers to check how suitable those jeans are for a certain performance, i.e., for traveling, going to a restaurant, etc.

So far, we have dealt with three of the four phases of Greimas's canonical narrative scheme; only the sanction is missing. We therefore have to take into account two sides of the same coin: on the one hand, the Addresser-influencer rewards the good follower with a discount code or with a direct interaction via Instagram, or through the link accessed via "swipe up", which is the interpellation of the gesture that transports the follower into the purchasing space; on the other hand, it is precisely in this concluding moment that the actantial roles are reversed, elevating the Addressee to the position of judge (Terracciano 2020b).

When the actantial conversion takes place, followers weigh up what the influencers propose to finalise their purchase choice. They cannot touch the fashion object and so rely on another body to internalise it simultaneously with its vision, picturing a "mental" image of that garment on their bodies in daily life. Followers have three senses at their disposal, touch, hearing and sight, although it is only through the latter that they can exercise haptic perception since they cannot directly experience textures and volumes. Getting into the influencer's moment of life means projecting oneself into them, here and now, triggering a *débrayage* of the sensory domain starting from vision itself, which, as Jacques Fontanille states, "shares a conspicuous number of properties with the other senses", and operates in "a mode called haptics, through which one 'touches' the surface and the shape of the object with the gaze" (Fontanille 2003: 165–166, my translation).

Instagram stories represent a mediation of visual, affective, and experiential nature, where the optical rises to the haptic, determining a seeing that feels, touches, knows and also fosters an understanding of the double bond between influencer and follower, expressed by a relationship of mimesis, i.e. where two subjects mirror each other, unfolding the freedom to self-identify, embodying and make sensible the invariants of fashion (Derrida 1975: 48).

Lights, colours, angles and gestures become the basis for the eidetic and actantial conversion triggered by the Instagram story: the influencer's body coincides with that of the follower, while the vision becomes tactile.

Thanks to the haptic, epidermal vision, and its proprioception, the expression plane and the content plane are brought together, in a relationship that underlies the proper process of signification of the text-story, through which meaning can be effectively conveyed (Fontanille 2003: 208).

4. The body-garment-culture relation

The body model signified by fashion is obtained through tailoring, design, features of the fabric (weight and sheen), structural and/or decorative elements (e.g. basque, belt, collar, etc.). Lines, cuts, seams and shapes make the body move in a precise way, assume a specific posture because, as Umberto Eco explains:

> By imposing an exterior demeanor, clothes are semiotic artifices or rather devices for communication. This was already known, but the parallel with the syntactic structures of the language that, according to many, influence the way to articulate the thinking was not yet attempted. The syntactic structures of clothing language also affect the way people see the world, and in a much more physical way than the *consecutio temporum* or the existence of the Subjunctive (Eco 1983: 264).

Garments induce one to keep a demeanour and to worry about what may happen to the body and the garment depending on gestures and situations, developing, as it happens to Eco while wearing a pair of jeans, a kind of "heteroconsciousness", or, better said, an epidermic self-consciousness because clothing, as a signifier, orients behaviours and relationships (Eco 1983: 262–263). A garment is indeed a fashion object, but it is endowed with a unique status because of its aesthetic valorisation, so it should be considered an affordance with synaesthetic qualities and an embedded value system. The garment englobes a sum of styles, of those who design it and those who wear it, social and cultural identities as well as anatomical references, and its functions are determined precisely from these elements and its morphology. A garment establishes the narrative path of the subjects since it manipulates them according to a "having-to-do", in other words, how they wear it, implying an acquired competence, a knowing-what-to do, which leads to action, to the most suitable occasion of use relative to the "doing-to-be". Between the garment (the modalising subject) and the wearer (the modalised subject) a contract is established that presupposes a persuasive and interpretative doing, both translated through the body and its relationship with the contexts of use.

Is it the garment that gives meaning to the body from the point of view of a social signified of the costume?

Yes, because clothing is an affordance of the body and vice versa, but the inclusion of aesthetic enhancements becomes necessary because, as mentioned, the function of covering the body is not the only one contemplated. The dress becomes a sort of artificial skin in which the human body rises to a parameter of invariance, a limitation of variation.

In this regard, Maria Pia Pozzato theorises a dual role of the relative constancy of the body schema: clothes support and obey the body and its functional needs, but at the same time, they modify and distort it, creating a second cultured and idealised version (Pozzato 2001: 86).

Body shapes structure the garment in the sense that they lend it points of support and limits or are constrained or freed by the clothing itself. Parts of the body can be negated or emphasised, following symmetries for the harmony of the figure or, by additions, they can be asymmetrical. Thus, the body becomes a discourse of plastic formants (eidetic, topological, chromatic elements), which express the logic of the styles of a given epoch and are oriented by figurative formants that enable the recognition of figures of the world in the visual text, to be also investigated in the correspondence with the content plane.

For Pozzato, "fashions fabricate around the shape and dimensions of the body a true visual discursive rhetoric", and it is precisely through these visual representations of the body-clothing relation that the *Zeitgeist* is communicated (Pozzato 2001: 86–89).

The fashion body is therefore always new, perpetually deformed and a mirror of social identity. In the "eternal return of the new" and in the ever-recurring cycle of trends, there is the limit of fashion's semiosphere: its forms, its form of social life, incorporate people involving them in a continuous process of birth and death of silhouettes, widths, and volumes, uncovered and covered body parts. To this last semantic category, condensed in the veil, Pozzato has dedicated much attention, correlating it to the regimes of visibility of the body imposed by styles, necessity and culture.

Pozzato compares the veil in the West (bridal gowns, transparencies) and in the Middle East with the coverage regimes of the Modest Fashion, namely that type of clothing that responds to the codes of the Islamic religion, which overcomes the cultural division between being fashionable and respecting the culture of origin (Pozzato 2012, 2020).

Depending on the contexts, garments and parts of the body that are "forbidden" can be covered or revealed, whether for reasons of culture or nature. The nude look of the 1990s, for example, arose in response to the immobilisation of the body by the garments of the 1980s because it sets aside

> the stasis/movement opposition, upon which was built the fashion body like a statue, giving way to a different issue, which revolves instead around the categories private/public, intimate/exhibited (Pozzato 2012: 120–121).

The level of veiling pertains to a semiotic dimension of culture that establishes the differences between identity and alterity, merging them into signification. In this regard, Ugo Volli states that

> [it] is precisely with respect to the concrete relationship with the body, in different societies, that the significant organization of clothing is articulated (Volli 2020).

Of course, fashion is obliged to make compromises with culture, but it is often the case that the latter is taken as a model of innovation (Calefato 2021). Paolo Sorrentino, for example, offers an empirical demonstration of this by investigating Sardinian costume from a Lotmanian perspective, using an emblematic garment of Sardinian tradition, *sa mastruca*, re-semantised in the current fashion system in the guise of a fur vest (Sorrentino 2020). A similar case, with higher media exposure, can be found in Asian costume, with the now widely used Japanese *kimono*, or with the less common Korean *hanbok*, which is continuously growing in popularity thanks to the spread of the k-pop music genre, which together with the traditional dress becomes an activator of translation of the culture of origin (Terracciano 2021).

5. Styles and trends

Omar Calabrese addresses a matter of methodology from the term *stilisti* [fashion designer], which means designers of style because their works are intended as an autonomous but also dependent object of art. This implies that the stylist offers an actualised tool that must be realised by the people who wear the garment and the accessory, interpreting their style. Calabrese would probably be surprised to see that lately, in Italian, the word *stilisti* has been replaced by *designer* or *creative director*, where the first term describes being a fashion designer, while the second refers to a superintending task that involves drawing a line, a style to be followed. In the latter case, "the style of the *stilisti*" emphasised by Calabrese makes even more sense because the creative director must not only suggest a direction to the final consumer but also to all the departments of the Maison. So, the style is a vision; it can direct taste and create possible worlds of aesthetic experience.

Calabrese proposes to consider both how designers organise their work and the lifestyle suggested to potential clients – on the one hand, artistic styles, on the other, forms of life. In the first case, it could be possible to refer to the macro-categorisation classic vs baroque proposed by Heinrich Wölfflin about the history of art and also used by Jean-Marie Floch (1995) in his analysis of the distinctive elements of Chanel. In Italy this could be classified in brands having a classicist inspiration such as Armani and Max Mara versus the ones propending for baroque as seen in Dolce & Gabbana, Gucci, Moschino, Versace, with whom Calabrese worked on two publications (Calabrese and Versace eds. 1991, 1993).

The opposition is not so sharply defined, because the style of stylists changes according to fashion and their creative streak: Gucci by Tom Ford was the acme of the classic style in the Nineties, but Alessandro Michele is the ultimate contemporary baroque. Calabrese argues that there is always something more in the sum of the various distinctive elements of a brand, triggering a "cocktail effect" whose ingredients are recognisable only in theory, in the recipe, but the flavour comes from their combination. The power of creolisation depicts the value of mixing styles and genres, of various universes of discourse, in an era in which radical innovation is increasingly impossible, and therefore one must cite and re-semantise in order to create something new (Calabrese 1992: 204).

Ugo Volli, in this regard, explains the pluralism of discourses and images with the passage from fashion to styles, understood as a claim to identity, which he attributes to postmodernism (Volli 1998: 9–11).

For Massimo Baldini the diffusion of styles begins from the centre to the periphery with the trickle-down effect theorised by Simmel and Veblen, but then the movement reverses and becomes both centrifugal and centripetal (Baldini ed. 2005b: 10). Although, in the latter case the centre is determined by influential people – in the early 2000s by entertainment celebrities, while in 2021 even by ordinary people with a large audience called influencers, model medial bodies who have the power to influence the collective imagination, especially concerning hair fashion, considered an invariant and distinctive feature of the star system members.

As Patrizia Calefato notices, trickle-down reverses into a bubble-up effect. This has been demonstrated by fashion objects such as the miniskirt and jeans. Ugo Volli's study of jeans is fundamental to understand this transition, since they are considered a pure signifier that adapts to the context or the wearers (Volli 1991). Everyone can wear jeans in any circumstance, it is sufficient to build the outfit system of which they are a part according to the context. Starting from these premises, Calefato proposes one of her best-known theoretical conceptualisations, namely mass fashion, which is characterised by the manifestation of "a complexity of tensions, signifieds and values – not only related to the clothing dimension" (Calefato 1996: 7). In such complexity, the forms of life and, therefore, the styles that characterise them are substantiated.

Consequently, the trickle-down effect is subverted by the influence of subcultures, by the change of trends, as Ted Polhemus (1994) stated, from the sidewalk to the catwalk, even if the opposite remains a constant. According to Gianfranco Marrone, in the 2000s there is no longer just one style to choose from, but one can operate a bricolage, a patchwork of identities through style surfing (Marrone 2006: XI). Here, trends originate not from the world of production but from the one of consumption, and then they are re-semantised by designers. Therefore, Marrone clarifies, the analysis of the fashion system nowadays must take into account the texts that explain and institutionalise it and the concrete dressing practices. For Marrone, the method that should be adopted is sociosemiotics, capable of typologising the practices and experiences of individuals or of the forms of life to which they belong, correlating them with the aesthetic and sensible dimension. The originality of semiotics as a science of signification resides in its ability to apply original analytical tools to socio-cultural discourses and texts, which are complementary to those of other social sciences (Marrone 2006: XII). Please note that Marrone does not intend to declare Barthes's *modus operandi* obsolete, but to expand the range of the semiotic objects, as he considers fashion

> the comprehensive meaning effect of these complex operations of inter-semiotic and intra-discursive translation through which a continuous resemantization of the garment is operated for purposes that are both aesthetic and social, literary and symbolic (Marrone 2006: XIII).

In other words, there is no longer the pyramidal oligarchy of the Barthesian era, and the styles of the urban tribes are worthy of belonging to the Fashion System on a par with those designed on paper patterns, thus becoming, more than a philosophy of life with an immanent dimension, a cultural code. Therefore, trends must be investigated by tracing the form of life from which they originate, namely a semiotic organisation characteristic of individual and collective identities, endowed with both a plane of expression and a plane of content, functioning autonomously in the semiosphere (Fontanille 2015).

At this point, what is left to establish are the criteria of being fashionable. Giulia Ceriani as a semiotician of trends has been working on systematising criteria that can extensively define being and not being fashionable (Ceriani 1995: 231). The diffusion of fashion trends is based on two criteria: contamination and intersubjectivity (*ivi*: 232). The adherence to fashion, then, pertains to a choice that is inscribed in the acceptance of a particular value system and the recognition of some silhouettes rather than others as meaningful. As Ceriani points out, bodies, lines and shapes do indeed express the relevant configuration in a specific time, but this is not a discourse that can be reduced to attributing to fashion a merely synchronic and, above all, univocal balance. In the fashion system, model bodies exist simultaneously, but they are categorised as salient according to their figurative traits and cultural significance by the enunciators who decide to adhere to the proposed values. In this regard, the forms of manipulation enacted during the communication of trends and collections are crucial. Ceriani formulates the example of the brand, which must construct a discursive universe whose manifestations are coordinated by expressing a vertical and horizontal coherence if it must make itself recognisable through a series of characterising traits that form a replicable and shareable norm. In the horizontal coherence, the meaningfulness of a brand is organised on a plastic and somatic plane, therefore of the fashion value on a visual level. In magazines, for example, the relevant configurations of fashion are proposed through body types, thematic roles, settings. By analysing some covers of *Vogue*, chosen transversally from various transnational editions, Ceriani concludes that fashion value is invested starting from figural traits, which describe proxemic, directional, dynamic and consistency relations, from which the *saisie esthétique* and passions are generated.

From the figural, Ceriani moves to the figurative manifestation of trends and their sensible impact, which she classifies into macro-categories such as fluidity, visualisation, access, sharing, and mixing (Ceriani 2020: 112). The trend resides in fashion because the latter is

> a metonymic laboratory of anticipation, where the discourse of the world is concentrated and finds its provisional and frivolous form, for this very reason the more needed (*ivi*: 111).

Fashion and trend are expressed in different dimensions: objective (e-commerce), subjective (supermodels, celebrities, influencers), discursive (spaces, advertising campaigns), and corporeal (fashion showed on social media and in the streets). If the trend is a vector, fashion acts as its catalyst, transforming it into sensitive issues. This can be attributed to fashion's power of iconisation, which simplifies the interpretation and communication of the change, making it shareable and accessible but also expandable in other areas and in other market branches (*ivi*: 116). Ceriani, beginning with fashion, outlines the significant instances of the present: dehumanisation, the illusion of eternity, the LGBT+ legitimisation, the decadence of bourgeois stylistic features, and the affirmation of streetwear.

It is precisely from streetwear that trends in every segment of fashion, from *haute couture* to fast fashion, derive (Terracciano 2018). The lemma "streetwear" is not present in all English and Italian dictionaries because it is a phenomenon in progress, in continuous transformation, so much so that it does not involve a rigid label, or at least its regimentation within boundaries is determined *a priori* by species, genres, categories and classes. The Oxford Dictionary circumscribes its relevance in relation to youth subcultures, showing an anachronistic conception of the phenomenon since streetwear is a style that has pervaded and infected high fashion; just think of the overturning of the Gucci, Balenciaga, Valentino collections, in which there have been subversion of the dominant aesthetic, introducing characterising traits borrowed from the street and pop culture.

Regarding the cultural side, one of the reasons for the success of streetwear lies in the association with skateboarding, an adolescent subculture rooted in the U.S. since the Fifties, endowed with recognisable ideological characteristics, based on the struggle of youth against social homologation, even if at the same time strongly influenced by popular culture, an idiosyncrasy explainable with the request for social support to dominant hegemonies, unresponsive to the needs of young people, who decide to rebel in order to receive the required and necessary attention. Rebellion is meant as an act of opposition, violent or otherwise, against the state or the law, and, by extension, an expression of dissent. The rebellion implemented through streetwear should be given the function of an adjective, so that it can describe a form of life and fashion, which incorporates some invariant traits and motifs such as tattoos, piercings, oversized volumes, provocative images, etc.

Streetwear is communicated by creating "hype", a word that describes a transmedia advertising operation, generally extravagant, sensational and excessive (https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/streetwear), whose pervasive and intensive media coverage has the purpose of attracting the public's attention at all costs, even if the object of the promotion is not worthy of it. Going back to the Greek origin of the word, the prefix "hyper" indicates an excess, the surpassing of the norm, explicating a relationship of direct derivation with the hyperbole, the rhetorical figure of exaggeration, which conceals its promotional nature, hiding in the frayed edges of a complex form of life and in the visual and verbal texts of social networks. Similarly to the Dadaist work analysed by Walter Benjamin (1955), the hype has to shock its potential consumers, who are submerged by endlessly daily product launches. Because of the advertising overload, consumers' attention must be shaken by surrealism and provocation, now intensified by a reassuring stereotyped event, made viral by exploiting that flow of interactions based on the union of collective experiences and personal identities, translated into pop culture as a common language. The strength of streetwear brands, bearers of hype, is expressed in the strict observation of the canonical scheme of online communication, which involves the use of memes[3], quotes and intertextual references, especially to pop culture, and an immanent ironic side, which aims at eluding the arbitrariness and superficiality of the content. The pervasiveness of hype lies in its ability to camouflage itself with spontaneous social media texts, flowing into what I have defined as marketing camouflage, i.e. the concealment of advertising in the loops of daily interactions between users, influencers – opinion leaders of the digital sphere, with the ability to evangelise audiences on consumption – and specialised magazines (Terracciano 2017: 127). The social media texts explicitly created to spread hype are characterised by a formulaic structure, devoted to the direct interpellation of the follower, to the generation of comments and shares, to the fixed presence of linguistic fetishes, i.e. terms that embody the thematic universe of brands and streetwear, identifying their country of origin. In the latter case, the keywords of the proliferation of hype are exclusively in English – streetwear is a globalised phenomenon, probably one of the few multicultural trends – and they strictly concern the buying act, as shown by the invariant utterance "would you cop or drop?", where the two verbal forms are used in their slang version strongly sharpening the sphere of the conquest of the object of value, thanks to the idea of the catch after an amazing chase. This is inherent in one of the meanings of "cop", whose counterpart "drop" carries the negative seed of loss. As a result of the previous question, the potential buyer is modalised in terms of "wanting to do", since the manipulation of the Addresser-hype involves a negative sanction related to voluntarily missing a good opportunity, letting it fall into oblivion. On the other hand, "drop" also describes a positive side of the coin, because it is used as a synonym for "launch", an informal version of the Anglophone "release", to indicate the arrival on the market of new products or music, distributed with the intent to impress the public.

As also stated by Ugo Volli, nowadays, there is a "fashion form" that permeates the economic and social system, whose first law is the aestheticisation of everyday life, visible and visualisable on social media (Volli 1988: 6). However, compared to what Volli observed, namely that the foundation of the fashion form is consumption and the rapid obsolescence of its objects, today there is a turnaround, distinctive of Millennials and Generation Z, concerning sustainable reuse and recycling, from which the attention to vintage also derives (Panosetti and Pozzato eds. 2013).

Still, the semantic consumption caused by hype is close to implosion due to the overcrowding of content and texts circulating in social media, with an expiration date of merely 24 hours. Not surprisingly, Volli analyses the fashion form by referring to Dawkins's "memes" an expressive form now incorporated into fashion discourse (Terracciano 2017). Fashion is a norm before being a fact, so it imposes a "having to be", having to be visible and visualisable by taking the form of a series of variations and combinations of simple memes, such as jeans (Volli 1988: 91).

6. Objects: hair, hats, glasses

A recurring isotopy of Italian fashion semiotics can be identified in hair, on which, for example, Massimo Baldini has published four volumes, both anthologies and essays (Baldini ed. 2003, ed. 2005b, ed. 2006; Baldini and Baldini eds. 2004). Hair is an important element of non-verbal language, both because of its visibility – it is on the top of the head – and because it can be manipulated according to personal feelings and the image that one wants to project to the outside world. According to Baldini, hair is a short form of knowledge like poetry, therefore enjoyable at once like social media texts. Furthermore, Baldini follows Ugo Volli's jeans analysis and defines hair as a pure signifier because of its permeability to modification, which makes it possible, by introducing one or a few variations, to explore various styles.

Eco would also argue that hair, like clothing, "talks", communicates a certain vision of the world, a particular way of being. Hair fashion is ever-changing, therefore it should always be related to the context, considering the *intentio auctoris* [the intentions of the empirical author] and the *intentio operis* [the meaning of a hairstyle according to its system of signification], to which Baldini adds the hairdresser's ability to interpret the *intentio clientis* [the intention of the client], the content to convey (Baldini ed. 2003: 17). For Volli, hair communication is essential and unconscious at the same time, it is made of mechanical gestures and appearances taken for granted. Hair is the most salient element on the perceptive level of the figure and represents one of the most evident biological and cultural clues about a person (Volli 1998: 149-150). Volli refers to the hair of the whole body, considered a manipulable, active, and dynamic primary substance of the body. Hair is cut, tied, styled, all in order to talk about people, to represent their way of being in a given moment. Hair communicates in static ways, indicating identity, or dynamic ways, as in the case of the long bob that fluctuates with the movements of the body, or hair swept back after a plunge into the water. Hair also frames the face, modifying its volume, thinning it or amplifying it, impacting the overall appearance.

Another act of hair communication is the control, voluntary or involuntary, of the hairstyle that can be natural or culturalised. It's not just about the opposition between hair colour by birth and by dyeing, but also about externally imposed ways of wearing hair, as is the case in North Korea where men and women can choose from about fifteen regime-approved haircuts and hairstyles.

Baldini classifies hair fashion starting from three revolutions that occurred in the transition from oral to digital culture. The first is the disappearance of taboos, that is, "not having to do" related to hair. The second revolution coincides with the advent of secularisation, therefore with hairstyles that go beyond religious prescriptions, while the third concerns westernisation and globalisation; haircuts transversal to cultures that speak a planetary language, which, however, risks de-semantisising the cultural affiliation (Volli 1998).

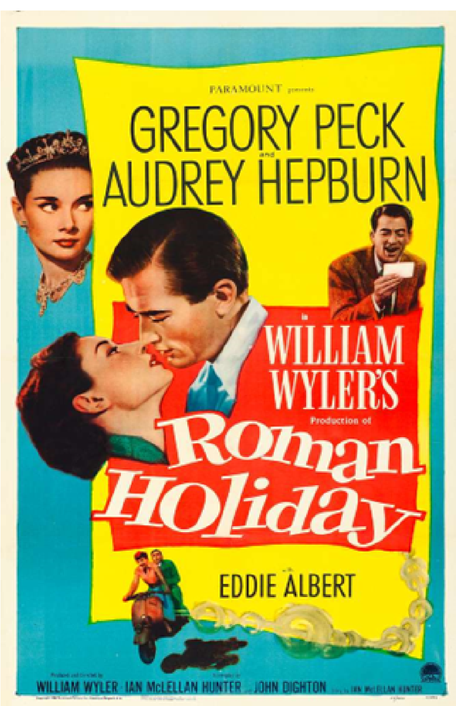

Fig. 3. *Roman Holiday*, 1953, poster, Creative Commons license**.**

Patrizia Calefato also reflects on hairstyles, correlating them to thematic roles: the braids of the good little girl, those of the hippie, the ones of the progressivist with the insertion of beads and cotton threads (Calefato 2004). Coco Chanel's bob, emblem of the liberation of the body from cumbersome lengths and societal impositions, followed by that of Audrey Hepburn's, a symbol of elegance in *Roman Holiday* (1953, Fig. 3), or the rebellious and masculine bob of the Beatles. Then there is the sexy bob of Valentina by Crepax, to which I would like to add the one that appeared in the second half of the 2000s, which is synonymous with female power. Calefato also places the accent on the absence of hair, on the negation of hairstyling, that is, on baldness, biological, or on the religious, ideological, or fashionable total shaving. Baldness is also related to the hairstyles that hide it and make it secret, as the comb-over or the male ponytail. *En vogue* in the 1990s, the latter is linked to Machismo in the same way as baldness. Calefato closes her list with the beard, permanently in the perspective of body hair, subject to social status or fashion, but still an indication of a thematic role.

From hair to hats, to affirm the validity of theories they are verified by analysing objects. Paolo Fabbri (2020) demonstrates this fact with an in-depth analysis of the hat, which he defines as a “sign zero”, divided into three distinct areas: rhetorical and physiognomic; carnivals and saturnalia, ethics, and etiquette. Fabbri suggests a model applicable to every object of the fashion system, confirming the liveliness and applicability of the semiotic method, including its ductility to the profitable interaction with other disciplines. Gianfranco Marrone (2020) also proceeds in the same way: starting from glasses, an object that, between technology and style, can assume different configurations, he proposes a *modus operandi* and a methodological framework in which the theories of Barthes, Floch and Greimas, passions and proxemics, find their place. The latter also, thanks to the contribution of Marrone and Isabella Pezzini, has once again attracted interest due to social distancing and the adoption of Covid-19 protective devices, of which glasses or eye protection shields are an integral part.

7. Practices and places of consumption

As Isabella Pezzini observes, fashion is a paradoxical object, mainly because of its peculiar temporality from which one of the rhythms of everyday life originates (Pezzini 2013). Fashion is characterised by perpetual motion, but there are places where it stops, for a short time or long enough to be considered Foucaltian “heterochronies”. This depends on how it is exhibited and consumed, i.e., whether we find it in a store or in a museum. Pezzini, in the broader context of several years of research on the semiotics of space, the city and places of consumption, has analysed fashion stores (literary and physical), thematic exhibitions (Pucci) and museums (Gucci, Ferragamo, Capucci), setting the basis for one of the liveliest branches of Italian semiotics. The point argued by Pezzini is that in artistic and commercial exhibition spaces the meaning of fashion is constructed and propagated. Pezzini analyses, for example, the department store starting from literature (Émile Zola’s *Au bonheur des dames* (1883) and *Germinal* (1885)), where the detailed and reiterated descriptions of commodities recall Benjamin’s concept of sex appeal (Pezzini 2020b). The seductive power of goods is comparable to that of the body, which is stunned by the labyrinthic spatiality of the department store, in which shapes, colors and textures intertwine, turning the visit into a mystical, almost transcendental experience. Furthermore, starting from the famous movie *A Breakfast at Tiffany’s* by Blake Edwards (1961), Pezzini describes how significant a consumer experience can be, even if humble, and the impact of stores on the identity of the city, the street, and the itineraries (Pezzini 2006).

This shows that the most sudden and recurrent urban transformations concern commercial and cultural places of consumption, which are affected by the inexorability of fashions, styles, and forms of life, dragged into an increasingly rapid temporality by online shopping practices and the "glocalized" needs of consumers. In order to keep up with the new diktats of consumption imposed by the Web and social media, the physical places of shopping must be equipped with a distinctive quid, a surplus of meaning – and of offering – that continues to justify their presence. It is necessary to differentiate experiences, enrich them and give value to the effort of time and energy required to move in the real world, offline. Therefore, the city is not only the background for shopping practices, but also redesigns them from the inside, infusing them with its *genius loci* to provide them with unique traits that can only be experienced in that location, re-semantising them through the interaction between places and subjects.

On the academic side, the group of researchers directed by Pezzini has largely contributed to demonstrating that places of consumption are perceived in the same way as monuments by both tourists and city inhabitants, promoting the convergence between consumption and preservation of cultural heritage, as more and more brands take on the task of renovation. They may even occupy, changing their intended use, spaces of historical and artistic relevance (cf. Barone and Torrini 2020; Cervelli and Torrini 2006; Terracciano 2016, 2020a; Pezzini and Finocchi eds. 2020). Throughout time, valid frameworks of analysis have been developed, such as the now widely tested model of spatiality developed by Pierluigi Cervelli and Claudia Torrini (2006), to which I added some contemporary-related adjustments in my research on the Rinascente/Tritone department store in Rome (Terracciano 2020a).

Gianpaolo Proni has also worked on the temporality of shopping practices, especially regarding young people's preference for low-cost fast fashion, leading to fast, syncopated, and frequent purchases (Proni 2006). A further issue addressed by Proni in his study of the city from the perspective of shopping itineraries and practices is the structure of the economic and value exchange in the urban and consumption space. In this framework, the shop window becomes the figure of exchange, the activator of the desire for conjunction (Proni 2007). Eleonora Chiais also reflects on the regimes of visibility of the shop window, starting from the studies of Eric Landowski (1989), considering the garment on display as the representation of "daily" fashion and its different narrations (Chiais 2020).

8. Conclusions

Fashion is signification, discourse, sign, code and value; fashion is semiotics.

Fashion spaces and objects are the result of social and cultural traits, of the commitment of different professionals, of bringing value systems into the discourse that can and must influence the future. The more respect and care are given to the materials employed, the conditions of the labour force, the impact on the environment, and the health of the world's population, the more their tangible and intangible value increases.

In each outfit, the body incorporates a constellation of meanings, determined through a dialogue between alterities generated by the gap between innovation and tradition, from which sensations and passions arise.

Sensations and passions are codified by the fashion discourse (social and traditional) in increasingly complex narrations, gradually flowing into the audiovisual sphere since 2010, the year of the establishment of the fashion film genre, whose semiotic typification is owed to Lucio Spaziante (2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has accelerated the race of fashion towards the future. The rush into the future is demonstrated by the digital fashion weeks that have followed one another since July 2020, which have traced a new typology of communication of the fashion system's collections. In addition to the now established media forms, such as the aforementioned fashion movies, there have been fashion shows with limited access and the distancing of the audience, that were streamed on social networks and websites, or even the filmic representations of the experience of model bodies during the times for which the garments of the collection have been designed, and the artistic performance-narratives of the world's major brands. Short expressive forms, enjoyable in a single solution that confirm the role of fashion as a catalyst for innovation, which, in addition to being the ideal field of application for semiotics, is also the most fertile ground for testing communicative innovations.

Notes

1. For this reason, I had to select scholars by the criteria of number and consistency of publications over time.
2. @fashionsemiotics on Instagram, publication forthcoming.
3. On the semiotics of meme, see Marino 2020.

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Filmography

Roman Holiday (USA 1953, director: William Wyler).
Breakfast at Tiffany's (USA 1961, director: Blake Edwards).

Image source

Fig. 3. *Roman Holiday*, 1953, poster, Creative Commons license.

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Semiotics of Space, Semiotics of the City

Alice Giannitrapani

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, configuring 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 characterising 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 enunciator 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 respective 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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