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Digital Media in Semiotic Research in Italy

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Summary. This essay retraces how the internet and the digital media in general have been approached by semiotics in Italian studies. The essay begins by noting that many of the issues arising from the advent of the digital communication, such as the dialectics among "apocalyptic and integrated", the role attributed to technology in the process of the transformation of societies and the debate over the models of knowledge (eg. Eco's remarks on the tree as a metaphor of knowledge as opposed to the labyrinth or on the limits of the interpretation) were discussed and already on the agenda of the discipline several years before the diffusion of the internet. Then, it deals with the first studies on digital artefacts, mostly focused on the communicative aspects of websites and their interfaces, as well as on the novelty represented by the "short texts" disseminated in new media (banners, clips, gifs etc.). After that, it shows how, starting from the studies of Floch ([1995] 2000), the discourse over digital media matures and produces a vast series of essays covering the socialisation processes on the web and in social networks. In such a scenario, the web is less a "topic" to be examined than an environment to be investigated in search of specific forms of interactions occurring in specific discourses (politics, marketing, food etc.).

Keywords. Italian semiotics, technology, digital media, social media, the internet

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Aufsatz zeichnet nach, wie das Internet und die digitalen Medien im Allgemeinen von der italienischen Semiotik behandelt wurden und werden. Ausgangspunkt ist die Feststellung, dass viele der Probleme, die sich aus dem Aufkommen der digitalen Kommunikation ergeben – wie beispielsweise die Dialektik zwischen „apokalyptisch" und „integriert", die der Technologie zugeschriebene Rolle im Transformationsprozess der Gesellschaften und die Debatte über verschiedene Wissensmodelle (z.B. Ecos Bemerkungen zum Baum als Metapher des Wissens im Gegensatz zum Labyrinth oder zu den Grenzen der Interpretation) – bereits mehrere Jahre vor der Verbreitung des Internets in der Disziplin diskutiert wurden. Der folgende Abschnitt widmet sich insbesondere den ersten Studien zu digitalen Artefakten. Diese konzentrierten sich hauptsächlich auf die kommunikativen Aspekte von Websites und ihren Schnittstellen sowie die Verbreitung von „Kurztexten" in neuen Medien (Banner, Clips, GIFs usw.), die mit hoher Innovationskraft einhergingen. Nachfolgend wird gezeigt, wie sich

der Diskurs über digitale Medien ausgehend von den Studien von Floch ([1995] 2000) entwickelt hat und eine Vielzahl von Aufsätzen hervorgebracht hat, die primär die Sozialisierungsprozesse im Web und in sozialen Netzwerken behandeln. Die Sichtweise auf das Web entwickelt sich also vom „Thema", das untersucht werden soll, zu einer Umgebung, die nach spezifischen Interaktionsformen in verschiedenen Diskursen (Politik, Marketing, Lebensmittel usw.) untersucht werden soll.

The interest in digital media developed in the area of semiotics comes as a natural continuation of the latter's mission of analysing contemporary texts in view of the construction of a philosophically grounded theory of language. This commitment is urged by demands coming from outside of the discipline, with regards to society as a whole[1], on the one hand, whereby the community of semiologists are expected to actively monitor and assess the progressive changes led by the advent of digital communication. On the other, from within, that is, by the community of scholars and practitioners of the discipline[2] itself, who are, so to speak, challenged by the specific textualities and the peculiarities of online interactions as compared to those of traditional media.

1. Before the web

However, on closer inspection, the semiotic interest in the net model comes before the web itself, as this term becomes a metaphor for a fundamental epistemological change in the conception of knowledge, which the discipline helps to promote. We are referring to that which – to use the title of a popular text by Umberto Eco (2007) – we could define as the passage *from the tree to the labyrinth*, or the progressive shift from a conception of culture understood in terms of hierarchy to a structural, process-oriented one, non-linear and rhizomatic by definition. Already in his *Treatise on General semiotics* [known as *A Theory of semiotics* in English], Eco ([1975] 1976: 21–28) embraced an idea of culture associated with Lévi-Strauss's structural anthropology (according to the axes of production, exchange, and kinship), indicating how "culture can be studied completely under a semiotic profil" (*ivi*: 28). If such an equivalence may seem obvious nowadays, it constituted a clear 'reticular' and anti-ontological positioning of the discipline with respect to the opposite hypothesis linked to the historicist-oriented metaphor of the tree.

In short, from the very beginning, semiotics has viewed culture as modelled through the metaphor of the web. *La svolta semiotica* [The semiotic turn] by Paolo Fabbri (1998) carries this shift forward, advocating the aban-

donment of a semiotics of signs and codes in favour of new models of analysis of culture as an ever-changing configuration (semiosphere) of texts.

But there is more: in a famous article from as far back as 1973 recently republished (Fabbri [1973] 2017: 65–70), Fabbri takes a position on the different perspectives of semiotics and sociology in the analysis of the issues emerged from the study of mass communications; he points out how the sociological approach to the media as outlined by Marshall McLuhan (1964) and summarised in the famous slogan 'the medium is the message' revealed a weak point that was anything but negligible. According to Fabbri, these studies upheld an admittedly reductionist hypothesis according to which, of the messages circulating in society, only the role of the expressive technological infrastructure from which they originated should be considered; conversely, the meanings, stories and narratives they conveyed was to be neglected and deemed irrelevant. While not denying the epistemological and interpretative value of McLuhan's reflections, Fabbri highlights their inadequacy: a theory of mass communication cannot be developed by considering only the infrastructural aspects of the media system, without dealing with the stories they circulate.

In this context, by embracing the task of developing a theory of culture, semiotics has an extra gear: it can subsume McLuhan's description of media dynamics by problematising its input within a broader and more exhaustive system that aims at modelling the relationship of reciprocal presupposition between enunciative infrastructures and the utterances ascribed to them, as well as, in more detail, between the expression and content of these same utterances. Considering the enormous success that McLuhan's theories have enjoyed in the approach to the study of the media by social sciences and, in particular, sociology; and considering that starting from the activity of the *Toronto Center for Culture and Technology* – founded by McLuhan himself – a recognised group of scholars continued the intellectual legacy of their master, persisting in the assumption of a primacy of technological tools over content, also with regard to the study of the internet and the new media (see for example de Kerckhove 1995, 1997 and in its wake, in Italy, Granieri 2005, 2006, 2009). Fabbri's objection proves to be fundamental in identifying the threads of the debate on the study of the digital sphere. In it, on the one hand, we can recognise a McLuhanian approach, often distinguished by its enthusiastic and cohesive tone towards the emancipatory role of 'new media'; on the other, a strand that can be traced back to Fabbri's standpoint outlined above, advocating a rethinking of the role of technologies in functional terms as delegated non-human actants, capable of replacing human intervention in some functions. Being in a continuum that seamlessly connects humans and non-humans, technology reveals and shapes the cultural, ideological and political values of the society of which it is a part. In this regard, a fundamental role is played by the interdisciplinary field of science and technology studies (STS)[3] and by the group of researchers whose activity draws inspiration from the work of Bruno Latour.[4]

However, the same 1973 essay by Paolo Fabbri allows us to take a critical stance also with regard to sociological models of analysis known as 'content analysis' applied to the study of media texts. As Marrone points out in the introduction to the new edition of the essay:

> In an attempt to study the information content of mass communication messages, the content analysis practiced by sociologists implicitly poses all the problems of linguistic semantics, while seemingly discounting the operational suggestions of the latter. In this, according to Fabbri, it "reveals a pre-Saussurian epistemology" which, on the one hand, does not take into account the complicated problem of the rather frequent presence of multiple expressive substances (verbal, images, music, etc.) within the same message; on the other, not knowing how to handle specific textual units, ends up cataloguing traditional and unrefined linguistic entities such as words or, rarely, brief summaries. Hence the taxonomic fury that characterises it – ineffective in fact in its explanation of the media – and the consequent need to replace the notion of message – a black box without internal articulations – with that of text, based instead on the Saussurian principle of *tout se tient*: that is, of a semiotic entity that exists thanks to its pertinent internal articulations and its clear boundaries towards the outside (Fabbri [1973] 2017: 25–26, my translation).

Considerations of this kind may constitute the root of a possible critique of contemporary market research and analysis carried out through querying huge databases and digital archives made available by the user interaction practices on social networks. These queries – mostly carried out by searching keywords or tags – in fact return results that can be evaluated on the basis of the same arguments put forth by Fabbri and emphasised by Marrone. Based as they are on the naive notion of 'word' or 'message', they fail to reveal the internal articulation, the text, of which these would be a manifestation, instead producing a hyper-segmentation (or hyper-mapping) of the plane of expression (hence the "taxonomic fury" evoked by Marrone) devoid of the necessary relation of correspondence (reciprocal presupposition) with the plane of content, except in reflexive terms. This is indirectly confirmed in Dondero's essay (2020: 169–193) which, starting from an analysis of the contribution to image theory by Media Visualization scholars such as Lev Manovich and his Cultural Analytics Lab, on the one hand, indicates the extraordinary possibilities offered by the visual exploration of large c o r p o r a of images, archived through digital media; on the other, it underscores how the semi-symbolisms that can be inferred from such surveys concern the meta-visual organisation of the corpora, or the relationship that the single images maintain with the collections to which they belong, and leaves aside the problem of their meaning and semantic stabilisation. Conversely, it could be objected that in a semiotic perspective every segmentation of the text – whether it be operated by the analyst or the social networks user – can only be aimed at some interpretative hypothesis, and the question of meaning cannot be eliminated from the concrete

practice of dissection. The clear unwillingness to assume a definite stance towards the predicative content of the images and the transformations they undergo in relation to the collection they belong to, which Dondero attributed to Manovich (Dondero 2020: 193), runs the risk of not taking into account the fact that the meaning is already in motion, produced as an effect of the gesture of segmenting the text in a certain way rather than in another. Choosing not to express oneself on what the meaning of this gesture might be does not prevent the eventuality that someone else might decide to exercise such interpretative power, proposing, as often happens in Sociology and Marketing, easy 'integrated' interpretations of complex social facts thanks to the illustration of visual patterns inferred from social media corpora. Not infrequently, such patterns are created without taking the trouble of demonstrating their composability, in textual terms, into a model constituted on the basis of an assumed reciprocal presupposition of expression and content; and in that exemplifying the kind of naivety that Fabbri imputed to content analysis. Alongside Dondero's contribution discussed above, an interesting direction is suggested by the research work of Valeria Burgio (2021a and 2021b) and Valentina Manchia (2020), aimed at reconstructing the boundaries and rhetoric of 'data discourse' by addressing the powerful translational role that information visualisation strategies play in the articulation of reality, despite their apparent neutrality; thus, the way in which 'data is given' (or presented) by old and new media can be the object of criticism, bypassing the contention that, being self-evident, they can speak for themselves.

Another line of enquiry concerns the question of competence. The attitude of openness towards complexity that must be taken in the face of the 'knowledge crisis' triggered by the advent of social media[5] (Weinberger 2012: 8–15) can be traced back to such fundamental contributions as *Opera aperta* by Umberto Eco, which, already in 1962, analysed contemporary art's new stance of openness and ambiguity towards multiple interpretations of the world. The same situation of crisis and a demand for openness towards complexity arises from the social scenario reconfigured by digital media, too often accused of being stupid[6] on the basis of 'pyramidal' epistemological models (whose strategy could be summarised – again according to Weinberger (2012) – with the slogan "knowing by reducing"): these are unable to profitably manage the new forms of knowledge production, characteristically extensive (that is, handled by large audiences of subjects), without borders (with contributors from all over), populist (inclusive regardless of roles and hierarchies), accredited by the 'others' (or based on the reputation recognised by others to subjects that are active within the community rather than on the titles that these same subjects have), and unresolved (that is, which do not seek decisive answers but on the contrary postulate disagreement as a systematic element to be managed adequately) (see again Weinberger 2012: 20–21).

If *Opera aperta* [The Open Work] (Eco [1962] 1989) poses the problem of the position to assume in the face of the ambiguity and multiplicity

of interpretations of the work of art and, consequently, of society, *I limiti dell'interpretazione* [The Limits of Interpretation] (Eco [1990] 1991) examines a specular issue, that is the identification of valid criteria in support of arguments against the uncontrolled drift of interpretations, legitimised precisely by technological openness and the multiplication of readers/writers ensured by technology. All such issues are ushered in the contemporary world by the emergence of a public arena in the form of digital media.[7]

The semiotic reflection on gamification also provides much theoretical food for thought for research devoted to the digital world. Umberto Eco had already shown his appreciation of *Homo Ludens*, a fundamental work by the Dutch Medievalist John Huizinga (1938), whose 1973 Italian edition, published by Einaudi, he introduced with a critical essay. In this paper, Eco argues that Huizinga can be considered the father of a strictly structural conception of play, a conception which views play not as a mere *ludus* or pastime focused on the dimension of pleasure but as capable of asserting a social model. According to Eco, Huizinga's modernity – which, not surprisingly, was criticised by the idealistic historians of his time – lay in his putting forth a notion of culture as a set of diverse and yet interconnected social phenomena (sport, law, art etc.), thus going beyond an elitist vision that made this term correspond only to 'high' output, and, at the same time, a certain romantic essentialism seeking to reveal the 'spirit' of a people through its culture. Moreover, his use of the notion of 'cultural invariant' (borrowed from sociology) can be considered highly innovative, identifying play as a profound structure spanning the most disparate thematic areas. In spite of the modernity of his conception, Huizinga does not appear to adequately pursue the mission he has set, according to Eco. Instead, the Dutch historian indulges in general considerations of an aesthetic/moral character that do not fit the need to trace a rigorous morphology of play practices and systems. It is precisely this inability to draw concrete analytical consequences from his epistemological moves that leaves room for a semiotics of play, aimed precisely at bridging the Dutch historian's ambiguities and undertaking to describe these morphological configurations in detail. Eco himself inaugurates such work, proposing a fundamental distinction which escaped Huizinga's observation: that between game and play. This distinction serves precisely to dissolve the ambiguities that the term has, both in Italian – the language in which Eco's introduction was written – and in German – the language of Huizinga's text – thus incorporating the two meanings that in English are lexicalised in two different terms. It is up to the semiologist, then, to clarify the issue, underlining the fundamental difference between the game as an abstract model defined by a system of rules, and play, intended as a game situation liable to be described m o r p h o l o g i c a l l y, or s e m i o t i c a l l y.

Indeed, what attracts the interest of the semiotic community is play's peculiarity of offering itself as a system that can shape interactions in disparate areas of sociality, combined with the call for a morphological description of the concrete forms in which it is expressed. And it was Omar Calabrese who took up Eco's baton, following the path of a semiotics of play

aimed at addressing its dual nature of game and play. In this regard, in 1993, Calabrese published a collection of essays with the emblematic title of *Serio ludere*. In the oxymoron of this Latin motto, Calabrese recognises how play can offer an effective modelling of semiotics' stance on the world, combining play and game, or assuming, in reflexive and therefore identitary terms, the peculiarities of both references. In other words, as a discipline devoted to the systematic description of sociality, semiotics can be likened to a game: first and foremost, for the fact of carrying out its activity with a playful disposition, linked to the enjoyment and disinterested fun (and not to instrumental gains) of the player in the game situation (play); then, for the fact of combining such a playful disposition with the 'seriousness' of those who consciously choose to carry out the task of a m o r p h o l o g i -c a l description of the game with the due dedication. Thus, dedication and playfulness go hand in hand. Therefore, according to Calabrese, semiotics can adopt the same playful attitude whether analysing proper games such as bridge (Calabrese 1993: 99–140), television programmes such as *Carosello* (Calabrese 1993: 27–46), trouser fastening zips (Calabrese 1993: 68–70) or Snoopy, the iconic cartoon character born of Schulz's imagination (Calabrese 1993: 47-51). Gianfranco Marrone, many years later, revealed the essential epistemological significance of this approach, ascribing to Calabrese the notion of the *serio ludere* approach, which defines the semiologist as a *professional amateur* (Marrone 2015). If it is true that the path of semiotics as a game can be recognised as a nerve traversing the very evolution of the discipline[8], the same cannot be said of a semiotics of gaming, which is the field explored by Bartezzaghi[9] and a few others; however it has garnered focus from a new generation of scholars, also as concerns the digital sector and in particular gamification, urban gamification, and semiotics of videogames (see Maietti 2004; Meneghelli 2007, 2013; Thibault ed. 2016, 2020; Idone Cassone 2020; Biggio et al. eds. 2020).

2.   The beginnings

But how exactly did the net as a theme enter the radar of Italian semiotics?

A first line of research seems, to us, oriented at shedding light on the innovative characteristics of the web in comparison to traditional media. A fundamental feature, granting that these studies fall within the disciplinary framework of semiotics, is their inductive approach and analytical character: every general consideration is legitimised by the concrete analysis of the various textualities – websites and artefacts – found online.

To our knowledge, the first work to appear in Italy affirming a semiotic point of view on the theme of the internet and the World Wide Web dates back to 1996. The booklet, published as a supplement to the economics magazine *Espansione* and curated by the *Centro Studi Astra* (1998) in collaboration with *Alphabet*, is entitled *Costruire internet: La prima ricerca semiotica sul World Wide Web per imparare a comunicare attraverso i siti*

[Building the internet: the first semiotic study on the World Wide Web to learn how to communicate through websites]. The approach taken is pedagogical and design-oriented. The research objectives, stated at the opening of the book, immediately clarify that the sociosemiotic analysis[10] of the approximately 80 websites making up the corpus examined will endeavour to determine a set of 'rules' for website design. The same attitude of 'adaptation' of the semiotic gaze to the novelty represented by the internet is found in other, increasingly rigorous and controlled studies on the subject. A good example is the successful volume edited by Isabella Pezzini (2001), *Trailer, spot, clip, siti, banner* [Trailer, commercials, clips, websites, banners]. Already underscored in the introduction is the discipline's difficulty in keeping pace with

> contemporary textual panoramas [...] increasingly dense and multiform, difficult to cut out and decipher according to unitary reading strategies (Pezzini ed. 2001: 7, my translation).

Of these textual panoramas, the logic of "infinite germination" is emphasised (which challenges the discipline by undermining the determination – essential for the attribution of meaning to the world – of textual closure[11]) as well as the incessant re-modelling power of the texts of culture. The volume contains some essays dedicated to the analysis of texts produced for the internet (see, in particular, the essays by Guarino (2001), Polidoro (2001) and Barbieri (2001) contained in it).

The book by Alessandro Zinna (2004), *Le interfacce degli oggetti di scrittura. Teoria del linguaggio e ipertesti* [The interfaces of writing objects. Language theory and hypertexts] can also be ascribed to this pioneering phase. Zinna's work examines the elements of discontinuity of digital interfaces with respect to writing, casting its gaze particularly on the design side and on the interfaces' semiotic characteristics capable of challenging consolidated semiotic models, in view of their adaptation. The volume aspires to the construction of a completely renewed semiotic theory resulting from the encounter with digital hypertexts and the consequent technologisation of the plane of expression.

A common feature of these studies is precisely their advocated approach to the analysis of the diverse textualities arising from the web. Rather than focusing on the rhetoric they embody, these studies emphasise their unique medial specificity, which challenges the classical models of the discipline that primarily analyse individual texts. This shift is driven by the progress marked by the advent and widespread use of hypertext. The latest publication in this line of research is the manual by Giovanna Cosenza (2014) *Introduzione alla semiotica dei nuovi media* [Introduction to the semiotics of New Media] which 'semioticises' some fundamental issues of the debate around the textual specificities of websites and their usability. Cosenza identifies actual 'guidelines' for the analysis of websites to be taken into consideration regardless of the individual narratives conveyed.

3.   Stabilisation

The fervour for an epistemological renewal of the discipline stirred by the novelty of the web was exhausted, however, as the web became hegemonic, and reflection on the medial specificities derived from digital media has given way to the analysis of the practices and rhetorics of internet discourse. This has been by far the most productive line of research for Italian (and, perhaps, non-Italian) semiotic studies on the dynamics of the web.

Jean-Marie Floch's foundational study on Apple and IBM (Floch [1995] 2000) opened the discussion around the forms of life that recognise themselves in the use of digital media. The essay establishes a model for the analysis of the visual identities of major brands, beginning with their logo. The logo is no longer considered solely as a symbolically meaningful trace but rather as a text with internal articulation that communicates a specific brand narrative. According to Floch, logos already make it possible to identify the visual identity that characterises the entire communication (advertising, product design, sales points, etc.) of a given brand. As the Apple and IBM logos are analysed, their narrative is revealed, showing how the two brands convey two opposing and competing ideologies on the digital world. This essay on corporate communication offers the first analysis of digital discourse which, considering its role and function in society, will end up being considered as a life form (through company CEOs such as Steve Jobs) by users; indeed, becoming a user of an Apple product means much more than using a tool, it amounts to identifying one's experience, one's way of being online, and more generally, of living. This study initiated a research trajectory on visual identities that, aligned with the notion of identity as the result of competing philosophies, explored the evolution of Apple's strategies within the discourse of information technology. The research expanded to encompass the visual identity (and life form) of Microsoft Windows (Mangiapane 2009a; Polidoro 2009) and extended further to include Google. A dedicated volume on Google's strategies (Del Marco and Pezzini eds. 2017) opens with an analysis of its visual identity (Del Marco 2017: 25–43). Information technology discourse and the ideological assertions of big brands on their role and mission are also the focus of an article dedicated to a well-known Telecom Italia commercial[12] featuring Gandhi (Mangiapane 2009b). The article sets out to deconstruct the advertising campaign's representation of the role of the web in the difference between new and old media, but it is also worth of mention for its account and analysis of the controversy raised by debunker activists such as Paolo Attivissimo[13] and fuelled by spoofs uploaded to Youtube by users – something which nowadays could be characterised as memetic practice.

The dawn of Web 2.0 caused the focus to shift to community and socialisation dynamics. The first forays into the subject are the works by Giulia Ceriani (2009) inspired by the non-specifically semiotic work of Granieri (2005) and Di Fraia (2007). My own essay dedicated to the urban blog *Rosalio.it* (Mangiapane 2010) and published as part of a project dedicated

to places of socialisation in Palermo (Marrone ed. 2010) represents the first structured analysis of the community dynamics of a medium-sized urban blog. The essay analyses five years in the life of the community orbiting around the blog, framing their interactions, and upholds the notion that blogs are configured as heterotopies which, by establishing an internal autonomous temporality, could also be considered heterochronic, as well as heteroglossic for coining specific jargons within their field of linguistic activity. The essay draws upon Landowski's (1989, 1996) political discourse analysis and for the first time applies its methodology to account for the life of online communities. Still on the subject of blogs and social networks, my own article dedicated to the world of culinary blogs (Mangiapane 2014a) adopts the same approach, delving into group practices such as giveaways and contests periodically announced by blogs.

Times were ripe for semiologists to develop a widespread receptiveness towards the "new forms of socialization" represented by the internet 2.0. *Politics 2.0* edited by Federico Montanari (2010) opened the dances. The slender volume – merely 150 pages – is a collection of essays by the 'old guard' in the fields of semiotics (including Eco and Calabrese) and political studies (Pasquino) who are sceptical towards the optimistic liberation perspectives of a certain rhetoric of new media. Its focus is in fact on the broad anthropological differences marked by the advent of the pervasive political communication of Berlusconi's commercial television and social media (looking at them mostly as worlds in continuity). Eco's contribution (2010) is noteworthy, advocating a semiotics of silence in the face of the noise generated by the incessant chatter filling websites and online communities. In the same vein is a work by Leone (2014) dedicated to digital spirituality, which interprets the spread of communication mediated by digital devices as part of a progressive process of de-materialisation of society with evident repercussions on the religious sphere. However, such critical stance does not seem to fit in with the prevailing attitude of general openness towards the demands of digital communication. This is attested by subsequent scientific production that aims at exploring and mapping out online socialisation practices and often displays an optimistic attitude towards the role of political openness exercised by digital media. *Viaggio nei social network* [A journey through social networks] is the title of a monographic issue of *E/C*, the official journal of the *Italian Association of Semiotic Studies*, edited by Nicola Bigi and Elena Codeluppi (2011) which testifies to the desire to systematically investigate this scenario. The editors' introduction to the volume points to a curious and, so to speak, 'integrated' approach, aimed at highlighting the advantages and opportunities of new communication tools through notions developed by the sociological literature on the web (for example, the concept of c o n t a g i o n and v i r a l i t y); however, these are assumed without adequate critical reflection.[14]

Progressively, the community gains a less naive viewpoint, oriented towards an increasingly sophisticated modelling of internet dynamics. Specialist literature on the subject of the web is consolidated. This is, for exam-

ple, the case of Vincenza Del Marco (see at least Del Marco and Pezzini eds. 2017; Del Marco 2018), Riccardo Finocchi (ed. 2016a, 2016b, 2017; Finocchi et al. 2020), Francesco Mangiapane (2009a, 2009b, 2010, 2014a, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2018a, 2018b), Paolo Peverini (2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b, 2017a, 2017b; Finocchi et al. 2020) and Gabriele Marino (2014, 2015, 2016; Thibault and Marino 2018; Marino and Thibault eds. 2016) who directs his attention to memetic dynamics and elaborates on the topic in a monographic issue of *Lexia* (see note 14).

A line of expertise in the semiotic discipline is represented by competent media analysis which, as we have seen, marks a distance from McLuhan's positions and increasingly chooses to focus on the problem of re-writing, translation and re-mediation posed by Bolter and Grusin (1998) (see Marrone 1998; Franci and Nergaard eds. 1999; Dusi and Nergaard eds. 2000; Dusi and Spaziante eds. 2006; Eugeni 2010; Mangiapane 2014b; Migliore ed. 2016a and 2016b; Marrone 2018; Biggio et al. eds. 2020; Giannitrapani and Marrone eds. 2020; Corrain and Vannoni eds. 2021). Another area of interest is photography, whose fate, following the impact of the transition from analogue to digital, is widely explored by the semiotic community (see among others, Dondero 2007; Basso Fossali and Dondero 2008; Brucculeri et al. eds. 2011; Del Marco and Pezzini eds. 2011; Finocchi and Perri 2012; Pozzato 2012; Leone ed. 2018; Mangano 2018).

Generally speaking, the consolidating semiotic gaze on the digital sphere is keen to distance itself from both triumphalistic tones and apocalyptic scenarios. Such an approach can be summed up by Isabella Pezzini's slogan (Del Marco and Pezzini eds. 2017: 7) "neither apocalyptic nor integrated", which, referring to a well-known work by Eco, ([1964] 1994)[15], carefully avoids taking an ideologically favourable or opposed position towards the novelty represented by new media. Contributions as *Corpi mediali. semiotica e contemporaneità* [Media bodies. semiotics and contemporaneity] (Pezzini and Spaziante eds. 2014), *Strategie dell'ironia sul web* [Strategies of irony on the web] (Finocchi ed. 2016a), *Nuove forme di interazione: dal web al mobile* [New forms of interaction: from web to mobile] (Pezzini and Spaziante eds. 2014), edited by Guido Ferraro and Anna Maria Lorusso (2016), the monographic issue of the journal *Versus. Quaderni di studi semiotici* dedicated to *Gli schermi dell'apparire* [The screens of appearing] (Finocchi and Pezzini eds. 2017) or *Le forme della persuasione e il sistema dei media* [The forms of persuasion and the media system] (Addis and Prato eds. 2020) put under scrutiny a world that is now inextricably linked to media representation, in which daily life is expressed and reflected through social media practices (Facebook and Instagram in the first place). In this context, the reflection on the political repercussions of the advent of social networks is of great importance, especially with reference to the contamination of the public debate caused by imbecility (see notes 5 and 6), conspiracies and fake news (see Leone ed. 2016b; Lorusso 2018; Polidoro ed. 2018). Noteworthy in this regard is the article on *Doppiozero* by Marrone (2017a) which invites the reader to re-interpret the phenome-

non of fake news according to credibility building strategies and the effects of verisimilitude of the texts circulating in social media. Also worth mentioning is an essay by Mangiapane (2018b) aimed at reconstructing a proper 'fake-news discourse' through the analysis of the intermediary rhetorical strategies of some Facebook pages accused of spreading false news. The attention thus progressively shifts to the reconstruction of emerging political dynamics starting from the pervasiveness of the mediatisation of everyday life induced by social media (see the notion of "social rhetoric" proposed by Mangiapane 2018a). Significant in this regard are the works by Mazzucchelli (2016) and Leone (2016a, 2020b) on the tactics of online conflict, by Peverini on the semiotic measurement of influence and online reputation (2016b) and again on the relationship between everyday life and Instagram (2017b), by Spaziante (2019) about the new forms of influence exercised by Youtubers.

Still in terms of political dynamics, it is worth drawing attention to the series of contributions by Sedda and Demuru (2018a, 2018b, 2019, 2020) dedicated to the forms of media populism. The hypothesis of the two semiologists is that the emergence of social networks as political arenas represents the lowest common denominator for the new forms of populism. Populist leaders – according to overall considerations developed through progressive generalisations based on the study of Brazilian leader Bolsonaro and the Italian Lega party secretary Salvini's communication strategies – characterise their discourse along at least five axes, namely vagueness, implosion, primacy of the body, esthesia and negativity. Social networks constitute the ideal environment for a characteristically ambiguous discourse, which to the rational construction of a political proposition based on a conscious choice in a system of alternatives (following a paradigmatic order OR/OR) prefers an unmarked logic (AND/AND). Far from avoiding charges of contradiction, this logic tends to blur any contradictory element to the point of making it appear insignificant; its strong point lies precisely in its ability to conciliate opposing demands. Building consensus on vague and mostly contradictory instances, in which everything is muddled, ends up creating an indeterminate collective which, depending on the point of view taken, may now be understood as a sign of the implosion of all possible political organisation or, conversely, as the original nucleus from which a new order may come into being. This would explain the evolution of many populist movements and parties which, after an early stage characterised by ambiguity, once they are integrated in the political system, choose to structure themselves on the basis of more precise and articulated platforms, becoming in some way part of the establishment. The indeterminacy promoted by "social-ist" (a neologism coined by the authors (2018b) to reflect the convergence of populism and social networks' rhetoric) leaders and groups finds a moment of stabilisation in corporeality, anchoring itself on it. It is a euphoria of the "mingling of bodies" which affords particular pleasure in the identification with an unclear vision and perspective of action; thus, the greater the semantic vagueness in terms of contents and politi-

cal propositions, the greater the role of the emotional component and aesthetic involvement, with the result of blurring the boundaries between reality and fiction and between historically separate discursive spheres (public life/private life, politics/football etc.), evoked concurrently. Finally, there is the propensity for negativity. The populist discourse as it is expressed on social networks is intrinsically aggressive, aimed at 'bringing down' opponents rather than proving them wrong; using foul language and an aesthetics of abasement whose goal is to make *tabula rasa* of one's anti-subject, demolishing it completely as the representative of an irreducible otherness and therefore radical and impossible to integrate within a common discourse.

These rhetorical forms emerge from social networks which, according to Sedda and Demuru (2020), literally end up giving shape to new political practices exploited by political leaders through specific interaction tactics, such as disguise (i.e. the idea that leaders can disguise themselves in the clothes of professionals and such recognised roles in society as fire-fighters, police, workers, and so on), posture (that is, poses and attitudes of figures outside the political arena, belonging to the military world or that of entertainment) and mimicry (that of the politician masquerading as a man on the street, the ordinary man). In particular, in adopting this last mimetic strategy political leaders exhibit their 'normality' of existing as subjects with imperfect bodies (as in the case of Italian Lega party secretary Salvini who does not refrain from showing his adipose belly while standing shirtless in front of a barbecue on a day off, in a photograph shared on social networks) or even as vulnerable subjects (as in the case of some photos published by the Brazilian leader Bolsonaro in which he shows his sick body). The daily diet made up of peasant or industrial foods exhibited on social media by both Salvini and Bolsonaro can be attributed to the tactics of mimicry as it has been described above.

Among the works worthy of mention is Marrone's essay (2017b), focussed on an analysis of Facebook interactions in terms of phatic communication. Marrone brings the question of online socialisation back to its anthropological roots founded on 'contact' by reconnecting the links that separate network users from the practices of the 'savages' studied by Malinowski (1923); on the other hand, it suggests a typology to classify interactions on the basis of a tensive pattern that ranks, depending on their degree of transitivity, heterogeneous practices such as exclamation, information, expression and promotion.

Semiotics does not fail to enter the debate on machinic enunciation (see Eugeni 2020; Mazzucchelli 2020), an area also investigated by Paolucci (2020a and 2020b) with the aim of proposing a revision of the theory of enunciation as set out (and received by structural semiotics) by Benveniste. Paolucci suggests recognising the pre-eminence of the *he/she* over the figures of the enunciator and the enunciatee: To be the source of subjectivity, according to Paolucci, is an impersonal instance that expresses itself first of all as a third person (a *he/she* who is both *me* and *not me*) which only

secondarily and under certain conditions is stabilised through the formal apparatus of enunciation in terms of linguistic subjectivity proper.

Another important strand of research focuses on the transformation process of objects from inert 'things' to real multifunctional devices as is the case of Google Home or Alexa (see Marrone 1999, Marrone and Landowski eds. 2002; Mattozzi ed. 2006; Mangano 2008, 2009, 2014, 2018; Polidoro 2009; Finocchi et al. 2020). Opening this new field of scholarly investigation, precisely regarding smart objects Finocchi, Perri and Peverini (2020) note how their progressive diffusion compels the human sciences, and even more so semiotics, to reassess the very notion of identity and delve more usefully into the identification procedures resulting from the interaction of human and non-human actors. Furthermore, this exercise can only lead to a rethinking of the theoretical notions that have guided the reflection on the problems of intersubjectivity and interobjectivity up until now: the idea of the medium as an external prosthesis capable of giving shape to virtual worlds, the dialectic that inextricably links form and function (clearly independent in objects such as Google Home or Alexa) and Latour's notion of hybridisation itself.

4. Specialisation

As we have said, the hegemony of daily life interactions mediated by digital technologies is gradually reducing the cogency of a specialised focus on the specific characteristics of individual platforms, as well as discouraging general stances on social media as a whole. The Italian community thus shows that it has progressively developed an expertise in analysing the texts of shared digital communication. This leads to the specialisation of the analytical gaze whereby the discourse on digital media is developed on the basis of an analyst's competence on a given field of research (fashion, marketing, visuality and so on), of which the specificities of digital communication may be investigated only in the second instance. Titles like *Social moda. Nel segno di influenze, pratiche, discorsi* [Social fashion: influences, practices, discourses] (Terracciano 2017), publications[16] yielded from the ERC FACETS (*Face Aesthetics in Contemporary E-Technological Societies*) a project coordinated by Massimo Leone or from the ERC *Nemosancti* [New Models of Sanctity in Italy] project coordinated by Jenny Ponzo, texts such as *L'immagine in rete. Selfie, social network e motori di ricerca* [Image on the web. Selfie, social networks and search engines] (Del Marco 2018), *I linguaggi dell'immagine. Dalla pittura ai Big Visual Data* [The languages of the image. From painting to Big Visual Data] (Dondero 2020), *Troppo lontani, troppo vicini. Elementi di prossemica virtuale* [Too far, too close. Elements of virtual proxemics] (Fadda 2018), *semiotica e Digital Marketing* [Semiotics and Digital Marketing] (Bianchi and Cosenza eds. 2020) give the measure of how the media from main target of investigation have become a perspective from which to consider specific issues and problems

referred to the intermedial expertise, so to speak, of the particular analyst. It is precisely this intermedial expertise that makes the semiologist effective, thanks to his ability to construe a synthetic discourse capable of recognising common patterns in areas that are ordinarily considered unrelated. Exemplary in this regard is Anna Maria Lorusso's approach to the question of post-truth mentioned above (Lorusso 2018). While public debate around the problem of fake news immediately accuses some media platforms (social networks and in particular Facebook), the work of the semiologist shows how the vanishing of enunciative and philological responsibility towards public assertions, far from being a prerogative of the web, could be ascribed to a compromised media system encompassing bad television and bad journalism.

Thus, we are increasingly witnessing the progressive disappearance of any explicit reference to the digital or analogue nature of a certain body of analysis or field of reflection as a decisive factor. This development, rather than pointing to a declining interest of the semiotic community in the digital world, is a sign of the latter's pervasiveness, as if to state the impossibility of a semiotic gaze on the contemporary that does not focus – intentionally studying them or taking into account their peculiarities – on digital media texts.

Notes

1   We use this generic term deliberately, referring to the countless occasions determined by interviews and opinions expressed in journalistic articles, television broadcasts, events and festivals or even through editorial projects, in which semiologists were called upon as recognised 'experts' even in the absence of a sufficient quantity of studies and in-depth analyses capable of guaranteeing a solid 'disciplinary' position on the subject addressed. The most notable case is that of Umberto Eco, who already in 1992 launched the *Encyclomedia* digital project in collaboration with Danco Singer and in 1996, again with Danco Singer and Gianni Riotta, founded one of the first large-scale online cultural magaines, *Golem – L'indispensabile*. Moreover, on several occasions Eco also expressed his views on the survival of the book as a cultural artefact in the age of computers (see, for example, Schelma 1991). Similar considerations could be made with regard to Calabrese, who, particularly in his *L'età neobarocca* [The Neo-Baroque Age] (1987 now in Calabrese 2013), provides a general epistemological framework for 'reading' the social in the face of the turning point of electrical and digital media (see in particular pp. 135–136, dedicated to video games). Fabbri too intervenes on the subject while it is still a work in progress, so to speak. During a *Rai* television broadcast in 1998, for example, he commented with the students of the DAMS Department of the University of Bologna on the perspectives opened up by the diffusion of new media (the interview was recently transcribed and published in Fabbri 2017: 23–27).

2   The constant solicitation by the students of communication sciences degree courses, established at the behest of Umberto Eco himself, acts as a spur to the semio-

tic production on the subject. These courses were activated in 1992, or at the dawn of the advent of digital media. The great success of the new degree course 'forces' the semiotic community to follow in real time, so to speak, the ongoing media turn, to which lectures, seminars, degree and doctoral theses will be dedicated.

3   A remarkable research output is the anthology of works from science and technology studies entitled *Il senso degli oggetti tecnici* [the meaning of technical objects], edited by Alvise Mattozzi (ed. 2006) and significantly included in the *Segnature* series directed by Paolo Fabbri and Gianfranco Marrone for the publisher Meltemi.

4   It is above all in the first works that the contours and specificities of Latour's sociology of science approach can be appraised (see, for example, 1979, 1987, 1996, 1999a). Returning the attention that Bruno Latour has reserved for semiotic studies and the work of Paolo Fabbri in particular (see Latour 2016), the semiotic community has shown a keen interest in his theories by drawing upon, publishing, and translating some of his works. In Italy, Latour's 1992 work was published and discussed in Mattozzi ed. 2006, Latour 1999b was published and discussed in Fabbri and Marrone eds. 2001, and he also produced works in 2009 and 2021. The semiotic community has also produced a string of reviews, including Mangano and Mattozzi 2009, Mangano 2010, Marrone 2011b, Peverini 2019, and Paolucci 2020b.

.5 The question was already posed in 2012 by Weinberger (2012: 8–15, Italian translation) and re-launched by Eco himself, in the famous polemic against the imbeciles of the net (see note 6). The crisis of expertise, in the relationship with the spread of social media, has been at the centre of semiotic reflection for some time, cf. Marrone 2013a, 2013b, 2015 and Marrone and Migliore eds. 2021.

6   On the central theme of stupidity there are various contributions from Italian semiotics, among which Marrone (2012) stands out. The relationship between social networks and stupidity was discussed by Eco (as summarised by Mangiapane 2015b) and Bartezzaghi (2019).

7   For a recent discussion on the "limits of digital interpretation" see Leone (2020a).

8   I first attempted an assessment of the playful disposition of the discipline (Mangiapane 2020: 165–168). For a historical perspective, see the seminar of the Cisel of Urbino, *Il linguaggio del gioco* [The language of play], held on October 25–27, 1975; the AISS conference dedicated to *Il gioco: segni e strategie* [The game: signs and strategies] whose proceedings have been published, edited by Perissinotto, 1997. On the practices of design as a game, see Zingale 2009. On the game of football and its ties with the Italian and Brazilian identity and culture, see Demuru 2014.

9   Stefano Bartezzaghi dedicates much of his essayist activity to the analysis of games, cf. among others, Bartezzaghi 1992, 1995, 1998, 2001, 2004, 2007, 2010, 2012, 2017. Many of his works directly focus on the internet and social networks, see Bartezzaghi 2013, 2016, 2019.

10 Let it be clear that this is a naïve approach, mostly oriented to the semiotics of Jakobsonian codes and functions, blandly touching upon the issue of Greimasian analysis, not without methodological errors (utopian and mythical valorisation are confused) and inaccuracies.

11 We noted above how the problem of disentangling the textual ambiguity of contemporary texts, between openness (Eco 1962) and the limits of interpretation (Eco 1990), represents a skill and a specialisation that semiotics has claimed since its

beginnings and through Eco's words, and distinguishes it from classic aesthetic theory. On the other hand, the problem is theoretically framed in Greimasian theory (see Greimas and Courtés [1979] 1983, entry: closure, *ad vocem*) which notes how each articulation of a semantic universe presents itself as the realisation of a relatively small number of possibilities; thus, the semantic scheme underpinning a text can be considered open, while its realisation is closed in the concrete use that is made of it. Then there is the problem of genres which allows the recognition of classes of discourses characterised by the same structure (for example, Russian folktales can be identified by foreseeing the re-establishment of the initial axiological state at the end). There is still the canonical narrative scheme which, articulating every possible story in stages, postulates a closure (sanction) as a condition of every opening. And finally, the interpretative activity of the enunciator who chooses to mark the boundaries of the text on the basis of his own ideological objectives, with reference to a particular reading of the text – which includes some parts and excludes others – or of a momentary interruption in the act of reading that permits a provisional closure. It is worth mentioning Marrone's viewpoint (2011a: 8–9): "of the text, everything is negotiated, beginning with its spatial or temporal, physical or semantic boundaries". Such a position allows the 'open' texts (hypertexts) of digital communication to be subjected to critical scrutiny, and places, among the objectives of the analysis, the reconstruction of the negotiation dynamics between enunciator and enunciatee regarding the textual boundaries to be assigned to their interactions.

12 This is an impressive 2004 advertising campaign, commissioned by Telecom Italia to Oscar-winning director Spike Lee, and starring the late political-religious leader Gandhi thanks to the use of special effects and editing. Speaking via the internet with new age music in the background, he exhorts all of humanity to peace and universal love. Gandhi's performance is followed by a text in white letters on a black background that asks, rhetorically: "if he could have communicated like this, what would the world be like today?"; then the Telecom Italia logo appears in the closing frame. The commercial can be watched on Youtube. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UE03ULLVPoI [last accessed on July 20, 2021].

13 Paolo Attivissimo is the most famous Italian digital debunker. He began his career writing books and manuals teaching the use the most popular software and applications, and since the end of the 1990s he has built a reputation as an expert 'scam buster', a debunker of the many scams and frauds circulating on the internet. His blog, *Il disinformatico* (still active: https://attivissimo.blogspot.com [consulted on July 20, 2021]) quickly gained popularity. Attivissimo did not take long to reconfigure his identity of 'scam catcher' into that of a debunker of conspiracy theories such as those surrounding the landing on the Moon or the September 11 attacks, up until the diatribe on fake news and disinformation on social networks.

14 These concepts were harshly criticised by Jenkins et al. eds. (2013: 25–28) and by the community of semiologists itself, led by Fabbri who on several occasions works against the transfer of the logic of contagion from the hard sciences to the humanities (see Marrone 2013b; Fabbri 2020). Around the concept of virality, a fundamental *Lexia* volume was published in 2016 (edited by Gabriele Marino and Mattia Thibault) which deals with the issue from an epistemological, theoretical,

and analytical point of view. While maintaining the centrality of the concept of virality, the volume strongly criticises it (see the essays by Volli, Manini and Damone contained in it), denouncing its inadequacy and, on the other hand, broadens its reach by reinterpreting viral practices and memetics in terms of spreadability.

15   An article by Giovanna Cosenza (2016) also heeds the same warning, in addition to my own works mentioned above (Mangiapane 2010, 2014a). Furthermore, a dossier published by *Derive e Approdi*, edited by Anna Maria Lorusso (ed. 2015), dedicated to the 50 year anniversary of the publication of *Apocalypse Postponed*, on which see my own essay entitled *Apocalyptic Web and Integrated Social Networks* (Mangiapane 2015b).

16   The publications related to the FACTES project are listed on the web page http://www.facets-erc.eu/publications/, those related to the Nemosancti project on the web page https://nemosancti.eu/publications/. Both links were accessed on July 21, 2021.

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Semiotics of Arts: A Historical Survey

Francesca Polacci

Summary. The essay identifies the founding moment of Italian semiotics of the image in Omar Calabrese's book *La macchina della pittura. Pratiche teoriche della rappresentazione figurativa tra Rinascimento e Barocco* [The Painting System. Theoretical Practices of Figurative Representation between Renaissance and Baroque], published in 1985 (Calabrese 1985a). The book is a meeting point between semiotic methodology applied to the visual and studies in the field of French art theory. In our work, the conceptual and thematic axes focused on by the book are explored alongside the most recent developments in the Italian semiotics of art. The theoretical cornerstones underpinning the discipline include Greimas's essay *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* (1984), the concept of art as a "theoretical object", the concept of visual enunciation and the centrality of the passions in images.

Keywords. Figurative semiotics, plastic semiotics, art theory, passions, visual enunciation

Zusammenfassung. Der Aufsatz identifiziert das Gründungsmoment der italienischen Bildsemiotik in Omar Calabreses Buch *La macchina della pittura. Pratiche teoriche della rappresentazione figurativa tra Rinascimento e Barocco* [Das System der Malerei. Theoretische Praktiken der figurativen Darstellung zwischen Renaissance und Barock], veröffentlicht im Jahr 1985. Das Buch bildet einen Schnittpunkt zwischen der, auf das Visuelle angewandten, semiotischen Methodologie und den Studien auf dem Gebiet der französischen Kunsttheorie. In dieser Arbeit werden die konzeptionellen und thematischen Achsen des Buches zusammen mit den jüngsten Entwicklungen der italienischen Kunstsemiotik untersucht. Zu den theoretischen Eckpfeilern der Disziplin gehören Greimas' Essay *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* [Figurative Semiotik und die Semiotik der plastischen Künste], das Konzept der Kunst als 'theoretisches Objekt', das Konzept der visuellen Äußerung und die zentrale Rolle der Leidenschaft in den Bildern.

Schlüsselwörter. Figurative Semiotik, plastische Semiotik, Kunsttheorie, Leidenschaften, visuelle Äußerung

1.   Introduction

In Italy, the semiotics of the arts saw a key moment in the publication, in 1985, of *La macchina della pittura. Pratiche teoriche della rappresentazione figurativa tra Rinascimento e Barocco* [The Painting System. Theoretical Practices of Figurative Representation between Renaissance and Baroque] by Omar Calabrese (1985a).[1] The book is a meeting point between semiotic methodology applied to the visual and studies in the field of French art theory. The first of these refers to the research carried out within the so-called *School of Paris*, whose main exponent and key point of reference was Algirdas Julien Greimas, in particular the essay *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* (1984) (cf. chapter 2). The concept of art as a "theoretical object" (cf. chapter 3), as elaborated by French art theory through the studies of Arasse (1992, 2000, 2004), Damisch (1972, 1984, 1987, 1992) and Marin (1977, 1989, 1994), plays a decisive role in outlining one of the theoretical references of the book. Right from the introduction, where the horizon of reference is set out, Calabrese underlines how the book aims to deal with theories of painting expressed through painting itself.

Such an approach was completely innovative in the panorama of studies aimed at the qualification of the arts as a language, which in previous years had marked the main debates concerning the status of the arts with reference to linguistics, the philosophy of language and semiotics itself. In this regard, this book marks a decisive moment as regards the status of images in relation to the theories elaborated in the field of linguistics; this clear choice was then followed by subsequent studies. In other words, by accepting Emile Benveniste's proposal (1974), the idea that images have a shared *langue* and that it is possible to identify a system of minimum units valid for all works is overcome. On the contrary, each work is thought of as a "system" of itself – a closed system of signifying relationships. This approach solves two problems: on the one hand, it overcomes the long-standing and unproductive question of the specific characteristics of languages that had marked the previous debates; on the other, it preserves and magnifies the uniqueness of each text in order to achieve a *local* reconstruction of the systems of signification, without understanding their meaning as ineffable and unspeakable. All this is valid for a single work, as well as for a *corpus* of works, as defined by semantic and expressive recurrences.

In terms, again, of the continuities and differences with respect to linguistic theories and their effectiveness in the visual field, a key concept is that of enunciation. Calabrese makes a completely innovative proposal, suggesting that it is much more profitable to ask whether the theory of enunciation is not a theory of painting rather than whether the procedures of enunciation are applicable to painting. In the context of Italian research, visual enunciation will constitute one of the most prolific areas of investigation (cf. chapter 4).

Finally, another aspect present in Calabrese's book (1985a) is the role of passions in pictures. The representation of passions in painting opens up numerous paths of meaning. It has to deal both with the problem of the representation of temporality on a static support, and with the possibility that figures, charged with pathos, re-emerge after periods of latency to give rise to a renewed signification (cf. chapter 5).

2.   Figurative semiotics and plastic semiotics

The essay *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* (1984), by Greimas, brings together the research carried out within the Paris School, giving scholars a fundamental methodological and analytical point of reference. Among other aspects, the formulation and concomitant sharing of an analytical method allows the comparability of results and therefore constitutes an important starting point for the progressive advancement of research. The studies devoted to image analysis in Italy draw primarily on this inaugural essay, which it is therefore important to review in order to understand its developments and analytical applications.

The essay marks a turning point in the panorama of semiotic studies of the image for a number of reasons; first and foremost, it allows us to move beyond a "theory of codes" in the direction of a semiotics of the visual text. The aim of the latter approach is no longer to reconstruct a universally shared *langue* or to identify an inventory of minimal units, but rather to disentangle the relationship between the relevant and pertinent elements in a work or in a *corpus* of works capable of forming a "system".[2] The essay also makes a decisive contribution to de-emphasising the supposed hierarchy between verbal language and visual language, which until then had dominated the semio-linguistic landscape, according to which the visual was subordinate to the verbal. Finally, it intervenes to clarify the relationship between representation and the world outside it, unhinging the idea of a m o t i v a t i o n between the two.

Visual semiotics, Greimas tells us at the outset, is characterised by its c o n s t r u c t e d nature: the operation of imitating the natural world must be understood in terms of its considerable reduction of the qualities of this world: Only the exclusively visual features of the natural world are "imitable", whereas the world is present to us through all of our senses, and, on the other hand, only the planar properties of this world are "transposable" and representable on artificial surfaces, whereas area comes to us in all its depth and volume. The "features" of the world – traces and tracks – that are thus selected and transposed onto a canvas are really nothing very much compared to the richness of the natural world (Greimas [1984] 1989: 631). Thus, while motivation involves a strict continuity between the world and the object represented, imitation, on the other hand, involves the selection of certain traits, mediated by a series of culturally acquired conventions.

The activity of recognition, the human reading of the world, takes place, according to the author, through a historically and culturally variable grid:

> It is this grid though which we read which causes the world to signify for us and it does so by allowing us to identify figures as objects, to classify them and link them together, to interpreter movements as process which are attributable or no attributable to subjects, and so on. This grid is of a semantic nature, not visual, auditive or olfactory (Greimas [1984] 1989: 632).

Such a point of view therefore radically revises the formulation of the icon as a sign motivated by the referent. This is because it eliminates the possibility of a m o t i v a t i o n between artwork and world. Moreover, if we postulate a similarity with the referent, this s i m i l a r i t y is placed at the level of meaning, that is, at the level of the semantic and cultural grid through which we read planar objects and the world itself.

2.1 Figurative semiotics

According to the point of view introduced above, it is therefore not correct to identify "iconic signs" because of the necessary revision of the concept of sign for the visual arts. Furthermore, figurativity must be understood as gradual, and iconization as an effect of meaning and not as the result of a m o t i v a t i o n between referent and sign. Iconization, indeed, is the procedure whereby this impression of the referential world is produced and sustained. It is the essential ingredient in the construction of the effect of reality or the illusion of a real world:

> That is the main point: the question of the figurativity of planar objects ("image", "painting", and so on) is posed only if an iconizing reading grid is postulated and applied to the interpretation of such objects. Yet this is not the necessary precondition for their perception, and it does not exclude the existence of other modes of reading that are just legitimate. The reading of a text written in French does not raise the question of a resemblance of its characters to the figures of the natural word. Such an iconizing reading is, however, a semiosis – that is, an operation which, conjoining a signifier and a signified, produces signs. The reading grid, which is of a semantic nature, solicits the planar signifiers and, bringing under this wings the bundles of visual features which vary in their respective densities and which it makes into figurative formants, endows them whit meanings (Greimas [1984] 1989: 633).

A very interesting analysis, by Calabrese (1985a), is that of Hans Holbein the Younger's *The Ambassadors* (1533, Fig. 1). The painting has a plurality of levels of meaning and model readers, who may or may not be able to recognise the many connections to the historical events to which the painting refers.

Fig. 1. Hans Holbein the Younger, The Ambassadors, 1533, oil on canvas, 2,07 m x 2,1 m, London, National Gallery.

An anamorphic distortion of the skull, recognisable only from an observation point at an acute angle to the plane of the painting, poses, according to Calabrese, a question about the regimes of belief and of veridiction of the image: there is a transition between what i s b u t d o e s n o t s e e m (s e c r e t), i.e. the elongated and enigmatic figure, and what i s a n d s e e m s (t r u t h), i.e. the figure of the skull. It thus poses a problem concerning the image and its status of veridiction, which brings into play the fiduciary agreement (*contrat de véridiction*) between the enunciator and the enunciatee.

2.2 The plastic signifier

Unnameable elements, not recognisable as figures of the world, also have a signification. This is the presupposition of plastic semiotics, which aims to isolate and describe such elements.

Diderot, in his description of the Salons, alongside a figurative approach, reserved an equally important place for the p l a s t i c component of the works, i.e. the colours, shapes and their distribution on the pictorial surface. If these elements also mean something, it is necessary to question, Greimas tells us, their reciprocal relations. Thus, the visual text can be broken down into categories (at the immanent level) and contrasts (at the level of manifestation) of a chromatic, eidetic and topological order.

The topological mechanism is related to the format. This is the old problem of the f r a m e w o r k - f o r m a t of a text, which establishes the c l o s u r e of the work to be analysed. The topological categories, some rectilinear (such as upper/lower or right/left), some curvilinear (such as peripheral/central or enclosing/enclosed), make it possible to segment the planar surface, to identify continuity and symmetries with respect to the axes of the format. The eidetic categories, relating to form (such as curvilinear/rectilinear, pointed/rounded), and the chromatic categories (such as light/dark, white/black, saturated/unsaturated, and so on) allow the identification of minimal units of signifier: the plastic figures. However, it is not possible to make a complete inventory of such figures, according to the phonology's ideal; on the contrary, following the semantic approach, only those categories relevant to the given micro-universe should be taken into account.

In a famous analysis of Klee's *Blumen Mythos* (1918), Thüerlemann (1982) shows how the plastic segmentation of the work makes it possible to identify a series of plastic categories, which enter into homology with semantic oppositions. For example, curved/straight :: heavenly/earthy; upper/lower :: heavenly/earthy; linear elements/surface elements :: animate/inanimate. At the figurative level, a flower is recognisable in the centre of the work and a bird is moving toward the flower from above.

A simple figurative reading would qualify the flower as an inanimate and earthy element. Thanks to plastic semiotics, the flower changes its status, becoming an element of conjunction between opposite semantic categories (such as animate *vs* inanimate and heavenly *vs* earthy). The flower is thus transformed into a myth in the anthropological-structuralist sense of the term (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1964). The myth is also evoked by the title; moreover, in German, the flower is feminine (*die Blume*) and the bird masculine (*der Vogel*). The first is shaped like a receiving sickle of a goblet, the second like a double piercing arrow, and so the myth takes shape: the "bird" joins the woman –"flower", a conjunction that indirectly comes into contact with the cosmos, represented by the "stars".

What has been said so far does not imply that figurative semiotics corresponds to the plane of content and plastic semiotics to the plane of expression (as many say). As Marrone (2013) has well highlighted, these two semiotic forms are two different grids projected onto the image, which segment it according to different logics:

> *Plastic language does not precede figurative language, it comes after it*: it is as if the eye went beyond its own perception, as if sensitivity surfaced again, sailing

around given cultural perceptive grids to found, possibly, locally new ones (Marrone [2013] 2016: 3).

Such a point of view relates figurative and plastic semiotics to the process of "aesthetic grasp" as theorised by Greimas (1987). Marrone (2013) indicates six stages: an initial one in which there is a standardised perception (*figurative dimension*), followed by a breaking up of the perceptive scheme and a setting aside of cognition and discursivity – this level allows the surface of sensitivity to emerge (*plastic dimension*), thus giving access to a new state of things (*aesthetic grasp*). The process is completed by a return to perception and discourse, then to standardised perception, but with a feeling of imperfection and longing, and then, the final stage, to the subject's acknowledgment of their own transformation.

2.3 The semi-symbolic system

In plastic semiotics, the centrality of the categories is based on the *relational grasping* of the text, which is why it is not simply colours and shapes that are relevant – the c o n t r a s t s between shapes and colours are also pertinent.

Greimas questions the way plastic semiotics produces meaning and identifies the semi-symbolic system as capable of organising the relationship between categories of expression and categories of content. The author draws mainly on Roman Jakobson's (1972) study. Starting from comparative studies on different cultures, Jakobson (1972) focused on the connection between the gestural category of /directionality/ (/vertical/ *vs* /horizontal/) and the semantic category of /affirmativeness/ (/affirmation/ *vs* /negation/): /yes/ and /no/ become homologous respectively with /verticality/ and /horizontality/, creating effects of motivation inside that specific system. According to Greimas, plastic semiotics is based on a principle analogous to poetic language:

> Poetic language as it functions within literary semiotics remains the best way to clarify the secondary nature of plastic language […]. The secondary poetic organization that is superimposed on the text takes over the signifier, up to then limited to its primary functionality, and articulates it in such a way as to reproduce the same fundamental forms that characterize the signified at its deep reading level […]. We are witnessing a process of autodetermination, a birth of a second language (Greimas [1984] 1989: 647).

In the panorama of Italian research, Calabrese's *La macchina della pittura* (1985a) makes use of the work developed within the framework of Parisian semiotic research, and the chapter "A look at the bridge" is particularly interesting in this regard.

The author theorises the bridge as a pictorial motif, and at the same time redefines, from a semiotic point of view, the qualities of the motif. He then suggests that we should recognise as "bridges" not only what corresponds to such a figure of the world (by the figurative semiotics), but also everything that has the same "syntactic" qualities (by plastic semiotics). Here, then, everything that /joins/ or /disjoins/ two different semantic universes becomes a "bridge", e.g. /culture/ *vs* /nature/ (e.g. through the representation of a city and a countryside respectively), or /heavenly/ *vs* /earthy/, or two different episodes of the same story.

Calabrese's analysis, by means of plastic semiotics, shows that l i n e a r and v e c t o r i a l features are the most relevant, and therefore that the same function of "bridge" can be achieved by different figures, e.g. roads, paths, flocks, trees placed transversely, etc. The units that the bridge joins or disjoins may correspond to a logical disjunction (antecedent *vs* consequent), a temporal disjunction (before *vs* after), a spatial disjunction (in front *vs* behind, left *vs* right) or something else. An important continuity is that through the motif of the "bridge" a moment of transition is represented; it is the place where the dynamisations of the narrative and fundamental semantic oppositions take place.[3]

The semi-symbolic is an important analytical and methodological tool, used transversally for the semiotics of the image and for analyses of tales, as well as in advertising and films.

There are numerous analyses in the field of Italian visual semiotics that have enhanced the ideas proposed in Greimas's essay *Figurative Semiotics and the Semiotics of the Plastic Arts* (1984), and it would not be possible to mention them all here. We therefore refer to the contributions that have highlighted its founding features, cf. Eugeni (1999), Corrain (1999, 2004), Polidoro (2008). As far as relations with other disciplines are concerned, see Lancioni's (2012) in-depth study examining the relations between semiotics and theories of "pure visibility". For the relations between semiotics and iconology/iconography, see Corrain (ed. 1991) and Lancioni (2019). For synergies (and differences) with the so-called *iconic turn*, see Mengoni's (2019) thorough examination.

3.   Art as "theoretical object"

Another perspective taken as central by the book *La macchina della pittura* (Calabrese 1985a) is that of considering works of art as "theoretical objects". This means understanding works of art as works that force us to return to the theory that generates them, that bring into discourse, self-reflectively, the theoretical apparatus that makes them possible. Such points of view will have an important continuation in subsequent research in Italy.

The roots of the reflection on the theoretical object can be found mainly in Damisch (1972), who proposed the following definition:

A theoretical object is one that is called on to function according to norms that are not historical. It is not sufficient to write a history of this object. It's what I said before: it's not enough to write a history of a problem for that problem to be resolved. A theoretical object is something that obliges one to do theory; we could start there. Second, it's an object that obliges you to do theory but also furnishes you with the means of doing it. Thus, if you agree to accept it on theoretical terms, it will produce effects around itself. […] Third, it's a theoretical object because it forces us to ask ourselves what theory is. It is posed in theoretical terms; it produces theory; and it necessitates a reflection on theory. But I never pronounce the word *theory* without also saying the word *history*. Which is to say that for me such an object is always a theoretico-historical object. Yet if theory is produced within history, history can never completely cover theory. That is fundamental for me. The two terms go together but in the sense in which each escapes the other (Bois et al. 1998: 8).

More recently, Careri (2018) has taken stock of reflections on the theoretical object and the analytical practice it has followed, highlighting its main points and showing, through his own contribution, the fruitfulness of this perspective. On this subject, see also Careri (2007, 2020). Among the aspects highlighted is the s i n g u l a r i t y of each theoretical object: the o b j e c t u a l component (i.e. the specific form and the materiality of the artwork) is resistant to conceptualisation, so the theoretical object is not purely conceptual. It is therefore a theory that cannot abstract itself from the s i n g u l a r i t y of the object studied. In order to achieve its aim, the theoretical object must offer an enhanced and renewed understanding of the artwork. This marks the difference from a philosophical approach, where, for example, the investigation of certain aesthetic categories is done by abstracting from individual works of art.

The relationship between theory and history is complex; in terms of how theory is grafted onto history, Careri suggests that the time of an artwork is multiple – it is an anachronic time, not a chronological one. The investigation into the time of images opens up an anachronic perspective, in which it is the artwork itself that "produces" the time in which it is inscribed. This is a very different concept from one that sees time as a uni-linear unfolding of events and where the relationship between artworks is understood in terms of influences. Mengoni in *Carte Semiotiche* (2013) raises the urgency of such a perspective, where the way in which theory selects new series and new constellations of images in the succession of objects and practices is central. According to this point of view, the work of art establishes relationships, based on structural traits and activated by the object itself, which connect the work with other objects and times. The author then goes back over some of Benjamin, Warburg and Lotman's theories, showing how the conception of time in these authors is not a chronological but an anachronic one. By the same author, see also Mengoni (2008).

Through an in-depth analysis of Cattelan's *All*, Corrain (2013) highlights how anachronic time has many points of connection with comparative linguistics, a foundational methodology for semiotics. It is again Cor-

rain (2016) who considers the "velum" of the image as a theoretical object, while Corrain and Mosca (2017) deal with anachronic montages in Mat Collishaw's *Black Mirror*.

Even more recently, Corrain (2019) has analysed market painting, the so-called *Fugger cycle* painted by Vincenzo Campi between 1580 and 1581. Through a rigorous application of the semiotic method and a close look at the works, the author shows how the *Fugger cycle* implies a stratification of meaning that qualifies it as a theoretical object. The prevailing interpretation of this cycle is that of genre painting. The author shows that beyond this dimension there is a second one of a sacred order, a domain that in turn conceals, in line with the culture of the time, that of laughter, the ridiculous and even the obscene. These are works that condense the cultural traits of the time and rework them, articulating them on a multiplicity of levels of meaning.

In Polacci's interpretation (2020), photographs taken by Brancusi, Rosso and Man Ray of their sculptures solicit a reflection on the status of photography and sculpture, respectively. The photos of sculptures bring out t h e o r e t i c a l problems concerning the value of reproducibility, the relationship between original and copy, the montage between elements shown by the photographs and the "off-screen" of the sculpture, which is included in some shots used to show and comment on the sculptures themselves.[4]

4. Visual enunciation

As far as visual enunciation is concerned, the semiotics of the arts first of all drew on the work of Marin (1975, 1977, 1982, 1989, 1994), as well as that of Schapiro (1969, 1996) and Stoichita (1993), and then made a contribution in terms of research and analysis.

Marin indicates two dimensions which characterise representation: one transitive (to represent in meaning the substitution of something absent with something present), in which the effect obtained is one of mimetic *transparency*, and an intransitive or 'presentative' (in which the etymology of the Latin term *re-præsentatio* is magnified, and therefore the operation of showing, presenting something is valorised) and the effect is one of the *opacity* of representation. In Marin's words:

> Every sign, every representation – and this is the very definition of its opacity – designates itself, signifies itself, reflect itself: the sign and representation present themselves while representing something, and, as a result of this reflexive dimension, all signs, all representations refer to a practical power of expression [...]. Corresponding to the strain put on the representational transparency of the image by its presentational or reflexive opacity is the strain pun on the representative transparency of discourse, the text, the sentence, the word, and the sign, all the more transparent in that they are by their very nature conventional and institutional: thus an 'immediate' transparency put under pressure by the opaque limits of discourse (Marin 1993: 98).

If the mimetic dimension prevails, the work of art seems to be able to speak by itself, creating an "effect of objectivity". On the contrary, if the presentative dimension prevails, the work of art shows the mechanism that makes the representation happen and there is an "effect of subjectivity". These concepts recall the theory of "visual enunciation" that Marin elaborated on the basis of Benveniste's "written enunciation" (Benveniste 1966, 1974): in language, the effects of objectivity ("narrative enunciation") and subjectivity ("discursive enunciation") depend, among others, on the personal forms of the verb "He" (effect of objectivity) as well as "I/ You" (effect of subjectivity) and on the circumstantial demonstrative adverbs linked with them ("that" for "He," "this" for "I/ You"). Obviously, there is a correspondence between the 'mimetic (or transitive) dimension of the representation' and the 'narrative enunciation'; on the other hand, the 'reflexive (or presentative) dimension of representation' corresponds to the 'discursive enunciation'.

The frame facilitates the mimetic or transitive dimension of representation, at the same time it takes charge of its reflexive dimension. Because every frame completes the picture in its finality, as it is to be seen, shown, and exhibited, it concerns a process of communication or, better, a relation with the beholder: When the viewer's gaze is substituted for the painter's eye, a frame is necessary, because the painting considered in the process of its presentation, its spectacularisation, is substituted for the artefact considered in the process of its production (Marin [1994] 2001: 323). So the frame activates a process of p r e s e n t a t i o n and p u t t i n g o n s t a g e the work, indicating what to look at.[5]

The presentative role of the frame could be also played by other elements, very different from a visual point of view, like painted curtains or figures that indicate something in the scene or look at the beholder. They can be inside the space of the narration and not necessarily inside the large space of the painted frame, but their function is the same. These elements are what Marin calls "figures of framing":

> This is also how the frame (by this I mean the processes and procedures of framing, the dynamics and power of positioning) will delegate some of its functions to a particular figure, who, even as he participates in the action, in the story that is "told," "represented," will utter by his gestures, his posture, his gaze, not so much what is to be seen, what the viewer *must* see, as *the way to see it*: these are pathetic figures of framing (Marin [1994] 2001: 358).[6]

In the field of semiotics, Greimas and Courtés (1986) incorporated Marin's important contribution, which then became one of the keystones of Italian semiotics of the arts.

Calabrese (1985a) makes an important contribution in that he reverses the usual point of view: he does not wonder about the applicability of the theory of enunciation to painting, but rather highlights how the theory of enunciation draws on the formulations of pictorial theories, starting from the centrality, among others, of terms such as *deictic*, *focalization*, *observer* and *point of view*.

In a later essay, Calabrese (1987) investigates the presence of enunciational effects even where anthropomorphic figures are not present, as in abstract art.

The relationship between the four spaces that characterise painting, all of which are not necessarily co-present, play a central role. These are: (i) the two-dimensional space of the canvas; (ii) the illusory space beyond the surface; (iii) the illusory space on this side of the surface (e.g. *trompe l'œil*); and (iv) the material space projecting from the canvas. Enunciational effects occur when a gap is created between two types of space, when, for example, the illusory depth is contradicted by a graphic layout that highlights the two-dimensional surface, as happens with the artist's signature.

In this regard, it is fruitful to investigate the relationship between writing and image from a semiotic point of view. In this regard, we recall the work on verbal-visual futurist experimentation by Polacci (2010), Migliore's (2012) on Mirò's graphic traces and Manchia's (2017) on Massin's writing. Fabbri's (2017a, 2017b) contribution on this theme is also of considerable interest.

The relationship between the verbal and the visual makes it pertinent to study the translation between different semiotic substances. In this regard, see some exemplary analyses, such as Corrain and Lancioni's contribution (1999) on the translation between a poem by Hölderlin and a painting by Morlotti, an essay by Fabbri (2000), where the focus is on the relationship between Klee's painting *Sphinxartig* (1919) and a poem by the same author, or a contribution by Addis (2011) in which Man Ray's photos and Dalì's writings translate Gaudi's architecture.

Research on enunciation in images makes an important contribution to defining the e f f i c a c y of images, a wide-ranging theme that can be developed through a pragmatic approach, i.e. with attention to the a g e n - t i v i t y of images, or with attention to the efficacy of the mechanisms inscribed and activated by the image.[7]

Since it is not possible to list all the works in the field of image semiotics that deal with the enunciative level, we will indicate three of the numerous areas of research in which a reflection in this sense has taken shape.[8]

The p o r t r a i t, and the s e l f - p o r t r a i t, has been a central field of investigation here, given that the representation of a subject can produce effects of subjectivity (or the cancellation of these). To mention just a few contributions, see Calabrese's book (2006a) entirely dedicated to the self-portrait; the same author dedicates a chapter of *Come si legge un'opera d'arte* [How to read a work of art] (2006b) to the "gaze in painting: an economy of enunciation". Fabbri's (2007) analysis of Savinio's *Self-portrait* (1936) provides singular insight. Lancioni (2012) retraces the critical-interpretive readings dedicated to Van Eyck's *Double Portrait* (1434) to open a reflection on the iconological method in relation to semiotics, as well as on the criteria of pertinence established by the researcher. The author's reflection on method concludes with a proposal for an original and "impertinent" interpretation of the painting. See also the essay by Corrain and Fabbri (2004), which suggests that a still life can be considered a self-portrait of the artist who creates it.

Second, the motif of the A n n u n c i a t i o n has motivated reflection on the enunciative level, starting from a brilliant essay by Arasse (1984). In 15th-Century Tuscan Annunciations, the author points to the recurrence of figures in profile, which achieve an effect of objectivity; in these works, events simply seem to happen and are shown to be happening. The historical enunciation is also achieved thanks to the skilful use of geometric perspective, which had been perfected in that period: the figures represented look at each other and their gazes cross at the vanishing point, allowing the spectator to admire what is represented, but never being included in the representation. On enunciation and Annunciation, see also Marin (1994).

More recently, Annunciations have been the subject of an extensive study by Leone (2014a), which considers not only the Christian Annunciation, but numerous Annunciations, from the perspective of the semiotics of culture and religion.

Corrain (2016) analyses an *unicum* in the history of painting: an Annunciation set in darkness, by night-light, that of Matthias Stomer, painted in the early 17th Century. This Annunciation is atypical, not only because of the absence of daylight, but also because of the absence of almost all the iconographic attributes that typically characterise Annunciations. Corrain shows the function of the candle and of light in the construction of a space "at hand", haptic, which helps to define the peculiarity of this Annunciation.

Lancioni (2020) in his in-depth analysis of Matthias Grünewald's *Isenheim Polyptych* (1512–1516) reveals how the enunciative level is pertinent but achieves a significant inversion with respect to what was shown by Arasse. In the *Polyptych*, historical enunciation is transformed into discursive enunciation: in particular, the book at the feet of the Virgin is the place where the vanishing lines converge and is itself in *trompe-l'œil*; it leaves its own space and makes the space of representation coincide with that of the observer.

The third thematic focus concerns the m a r g i n   o f   t h e   i m a g e , and therefore the f r a m e w o r k - f o r m a t (Greimas 1984) as a significant mechanism for the meanings of the image.

It is primarily Marin's work mentioned above that focuses on the frame of the image as a dense *limen*, one which "shows" the spaces that the frame itself is designed to articulate: With the frame, the painting inscribes its own theory in itself, that is, the fact of presenting itself theoretically so as to represent something. That condition of possibility of "aesthetic" contemplation of representation is thus an element of the metalanguage of pictorial representation (Marin [1994] 2001: 324).

Some recent semiotic research has focused on the centrality of the image margin in different historical periods, e.g. Polacci (2012) analysed it in relation to Picasso's collages and more generally in the period from the late 19th to the early 20th Century (Polacci 2013), when it was the system of the arts itself that was called into question. In such cases, the margin is deprived of its neutral value so that it can be transformed into a place for rewriting the limits of representation. In a later essay, Polacci (2018) again articulates a reflection on the self-reflexive use of the frame in Paolini's artworks.

Corrain (2018) investigates the role of the frame in some significant cases of street art.[9] Enunciation, frame and street art are again the focus of Pezzini's (2020) work on William Kentridge's *Triumphs and Laments*. Mengoni (2020) shows how the evidence of a portion of the "frame", i.e. the black margin of the image, plays a veridiction process in two photos taken by a *Sonderkommando* member from inside the crematorium of the Auschwitz-Birkenau extermination camp.

Moreover, the last two essays mentioned above are published in the two volumes of the conference of the *Italian Association of Semiotics* dedicated, in 2019, to enunciation and images – volumes to which we refer for an overview of the most recent Italian research in this field. See Lancioni and Lorusso (eds. 2020); Addis and Jacoviello (eds. 2020). Further insights on enunciation and images can be found in a recent Italian volume, edited by Tiziana Migliore and Marion Colas-Blaise (2022), exploring the relationships between forms and formats.

5.   Passions in images

The study of p a s s i o n s marks an important line of semiotic research[10] and also occupies an important place in the field of images.

An inaugural study that opens up a range of research directions is that of Careri (1990) on Bernini's *bel composto*, where, partly through the notion of "montage", the author investigates the relationship between painting, architecture and sculpture in Bernini's work. It is precisely the relationship between the dimensions of passion and montage, as theorised by Eisenstein (2004), that will be particularly dense with ramifications.
More generally, the representation of the passions can be expressed either by a subject who manifests, through his or her own expression (e.g. admiration), a certain feeling, or it can imply a narrative dimension, thus involving a transformation from one state to another; see also Careri (2005).

The representation of an a c t i o n in painting is a complex process. Being a still medium, painting concerns spatial but not temporal dimensions; for instance, to correlate events happening in different times, the categories "before" and "after" are inferred by the beholder thanks to the logical relations between the places where static signs are arranged by the painter. But the artist who wants to represent a single action knows that it contains different phases, which can be schematised as "beginning," "climax" and "the end". Climax is the moment of maximum tension – an instant infinitely short – and, concentrating on it, the artist summarises the two extremities of the action, "before" and "after" (Calabrese 2006b). It is an excellent expedient to introduce the passing of time in the still medium of painting (Corrain ed. 1987).

For instance, the representation of death is a problem of passions because it involves a certain a s p e c t u a l i t y of suffering (i n c h o a t e -
n e s s of agony, p u n c t u a l i t y of the act of dying, d u r a t i v e n e s s of

being dead). These linguistic categories, adopted by generative semiotics for the visual arts, could be used to refine the three phases of the action ("beginning," "climax" and "the end").[11] The iconography of *Crucifixion* is one of the most vivid examples of the challenge of representing the infinitely short instant of passing away. In different ages artists have tried to approach the final act (the climax), emphasising some important signs of suffering, such as tension, contortion of the body and pale skin-tone (Calabrese 2006b).

In the wound motif too, investigated in detail by Mengoni (2012b) and Corrain (2016), the aspectualisation of passions is central.

Much of the Italian research on the representation of the passions has been marked by the ideas of Aby Warburg. One of Warburg's principal lines of thought consists of investigating the *Nachleben* (that is, the "after-life") of certain figurative motifs (not necessarily conventionalised in terms of iconographic motifs) and isolating in the moment of their re-emergence a process of intensification. This is what Warburg (1932) called the "superlatives of expression," in which a *formula* of the past is subjected to a process of intensification, giving rise to what he calls *pathos formulae*. Warburg's investigation takes shape through his *Atlas Mnemosyne* project, in which such *pathos formulae* are investigated according to a model of anachronic time and by moving transversally between images of the artistic tradition and those produced by mass culture. Warburg's proposal in the field of semiotics was also fruitful with regard to the construction of *corpora* of images, in which figurative recurrences can lead to the interpretation of images distant in time and space.

Richter's *Atlas*, which summarises the problem of traumatic memory and the possibility of giving it form through contemporary art, is the focus of an in-depth examination by Mengoni (2012a). In Mengoni's work, Richter's boards are analysed as a form of visual montage in which the memory of post-war Germany is at the centre.

In *Shrouds and Footprints in Robert Morris*, Corrain (2020) adopts the Warburgian perspective to show resonances between *Moltingsexoskeletonsshrouds* (2015), *Boustrophedons* (2017) and *Out of the Past* (2016) and some works from the past, the latter re-actualised in the work of the American artist.

Vedere ad Arte. Iconico e icastico collects the main writings of Fabbri (2020b) on contemporary art. There are essays on some central contemporary artists, including Barbara Kruger, Matthew Barney, Luigi Ghirri, Maurizio Cattelan, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Christian Boltanski, Alberto Savinio and Bill Viola, as well as many others. The *fil rouge* is the semiologist's point of view, attentive to systems of signification as well as to the sphere of the passions. The gaze proposed is always an "intra-vision", capable of seeing the works, but also of seeing through them and grasping the profound meaning that structures them.

Another important area of Italian research is the relationship between semiotics and aesthetics, which has been studied mainly by Calabrese (1985b) and Marrone (1995). The first highlights the relationships between

semiotics and pragmatism, formalism and structuralism, the second outlines continuities and differences not only with the linguistic tradition but also with the philosophical one, and then focuses on the most recent developments of semiotics in relation to aesthetics, with reference also to the concept of "aesthetic grasp". Both show how, thanks to Eco's theories (1975, 1979, 1990), the contribution of semiotics has been enhanced, even going beyond Croce's aesthetics.

A strong impetus to increase the relations between semiotics and aesthetics has been given more recently by Montani's work (2007, 2014, 2020), which focuses on the concepts of bioaesthetics, imagination and the technologies of sensibility. A work consistent with this perspective and dedicated to the words of the new aesthetics is that of Finocchi and Guastini (eds. 2011). In this regard, the monographic issue *Appearance Screens. Technologies, Imagination, Forms of Life between Semiotics and Aesthetics*, edited by Finocchi and Pezzini (eds. 2017) is of crucial interest. This issue is dedicated to the concept of imagination in relation to the arts and digital technologies, in which the relationship between creativity and automatism in artistic creation and contemporary forms of life is also examined.[12] Also in the area of the relations between semiotics and aesthetics, see Migliore's monograph (2018) investigating the relationship between image, meaning and artwork.

The representation of suffering then runs through the research of numerous authors. Photographs of humanitarian organisations have been investigated by the TraMe Centre at the University of Bologna (https://dfc.unibo.it/it/ricerca/centri-di-ricerca/trame, last accessed on April 30, 2021). These are photos of suffering, in which the pathematic dimension is foregrounded. In these photos, the cognitive dimension (letting people know) is joined by the sphere of the passions (making people feel). The images in question are aimed at moving the spectator, thus moving him or her to indignation and so to action (cf. Violi 2011).[13]

Similar issues are the focus of Zucconi's monograph *Displacing Caravaggio* (2018), in which the author isolates "humanitarian visual culture" as an object of investigation. The author explores a problem that ties together art history and humanitarian communications, making use of an extensive theoretical apparatus. Among the tools used are the concept of montage and Warburg's *Atlas*, through which Zucconi highlights the synchronous relationships between contemporary images and those of the past. The survival of images in cinema is also the focus of Zucconi's previous monograph (2013). An analytical look at images depicting migrants is provided by Coviello and Tagliani (2018, 2019), who investigate the implications for media and film.

Finally, we would like to mention an important project *FACETS – Face Aesthetics in Contemporary E-Technological Societies* (http://www.facets-erc.eu/, last accessed on April 30, 2021), the result of a European Research Council Consolidator Grant (main referee: Massimo Leone). The project focuses on the sphere of passion in the representation of the face

in social media, and therefore investigates, through an interdisciplinary approach, the increasingly widespread practice of displaying the face in social networks, as well as in practices of political activism or artistic provocation.

Notes

1   The text was then republished in 2012. For the new edition, see the introduction by Corrain and Lancioni (2012). For the activities carried out by *CROSS* (*Omar Calabrese Research Centre for Semiotics and Image Science*), see https://www.semio-cross.it, last accessed on May 20, 2021, which also has information about the journal *Carte Semiotiche. International Journal of Semiotics and Image Theory*, published by the centre.
2   For the establishment of the corpus, see Greimas (1966).
3   On the subject of the semi-symbolic, see also Calabrese (1999), as well as the monographic issue of the journal *Carte Semiotiche*, cf. Leone (ed. 2004).
4   We will not examine, for reasons of space, the semiotics of photography; however, formulations concerning the theoretical object have converged in two important publications – see Del Marco and Pezzini (eds. 2011) and Brucculeri et al. (eds. 2011). Recently, for an interesting examination regarding theoretical issues in a semiotics of photography, see Mangano (2018).
5   See also the introduction to the new Italian edition of *On Representation*, cf. Corrain and Fabbri (2013) and cf. Fabbri (2020a).
6   Marin ([1994] 2001) also reminds us of some of Alberti's precepts concerning the figures placed in the position of commentator, *admonitor* and *advocator* of the work of art. Inside the visual narration, Alberti appreciates figures which suggest the emotional reaction or the beholder's moral response: "*E piacemi sia nella storia chi ammonisca e insegni a noi quello che ivi si facci, o chiami con la mano a vedere, o con viso cruccioso e con gli occhi turbati minacci che gnuno verso loro vada, o dimostri qualche pericolo o cosa ivi maravigliosa, o te inviti a piagnere con loro insieme o a ridere*" (Alberti 1436: 72).
7   One of the main reference texts is that of Freedberg (1989). In the semiotic field we point out Calabrese's monograph devoted to *trompe l'œil* (cf. Calabrese 2010); more recently, there has been the monographic issue of *Lexia* dedicated to efficacious images, cf. Leone (ed. 2014b).
8   In the Italian context, for an in-depth study of enunciation, cf. Manetti (2008). In the field of the semiotics of the arts, cf. Polacci (ed. 2011).
9   Street art has been investigated in the field of semiotics. See Leone (ed. 2009); Calabrese (2013); Mastroianni (ed. 2013).
10 See Greimas and Fontanille (1991); with reference to Italian work, the main studies are Pezzini (ed. 1991) and Pezzini (2008).
11 "The term *aspectualization* refers to the process whereby the implied presence of an observer is established in the discourse. It involves the spatial, temporal and actorial co-ordinates set up by the utterance which characterize and position the observation. In spatial terms, for example, reference to objects placed on the left

or on the right is only meaningful in relation to an implied point of observation. Temporal *aspectualization* makes itself felt in the stopping and starting of enunciative (or discursive) events; or in the duration of a process on the syntagmatic axis or the punctuality (lack of duration) of a process on the paradigmatic axis of the discourse" (*Aspectualization ad vocem* in Greimas and Courtés 1979: 21–22).

12   Previously, Pezzini (2013) analysed digital technologies in their ability to reproduce works of art, with particular reference to *Google Art Project* and *Google Art & Culture*. On this same topic, see also Del Marco and Pezzini (2017) and Corrain and Macauda (2016).

13   In this regard, see also the essays devoted to the photograph of Aylan Kurdi on the Turkish beach; see Migliore (2017) and Lorusso and Violi (2020).

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Image sources

Fig. 1. Hans Holbein the Younger, *The Ambassadors*, 1533, oil on oak wood, 209, 5 x 207 cm, London, National Gallery. Public Domain.

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Italian Film Semiotics (1965–2020)*

Francesco Galofaro

Summary. The paper describes the development of film semiotics in Italy, from the early foundation of the discipline to the contribution of recent scholars. In particular, a first change of paradigm occurred during the 1980s, when the focus of the research shifted from the film's codes to pragmatic issues. In the new millennium, a second turn involved the notion of intersemiotic translation, which anticipated the international debate on intermediality. Italian film semiotics is not to be considered a "school": it is rather a discussion between different perspectives on the foundation of semiotics (phenomenological, pragmatic, and post-structuralist) in which Italian scholars were actively connected to the international semiotic debate. Since many Italian semioticians avoided specialising in film theory, their work proved to be useful in new research fields such as broadcasting, internet, videogames, virtual reality, informatics, thus contributing to the cross-fertilisation of media studies.

Keywords. Enunciation, intersemiotic translation, intermediality, pragmatics, media studies

Zusammenfassung. Der Artikel beschreibt die Entwicklung der Filmsemiotik in Italien, von den Anfängen der Disziplin bis zu aktuellen Beiträgen. Während der 1980er Jahre ereignete sich ein erster Paradigmenwechsel; der Schwerpunkt wechselt von filmischen Codes zu pragmatischen Fragestellungen. In den 2000ern erfolgte eine zweite Wendung, die das Konzept der intersemiotischen Übersetzung einschloss und die internationale Debatte über Intermedialität vorwegnahm. Die italienische Filmsemiotik ist nicht als „Schule" zu betrachten, sondern vielmehr als Diskussion zwischen verschiedenen Perspektiven zur Grundlage der Semiotik (phänomenologisch, pragmatisch und post-strukturalistisch). Italienische Forscher:innen waren und sind aktiv in die internationale semiotische Debatte eingebunden. Obwohl oder gerade weil viele italienische Semiotiker:innen es vermieden, sich auf Filmtheorie zu spezialisieren, erwies sich ihre Arbeit in neuen Forschungsfeldern wie Rundfunk, Internet, Videospiele, Virtual Reality und Informatik als nützlich und trug so zur gegenseitigen Befruchtung der Medienwissenschaften bei.

Schlüsselwörter. Artikulation, intersemiotische Übersetzung, Intermedialität, Pragmatik, Medienwissenschaft

1. The early days (1965–1979)

Film semiotics in Italy dates back to the very beginning of the semiotic debate. Between 1965 and 1967, Christian Metz, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Umberto Eco participated in the seminal panels aimed at founding film semiotics organised by the *Mostra Internazionale del Nuovo Cinema* in Pesaro. At these panels they discussed the linguistic structure of cinema (Bruno 1991: 30) or – as Pasolini proposed – the semiotics of the audiovisual (Eco 1968: 149). At the *Centre for Semiotics and Linguistics* in Urbino, founded by Pino Paioni, Carlo Bo, and Paolo Fabbri in 1970 at the suggestion of Algirdas Greimas and currently directed by Gianfranco Marrone, these discussions continued with two conferences: the first, organised by Christian Metz and René Lindekens in 1971 and dedicated to audiovisual semiotics, was attended by Francesco Casetti and Claude Chabrol, amongst others; the second, in 1976, again organised by Metz, Marie Claire Ropars and Lino Micciché, was dedicated to the problems of analysing the filmic text. Speakers included semioticians, intellectuals, sociologists and film critics such as Alberto Abruzzese, Beniamino Placido, Gianfranco Bettetini, Gian Piero Brunetta and Maurizio Grande, testifying to the success of the discipline in providing new interpretative tools for film theory.

Umberto Eco needs no introduction: after his philosophical studies, he set out to locate a scientific re-foundation of aesthetics in Information Theory (IT) (cf. Eco 1962). Emilio Garroni convinced Eco that IT does not provide any insights into meaning or interpretation, however, thus opening the way for semiotic research. Nevertheless, IT provided a material foundation for semiotics in terms of the articulation of expressive units, and Ross Quillian's computational semantics was the inspiration for Eco's encyclopaedic representation of culture. During his scholarly career, Eco constantly sought to link Italian culture, often traditionalist and parochial, to the most recent developments and paradigms in international research, from structural linguistics, semiotics, and information theory to analytic philosophy and cognitive science, always searching for connections with semiotic theory even when attempts to strike up a dialogue proved fruitless.

Pier Paolo Pasolini was one of the most prominent and influential intellectuals of the second half of the 20th Century. He is well known as a poet, filmmaker, and writer. His contributions to the foundations of Italian semiotics are collected in *Heretical Empiricism* (1972). He founded no school and left no heirs; his research exerted more influence abroad than in Italy, especially in France and the USA where his work influenced women's studies (Bruno 1991).

1.1 Film semiotics or reality?

Eco (1968) summarised the three respective positions on film semiotics that were formulated in Pesaro. According to Metz (1964), there is no cin-

ematographic equivalent to the linguistic system: before the movie there is only the image, which mirrors reality and cannot be further analysed in terms of units. Consequently, each shot is a surrogate stimulus. For this reason, the only possible semiotic research would be studies of the syntagmatic organisation of the film. Pasolini agreed with Metz regarding the relationship between image and reality but analysed each shot by breaking it down into the real objects that compose it. According to Pasolini, cinema can be defined as the "written language" (Pasolini 1972: 197) of reality, and reality in turn is to be considered a semiotic organisation. Eco (1968: 154–158) agreed with Pasolini on cinematographic articulation while at the same time criticising the idea of a semiotics of reality, labelled "ur-semiotics". Eco's view converged with that of Metz in that the latter fell back on his previous positions by proposing to identify two levels of coding that come together in film: first, an anthropological and cultural level (iconic codes governing perception and representation) and, second, more specialised codes governing the frame, cut, and narrative structure of the film (1968: 151). Eco thus supported Metz in opposition to Pasolini. At the time, Eco was convinced that the aim of semiotics was to reduce "nature" to cultural phenomena, not vice-versa. Eco considered the idea of a semiotics of reality to be unacceptable and naïve (1968: 152). Eco's position was founded on a more general criticism of the notion of i c o n i c   s i g n (1968: 112) according to which there is a relationship of "likeness" between signs and things. According to Eco, semiotics should explain h o w this kind of relationship is established.

During the 1970s, Eco's journal of semiotics, *Versus* (AA.VV. 1972) launched a debate on iconism in which semiotics scholars such as Gianfranco Bettetini, Ugo Volli, and Francesco Casetti all took part. Eco's thesis was opposed by Tomas Maldonado (1974), who had applied semiotics to design theory to formulate the well-known Ulm Model. The problem represented by iconic signs remained central to Eco's research throughout his life even though in the 1990s he began searching for an answer to this problem in the naturalising approach of cognitive sciences, a direction that ultimately proved fruitless (Eco 1997). At the time, however, Eco's position was anti-naturalistic and anti-referentialist. Pasolini replied to Eco in an essay identifying the code of reality with the ur-code, the code of codes:

> I therefore do not see why the minimal unit of an Ur-code – that is, the cognitive code of reality, that is, the self-revealing objects – cannot become a minimal level of another, higher code which is more cultural in a technical sense (Pasolini 1972: 279–280).

While elsewhere Pasolini's position was further developed (De Lauretis 1981), in the Italian community of semioticians, Eco's position prevailed (Costa 1993: 140). Recently, Gianfranco Marrone (2021) has reinterpreted this debate, noting that Pasolini's choice of words was indeed equivocal, but his purpose was to suggest a "third way" between iconodulism and iconoclasm according to which images are natural but nature is already cultural in and of itself.

1.2 Other themes developed by Pasolini

Pasolini's work significantly impacted visual semiotics. In particular, he considered images to be signs, called *im-signs* (Pasolini 1972: 70), a terminological choice reminiscent of Charles Peirce's classifications of signs. This theoretical option was filtered through Metz's work to influence French film semiotics:

> 'Objects' (and characters must also be included) – that is to say, the different basic elements of filmic discourse – do not enter the film in a virgin state; they carry with them, before even 'cinematographic language' can intervene, a great deal more than their simple literal identity – which does not prevent the spectator belonging to a given culture from deciphering this 'increment' at the same time that he identifies the object. This is the concept of the 'im-segno' as formulated by Pier Paolo Pasolini (Metz 1971: 113–114).

Among Pasolini's theoretical interests, his relationship with cinema and poetry was closely connected with the scientific debate emerging in Paris at the time:

> Much as writers do not always have a precise technical awareness of a process such as free indirect discourse, so directors, too, have until now established the stylistic premises for such a process either with the most absolute lack of awareness or with a very relative awareness. That nevertheless a free indirect discourse may also be possible for cinema is certain. Let us call this process a "free indirect point-of-view shot" (Pasolini 1972: 176).

Through the notion of "free indirect point-of-view shot", Pasolini sought to locate a semiotic and technical basis for the notion of film poetry so as to avoid the risks involved in idealistic approaches to critique. Pasolini's position was later re-assessed by Gilles Deleuze (1983: 71–75). Twenty years later, the notion of "free indirect point-of-view shot" re-surfaced in the semiotic debate on cinema and enunciation played out between Francesco Casetti and Christian Metz (Metz 1991: 132). In more recent times, Paolo Fabbri (1997: 123) has returned to this topic to underline that images are subjected to specific principles of enunciation, ones that are not comparable to language. Along the same lines, Gianfranco Marrone (2021) discusses this issue in the light of the contemporary debate on enunciation, as outlined below.

1.3 General features of early Italian film semiotics

A closer look at this debate allows us to understand why semiotics was able to interest a generation of Italian writers, philosophers, and filmmakers such as Pasolini and Eco. First, there is no single 'Italian school'. The research progresses dialectically through wide-ranging debates, orienting research groups. Second, the birth and transformation of semiotic research in Italy is the result of a shift in the relationship between Italian culture and other inter-

national cultures that resulted in cultural innovation. For example, according to Costa (1993: 129), Pasolini's early essays on cinema continued to employ the technical language of the previous generation: Gianfranco Contini's philological approach and Leo Spitzer's idealistic methods, developed later, were able to shrug off this legacy. Semiotics allowed the younger generation to emancipate themselves. While German was the working language of Benedetto Croce and his epigones, during the 1960s French intellectuals became the new welcome interlocutors. A general characteristic of Italian approaches to film semiotics, approaches that remained stable over the decades, is their connection to international debates: French post-structuralism, Anglo-Saxon pragmatics, and – in recent times – media theory. Drawing on Lotman and Uspenskij (1978), it is useful to consider culture as a model of the world with an internal and external space. Other cultures can be identified as sectors of the external space, some of which are conjoined to the internal space by orientation vectors (see Galofaro 2015). According to this perspective, language plays a crucial role: if we consider Italian culture, the orientation vector shifted from German to French at the end of the 1950s, and was then progressively extended to English starting from the end of the 1970s.

1.4 Semiotics and television

Furthermore, the considerable attention granted to cinema reveals the explanatory power of semiotics when applied to the new features of mass culture, whereas older approaches, such as the Frankfurt School, seemed only capable of condemning mass culture as part of an apocalyptic perspective. Eco (1965: 24) openly accused Theodor Adorno of being a pseudo-Marxist and true reactionary: the new intellectuals aimed to understand – and, consequently, to overthrow – the mechanism of the media, its ideological production, and the way it manipulates the masses. Eco dedicated a great deal of writing to television during his lifetime, distinguishing, for example, paleo-television from neo-television:

> A complex phenomenon consisting of lots and lots of TV channels, all shot through with ads, and programmes that copy one another, taking turns to compete for the attention of the viewer who zaps compulsively on his remote control. Each programme talks about itself and addresses an audience that is part of the programme: the message, obsessively repeated, is not, "This is how the world is", but, "I am here, do you see me? This is the only reality that you will recognize from now on" (Eco 1965: 75–113).

In addition to Eco, other Italian scholars such as Aldo Grasso, Fausto Colombo and Francesco Casetti also began to apply semiotics to the analysis of television (cf. Bettetini 1996: 60). News and its ideological construction fell under scholarly observation from the very beginning: as case in point, we can cite seminal works by Calabrese and Volli (1979, 1995), followed, during the 1990s, by Gianfranco Marrone (1998). Maria Pia Pozzato (ed. 2000)

coordinated an interdisciplinary team to analyse the journalistic construction of the Kosovo War. It should be noted that, during the 1990s, Italian state television commissioned many scholars to conduct semiotic studies to verify the quality of its programming: these studies were published in the *Nuova Eri/Vqpt* book series. Contemporary Italian semiotics inherits from its founders a certain focus, less on the 'specific cinematographic' and more on audio-visual forms, new media and their respective relationships.

2.   From language to text (1980–2000)

At the end of the 1970s, the semiotic debate on the code, the linguistic and specific features of semiotic systems, and iconism had come to an end for three reasons: scientific, institutional, and political. From a scientific point of view, the body of knowledge about analysis procedures, syntagmatic rules, systems, processes and their respective relations had reached maturity and this saturation left little room for further research. From an institutional point of view, from 1971 onwards semiotics became a subject in university courses such as DAMS programmes (the disciplines of art, music, and performing arts) aimed at training technicians for the cultural industry. Semiotics ceased to be the object of intellectual debates and instead became a technical subject: during the 1980s, debates on the ideological nature of mass communication and television were progressively substituted by marketing consulting. Semiotics risked becoming a "pop epistemology for communicators" or "a technique to sell snacks", as Paolo Fabbri used to say (personal communication). For these reasons, from a political point of view and with a few exceptions, semiotics ceased to give rise to critical knowledge useful for social change in the way originally intended by Pasolini's and Umberto Eco's early work, or the scientific production of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (see for example Rossi-Landi 1968).

If we look at the cultural relations maintained by the Italian debate in this period, French semiotics was constantly present. However, a new, 'pragmatic' research paradigm was beginning to take hold, one rooted in Oxford and Berkeley: the authors referenced in this thread of work are John Searle (1969) and Paul Grice (1975).

2.1 Narratology and pragmatics

As a result of the above-mentioned developments, the focus shifted to different topics and issues: in particular, narration and communication (see Bettetini 1996: 39). In 1979, two books redirected Italian semiotic research: Greimas's dictionary of semiotics (Greimas and Courtés 1979), which presents the most comprehensive semiotic model of narrative and textual structures, and Umberto Eco's attempt to encapsulate this model in a broader, pragmatist frame (Eco 1979). The former theory considers meaning imma-

nent and generative: starting from general, deep oppositions between semantic values, the model takes into account the conversions between semio-narrative and semio-discursive structures leading to the surface of the realised text. According to the second theory, the text presupposes some inferences in the attempt to reconstruct the possible world addressed by fictional references (e.g. "A long, long time ago, in a galaxy far away …"):

> At the level of discursive structure the reader is invited to fill up various empty phrastic spaces (texts are lazy machineries that ask someone to do part of their job). At the level of narrative structures, the reader is supposed to make forecasts concerning the future course of the *fabula* (Eco 1979: 214).

Eco's purpose was to study the effects of the text on the reader t h r o u g h the text, without resorting to any unnecessary hypotheses about the r e a l person reading the book or viewing the movie.

In the same period, Italian film semiotics adopted a similar research programme, enclosing narrative theory in a broader theoretical framework and focusing on the effects of the audiovisual text on the spectator (Bettetini 1979). The traditional opposition between models of interpersonal communication and mass communication was called into question by Gianfranco Bettetini (1984). As Francesco Casetti wrote:

> If in the past the spectator had existed at the outskirts of representation – as an occasional participant or simple consumer – she was now seen as someone summoned to weave the threads of the intrigue. The spectator became both a true recipient, insofar as the story unfolds for her, and an obligatory reference point, since she is already inscribed within the fabric of the representation (Casetti 1986: 7).

Francesco Casetti and Federico di Chio (1990) wrote a manual aimed at providing a methodological synthesis focused on analysis, a development that testifies to the fact that film semiotics had ceased to be the purview of a few intellectuals and had entered university courses more generally. This volume was an editorial success and ended up being translated into Spanish. In some ways, the manual retraces the stages of the research: segmentation, cinematographic codes, representation, and narration. Finally, the volume proposes a chapter on the analysis of communication, distinguishing between sender, implicit author, and narrator; receiver, implicit viewer, and narratee.

2.2 Beyond cinema

The label 'film semiotics' is reductive when considering the Italian debate on the audio-visual. Italian researchers have displayed exceptional curiosity, as testified by Gianfranco Bettetini's pioneering studies on Information Theory, video games, and Artificial Intelligence (Bettetini 1987) as well as his work on

computer graphics, virtual reality, interactivity, and hypertexts (Bettetini 1996). Bettetini applies the conversational model he had developed in reference to films to Human-Machine Interaction, finding analogies and differences between the two cases. In particular, the enunciator's competence is partially virtual and is actualised by means of an intervention on the part of the enunciatee; the latter becomes visible, assuming a simulacral body; and interaction is oriented towards action (Bettetini 1996: 149–154). According to Fausto Colombo (1993: 278–279), the operation performed by hypertexts is that of manifesting the true essence of textuality which is the simulation of experience, thereby creating a perceptive and psychological situation inside which the user finds the simulation of his or her experience. It is clear that Italian semiologists have tried to cope with these newer objects of analysis using concepts and instruments developed in relation to older genres of textuality, testing their solidity and partially broadening their meaning. Furthermore, the fact that they began analysing these technologies when they were still in the early stages of development prevented them ,to some extent, from focusing on important features of the new media in question, such as the interaction between different human simulacra in a virtual environment, an experience which in those years often proved frustrating and disappointing (Bettetini 1996: 92).

2.3 Enunciation

Francesco Casetti (1986) proposed a theory of film enunciation according to which it is possible to distinguish among four types of gazes (objective view, unreal objective view, subjective view, and interpellation) based on the different positions of enunciation (*I*-enunciator, *you*-enunciatee, *he*-narrator, or *he*-narratee) articulated through Greimas's logic square (Fig. 2) and by re-thinking the classical distinction between *personal* and *impersonal* enunciation (Benveniste 1966). The "I" position coincides with the enunciator, "you" corresponds to the enunciatee, and the "she/he" position can be occupied by a narratee or a narrator. The resulting types of gaze are:

1. The o b j e c t i v e   v i e w, which corresponds to the nobody shot. The enunciator constructs this point of view as if "you and I, we gaze at him/her/it". The enunciatee must assume the position of a witness (Casetti 1986: 47).
2. I n t e r p e l l a t i o n corresponds to the gaze into the camera. This point of view can be described as "she and I, we gaze at you" (Casetti 1986: 48).
3. The s u b j e c t i v e   v i e w corresponds to the POV shot: "I make you gaze, you equally as her" (Casetti 1986: 49).
4. The i m p o s s i b l e   o b j e c t i v e   v i e w could be confused with the nobody shot, but the point of view is not phenomenologically neutral, as in everyday experience: "what you see, thanks to me, is that I alone am able to see".
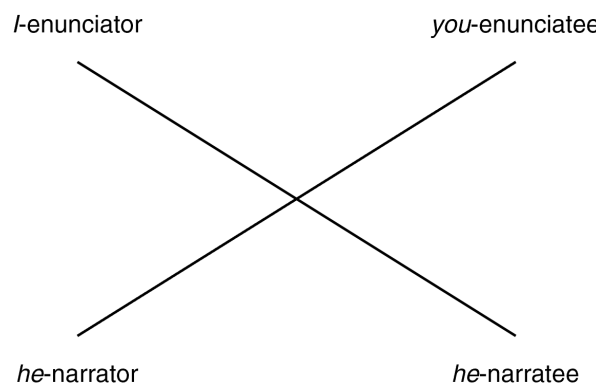
I-enunciator   *you*-enunciatee

he-narrator   *he*-narratee

Fig. 2. The semiotic square generating enunciational relations (Casetti 1986: 53).

This analysis of point of view relates vision to cognitive and epistemic modal values (to know, to believe) – see Greimas and Courtés (1979). In particular (Tab. 1):

Tab. 1. Point of view, cognitive and epistemic values (Casetti 1986: 71).

	Seeing	Knowing	Believing
Objective	Exhaustive	Diegetic	Solid
Impossible objective	Total	Metadiscursive	Absolute
Interpellation	Partial	Discursive	Relative
Subjective	Limited	Intradiegetic	Transitory

2.4 The debate on enunciation

Translated into French, Casetti's book (1986) brought Metz back to semiotics. In fact, Metz had not participated in the enunciational turn of this field of research during the 1980s, a turn that can also be considered to signal the self-affirmation of the younger generation. After concluding his inquiry into filmic codes, Metz shifted his methodological attention to psychoanalysis (Metz 1977). The relationship between early semiotics and structuralism can be considered a legacy of the structuralist program proposed by Michel Foucault (1966) in which three anti-human sciences (linguistics, psychoanalysis, and anthropology) are opposed to the three kernel human sciences characterising bourgeois society and the western myth of the philosophical subject. Another important author often quoted by Metz on this subject is Jacques Lacan, a scholar who influenced a generation of scholars – Julia Kristeva, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, and Michel de Certeau, among others.

Metz wrote the French preface to Casetti's book which was then translated in the English edition (Casetti 1986: XI–XV). In particular, Metz writes:

> The specificity of his work, for me, lies in the combination of these three traits: a formalizing aim, a concern to "cover" everything, a deliberately synoptic view. These characteristics are particularly striking in the powerful and new chart that is proposed for the four cardinal points of cinematographic enunciation, corresponding to just this many different combinations between an ideal I, a you, and a he/she. It should be understood that the aim of the book is not to make an inventory of the enunciative constructions, with their numerous concrete forms and their slight variations, but to propose a conceptual frame, with examples to support it, that can accommodate them all. This is a courageous undertaking, and I am in a position to salute it without scruple, since, on this point, I chose the opposite, or more precisely, the complementary path (Casetti 1986: XIV).

According to Metz (1991), the enunciator and enunciatee, the fictive positions featuring what he calls humanoid enunciation, do not exist. Film enunciation is impersonal. There are no pronouns or shifters in film language. It is true that Bettetini (1984) compares a movie to a conversation, but this is only a metaphor in that the public cannot answer even when explicitly harangued by a character on screen. Similarly, there are no narrators in a movie: when a character starts telling a story, sooner or later he must leave room for images. Enunciation is impersonal because it is based on technical devices. In fact, Metz argues, enunciation is sometimes revealed when its technical features are exhibited (e.g. representing other frames, mirrors or crosshairs in a frame). According to Metz, neither Benveniste's nor Genette's notions of enunciation are applicable to film semiotics. Instead of multiplying simulacral instances such as "I", "you", "she/he/it", theory should focus exclusively on the c y b l e (source) and f o y e r (target). Furthermore, analysis reveals that the c y b l e is not a person: it is a function and a process. At the same time, however, the target is a person: the spectator or analyst. In this framework, enunciation is defined as a soliloquy (Metz 1991: 164).

2.5 Effects of Metz's criticism

Metz's theory cannot be considered *new*. He tried to demonstrate that the orthodox, anti-subjectivist structuralist perspective could lead to a proper distinction between film structure and code, on one side, and the real spectator, on the other side. After all, the presence of a real spectator rather than a simulacrum is what justifies his studies in psychoanalysis. Consequently, Metz does not criticise every definition of enunciation. On the contrary, in the very beginning of his book he references the notion of enunciation as production and transition from a virtual instance (the code) to a real one, as proposed by Greimas and Courtés (1979). Metz's purpose is to eliminate the subject. He is aware that scholars have posited that enun-

ciation does not summon a full and a transcendental subject; however, he defines these kinds of disclaimers as "conventional":

> The locations of enunciation itself – enunciation that we are told is purely textual – are nonetheless most often conceived of as people of some sort. We have to admit that we cannot think of them otherwise; we cannot represent them otherwise clearly, except as instances of incarnation (Metz 1991: 3–4).

Metz's book did not bring about a return to structuralism. Indeed, Bettetini (1996: 55) noted that Metz's radical position is distinguished by a focus on the empirical spectator, considered as a subject. This stance opens up theory to other insights deriving from pragmatics and speech act theory, without forms of mediation. In the English translation of Casetti (1986), the author writes:

> In the years following the publication of this book in Italian, I continued working on enunciation, but I also tried to look at the spectator from the perspective of the actual, material mechanics of reception. In several studies, employing ethnographic and "life-story" methodology, I have engaged issues (such as gender) that were purposely kept in the background of Inside the Gaze (Casetti 1986: XVII).

In what follows, an example of the two different points of view on enunciation (impersonal and anthropoid) is provided (Fig. 3).

Fig. 3. Stanley Kubrick's 2001 *A Space Odyssey*, screenshot from the film. For less than one second, the two hostesses smile at the camera. Actually, they look at a sleeping passenger, but it is impossible for the viewer not to be installed and embodied in the movie. It is a good example of Casetti's interpellation to the enunciatee: "them and I (scil. the enunciator), we gaze at you". However, adopting Metz and Paolucci's notion of impersonal enunciation, the only relevant point in the considered example is the unveiling of the technical device (looking into the device) associated to other marks of the enunciation, e.g. the frame within a frame. The comparison between the two notions of enunciation illustrates Basso's distinction between a semiotics of the technical apparatus (camera, microphone, keyboard …), and a semiotics which is interested in the transformation of values, implying a subject-like instance to which value has a value.

2.6 Re-opening the debate on enunciation

Concern for the "real" spectator can still be considered a pole characteris-
ing the position of Italian semiotics scholars. In some cases, however, this
focus led some prominent scholars to abandon film semiotics. For this rea-
son, the third generation of Italian semiotic scholars re-opened the debate
on enunciation, starting from an important outline of the genesis of the con-
cept and the development of the debate by Giovanni Manetti (2008). We will
focus mainly on two researchers: Pierluigi Basso and Claudio Paolucci.
Basso has been the president of the *French Association of Semiotics* (ASF)
and, when he was still living and working in Italy, he collaborated with Paolo
Fabbri. Of his many monographic studies dedicated to film semiotics, his
work on David Lynch's cinema stands out (Basso 2006). Basso (2003: 60–63)
considers *La Région Centrale*, a 1971 experimental Canadian film directed
by Michael Snow. The movie is 180 minutes long and consists of 17 shots
of an uninhabited mountainous landscape produced by a pre-programmed
robotic arm. The film does not include any human elements. The camera's
turns and rollovers are alien to common perceptive experience:

> The impersonal enunciation characterising *La région céntrale* seems to put on
> stage a purely inter-objective dimension between the gaze of a machine and a
> landscape devoid of anthropic values (Basso 2003: 62).

Any attempt to read the movements of the gaze as anthropic is neutralised.
By contrast, therefore, it is possible to infer from the movie the affective and
cognitive values characterising the intersection between the anthropic gaze
and the world. In particular, the movie lacks narrativity in that it does not
depict any transformations. Its meaning reminds Basso of instrumental
music: a pure semiotics of experience, a trial for the body of the spectator.
However, the anthropic values usually associated with enunciation can only
be neutralised on a local scale and through specific discursive choices
(Basso 2003: 89–99). Basso agrees with Metz that enunciation is to be con-
sidered impersonal, but he also reminds us that "personal" does not coin-
cide with "subjective". Metz focused on the technical functionality of the
cinematographic apparatus. On the contrary, enunciation cannot be sepa-
rated from the transformation of values, and such transformation can only
be carried out by an instance on the part of the subject. Furthermore, the
non-coincidence between the competence of the subject of enunciation
and the spectator is the main reason for the internal division of the cine-
matographic text into two enunciational figures, namely the enunciator and
enunciate. Basso's argument is proposed as part of an effort to re-articu-
late the generative and phenomenological perspectives with the cine-
matographic text (*ivi:* 74).

Unlike Basso, Claudio Paolucci (2020) re-evaluates the notion of imper-
sonal enunciation. Paolucci is a full professor of semiotics at Bologna Uni-
versity. Although he is considered a prominent disciple of Umberto Eco, on

this subject he has abandoned the pragmatist research paradigm to converge with Metz's views. However, it would be reductive to limit Paolucci's theoretical proposal to the field of film semiotics; rather, Metz's theory of impersonal enunciation serves to propose a general, unified notion of enunciation based on the category of "non-person" (Paolucci 2020: 39) appropriate for various contexts such as digital technologies and big data (*ivi:* 165–166). Paolucci also refers to Gabriele Marino (2020), a promising scholar in music semiotics who had proposed a theory of impersonal enunciation for "the phonographic frame" and "listening point", and defined enunciation as the "place of the record", paraphrasing Metz. At the same time, Paolucci justifies the presence of subjectivity as an e f f e c t . To this end, Paolucci adopts Greimas's definition of enunciation:

> We prefer to speak of intentionality, which we interpret as a vision of the world, as an oriented, transitive relation owing to which the subject constitutes the world as an object while constituting it thereby (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 104).

However, Paolucci notes that Greimas's formulation sounds idealistic in that the subject constructs the statement through an act of his own while constructing himself at the same time. For this reason, Paolucci proposes what he calls an "ergative model", according to which the act of enunciation does not imply a causal intentionality on the part of the subject (Paolucci 2020: 154). Unfortunately, the examples provided by the author to illustrate the deep level of his model on the basis of which subjectivity is produced, are practically impossible to translate into English since it lacks an equivalent of the Italian particle *si* (*"la pasta si cuoce"* – "the pasta cooks"). A better example might perhaps be provided by some deponent verbs in Latin such as *sequor*, a verb that is active but is conjugated in the passive voice and does not involve the subject's intentionality (e.g. *quo fata trahunt retrahuntque, sequamur* – "where the Fates drag us and drag us back, let us follow"). It would perhaps be clearer to adopt a different definition, the one proposed by Francesco Marsciani (2012b: 120) and quoted by Paolocci himself: "Subjectivity and objectivity are mutually constituted in language, through a *debrayage* operation". Unlike Paolucci, however, Marsciani does not place the subject at the origins of the process. For Marsciani it is instead *intersubjectivity*, considered as a condition of possibility of meaning, that gives rise to this process.

To return to film semiotics, Paolucci finds that his "ergative" point of view outdates the opposition between Metz and Casetti. For example, Metz is puzzled by the fact that, from the anthropoid point of view on enunciation, the viewer sometimes occupies both the "I" and "you" positions in the movie at the same time.

> For my theory of enunciation, this situation is absolutely natural and expected: filmic language defines two subject positions in the place of the enunciator, whereas other languages have only one (Paolucci 2020: 292).

Paolucci does not quote Basso (2003) neither does he respond to the latter's criticism about the risks surrounding impersonal enunciation, in particular the self-referentiality of the text when it is artificially disentangled from the viewer, the non-coincidence between "person" and "subject", and the fact that impersonal enunciation depends entirely on the technical devices used to produce the document. And indeed, the technical ability to record sound with different audio resolutions seems crucial in Paolucci's (2020: 299–307) analysis of *Wish you were here* as well. However, Paolucci does not agree with the option of reducing the enunciation dispositive to the enunciative practices, proposed, *inter alia*, by Basso (2016), preferring instead to define it in terms of Hjelmslev's schema. Paolucci (2020: 333) quotes Basso (2013: 378), agreeing with his prosthetic and not simulacral notion of enunciation and noting that the avatar in video games is more of a technological prosthesis enhancing the player's abilities than the image of an external subject.

3.   Another change of paradigm

Pierluigi Basso and Claudio Paolucci belong to a third generation of Italian semiotics scholars whose research began at the turn of the Millennium. While the second generation was interested in the pragmatic effects of movies on spectators and used Greimas's theory exclusively for this purpose, a number of scholars in the new generation launched new, original research on the basis of Greimas's framework. As Nicola Dusi (2014: 13–15) writes, Metz's synthesis on film enunciation and reflexivity closed that important debate. Subsequently, the pragmatic approach widened its scope to also encompass the context of reception, including the spectator's knowledge and memory, as well as historical and sociological considerations. Post-structural semiotics became interested in sociosemiotics. One key factor behind this new turn was the move by Italian universities to offer new degree courses in communication science. Beginning in the late 1990s and on the initiative of Umberto Eco, semioticians started working with sociologists and psychologists, and in some cases this collaboration generated interesting transdisciplinary relations, pushing semiotics to re-discuss its own purposes and case studies.

   In this framework, the approach of the Greimas school began to enjoy new popularity. One of the problems in the early Italian reception of Greimas's theory during the 1970s was a misunderstanding of its purpose. Indeed, this theory is often mistakenly viewed as a narratological model of fictional texts, in the sense that fiction could be opposed, for example, to non-fiction. A second misunderstanding concerns the notion of "text". However, "text" should not be confused with the "document" or "support", as it is instead the result of an analysis carried out on a s i g n i f i c a n t s e t – see Marrone (2010a). In other words, texts cannot be opposed to practices, as has often been erroneously suggested even among Greimas's epi-

gones. In line with semiotics, Greimas's theory is an inquiry into the conditions of possibility of signification, hermeneutics, and ethnology. It strives to serve as a science of signification or an epistemology for human sciences – see Marsciani (2012a). Having not fully understood its nature, scholars have sometimes used Greimas's model as a sort of grid to produce 'cookie cutter' literary, musical, and film critiques, as Umberto Eco used to say (personal communication). From the 1980s onwards, therefore, research had focused on other problems. This focus changed with the rediscovery of the notion of semiotic translation, a notion that will be presented in the next section. In particular, according to Ruggero Eugeni (2008), one of the protagonists of the new phase, a debate on the semiotic notion of text emerged in the 1990s involving three different positions:

- Radical anti-textualism, according to which the textual model imposes limits on the analysis of filmic experience and should be abandoned.
- Post-textualism, according to which films are characterised by "weak textuality": they are "concrete objects" (Dusi 2014: 27), a texture of perceptual fragments that the researcher should examine as modulations and trends of experience. Ruggero Eugeni, one of the most prominent Italian researchers in film semiotics, endorses this position. Eugeni (2010) has authored many important publications, one of which was awarded the Limina prize for being the "best Italian book on film studies". In search of the spectator's experience, his research often makes use of neurocognitive data. According to Eugeni (2015), we have entered a post-media era in which media are dissolved into apparatuses of commerce, control, combat, play, travel and relationship, and meaning must be recomposed by epic narratives such as the naturalisation of technology, the subjectivation of experience, and the socialisation of relational bonds. Other contributions by Eugeni to film semiotics will be presented below.
- Neo-textualism, according to which the new research paradigm on sensibility, emotions, and experience widens the field in which textual semiotic instruments can be applied with the aim of mapping the peculiar micro-semantic universe of the movie. The key authors in this field include Gianfranco Marrone (2010b), Francesco Marsciani (2012a), and Nicola Dusi (2014).

3.1 Intersemiotic translation

Originally proposed by Roman Jakobson (1959), the notion of intersemiotic translation was re-discussed at the semiotics graduate seminars held at the University of Bologna between 1997 and 1999. The proceedings of these seminars have been collected in a monographic issue of the journal

Versus edited by Nicola Dusi and Siri Neergard (eds. 2000). An English presentation of the debate is published in Dusi (2015a). The seminars were attended by leading figures of the field, including Umberto Eco, Paolo Fabbri and Omar Calabrese. This notion proved to be highly fertile, giving rise to various publications focused on the relationship between cinema and literature (Francis Vanoye, Gian Paolo Caprettini, André Halbo) as well as music semiotics (Luca Marconi, Lucio Spaziante). The debate focused on two opposing theoretical stances. The first involved interpreting the notion of translation in light of interpretation, in line with Jakobson's original definition: "Intersemiotic translation or transmutation is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of nonverbal sign systems" (1959: 261). The second entailed redefining intersemiotic translation in light of an approach to text modelled after Hjelmslev's work:

> Intersemiotic translation can provisionally be said to take place when there is a re-presentation, in one or more semiotic systems with a different purport and substances of expression, of a form of the content intersubjectively recognized as being linked, at one or more levels of pertinence, to the form of the content of a source text (Dusi 2015a: 248).

According to Dusi, translation is not a mechanical re-presentation of the elements comprising the departure or source text; rather, it implies r e s h a p - i n g the relationships between expression and the level of content, given that both the source and target of this process are often aesthetic texts.

Umberto Eco endorsed the first position. According to Eco, intersemiotic translation cannot be an adaptation because it transforms the source text by making explicit what had remained unsaid, revealing an image or placing a point of view, in contrast to novels with their tendency to undecidability. For example, in Moby Dick

> the account takes care to inform us that Ahab had only one leg, but, as far as I remember, it does not say which, leaving us free to use our imagination (Eco 1997: 326).

During the seminar, Eco noted that, when adapting the story for film (1956), John Huston and Ray Bradbury decided to s h o w the peg leg and so chose the left one. The question posed by Dusi (2003: IX) is: does this decision change the meaning of Melville's novel? Eco published a collection of essays on translation theory in support of this latter position (Eco 2003).

3.2 Semiotic translation and intermediality

Both of these positions focused on the problem of selecting the invariants and the specificities of the different substances and matters of the expression under investigation, since many analyses presented during the seminar focused not on translations that had been carried out, but on the pro-

cess of translation (Dusi 2003: 161). The notion of intersemiotic translation thus proved quite useful for exploring the phenomenon of intermediality, which was, in that period, a relatively new field of research and the source of many questions and problems. The definition of intersemiotic translation is analytically more precise and functional when compared to the vague and multi-faceted definition of intermediality. In fact, the word "intermediality" can refer to medial transposition as well as the combination of media in syncretic (i.e. multi-planar) semiotics such as film, comic books, and opera. Finally, it can be used as an i n t e r m e d i a l   r e f e r e n c e, that is, as the imitation of techniques used in different semiotics: for example, when a movie displays artworks (Dusi 2015b: 20). Federico Zecca (2013) has recently returned to semiotic translation, generalising it to encompass intermedial translation whenever it is possible to identify a source-text, an outcome-text, and a certain number of intersemiotic passages. Intermedial translation can involve a whole text or a partial section of a larger text.

3.3 The intermedial character's passions

This focus on the intersemiotic translation process generated important insights on intermediality. For example, Gianfranco Marrone (2003) analyses the different intermedial transformations of the popular inspector Montalbano character from literature to TV movies. The author reconstructs a hierarchy of media in which television occupies a dominant position. Marrone (2010b) focuses on the body and analyses the way it is articulated in Anthony Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Stanley Kubrick's movie adaptation (1971). Marrone's attention to the body and its rhetorical and figurative representation, as well as the impact of these representations on passions and the overall intelligibility of the text, follows the same line of inquiry developed by a French tradition rooted in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, undoubtedly one of the phenomenological foundations of semiotics, and subsequently interpreted by Greimas (Dusi 2014: 24–26).

According to Paolo Bertetti (2011: 8–9), Marrone's work opened a new sociosemiotic perspective on the intertextual construction of the "character":

> In other terms, the character is a sociosemiotic construction resulting not from a single text, but from a web of intertextual references. Thus [...] from the set of texts and interpretive discourses relative to the character in question, and in particular – at least in the case of some characters, in particular serial characters – from the set of the texts, by one or more authors, which recall, modify and translate the character, in the same medium or in other media (Bertetti 2011: 9).

In the same vein, Bertetti dedicated an exemplary (and very enjoyable) book to the metamorphoses of Conan, the popular character of Robert Howard's short stories, as he moves through novels, apocripha, comic books, cinema, and video games. This book also features a very useful the-

oretical chapter on the notion of character in semiotics that proposes a practical grid for analysis (Bertetti 2011: 13–44).

3.4 Perspectives

As the notion of intersemiotic translation attests, the Italian debate on intermediality had retained its own originality and enjoyed an early development that led the scientific community to take into account phenomena such as remixing and remaking, interpreted as p r a c t i c e s o f r e p l i c a b i l i t y. An important symposium on this subject was held in Urbino in 2004 as part of the traditional semiotics seminars organised by the *International Centre of Semiotics and Linguistics*. As evidenced by the volume publishing the proceedings, edited by Dusi and Spaziante (eds. 2006), a distinguished part of the semiotics scientific community participated in the seminar: Ruggero Eugeni, Daniele Barbieri, Luca Marconi, Allan Moore, Maria Pia Pozzato, Marco Senaldi, Guido Ferraro, Francis Vanoye, Cristina Demaria, Antonella Mascio, Giorgio Grignaffini, Gianfranco Marrone, and many others. Another consequence of the attention to intermediality and semiotic translation has been the research on the stratification of different semiotic planes and syncretic semiotics, and indeed this was the focus of an important symposium of the *Italian Association of Semiotic Studies* (AISS) chaired by Maria Pia Pozzato (Pozzato and Spaziante 2010). Many Italian scholars have also worked on themes and problems related to the international debate, such as t r a n s m e d i a l i t y: one profound interpreter of this issue is Paolo Bertetti (2020). Together with intermediality and new media, new objects of study closely related to film have also been analysed such as, for example, series (Attimonelli and Susca 2020) and cultural icons (Bernardelli and Grillo eds. 2020). Italian research on these subjects developed prior to the international debate in some respects. However, it is worth noting another important shift in the vector orienting Italian culture towards other interlocutors: Italian semiotics was born when this vector rotated from Germany to France, or from idealism to structuralism, and later to Anglo-Saxon pragmatics. French post-structuralism remains central to current discussions: Gilles Deleuze's work has been used by Paolo Fabbri (2019) to re-read Federico Fellini's cinema by considering books, comics, scripts, drawings, photograms and music. At the turn of the Millennium, the orientation vector was extended to include mediologic work such as that of Lev Manovich (2001) and Henry Jenkins (2006). Another important reference point over the last 20 years has been Juri M. Lotman, whose semiotics of culture seems to bring together different approaches circulating in current Italian debates.

Nowadays, a new semiotic generation has emerged in Italy, and it is difficult to guess the direction the next turn will take. Quite interestingly, after research on intermediality, young scholars have gone back to recognising the vitality and anti-ideological usefulness of film semiotics. Without forget-

ting new media, they have returned to focus on movies, following Slavoj
Žižek's example, and trying to read the history of culture through screen
surfaces (Surace 2018: 800). Recently, Bruno Surace dedicated an inter-
esting volume to the problem of destinality in cinematographic texts (*ibi-
dem*). D e s t i n a l i t y is defined as the textual manifestation of a transcend-
ent sender of semantic values; the category of destinality thus acts before
the text means something, as a widespread instance that tells us why the
text is meaning (Surace 2019: 43).

3.5 New media research and video game semiotics

Bettetini's seminal work on interactivity, presented above, was further devel-
oped by Giovanna Cosenza (ed. 2003). Eco's research on interpretive coop-
eration was extended to video games by Massimo Maietti (2004), while
Francesco Galofaro (2003) proposed the notion of meta-direction: in first-
and third-person shooter video games some features of film direction are
delegated to the user, while it is possible to recognise a hierarchically supe-
rior instance that decides the functions that can be delegated to the play-
er. An important comparison between the cinematographic subjective shot
and the first-person point of view in video games has been proposed by
Ruggero Eugeni, according to which the c o r e - s e l f emerging from the
elementary subjective experience is then narratively developed through a
continuous and coherent process of unfolding (Eugeni 2012: 28).

From the turn of the Millennium onwards, early ideas about interaction,
focused on humans and machines in video game research were flanked
by new studies focused on the interaction between humans in virtual envi-
ronments. This latter body of work seeks to distinguish video games from
the model of the hypertext (Ferri 2007) and has contributed to the problem-
atisation of the notion of "human", as well as posing considerations about
the body that merge semiotics and gender theory (Demaria and Mascio
2000). It is important to underline that, over the last 20 years, video game
semiotics has gradually detached itself from film semiotics in terms of its
methodologies and problems, moving towards an autonomous videoludic
critique (Compagno 2012), interaction design (Zinna 2004; Diamanti 2012),
and design and gamification (Caliri et al. eds. 2018). Finally, Ruggero Eugeni
(2021) has extended the post-medial perspective introduced above to the
case-study represented by new technologies such as smart glasses, night
vision goggles, augmented reality, and neural networks.

4.   Conclusion

As we have seen, some features of Italian film semiotics have remained
constant over the decades. The first of these is the discipline's dialectic
development through significant long-lasting debates on specific themes

(such as the film system, pragmatic effects on the spectator, enunciation, intermediality and "new" media) and intergenerational discussions. Some classic authors, such as Umberto Eco and Gianfranco Bettetini, were able to orient the debate in different epochs. Second, all of these Italian semiotic traditions frame the meaning of film in a broader context, sociosemiotic in the case of the textualist and narratological approaches and more experience-oriented in the case of neurophenomenological approaches. However, as outlined above, phenomenology is to be considered a foundational element of textualist approaches leading to very interesting research such as Pierluigi Basso's work on amnesia in movies such as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) (Basso 2003: 283–316).

The third feature is cross-fertilisation. Semioticians have avoided specialising in "film theory" and indeed every attempt to distinguish between general semiotics theory and the specific semiotics of movies, music, and theatre has proven fruitless. On the contrary, many semioticians have contributed to film research without dedicating themselves to it full time, and, at the same time, many film semioticians have contributed to pioneering research in other fields, from algorithms to augmented reality. Finally, film semiotics is part of Italian culture. If we join Lotman in considering culture to be a model of the world, we can see that gradual changes in the border between the internal and external space have periodically redefined and re-oriented the semiotics debate.

Notes

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Memento (USA, 2000, director: Christopher Nolan).
Moby Dick (USA 1956, director: John Huston).

Image sources

Fig. 2. The semiotic square generating enunciational relations (Casetti 1986: 53).
Fig. 3. Stanley Kubrick's *2001 A Space Odyssey*, screenshot from the film.

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Fifty Years Off-key: A Map of Musical Semiotics from the Italian Perspective*

Gabriele Marino

Summary. Music has always been a problem for semiotics to the extent that the semiotics of music (music semiotics or musical semiotics) is the most neglected among the so-called "applied semiotics". Therefore, this paper first exposes how music presents a series of theoretical challenges to the verbally and visually-oriented semiotic episteme. Subsequently, it highlights the pivotal role of Italian scholarship in the field, from the 1970s to the 2020s. A foundational figure is Gino Stefani (1929–2019), a pioneer of the semiotic analysis of music who operated in Bologna under the auspices of Umberto Eco and propitiated a fertile collaboration between musicology, musical pedagogy, popular music studies and semiotics.

Keywords. Italy, linguistics, musical semiotics, musicology, popular music studies

Zusammenfassung. Musik stellte schon immer ein Problem für die Semiotik dar. In der Folge ist Musiksemiotik die am meisten vernachlässigte Disziplin innerhalb der so genannten „angewandten Semiotik". Dieser Artikel zeigt zunächst auf, inwiefern die primär sprachorientierten semiotischen Episteme durch die Musik vor eine Reihe theoretischer Herausforderungen gestellt werden. Anschließend wird die zentrale Rolle der italienischen Forschung beginnend in den 1970er Jahren bis in die 2000er auf diesem Gebiet beleuchtet. Eine Schlüsselfigur ist Gino Stefani (1929–2019), ein Pionier der semiotischen Musikanalyse, der in Bologna unter der Schirmherrschaft von Umberto Eco arbeitete und eine fruchtbare Zusammenarbeit zwischen Musikwissenschaft, Musikpädagogik, Popularmusikstudien und Semiotik förderte.

Schlüsselwörter. Italien, Linguistik, Musiksemiotik, Musikwissenschaft, Popularmusikstudien

1. Music and semiotics

1.1 The semiotic need for difficult things

It is quite common to think that music raises quite peculiar questions with respect to semiotics, the theory of signification. As Italian philosopher of language and semiotician Ugo Volli, an early collaborator and friend of Umberto Eco's, puts it:

> The analysis of musical texts and systems stands as one of the most difficult fields for semiotics, to the extent it would constitute in some ways almost a challenge to the possibility of extending its concepts in a homogeneous way to all forms of expression. It is true that many of the typical notions of the discipline have been applied to the analysis of musical texts, however in many cases one can have the feeling that such applications may be far-fetched or that there is no more than a vague resonance between how these notions work in the original context and how they would work in the musical one. The difficulty with which the elaboration of more founded and convincing methodological perspectives was finally reached therefore seems to reveal how specific the problems of music as a subject matter to be studied in a semiotic fashion are (Volli 2003: 264).

It was not easy for semiotics to apply itself to musical materials. From the founding essay in which Belgian linguist, semiotician and musicologist Nicolas Ruwet (1966) had tried, in his opinion for the first time, to endow musicology with a rigorous method (applying a mixture of linguistic structuralism and generativism)[1], up to today, the history of musical semiotics is a story of attempts, adjustments, stretches and idiosyncrasies. Musical semiotics feels like a musician who has been trained on a keyboard being forced to apply their musicianship to a wind instrument.

If one were to open a manual or anthology of semiotics and scroll down the table of contents, one would see no trace of music. There are a few exceptions: the aforementioned Volli (2003), for instance, and Bernardelli and Grillo (2014). Music has its own place in the encyclopedic volumes that reconstruct the history and subfields of the discipline (Nöth 1995; Trifonas ed. 2015) and in those that deal with the semiotics of music among the so-called "applied semiotics" (Calabrese and Mucci 1975; Stefani and Marconi 1991). Still, musical semiotics seems to have been unable to go beyond the role of a minor, extremely specialised subsidiary. A semiotician who could be called a "music semiotician" because they dealt mainly with music has certainly studied other things as well (literature, cinema, advertising, painting, etc.); on the contrary, it is not common to find a semiotician involved principally with literature, cinema, advertising, painting, etc. who has also dealt with music. Music seems to stand as a kind of separate field; a different, difficult, and problematic subject for semiotics which, after all, remains outside its canon. Unlike other areas, such as literature, visual art or advertising, music does not seem to have ever been taken into great considera-

tion in the definition of what has been called "general semiotics" which, proceeding from its structuralist origins in the 1960s up to the affirmation of sociosemiotics in the 1980s, could be considered the "standard" or "mainstream theory".[2]

If semiotics has a problem with music, if music is a problem to semiotics, the causes do not lie with music but rather with semiotics itself. And if semiotics wants to stand as a scientific discipline or disciplinary perspective capable of saying something meaningful about phenomena that are meaningful to us, it simply cannot consider such an important area of human life as music to be an "exception". As Eco often suggested, starting with the early aesthetological masterpiece which anticipated his actual semiotic turn, *The Open Work* (1962), a theory of literature, a theory of translation and a theory of language that neglected the existence of something – different, difficult, and problematic – like James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* would not be legitimately authorised to call themselves "theories". In other words, the exception must be made into the rule. Music would become a new semiotic wake, a new object capable of keeping semiotics awake. If music does not fit the traditional semiotic grids designed upon verbal language, we may imagine a semiotics re-conceived so as to include under its domain those objects which were the old exceptions within a system that had such a vivid focus only due to its narrow scope. The semiotic interest of semioticians for music is thus explained musically, since they are interested in music but, above all, semiotically, as they are interested in semiotics.

Music semiotics is difficult because it is necessary, and vice versa. Its origins date back to the moment when the idea first arose that a given music could be detached from a strictly functional value: we could conceive not only liturgical, court, theatre or dance music – music composed and played to pray, have a banquet, set up a show or dance – but also music to be listened to. Towards the end of the Baroque all arts started becoming emancipated from sociocultural needs and music slowly reached the status of an autonomous practice; this ideology was magnified by the romantic aesthetic and then the 1900 Modernist avant-garde proposing the idea of "art for art's sake" and, in particular, "absolute music". Music's meaning was no longer tied to its pragmatics as liturgy, ceremony, show or dance, but could simply be activated through listening. This is when music semiotics was born *in nuce*: a discipline dedicated to explaining the meaning of something that was no longer self-explanatory.

1.2 *Music as a semiotic problem*

As anybody involved in it in any possible sense knows perfectly well, music is a knotty issue. Music represents a problem, because it presents us with a dilemma: that of meaning. We should not ask "what" sense it makes but rather "how" it does so, seeing that it always balances the two distinctive features which make it comparable to the sense of smell: its impregnabili-

ty and its capacity of communicating sensations, emotions, atmospheres, places, images and stories with surgical precision. Music is a big semiotic problem, since semiotics has always dealt with it as if it were a big problem. As a matter of fact, the semiotics of music is the most neglected among the so-called "applied semiotics", a term coined around the mid-1960s, when Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco started getting involved with mass culture and Christian Metz with cinema. The semiotics of music developed in a parallel way to the general theory of signification, in a heterodox way in comparison to other applied semiotics and, internally, in the most inhomogeneous way. Indeed, there is no such thing as "the semiotics of music" in the sense in which, on the contrary, we may identify a "semiotics of painting" or "of advertising"; at most, we can identify different "possible semiological projects", to quote Jean-Jacques Nattiez (1988: 186), who was principally responsible for the introduction of "musical semiology" within music studies, in the climate of so-called "New Musicology". There is the paradigmatic-stylistic analysis of the neuter level elaborated by Nattiez (1987; in the footsteps of his masters Ruwet and Jean Molino). There is a group of scholars who stress the narrative component of music, mainly but not exclusively in the footsteps of Greimas (Tarasti 1994; Samuels 1996; Almén 2008; Grabócz 2009). Others focus on music as gesture and embodied metaphor (Lidov 2004; Hatten 2004). Others on the notion of "topic" (Agawu 1991; Monelle 1992). There is the inter-objective comparison of "musemes" (a neologism coined by Charles Seeger on the model of "morpheme") elaborated by Tagg (1979) as the methodology for a "semiotic musicology of the mass media" (Tagg and Clarida 2003). Other scholars developed a Peircean, cognitive-interpretative perspective (Martinez 1997; Cumming 2000; an approach pioneered by Coker 1972). And there is the pragmatic musical competence model elaborated by Stefani (1982; see *infra*).[3]

Most of the aforementioned scholars are not exactly semioticians who dealt with music, but rather musicologists who pursued the semiotic way. In fact, the semiotics of music has historically been more the concern of musicologists than that of semioticians, with the fundamental difference that semiotics considers music as carrying meanings, whereas 20th Century musicology is formalist, following the path originally traced by Eduard Hanslick; as such, as a kind of minor branch of musicology, the semiotics of music has been suffering from what we may call "scorecentricism" (an ideological focus on the score), with the side effect of analysing not sounds, but graphic signs: the black dots on the pentagram which represent the visual translation of music. This fight between semiotic thinking and musicological tradition is clear in Nattiez (1975; Nattiez ed. 1971, 1975), Nattiez, Paioni and Stefani (eds. 1975) and Stefani (1973, 1976, 1985b).

The problem of music's meaning has always been an issue of translation from one semiotic material into another. On the one hand, the difficulties in approaching the object derive from its peculiarities, its proverbial ineffability (Jankélévitch 1961) and its unclassifiability in terms of linguistic signs: for Peter Faltin music has no referent, for Ruwet it is asemantic, for

Émile Benveniste it has semantics but is not semiotic (i.e. it is not a biplanar system), for Marcello Pagnini there are "places of homological integration" between the two systems of language and music. For Claude Lévi-Strauss, the founder of structuralist anthropology, who was deeply inspired by music, it does not present proper meanings and signifies in a "profoundly mysterious way". Roland Barthes talked of "musical significance", something different and more elusive than "musical signification". One of the crucial points of the semiotics of music is actually external to proper semiotic discourse: the ontology upon which the semiotic discourse builds at all. As pointed out by Volli

> The field of musical semiotics is further complicated by the fact that – in a very similar way to what happens also to the semiotics of theater – one must distinguish between the written text (the score) and its performance, which is the true translation into musical fact (Volli 2003: 267).

Semiotics has long dealt with the issue of defining music in its own terms (a discussion of this metalinguistic quest can be found in Marconi 2012), but scholars have not been able to find an agreement, a solution which would not sound like drastic reductionism: "Music is the score". So, on the one hand, there is the semiotic *impasse* due to music *per se*. On the other hand, such an *impasse* is due also to the discipline, to its predilection for verbal language, the "final metalanguage" (according to Benveniste) and "primary modelling system" (according to Lotman) focusing on which semiotics – at least in its linguistic, structural, generative European tradition deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure – has cohered and systematised itself. Even the homomateriality of music and the spoken word, both of which are made of sounds, can do nothing against this glottocentricism (the ideological supremacy of the word against all other semiotic systems) so that, in one way or another, we must confront the old question: "Is music a language"? Which would be, Noam Chomsky (2014) suggested, as if we were asking whether airplanes actually fly or submarines swim. Some authors propose overturning the perspective: Augusto Ponzio (and Lomuto, 1997), Lawrence Kramer (2002), Philip Tagg (2012), Daniele Barbieri (2020) and Guido Ferraro (2019) imagine a theory of signification that would be "musical" not in terms of being the passive application of principles that were originally conceived for a different semiotic matter to music, but rather a semiotics conceived on the basis of the semiotic matter of music itself. Italian music pedagogist Roberto Goitre (and Seritti, 1980) and Canadian musicologist David Lidov (2004) went further, asking themselves: "Is language a music"?

As pointed out by Eero Tarasti "oddly enough, few of the great semioticians have said anything about music as a sign" (2002: 4). Basically, Louis T. Hjelmslev, Algirdas J. Greimas[4], Jurij Lotman and Umberto Eco (but see chapter 2.1) did not deal with music in a theoretical fashion. Roland Barthes, who was also a skilled pianist, had great musical intuitions, but never organ-

ically developed them.[5] There is not even an entry dedicated to music in the *Analytical Dictionary* edited by Greimas and Joseph Courtés (1979); or, rather, a short, partial and confused one was included in the second "experimental" volume of the dictionary, which was subsequently removed from the canon (Castellana 1986).

When it is not literally a blank space, musical semiotics is familiar with bad reviews. Whereas a philosopher of the phenomenological school like Giovanni Piana (2005) denies the very possibility of a semiotics of music ("Music is absolutely not a sign") and an expert in musical aesthetics like Enrico Fubini (1987) judges semiotics fruitfully applicable only to the field of pop music, a media scholar educated in semiotics like Gianni Sibilla (2003) overturns this judgment and evaluates positively only the outcomes emerging from the semiotics of classical music. Given this axiological confusion, it is no surprise that 20 years after its first formalisations (after Ruwet 1972), one of the most prominent musical semioticians, Raymond Monelle, was to draw such bitter conclusions in relation to the progress of the semiotics of music:

> The chief enterprise of music semiotics remains unfulfilled. The complaint of eth-nomusicologists, that music analysis was based on a vague and impressionistic metalanguage, was to have been met by a scientific and universal methodology which would make it possible to describe and compare ethnic musics as linguists do with language. But with all the making-explicit of principles and criteria, there has been no single agreed and tested method for the description of music, and writers have still tended to confine themselves to discussion of one musical style only. Only Jay Rahn (1983) seriously tries to lay down a theory for all music, and his results are inconclusive. It is a lamentable failure for our study and perhaps shows that there is much still to be done (Monelle 1992: 327).

Beyond the formal, musicological and aesthetological issues, the status of music semiotics is similarly lacunose and confused. Lucio Spaziante, a semiotician interested in music as a communicative and sociocultural fact, underlines that the sociosemiotics of music is a very "little-traveled line of research" (2007: 13). In other words: communication scholars have paid scarce attention to musical communication. Which is paradoxical if we think, as Tagg reminds us whenever possible, of the number of hours per day in which we listen to music, whether incidentally or accidentally, in "direct" and, even more, in mediated form. Music is ubiquitous, to quote Anahid Kassabian (2013), but semiotics has apparently opted to be deaf to it.

Still today, in the era of TikTok – a video social platform born for do-it-your-self music videos – music is not a highly semioticised field, nor is semiotics a very musicophilic discipline. However, we can still learn something from the musical semiotic *impasse*, from the errors scattered throughout the last five decades of confrontation between "organised sounds" (as Edgard Varèse would say) and the "science of signs". The way in which music signifies, the way in which we make sense of it by turning it into signs,

obliquely shed light onto the mechanisms of meaning-making that we have always conceived on the basis of linguistic texts. The postulates of general semiotics are of no exception for music; if anything, this is a field of investigation that osmotically forces semiotics to greater elasticity and greater accuracy at the same time. Jacques Attali (1977) claimed that "music is prophecy": as a matter of fact, the horizon of today's musical semiotics is by necessity entirely projected into the future. If this path proves as challenging as it promises to be, it will certainly be a long one to travel.

2.   Music and semiotics in Italy 1970s to 2020s: a provisional outline

It is very difficult to try and map the fragmentary development of musical semiotics in Italy. Nevertheless, what this section will attempt to do is discuss a handful of leading figures, outline some tendencies and identify possible macro-thematic clusters. As we have seen, the contribution of Italian authors to the debate around the semiotics of music has been prominent; in particular, we have already addressed the theoretical contributions of Pagnini (1974), Goitre and Seritti (1980), Stefani (1982), Ponzio and Lomuto (1997) and Barbieri (2020) and we have already mentioned Sibilla (2003), Spaziante (2007) and Marconi (2012).

2.1 Umberto Eco

Eco (1932–2016) did not develop a proper semiotic theory of music nor did he encapsulate music organically in his philosophy of signs; nevertheless, he was a key reference who made it possible to start studying music and especially popular music in a semiotic fashion. His advocacy of the critical and scientific study of popular songs can be seen in his preface to the Adornian work by Michele Straniero, Emilio Jona, Sergio Liberovici and Giorgio De Maria (1964), later included in Eco (1964). An amateur musician himself (trumpet and recorder) and friend and close collaborator of Luciano Berio's [see the four-handed work for magnetic tape *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*, 1958][6], Eco was strongly influenced by the avant-garde music produced in the context of the "Studio di Fonologia RAI" established in Milan by Berio and Bruno Maderna in 1955, in the definition of the aesthetics he would later call *The Open Work* (1962). While Eco was laying the foundations of contemporary Italian semiotics in his lectures at DAMS (the faculty of arts, music, and performance, in Bologna), Gino Stefani was contemporaneously doing the same – under Eco's auspices – with respect to music semiotics.

2.2 Gino Stefani

Stefani (1929–2019, the stress is on the first 'e'; pictured in Figure 4, along with Umberto Eco and Mario Baroni) is the musicologist who developed the most convincing theoretical proposal within the framework of a pragmatic approach to the semiotic issues of music (Middleton 1990: 244–247). Such pragmatic vocation was due to his primarily didactic-pedagogical interests.[7] For Stefani (1982: 9–32)[8] the meaning of a musical text is indeed rooted in its immanent level, namely in the sound itself, but it is somewhat overdetermined by the concrete usage that we make and, moreover, are able to make of music. Therefore, musical meaning would actually stem from the "knowledge, the knowing-how-to-do and the knowing-how-to-communicate" of all the subjects involved (musicians, listeners). The different levels of musical competence would constitute "extra-textual variables" that influence both the result of musical activities (playing, listening), as well as the possibility of making them objects of discourse (namely, constructing a metalanguage capable of verbalising musical experiences). Influenced by the typology of Eco's codes, Stefani (1982: 13) identifies five levels of competence:

- General codes (GC [It. *Codici generali, CG*]): perceptual and logical schemes, anthropological behaviours, basic conventions through which we interpret any experience and, therefore, also those related to sound;
- Social practices (SP [*Pratiche sociali, PS*]): projects and modes of material or sign production, or, in other words, cultural institutions (language, clothing, agricultural work, industrial work, sports, shows, etc.), including also "musical" ones (e.g. concerts, criticism, etc.);
- Musical techniques (MT [*Tecniche musicali, TM*]): theories and methods more or less specific or exclusive to musical practices (instruments, scales, compositional forms, etc.);
- Styles (St [*Stili, St*]): related to epoch, genre, current, author, meaning particular ways of creating musical techniques, social practices and general codes;
- Opus (Op [*Opere, Op*]): specific musical oeuvres (symphonies, songs, etc.).

Depending on the listener's level of competence, the musical text will produce different "layers of meaning". Although the various types of competence are differently articulated and evaluated in different communities, it is possible to identify a "high competence" (it. *competenza colta*, lit. cultured competence), which

> tends to engage in an appropriation of the work with sounds that is specifically and autonomously of the artistic-aesthetic kind, and therefore considers the Op level to be most relevant (Stefani 1982: 25–26)

and a "popular competence", which

> inversely […] tends […] to a global and heteronomous ('functional') appropriation of the work with sounds (Stefani 1982: 25–26).

When these two competences meet halfway, we can identify a "common competence", the maximum extension of which is given at the MT level and narrows in correspondence with both GC and Op.[9] The levels of competence identified by Stefani may be translated into prototypical sociological terms if understood as conditions of possible codified uses of music; let us think, for example, of the famous proposal by Theodor W. Adorno (1962: 3–25), who identifies six types of musical conduct (expert, intuitive, consumer, emotional, resentful, passive) based on choices, inclinations and tastes rooted in the degree of competence of the musical *datum* possessed by the listener. Albeit outdated in terms of metalanguage, with such an emphasis on the notion of "code" (elaborated by Eco and then replaced by Eco himself with the more elastic "encyclopedic model"), the theory proposed by Stefani (a self-admittedly "provisional" one; Stefani 1982: 27) is the only one that tried – bypassing the structuralist approach, but always within a semiotic framework – to give a systemic account of the pragmatic nature of the construction of musical meaning as discourse: a circulation of meaning between texts, practices and their metatexts.

Stefani's writings on Baroque and liturgical music, music pedagogy, the relationship between music and pacifism, as well as on musicotherapy (in the framework of an approach that he would later define, along with his wife Stefania Guerra Lisi, MusicArTheraphy in the Globality of Languages [it. *MusicArTerapia nella Globalit dei Linguaggi*]) are pivotal. In the 1970s, along with Nattiez and, later (in the 1980s) Tarasti[10], Stefani was the international promoter and spokesperson of the semiotic approach to music; a rich autobio(biblio)graphical commentary on the paths of music semiotics can be found in Stefani (2009). Like Nattiez (who transmitted his and his collaborators' semiological sensibility to the music encyclopedia he edited for leading Italian publisher Einaudi, based in Turin), Stefani was a populiser of music scholarship as well (1985a). This component, the capability of using semiotics as a meta-perspective with which to frame music and give it depth, was taken up by his pupils so that, for instance, we can find it in the encyclopedia issued by *laRepubblica/l'Espresso* publishers and edited by Eco whose music section was scrupulously edited by Luca Marconi and Lucio Spaziante (Spaziante and Marconi eds. 2012).

2.3 Semiotics and popular music studies

In Bologna, while Stefani was teaching musical semiotics, Mario Baroni and Rossana Dalmonte, partners both in research and life, among the founding members of *GATM-Gruppo Analisi e Teoria Musicale* [Group for the analysis and theoretical study of music, Fig. 4] in 1989, applied semiotics to musicology maintaining a strong emphasis on formal analysis with the final aim of turning the discipline into the possible epistemology of a computational understanding of music (see Baroni, Dalmonte and Jacoboni 1999).

Fig. 4. Gino Stefani, Mario Baroni, and Umberto Eco (left-right) playing flutes at Mario Baroni and Rossana Dalmonte's house in Bologna, early 1980s. Courtesy of Baroni-Dalmonte.

The DAMS in Bologna, in the original venue in *via Guerrazzi*, and the offices of *Laboratorio Musica* [Music laboratory] (a monthly magazine edited by avant-garde composer Luigi Nono issued 1979–1982), between Florence and Rome, are where semiotics and popular music studies met, thanks to the meeting of Gino Stefani and Franco Fabbri, the former bearing the semiotic heritage of Umberto Eco and the latter the popular music scholarship of Philip Tagg. The project was to renew musicology from within, providing an alternative to the traditional, philological, historicistic, scorecentricist approach to music that would update the canon (by studying not only Art music but also phonographically mediated and non-Western music) and encompass both introversive and extroversive – formal and sociocultural –

meaning at the same time.[11] The genre theory proposed by Fabbri (1981, 1982, 2002) was strongly influenced by both Eco and Stefani; Fabbri's pupil Jacopo Tomatis (2019) published a monumental study on the Italian song that aimed at bridging the gap between formal and ideological analysis. Two of Stefani's pupils and collaborators, Roberto Agostini and the aforementioned Luca Marconi, among the earliest second-generation scholars (the first being Fabbri himself) in the field of popular music studies in Italy, translated and edited a collection of seminal writings by Tagg (1994), ranging from his classic analysis of the theme of the TV series *Kojak* to his later reflections on rave music.

Stefani's pupils and early collaborators also included Francesco Spampinato, Dario Martinelli, Johannella Tafuri, Maurizio Spaccazzocchi and Franca Ferrari. Whereas the others focused mainly on the relationship between musicology and pedagogy, Agostini, Marconi and Martinelli cultivated that between semiotics and popular music. Besides essays related to pedagogy (in the Stefanian tradition), Agostini published studies on cutting edge and emerging music phenomena (2002, 2008) as well as a short history of popular music studies in Italy (2006). Martinelli is an internationally renowned expert in the biosemiotic field of zoomusicology (2010) and, in addition to dealing with classic themes such as authenticity and ideology, he has gradually oriented his semiotic analysis towards multimodality and the audiovisual (2020). Luca Marconi (1960–2019) is a key figure of connection between different areas of music scholarship – music analysis, pedagogy, popular music studies, sociology (see Gasperoni, Marconi and Santoro 2004) – under the unifying umbrella of semiotics; fascinated by the theories of Leonard B. Meyer (1956)[12], Marconi (2001) studied the relationships between the body, emotions and musical forms, as well as an incredibly manifold series of topics, such as intertextuality (2006a), prog music (2006b), enunciation (2007), Italian singers-songwriters (2014a), etc.

2.4 *From the semiotics of the plastic arts to the semiotics of music*

Andrea Valle (a pupil of Gian Paolo Caprettini's in Turin – who in turn studied under D'Arco Silvio Avalle, among the founders of literary semiotics in the 1960s – and Eco's in Bologna), Guido Ferraro (an early collaborator of Caprettini's) and Stefano Jacoviello (a pupil of Omar Calabrese's in Siena, perhaps the most important Italian semiotician to deal with the semiotic analysis of painting), independently and ending up with very different solutions, all share the same theoretical intuition: a return to the Greimasian proposal of the semiotics of the plastic arts (originally conceived in order to deal with visual texts generally defined as abstract, in opposition to the figurative/mimetic ones), to free it from any specific substantialisation (plastic semiotics would not appeal only to the visual domain) and, on this basis, build up a semiotics of music which would not be subject to musicological ideology, metalanguage and tools.

Valle, an avant-garde composer himself (in the experimental, computation-
al tradition of Iannis Xenakis), who scrupulously studied the heterodox semi-
ography of music in the 20th Century (2002)[13], proposed a "semiotics of the
audible" (2004, 2015) rooted in Pierre Schaeffer's acoulogy (the detection
of a set of distinctive features of the audible domain), Jacques Fontanille's
somatic semiotics and Wayne Slawson's theory of "sound color" (i.e. tim-
bre); his interests are explicitly connected to technical and phonographic
issues and, therefore, to the materiality of sound, so that his theoretical pro-
posal has to be understood within the wider framework of a proper "semi-
otics of the sensory".

Guido Ferraro is another Italian semiotician (along with Ponzio and Bar-
bieri; the three authors share very little apart from this common theoretical
elan) who has used music to rethink semiotics as a whole; albeit rejecting
the definition of "plastic semiotics of music", Ferraro provides what perhaps
is the clearest application of this paradigm to the sound domain:

> Music is […] to be considered substantially 'abstract' in the sense in which we
> intend non-figurative painting to be: the iconic reference occurs on bases of a plas-
> tic nature, […] rather than figurative (2007: 22).

In music Ferraro finds a more complex model of signification than verbal
and visual language and the most prominent example of what he calls the
"amodal bases" of narrativity (2015, 2017, 2019: 274–281).

Jacoviello, both a musicologist and a musician (he taught semiotics of
music at the University of Siena), elegantly proposes a philosophical aes-
thetics articulated on the double level of immanent meaning (the only one
judged pertinent in a structuralist perspective and on which, therefore, the
author focuses) and the hermeneutics of cultural forms (pertaining to a
properly sociosemiotic approach). More specifically, Jacoviello's model
(2012, see also 2009, 2011)[14] is based on the centrality of the figural device:
a "transparent" syntactic-semantic structure defined by the differential rela-
tionships between traits (phonic, rhythmic and timbral) and configurations
of traits (phrases, rhythmic configurations, synchronic [i.e. chords] and dia-
chronic [modes] harmonic configurations) on the musical expression plane,
a structure that acts like a synaesthetic conductor of the semantics of all
the different object-semiotics at stake (e.g. the voice, conveying linguistic
meaning via the lyrics in opera and song, and the instrumental musical part)
and that opens to the discursive dimension (in the proper sense of the Grei-
masian generative trajectory of meaning).[15]

2.5 Media studies, sociosemiotics, and other lines of research

Media scholar and music journalist Gianni Sibilla (2003), a pupil of Gianfran-
co Bettetini's (among the founders of the semiotics of the audiovisual and
cinema), mapped the media narrative of pop through its six interlaced plac-

es (song, live performance, press, radio, iconography and audiovisual, digital media) in what is perhaps the best introductory book to date in the field. Mara Persello (2003), a pupil of Francesco Marsciani's (himself a direct pupil of Greimas's), analysed the glam genre and form of life. Paolo Peverini (2004), a pupil of Isabella Pezzini's (another scholar in the direct lineage of Greimasian scholarship), analysed music videos (before the You-Tube era that started in 2005). Lucio Spaziante, a pupil of Eco's and Paolo Fabbri's (who himself sporadically wrote about music, mainly free jazz)[16], proposed – among other things – a semiotic reflection upon sound design (Spaziante 2009, 2013) and extensively applied sociosemiotics to popular music textualities (genres, live performances, videos, song structures; 2007) and icons (2016). Claudia Attimonelli (2008), a pupil of Augusto Ponzio's and Patrizia Calefato's from the Bari school, mainly dealt with electronic popular music and, in particular, techno, using a critical and culturological approach. Three collective resources may help map the musical sociosemiotic field: Dusi and Spaziante (eds. 2006, focusing on intertextuality and remix culture), Calefato, Marrone and Rutelli (eds. 2007) and Pozzato and Spaziante (eds. 2009); the first two also enjoy the advantage of being freely downloadable from the official website of AISS, the *Italian Association for Semiotic Studies*.[17] Marrone (ed. 2005) develops a strong sociosemiotic hypothesis concerning the mutual translation between different semiotic regimes such as psychotropic substances on the one hand, and arts (literature, cinema and music) on the other.[18]

Francesco Galofaro, a pupil of Eco's and Marconi's (close to Marsciani's ethnosemiotic approach as well), has always dealt with the issue of metalanguage in semiotics and, besides specific analyses (mainly of classical or contemporary composers), has kept this perspective also with regards to music, conceived spatially (2004) and semi-symbolically (2013).[19] Claudio Paolucci, a pupil of Eco's, who, among other courses, teaches semiotics of music and audiovisual languages at the University of Bologna, has tried to epistemologically bridge the gap between the structural and interpretative traditions of semiotics, and between semiotics and (post)-cognitive sciences, integrating – as pivotal – the role of music in meaning-making processes – with Pink Floyd's song *Wish You Were Here* as the main case study (2020: 285–356) – within his systematic rethinking of enunciation theory as impersonal, following a path traced by Gustave Guillame (and then Gilles Deleuze), in opposition to the traditional approach that Greimas retrieved from Benveniste, modelled upon face-to-face dialogic communication. Pierluigi Basso, a pupil of Paolo Fabbri's specialised in visual and audiovisual semiotics, has not explicitly dealt with music semiotics but for several years ran a website dedicated to music criticism (*orfeonellarete.it*, online 2000–2021) and integrated music within a more general reflection upon semiotic aesthetics (2002: 412–415). Michele Pedrazzi, a musician and media artist, has mainly dealt with sound studies (2007) and jazz improvisation (2008). Emiliano Battistini, a guitar player as well, who obtained his PhD in semiotics within the Palermo group (led by Marrone), has main-

ly dealt with the semiotics of minimalism (with Cristina Cano, 2014) and sound studies (with Patrizia Violi, eds. 2020). Gabriele Marino, also an amateur drummer, who obtained his PhD in semiotics within the Turin group (led by Ugo Volli, Guido Ferraro and Massimo Leone) and teaches semiotics of music cultures at the University of Turin, has mainly dealt with the relationship between music and writing (2011) and, relying upon Jacoviello's proposal (within the framework of a critical analysis of the history of music semiotics), with enunciation theory applied to phonographic music and with the system of musical genres (2020). Michele Dentico, who published a book about fandom in a different realm to music (football; 2020), as a PhD within the Rome group (led by Pezzini) is currently (as of March 2022) working on the spaces of consumption of electronic popular music.

Notes

*   This article is dedicated to Italian music semiotician Luca Marconi (1960–2019). The author wishes to thank Ivano Cavallini, Gianfranco Salvatore, Christian Zingales, Ugo Volli, Gianfranco Marrone, Roberto Agostini and, most of all, Tiziana Migliore (for her patience) and Stefano Jacoviello (for his trust). Due to old ideological issues, the semiotics of music – and especially the Italian branch – is at risk of disappearing (e.g. even the most important books in the field are no longer available and hard to find in libraries): it is not rhetorical for me to say that it is an honor to try and give my own own contribution to its memory and, thus, survival. All translations from Italian into English are by the author.

1   "Generativism" as in Noam Chomsky's linguistic theories. On music semiotics as "systematic musicology" see also Stefani (1974).

2   This theory that we may provisionally call "standard" or "mainstream" would coincide with what we generally call the "semiotics of the text" or "textual semiotics" (which would include the "generative trajectory of meaning" as elaborated by Algirdas J. Greimas), with key integrations – not unproblematic on the epistemological level – from the theory of "cooperative interpretation" as elaborated by Umberto Eco. By "sociosemiotics" (not to be confused with the "social semiotics" of M.A.K. Halliday) we mean the developments of the structural-generative semiotics elaborated within the Paris School which coagulated around Greimas (prominent figures were Jean-Marie Floch, Eric Landowski and Jacques Fontanille) that aimed to rediscover Ferdinand de Saussure's "prophecy". Saussure imagined a "semiology" yet to come that would study "the life of signs in the framework of social life" (semiology would include the study of linguistic signs, namely synchronic linguistics, and would in turn be included within social psychology). Sociosemiotics is a critical discipline in the Kantian sense (that is, it is interested in reconstructing the conditions of possibility of sociocultural phenomena); it studies "discourses" (a dimension of what Hjelmslev defined as the "content plan" that goes beyond the substance of manifestation; e.g. "music discourse" is made of musical sounds themselves but also metatexts – people talking about music – and the practices related to music production), and has often been defined as "spectacular", because it

studies the forms with which society presents itself as spectacle through cultural products (sociosemiotics studies how a given culture self-represents itself). This approach was anticipated, in the 1960s, by the "critical semiotics" (in a Frankfurt School-like sense) of Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. Here we do not distinguish sharply between sociosemiotics and the semiotics of culture, as later outlined by Jurij Lotman. Landowski (1989) is generally considered the manifesto of sociosemiotics. In Italy, two important references for this area are Marrone (2001) and Ferraro (2012). For the application of the sociosemiotic approach to music, and especially pop music, see Spaziante (2007).

3   For a synthetic review of the main theoretical positions see the classic *Handbook of Semiotics* edited by Winfried Nöth (1995). For a more in-depth critical reconstruction of the issues of musical semiotics see Stefani (1985b), Marconi and Stefani (eds. 1987, being a reader), Nattiez (1988), Monelle (1992), Agawu (1991), Tarasti (2002), Sibilla (2003: 81–96), Marconi (2012) and Fabbri (2014).

4   But see Greimas, Castellana and Maluli Cesar (2017).

5   Barthes wrote about music outside the rigid structural methodology he had contributed to founding (Jacoviello 2018), opening the path to sound studies (the grain of the voice, the Kristevian feno- and geno-song; Barthes 1972), enactivism and embodiment (the somathemes; Barthes 1975) and popular music studies (Laing 1969: 194–196). Some commentators (Ponzio, Calefato and Petrilli eds. 2006) argue that Barthes's interest in music is actually the basis of his semiotic approach.

6   Among the first published editions of the piece, one can find: Luciano Berio (1967). *Thema (Omaggio a Joyce)*.

7   Worth mentioning here is Boris Porena, a composer and musical pedagogist close to Stefani due to the mutual respect stemming from one same pedagogical goal: to "enhance people's basic music skills" (Stefani 2009: 13). Porena reflected a lot upon the new ontology of music determined by phonography and proposed the idea – whereas most music scholars at the time still considered the record a mere box in which to stock music (e.g. Maselli 1972: XI) – of a "properly productive use of the record, an opportunity for processing messages at a metalinguistic level" (Porena 1975: 197). In other words, Porena talked of electroacoustic music in the terms that Floch's axiology would define as "mythic".

8   An English translation of the theory is Stefani 1987. In Italian, see also Sibilla (2003: 89–90), Marconi and Stefani (eds. 1987: 32–35) and Jacoviello (2012: 137–160).

9   Stefani 1976 (104–105) had already defined a "high" and "popular code".

10   Worth mentioning here is Italian-Swiss Costantino Maeder, a collaborator of Tarasti's educated in Italian and comparativist studies who has authored and edited several books linking together historiographical approaches, musicology and semiotics.

11   The opposition between introversive and extroversive semiotics, namely "internal" (endosemantic) and "external" (esosemantic) meaning, was first proposed by Roman Jakobson.

12   Meyer's perspective was influential also for Barbieri (2004, 2020), a pupil of Eco's specialised in visual and poetry semiotics.

13   The English translation is Valle 2018.

14 For the sake of philology, it must be noted that Jacoviello (2011) is the English
    translation, adaptation, and update of an essay originally published in Italian in
    2007 (the year of his doctoral thesis as well, to which we can trace back his theo-
    retical proposal).
15 Like Ferraro, Jacoviello refuses the interpretation of his proposal as strictly tied to
    plastic semiotics (e.g. Marconi 2014b; Gecevičiūtė 2016).
16 See https://www.paolofabbri.it/ [last accessed on 27 March 2022].
17 See http://www.ec-aiss.it/biblioteca/biblioteca.php [last accessed on 27 March
    2022].
18 See also the thematic section of the AISS website dedicated to music: http://www.
    ec-aiss.it/archivio/tematico/musica/musica.php [last accessed on 27 March 2022].
19 Semi-symbolism being a notion coming from visual semiotics and, in particular,
    the semiotics of plastic arts.

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Fig. 4. Left-to-right, Gino Stefani, Mario Baroni, and Umberto Eco playing Händel on
    flutes at Mario Baroni and Rossana Dalmonte's house in Bologna, early 1980s.
    Courtesy of Mario Baroni and Rossana Dalmonte.

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Ethnosemiotics

Giuseppe Mazzarino

Summary. The purpose of this article is to present the major theoretical orientations of ethnosemiotics in Italy. Ethnosemiotics is a semiotics that aims to deal with the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena, considering these as a privileged place within which to grasp the signification in its making. In the article we will try to outline the historical and theoretical path of the discipline focusing attention on the works of Maurizio del Ninno and on the Bolognese *Research Center of Ethnosemiotics* coordinated by Francesco Marsciani, to try to retrace the main stages that led to the development of this particular branch of Italian semiotics. Finally, the theoretical ideas on which the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory* and the Bolognese University *Center of Ethnosemiotics* are working will be presented.

Keywords. Ethnosemiotics, semiotics, anthropology, ethnography, signification

Zusammenfassung. In diesem Artikel werden die wichtigsten theoretischen Orientierungen der Ethnosemiotik in Italien vorgestellt. Die Ethnosemiotik befasst sich mit der Analyse soziokultureller Phänomene und betrachtet diese als einen privilegierten Ort, um Bedeutung in ihrer Entstehung zu erfassen. In diesem Artikel wird versucht, den historischen und theoretischen Werdegang der Disziplin zu skizzieren, wobei das Hauptaugenmerk auf den Arbeiten von Maurizio del Ninno und dem von Francesco Marsciani koordinierten Bologneser *Forschungszentrum für Ethnosemiotik* liegt. Hierbei werden die wichtigsten Etappen nachvollzogen, die zur Entwicklung dieses besonderen Zweigs der italienischen Semiotik geführt haben. Schließlich werden die theoretischen Ideen vorgestellt, auf denen das *Laboratorium für Ethnosemiotik* und das *Zentrum für Ethnosemiotik* der Universität Bologna aufbauen.

Schlüsselwörter. Ethnosemiotik, Semiotik, Anthropologie, Ethnographie, Signifikation

1.   Introduction. The historical background

Ethnosemiotics is, in general terms, a semiotics that deals with the study and the analysis of phenomena of interest to the social sciences. This par-

ticular branch of semiotics has had a distinct development within the Italian semiotics panorama.

Therefore, rebuilding a historical-theoretical framework of ethnosemiotics is an unprecedented operation. Until now, no ethnosemiotic scholar has felt the need to reconstruct the historical traits that led to the generation of this particular field of Italian semiotics. This article is an opportunity to begin this work of historical and theoretical reconstruction of the main guidelines that have outlined ethnosemiotics since the early 2000s. The difficulty of structuring a coherent discourse on the origins and development of ethnosemiotics are nested in the fact that ethnosemiotics did not have a linear history in Italy, but had different points of origin, which have merged into a univocal direction only in recent years. We could therefore hypothesise two points of origin of ethnosemiotics: the first, close to the studies of Maurizio Del Ninno of the University of Urbino and the second resulting from the research of Tarcisio Lancioni of the University of Siena and Francesco Marsciani of the University of Bologna. The theories and concepts born around these two "schools" then merged, more or less starting from 2014, in what we could define today as "the Bolognese school of Ethnosemiotics", which is structured around Francesco Marsciani, at the C.U.B.E. research centre which he founded (*Center of the University of Bologna for Ethnosemiotics*) and at the *Laboratory of Ethnosemiotics,* an internal branch at the C.U.B.E., which developed a certain line of research on ethnosemiotics in the years between 2014 and 2018. Before going into the details of the single moments that have marked the history of ethnosemiotics in Italy however, it is necessary to try to introduce the reasons for the approach of Italian semiotics to certain research themes, in particular the interest of semiotics in dealing with themes and topics familiar to social sciences and anthropology in particular.

The initial project of an ethnosemiotics is certainly to recover the anthropological foundations inherent in semiotic theory, especially in the Greimasian works. Everyone knows Greimas's interest in addressing certain anthropological issues, and equally well known is the influence that the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss have had in the formulation of Greimasian theory in general. The relationship between the study of meaning as a fundamental part of the study of "man", in an anthropological sense, is clear from the first lines of *Sémantique structural: recherche de methode*, where the Lithuanian semiologist writes:

> The human world seems to us to be defined essentially as the world of signification. The world can only be said to be 'human' insofar as it signifies something (Greimas 1966, English translation: 5).

In this short sentence we can see how the whole Greimasian theory is based on a strong tension between the disciplinary fields of semiotics and anthropology: signification and man.

We can therefore say with certainty that ethnosemiotics arises from an interest shared by various semiotic scholars to dust off some problems his-

torically linked to the period in which the "linguistic turn" spread in the social sciences. However, it is necessary to understand how ethnosemiologists wanted to resume the debate to readjust it to the contemporary academic context.

In this first part I will try to retrace some important steps that have allowed the development of a structured debate on the tension between s e m i o t i c s and a n t h r o p o l o g y, with the dual purpose of tracing the moments in which these two disciplines met and laid the foundations for an active and fruitful dialogue and to understand the reasons that led some Italian semiologists to reinterpret their objects of study in light of some reflections that emerged from this comparison.

The origins of the interest of Italian semiotics in entering into dialogue with anthropology and anthropological studies can be traced back as early as the 1970s. In those years the boundary between semiotics and anthropology was still not very marked and scholars of both disciplines openly dialogued on common themes. There have been several Italian conferences on the subject. In this regard, it is important to remember the work of the *Sicilian Semiological Circle* thanks to which, today, we can trace a coherent path on the interests of semiologists on the problems of anthropology. A first trace of contact between semiotic and anthropological scholars can be found in a conference, held in Palermo between the 5th and 10th April 1970, whose proceedings were collected in a volume, published by Flaccovio, entitled *Strutture e generi delle lettereature etniche* (Avalle D'arco ed. 1970). In this work, followed over the years by many other texts edited by people close to the *Sicilian Semiological Circle* (Ruta and Lendinara 1981; Miceli 1982; Pasqualino 1992; Buttitta 1996), we can find the first origins of a direct comparison between anthropology and semiotics and they constituted the basis on which the theoretical discourse of ethnosemiotics was set, at least for its first years of life.

Specifically in the Italian context, one of the first research initiatives of great importance for the birth of ethnosemiotic theory, was the conference *Forms and practices of the party* held in Montecatini Terme between the 27th and 29th October 1978. In this conference, organised by semiologist Maurizio del Ninno and anthropologist Carla Bianco, the speakers were invited to discuss, starting from the theme of the "party", theoretical and analytical issues in an attempt to find a meeting point between anthropology and semiotics. The authors themselves clarify in the introduction the interest in opening a dialogue between semiotics and anthropology, which is the basis of the constitution of semiotics itself. The two write:

> By opening the conference to scholars of different backgrounds, the intention was to promote collaboration, a constructive debate between researchers of ethnoanthropology and semiotics. The intention was to draw, on the one hand, anthropologists to the problems of greater methodological rigor, on the other, semioticians to the problem of ethno-anthropology, which used to be one of the focal points of the discipline's development and now appears to be neglected (Bianco and Del Ninno eds. 1981: VII, my translation).

After 1978, there are no texts or conference proceedings that can testify research activity regarding the relationship between the two disciplines. Not until 2007, the year that marks the official birth of ethnosemiotics in Italy.

This year, as a matter of fact, is by all means the "date of birth" of ethnosemiotics. In 2007 the two fundamental texts were published: *Etnosemiotica. Questioni di metodo* is published in Urbino, edited by Maurizio del Ninno, while the *Tracciati di Etnosemiotica* by Francesco Marsciani is published in Bologna, introduced by an article, written by Francesco Marsciani together with Tarcisio Lancioni, titled "La pratica come testo: per un'etnosemiotica del mondo quotidiano", published in a volume edited by Gianfranco Marrone, Nicola Dusi and Giorgio Lo Feudo titled *Narrazione ed esperienza: intorno a una semiotica della vita quotidiana* (eds. 2007), in turn the result of an AISS (*Italian Association for Semiotic Studies*) conference held at the University of Cosenza in 2006. During this conference the ethnosemiotic project of the Sienese-Bolognese school was presented, applied to particular types of analyses commissioned to the two speakers. The Sienese-Bolognese ethnosemiotics was therefore born as a response to the practical needs of applying semiotic theory and methodology to case studies of particular interest to the social sciences, namely human behaviour in specific contexts. The resulting speculation has led the theoretical proposal to become an actual movement of Italian semiotics.

The origin of Urbino's ethnosemiotics, however, is different, starting from the interest of Carla Bianco and Maurizio Del Ninno in resuming the dialogue between semiotics and anthropology neglected in recent years (eds. 1981). As a matter of fact, the authors give rise to the need for a resumption of these studies as a consequence of the debate subsequently opened to the post-modern movement in the human and social sciences, which was spreading in Italy in the 1990s and early 2000s, opening important debates on the scientific status of the human and social sciences. In 2012, Del Ninno's sudden death caused a long interruption of ethnosemiotic research in Urbino, which some young scholars in the Urbino academic environment have recently been resuming (cf. Mariani 2022). Maurizio Del Ninno left traces of his research activity on the website www.etnosemiotica.it (last accessed on April 25, 2022), an important source for recent studies on ethnosemiotics.

On the other hand, the Sienese-Bolognese ethnosemiotics had a different fate, it found fertile ground in Bologna to continue research and give life to a real "school", coordinated by Francesco Marsciani.

Ethnosemiotics therefore, after a first phase of construction of the theoretical proposal and analytical attempts on both sides, returned to public discussion only in 2014, the year in which a day of discussion entitled "Ethnosemiotic research" was organised in Urbino, at the CISS *International Center of Semiotic Sciences* (recently dedicated to Umberto Eco), coordinated by Paolo Fabbri at the time. On the occasion Paolo Fabbri, a central figure for the birth and development of the discipline, gave a lecture in memory of the works of Maurizio Del Ninno and Alessandro Falassi titled *Ind-*

agini etnosemiotiche. Richiami a Maurizio Del Ninno (Urbino), Alessandro Falassi (Siena). In his speech, Fabbri introduced the hypothesis of defining ethnosemiotics by comparing semiotics and ethnography, a point of interest shared by many Italian semioticians, as demonstrated in works by Pozzato 2002; Demaria and Pozzato 2006; Lancioni and Marsciani 2006; Marsciani 2007; Mazzarino 2015. In many of his works he has always insisted on leaving a dialogue open between semiotics and anthropology and to take into account that "anthropological vocation" that semiotics has always had (Fabbri 1991; Mazzarino 2015; Donatiello and Mazzarino 2017a, 2017b).

In Bologna, on the other hand, in 2012 the ethnosemiotics course was established, which is still active and held by Francesco Marsciani. The course is part of the "Semiotics and Visual Arts" master's degree study programme. In February 2015 the C.U.B.E created the series *Quaderni di Etnosemiotica* (Esculapio Editore)[1], the first volumes, edited by students and researchers close to the Bolognese research centre and the teachings of Francesco Marsciani, also mark the birth of the orientation promoted by the *Laboratory of Ethnosemiotics*, which tries to find the link between the most anthropological works of Del Ninno and the profoundly semiotic (and/or phenomenological) reflections by Marsciani.

Another important opportunity for debate in the constitution of ethnosemiotics, always under the guidance of Francesco Marsciani, is the *Seminar of the Foundations of the Theory of Signification* (https://www.marsciani.net/seminario, last accessed on April 25, 2022), which was intended as a place for reflection for the master's degree students about ten years ago. It is now a reference point for Italian semiotic studies and research. In recent years, thanks to the active collaboration in the organisation of the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory*, the seminar deals with extremely current topics to carry out the ethnosemiotic project in the light of new developments and theoretical advances in anthropology, semiotics and philosophy.

2. Brief notes on the theoretical debate: from text to practice

The theoretical reasons that led to the birth of ethnosemiotics in the Italian context of the early 2000s can be found in a debate that precedes the period we have dated the birth of this semiotic orientation to.

Ethnosemiotics, as well as other branches such as sociosemiotics and semiotics of culture, develop from an internal debate of human and social sciences that appeared starting as early as the early 1990s (Landowski 1989; Marrone 2001; Rastier 2002; Lorusso 2010). The hint of a 'change of course', of the need for a turning point that would be able to eliminate the last cumbersome residues of structuralism, was already coming at the end of the 1980s. But only in the second part of the 1990s, after a period of great fortune even outside the academy, which turned out to be a place in which to practice theory and reflect on possible new theoretical horizons, did Italian semiologists begin to feel the need to extend their analytical horizon.

The developments of social sciences, the postmodern turning point and the growing interest of semiologists in the theories of enunciation to the detriment of the study of *langue*, have led to a will to extend the fields of research and even to think about the possibility of broadening one's own object of study, identified in the notion of 'text', to less 'defined' objects.

The constant reference to the idea of a systematic semiotics, dedicated to synchrony and syntagmaticity, appeared to be out of fashion at this point due to the postmodernist wave. All this lead some Italian semiologists to criticise the idea of a t e x t intended as the only possible object of study of their discipline. The need to extend one's research horizons, so as to conform and keep up with the rest of the human and social sciences, takes shape in a real theoretical proposal that sees the text as an object that is now obsolete and no longer sufficient to meet the needs of semiotics.

The critique of the text by a part of semiotics and some circles of philosophy and the human and social sciences, consists in considering this object as limited and 'closed', no longer able to take into account the "signification in its making" (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007: 65). The text, therefore, limits the object of study to what is only part of the world of cultural production and not of 'culture' in the anthropological sense of the term. This last consideration is not entirely out of place if we consider that Italian semiotics was born and developed precisely from the analysis of artistic, literary, photographic, television products, etc., objects that in the Anglo-American landscape were incorporated into cultural studies. In Italy this development has led to the birth of two branches, one anchored to this type of t e x t u a l - i t y and dedicated to analysis and another that has tried at all costs to read-just to the contemporary theoretical and academic context by proposing new methodological approaches in an attempt to replace "texts" with "practices" (Rastier 2001; Fontanille 2006a, 2006b; Basso ed. 2006; Volli 2007).

The spread of the term "practices", which had by now also caught on in Italy, at least since 2003, after the Italian publication of *Outline of a theory of practice* by Pierre Bourdieu (1973), also coincides with a change of internal orientation in Italian semiotics, increasingly distant from the Greimasian point of view and ever closer to the perspectives of Peirce, Lotman and the "cognitive turn" (Eco 1968, 1997; Violi 1997; Lorusso 2010; Paolucci 2010, 2021).

The influence of the Limoges school will be the point of reference for this shift from "text" to "practices". The positions of Jacques Fontanille expressed in 2006 in *Pratiques Semiotiques*, translated into Italian only in 2010 for Edizioni Ets, pushed Italian semiotics towards an interest in the "pratique". In 2006, shortly before the Italian translation of Fontanille's text, a volume of the *Semiotiche* journal was published entitled *Testo, pratiche, immanenza* (Basso 2006) in which, also on the basis of Fontanille's positions, the debate on the need for an exit from the text was expressed. We can consider this volume as one of the first texts produced by semiologists to make explicit in the Italian context those ideas that were already present in the classrooms of Italian universities since the early 90s. "Text" is

therefore cumbersome if thought of as a simple 'closed object' that is there in the world and is waiting to be 'grasped'.

The effectiveness of the text is questioned in the 2006 volume. There are several contributions that attempt, in various ways, to dismantle the textualisation operation and the value of the text as an *enunciato* which relates the discursive level to the level of the manifestation. The proposal of practice, as an alternative to the text, therefore serves to restore a certain sense of 'substantiality' that the object of study of semiotics does not seem to have. The "enunciation practice" is conceived as a semiotic operation that takes into account complex levels of relevance, not attributable to the "texts" (Fontanille 2006a, 2006b).

In Italy in the 1990s, therefore, there was the need, perhaps following the wake of the new substantialist paradigms of the post-modern human sciences, to overcome formalism, still too close to structuralism, to get one's hands dirty in 'substance'. Therefore, some semiologists are increasingly pushing to define the enunciation in a concrete act, rather than thinking of it as a formal operation of reordering different levels of signification.

The problem of semiotics was therefore that of providing new methodological tools capable of satisfying this need to 'engage in practice', with the firm conviction that Greimasian theory was unable to face this challenge. Therefore many authors have done their utmost to search for new theoretical-methodological ideas to help solve this problem.

The first forms of ethnosemiotics, which emerged at the turn of 2006 and 2007, derive precisely from this debate and affirm their will to 'remain' anchored to the notion of text. According to the first works that we can consider ethnosemiotic, the Greimasian theory has within it many open fields, within which it is possible to explore forms of textualisation of socio-cultural phenomena (Greimas 1976). These research fields favour the encounter between semiotics, anthropology and sociology. The birth of semiotics dedicated to the study of experiences, practices, actions, objects and their uses, etc. is a clear sign of this tendency of Italian semiotics to give itself to something other than its classic object, which, to use Marsciani's words, had by then turned out to be just a "world of paper" (Marsciani 2020a).

So we can say that starting from the debate, a third path is formed, which intends to read the possibility of "engaging in practices" without abandoning the methodology of textualist semiotics. The text is not to be seen in opposition to another object and certainly cannot be replaced by another substantially different object.

Semiologist Gianfranco Marrone eventually clarified this point in 2010. In the pages of *L'invenzione del testo*, the Italian semiologist tried to resolve the misunderstanding and restore dignity to the text as an indispensable methodological tool for certain semiotic studies, believing that it is an:

> [...] expressive medium designed to convey certain contents, with its specific features, recognizable boundaries, internal processes and so on (Marrone 2010: 5, my translation).

Ethnosemiotics was therefore born within this debate, but in opposition to the 'practices turning point', that is, to the construction of an object of study other than the text. Since ethnosemiotics wants to be a semiotics of Greimasian derivation, the interest of the first works was concentrated, in fact, on a reinterpretation of the generative theory in order to find, within it, a field of study to explore, in which the problem of the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena and daily practices could be incorporated. Aware, nevertheless, of the fact that the 'text' is a construct of the analyst that acts as an instance of control of meaning which the semiologist cannot do without (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007).

If, however, the other similar semiotic trends, in particular sociosemiotics, have dealt with how the "cultural product" interacts and acquires significance within society, in the footsteps of Floch and Landowski's works (Floch 1990; Landowski 1989; Landowski and Marrone eds. 2002), the destiny of ethnosemiotics, on the other hand, is to open a field of reflection and study on the real application of Greimasian theory to socio-cultural phenomena of the natural world. In the first place, deconstructing the preconceptions that over time have been structured around the notion of text in semiotics, which has become a simple theoretical synonym to define films, books, photographs and some everyday objects. A preconception that arises mainly due to the fact that the text is considered as an "object" and not as a model (Marrone 2010: 52, my translation).

The first works of the ethnosemiologists therefore consisted of an immersion in Greimasian theory to try to think of the study of these 'objects' improperly called "practices" as production processes of 'semiotic systems', or rather of 'micro universes of meaning'. Phenomena that, as we will see later, can be subject to processes of textualisation and therefore of analysis.

Therefore ethnosemiotics, even if from two apparently different theoretical starting positions, presents itself, starting from 2007, as the semiotics capable of responding to the needs of opening up to new objects of study by not providing new methodological tools, as the *pratique sémiotique* attempted, but opening a direct comparison with the Greimasian theory, to search within it the conditions of a comparison with anthropology and the epistemological reasons to be able to structure a semiotic theory capable of analysing signification and meaning "in its offering" (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007: 65).

By presenting the major theoretical proposals of ethnosemiotics we will try to reconstruct the key points of this debate from the point of view of the authors who gave birth to this particular orientation in the Italian context.

3.   Definitions and theoretical proposals: from Maurizio Del Ninno to the Bolognese School

Now that we have pieced together the essential theoretical points that led to the birth of ethnosemiotics in the Italian academic context, it is neces-

sary to move on to the examination of the various theoretical ideas developed over time, starting from the common thread that binds them, the dialogue between semiotics and anthropology.

Tracing the history of ethnosemiotics, in fact, also means tracing the history of its definitions. The only certainty that one has in trying to define this field of study is that the term is composed of two elements: "ethno" and "semiotics". The difficulties, however, lie in being able to define the connections and boundaries between the two elements that make up the term. "Etnosemiotica" is not a name invented by the Italian authors, but explicitly refers to a lemma in *Semiotics and Language: an Analytical Dictionary*, of which I will quote only the essential points:

> 1. Ethnosemiotics is not a truly autonomous semiotics. If il were, it would be in competition with a field of knowledge already established under the name of ethnology or anthropology, whose contribution to the advert of semiotics itself is considerable. Taher, it is a privileged area of curiosities and methodological exercises. This is due, first of all, to the fact that anthropology appears as the most rigorous discipline among the social sciences, because of the demands that it imposes on itself and because, on the other hand, it has had to attack Eurocentrism and go beyond it, by developing a way to study the universality of cultural objects and semiotic forces as a result of its awareness of the cultural relativism that the very object of its research ceaselessly calls to its attention. [...]
> 6. Given that general semiotics authorizes the treatment of nonlinguistic (gestural, somatic, etc.) syntagmatic concatenations ad discourses or texts, the field of ethnolinguistics can be enlarged to become an ethnosemiotics; analyses, still rare, of rituals and ceremonies lead us to suppose that ethnology can become, once again, the privileged locus for the construction of general models of signifying behavior (Greimas 1976, English translation: 109).

What is clear in the words of Greimas and Courtés (1979) is the intention to think of ethnosemiotics as an evolving field of analysis, in which semiotics can exercise its methodology at the service of objects of study coming from ethnology. Maurizio del Ninno also refers to this. The semiologist from Urbino, who always focused on a direct and profound comparison with anthropology, defined ethnosemiotics as the semiotics that deals with objects of study of anthropology (or ethnology).

Del Ninno argues that Greimas placed ethnosemiotics alongside ethnolinguistic studies by devising a 'tactic' to broaden the field of semiotic studies to include ritual discourses, therefore offering a meeting point between anthropology and semiotic studies in which to deal with the analysis of pertinences related to human behaviour with the tools of narrative and discursive analysis. For the author, in fact, the crisis induced by postmodern thought in the context of the human and social sciences has led to the need, on the part of sociologists and anthropologists, to acquire semiotic methodologies of analysis useful for dealing with "contemporary worlds" (Del Ninno ed. 2007: 8). Ethnosemiotics can therefore be a methodological support to ensure

an effective analysis of socio-cultural practices. Del Ninno's suggestion is to go back to the Levi-Straussian precepts that were the background to Greimasian semiotics and to think of ethnosemiotics as that orientation capable of contributing, in general terms, to the construction of a theory of human behaviour. In a 1985 article, he argues that semiotics should also deal with the study of "social practices" and rituals and treat them as discourses, so as to be able to apply "the methodological apparatus of discursive analysis" (Del Ninno 1985: 12). For Maurizio Del Ninno, the meeting point between semiotics and anthropological studies is social anthropology as presented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, in continuity with Saussurian thought (Lévi-Strauss 1960). Levi-Straussian anthropology is capable of comprehending how social facts convey meaning, ensuring a systematic understanding of signification that spans from discursive structures to the conditions of immanent possibilities. The element of innovation of ethnosemiotics in this procedural model of analysis of social facts, would consist in integrating cultural analysis with the tools of the generative trajectory of meaning, as it studies both "human action", through the structuring of this in semio-narrative structures, and "cultural diversity", thanks to the possibility of investing narrative structures in all *figures* from the natural world (Greimas 1970, 1983; Del Ninno ed. 2007). To do this, it is necessary to refer to the text, as formalised by generative semiotics, that is an object constructed by the analyst, capable of giving a structure to the discursive procedurality of socio-cultural phenomena, reinstating a significant form to the "nebula in which nothing is delimited" (Del Ninno ed. 2007: 13, my translation). Therefore the methodological procedure proposed by Del Ninno involves addressing the rituals as textualised discourses. Some methodological problems arise from these considerations that Del Ninno lists in one of his writings (1985), in order to clearly clarify the complexities that must be overcome in order to face a discursive analysis of the rituals. Among these, the two most important problems are: what is the privileged "language of manifestation" in a ritual and how is it possible to delimit a "beginning" and an "end" of its textualisation.

In the case of the first question Del Ninno confidently affirms that the ritual is formed by a "plurality of languages of manifestation" (1985: 2); but regarding the second problem, that relating to the closure of the text, he refers to the temporality of the ritual itself. This, however, appears to be, from a strictly methodological point of view, not entirely suitable, as the boundaries of the text would thus be dictated by events within the ritual itself and not by the analyst's adequate research question. However, theoretically it is still consistent with the precepts of his proposal, since the pertinences that structure the text must obviously be limited to the single analysed case. However, the split that arises from this problem offers an interesting prompt for subsequent works.

Del Ninno's reflection is based on a somewhat outdated concept of the subject of study that should be considered when attempting to approach anthropology from a semiotic perspective. The textualisation procedure is still one of the most complex problems for ethnosemiotics. And it is precise-

ly from this point that we can start to talk about the already briefly mentioned study perspective brought forward at first by Francesco Marsciani together with Tarcisio Lancioni and then continued by Marsciani only, together with the C.U.B.E. research group and at the *Ethnosemiotic Laboratory* in Bologna.

This perspective derives from different assumptions both on a theoretical and methodological level. Firstly, an important change is made in the very definition of ethnosemiotics in Greimas's Dictionary (Greimas and Courtés 1979). The term "ethnology" in the definition, which justifies the presence of the suffix "ethno" in the name, is replaced with "ethnography". This passage overturns the entire theoretical apparatus of previous ethnosemiotics, both of Greimas and Del Ninno. In fact, because of its being a methodology that implies and imposes a certain observational practice applied to specific case studies, "ethnography" allows ethnosemiotics to experiment with a different methodological system, where ethnographic observation is added to the analytical level of semiotics (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007; Mazzarino 2015). This also implies a particular insight into the construction of the object of study, which is not limited to being the ritual in itself or the practice as a human action coordinated by structured and structuring logics (*habitus*), rather the object is the signification in its being able to be produced, in the conditions of its possibility. Subsequently, Francesco Marsciani, with his *Tracciati di Etnosemiotica* (2007) opens this perspective to various case studies in which the social actor, human or non-human, coincides with the i n s t a n c e o f e n u n c i a t i o n and the analysed phenomenon is seen as a process, that is, the discursive component of generative theory. The analysis will then find the pertinences and link them to the systematic lines of the semio-narrative levels, based on the preparation of the 'text', made starting from the analyst's research question. Thus we have overcome the limit according to which only certain already identified anthropological objects could be considered, because of a vice inherent to the discipline. Identifying itself as "ethno" because of its "ethnographic" nature, this particular semiotics becomes a discipline capable of analysing any socio-cultural phenomenon, respecting specific epistemological parameters for the construction of the object of study and analysis and searching for the intersubjective relationships that structure the phenomena. This is where the previously examined dichotomy 'text/practices' finally crumbles. Ethnosemiotics does not deal with practices but with texts constructed from the observation of socio-cultural phenomena, considering the fact that they are multiple and can also consist of simple daily actions: shopping, strolling in a town square, going to a funeral, uncorking a bottle, provided that they "become meaningful actions in the eyes of someone, from that certain distance" (Marsciani 2007: 10, my translation).

Marsciani also realises there is a difficult problem in the Greimasian theory, which concerns the passage from immanence to manifestation. The Bolognese professor understands that in order to take into account all the pertinences necessary for the textualisation of a phenomenon of the natu-

ral world, it is necessary to review the relationship between themes and figures, as well as between plastic and figurative. The phenomenon is *a discursive scene* in its manifestation, which, clinging to a plurality of manifestation languages (Del Ninno, Mazzarino), requires more complex theoretical tools to be able to take into account its completeness. The "figure of the natural world" alone does not fulfil the needs of textualisation as it is unable to tie the different figures in the scene together, despite the coherent isotopies. Marsciani therefore adds the concept of 'image' to the theory. The image is the theoretical tool that unites the different figures of the natural world to reproduce, at a level immediately prior to the manifestation (which is the taking of meaning in reality), the totality of the pertinences and isotopic instances that bind the different figures of which the analysed scene is composed. The theory of the image is perhaps, to date, the greatest contribution that ethnosemiotics has given back to the original theory.

Therefore, the proposal to mean "ethno" as "ethnography" has allowed ethnosemiotic theory to make considerable progress. Between 2007 and 2018 there have been many works that have tried to apply this methodology to different subjects of study in the wake of this approach. However, the numerous works have brought to the surface different problems from several points and it was necessary, starting from 2017, to resume the debate on the definition of ethnosemiotics. There were three events that led to this reconsideration: the first is the drafting and publication of two volumes of the series *Quaderni di Etnosemiotica*, *Tra "etno" e "semiotica"*. *Affinit e divergenze ai margini di due discipline vol. I* and *Tra "etno" e "semiotica". Conversazioni tra antropologia e teoria della significazione vol. II* (Donatiello and Mazzarino 2017a, 2017b), edited by the *Laboratorio di Etnosemiotica*. The second event is linked to the interest of ethnosemiologists in new anthropological theories of a semiotic nature, in particular the works of Edoardo Viveiros de Castro (2004, 2009), which led ethnosemiologists to think carefully about the current variety of meanings of the term "ethno" – as a term capable of restoring the fragmentation that characterises 'culture' today, as an object of study of anthropology – and to ask an important question about the 'other' nature of the observed phenomena. I had already raised this type of problem in 2015 in the text *Il potere dell'ipnosi. Proposte teoriche per un'etnosemiotica*, in which, starting from the dichotomy "ethnography/semiotics", I attempted to rethink the concept of 'alterity', not considering it as a "group of individuals" or a "community", but in its meaning as phenomenon (Mazzarino 2015). Furthermore, anchored to an idea of ethnosemiotics as a discipline, both theoretical and practical, capable of giving back an analysis of socio-cultural phenomena, I detected a problem in the concept of textualisation. Being purely theoretical in nature, it lacked its methodological counterpart. To be textualised, the phenomenon requires tools that can implement this process. Therefore it was necessary to identify an instance of control of signification capable of taking into account the different pertinence plans and relationships in the analytical phase. I call this instrument "writing" and by this I mean the methodological instrument

that allows the phenomenon to become an analysable 'text' (Mazzarino 2015). Writing is textualisation put into practice.

Meanwhile, the third event concerns the considerations brought forward during the seminar of the foundations of the theory of signification held in Bologna during the 2019/2020 academic year, in which semiologists, anthropologists and philosophers conversed starting precisely from the univocal construction of a concept of 'alterity'.

4.   The *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory*

Before we discuss the latest developments in ethnosemiotics which came up during the discussions of the seminar of the foundations of the theory of signification, it is necessary to go back in time, to fully understand the historical events that have turned the seminar into the privileged place for discussion for ethnosemiotics it is today.

We must go back to 2014 when the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory* was set-up, inside the C.U.B.E., in Bologna. Intended to open opportunities for research among the students of the master's degree in semiotics, the laboratory immediately began a direct dialogue with anthropologists and philosophers on various topics, creating, over time, its own theoretical proposal, in line with the perspective promoted by Marsciani, focusing on the relationship between semiotics and anthropology from a methodological point of view.

The objective of the laboratory was to find a meeting point between Maurizio Del Ninno's theory and the analytical and methodological proposal of Marsciani and Lancioni. I can say that all of the laboratory's research work focused on four main phases: the first phase consisted in the rewriting of Greimas's definition by replacing the word "ethnology" with the term "ethnography", as already mentioned above. The laboratory took care of writing a Wikipedia contribution on ethnosemiotics in these terms; the second phase of research, consisted in the dialogue with phenomenology, inspired by the perspective of Francesco Marsciani (Marsciani 2012a, 2012b) and anthropology and led to the publication of volumes of fundamental importance for the development of ethnosemiotic theory (which we will see later). The third phase, simultaneous with the second, consisted in the application of the ethnosemiotic methodology to various case studies. The fourth phase, which is still active, consists in taking part in the seminar to open a debate about the status of the "ethnos" as a place of immanence.

These already previously discussed phases have developed parallel to the studies of Francesco Marsciani. The active role of the laboratory, however, has led ethnosemiotic theory to make significant and interesting theoretical changes, mainly originated from the dialogue with philosophers and anthropologists.

The results of the exchange which developed as part of the *Laboratory of Ethnosemiotics* can be found in at least three publications of the *Quad-*

erni di Etnosemiotica series and in numerous meetings and seminars held between 2014 and 2019, when the activities of the laboratory merged with the seminar of the foundations of the theory of signification. The most important publications to come out of the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory* are: *Corpo linguaggio e senso tra semiotica e filosofia* (Amoroso et al. 2016) and the two, already mentioned volumes, *Tra "etno" e "semiotica". Affinità e divergenze ai margini di due discipline vol. I* and *Tra "etno" e "semiotica". Conversazioni tra antropologia e teoria della significazione vol. II* (Donatiello and Mazzarino 2017a, 2017b).

The first text is a direct comparison with philosophy, in particular with Merleau Ponty's phenomenology. The work initiates a comparison on the possibility of understanding meaning and the making of meaning, starting, as Manlio Iofrida says in the introduction to the text, quoting Merleau Ponty himself, from the "world perceived in its flooding inaccuracy" (Amoroso et al. 2016: 7–8). The dilemma is purely theoretical: ethnosemiotics seeks an answer to its search for signification taking place in phenomenology, to try to broaden its horizon more and more and extend that concept of "ethno" beyond the "tropics".

The two volumes of *Tra Etno e semiotica* (Donatiello and Mazzarino 2017a, 2017b), the result of research work of the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory* which lasted two years, are certainly of considerable importance for ethnosemiotics. In the two volumes, through a direct dialogue with semiologists and anthropologists, using an interview style, we try to find the crucial points of the relationship between the two disciplines, but above all to bring out the critical issues of such an interdisciplinary approach. Our well-known anthropologist, Michael Herzfeld, gave an interesting contribution on this point, collected in the second volume, which made us reflect a lot on the nature of 'ethno'. In addition to providing a historical scenario on the use of the term "ethnosemiotic" in America, in the environments close to the University of Chicago, a place that has been a breeding ground of interest for semiotic reflections in anthropology for years, he also reports a specific use of ethnosemiotics in this academic environment between the 1970s and 1980s (Herzfeld 1981, 1983a, 1983b). Herzfeld in fact believes that the use of the term thought of as a combination of "ethnography" and "semiotics" is incorrect and suggests thinking of ethnosemiotics as an emic datum, as that particular ability of the studied actors to p r o d u c e t h e o r i e s which can be observed during ethnography. Therefore 'ethnosemiotic' in this sense would acquire the characteristics of a way of managing meaning through ethnographic analysis. In fact, this way of seeing semiotics as 'ethno' would solve the problem of interdisciplinary methodology, but is still confined to the 'distant' margins of otherness to be sought elsewhere, in the different, in the native, apparently unable to produce signification if not thanks to the interpretative gaze of the anthropologist, who, thanks to his cultural categories, manages to accurately interpret it. Even though the contribution gave back an important observation for a reformulation of the theory, the semiotic problem of the definition of ethnosemiotics is still difficult

to solve. The question of the definition of "ethno" cannot be translated, in semiotic terms, neither as ethnographic methodology nor as 'ethnicity'. The new studies of the *Ethnosemiotics Laboratory*, from 2018 to the present day, concern the resumption of research starting from the semiotic nature of the object of study of ethnosemiotics, which cannot be limited to the anthropological conceptualisation of 'group' or 'community'. Ethnosemiotics, today, must rethink itself as an extended theory of enunciation and reflect, starting from this precept, on the alterity of the phenomena of meaning that it analyses as its objects of study.

5.   Conclusions: Future plans and perspectives. 'Ethno' as 'Alterity'

Nowadays, therefore, ethnosemiotics is in a phase of further revision of some basic concepts. The very definition of ethnosemiotics still remains an open problem, not so much because of the impossibility of semantically circumscribing its meaning, but because the definition hides all the theoretical importance of this orientation of semiotics.

In fact, in 2020 a contribution by Francesco Marsciani was published in the *Actes Sémiotiques* journal, titled: "Etnosemiotica. Bozza di un manifesto" (2020a), in which the professor re-examines the prefix "ethno" and writes:

> I would suggest going back to considering the name "ethnosemiotics", ethnosemiotics without a hyphen, and think about what the prefix "ethno" can refer to. It could be useful and it seems legitimate to extract a sort of essence from it, a hidden core, and pass through its somewhat referential etymology ("too referential" I would say...) which has as its object meaning the people, the population, the classic "ethnic group", which appears as a reality located somewhere in the world, preferably far away and in a forest, which we go to observe, visit, study, describe in its appearance and through the traits that it itself, that object people, allows us to reveal and recognize […], shifting from this meaning to another valuation of "ethno", that of any community that recognizes itself as such, that is, as a community, which implies that it must be considered as an intersubjective sharing of constitutive categories, which establish, let's say, the relations that form a system and that allow a set of instances to coordinate one in relation to the others. This is no longer necessarily an external object, nor distant and wild. It is nothing less than the significant conditions of life in common, conditions that are significant insofar as they articulate and categorize the intersubjective experience of the experienced world (Marsciani 2020a: 6, my translation).

It is precisely from these considerations that we need to start to delineate the boundaries of ethnosemiotics again, within the space of a semiotics interested in the founding relationships of all those 'discourses', that acquire a socio-cultural value, where the latter is nothing more than a figurative effect connected to deeper levels and of a narrative type. 'Ethno' becomes

synonymous with 'alterity' to the extent that with this term we identify that void that needs to be filled in the identification of the *I-you* relationship. In this way, the 'ethno' coincides with the place of immanence, or that relational dimension that structures intersubjective relationships and distributes the roles of s u b j e c t - e n u n c i a t o r and o b j e c t - e n u n c i a t i o n (or recipient) through the text.

This revolution should also affect anthropology, which needs a revision of its basic concepts in the light of the now established certainty of the domination of "hybrids", of the collapse, at least substantially, of the rigid separation of the world into nature and culture, subjects and objects, human and non-human (Latour 1984, 1991; Viveiros de Castro 2004).

But while the interest of anthropologists is to build new forms of "ontologies", the interest of ethnosemiotics is to study the ways in which immanent relationships crystallise into signification for someone and in a certain way; therefore analysing the complexity of events starting from their structuring into speeches and thus into potential texts. But here we do not want to propose a return to 'inside the text', but rather an expansion of the concept itself by opening it to the reference context, where this term means the set of relationships, that make what is observed 'other', starting from a certain perspective. Moreover, this idea of ethnosemiotics should also be able to overcome the postmodern idea of an interpretation of interpretations, since the game of perspectives, inserted within the context made up of relationships between subjects and objects, senders and receivers, enunciators and statements, allows us to read the interpretation itself as a perspective, which in turn constructs signification. This means that the texts are not interpreted or to be interpreted – an action that affirms a temporality *a posteriori* in relation to who/what is subjected to the action – as stated by a certain Geertzian anthropology, but they are always built on the basis of perspective relationships. Therefore the interpretation operation is *a priori* and constructs the scene starting from the observer's perspective. Ethnosemiotics to date tries to work on these spaces of engagement. It is not looking for methods of interpreting events that occur, but is looking for the "conditions that make objects give themselves, things appear and make sense" (Marsciani 2020a: 7, my translation).

Therefore, the proposal of ethnosemiotics is to abandon the "substantiality" of enunciational praxis, and therefore of practices in the strict sense, and is capable of substituting the text to be promoted to an object of study, and thus propose a "formal theory of enunciation" (Marsciani 2020b: 34, my translation). The practice remains a manifest origin of an object that becomes a text, only to the extent that it is useful to untie the formal knots of the conditions of semiotic existence of the analysed phenomenon. What interests ethnosemiotics is perhaps reassigning importance to the relationship between *langue* and *parole*, conceived as an inseparable relationship between synchrony and diachrony. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, a well known author among ethnosemiologists, we could hypothesise the possibility of this semiotics of taking up a phenomenological concept of the act of lan-

guage, of the word, understood in its semiotic opening to different languages of manifestation, namely:

> The word, as distinct from the language, is the moment of meaningful intention that is still mute and entirely in progress reveals its capability of incorporating itself into culture, mine and that of others, of forming myself and forming others by transforming the meaning of cultural tools. It in turn becomes "available" because it gives us, successively, the impression that it was inherent to the already available meanings, while, by a sort of cunning, it joined these meanings only to give them new life (Merleau-Ponty 1964: 107).

And it is precisely this new life of signification that ethnosemiotics intends to deal with, digging deep into the formal precepts that provide the conditions of possibility, inverting the perspective and welcoming the 'other' meaning of the phenomena of meaning it studies which are inevitably always culturalised.

Therefore, thinking of ethnosemiotics as the semiotics that deals with the "intersubjective experience of the experienced world" (Marsciani 2020a: 6) means paying particular attention to the perspectives of the subjects-objects that make up the scene, a way through which otherness is structured, which can then also be found in the relationship between "I" and what is "other" besides than me (Marsciani 2007; Mazzarino 2015, 2020; Galofaro 2015).

The idea, therefore, of converting the suffix "ethno" into an 'other dimension' leads ethnosemiologists to consider this particular semiotics as an enlarged theory of enunciation. To explain this point I will refer to the reflections of Louis Marin, taken from the text *On Representation* ([1994] 2002). The semiologist, in the introduction to his text, redesigns the theory of enunciation starting from Benveniste and focusing the attention on the construction of subjectivity in the practice of discourse. He writes:

> It is thus other as "thou" who fills the empty identity of the form "I", who carries it put as the sense act of full identification, who construes the phenomenological difference between "I"s as an identity. In other words, it is the other as "thou" who constitutes, in the mediated immediacy of the linguistic exchange, the "I" as Myself. From this point on, and to sum up the uncanny structure of the act of speaking in a non-hegelian formula, I shall say that the ontic identity of *Myself* is the difference – and here is the dialogic structure of its constitution – between possible systematic identity and real phenomenological difference. The being of Myself is the being of difference, not at all identity between the nonidentity and identity at same, but nonidentity between the identity and the nonidentity of the other.
> The linguistic-semantic deduction of temporality is directly articulated with that of the subject, *ego*, in the sense that is simultaneously repeats and displaces it on another level (Marin [1994] 2002, English Translation: 134).

If with ethnosemiotics one leaves the purely 'textualist' dimension, but rather focuses on the processes of textualisation of the everyday phenomena observed as spoken discourses, it is necessary to think that an important part of the construction of the object of study of ethnosemiotics will concern grasping the relationships between the actors (*I-you*) that stage the observed discourse. At this point it is necessary, first of all, to have a research question that guides the analyst in assuming a certain perspective rather than another and to suggest a subject enunciator, secondly to understand the relationships that co-construct the i d e n t i t y of the actors involved.

Just as Marin understands the importance of the relationship between an "I" or "ego" subjectivity and an "other" identity that contributes, with its presence, in filling the previous one and making that "I" a real "I", that ego a true ego, in ethnosemiotics the discourse of identity extends to all the possibilities in which subjects and objects interact and produce signification by building the world (Mazzarino 2020). At this point, "ethnos" is nothing more than an extension of that "ego" that Marin tells us about. Observing signification in its giving itself as a perspective, as a sense oriented by someone or something, means assuming the "I/you" relationship in terms of a "we/they". The perspective, or rather the "culturalised" signification, is always something plural, shared. Observing and analysing the relationships that structure the signification inserted in this dynamic means, therefore, thinking of the "ego" in the plural terms of the community, of the collective subject (understood as a perspective from which to look at meaning). This is how ego becomes *ethnos*.

If Louis Marin's problem is to describe how the "I" becomes the starting point of the enunciation, the aim of the ethnosemiologist is to overturn this concept to extend this theory to the "others" point of view. For ethnosemiologists the theory of enunciation completes the theoretical plan presented, giving rise to an exhaustive theory for the analysis of the significance of everyday (and/or socio-cultural) phenomena. Starting from the identification of the conditions of possibility of the construction (on a semiotic and not ontological level) of the subjects, but above all of the conditions of construction of the identities at play: of an enunciating subject, that suggests a perspective through which to recognise an alterity which in turn contributes to the construction of signification as a "difference" (Marin [1994] 2002, English translation: 134). This way, in sum, the objective of ethnosemiotics is to explain the concept of alterity, going beyond a mere semiotic analysis of the elements of otherness, which was a mistake in the past for ethnosemiotics. To date, the research work of Italian ethnosemiologists is committed to reconstructing this theoretical framework.

Throughout 2021, a cycle of meetings was organised within the seminar of the foundations of the theory of signification at the University of Bologna, titled *Non siamo mai stati strutturalisti!(?)* a title that, mimicking the well-known book by Bruno Latour (1991) *We have never been modern*, opens a dialogue between semiologists, anthropologists and philosophers discussing the post-structuralist status of the semiotic approach and how

ethnosemiotics would somehow have acquired the inheritance of this hidden trend of generative semiotics.

From 2007 to today, the internal changes in ethnosemiotics have been significant. First there was a direct confrontation with anthropology and then the debate on the semiotic analysis of everyday practices which led to the idea of an 'ethno' as a perspective of production of meaning, in which the relationship that structures the signification is more important than the interpretation that is given to it.

If before 2017, prior to the release of the two volumes *Tra etno e Semiotica* (Donatiello and Mazzarino 2017a, 2017b), the idea of ethnosemiotics as an interdisciplinary theory seemed achievable, in the following years, the comparison with philosophy and the new perspectives of certain anthropology presented ethnosemiotics as a transdisciplinary semiotics. A semiotics that crosses philosophical and anthropological thought and is positioned at a precise point of semiotic theory: the study of the taking of meaning in the world.

Notes

1   From 2015 to 2021, the publications produced by the Bolognese school were: Accardo Lorenza et al. (2015). *Via Mascarella. Declinazioni di uno spazio denso*, Bologna: Esculapio; Giuseppe Mazzarino (2015). *Il potere dell'ipnosi. Proposte teoriche per un'etnosemiotica*. Bologna: Esculapio; Francesco Galofaro (2015). *Dopo Gerico. I nuovi spazi della psichiatria*. Bologna: Esculapio; Amoroso Prisca et al. (2016). *Corpo linguaggio e senso tra semiotica e filosofia*. Bologna: Esculapio; Jaqueline Crestani (2016). *Autorappresentazione e negoziazione dell'identità culturale. Il caso degli indigeni Mbya-Guarani*. Bologna: Esculapio; Maria Cristina Addis (2017). *L'isola che non c'è sulla Costa Smeralda, o di un'utopia che non c'è*. Bologna: Esculapio; Paola Donatiello and Giuseppe Mazzarino (2017a). *Tra "etno" e "semiotica". Affinità e divergenze ai margini di due discipline vol.I*. Bologna: Esculapio; Paola Donatiello and Giuseppe Mazzarino (2017b). *Tra "etno" e "semiotica". Conversazioni tra antropologia e teoria della significazione vol. II*. Bologna: Esculapio; Francesca Scanu (2018). *A lezione di canto barocco. Lì dove nasce un cantante*. Bologna: Esculapio; Isabella Pezzini and Riccardo Bertolotti (eds. 2019). *Viale Togliatti a Roma: una strada in cerca d'autore. Un'inchiesta semiotica tra paesaggio, pratiche, rappresentazioni*. Bologna: Esculapio; Michele Dentico (2019). *Sul tifare il Taranto. Ricerca etnosemioticaintorno ad una disaffezione*. Bologna: Esculapio; Francesco Marsciani (2020a). Etnosemiotica: bozza di un manifesto, *Actes Sémiotiques*, n. 123; Francesco Marsciani (ed. 2021). *Un etnosemiologo al museo*. Bologna: Esculapio; Chiara Petrini (2021). *La pratica religiosa cattolica ai tempi del coronavirus*. Bologna: Esculapio.

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Semiotics of Law*

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Summary. In this contribution we aim at discussing the relevance of an ethnosemiotic approach to law, namely for the specific issues of the block of flats as an object. The chapter is hence structured in four sections. In the first one the theoretical disciplinary context of semiotic studies on law is introduced, encompassing various approaches across Europe and the United States, in the fields of pragmatics, sociolinguistics, legal anthropology and legal geography. The second section links some of these approaches to Greimasian semiotics, going back to the crucial outcomes of Algirdas Greimas, Bernard Jackson and Eric Landowski's investigation in the field of law. The third section presents the main aspects of an ethnosemiotic approach, and focuses on the matter of considering law and social norms as inextricably interlaced. The fourth and last section therefore comes to analyse the case study of block of flats in an ethnosemiotic perspective. Despite the existence of many issues involved, such as space, anthropological habits, architectural styles, and the law, the approach of ethnosemiotics makes it possible to display a structural coherence of block of flats in terms of a semiotic form of life.

Keywords. Semiotics of law, ethnosemiotics, block of flats, social norms, semiotics of space

Zusammenfassung. In diesem Beitrag soll die Relevanz eines ethnosemiotischen Ansatzes für das Recht erörtert werden, insbesondere im Hinblick auf die spezifische Problematik des Wohnungseigentums. Der Beitrag gliedert sich daher in vier Abschnitte. Der erste Teil führt in den theoretisch-disziplinären Kontext der semiotischen Studien bezogen auf das Recht ein, der verschiedene Ansätze in Europa und den Vereinigten Staaten in den Bereichen Pragmatik, Soziolinguistik, Rechtsanthropologie und Rechtsgeographie umfasst. Im zweiten Abschnitt werden einige dieser Ansätze mit der Greimas'schen Semiotik verknüpft, indem auf die Knotenpunkte der Untersuchungen von Algirdas Greimas, Bernard Jackson und Eric Landowski im Bereich des Rechts zurückgegriffen wird. Der dritte Abschnitt stellt die wichtigsten Aspekte eines ethnosemiotischen Ansatzes vor und konzentriert sich auf die Frage, ob Recht und soziale Normen als untrennbar miteinander verwoben betrachtet werden können. Der vierte und letzte Abschnitt schließlich basiert auf einer Analyse der Fallstudie der Eigentumswohnung aus einer ethnosemiotischen Perspektive. Trotz der zahlreichen Fragen, die sich

in Bezug auf den Raum, die anthropologischen Gewohnheiten, die architektonischen Stile und das Recht stellen, ermöglicht es der ethnosemiotische Ansatz, eine strukturelle Kohärenz des Wohnhauses im Sinne einer semiotischen Lebensform aufzuzeigen.

Schlüsselwörter. Semiotik des Rechts, Ethnosemiotik, Wohnblock, soziale Normen, Semiotik des Raums

1.   The studies on law with a semiotic orientation

Adopting the perspective of Greimasian semiotics, in the following paragraphs we propose to illustrate its Italian developments with respect to law, and in relation to ethnosemiotics. The general assumptions of this point of view may be considered the following three: that the law is not a monolithic unit, that it does not result from some metaphysical table of law, finally, that the judicial, as a bundle of phenomena, is nevertheless based on systems and processes of specific signification. With a penetrating philosophical approach, the British scholar Andreas Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos has proposed to think that:

> in practice, law has never been more than an interdisciplinary or even postdisciplinary snapshot of a heady mix including geography, history, psychology, chemistry, physics, economics, the media, religion, and so on (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015: 21).

Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos is among the most interesting law scholars in the contemporary scene, and he draws his observations starting from a dialogue with Luhmann (see also Teubner 1988) and from an even more crucial strict observance of Deleuze's thought. On the semiotic side, we certainly may federate with this approach on some aspects of a general study on normativity as stratified and multiple, but then the problem will become to distinguish between something that is law and something that is not law (which does not worry Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos), and understand how the differences and relationships between, for example, good manners and the penal code are given. Even if we come to a consideration of very different problems, and even if the positivism that sees in the legal system a metaphysical foundation is undoubtedly the main obstacle to a semiotics of law (Jackson 2017: 6), nonetheless, the semiotics of law was born as an effort to retrieve articulations in discourse, and thus it remains separate from a conception of law as a totality of ontological nature, and of conative character (Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos 2015: 74–76). It is therefore good to distinguish, first, the point of view that we will adopt from a similar philosophical perspective[1], and to make some other clarifications. Elsewhere (Bassano 2018d, 2019) we outlined the historical-philosophical foundations of a constructivist consideration on legal language: it arises in the

context of the Oxonian debate where Gilbert Ryle, Peter F. Strawson, Herbert L. A. Hart and John L. Austin dialogued, and it was precisely the latter, with his famous theory of speech acts (1961, 1962) that gave the law the possibility of existing as a performative discourse *tout court*. In the judicial enunciation there are no assertions, only acts. From Austin's observations descend two great disciplinary fields that are in some ways independent and parallel to our perspective: pragmatics and pragmatism. The first one concerns rather heterogeneous studies in the European context, where, under the same name, distant considerations lie, such as those of Grice and those of Searle. Bernard Jackson, for example, identifies a pragmatics of the Italian school and one of the German school (Jackson 2012: 12), for which the works of Carcaterra (1974), Posner and Krampen (1981) among others can be considered. If we want to define pragmatics in the most general way possible, we could say that it deals with law by studying the rules of negotiation connected to judicial rhetoric in interactional contexts (Bertuccelli Papi 1993; Sobota 1990). The second major disciplinary field, that of pragmatism, has a predominantly American based ground, and it was born along with the study of common law from a Peircean perspective (Kevelson 1982). Hence a vast programme of studies, which aims at thinking of a

> law semiotics capable of tracing the connections between semiotic systems of law distant from a historical, cultural, and ideological point of view, on a global scale of human cultures (Kevelson 1982: 22).

Nowadays, pragmatism has *The International Journal for the Semiotic of Law* as a reference, which promotes an interdisciplinary perspective, also embracing contributions from different fields, such as deconstruction and sociolinguistics, the story of law discourse, hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, the study of law in literature, and visual semiotics. However, the panorama of contemporary studies on law, with a semiotic vocation, is even more multifaceted. Combining the "critical legal studies movement", born in the 1970s, with Kevelson's pragmatist tradition, a semiotics of law of mainly Anglo-Saxon origin (Wagner and Broekman 2012) considers law as a "discourse of power", without neglecting typical problems such as the question of what the essence of the law is (*ivi*: 5) and paying particular attention to *jurisprudence* as a communicative context – that is, capable of shaping the social world and understandable only because it is continuously interpreted in a Peircean sense. Still in the Anglo-Saxon context, there exists a widespread and varied anthropology of law. Even if it is difficult to summarise its interests – because it is a young and developing discipline – we can nevertheless recognise that, on the one hand, it is connected to branches of the American philosophy of law, such as the new legal realism (Nourse and Shaffer 2009), and on the other hand, it is constituted as a specific vocation to the study of the

law from a cross-cultural, comparative perspective, in order to identify general principles that characterize this slice of sociocultural life (Donovan 2008: VII; see also Chase 2005).

Also, the sociological and sociolinguistic approaches deserve mention, among which the contributions of André Jean Arnaud (1981, 1985) and Peter Manning (1977, 1980, 1988) are notable. The former for example stressed the plurality of "legal systems", from the official to those of the *droit vecu* (1981: 180), integrating semiotics as a perspective on the problem of juridicity itself. Manning's work, which refers to the sociology of organisations, analyses communication and production of meaning in the structuring of law enforcement activity, integrating semiotic concepts with the work of Erving Goffman.

2.   The most recent frameworks and their tangency to the prospective of an ethnosemiotics of juridical phenomena

Among the most innovative and fertile approaches, in view of an exchange with the Greimasian semiotics, and in the idea of a possible connection with the ethnosemiotic study of law, we identify five directions, intentionally keeping a general framework. The choices made can only be partial, but they depend on the willingness to give precedence to approaches in which there is a strong theoretical apparatus put in the service of the analysis of concrete objects, which in many cases turn to the civil law, or to cases not solely Western, and no longer to the common law.

The first direction of an anthropological nature is the legal pluralism field. It has originated thanks to the seminal proposals of Leopold Postpisil, with a theory of legal levels (Postpisil 1971). Here Postpisil observed that the laws can be of diverse nature, according to whether they possess one or more, or all of following characteristics: authority, intention of universal application, obligations (*obligatio*), sanction (psychological sanctions can equally satisfy the criterion); that the laws exist at different degrees of generality, and actually, for example, also "criminal gangs ethics" are full-fledged laws; that laws are always also a political device for setting values, it suffices to think that, in the Western culture, the concept of law has acquired a strong moralistic connotation. On these bases, the legal pluralism (Griffiths 1986; Fuller 1994) meets the general idea that a society can contain multiple legal systems in addition to any official legal rules at the level of the state. Contentious arguments surround the nature of these alternative legal systems, their hierarchical arrangement within the society as a whole, the way they articulate with each other, and finally how the person navigates through and between the often conflicting normative demands that she/he is obliged to observe. This is probably the prospective that most closely touches the interests of an ethnosemiotic framework of law.

The second direction is that of legal geography, a happy example of a research conducted on a complex object (law) from a subtle and articulated theoretical perspective (that of human geography) through the mediation of the concept of space. With special attention to the theme of globalisation, legal geography (Blomley 2004; Delaney 2010) uses conceptual frames to structure a discussion – boundaries, land, property, nature, identity (of people and places), culture, time, and knowledge. These frames cut across various taken-for-granted distinctions, such as the social and the material, the human and non-human, and what constitutes people and things. It is curious that these studies find a principle of articulation precisely in geography, a discipline that, in many cases, already communicates with semiotics (Farinelli 2003). This shows well how the circle between a legal geography and a semiotics and ethnosemiotics of law could soon close to the benefit of all.

The third direction is that of a philosophical-material analysis that regards legal phenomena without an *a priori* distinction between theories and concrete objects: the main example is the material anthropology proposed by Bruno Latour, which has taken from semiotics many of its operational concepts, and which has also put them in field in the well-known ethnography of the French *Conseil d'État*, the leading jurisprudential authority of administrative law (Latour 2002). The sociologist becomes familiar with a legal institution: she/he gets used to exploring its spaces, strives to understand its interactional logics, studies its actors – human and not, as in the case of dossiers. After almost two years the sociologist can reveal some dynamics of the "life inside the legal machine of the Council of State" (Latour 2002: 27), and she/he does so by combining the tools of the constructivism of the sociology of science with specific notions of semiotics. She/he collects revelations of great interest, for instance, on the relation between secret and *moyen* in the discussions of the court or the material treatment and the crucial role of dossiers. In a rather similar direction goes the work of Marie-Angèle Hermitte (1996), a study on the story of the relation between blood and French law, told by the complex international regulation of donations, and the topic of the HIV epidemic in 1982.

The fourth direction is the philosophical-political framework of Western law accomplished in the remarkable work of François Ost, *À quoi sert le droit* (2016). A long-time thoughtful scholar of the articulation of the European civil law in French, in this effort of systematisation, Ost specifically talks about a function of "replication" (*redoublement*) that the law would engage with cultural forms to which it binds (2016: 127–129). We will see how the interests of an ethnosemiotics of law are really close to this conception of social-regulatory and social-legal phenomena, seen as interconnected.

Finally, as a fifth direction, the work of Garapon (2001) should be mentioned, which, for instance, provides a deep insight into the concept of legal ritual of civil law in relation to that of common law. By gathering Girard, but also Garfinkel, Foucault and Cassirer, Garapon mainly deals with the symbolic value of the criminal trial scene.

3.   Greimasian semiotics and the law: French and Italian contributions

In this paragraph we propose to briefly outline the Greimasian semiotic reflection about law which has since been carried on by various Italian scholars, and we seek to decline it in an ethosemiotic perspective. In 1971[2] Greimas published his well known analysis about the French law 66-537, issued in 1966, about corporate establishment and regulation. Given that the text of the law was articulated, based on 509 sections, Greimas led a group of researchers composed of Eric Landowski, Gérard Bucher, Claude Chabrol and Paolo Fabbri. The outcomes had been essentially two:

  a.   the establishment of a specific narrative model, in order to explain how, within the law 66-537, a corporation build a new network of relations between actors (stakeholders; the state; the law; the corporate general meetings, and the corporate board) somehow independent from former social relations;
  b.   an extensive theory about law as a language, at the same time comparable to other languages. We will focus only on the second, for space reasons, and trying to avoid technicalities.

In 1971 Greimas claims that the condition of the juridical b e i n g can be identified in the opposition existent / non existent. What is unsaid by the law, simply d o e s n o t e x i s t. This is the way by which Austin's performatives are the only one utterance provided by law. Any of the legislator's utterences can be questioned as true or false. They all have the value of

> absolute performative words, establishing an ordered, conventional and exlicit word of meanings; within this world the legislator's utteracences enuciate the things and the beings and make them exist, and also provide them with clear functions, laid dawn in terms of rules of obligation and ban (Greimas 1976: 80, my translation).

The following is a reflection on the system creating and validating such rules. Quite clearly, for what concerns the production of rules, Greimas explains how the law incorporates elements from its referential level, namely natural language,

> elements which in the beginning are part of a general discourse expressed in French, as natural language, where heterogeneous elements stands, pell-mell, the ones and the others belonging to different semantic universes" (*ivi*: 81, my translation).

What law does is to "name properly things and being and to attribute expected events to a modal panel based on obligation and ban" (*ivi*: 79, my translation). On the other hand, for what concerns their validation – that would be maybe better defined as a r e c o g n i t i o n[3] – Greimas takes into account the level of jurisprudential judgements. Here, he argues, various facts, not yet legally correct in itself, are processed in order to obtain

an adequate utterance, compliant to the rules of construction of legal utterances, and the purpose of this processing is to show that, of all the juridical utterances of the legal grammar, there is at least one ready to embed the original not-legal fact (*ivi*: 83, my translation).

With such a first analytical outcome, Greimas has radically changed the notion of legal formalism.[4] A notion enhanced with a new complexity, or better acknowledged for its complexity, since jurists know how the legal practice operates, in fact, such transformations of meanings. But the rhetorics of Western law, as Greimas argues, consider law and legal processes by the "end point", in a perspective where the structures of such processes are seen a s a l r e a d y d o n e, and for this reason static and self-evident. A decade later, Eric Landowski provided a strong drive for the development of a semiotic comprehension of legal phenomena. In 1989 Landowski writes a long paper on law and its hierarchy, *Pour une approche sémiotique et narrative du droit*, where he deals with a theory of dynamic legal layers (Landowski 1989a). Law could be seen as a normative frame among others – such as those of religion, politics, morality, etiquette – but it distinguishes itself because of two strong features: o r d e r a n d d y n a m i s m. A first fundamental dimension is h o r i z o n t a l: various relations take place on this level, between objects and subjects, they concern values and are structured in modal terms. Landowski leads back for instance legal acts such as requisitions and expropriations to the narrative status of "appropriations" (see Greimas 1983, chapt. 1); while the act of abdicate is based on a "reflexive privation" and various conventional terms of legal agreements can be read as "mutual gifts" (Greimas 1976: 86, my translation). On this level, legal dynamism is guaranteed by a commutation principle between two roles, the one of c o n t r a c t and the one of s a n c t i o n, that somehow circumscribe any legal act.

The second dimension is that of a v e r t i c a l l e v e l, because law comes with an i n n e r r e c u r s i v e p r o p e r t y. Hierarchical relationships can indeed always be replied at a higher level, and it an "ultimate sender" does not exist (both in the sense of "mandatory sender" and of "sender-adjudicator", see Bronwen and Ringham 2000: 121–122). There is just a sort of axiological instance, embodied from time to time in various kinds of legislating and sanctioning actors. This empty position – the absence of a substantial sender – is seen by Landowski as the core-element of the structure of law as dynamic and regulated at the same time. Two years later, in 1988, Landowski writes a second important contribution. The matter here is not the hierarchy of juridical structures anymore, but rather he focusses on something complementary: the framework of the trial. Landowski seeks to detect the existence of several specific actants, starting from the specific actors of the trial – witnesses, defendants, victims, defence attorneys, prosecutors, experts, courts. The approach he takes focuses on different kinds of knowledge held by the actors (1988: 62): what enables the judge to recognise proof as valid? More precisely, what is the complex architec-

ture of the juridical forms of truth made of? Landowski's answer is the co-operation of f o u r   t r u t h - r e g i m e s. The first regime involves the "empirical evidence", so that here "facts are simply facts" and "speak for themselves" (1989b: 48). An example is the quintessential proof, confession. It would be the case, for example, of a defendant, guilty of a financial crime, who would eventually provide the court with documents which certify the way he embezzled and spent the money of the corporation he defrauded. A second regime, opposite to the former, is the one of the conventional legality.

Here the everyday life and the world of legal processes show to be radically different: in the second, for instance, a charge can be enacted only by a strict frame of times and procedures. In case a prosecutor would not lodge an official document at the registry on time, it would cancel the possibility to go ahead with that specific lawsuit forever; it doesn't matter whether the lawsuit was about a serious offence which had really taken place in the everyday world. A third regime is identified in the social plausibility. Elsewhere (Bassano 2018c) we claimed the crucial importance of this aspect among the others. Landowski connects to the social plausibility what in many legal systems is called and established as the judge's independence; the strong assertion, in addition, here, is to argue that from a certain point of view courts think not differently from an average person. This element leads straight to the anthropological reflection on social beliefs and behaviours in different cultures. Finally, the fourth regime is that of scientific truth. Landowski deals with the role of the expert in the trial, asserting that it:

> is a mix truth-regime, in which science is called into play, and heard, but where, however, its data and displays do not have an absolute power, since they are compared with other opinions; the court manages and crosses these opinions in a discursive rather than demonstrative frame (Landowski 1989a: 52).

A third group of theoretical outcomes derives from the work of the British philosopher Bernard Jackson, who has been collaborating with Landowski throughout the 1980s. In 1985 Jackson published a first essay on the topic: *Semiotics and Legal Theory*.[5]

Here we summarise just two of his theoretical cornerstones. The first claim is about the role of a semiotic perspective facing legal phenomena: according to Jackson semiotics has encompassed pragmatics, in a Morris sense (1938), into semantics. Semiotics has had a key-role in a "narrativization of pragmatics" (Jackson 1988b: 33–36), since semiotics does not oppose the law in the world, on one hand, and the written law, on the other, but rather displays the input of the world in the legal discourse both as a figure of the enunciatee and as a trace of the enunciation (Greimas and Courtés 1979: 125). The second assumption is Jackson's denial of the unity of the legal system, a basis of the main philosophical theories of law, from Kelsen's normativism to the Hart and post-Hartian giuspositivism (see Jackson 1985: 147–262). For this purpose, Jackson invokes Greimas's notion of "semiotic groups" (Greimas 1970: 86) as a "group of people using a same

signification system" (Jackson 1985: 286). According to Jackson, the theory of unit threatens the visibility of some core-groups of the legal processes, such as those of local authorities, that of the actors acting aside the trial courtrooms (court clerks and security), the one composed by the lawyer and her/his client. But also, the addressees of many legal rules are often ignored, as in the case of fiscal legislation, mostly directed to a branch of civil service, or as in that of the penal legislation, read and used mostly by police and quaestorship offices.

It is thus surprising to find Jackson and Landowski criticised, in the 1980s, by scholars of the field of critical legal studies. *Semiotics and legal theory* (Jackson 1985) was received as a collaborationist essay to the legal positivism perspective, as if semiotics as a whole would have done nothing else than confirm classic positivism in the field of semiotics of law (Hunt 1986a, 1986b). In 1988 Jackson answered with an article where he placed semiotics much more on the side of deconstructionism. Furthermore, he claimed that semiotic instruments should be taken as crucial at the first stage of any critical reflection on legal phenomena – since semiotics is neither a "pseudo-philosophy nor the study of brute facts", but rather a project of "description" of systems and processes of signification (Jackson 1988a: 68–69). Lastly, both Landowski and Jackson underline the opportunity to distinguish two levels of enunciation of the trial: on one hand the s t o r y i n t h e t r i a l, namely the facts on which the trial is based, and on the other hand the s t o r y o f t h e t r i a l, that is the vicissitudes of the judgement itself, with its stages and events (Landowski 1988; Jackson 1988b). In light of these findings, recently in Italy a revival of a semiotics of law as a challenge seems to be taking place. A new group of scholars, mostly with a solid semiotic background, seek to extend the effort of the 1980s. Among others, remarkable results are those of Mario Ricca (2002, 2008, 2013), where a bridge is built between the philosophy of law and semiotics, to outline certain crucial issues of the intercultural law, and those of Bertolotti (2019, 2017) which merge the perspectives on law of Greimas and that of Landowski (1989a), dealing with the topic of the relations between law, space and visibility.

Dealing both with Greimasian models on law and Latour's work, Carlo Andrea Tassinari (Tassinari 2019; Tassinari and Puca 2019) explores the dimension of international and communitarian laws in terms of their semiotic structures, dealing with both the topics of environmental law and food law. In terms of our contributions, we would like to refer to a research on the topic of the space of the trial courtroom, conducted in an ethnosemiotic perspective (Bassano 2015); several articles about conflicts between fields of law, the way law sets out animal life, the problem of technology and privacy (Bassano 2017b, 2018a, 2018b) and a contribution on the structure of the enunciation in contemporary penal judgements (2017a). Currently in preparation is an Italian reader of semiotics of law, including, among others, contributions courtesy of Eric Landowski, Bernard Jackson, Antoine

Garapon, Oscar Chase, Marie Angèle Hermitte and Bruno Latour, to be published soon.

4.   Ethnosemiotics of law

Thus, we reach the matter of an ethnosemiotic perspective on legal phenomena. A first general assumption of an ethnosemiotic perspective on law implies to face law as impure and deeply connected with everyday life. Such a point of view deals with law focusing on two aspects: on the one hand, legal relationships are duplicated starting from some social relationships, but giving shape to autonomous patterns (see above Greimas 1976; Ost 2016); on the other hand, law cannot be separated from social life since they have mutual strong ties – as shown by Landowski with the idea of a regime of social plausibility in a court's decisions (Landowski 1988). Hence, we must note how ethnosemiotics differs even from a general ground shared by many studies in philosophy of law, about which, Blomley argues:

> legal academics prefer to pitch their tents in the shadow of the Supreme Court rather than in Main Street (Blomley 2005: 286).

We refer to Giuseppe Mazzarino's contribution (in this volume) for the historical aspects of the foundation of ethnosemiotics in Italy; nevertheless, as a first step, it is necessary to underline several theoretical viewpoints particularly relevant for the analysis of legal phenomena. Recently, Francesco Marsciani (2020: 1–7) has defined ethnosemiotics referring to a manifesto with a dual form, both negative and positive. The negative characteristics concern the fact that ethnosemiotics cannot be approached either as a sociology, in that it does not present the same a-problematic, naturalising assumption of concepts as 'belongings, roles, institutions, classes', or as a cultural anthropology, to which it would be rather more plausible to link ethnosemiotics, as it does not act to understand "cultural facts".[6] Quite the opposite, an ethnosemiotics point of view:

> allows the forms of its objects to organize themselves without hypothecating their identifiability from pre-established categories, such as for instance the category of culture itself in relation to an opposite nature, or the category of human compared to the non-human one. In this sense, inevitably, ethnosemiotics is not a theory of the human (Marsciani 2020: 2, my translation).

Far from being a provocation; if this curriculum denies such disciplinary relations, it is to claim a strong approach as a method. As a matter of fact, the positive part of the manifesto clarifies what is meant by "method". The ethnosemiotic method is not a guided procedure of some sort, but a radically specific type of observation, because it undertakes the responsibility of making explicit the structures, each time different, at the root of our pro-

cedures and our daily experience of meaning. In other words, it is not just a matter of describing, but of

> creating one's own objects wherever it is possible to project structures of meaning, and that is thanks to a real work of controlled explicitation of the simple and daily textualization within which we are all constantly immersed[7] (*ivi*: 6, my translation).

The analyst proceeds by building one or more relational fields and enables them to manifest as a world, on the scene of a possible discourse (*ivi*: 10). Put differently, the immanence is here assumed with an extreme methodological accuracy and with the widest openness and analytical flexibility in the construction of the object of analysis.

The issue at stake also concerns a re-definition of the concept of "ethno": this word is not conceived as a reference to the 'other', to a subculture or to a human group that lives somewhere in the world, to an ethnicity of a socio-anthropological interest, but it is interpreted as a reference to a community, our community in particular, the one the analyst speaks the same language as. "Ethno" is the combination of the significant conditions for the communal life and the challenge here is to manage to detach ourselves from the behaviours that are more familiar and more obvious to us, so as to find a good distance that makes the categories that hold those behaviours emerge (Fontanille 2017: 8).[8] These categories will always be local, never universal nor *a priori*; however, implementing that curriculum of study means providing the scientific community with reports that are valid for this very reason, for a specificity that has nothing exemplary, and yet shows even more about the objects it analyses than what unitary and/or integrative models could do.

In this respect, ethnosemiotics reveals an empirical vocation which defines the perspective of Italian semiotics as its own peculiar trait, as opposed to the theoretical vocation, we could say, typical of the contemporary French semiotics. We could also claim that the history and the collocation of the ethnosemiotic point of view is totally spontaneous on the one hand, but on the other hand it presents widespread and not homogeneous connections.

In the first case, ethnosemiotics is a coherent development outcome of European semiotics, the structural and Greimasian one, in light of the contemporary epistemology of the text.[9] In the last thirty years, semiotics has understood that its tools did not condemn it to analyse exclusively a "world of paper" (Marsciani 2020: 5), and from there on fields such as the semiotics of objects, of the body, of food, of forms of life, etc. have seen the light. In this first sense, we believe that the suffix "ethno" could even be eliminated, and the ethnosemiotic curriculum would simply and rightfully coincide with the actual and future horizon of a discipline that sees all the experiences as already textualised. The analyst is in charge of translating them into another interpretation, into a new textualisation according to her/his

scientific view.[10] In the second sense, ethnosemiotics is linked with studies carried out at different times and starting from very distant perspectives.[11]

There are convergences with the sociology of Erving Goffman (1959, 1971), the ethnomethodology of Harold Garfinkel (1967) and the proxemics of Edward T. Hall (1959, 1966), whose aim, similarly to ours, was to account for a density under the surface of everyday behaviours, the first in the organisation of interactions, the latter in the management of space and interpersonal distance, denying on the one hand psychological explanations and on the other Durkheim's functionalism. In France, Jean-Didier Urbain's work (1991, 1994) offers a challenging dialogue: with an eclectic insight, his reflection on tourism and the ritualisation of space is one of the most systematic contribution around anthropo-semio-linguistics on the possibility of putting habits and practices at a distance, to project a structural outlook on them. In the field of semiotics, the most explicit link is with the seminal work of Michel de Certeau (1990: 169–192), the semiotics of space of Manar Hammad (2006, 2013) and the analysis on the Paris subway routes of Jean-Marie Floch (1990: 59–88). Such synergies allow us now to explain better what is meant by an ethnosemiotic perspective on practices, or significant behaviours. Ethnosemiotics can involve the study of objects that require explicit observation and have their own consistency during the observation period. For instance, in the works of Floch and Hammad, the research question shapes the problem of understanding a ceremony, a path, or everyday interactions in a particular urban section, assuming these definitions, namely "ceremony", "path", and "urban interactions", do not provide a secure foundation for analysis or any prefiguration of the object on which we could base. The concept of a "ceremony" or "path" should be a result of research, not taken for granted.[12] In some other cases, as in the work of Urbain (1991) and in the majority of Certeau's observations (1990: 169–192), the relevance of direct observation is tautologic because something so well-known is assumed as an object – traveling of an ordinary tourist, staying on a train, or as we will see next, living in a block of flats – so that the problem is rather reversed. That is, it is no longer o b s e r v i n g   d i r e c t l y, but f i n d i n g a   r i g h t   d i s t a n c e so that a hypothesis of deep structuring of the object in analysis comes to light. Thus, perhaps, this second type of situation best shows how we can perform an analysis of the significant conditions of communal life from an ethnosemiotic perspective. It will indeed be a matter of identifying relational fields and then of employing, depending on the analysis needs, "differential schemes, actantial syntax, modal structures, discursive strategies" etc. (Marsciani 2007: 13) as tools by which structuring relations emerge.

5.   The block of flats

We focus now on a specific object, to illustrate the theoretical apparatus through an analysis of what could be called in general "a block of flats" as

a way of life. The pandemic has encouraged reflections on the relation between the concepts of 'public' and 'private' and their link with space, but, perhaps, there has been a lack of attention to problems that, for various reasons, concern the most spread Western form of urban life: living in a block of flats. In Italy, for example, the Trieste consumer association spoke about a 30% increase in the consultations for disputes between neighbours that concerned postponed council meetings, lockers and plaques placed in public spaces, reports to the police about gatherings in communal backyards and stairs.

These types of conflict, although exacerbated by the months of medical confinement, are low intensity conflicts after all, known to everyone. In its many forms, life in a block of flats involves most of the European and probably global urban population and its main characteristic is to put us in constant contact – and "forced" contact, using a legal term, with other households and other lives.[13] But how may we treat cohabitation from an analytical point of view?[14] We will begin disclosing a complex and ambiguous relationship between living and space, a relation that involves habits, forms and architectonic philosophies, conceptions of dignity, visual regimes, bodily attitudes. We will thus see the emergence of a problem of rules and customs that regulate communal life, and we will witness how they blend or conflict with explicit laws, which affect the existing relations and, for some aspects, create new ones, equally arbitrary and worthy of analytical interest.

5.1 Rules, laws, and life together

As already noted (note 13) cohabitation has specific forms in French, Italian, German and English, challenging to translate from one the other, but it is still possible to outline in brief a paradigmatic axis that organises the forms of residential private cohabitation and distinguishes them from others. If there are units, such as terraced houses and townhouses, where the neighbourhood is more marked on the value of /private/ than on that of /communal/, this is not the only way of the private: according to Charmes (2005: 113) a residential collective "has several means to make its territory a club enjoyed exclusively by the inhabitants". Referring to the US phenomenon of "gated communities" (Blakely and Snyder 1997), Golovtchenko and Souchet have conducted a study on various types of closed and secure residential buildings in the Toulouse area. They have considered different profiles for each urban situation, such as the type of residents, services, and architectural forms. Based on their research, they have identified three distinct types of gated communities: 'the citadel', 'the oasis', and 'the convent' (Golovtchenko and Souchet 2005: 155–158). So, we can identify as the first criteria, the size of the complex and the degree of freedom of access, but it is also true that there are blocks of flats that are familial, provincial, suburban, in the city centre, metropolitan, with/without janitor, with/without lift, with/without central heating, not to mention the large field

of social housing. Moreover, the difference between these elements of a housing system that aggregates multiple units and other forms of cohabitation appears common to various languages: squat, agricultural community, prison, student residence, barracks, camp sites, residences, hotels, hospitals, protected houses etc. For our purposes, we try to identify an average form that responds to a canonical narrative scheme of socio-normative practices – according to Marrone for whom

> the semantic boundary of not-being-able-to-do (and that of being-able-to-do) retroacts on the expressive one, creating it (Marrone 2013: 247).

We could say that the block of flats, as a durative form of residence, is the site of a series of multiform contracts about the production of rules and the construction of figures of deviants; this is reflected, in terms of competences, in incessant operations of negotiated territorialisation.

Concerning the performances, Lelévrier and Guigou speak about the possibility of the introduction of an "average use" (Lelévrier and Guigou 2005: 49): it is what happens when a dominant group, a small or large group of owner residents with "self-awareness" gives an example of behaviour and ensures social control because it sees the stability of the occupants as a value and has standardised its practices as collective references. Among the less pleasant but fairly common block of flats sanctions, it seems, is the galaxy of insulting and threatening notes, or "only apparently friendly" pieces of writing that residents leave and find posted on the walls, doors, placed between the windshield wipers of cars. In terms of social rules that inevitably form in a block of flats, the studies by Hammad (2006) and Zerubavel (1981) have been of great help. The first recalls that space is always regulated both d e j u r e and d e f a c t o , and it shows the fragility of the code of law based on *de jure* regularity.

It is enough, indeed, from a practical point of view, that someone fills, *de facto*, a space that is not marked *de jure* (just think of a bicycle improperly abandoned on a landing "at disposal") for the answer to be a strong gesture, more difficult to realize as a *de jure* act than as a *de facto* reaction. The second study carried out crucial studies on the rhythmic rules of everyday life, for example observing the times in which it is allowed/required/forbidden to stop in a place/space, to perform a certain practice. It is strictly forbidden to constantly monitor individuals in any form of cohabitation. However, it is unclear what duration of monitoring can be considered 'constant'. At what point does a person begin to feel excessively observed by their neighbors? The answer to this question is determined by culture, which establishes varying thresholds for the duration of certain experiences. Therefore, culture plays a crucial role in defining what can be considered constant monitoring. We thus come to the problem of explicit thresholds, established by law. Given that it is impossible to include the dissimilarities among different civil law systems (French, German, Italian) and given the enormous distance from the common law that prevails in the UK and in many

other countries, we limit ourselves to some considerations that start from the Italian law, trying, where possible, to show the appropriateness of their comparison with other circumstances.

In Italy, the law distinguishes between "co-ownership" and "condominium", by far the most common case for the block of flats (article 118, *Italian Civil Code*). In co-ownership, each participant only has a right on the undivided common property and can renounce it at any time, avoiding the obligation to pay the expenses; in the condominium the single resident cannot renounce the property of the communal parts, without also renouncing the exclusive ownership of the real estate unit, because otherwise it would continue to benefit from the service that communal things and systems provide. The condominium has the character of "forced co-ownership", necessary and permanent, which lasts as long as there are common and complementary accessories. In order to manage this scenario, quite similar in all European legal systems of civil law, the law provides for a council of tenants (*Eigentümergemeinschaft*) with a very special identity, both as an actor and as an actant. It is somewhat ambiguous and faded, in a legal sense, but with an incontrovertible existence, is defined as a subject who makes purchases, deliberates on various issues, pays workers, posts threats, warnings and sometimes wishes and greetings. Even considering some differences among France, Germany and Italy:

1. the council of tenants distributes different shares of power on a census basis,
2. through its regulations (*Hausordnung* und *Gemeinschaftsordnung*) the council carries out a series of actions at different levels to regulate both negatively (as duties) and actively (as rights) the avoidance and resolution of conflicts and the management of shared assets (art. 1129-30-1135, Italian Civil Code).

If we could undoubtedly walk the path of a legal semiotics of the condominium, following the same steps of the work of Greimas on "loi 66" (Greimas 1976: 79–128) – in fact the condominium in several ways evokes the configuration of a corporate subject – here we would like to resolve another issue. The problem is that implicit and explicit rules are interlaced[15], so that the complex and regulated everyday life of any shared building is not based on the simple existence in parallel and in autonomy of habits and laws, but precisely on the subtle relationship that exists between the two; and this has an ideological consequence. The problem is not merely the explication of certain norms, but rather the absence of others, and this brings to light some axiologies that characterise the block of flats as a sample of the social order in miniature. We could say, in a more general sense, that there is an arbitrary relation, for which, in certain cases, an element can move, now from rules to law, somehow emerging in the latter, starting from the first; now from law to social rules – as it happens, for instance, in the phenomena of decriminalisation – where an infraction sanctioned by law is re-immersed in the prac-

tice of informal sanctions. If, for instance, we think about the life of car drivers on the road, it is quite obvious that it is governed by an often unclear border between abuses and infractions of an unwritten code of knowing how to drive, and abuses that correspond to offences/crimes punishable according to a coded law. In the case of the block of flats, many aspects of communal life may be completely different due to the specific regulations: residents can be forbidden from possessing animals, vases and plants, from making noise at certain times or at any time, from cooking ethnic foods and walking in heels around the house. The "parliamentary" composition of the council of tenants can be diverted towards a strengthening of the majority system or, on the contrary, the most powerful owners (owners of the largest surfaces) can be weakened by binding many choices to the criterion of unanimity. On a closer inspection – and the Italian case is only one among several – the network of decisions of the council of tenants, the texts of the regulations and the jurisprudence on the disputes between neighbours, all give shape to a real "Chinese encyclopaedia à la Borges" (Foucault 1966: 5): the breaking of a horizontal pipe must be paid for by a single condominium, that of a vertical pipe by the collective (*Hausgemeinschaft*) (art. 1117 c.c.; Cass. Civ. judgement 778 19/01/2021; Cass. Civ. judgement 19045 03/09/2010; Legislation 220 11/12/2012); the partial closure of a balcony with mobile structures is allowed, but prohibited if the structures are immovable, but the regulation (*Gemeinschaftsordnung*) can absolutely ban changes, if voted unanimously; again, in order for an acoustic disturbance to be recognised as such, it should concern an indefinite number of residents, and not just one (this is an Italian peculiarity), but it might still be considered irrelevant if it does not exceed a specific amount of decibels – the "background noise" that is recorded daily in that environment (art. 844 Italian Civil Code; legislation 447, 1995). Installation of the lift and video surveillance cameras are very sensitive issues as well, as together they thematise the problems of disability, a question of privacy which often clashes with the prevaricating force of the council of tenant's decisions and are perceived as an expression of arrogance (Bordolli and Di Rago 2020; Cusano 2020; Zuppardi and Rizzo 2020).

To revisit the previous points, it is important to note that we can only consider an action as an offence or a crime if it violates a particular set of conditions and regulations. If an action does not breach these conditions, then it is simply a disturbance or a need that can be resolved through personal choices and strategies of power, impotence, or resistance. At this point we can try to draw some general considerations concerning an observation of the problems of normativity and everyday life in the block of flats from an ethnosemiotic point of view:

1. The council tenants is an internal form of m a r k e d d u p l i c a t i o n o f t h e c o l l e c t i v e t h a t c o h a b i t s;
2. Its rules do not concern only humans, nor only artefacts, but they arrange new relations, procedures, and segmentations of space and sensory perceptions;

3. The law recognises the council tenants as a judicial being, and therefore places offences, crimes, and infractions of the regulation on the same level, but at the same time allows the council tenants a degree of an almost autarchical autonomy;
4. the council of tenants is formed on a principle of corporate ownership, but leaves a range of needs and rights uncovered, for which a concept of tolerance seems to apply, the idea of a necessary stoic endurance of a series of actions performed by other people;
5. the task of not overflowing seems to be a weak but general principle, which affects both passively and actively, the structuring of the informal and formal rules of the block of flats, and from this instance, a sort of ordering form of contemporary Western coexistence (in open conflict with the rethorics of collaboration and of participation).[16]

5.2 The law and the normative: about thresholds in a block of flats

A further step is to consider some inner articulations of the block of flats as provided by law, and at the same time somehow challenged or integrated by the interlace with social normativity. It must be clear that thresholds of any kind depend on semiotic criteria established in the construction of the object of analysis; it is thus obvious how the block of flats is a case of a complex and flexible syntax between accessible / not accessible, and its thresholds could be stretchable by different points of view. We have followed Italian law as a guide, since it provides (at least) five different spaces, following a spatial idea of gradual progress – from the external and public space to the inner and private one (see Legislation 220, 11/12/2012). Partly following Floch's pioneering work on metropolitan space (1990: 59–88), we will deal with five discontinuities[17], not merely physical but already semiotic, which seems to develop a description about the block of flats inhabited, treaded, explored in crossings and rewritings, the description of that form of life which creates specific conditions and builds relations of similarity and difference with other architectural and semiotic forms of life.

5.2.1 The facade and the common face

The first discontinuity, the first element that marks the existence of a block of flats is the presence of a f a c a d e . The facade is the part of the building facing the street, the one that signals the interruption of the public space and at the same time also marks the existence of a unitary complex that differs from a public space. The facade is the first element of a resident occupation, of an ensemble, but for its own features, in a scopic sense, it is also barrier, fortification, wall, architectural body that stands out, from which to look at the swarming street, the open exterior and the transient border between inside and outside.

Edward T. Hall establishes a connection between the facade in architecture and Goffman's studies (1959) on the "self" as a public identity to manage. The word "facade", Hall recalls, denotes that people have different "levels to penetrate" (Hall 1966: 141) and architecture provides shields behind which one can occasionally hide, solving the long-standing problem of maintaining a facade. Lastly, the facade quite often hosts a particular type of space, the b a l c o n y.

The concept of the balcony has a complex lineage. According to Le Corbusier (Moley 2005: 45), it represents a private annexation of the garden and adds to the separate spaces of individual occupancy a portion of the green space that the accommodation alone cannot provide. However, a considerably weaker development of this idea has instead emphasised in the garden the simple value of extending the private space toward the outside world. All the identity proclamation forms from the inside to the outside can be ascribed to this concept: for instance, protests and demonstrations displaying flags and signs; and during the 2020 lockdown, the phenomenon of the concerts from the balcony (Taylor 2020). Of course, the reciprocal point of view also applies, for which the facade is the external part of the building visible to all, open to an undifferentiated gaze, and closely related to an architectural scenery that makes the block of flats an urban building among other buildings. In this regard the law is particularly interesting, as it has an ambiguous idea of the balcony – on the one hand it is perceived as an annexation to single accommodations, and therefore subject to a number of managing and furnishing rights, on the other hand it is viewed as a "common part" of the facade, and so bound to aesthetic choices that exclude or limit interventions or extensions (legislation 447, 1995).

5.2.2 The "inner forum"

The second element is equally defined, but perhaps less omnipresent, depending on the types of buildings that populate the landscapes of our urban communities: it is the inner courtyard (Fig. 5).

The c o u r t y a r d is a second strong point of access to the interior, and it is often the first place where mandatory relations between residents intertwine, as it is impossible not to be seen. One of the major advocates of the inner courtyard's role was the urbanist Camillo Sitte, who proposed the square closed by adjacent buildings, each one equipped with a "central view" (Sitte 1889: 34), as the ideal model of urban plan.

The advantages of this prototype were thought of as both psycho-perceptual and social, among them the "lateral protection". Sitte obtained the ideal image of f o r u m from the closed square. An encounter follows, between French hygienism of the beginning of the 20th Century, where the courtyard plays the role of 'lung', because it aerates and illuminates each individual house, and the group of the Chicago school, directed by Robert Park, that thinks of the courtyard rather as a square, conceiving the neighbourhood as a "halfway group between the family and the city" (Moley 2005: 41–43).

Even Le Corbusier focuses on the concept of common space, private yet accessible to all, and the inner courtyard is an essential element of his five *Unités d'habitation*.[18] According to Arnheim, in this respect,

> the buildings play a major role in determining how much each one of us is an individual person or a member of a group, and to what extent we are allowed to make decisions freely or we must obey to spatial delimitations (Arnheim 1977: 298).

Not surprisingly, indeed, the common spaces of which the courtyard of these days is the direct heir have been objects of disputes: Architects in the late 19th century created an idealised myth of rural community life, disrupted by the rapid demographic changes of the Industrial Revolution. Paradoxically, the same architects criticised communal spaces such as latrines, wash-houses, laundries, drying rooms, kitchens, cellars, and attics due to concerns over spreading epidemics and sexual promiscuity(Secci and Thibauld 2005: 24).[19]

Fig. 5. Giuditta Bassano, Inner courtyard in Rome (via Paolo Emilio), 2022.

5.2.3 Miniature block of flats: the stairs

A third potential discontinuity arises due to the presence of an internal staircase, which may not be present in all buildings, just like the inner courtyard. Furthermore, the importance of a staircase is not always decisive. For instance, when it serves as a means of connecting all the flats in an apartment block, and especially when it is built with two rows of closed walls, its significance diminishes. In such cases, the central void disappears, and a small panopticon, that is more or less total, is missing from a scopic point of view as well.

But there is sometimes a second world around the staircase, nested within the larger community of the block of flats. Both social and stately buildings commonly feature staircases; organising shared buildings around multiple staircases creates significant differences.

A first aspect is the intersubjective contact which intensifies: though it seems unusual that kindness increases thanks to the stairs, it is rather true that the stairs rearranges the relationships between cohabitants in terms of a daily or at least more regular frequentation. First, from an acoustic point of view, there is a phenomenologically dense intimacy with other people, a

special perceptual contact with certain bodies, those of the neighbours of the stairs, which move with their weight within listening reach – Warburg noticed how the stairs are a sort of primigenial form of human experience, since they represent the becoming, ascents and descents (1988: 26). Moreover, the communal stairs are a device widely explored by the history of painting and cinema.[20] The symbolic value of the central, open void around the stairwell may be explained by its contrast to the private, closed, and differentiated void of individual houses. The flats are concealed while the stairwell is always visible, even at low heights. Finally, to come back to the very thin membrane that in some cases connects law, social normativity and anthropological forms, the stairs are undoubtedly an inter-subjective device of control, as well as a physically dangerous place (we shall just mention the tragic suicidal death of Primo Levi).

5.2.4 The closed doors; the space of others

Rather unsettling for its obviousness, a fourth discontinuity coincides with the privacy of others, that is, with that landscape more or less crowded, more or less homogeneous, of the closed doors of the flats. In the spring of 2020, photographer Alice Valente Visco made a reportage in an apartment building in Rome:[21] the pictures that compose the work are accurate pictures of the frame of the life of others captured on the threshold of the flats. In some pictures the doors are open, just a little, and you can catch a glimpse of those interiors that anyone briefly spots in her/his daily life, crossing the building when by chance someone else in turn leaves or enters, or receives visitors. Another series of pictures, maybe the most significant, has as its object closed doors: here we are at the heart of the limit of the idea of cohabitation, here we are at the device that strongly marks the end of the community and inaugurates property, a space of which the closed door delineates, according to Hammad, a series of subtle levels of negation:

> 1. Here is private; 2. Here is someone's; 3. Here is not yours; 4. Here is not for everyone; 5. Entry forbidden; 6. Do not enter; 7. I wish you not to enter; 8. You mustn't enter (Hammad 2006: 244, my translation).

Omar Calabrese underlines that the term "apartment" comes from the Spanish language, and etymologically means the 'act of hiding, withdrawing' – because of the existence of inner places in court palaces where it was possible to perform private functions – sleep, having sex, attending personal toilette, indulging in contemplation. Bourgeois culture picks up the idea but enriches it with a repressive meaning: together with the secret, the apartment becomes the place of who/what is segregated. The idea of not-having-to-be seen, switches to that of not-having-to see. Furthermore, Calabrese stresses that even such an articulation collapses, considering that inside an apartment there are other places of hiding – (the bedroom, the bathroom, the home office/library) (Calabrese 1989: 153).

For Simmel (1909: 410) doors articulate human space with all that is non-human: since they can be opened, when they are closed, they "signify" – in opposition to the silent functional role of a wall. Compared to windows, doors have a deeper and more relevant meaning, as they are involved in two opposite actions: 'get in' and 'get out', while the window is oriented only from the inner space: its function is to look outside, rather than inside. Hence, if transparency allows windows to establish a diachronic link between inside and outside, their clear orientation and their being limited to sight would make of them no more than a part of what doors signify. Anyway, the management of the door-limit is very delicate, and reveals endless gradients between the 'still public' and the 'already private': from the cases in which a bare door, more or less well-finished in its painting, sometimes equipped with a shiny knob or a solid handle, often supplied with a decent doormat, is still part of a shared and anonymous asset, to those in which the exterior of the accommodation shows evident signs of an occupation that overflows, extending towards the outside – with an umbrella or with a garbage bag, in the most common cases; or with abandoned shoes, eccentric decorations, sometimes more simply ritualistic and festive; up to the brutal occupation of the landing with lockers, bikes, planks, boxes and tools of all sorts.

5.2.5 Sound communities

Here, just after the closed doors, a radical perceptual separation intervenes between what should not be seen anymore and what – against our will – remains public, shared, open to confrontation. In fact, a block of flats is inevitably a small or big acoustic community with compulsory participation. It is not difficult to find its most common traces: there are human voices, the barking of dogs, some meowing, laughters and quarrels; there are deep rumbles and high-pitched buzzing noises of the home appliances; the thuds of the slamming doors, the tinkling of keys, the clicking of locks and the echo of footsteps; in the warmer months there are also the sounds emitted from televisions and radios, more or less good music, noises of plates, cutlery and glasses. In the essay that founded the concept of 'soundscape' (1977) Raymond Murray Shafer linked the sounds produced in our daily life with the existing regulations to limit them: he noted that each Western country has laws about noise disturbance, even if its definition is purely random. Shafer quoted a 1969 regulation of the police of Genoa which forbade the slamming of shutters too loudly from nine in the evening to seven in the morning, thus recommending that they were closed as quietly as possible. In South Africa there were several regulations against radios, while in Chicago they were targeting air conditioning noise (Shafer 1977: 274). From the communal life perspective:

Listening in on the lives of others, a kind of involuntary spying, negatively affects neighbourly relations. Due to a lack of acoustic isolation or visual privacy, one may be overheard and surveilled by neighbours. Or, conversely, one may not avoid hearing them, or the neighbours are too visual-

ly exposed. In other words, not only does this acoustic espionage lend itself to gossip, discontent, and soft threats, but it is interesting also to notice that the noises are more connected to the anonymity of the visual disturbances, that is, small rudeness and violence that cannot be seen (and this is for anthropological reasons still unexplored). T h u s, t h e s p a c e o p e n s f o r a m u l t i p l e i d e n t i t y o f t h e O t h e r : we may be polite and correct neighbours when seen, and then, perhaps, harass our unknown family members with everyday noises. We will return to the issue of a multiple identity, radically connected to the forms of neighbourhood in the conclusion.

As said above, in law, noises are sanctioned on the basis of a complex concept of abnormality. Depending on the duration, repetition, and intensity and according to the circumstances, the judge must consider whether the conditions of a crime are met, once it is of course excluded that there are violations of the regulations (*Gemeinschaftsordnung* and *Hausordnung*) of the block of flats. However, what is "normal noise" is the subject of a cultural anthropology of sound that is blind to the individual lodger's need for quiet. Here, as we have seen, a peculiar relation is achieved between (informal) endurance and the right to act legally in order to defend one's own quality of life.

5.3 Actors

The point of view we have adopted allows us promptly to enumerate the inhabitants of this form of life without considering only a type of human occupants. Of course, the neighbours have their impact, and they are usually classified according to their presence to our senses, the amount of disturbance they cause us, and lastly, for the flats owners, according to their role in the council tenants (*Eigentümergemeinschaft*). While we usually expect confusion and poor care of the rooms they rent from students, lovers, of whom one has purely a hearing acquaintance, are no less typical, so are foreigners – people speaking different languages, cooking different food, behaving unpredictably or lacking in transparency – owners of noisy dogs, lonely elderly people of a thousand eccentricities or needs, professionals/owners of a business located in the apartment building, of whom, for the most part, one knows the coming and going of clients. As far as the building manager (*Hausverwalter/Hausverwalterin*) is concerned, it is not always an identified human actor: it is often an executive instance, normally – or in the best cases at least – characterised by faint and polite neutrality; sender of payment letters, or signatory of messages posted in the hall, communal staircase, on the entrance door.

Different is the role of the janitor, actually the most important mediator of the group. She/he plays the role of a shaman who keeps in communication intimate business and bureaucratic duties. The janitor knows (and in popcultural portaylas gladly so) everyone's business, delivers messages,

sorts packages, and directs repairmen. During the 18th and 19th centuries in France, the development of the condominium was made possible by the janitor, according to Jean Louis Deaucourt (1992: 40). This marked gradually the end of the aristocratic and monastic system of residence. The French Revolution brought about a new rule that required the doors of palaces to be locked at night, which resulted in the creation of a position dedicated to this task.

As Bonnin states (2005: 236), the janitor is given the dual mission of separating and joining. The separation concerns both humans and space: the janitor is entitled, indeed, to the crucial identification of the residents and their distinction from other external people, who may sometimes frequent the flats too assiduously. Furthermore, there is generally also the aspect of cleaning the communal areas or at least, in many cases, of managing the waste area, which, Bonnin continues, gives the janitor an additional role in terms of separation between dirty and clean, impure and pure. Lastly, the "kingdom" of the janitor is usually wider than the guardian area: he often guards cellars and attics, holds the keys to individual homes and all technical rooms.

Bonnin also marks the alternate fortunes of the function of access to the private life of residents, due to the use that the police of some political regimes, such as Francoism, have made of janitors. The bad reputation is such that especially in council housing, in France, the janitor sometimes refuses to guard, rejecting a function of pseudo-political control over illegal activities. On the contrary, the modern janitor is often proud of his discretion, and in an ethnography made in the 1990s by Bonnin, a janitor stated that if he wanted to, he could have made the whole building get a divorce (Bonnin 2005: 237). If, for reasons of space, we neglect the people who clean the communal areas and the potential repairers and technicians who periodically intervene, there is still a wide range of actors, distributed among animals, artefacts, and less tangible instances. In addition to pet animals (especially dogs, due to their acoustic presence), cars, often the subject of fierce disputes, and bicycles, it is worth dwelling

1. on space, in its versions of fullness and emptiness, as a set of all communal parts such as attics, foundations, pipes, doors, windows, balconies, corridors, hallways, stairways, terraces and gardens, due to the way in which it guides daily practices; and
2. on the regulations: they are actually real tables of the law, they are equivalent to corporate bylaws, and apart from the limit of not being able to override city, national or international laws, they can design, in a completely omnipotent way, the rights and duties of residents.

5.4 Space, thematic roles and modalities between normativity and law

A way in which space heavily affects cohabitation is by providing residents with relations of two types, depending on specific thematic roles given to the spatial and visual proximity. On the one hand, in fact, there are those we could define as public neighbours, that is, all those neighbours we meet in more or less envisaged spaces and occasions, such as the neighbours on the landing to whom we address a greeting on the thresholds of the respective flats in the morning. This type of neighbour in a Goffmanian sense sees only a controlled and cautious face of ourselves, and it is easier for her/him to treat us in a neutral to polite way. On the other hand, the architectural structure of a block of flats, the arrangement of windows, balconies, perhaps a terrace, force many of us to also have another type of neighbour, intimate neighbours, so to speak. This sort of proximity is totally involuntary and gives rise to embarrassing interactions. Intimate neighbours are those who see us eat, who listen to our telephone conversations, who can witness moments of carelessness and have access, even if only acoustically, to very private gestures and actions. In this second type of relationships, spontaneity and dignity are in mutual conflict, and it is not rare to feel slightly guilty and feel a resentful shame for these intrusions (of which, generally, the other person suffers democratically the unavoidability). Besides, space always has the power to build thematic roles based on architectural layouts that mutually designate victims and offenders: in a building several floors high, for instance, the residents of the lower floors will always be condemned to the falling of small objects from above (sometimes denying the restitution for revenge), cigarette butts, water dripping from the balconies etc. Similarly in cases where, for example, a restaurant is incorporated in the structure of an apartment house, its managers will involuntary haunt the neighbours with the kitchen smells, music, or evening bustle.

Finally, it seems useful to introduce a difference among spaces with respect to the modal competence of state and of doing. The block of flats inevitably provides a range of spaces that transform the organisation of the being-able-to-be and being-able-to-do. For instance, in everyday life, the communal spaces are organised into having-to-be-seen spaces (guardian area, internal courtyard); being-able-to-be-seen spaces (stairs, cellars, balconies); being-able-not-to-be-seen spaces (blind corridors, dark/closed corners of communal parts).[22] Usually, in this third type of space, the conduct depends strictly on the awareness of a cancelled intersubjective control, and here a staircase can be of service to a couple similarly to how the pillar of a suburban bridge can be of service to a tagger engaged in a night performance.

This third form of common space recalls the philosophical-ethical ambiguity of the concept of 'common' which, if in a certain rhetoric is understood for its sense of belonging to everyone, often semiotically it reveals itself exactly as the opposite, as nobody's space. As for the competence of doing,

it is interesting to draw attention to the fact that among the communal parts, there are some on which it is possible to act, they are spaces that we should preserve every day, as good residents, and spaces that belong to us and for which we are responsible without being able to act on them (the pipes, the roof, the foundations).

6. Conclusion

As stated above by Calabrese (cf. paragraph 5.2.4) the language of thresholds, in a block of flats as much as in any other building, is the major means of uncountable relations, so that we could face the issue of house and communal life as a language itself. It would be easily confirmed both on the side of social normativity and the law. Following Calabrese, the apartment comes after the block of flats as a new articulatory device of limits, public and private spaces – many may recall personal experiences with other tenants in a shared flat which are hard to forget – others shall agree to the image of an apartment shared with a partner, immediately transformed in a block of flats itself due to a marital crisis.[23] In addition, legal norms often contain concepts that must be interpreted semiotically. For instance, in most civil law systems, trespassing is linked to the notion of domicile (*Wohnsitz*). Domicile refers to the space a subject occupies according to their rights, which no one else can access. A domicile is any private place where a person's life, work, or other activities take place. Consequently, a professional office or a hotel room may also be considered a domicile. Additionally, a domicile could be the garden or garage of a house or any other place where a person's private life takes place, even if only occasionally. It is worth noting that entering someone's car (or a camper van) without permission is also considered trespassing.

However, the outlined approach should have highlighted how, for ethnosemiotics, investigating a complex life form such as the block of flats is not equivalent only to an anthropology of the neighbourhood, a history of architectural forms, a sociology of space or good manners, and certainly not to a study of the texts and acts that regulate it. At the cost, or perhaps, with the advantage, of a certain eclecticism, we have tried to define aspects and problems that can be summarised in four considerations.

The space of cohabitation, like several other forms of space, is carved by intersubjective relationships, but at the same time it can design their procedures and outcomes. The individual nature of the residents of a block of flats is fragmented and resized both by the dual character of the normative practices that established themselves (both informal rules and formal laws) and by a multiple perceptual existence, and the fact of being visible/invisible; audible/inaudible, often with the result of the proliferation of multiple identities and behaviours related to camouflage, duplicity, conspiracy of silence, non-responsibility. We could have dealt with the

issues addressed also from the rather crucial point of view of a semiotics of passions, or we could have paid, from the thematic point of view, more attention to the economic aspects: both possibilities remain to be explored, and therefore our observations cannot claim exhaustiveness. According to an ethnosemiotic perspective, there is no ontological distinction between social and juridical normativity. This determines our choices in investigating problems of social normativity. To mention a statement by Lancioni and Marsciani, at the time of the foundation of ethosemiotics, if the difference "between sociosemiotics and ethnosemiotics is that between studying tv programs and studying telly" (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007: 69), the one between anthropology and ethnosemiotics is that between studying neighbours and studying the block of flats.

Notes

*   Translated from the Italian by Valentina Marcaccini and Giuditta Bassano.
1   Philippopoulos-Mihalopoulos expands the perspective of the legal geography field of studies, which we shall describe in the second paragraph.
2   Before it was published in *Sémiotique et Sciences Sociales* (1976), to which we refer for the current quotations, the analysis was printed in the series of *Documents de travail* of the Urbino University, in August 1971. The title was unchanged, *Analyse sémiotique d'un discours juridique*, but not the header, which was: "par un groupe dirigé par A. J. Greimas". The file was composed of 50 pages, although Greimas pointed out how it was a summary of a former draft of 181 pages.
3   The term "recognition" (*reconnaissance*) is used as a synonym to that of "validation" (*vérification*), but just from page 98 on.
4   Interview with Paolo Fabbri, "Dal diritto alla semiotica: un percorso intellettuale", *Semiotica Cultura Comunicazione*, http://semioweb.msh-paris.fr/corpus/SCC/IT/ Event.asp?id=1089&url=/corpus/SCC/1089_it/Shots.aspparis.fr/corpus/scc/IT/_ EncycloPubByKeyword.asp?motCle=Anni+Sessanta+della+semiotica [last accessed on April 21, 2022].
5   The essay was followed by other publications in strong continuity with its issues (see i.e. Jackson 1988a, 2012, 2017).
6   The definition in negative also explains the distance between ethnosemiotics and a "linguistics", a "psychology", a "philosophy of language" and even "a semiotics". About the latter, it is further explained: "in the way that it is not a syntax, a semantics, a pragmatics, a theory of signs, an empirical or formal vocation, a theory of interpretation and therefore it is not a theory of interpretative inferences, a theory of the functioning of the semantic universe interpreted as globally determinable (encyclopaedia), but it is neither a grammar of textual production, nor a theory of content and it is not a theory of expression [...]. In the same way, it is not a theory of the functioning of texts within given *a priori* cultural contexts (semiospheres), and for this reason it is not a semiotics of culture (other than the fact of not knowing what 'a culture' is)" (Marsciani 2020: 2, my translation).

7   Marsciani stresses a fundamental assumption, that is to charge back to Roland
     Barthes's *Le Système de la mode* (Barthes 1967).

8   According to Fontanille (2017: 8–9) ethnosemiotics is a way of revealing a content
     level which corresponds to a level of expression we "watch without seeing, listen
     without hearing, experience without perceiving it".

9   See Marsciani (2012: 83–94) for the relation between phenomenology and semio-
     tics with respect to the foundation of the text; see Marrone (2014), Fabbri (1998,
     2017) for a general discussion on the notion of text within contemporary semio-
     tics.

10   See the analysis of everyday practices in a tourist village studied by Marrone as a
     "spatial text" (Marrone 2013: 231–257).

11   There is also convergence with the well-known ethnographic work carried out by
     Bruno Latour in a science laboratory and at the French *Conseil d'Etat* (2002; with
     Steve Wollgar 1979). Anyway, this convergence needs to be questioned and
     enlarged, since, at least in these cases, Latour's analysis model remains anthro-
     pology. The issue, indeed, is always that of studying "savages" (institutions, scien-
     tific and professional practices) from the perspective of an unaware-observer, who
     "stays long, learns the language, keeps himself informed, hangs around" (Latour
     2008: 349–350), in short someone who does everything a good ethnographer
     should do. From the ethnosemiotic perspective, what changes is that (1) there is
     no epistemological distinction between constructing objects in this way and con-
     structing them from one's most banal daily routine (a bath, a corkscrew, a visit to
     the dentist) (Marsciani 2007: 63–74, 17–38; Marsciani 1999: 159–176), since in
     ethnosemiotics we do not think of signification according to strictly independent
     regimes of enunciation, a key element in Latour's recent work (2012); (2) as already
     said, in our case there is a strong approach to method, which in Latour's thought
     is one of the least relevant element.

12   There is no sense that could deplete the incalculable density of a practice, even
     an apparently simple and clear one like a daily "path" from point A to point B. The
     object can be constructed by focusing on the problem of its delimitation; we can
     ask ourselves how space influences the path; the path can be segmented in dif-
     ferent units depending on the space, the orientation, the urgent need to end it; only
     discontinuities can be isolated (and for many different reasons); that path can be
     considered with respect to its alternatives; we can pay particular attention to the
     aspect of the visibility that the path ensures (in various senses), or we can con-
     centrate on other perceptual aspects, such as smells and sounds; and all this would
     still not be anything pertinent, if, for example, in the narrative sense it were an
     escape, or a chase, or a walk performed by somebody undergoing a rehabilitation
     process after an accident, or even the search for a lost set of keys.

13   Here we mean the residential private cohabitation in its broader sense, remaining
     aware that French, Italian, German and English provide for specific differences
     among types of buildings/forms of cohabitation (i.e. "pavillon" *vs* "immeuble"; "vil-
     letta" *vs* "condominio"; "Reihenhaus" *vs* "Wohnung" *vs* "Sozialhäuser"; "terraced
     house" *vs* "apartment building" *vs* "block of flats"). Therefore, we will not deal with
     how in these different cultures some forms of cohabitation are more standard than
     others. Moreover, this choice also prevents us from paying attention to the forms

of social housing, about which a wide bibliography exists (cf. for the case of metrop-
olises in Latin America McGuirck 2014; Caldeira 2001). Finally, a wide field of study
we cannot explore is the one which connects contemporary urban life in flats to
the social evil of loneliness, c.f. the phenomenon of the *kodoku-shi* in contempo-
rary Japan, the "silent deaths" (Dahl 2019: 83–102).

14   Roland Barthes based his course at Collège de France of the year 1976/1977 on
     sociability, questioning the idea of a "respectable distance" from others, within social
     and personal spaces (Barthes 2002). Many pages of the course transcription are
     about concepts closely related to home and neighbourhood, such as the idea of
     closure itself, those of protection and ban, border, and limit. About the bourgeois
     apartment, Barthes writes: "this general territory (the building) defines the essence
     of the community: the bourgeois worthiness. Inside this territory, other smaller ter-
     ritories (but strictly delimited): the apartments [which] define the canonical attitude
     to the family. The bourgeois staircase with all the closed doors works then as a
     delimiting space. Closure=signal" (Barthes 2002: 93–95). Below (178–179) Barthes
     reflects on space "as the absolute good of the consumer society: what is expen-
     sive is space. In the houses, in the apartments, on trains, airplanes, attending class-
     es and seminars, the luxury item is having around some space, namely 'someone'
     but few: central problem of the i d i o r r y t h m i e – the way Barthes calls the "uto-
     pian, middle, edenic form of living-together" (Barthes 2002: 36).

15   In a wider essay that contains some ideas also presented here, about to be pub-
     lished in the journal *Actes Sémiotiques*, which is more focused on some legal mat-
     ters which are just mentioned in passing here, we trace a correlation with the notion
     of "interpretation" of social systems proposed by Niklas Luhmann (Luhmann 1977:
     62–76).

16   See Bernardi et al. (eds. 2015) for a merciless discussion on the relations between
     law and the use of law in a perspective of maintaining social order in urban plan-
     ning and residential matters, based on the work of Henri Lefebvre (1970, 1974).

17   The issue for Floch was to "approach a path as a text" (Floch 1990: 61). Among the
     operations carried out for this purpose there was a crucial "segmentation", that is
     "the disassembling of the path in a finite number of units, stages or moments in rela-
     tion to one another according to specific rules" (*ibidem*). We have adopted this point
     of view considering spatial thresholds and not stages. Similar is the way in which
     Kevin Lynch understands urban "margins" in his model of the city (Lynch 1960:
     78–82), and Hamon's metaliterary reflection: "each architectural object can be seen
     by the literary text as a discriminatory, differential object, which analyses space by
     interfaces and proximity and divisions and contiguity: an object that opens and
     obstructs, distinguishes something conjoint from something disjoint, embraces,
     rejects or filters, creates compartments, distributes, rearranges, classifies, separates
     objects from subjects, and therefore naturally organizes strategies of desire, of want-
     ing to do of the actors" (Hamon 1989: 31). See also Hannerz (1990: 431–441).

18   The first one was built on Boulevard Michelet in Marsiglia in 1952 and it is consid-
     ered a masterpiece of Modernism, since it follows many of the typical elements of
     Le Corbusier's intuitions: the services included in the residential complex, the over-
     coming of the terrace house to free farming land, the garden-roof, etc.

19 Lifts are not mentioned, here, for space reasons; however, Italian law puts lifts at the same level of corridors, hallways, stairways, terraces, and gardens. Legally, lifts are thus communal spaces of the same kind as the courtyard, although one shall hardly ignore its specific dimension in terms of a conflicting set of social-normative rules ruling the human and proxemic interactions inside a lift.

20 Well-known and very eloquent is a low-angle shot of the stairwell in a Parisian building in Roman Polanski's horror-thriller *Le Locataire* from 1976.

21 The reportage can be freely accessed. Alice Valente Visco, *Viaggio all'interno di un condominio al tempo del Coronavirus*, 2020, http://cargocollective.com/ViVa/Viaggio-all-interno-di-un-condominio-al-tempo-del-Coronavirus [last accessed on November 12, 2023].

22 On this theoretical aspect much research has been conducted, but the main reference is still the work of Landowski. See Eric Landowski's research on the *régimes de visibilité* (1989b: 113–136).

23 I am thankful to Gianfranco Marrone for these observations.

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Image sources

Fig. 5. © Giuditta Bassano, photo taken by the author: *Inner courtyard in Rome (via Paolo Emilio)* (2022).

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Cognitive Semiotics*

Luigi Lobaccaro

Summary. This paper offers a broad overview of Italian cognitive semiotics from its origin, in 1988, to its latest developments. Starting from Eco's novel *The Island of the Day Before* (Eco 1994), the paper tries to delineate a coherent path of the discipline by keeping track of its most fundamental stages: the encounter with cognitive semantics, the reflections on the experiential dimension of meaning, the problems and possibilities offered by the theories of embodiment, and the dialogue with 4E Cognition. In this journey, particular attention is offered to the way in which the relationship between semiosis and perception has been articulated from *Kant and the Platypus* (Eco 1997) to *Cognitive Semiotics* (Paolucci 2021).

Keywords. Cognitive semiotics, semiotics of perception, meaning and experience, 4E Cognition, Italian semiotics

Zusammenfassung. Dieser Beitrag bietet einen umfassenden Überblick über die italienische kognitive Semiotik von ihren Anfängen im Jahr 1988 bis zu ihren jüngsten Entwicklungen. Ausgehend von Ecos bahnbrechendem Werk *The Island of the Day Before* [Die Insel des vorigen Tages] (Eco 1994), versucht dieser Artikel einen kohärenten Weg der Disziplin zu skizzieren, indem ihre wichtigsten Etappen nachgezeichnet werden: die Begegnung mit der kognitiven Semantik, die Überlegungen zur Erlebnisdimension von Bedeutung, die Probleme und Möglichkeiten, die die Theorien der Verkörperung bieten, und der Dialog mit 4E-Kognition. Ein besonderes Augenmerk wird dabei auf die Beziehung zwischen Semiose und Wahrnehmung gelegt, wie sie von *Kant and the Platypus* [Kant und das Schnabeltier] (Eco 1997) bis zu *Cognitive Semiotics* (Paolucci 2021) artikuliert wurde.

Schlüsselwörter. Kognitive Semiotik, Semiotik der Wahrnehmung, Bedeutung und Erleben, 4E-Kognition, Italienische Semiotik

1.   Cognitive semiotics in Italy

Leafing through this volume, even a non-expert reader will easily realise how difficult it is to speak of semiotics as a unitary disciplinary field. Maybe, asking ourselves what semiotics are, rather than what semiotics is, helps us to get over this embarrassment because talking about semiotics as a plurality of positions is the only way to approach a field of studies so various, multiform, and constantly evolving.

This difficulty is all the more evident when we speak about cognitive semiotics. Indeed, the schools of thought that apply to this label do not always mean the same thing, and they often carry out research programmes with methodologies and theories that are notably different. This is no exception in the Italian community, where the term "cognitive semiotics" is likewise ambiguous and not free from misunderstandings: when someone thinks of cognitive semiotics, she generally refers to the type of interpretative semiotics that Umberto Eco formulated in *A Theory of Semiotics* (1975). However, this is only one part of a broader story.

In this first interpretation, the compass of cognitive semiotics is the philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce, whose fundamental ideas are that mind and semiosis coincide; that cognitive processes are all abductive processes produced by semiosis; and that the semiosis is not dependent on man, but the man is dependent on semiosis (CP 5.213–5.317). The adjective "cognitive" attributed to the philosophy of Peirce (Bonfantini 1980; Eco 1984) here indicates a very close identity between semiotic theory, gnoseology and epistemology, whose anti-psychologism went so well with the semiotics of the 1970s and 1980s when "the mind was considered a bad word" (Eco 2006: 5:55–5:57, my translation).

However, a second interpretation arrived soon, which spread in the 1990s particularly in Northern Europe, that was practically the opposite of the previous. Thanks to the success of psychology and the cognitive sciences, it was widely believed that in order to better understand the phenomena of meaning-making, it was necessary to investigate the cognitive mechanisms that were the basis of semiosis through a series of cross-methodologies that could show how cognition involves the semiotic dimension (Daddesio 1994; Brandt 1995). Thus, the anti-psychologism fundamental in the first interpretation was opposed by the psychologism constitutive of the second one.[1]

Both these interpretations have been widely developed in Italy, where there is an established tradition of studies on Peircean cognitive semiotics (Bellucci 2017; Fabbrichesi 1993; Fadda 2013; Proni 2017) and a widespread interest by cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind in meaning, language and communication studies. However, a third interpretation of cognitive semiotics has been developed for the last 30 years mainly at the University of Bologna. The present article focuses on this third approach that represents the most organic and structured attempt in the Italian landscape to formulate a framework that takes together the other two interpretations,

providing a new and original research programme perfectly consistent with the reflections that had animated the semiotic debate of previous years.

From now on, I will use the label "Italian cognitive semiotics" when referring to this third research program.

The queries on which Italian cognitive semiotics reflects today are the same as those of the 1970s and 1980s: how can we know and interpret the world? How do we communicate with others? How do signs, meanings, texts, and languages, and ultimately all semiotic systems, interact with our experience and provide us with "a cognitive scaffolding which represents the background of our perception of the world" (Paolucci 2021: VIII)?

What has radically changed is the way in which these questions are answered. Italian cognitive semiotics, indeed, continuously measures up with a series of heterogeneous and multidisciplinary perspectives, trying to acquire instruments to resolve problems that still remain open in classical semiotics. In this dialogue, the preferred partners are the contemporary cognitive sciences, which must always be evaluated starting from the specificity of the semiotic paradigm. The result is a transformative hybridisation that shapes the domains at stake and allows us to rethink semiotics through the cognitive sciences and cognitive sciences through semiotics, in order to improve what for Umberto Eco was the only philosophy possible: the one that "reflects on the human being as an animal that interprets the world" (Eco 2006: 8:39– 8:45, my translation).

2.   Naturally, a novel

What do a physical place like the University of San Marino and a fictional place like a deserted ship named "Daphne" wrecked in the middle of the Pacific have in common? At first sight, nothing. But actually, these two places have given birth and inexhaustible nourishment to Italian cognitive semiotics. Two stories intertwine here.

Our first story begins in 1988, when the field of interpretative semiotics was about to end its battle against the deconstructive drifts of hermetic semiosis and restarted a discussion on biosemiotics and the threshold between nature and culture (Kull 2018).

That same year, Eco founded the *Centre for Semiotic and Cognitive Studies* at the University of San Marino, which, also thanks to the direction of Patrizia Violi, soon became the epicentre for the reflections that would encompass the following twenty years: here, several conferences were organised with the aim of establishing an interdisciplinary dialogue between the internationally most appreciated and well-known scholars who dealt with topics that, today, we would not hesitate to lead back to cognitive semiotics.[2]

During that period, cognitive semantics was acquiring more and more importance in language and cognition studies. Cognitive semantics' approaches shared the idea that meaning directly depended on a deeper cognitive capacity for conceptualisation and mental representation. With the propos-

al of a strong semantic theory based on the role of the world, culture, and experience in creating concepts, they tried to move away from Chomskyan cognitivism and a purely syntactic and modular conception of language.

Interpretative semiotics started to be interested in cognitive semantics mainly because they had in common the same polemical targets: classical cognitivism and truth-conditional semantics. So, although accompanied by a bit of hesitation on both sides, a debate arose that marked the semiotics of years to come.[3]

Our second story takes place in 1643 on the ship "Daphne" and is narrated in the most philosophical of Umberto Eco's novels: *The Island of the Day Before*. In an unusual way[4] and with his proverbial irony, Eco himself pointed out the importance of this work for his semiotics when in 1998, responding to a provocation by Marconi about some of the theses of *Kant and the Platypus* (Eco 1997), he said:

> I do not know how dogs think. Marconi reproaches me for not wanting to stick my nose into the black box of humans, let alone in that of animals. But I certainly do not refuse to make thought experiments on the subject – indeed I often make them in free zones, and I would like to remind readers that in my latest novel, *The Island of the Day Before*, taking up various ancient speculations, the most recent being by Gassendi, I tried to ask myself how stones think. Nor do I consider these pages pure narrative play, and I attribute to them, if only privately, some philosophical dignity (Eco, Ferraris and Marconi 1998: 43).

As Paolucci (2017a, 2017b) has pointed out, there is a double soul of Echian philosophy made by fragments of non-philosophy. Fiction, in fact, would have the role of showing what theory cannot explain, bringing together in the cosmological and closed dimension of the novel the debates and theories that Eco elaborated and confronted every day.

With *The Island of the Day Before*, something even more extraordinary happens: the novel not only shows but anticipates the themes and the problems of the theory. The plot is straightforward: a narrator retrieves papers from a diary dating back to 1643, which contains letters that the adventurer Roberto de la Grive wrote after having been shipwrecked in the middle of the Pacific on a deserted ship in front of an island that was near but unreachable.

In these letters, Roberto tells us about the days spent on the Daphne between the remembrances of his past life and the notes on his activities as a castaway. In these reports, Roberto often strives to account for the wonder provoked by the unknown place, resorting to very daring metaphors. In addition, Roberto decides to write a novel about his beloved and his supposed brother/nemesis Ferrante, a fictional story that he will end up believing after a fever dream.

Thus, Eco's work stages the link between memory, imagination and experience, the power and the limits of language, the value of metaphor as a conceptual instrument[5], the fatigue of hypotyposis, and more, the border between realism and nominalism, and between reality, dream, and fiction (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. Marco Turambar d'Alessandro, Tarowean – Il giorno delle sorprese, 2022. Inspired by Umberto Eco's *The Island of the Day Before*. Courtesy of the author.

Eco decided not to use words that did not yet exist in the 17th Century to write the novel. This self-imposition causes the descriptive effort of Roberto (and Eco) to coincide with that of the entire encyclopaedic repertoire of the Baroque period, forced to infinite contortions in an attempt to approximate, to verify and recognise what that world of flashes and colours could have represented for an Italian of the time. Here is a taste of it:

> If until that day he had never heard birds really sing, neither could Roberto say he had ever seen birds, at least not in such guises, so many that he asked himself if they were in their natural state or if an artist's hand had painted them and decorated them for some pantomime, or to feign an army on parade, each foot-soldier and horseman cloaked in his own standard. An embarrassed Adam, he could give no names to these creatures, except the names of birds of his own hemisphere: That one is a heron, he said to himself, that a crane, a quail […]. But it was like calling a goose a swan (Eco 1994: 31).

Roberto, educated to "see through the words", is now forced to create new ones. He must create new rules in order to interpret the new reality that he is facing: "Roberto did not simply gaze at the constellations: he was obliged to define them" (*ivi*: 326). Thus, *The Island of the Day Before* is a long thought experiment to understand how meaning, language, cognition and experiences intertwine: how can Roberto explain what he sees? And how does he recognise the thing he has never seen before? Is the metaphor sufficient to express the meaning of the experience? Is there a meaning in experience even without the language?

This is the first book of Italian cognitive semiotics because it s h o w e d the problems that the theory tried to e x p l a i n and because, even nowadays, it pushes the reader to wonder about the power of semio-linguistic systems and their role in scaffolding our knowledge of the world and shaping our experience.

3.   The experientiality of semantics

The first answer to the questions formulated during those years was Patrizia Violi's book *Meaning and Experience* (1997), in which the semiologist reflected on the lexical meaning holding together the different descriptions provided by the main semantic traditions (logical-analytical, structuralist, and cognitive). The book's thesis appeared very strong at the time and consisted mainly in claiming a non-autonomy of the linguistic meaning: for Violi, it was impossible to describe meaning with only differential models or componential analysis of semantic traits. The reason was, that lexical meaning is as deeply implicated with the cultural system as with our conceptual, inferential, emotional and perceptual systems that facilitate recognition and categorisation operations.

Thus, the book's argumentation proceeds through a close debate between the principal semantic models, particularly those of cognitive semantics, showing some of their critical issues, limits, and naïvetés.

Eleanor Rosch's prototype theory (1973) represented a crucial point in this argumentation because it was the theory that, for Violi, allowed semantics to cross the boundaries between the intra-linguistic, conceptual, and experiential dimensions of lexical meaning description. Prototypes are typical conceptual models that support the modalities of organisation and categorisation through 'analogies' and 'similarities'. These modalities, in Violi's account, provided the basis to describe meaning using an encyclopaedic and inferential model. For Violi, a prototype was not the meaning of a word but its conceptual background: a categorial and semantic regularity that, once created, helped to stabilise particular inferential paths that connect the meaning of a word to the experience of the world.

Starting from the critique of the standard prototype theory, Violi advanced her original theoretical proposal: lexical semantics should be

a.   e x p e r i e n t i a l because it is necessarily founded on schemes (intersubjective, encyclopaedic and perceptive) that allow us a knowledge of the world, and
b.   i n f e r e n t i a l, because words are already local organisations of some of these schemes and interact with them, providing interpretive and inferential anchors to meaning understanding and use.

In *Meaning and Experience*, a series of theoretical instruments were introduced to explain the intrinsic dynamical regularity of the lexical meaning:

"essential" and "typical properties", "semantic" and "encyclopaedic competence", the "standard context" etc. These tools accumulatively helped to create an original theory whereby meaning is the result of the social uses of the language that regulates the encyclopaedic meaning through a form of intersubjective organisation.

This idea was later further radicalised by the author, who in a later essay (Violi 2006) explained the importance of the situated and intersubjective dimensions present when forming what is called the "semantic potential" of words. In a few words, the linguistic use is the function that creates a typification of a word's meaning dependent on the frequency of its actualisations. The abstract type that semantics tries to describe is directly equivalent to the result of semiotic 'adjustment' processes that take place i n v i v o and that allow the elevation of a given token to a type only according to local encyclopaedic pertinence.

Violi's reflections have been absolutely fundamental for successive semiotic research and have anticipated some of the themes that are still at the centre of the philosophical and linguistic debates in Italy: on the one hand, the traces of the union of social and experiential dimensions can be found in the discussions of philosophy of language with the "embodied turn" (Liuzza, Borghi and Cimatti 2010; Diodato 2019) and in the investigation of the boundaries between language and perception (Cimatti and Paternoster 2015); on the other hand, the ideas that connected experience, body, practices and semantics have been re-discussed in a tradition that comes to Italy from the French cognitive and morphogenetic semantics (La Mantia 2012; Bondì ed. 2012; Galofaro 2012).

4.   Semiosis and perception

4.1 "Kant and the Platypus" and some consequences on visual semiotics

Also in 1997, Umberto Eco published *Kant and the Platypus*. This book is the acme of Eco's attempt to merge Hjelmslevian structuralism and Peircean semiotics. Here, Eco resumed some of the debates that had animated semiotics in the 1970s and 1980s[6], addressing them in a new way: the problem of iconism, the discussion on the lower semiotic threshold, the themes of reference, recognition and categorisation, the theme of the mirror image and of the truth.

The main aim of the book was to define the relationship between semiosis, perception and reality: if in previous years Eco had dealt with reality, identified as the dynamic object of Peirce, only as a dimension *ad quem* of semiosis, in *Kant and the Platypus* he started from the problem of the *a quo* of semiosis, questioning how starting from the dynamic object, that constitutes an amorphous continuum, we arrive at harnessing it with the nets of signification.

The first step of the book consists in defining this *a quo* dimension of the reality, defined as

> Something-that-sets-to-kicking us and says 'Talk!' to us – or 'Talk about me!' or again, 'Take me into consideration!' (Eco 1997: 14).

It is the "being" that pushes us to meaning-making. However, this reality doesn't facilitate its representation through signs with a correspondence between semiosis and world: its primary role is to limit the interpretation through lines of resistance that say "NO" to some inferential processes.[7]

Then, how does this relationship between being and semiosis work? This is what Eco explained in the rest of the book, trying to define "the characteristics of a cognitive semantics" (Eco 1997: 5). Eco's thesis was that between the continuum of dynamic object and signification, there is an intermediate level that pre-structures the continuum: it is the level of perception that works as a medium between world and meaning. Perception is, in Eco's opinion, a particular dimension in which non-semiotic and dyadic processes (the so-called "primary iconism") come together with triadic semiotic elements that allow the cognitive functions of identification, recognition, and categorisation of a token under a type. Therefore, perception has a hybrid form, in which the result of the stimulus-response adequacy between reality and retinal image, that is, the primary icon (conceived as the lower threshold of semiosis), needs an elaboration through a perceptive judgement, already imbued with semiosis which means with triadic relations.

This theoretical move has been defined as a form of "semiotization of the referent" (Violi 2000: 7): not only semiotic processes have a role in the determination of reality, but they meet it halfway, in the area of perception where the continuum already exhibits lines of tendencies and resistance that stabilise categorial parameters of the experience. The role of perception is more evident when we face an unknown object, as has happened with the platypus at the end of the 18th Century: the explorers, although they did not possess cognitive schemas for the recognition of the animal, started the process of interpretation from a perceptive pre-structuration of the referent that led them to an attempt of categorisation, compared by Eco to the Kantian reflective judgment. Because there was a lack of an immediate object useful to recognise the platypus, it must be built *ex novo* starting from the perceptive manifestation of the object through chains of inferences and contracts.

In Eco's theory, the creation *ex novo* of the immediate object is a result of an act of imagination that produces a "schematization" of the percept that provides a first categorial hold, called "cognitive type", that is a private and individualistic schema, directly connected to the subject's capacity for conceptualisation. When the characteristics of the cognitive type are shared with others through signs, it acquires a public dimension that transforms it into a contractable m e a n i n g, called "nuclear content", the public side of the "cognitive type".

Cognitive types and nuclear contents interact continuously and are shaped simultaneously by the public dimension of meaning, the encyclopaedia, which provides other series of knowledge, called "molar contents", related to the couple cognitive type/nuclear content.[8] Eco analysed how the interplay between semiosis, perception and encyclopaedia produces the capacity for recognition, individuation, and reference, underlying the contractual and fallible dimension of every act of knowledge and categorisation.

Finally, the last part of *Kant and the Platypus* tackled the famous debate on iconism that was one of the hot topics of semiotics in the 1970s, updating it thanks to the new considerations on reality and perception made in the first part of the book. Here, Eco reconsidered some of his previous ideas about the conventional status of images, and he admitted that iconic signs acquire meaning not only for a relationship of similarity with the represented object created conventionally, but even thanks to non-conventional relationships of likeness with the referent. The likeness of a sign with its object is produced through surrogates of perceptual stimuli that hit the perceptive field of the subject, causing perceptive effects that are really similar to those of the represented objects. Thus, there are different types of iconic signs (or "hypoicons"). Some have a meaning mainly based on the likeness with the immediate object and are more motivated; others are more based on similarity and are more conventional. However, it is important to say that, for Eco, a fully motivated sign, a pure likeness, cannot exist. When there are purely motivated images, there are no signs, as the case of the mirror images shows, because there is no kind of mediation between the object and sign.

This division between likeness and similarity brought Eco to elaborate a new theoretical proposal that differentiated the kind of interpretive modality of iconic signs. Indeed, the iconic sign can be perceived simply through the dimension of surrogate stimuli, and in this case, the interpretation is a basic semiotic process similar to the one used in the standard perception: this modality is called "alpha mode". On the contrary, when the image is considered as the occurrence of a semiotic relation with expression and content planes, there is the "beta mode".

These final considerations expressed by Eco in the last part of *Kant and the Platypus* were highly significant for the reconsideration of some classical problems in the semiotics of the image, but perhaps they have not been fully exploited yet.

Piero Polidoro has undoubtedly been the scholar who has continued Eco's last theoretical reflections on the hypoicons, trying to form a dialogue between structural semiotics and North European cognitive semiotics. On this point, a first contribution by Polidoro, that needs to be reported, consists of the attempt to update the theory of alpha and beta modes, thanks to a comparison with the cognitive semiotics of Sonesson and with the theories of vision of David Marr, so as to make it heuristic in the analysis of particular perceptual phenomena such as trompe-l'œil and their effects (Polidoro 2012). A second contribution comprises the recent proposal to reformulate the themes of the meaning of plastic formants in semiotics start-

ing from the embodied theories of Johnson and comparing them with Meyer's theory of perception and with Eco's theories (Polidoro 2019).

4.2 The issue of primary iconism and "The Threshold and the Infinity"

The whole Echian approach to perceptive semiosis in 1997 depended on a reflection that started from Peirce's writings, tracing an intuitionist turning point, reflected in the concept of primary iconism introduced by Eco. In fact, Eco, relying on some interpretations of the Peircean writings and the studies on vision of David Marr (1982), believed that perception was a semiotic process divided into phases, in which, starting from an element of "firstness" (understood as pure quality), and passing through the "secondness" (an attribution of that quality to its object), we finally reach a phase of interpretive "thirdness", in which we could speak ultimately of the immediate object, the object represented by the sign.

This interpretation proved to be problematic, as was pointed out to Eco by one of his students, Claudio Paolucci, since his doctoral thesis (for a reconstruction, see Paolucci 2015). In fact, Peirce has never thought of the categories of firstness, secondness and thirdness as elements logically and temporally separated, but always as categorical elements included in every process of knowledge, constituents of the structure underlying any phenomenal manifestation that Peirce called "phaneron" (hence the name "phaneroscopy", Fabbrichesi 2018). Paolucci then pointed out that Eco, when he identified the pre-semiotic dimension of perception and the irruption of novelty in the perceptive field, performed a non-semiotic type of reasoning, forgetting the Peircean lesson: in identifying a new *a quo* as something that kicks us and pushes us to the exercise of interpretation, Eco ignored that for Peirce the something new, the firstness, always emerges from a field of regularity on which it stands, the thirdness.

In the following years, on the basis of these considerations and a critique of Marr's visual models (1982), Paolucci (2010: chapt. 4, 2017c, 2021) would propose a new updated model of perception that considers the Peircean phaneroscopy and Jean Petitot's morphogenetic studies (Petitot 2011). In Paolucci's theory, a phase of primary iconism of the stimulus-response type could not exist because the stimuli that hit the retina are constantly shaped and modified by sub-personal morphological processes. For example, this happens in perceptual illusions and gestalt experiments or in the case of the smoothing over of the blind spot in the visual system.

Eco replied to these critiques in a very important essay of 2007 that marked a discontinuity in the Italian cognitive semiotics that, in my opinion, is at least as important as that introduced with *Kant and the Platypus*. In "The Threshold and the Infinity" (in Eco 2007), Eco reformulated his idea of a p r i m a r y i c o n, no longer seen as an element that can be placed below the lower threshold of semiotics, but as "a primum for me, at that moment, and it is such only in some respect or capacity" (Eco 2007: 516).

Thus, the firstness is the result of an act of molar pertinentisation operated by a subject in a broader background of semiotic molecular processes of which she knows nothing. It can be noticed that Eco's cosmological-ontological argumentation dissolves, leaving room for a more phenomenological one. There is a threshold then, but it is relative to a subject, and Eco uses it in order to show that the subject is always historically placed in semiosis and cannot map itself to a molecular level no matter how hard she tries. The subject can start only from a *primum* that she has to cut and extract from the flow of semiosis in progress (Fabbrichesi 2017). That is the real revolution: among the infinitesimal and molecular processes that pertain to the cosmological level and the processes of "molar semiosis", in which there is something that stands in front of someone and attracts her attention, Eco introduced a living operator that since *A Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 1975: 314–319) he had always refused to treat: the Subject.

Nevertheless, a fundamental doubt remained. What (or who) is this subject? Eco defined it as

> any instance capable of saying I that somehow enters into the semiosis from the material and corporal outside-what I am speaking about is a brain (Eco 2007: 525).

Then, the notion of Eco's subject seems to correspond to a self-conscious brain, while when he spoke about the molecular semiosis, he seemed to refer almost exclusively to semiotic processes that take place in the brain at a subconscious level. Thus, on the one hand, Eco admitted a semioticity of unconscious cognitive processes; on the other, placing himself in an internalist perspective, he recognised this semiosis as an operation made by the brain alone. It seems strange since, at that time, the function of the body in semiosis was being discussed.

5.   From the body to the world

5.1 Which body for which semiotics?

The first decade of the 2000s saw the explosion in psychological, cognitive, philosophical, and linguistic studies of what has been defined as the corporeal or embodied turn. During those years the body, previously relegated to a secondary role in the classical cognitive sciences, assumed a completely new centrality and very different theories were spreading, stressing the need to anchor cognitive processes to a bodily dimension.

However, in an excellent article of 2003, Patrizia Violi, who was one of the first to emphasise the importance of the bodily dimension in studies on cognition and meaning, stressed the dangers of what was becoming a real cultural trend, calling for prudence. Many models of embodiment, in fact, began to proliferate without a unified line among the different paradigms that used them, consequently producing very different models of the body

that ended up being treated as self-evident concepts. Therefore, from the outset, Violi pointed out that there were different notions of embodiment, some weaker and others stronger, and she also has shed light on the different models of the body, now understood as a body-brain, now as a situated body, now as a "body schema".

In those years, the theories that spread the most were those of "embodied cognition" (Varela, Thompson and Rosch 1991; Lakoff and Johnson 1999), a strong conception of embodiment according to which the nature of the human mind is determined and shaped by the characteristics of the human body. Soon, however, many of these embodied theories have hypostatised the concept of the body, considering it as a given entity. What Violi contested the most was exactly the idea of the body as a pre-given fact, while the different meanings that it assumed within different theories effectively showed its nature as a constructed theoretical concept, a nature that was always forgotten and overshadowed: we build a representation of the body every time we try to explain how the body has a role in cognition. Nonetheless, the direction of the reification of the body affected cognitive semantics, which has progressively reduced the study of meaning to completely ahistorical representations of the body, and in some cases even semiotics. This happened, for example, when Jacques Fontanille in *Soma et Séma: Figures du Corps* (2004) considered corporeity as the origin of sense and identified it as the lost object of semiotic research, the auroral dimension of semiosis that, since *The Semiotics of Passions* (Greimas and Fontanille 1991), represented a very controversial element in the reformulation of Greimas theory.

It can be said that Italian semiotics has evolved away from the fallacy linked to the unquestioned concept of 'body', producing results that were quite different and that started from a "not romantic"[9] interpretation of *De l'Imperfection* by Greimas (1987). Indeed, a reflection about the aesthetic and emotional dimensions of semiosis (see Fabbri 1998; Pezzini ed. 2001) had brought into the foreground the role of corporeity as a determining element in shaping sense at an ante-predicative level. In the Italian semiotic tradition, the body was not considered as the source of the sense, but rather as an instance of translation in continuous negotiation with the corporeity of the world, as a matter between the matter that establishes a field of signification in the encounter with the world (Marsciani 2007). The body was then understood as an instance of reality and regulation but always constitutively relational (Marsciani 1999), a field where the meaning articulates itself more than a precondition of the sense. It is never the individual body that is the centre of the signification but the body as "the chiasma between me and the world" (Marrone 2005: 172) that produces a meaningful view of the world since it is already and always in the world.

The result is a conception of a body in continuous i n t e r c o r p o r e a l and i n t e r s u b j e c t i v e bargaining: certainly, it is considered a transformer and a regulator of meaning, but also a historical product made by semiotic processes that shape and guide the possibilities of signification. In sum,

the body is always culturalised, or to say it better, semiotised (Violi 2012a; Marrone 2001). For these reasons, speaking about embodiment in Italian semiotics is possible only by seeing it as the emergence (and concretisation) of a local point of view in a field of signification

> as a temporary clothing, as a somatic exteriorization, interconnected with the viewpoints of others, of an interior system of habits, of affections and affects (Migliore 2017: 130).

Then in the early 2000s, Italian cognitive semiotics certainly had to deal with embodied cognition, but this could only happen through those cognitive theories that deeply considered the intersubjective and situated dimension of embodiment (Fusaroli, Demuru and Borghi 2012). Therefore, it is not by chance that the attention of cognitive semiotics, from the first moments (anticipating the turning points of the following decade again), turned its gaze to the studies on ontogenesis that, in those years, showed, in a strong way, how the bodily and the intersubjective dimension were always co-implicated in a dyadic interaction (Ammaniti and Gallese 2014), which, by shaping a child's abilities, led to the acquisition of language and self-consciousness.

As Violi (2008) rightly points out, the bridge between these ideas and semiotics was already traceable in the Peircean conception, where the body had a fundamental relevance without being considered a privileged location of meaning: the philosophy of Peirce, in fact, crucially emphasises the primacy of the relationship. Starting from these reflections and the semiotic analysis of video recordings of mother-child interactions, Violi introduced the idea of a pre-conscious semiotic dimension distributed in intersubjective practices, that was particularly evident in cases of ontogenetic child development (Violi 2007; Violi 2012b).

This vision of semiosis – as anchored to the body and to intersubjectivity since the first moments of life – led to a total overcoming of the Echian conception of subjectivity and a different location of molecular semiosis processes that were no longer relegated to simple unconscious neuronal processes but always already distributed. Also here, the Peircean influence was strong: indeed, as noted by Rossella Fabbrichesi (2015), in Peirce's philosophy, consciousness is always the result of semiotic inferential processes that move between inside and outside, generating the "entire cognitive result of living" (CP 7.527), that is the Peircean definition of the conscious experience.

In this perspective, the subject Eco has placed as a limit of the semiotic threshold is transformed and becomes a property emerging from the same molecular semiosis processes that, by stabilising in habits, constitute the thirdness on which every attempt of semiosis stands out (Paolucci 2010). In this way, Italian cognitive semiotics has acquired a new idea on the subject now thought of as emergent from semiosis and distributed between brain, body, practices, and intersubjectivity.

5.2 Semiosis and the extended mind

The reflections that emerged from this first decade soon led to what could be defined as the second season of Italian cognitive semiotics. Claudio Paolucci has promoted an original attempt to integrate Peircean semiotics with new considerations from the embodied, embedded, extended and enactive (4E) approaches to cognitive science.

Indeed, already by the end of the 90s, the embodied cognitive scientists realised that the body dimension alone was not sufficient to explain cognition. Therefore, they have developed new models: the body is always seen as located in an environment that provides material anchors to promote cognitive scaffolding. Moreover, they started to think of cognition as a distributed process involving objects, cultural practices, language, institutions, and other subjects. In short, these theories hold that the environment in which we are located is always active in structuring cognition, which thus becomes an externalised process, that is always diffused within a "cognitive niche". Paolucci finds in these ideas a strong consonance with the spirit of the cognitive semiotics of Peirce, who saw the mind exactly as an external sign always connected to a complex network of semiotic processes[10] (Paolucci 2011).

These innovative confluences between semiotics and new cognitive sciences led to the dedicated volume *The external mind* (Paolucci, Fusaroli and Granelli eds. 2011) of the journal *Versus* that collected crucial contributions by some protagonists of the 4E turn.[11]

This was followed by a dense season in which Paolucci, with the young researchers of the University of Bologna, has tried to rethink the semiotic paradigm in the light of advances in the field of cognitive studies through two movements:

- A first movement tackles classical semiotic problems with a new gaze, for example, the concept of narrativity (Paolucci 2012a), the relationship between language, perception and intersubjectivity (Fusaroli 2011; Murgiano and Nardelli 2015), laughter (Paolucci and Caruana 2019, 2020), spatiality (Sykes 2021), and the semiotic status of mirror images (Lobaccaro and Bacaro 2021).
- A second movement consists of bringing semiotics to the heart of some of the hot debates of the cognitive sciences, such as the theories of social cognition (Paolucci 2012b, 2019), the theories of habits in cognition (Murgiano 2015), the debate on representations (Caravà 2019) and the acquisition of read-writing capacity (Martinelli 2020).

The decade following the first publication of the volume of *Versus* has therefore seen a decisive turn in semiotics towards the theories of 4E cognition[12], also thanks to all the seminars organised by the *Centro Internazionale di Studi Umanistici "Umberto Eco"* [International Center of Humanities Umber-

to Eco] which over time has hosted several scholars from these fields of research.

6.   For a new cognitive semiotics

The transformative convergence of cognitive semiotics with 4E cognition has reached its final form in 2021 with the publication of the book *Cognitive Semiotics. Integrating Signs, Mind, Meaning and Cognition* by Claudio Paolucci. If *Kant and the Platypus* and *Meaning and Experience* have dialogued with the most theoretically advanced cognitive sciences of their time, today Paolucci does the same with enactivism and the theoreticians of the extended mind[13] by reformulating all the problems of semiotics thanks to this updating of principles, methods, and theories. Thus, *Cognitive Semiotics* represents the completion of an ideal triad, resuming the originality of Eco's thought, figuring out semiotics as a "disciplinary platypus" (Paolucci 2017a), that is, as a vast field of research that brings together portions of other disciplines, able to build bridges and mediate between heterogeneous domains and identifying structural homologies that allow for innovative hybridisations.

The book advances a strong thesis, presenting itself as an attempted (re)foundation of a *de iure* cognitive semiotics: that is, a semiotic theory with a clear theoretical claim able to show how semiolinguistic reflection on signs, languages and meaning not only helps us to understand high-level cognitive phenomena, but even may enlighten us about the totality of the means by which we understand the world and give meaning to our experience.

To do this, Paolucci connects and confronts concepts developed in the 1970s and 1980s, like that of "narrativity" (Greimas 1970), semiotics as the "theory of lie", "semiotic system", "ratio difficilis", and "encyclopaedia" (Eco 1984) with the enactivist theories of Shaun Gallagher (2020) and Daniel Hutto (2008), the embodied neurosciences of Vittorio Gallese (2001), the extended mind theory of Andy Clark (2008) and the material engagement theory of Lambros Malafouris (2013). The result is a completely original theoretical framework where, beyond every division, biosemiotics[14], interpretative semiotics and structural semiotics hybridise in a new enactive and anti-representational conception of semiosis, summed up in the author's words as:

> (1) an enactive form of sense-making, involving interaction with the external world; (2) a form of action mediated by meaning, where meanings are not representations of the world or truth conditions, but interpretive habits and sense-making activities; (3) a perspective in which texts, languages and semiotic systems represent not the expression of a pre-existing thought located in our heads, but forms structuring the way in which we think and know reality, or as cognitive scaffolding which represents the background of our perception of the world (Paolucci 2021: VII).

Chapter 1 and chapter 3 of the book are devoted to establishing a theoretical framework for this proposal. These are the chapters in which the reciprocal transformation of enactivist and semiotic paradigms is most evident and in which the idea of a s e m i o t i c   m i n d is advanced. The proposal is clear and linear: we must start from the Echian definition of semiotics as the theory of lie. This move allows for a reading of every cognitive phenomenon as the result of a sign production in which a cognitive agent sets up significant surfaces capable of helping to trigger and promote an effective form of action. Cognition is nothing else than "sense-making" (Di Paolo, Cuffari and De Jaegher 2018), which is a cropping in the material continuum of the world of perceptive grabs, that Paolucci thinks of as a system of expressions already imbued with significances and values. This expressions' objective is not to represent the world but to drive effective actions that are, in this framework, the enactive responses of the organism to the meaningful world that she contributes to creating with semiosis.

The theoretical founding comes together with an application of the cognitive semiotic approach to some of the hot topics in contemporary cognitive sciences, such as the linguistic self and social cognition and its disturbances.[15] A key element that we need to underline at this point of our story is, that the last chapter of *Cognitive Semiotics* contains a critical rethinking of the theory of semiotic perception expressed by Eco (1997). Thanks to the contemporary cognitive theories of p r e d i c t i v e   p r o c e s s i n g and the "Goethian" theory of perception proposed by Jan Koenderink (2010), the Echian theory is totally reversed: where Eco individuated "primary iconism", Paolucci instead proposes an idea of perception as controlled hallucination, according to which perception works thanks to a prediction that projects figures in the perceptive field based on h a b i t s, producing presentations and not representations of the world. In Paolucci's view, perception is a form of creative imagination that produces signs controlled by environmental interactions, condemning us to perceive the future in the present, based on habits of interaction and the system of our expectations. Thus, there are no percepts without their prior anticipation, no perceptive novelty without the habits that constitute the background of our world perception: in Peirce words, no firstness without thirdness.

Immediately after the publication of the book, thanks to an axis between the University of Bologna and the University of Memphis, a new organisation is born: the *International Centre for Enactivism and Cognitive Semiotics*. The centre is led by Paolucci and founded by him with Daniel D. Hutto, Shaun Gallagher, Vittorio Gallese, Lambros Malafouris, Fausto Caruana and Catherine Legg, and has the aim of collecting and spreading the international research on enactivism and cognitive semiotics, and to improve and refine the methodological reflections for investigating the ways in which agents make sense of the world. This dialogue has only just begun, but thanks to the first series of seminars that saw wide public participation, it promises to respect the great tradition that binds the new cognitive semiotics to its cradle, the *Centre of Semiotic and Cognitive Studies* founded by Eco more than thirty years ago.

7. This is not the end of the novel

Hitherto, an attempt to draw a coherent line of development of Italian cognitive semiotics has been made. However, of course, this attempt can only be partial as the encounter between semiotics and cognitive sciences was not always programmatic, but sometimes also linked to some individual and circumscribed research experiences. Therefore, the situation is much more fragmented than what we have been able to outline, and we cannot always trace continuities: we could say that cognitive semiotics are evolving in parallel, even in leopard spots.

At this point, it is almost impossible to account for this dynamic situation, and too many developments are yet to come. However, as a partial conclusion, it is perhaps necessary to underline that the results of Italian cognitive semiotics in recent years are before everyone's eyes: not only does this disciplinary field convince more and more cognitive scientists and philosophers of mind, such as Antonino Pennisi[16] and Vittorio Gallese[17], who do not disdain forays into properly semiotic themes, but also, cognitive semiotics is attracting a range of funding related to European projects. This is a sign of good health for a young and varied disciplinary field that manages to provide new impacting cross-methodologies.[18]

At this point, the only possible leave is a relaunch that comes directly from the past, precisely from 1643. Cognitive semiotics has now fully solved some of the problems that the story of Roberto de la Grive posed to us: we know that language and experience communicate and translate each other, that narrations shape our ability to act in the world, and that language, as an extraordinary cognitive instrument, pushes us into the knowledge of what is new starting from the old, through the exercise of metaphors.

However, we still have very few ideas on the reasons why Roberto, shipwrecked on a deserted ship at a distant point not only in space but also in time, decided to write his autobiography and a novel despite being fully aware that no one would read it. Moreover, we have even less ideas about why at a certain point, Roberto imagines another story that is not his own but becomes his, and why his past, his present and his novel are all converged in the final dream that troubles him so much. Memory, imagination, and dream, then: these are also the main themes in a successive Umberto Eco book *The Mysterious Flame of Queen Loana* (Eco 2004). Perhaps there is still something to think about.[19]

The novels continue to suggest paths to undertake and possible fields of investigation: it would be appropriate to resume something that has been left out in the growth path of the discipline, also taking an excellent opportunity to join forces with those contemporary Italian philosophical and cognitive research directions that deal with the "Mental Time Travel" (Ferretti et al. 2017) and memory (Cimatti 2020).

Despite all the theories elaborated up until this point, this is not the end of the novel.

Notes

1   Today, this second cognitive semiotics development can be traced in the Aarhus and Lund traditions of studies, which are gradually abandoning Peircean ideas in favour of a more phenomenological position and are reducing the use of semiotic terminology in the cases where they deem it unnecessary (Konderak 2018).

2   The invited speakers' list between 1988 to 2006 is enviable. To name but a few: Hilary Putnam, John Searle, Dan Sperber, Jean Petitot, Willard W. O. Quine, Saul Kripke, Donald Davidson, Gilles Fauconnier, Philip Johnson-Laird, Francisco Varela, Paul Churchland, Daniel Dennet, Hubert Dreyfus, Mark Johnson, Eleanor Rosch, Charles Fillmore, Jerry Fodor, Gerald Edelman, Richard Rorty, Ronald Langacker, Thomas Sebeok, Leonard Talmy, Michael Tomasello.

3   It is possible to find a first trace of this dialogue in the volume *Meaning and Mental Representations* (Eco, Santambrogio and Violi 1988).

4   It is well known that for most of his life Umberto Eco insisted on keeping separate the theoretical aspects of his production from those that are literary. However, in the volume of the *Library of the Living Philosophers* dedicated to his philosophy (Beardsworth and Auxier eds. 2017), Eco agreed to also include reflections on his novels. In his *Intellectual Autobiography* (Eco 2017) Eco himself acknowledged that his work as a novelist was not entirely independent of his philosophical work. Many of his pupils have always considered his literary production as a part of the philosophical activity. Today, Eco's novels are considered either a refraction of philosophical themes and their representation (Lorusso 2021), or as a real constitutive part of his philosophy that moves between s a y i n g and s h o w i n g (Paolucci 2017a, 2017b).

5   In this novel the reflections on metaphor are entrusted to Padre Emanuele, a clear reference to the Italian literate and rethorician Emanuele Tesauro and to his work *Il Canocchiale Aristotelico* (1654). However, I don't exclude that this interest in the metaphor could be influenced even by *Metaphors We Live by* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980), that would be translated to Italian few years later by Patrizia Violi.

6   For a more focused discussion on the themes of *Kant and the Platypus* and their links with the general theory of Eco see Lorusso 2008 and Traini 2021; On the "problem of iconism" see Polidoro 2012 and 2015; to follow the evolution of the themes of the book, read the volume "Eco, Kant and the Platypus. Twenty years after" in *RIFL journal* edited by Pisanty and Traini (2017).

7   Eco defined this position as negative realism or contractual realism (Fadda 2017; Traini 2017). This concept has been appreciated a lot in philosophy by the advocates of new realism (Ferraris 2017).

8   For a critical position on the division between nuclear contents and molar contents see Bianchi (2017).

9   I owe this expression to Gianfranco Marrone (private communication).

10   On the convergences between Peircean thought and 4E cognition see also Cara-
     và 2015; Fabbrichesi 2016.
11   The volume contains among others contributions of Massimiliano Cappuccio,
     Michael Wheeler, Shaun Gallagher, David Kirsh and Charles Goodwin. For an intro-
     duction to these topics see Fusaroli and Paolucci 2011.
12   It should be noted that Bologna's semiotic school is not the only one to have under-
     taken this path: in fact, research in cognitive semiotics related to media and filmol-
     ogy and deeply connected to neuroaesthetics and embodiment are going on at
     the Universities of Milan and Bergamo (Eugeni and D'Aloia eds. 2014). Particular-
     ly relevant are the filmological research on empathy (D'Aloia 2014), temporality
     (Eugeni 2018) and spatiality.
13   This passage of interests is not radical and total, as it shows the recent contribu-
     tion by Costantino Marmo on Fillmore's frame semantics (Marmo ed. 2017).
14   Paolucci's attempt to redefine the limits of the "semiotic lower threshold" intercepts
     the long-standing claims of the Italian bio- and zoo- semiotic research (Prodi 1977;
     Cimatti 1998, 2018; Gensini 2018a, 2018b, 2020).
15   Topics on which Paolucci is principal investigator of the European project "NeMo":
     https://site.unibo.it/nemoproject/en, retrieved September 28, 2022).
16   The Department of Cognitive Sciences at the University of Messina has actively
     collaborated with Italian cognitive semiotics for more than 20 years. Their research
     on the bioevolutionary dimension of language (Pennisi and Falzone 2017), psy-
     chopathologies of language (Pennisi 1998), and embodiment (Pennisi 2021) strong-
     ly interacts with the Italian semiotic tradition, serving as a solid foundation for the
     ongoing debate (see Lobaccaro 2022).
17   At the Department of Neuroscience of the University of Parma, Vittorio Gallese is
     pursuing a series of research initiatives that are strongly aligned to cognitive semi-
     otics, such as the embodied aesthetic experience (Gallese and Guerra 2020) and
     the evolution of cultural habits (Gallese 2021).
18   It is worth noting that Paolucci is the principal investigator of two Erasmus+ pro-
     jects: the above-mentioned "NeMo" project (which aims to introduce innovative cur-
     ricula and observational methodologies for children's schools in order to promote
     the screening and increased inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorder);
     and the "Fakespotting" project (which aims to develop debunking strategies and
     good educational practices against fake news). In addition, it is important to refer-
     ence the work of Massimo Leone in the project ERC "FACETS – Face Aesthetics
     in Contemporary E-technological Societies", which aims to analyse how digital
     tools and technologies are changing the processes of meaning that involve the
     human face. Leone proposes a cross-methodology that considers not only anthro-
     pology, semiotics and visual arts, but also the cognitive and emotional dimension
     involved in face recognition processes (Leone ed. 2021).
19   Regarding this, a good starting point could be the study led by Maria Pia Pozzato
     (2017) on the visual and linguistic representation of the places of origin. In this
     work it is precisely the themes of memory and imagination that are addressed in
     an interdisciplinary way; although the semiotic and cognitive methodologies are
     not merged, they rather aim to offer a multiplicity of perspective on a common
     object.

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Image Sources

Fig. 6. Marco D'Alessandro, *Tarowean – Il giorno delle sorprese*, 2022. Inspired by this research paper. Watercolour on paper. Bologna, Courtesy of the author.

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Semiotics: The Art of Social Care

Tiziana Migliore

Summary. One of the main features of Italian semiotics' identity is its dual paradigm. That is, semiotic studies in Italy are developed from two schools of thought: structuralist and generative (from Europe, especially France) or pragmatic and interpretative (from the United States). This article attempts to explain the reasons for this tradition, which are epistemic and semantic before being political. The two approaches are mutually irreducible but are in continuity with one another: they stem from the need to take into account processes of signification in terms of how they emerge and are articulated within them, but also, subsequently, in terms of how they are interpreted. The reference model is semeiotics, which was originally the only field of study to be called "semiotics" or "semiology" and where research is actually done by connecting the internal relations between certain signs and the manifestation of symptoms in the communicative relationship between patient and doctor. Our hypothesis is that the nexus between semiotics and semeiotics go beyond the similarity in procedures, for the correspondence between the visible and the enunciable (Foucault 1966a; Deleuze 1986). Semiotics too practices an art of care, through the analysis and reading of meaningful processes, which, however, concerns not individual bodies but social corporeity.

Keywords. Semiotics, semeiotics, visible, medicine, care

Zusammenfassung. Eine der zetralen Besonderheiten der italienischen Semiotik ist ihr duales Paradigma. Semiotische Studien in Italien haben sich aus zwei Schulen entwickelt: der strukturalistischen und generativen (aus Europa, insbesondere Frankreich) und der pragmatischen und interpretativen (aus den Vereinigten Staaten). Dieser Artikel versucht, die Gründe für diese Tradition zu erklären, die eher epistemischer und semantischer als politischer Natur sind. Die beiden Ansätze sind gegenseitig unauflöslich, stehen jedoch miteinander in Kontinuität: Sie entstehen aus der Notwendigkeit, Signifikationsprozesse hinsichtlich ihrer Entstehung und Artikulation zu berücksichtigen, aber auch in Bezug auf ihre Interpretation. Das Referenzmodell ist die Semeiotik, die ursprünglich das einzige Fachgebiet war, das als „Semiotik" oder „Semiologie" bezeichnet wurde und in dem die Forschung tatsächlich durch die Verbindung der internen Beziehungen zwischen bestimmten Zeichen und der Manifestation von Symptomen in der kommunikativen Beziehung zwischen Patient:in und Ärzt:in erfolgt. Unsere

Hypothese ist, dass die Verbindungen zwischen Semiotik und Semeiotik über die Ähnlichkeit in den Verfahren, in der Korrespondenz zwischen dem Sichtbaren und dem Sagbaren (Foucault 1966a; Deleuze 1986) hinausgehen. Auch die Semiotik praktiziert eine Kunst der Fürsorge, durch die Analyse und Lektüre von Sinnprozessen, die jedoch nicht den individuellen Körper, sondern die soziale Körperlichkeit betrifft.

Schlüsselwörter. Semiotik, Semeiotik, sichtbar, Medizin, Pflege

Italian semiotics is a paradigm with two heads, or at least, it is certainly not monocular. The entirety of its ideas can be traced back to two traditions: Saussure's linguistic structuralism and Peirce's philosophical pragmatism. Why this double interest in the science of signs? This volume, offering an exploration of Italian semiotics with essays from the newest generation of researchers, provides the impetus for reconsidering, today, this peculiar identity, in an attempt to understand where the roots of this research lie and place it within a prolific perspective.

1.   A paradigm with two eyes: signification and interpretation

There is no doubt that structuralism and pragmatism are distinct approaches with differing beliefs. However, rather than keeping them separate, this would be the moment to understand the reasons for their lengthy co-existence in Italy.

Signs condense the relations of meaning that are woven into society. Structuralism in semiotics, of which Paolo Fabbri was the main exponent in Italy's first generation, studies signs not as isolated entities but as texts, 'relational weavings' (in terms of their internal signification) with a correlation between expression and content. It explores the path of meaning from the superficial levels – those that are manifested – to those that are buried deeper and vice versa, observing how basic individual and collective values, phoria and dispositions take on a narrative character and are embodied by tangible, visible forms.

Texts, however, are not the object of analysis. They live in symbiosis with the interpretations that they inspire. Pragmatism, developed in Italy by Umberto Eco, takes on this other side of semiotics, logical reasoning and reactions liable to bring new meanings to our comprehension thanks to the way in which these meanings summon up the varying backgrounds to the receivers' knowledge and skills.

Previous attempts at blending structuralism and pragmatism have failed (Fabbri 1998). As we have said, the categories and tools of these respective schools of thought have incompatible philosophical and theoretical bases. But this rightful resistance to fusion has meant there has been no recognition of the contiguity in the processes and systems investigated by

the two schools. Signification and interpretation are concatenated praxes and the eye of interpretation can be activated, contributing to the recognition of what analysis does not see, when the eye of signification has been exhausted. Fabbri himself demonstrates this when, after analysis, he concerns himself with what happens in the use of the texts, giving meaning to transgressive readings and unusual decoding as enlightened practices of resistance and counter-information (Fabbri 1973; Migliore 2021). Valuing the parallel growth of the two branches – structuralism and pragmatism – in Italy does not mean having to superimpose or transplant one into the other, but rather it reflects on how they articulate and connect, one after the other, providing a complete picture for studies in this field (Paolucci 2010).

This is what has always happened, operatively and according to two phases that differ also on a theoretical plane, with medical semiotics or *semeiotics*, a branch of natural sciences similar to our own field (Baer 1988). Eco (1975) includes semeiotics in the field of general semiotics because it concerns the study of signs in two aspects. On the one hand, it studies the justifiable relation between certain external and internal alterations, while on the other, it studies the communicative relation and codes involved in the interaction between doctor and patient. He remembers that

> until a short time ago, medical semiotics was the only type of research which might be termed 'semiotics' or 'semiology' (so that even today there is still some misunderstanding) (Eco 1975, English translation: 10)

And he specifies that it implies

> a study of the connection between certain signs or symptoms and the illness that they indicate […], and a study of the way in which the patient verbalizes its own internal symptoms, that extends on its most complex level of psychoanalysis which is a systematic codification of the meaning of certain symbols furnished by the patient (*ibidem*).

Barthes (1972), Manetti (1987), Baer (1988), Calabrese (2001), Sebeok (2001), among others, unanimously recognise how, in semeiotics, the shared starting point of signification and interpretation is that of the divinatory practices of the most ancient civilisations with the *Corpus Hippocraticum* and Galen. But what motivates these same procedures and origins? Why are semiotics and semeiotics so alike? And is it enough to just state this?

2.   The model of semeiotics

There is a vast amount of literature on the nexus between semeiotics and semiotics, partially covered by the Italian volume *Il discorso della salute* [The Discourse of Health, Marrone ed. 2005], which contains the proceedings of an AISS conference on the theme of healthcare and the ailing body.

Here, semioticians play an extraordinary role by explaining the procedures of semeiotics, both ancient and modern, comparing them with their own experience and rendering them useful for both medics and philosophers of medicine. They prove, above all, the "thought from the outside" (Foucault 1966b) that is used in both semiotics and semeiotics. The discourse of health is a reference point worth returning to in order to find the missing link in the consideration of this affinity.

Barthes (1972), when talking about semeiotics, was already demonstrating the concatenation between signification and interpretation, tracing the symptom back to the substance of the expression – a phenomenon that emerges in the body and signals itself as a pathological presence –, and the sign to the form of expression, the symptom placed in discourse and taken up in the language used by the doctor. Semeiotics is not, therefore, simply a discipline that investigates a particular kind of sign. It is a science that exemplifies the experience of the passage from symptom to sign, highlighting this using its own system (Uexküll 1982; Staiano 1982; Calabrese 2001; Stano 2020). This perceptive moment of quality in transition increasingly characterises the encounters between the semioticians and the figures of the world. It marks, on an epistemological level, the passage from phenomenology to semiotics. But the modelling function played by medicine for the science of signs does not end here. Indeed, what will we learn to see after?

The Birth of the Clinic is a *sine qua non* in the advances of semiotic research in this regard. Foucault's discourse (1963) on the conversion of the medieval and Aristotelian gaze into an "ocular science" in which there is a correspondence between the visible and the enunciable, between observation and descriptive language, is also relevant for semioticians. It allows us to think semiotically, thanks to the accentuation of clinical analysis and systems of different signs:

> On one hand, there is the recognition of the organisation of symptoms following a radical change in the observation regime; on the other, we have a new way of reading with strategies (Fabbri 2005: 31, my translation),

that can be exported and migrated from one system to the other. Foucault (1966a, 1966b, 1971, 1973) himself adopts the same criteria he developed for medical use when tackling paintings, in his work on *Las Meninas* by Velázquez, and on Manet and Magritte. Another philosopher, Nelson Goodman, follows this path in the opposite direction, from semiotics and aesthetics to semeiotics, demonstrating how something is a work of art when it has these "symptoms", artistic properties that are both necessary and insufficient (Goodman 1977).

So, semeiotics, its depths plumbed by semioticians, is a model for the semiotic method. In the previously cited volume, many references are jokingly made to people confusing the two disciplines – "you are a medical semiotician, correct?" – and their shared passion and curiosity is made

clear, particularly since, with the rise of the clinic, the visual dimension has become fundamental for semeiotics with the "*coup d'oeil* " and the "eye that talks by itself" (Foucault 1963, English translation: 109).

> In the interests of *cure*, as attested to by the etymology of the word, there is a powerful idea of *curiosity*, which is welcomed by the semiotician who not only gives themselves the task of studying the medical discourse, but also that of asking the doctor for information on their own discourse and on what they expect from us (Fabbri 2005: 27, my translation).

Fifteen years ago, at the time of the *Discourse della salute* (Marrone ed. 2005), the focus on medicine as an object of study did not go beyond the confirmation of a shared 'curious eye', asking for example whether in its own way semiotics was also practicing a kind of care. Perhaps it was not yet the right time for a meta-reflexive vision of our discipline. The hypothesis we formulate here is that semiotics is an art of social care, in the positive sense of concerning itself with phenomena, searching for remedies, treating in order to heal. Greimas alludes to this vocation of semiotics as a "therapeutics of the social", i.e. "knowledge" and "action on the state of things" not in the abstract but "in order to transform them" (Greimas 1987: 169, my translation). He remembers that he was "taken for a ride" when he announced it and in the late 1980s considered it to be a stake "of capital importance" and "an achievement that can only be achieved in the distant future" (*ibidem*, my translation). Today?

Semiotics and semeiotics are genealogically interwoven and share both method and epistemological background because they deal with the same object – c o r p o r e i t y – on different levels: semeiotics in terms of the individual, semiotics in terms of society. Both have their own tools and search out more in order to enunciate the visible, which is not simply that which can be seen but a multi-sensory complex of actions and passions that comes from the fact that things are there to be seen (Foucault 1963). Both take externality from the world (not the soul) as their starting point and they take care of this, semioticians on the front line (Eco 1967) just like doctors. This is the missing link: care of bodies. Furthermore, Gianfranco Marrone (2001: XXX, my translation) explains the metaphor of "social *bodies*" as precisely the "transposition of somatic characteristics onto the collective scale". And the profound similarity in the way these two fields function is well known:

> A certain macro-social logic from which grand political sentiments, collective passions and shared values derive, is comparable to that pre-individual logic linked to the body and its procedures of perception and proprioception (*ibidem*, my transation).

Signs are the product on any level of subjects that h a v e bodies and a r e bodies. Somatic logic provides the basis for many of our social processes

and permeates every intersubjective relationship (*ivi*: XXVIII). If our discipline in Italy is strongly socio-semiotic, it is because it deals with signs through the symptoms of a social corporeity to which it pays careful attention.

3. Semioticians on the front line

Eco worked for the Italian television network RAI in the 1950s when Roland Barthes's *Myth Today* (1957) was published in France, Barthes being the first intellectual to have taken the defence of the public. His débuts as a literary and (in particular) theatre critic, led Barthes to understand how spectators and readers need "mediators" that allow them to read and understand the messages in circulation. This is where his observations on the responsibility of the form and conscience of the word come from. Barthes considers structuralist semiotics capable of dismantling and belying the representations of society that the media render normal and natural, but which are often untruthful and damaging.

Eco makes the most of this political thought advanced from the other side of the barricade, which contemporary semioticians in France still defend (Alonso Aldama et al. eds. 2021). And in 1975, he instituted semiotics at the University of Bologna as a d i s c i p l i n e o f a c t i v i s m . The thought movement of Structuralism, that he embraces, offers everyone a methodology to establishing relationships between the sciences and different domains of social life. As such, *Apocalittici e integrati* (1964) is not a watershed between the supporters and critics of the mass media, but a controversy internal to high culture, which tests emotions in order to subordinate the public. *Superman* is a "minimal message" with which high culture controls the masses, the media creates myths, telling us what we should desire. In Italy at that time, a philosopher investigating characters from the worlds of television, comics and adverts with the same interest as that shown for ancient classics, unleashed violent reactions among the *élite*, who accused him of degrading knowledge. Instead, Eco was intent on spreading it, like in an encyclopedia, an archival system of knowledge that keeps the high and the low united, storing together cultural histories, notions, skills and traditions. The pragmatism in Eco's version aims to form "model readers" (1979), anticipated by texts and capable of filling their gaps and recognising their traps.

The reading of manipulatory mechanisms in communication is the way to interpret them correctly, but also, as disobedients, to consume them, to cause them to deviate from their intended meanings, and thus deprive them of power. Today, with the authority of experts in a state of crisis, in medicine as in information in general (Marrone and Migliore eds. 2021), the need for mediation is greater than ever. Indeed, it is precisely because we have been through a time in which the elite blocked access to knowledge and we now find ourselves in one where there is too much of it and it is disorganised, that people, who are disinformed because they are badly informed,

have more confused opinions than ever, and are easily influenced as they fumble around in the dark. Trusting someone to guide your choices, recognising their skill in doing so, has fallen out of fashion. Now, we have the idea that you educate and cure yourself on your own. "I am my own doctor" is the most widespread slogan seen in the no-vax protests. More than fifty years from Foucault's biopolitics, which considered medicine to be a strategy for subjugating a person through interventions on their body (Foucault 2021), many continue to talk of a "healthcare dictatorship", invoking a return to 'natural life' and their non-involvement with medical techniques. However, medicine has been working for over two centuries to build collective wellbeing and this presumed alliance of individual-nature-freedom, defended to the death, has the traits of a contemporary myth. How can semioticians cure this society?

4.   The semiotic cure. The body on a social scale

Symbolically, in an interview with the French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur*, when asked the question "what is the point of the intellectual?", Barthes (1977: 67) responded that the intellectual helps to "build one's own interior world" in the outside world. This is how we explain it to ourselves. Sciences such as psychoanalysis presuppose mental states and an unconscious that it attempts to draw out. It therefore proceeds from the i n s i d e o u t, like the Pixar film (2015) of the same name in which everything depends on an internal 'control tower', which is normally invisible. The exteroceptive (the world is often not easy to digest!) ruminates, deposits and re-elaborates within, in meanders that are often impenetrable, and it is on this mystery that they work. Paradoxically, in the canonical Italian jargon used to address matters of the soul, attributing a priority and superiority to neurones and internal impulses, believing them to be revelatory, agents regardless of cultural and social sphere, are referred to as *curati* [cured], a term with a double meaning that is both active and passive. On the contrary, other sciences begin with the 'skin' of the body and the world, from that which faces outside, towards the external, as an expression of what is happening inside. The direction here is o u t s i d e i n, medicine with semeiotics in a physical setting, semiotics for the inseparable aspects of the body and the soul of people and social groups, disimplying behaviours, imaginaries, traditions, attitudes and habits from the texts and practices that testify to their existence. Painting, theatre and music, in a similar way, are forms of care: they treat the body to treat the soul. Psychosemiotics, which has little representation in Italy according to our volume, constitutes a discipline that borders both (Darrault-Harris and Violi eds. 2021).

   "Helping to build an interior world in the outside world", to return to Barthes (1977: 67), means providing the tools for reading the information at the entrance and learning to differentiate states of things and of the soul from the sensitive forms of their appearance. The intelligible lies in the sen-

sitive. This is the motto of von Hofmannsthal who said, "Depth must be hidden. Where? On the surface" (1922, English translation: 362). As such, 'style' is a bond that comes from the body, a coherent deformation of the flesh, and the most widespread signs that many wear in a permanent way – tattoos – expose personality traits on the skin (Migliore 2018b). In semiotics and medicine, what counts is not the being (which is eternally hidden) but the relationships between seeming and being. The t r u t h is not simply the essence, what it is, but what it seems a n d what it is, whereas the f a l s e is both what it doesn't seem a n d what it is not (or that it is not because it doesn't seem!) and between these two poles, the secret does not seem a n d y e t i t i s, while the lie seems and i n s t e a d it is not (Greimas 1983).

The diagnosis of both social and physical phenomena requires a much closer reading and a pact of trust with the sensitive dimension. As in medicine the symptom is understood and correlated to others in the same body, so in semiotics every element signifies not in itself but when connected to others in the same text, by similarities and differences. However,

> the idiolectal character of individual texts does not allow us to forget the *eminently social aspect of human communication*. It is therefore necessary to widen the problem by introducing the principle that a certain number of individual texts, on condition they are chosen according to non-linguistic criteria guaranteeing their homogeneity, may be formed into a *corpus* and this corpus may be considered as sufficiently isotope (Greimas 1966, English translation: 93).

The macro, intertextual level of the c o r p u s, always encroaches on the microscopic level of analysis, that of textual singularity, which is always our starting point (How interesting how linguistics and semiotics use a somatic metaphor to designate the 'collective' of texts!). In order to have broader hypotheses on the social world, we need the c o r p u s, the intertextuality by a s s o c i a t i o n to an initial text; a series of connected texts that reaches adequacy, homogeneity and thoroughness in a paradigmatic way, with complementary and commutative enrichment. In response to the two accusations most commonly levelled at semioticians – that they are 'jacks of all trades' and limit themselves to detailed analysis –, the description of the text continues through intertextuality, through the construction of the c o r p u s, and the symptoms that connect them are neither disparate nor casual. They tend towards a non-totalising globality (*totus*) that is omni-comprehensive (*omnis*), open and dynamic.

> *Omnis* introduces an idea of movement, like when Horace says *Non omnis moriar*, 'I will not die completely' (Fabbri 2000: 21).

The semiotician's c o r p u s can be likened to a series of X-rays in semeiotics (Galofaro 2005), in which there is both *a priori* no body, and the patient's state of health is not revealed spontaneously but instead f i n d i n g s (what-

ever is found in the X-ray) and r e p o r t s (the descriptions given of this) result from relationships between the visible and the enunciable. The visible includes the kind of device and the level of definition in the X-ray, the chromatic, eidetic and topological aspects of the X-ray, the density of the body penetrated by the X-ray, the eventual comparative method used. The enunciable, as in Italian semiotics, is established (as Galofaro also maintains),

> by two distinct and non-coinciding operations: describing phenomena pertinent to the level of expression and interpreting them, assigning them their own diagnostic content (2005: 247, my translation).

In the doctor's diagnosis we find an intersubjective and codified scientific metalanguage and the competent point of view that derives from this theory. In any case, X-rays and their content are not isomorphic. A symptom does not provide a single meaning, it can stand for a number of possible contents. In semeiotics, too, further investigation is required. Let's then get to the heart of the methods used in this cure.

5. The "how" of the semiotic cure

Semantic ways and meanings of care in medicine are the object of two articles by Fabbri (1995) and Marrone (2012). We will look at them in this last paragraph to see how they can be translated, on a meta-reflexive level, in semiotics and in the semiotician's stance.

5.1 Taking the world's pulse

In a contribution for the sixth edition of *Spoletoscienza*, Fabbri (1995) reasons extensively on the epistemology of the cure. He opposes the principle of the cure as understood by Heidegger (1927), in the sense of anxiety about the death to come, a worry with unknown and non-immanent causes, to a principle of the cure as hope (Fabbri 1995: 89–90). And he ascribes this to a "semiotic or semeiotic gesture at the origins of medicine", which are such because

> the pain of humans is a system of signs, of symptoms that we attempt to somehow transform into signs of something else (*ivi*: 90, my translation).

This is an important step for the hypothesis on semiotics as the art of social care. Medical interventions are based on the correlation between the rhythmic organisation of the body and the rhythmic organisation of language. They require the patient's pulse to be taken and for this to be interpreted not only through logical inference (if there is a rise in fever then do X) but

using the physical rhythms as a metaphor in order to repair those that are wrong and re-establish eurhythmy (*ivi*: 93–94). From this perspective, Fabbri continues, medicine is both a science of singularity and an *ars*, a conjectural knowledge that uses wisdom and efficacy (*ivi*: 95). Semioticians, like doctors, do not do theory (which means 'to watch') but instead go into the field and exert themselves, in immanence, in the translation of dissonant social phenomena of common interests. Fabbri encourages the doctor – a term whose Latin root *med- refers to the 'mode' of care – "measure, means, weight and judgement" – but also to meditation (*ivi*: 91, my translation)

> to a participation of an integrated aesthetic–ethical kind with the senses, because Igino is right: 'man is in the hands of the care' (*ivi*: 106, my translation).

In the article, three narrative configurations of 'taking care' emerge. Paraphrasing Fabbri's discourse, the first is pathemical: worrying or growing anxious for someone or something. The second is cognitive: thinking of something or someone, concerning yourself with them. The third lies halfway between the previous two and precedes the action: being careful but, at the same time, ready to act (*ivi*: 91). This last form of taking care, transposed into the action of the researcher in semiotics, is like a halfway house between the *punctum* (passional) and the *studium* (cognitive) in Barthes's sense. It recalls the empirical vocation of semiotics and the Hjelmslevian postulate of operativity, which is solidified in Greimas's analytical procedures (Migliore 2018a). But it adds the idea of a physical proximity to the texts and the *corpus*, and of an effort to say their meaning differently.

Fabbri etymologically connects the concept of 'cure' with 'curiosity', which makes possible "a world of things before us that is not hidden in an ontological secret but is the object of systematic research", even putting ourselves at risk and facing danger. "Experience and expertise are danger, experimentation" (Fabbri 1995: 101, my translation). The semiotic stance is equally curious and unsure. It rejects easy assumptions and formulates hypotheses that, though daring, can be heuristic. "Security" is the opposite of curiosity (*ivi*: 92). From Fabbri's structuralist analysis come enlightening considerations, not least when it comes to understanding the relation of consecutivity between two dramatic events of our time: the pandemic, with the care of the vaccine, and the war, with the promise of security provided by weapons.

> Security comes from *sine cura* and means to reach a state free from worry and of which one can be certain; obtaining a balance between perceptions and sensations in the absence of solicitation, asthenia. Whoever is secure rejects the care, to the point of 'neglect' and 'carelessness' (*ivi*: 92, my translation).

In terms of this attitude to life, which implies an idea of health as total integrity, with the Latin *salus* linked to *salvus*, 'those who save themselves' from

change, from perturbations that come from the outside, Fabbri, once again invoking the opposition between *totus* and *omnis*, values an understanding of

> health as non-totalising but omnipresent, which aims for a certain indeterminacy rather than determination (*ivi*: 98, my translation).

With reference to today's situation, care through vaccine functioned largely temporarily while the state of security, of salvation through weapons, is a prerogative. It is symptomatic that a year and a half since the emergence of Covid-19 and before the outbreak of war in Ukraine, there was already a sense that the vaccine would be commutated with weapons, despite the *desiderata* of many (Fig. 7).

Fig. 7. Poster for the Italian Peace and Disarmament Network (*Rete Italiana Pace e Disarmo*), 2021.

Communal money is often spent on 'assistance', not on a 'system'. The curative power of the vaccine has the culture of life as its object of value, whereas the reassuring power of weapons goes through a programme of use that is the culture of destruction and death, and for which basic programme? Economic and political hegemony, which refuses the care.

In his investigation into the curious way of reading signs, Fabbri's thoughts are elevated beyond any specific discipline in order to admit that this curiosity is born from the

> modern conscience as one's own awareness of the other, beyond care for the self and actually in the dissipation of self (*ivi*: 99, my translation).

Indeed, the curious "unlike the vain, do not accumulate", curiosity "is accompanied by a dispersal of subjectivity" and by the emphasis "of the consistency of alterity" (*ivi*: 99, my translation). Security is care for the self in the most frenzied form of individualism. Curiosity is taking care of the other because 'they' are more important than the 'I'. Abnegation is the watchword of doctors and semioticians in the front line, who renounce the self for reasons of social order. They hear absurdities, dissonances and badly-formed durate, they clarify them and re-tie them in another way.

5.2 Engraving the real

Many more examples of semiotic care for society can be found in an *ekphrasis* by Marrone (2015). It should be said that both he and Fabbri provide definitions of the semiotician's professional role that are pertinent to this argument. The researcher of the systems and processes of signification is actually an "amateur by profession", someone who is not active in the sector but who works purely for pleasure in order to create resonance between knowledge (Marrone 2015). According to the formula invented by Fabbri using a calque from medicine, the semiotician is like a "medico condotto", namely

> like a generic doctor who cares for every patient without excluding the different specialisations and beyond sterile oppositions between pure and applied dimensions, between the stars and stables (Fabbri 2001: 364, my translation).

Technique and pleasure require awareness.

Marrone's ekphrasis is on the painting by Marcos Zapata *Assistenza ai malati nell'ospedale Sant'Andrea di Cuzco*, used as the poster for the congress *Il discorso della salute*. This initial 2007 version in the introduction to the conference proceedings is followed by a 2012 version, expanded in narrative terms. The painting, an oil on wood from the 18th Century, acts as a thought experiment, as an

> effective dispositive of medicine as 'discipline', in all senses of the term […], made up of bodies and things, but also of objects and space, knowledge and power, intersubjective and interrogative relationships, of social ills and redemptive practices (Marrone 2012: 191, my translation).

Here is our re-reading, but of the full reproduction of Zapata's work, recently found on the net (Fig. 8).

Fig. 8. Marcos Zapata, *Assistenza ai malati nell'ospedale Sant'Andrea di Cuzco*, XVIII Century, oil on wood.

The painting's frame, a kind of theatrical proscenium, cuts through a simulated architectural space in a way that is discontinuous with the outside world. It is divided into three parts: the closest is closed, the furthest away, open. The underlying, oblique geometric lines impose an accidental perspective with a vanishing point that, falling in the background to the right, forces the spectator to get closer in order to have a vision of the whole, but to locate themselves on the left-hand side, where the diagonal lines begin, and look at it sideways. If we look at the topological grid, the areas on the right/left and bottom/top of the painting appear marked in a temporal sense, of anteriority and posteriority. Left opposes right as the /after/ of the topical proof on the patient opposes the /before/ of his arrival in hospital; low always opposes high according to the consecutive nature of times – low is to high as the /before/ the arrival and the intervention is to /after/ the rest – but also according to a dynamic/static opposition. Eidetic and chromatic contrasts, those of light and texture, between the floors of the three rooms reinforce the impression of the nearby space of wakefulness, of the qualifying and decisive proof, as different from the distant space of sleep.

Now, if this painting is a good example of the topic of care, it is because caring is enunciated here not in a univocal way but in the form of competition between different programmes, modalities and knowledge. Religion and medicine, with their respective systems of values and beliefs, provide the umpteenth demonstration of the fact that meaning is understood through difference. The actantial and thematic role of the patient is translated, at a discursive level, into three actors dressed in white: the first, at the front, is awake, the second, behind, is dozing, while the third, at the back, is asleep. Around the first figure – who is closest to the spectator and who, awake, is the care's object of value, the real patient –, in profile and between themselves a subject and an anti-subject clash, a monk on the left and a doctor on the right, respectively. A fourth character behind them, dressed elegantly in a large hat denoting power, plays the cognitive role of the represented observer. Marrone rightly notes that in the text, the point of view of the person telling the story is unclear.

> Who is the Subject and who is the Anti-subject? Who is right – the monk or the doctor? Which of the two forms of care will be most effective? Whose side does the observing character inscribed in the painting take? Each of the two actors, whatever their cultural value, is an actant Subject who possesses a clear skill: a capacity for care that is a know-to do that has been previously acquired (Marrone 2012: 192, my translation).

The text simultaneously displays the two methods, care for the soul and care for the body, leaving the spectator the capacity and right to judge. Apparently at least.[1]

Marrone's analysis of the two 'experts' who contend the patient's body is a masterpiece in argumentative refinement. Doctor and monk carry out actions that are symbolically representative of their professional, social, cultural and epistemological roles. Both, one dressed smartly and the other barefoot and wearing a tunic, are bent over the patient. The man of science,

> genuflecting, looks and points his hand-tool; the man of the church, much less deferent, touches with his tongue (*ivi*: 189, my translation).

The monk's mouth and arm are in intimate contact with the patient's skin and blood, in a "thaumaturgical practice" expelling the ill humours from the body and inserting liquids for salvation (*ivi*: 187, my translation). The doctor is also involved and busy, but his surgical action, which consists in cutting, removing and sewing up the malfunctioning organ, takes on a "punctual and individualising pose" (*ivi*: 188, my translation) with his gaze directed at the site where

> the patient's illness originates, the wound, the topical location of the entire scene, as a diagnostic symptom of an organic material that is momentarily in disorder (*ivi*: 188, my translation).

The idea returns here of a basic programme for the man of science, aimed at restoring the rhythms.

At some distance, in a spatial area of proximity but not contact, the doctor uses

> technical tools in which previous experience and a science that sustains this are tacitly inscribed" (*ibidem*, my translation).

The scalpel, which "is not an exterior prothesis" but an essential component of his "hybrid corporeity", does not further attack the wound, Marrone writes, because his gesture is included in and anticipated by the gaze.

> It is not necessary to see him at work: his effective work is all there, it is already there, precise and self-assured. It is this superiority that we must admire, this competence that is so strong and rooted in his making himself a predetermined guarantor of the success of the following banal performance (*ivi*: 189, my translation).

So, security is not always contrary to care. It can make itself manifest within it in a clinical guise, as the prediction and projection of a positive outcome. This "superiority" will nevertheless be provisory, given the incomplete awareness of things by a knowledge that is in progress (*ivi*: 189).

However, gestures, facial expressions and the direction of glances tell us something more. They act as informers of the euphoric and dysphoric effects of care practices. Indeed, while the monk and the doctor are outstretched towards a single point (the wound), the patient is concentrated not only there but also on the pain he feels. He stares at the bloody act inflicted on him by the monk, and the distress on his face and movements of his head and hands cause him to take on a concerned air. At the same time, next to him, the man with the hat pays close attention to the doctor's work and, smiling with his hands raised, shows appreciation for it, instructing the spectator to do the same. There is, then, one clue as to who out of the two is caring better, albeit communicated in a subtle way. It is reinforced by the correspondence in the colours of their clothes, red and blue, in contrast with the black tunic worn by the monks.

In turn, the red and blue of the doctor's clothes gently differ from those of the man in power. Not opaque, but bright and luminous, tending towards white, they chime with the tonality of the most distant halls (floors, curtains, bedspreads and even the trees), in which human presence reduces to the point of disappearance. This widespread chromatic 'refrain' leads us to reconsider the man of science. Right at the centre of the scene, he holds a scalpel in his left hand and a recipient in his left. The pose, in the genealogy of the visual arts, is the same as that of the artist's self-portrait, as they paint with their brush and palette (Stoichita 1993). Is this an overlapping of the isotopy of the medical *ars* with the aesthetic one, in the light of a variety of spaces designated for care (Marsciani 2005) and given that "every painter paints themselves"? On an enunciatory level, the hospital

engulfs in *abyme* the artistic activity depicting it, as an encounter between form, material, tools and hand, with the approval of the patron behind.

In this meta way of presenting themselves – the monk through difference, and the doctor through analogy –, which carves into the real by transforming an already signifying material, and introducing and removing various *rélais* (Lévi-Strauss 1977), the semiotician discovers their own visual identity.

Notes

1   Regarding the intervention of semiotics in the laws governing religious cultures, Massimo Leone distinguishes the path of "semiotic guerrilla warfare" from "semiotics as therapy". The former accuses mystifying systems of power and prescription, with the risk of becoming imperialist in its turn by deciding what is right and what is wrong; the latter (like Zapata?), deploys existing possibilities and alternatives while remaining super partes (cf. Leone 2009: 302–304).

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Filmography

Inside Out (USA 2015, director Pete Docter).

Image sources

Fig. 7. Poster for the Italian Peace and Disarmament Network (Rete Italiana Pace e
    Disarmo), 2021. Public Domain.
Fig. 8. Marcos Zapata, *Assistenza ai malati nell'ospedale Sant'Andrea di Cuzco*, XVIII
    Century, oil on wood. Cuzco, Instituto Nacional De Cultura.

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