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VOLUME 1

PAOLO FABBRI

Unfolding
semiotics
Pour la sémiotique
à venir

EDITED BY
Isabella Pezzini





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To P.F., Permanent center of gravity¹

BY: Isabella Pezzini

This first volume of *Punctum Semiotics Monographs* is dedicated to Paolo Fabbri (Rimini, 17/04/1939 – Rimini 2/06/2020). Paolo devoted his life to semiotics, with an extraordinary passion and energy, studying, teaching, traveling for courses, conferences, and seminars worldwide. We would like to thank the series editor, Gregory Paschalidis, and the Italian Cultural Institute of Athens, and its director Anna Mondavio, who sponsored the publication, for this wonderful initiative in his memory. Thanks also to Simonetta Franci Fabbri for her interest and willingness to help.

Lucia Corrain, his collaborator during the Bologna years, writes an affectionate biography that has the task of reconstructing the main stages and passages of the intense, generous, and strongly research-oriented life that distinguished Paolo as a ‘master and commander’ of contemporary semiotics.

In assembling this volume, we thought of offering readers one of Paolo’s texts, translated for the occasion into English, the language in which his semiotic work is perhaps less well known. Among his essays, we have chosen “Considerations (and updates) on proxemics” since it deals with a field of semiotics that has become especially relevant again during the pandemic. The initial part of the article is based on a well-documented essay written in 1968, soon after the publication of E.T. Hall’s *The Hidden Dimension* (1966), Fabbri’s main point of reference in proposing the development of the European semiotic study of non-linguistic signifying systems, in particular gestural practices, and languages.

¹ Centro di gravità permanente, song of Franco Battiato, *La voce del padrone*, 1981.

The second part of the article, written some fifty-odd years later, gives an account of the alternate fortune of proxemics, starting with its unusual epigraph. Proxemics was quickly and enthusiastically annexed to the semiotic field – as in Umberto Eco’s *A Theory of Semiotics* (1975), or Greimas and Courtés’ *Dictionary* (1979) – but subsequently somewhat neglected. Recently, however, proxemics has regained relevancy following the obligations of social distancing introduced to protect against the pandemic, which has re-emphasized the cultural and often unconscious forms of signification related to the distribution of subjects and objects in space.

Beyond its specific interest, Fabbri’s text is exemplary of his way of working. Faithful even after many years to the research themes that intrigued him, he did not hesitate to reopen his old dossiers and reconsider them anew, resituating them in the fundamental problems of the discipline and casting a wide-ranging gaze at the general with which he has always maintained a close dialogue “for a good reason,” as he would have said.

Maria Pia Pozzato offers a very vivid idea of what his lessons were like during the complex, brutal, and, at the same time, effervescent years of 1977 in Bologna in her detailed recollection, from which emerges not only the impulse to share his knowledge but also his sincere interest in his students and audience. It should not be forgotten that in those years, along with Umberto Eco, Fabbri was one of the few Italian intellectuals who succeeded in maintaining an open dialogue with all the components of the so-called “Movement.”

Inevitably, starting from the parallel and different courses that Eco and Fabbri taught in those years, and from the constant dialogue between them, a comparison should be made between their different ideas of semiotics: Anna Maria Lorusso highlights the complementarity between Fabbri’s more ‘militant’ semiotic vision and Eco’s research orientation towards semiotic theory-building. Jacques Fontanille, Fabbri’s companion throughout his long Parisian adventure at the side of Algirdas Julien Greimas, identifies the critical point of Fabbri’s semiotic commitment as being the broadest possible exploration of the diversity of semiotic expressions but starting from epistemological requirements and principles of specific theoretical relevance. It is not by chance that Fontanille titled his text with the same anagrammatic title that Fabbri had used for the long preface to a French collection of interviews with Umberto Eco: it is a matter of keeping his friend in mind and indicating the themes of his mastery, albeit through *a jeu de mots* that emphasizes the finesse of language, its poetic and rhetorical resources, its reserves of untranslatability as a stimulus to the search for an ever-renewed meaning.

The catchword “For a marked semiotics,” that Fabbri chose to title his last public intervention, is picked up and relaunched by Gianfranco Marrone, who takes it to encapsulate Fabbri’s practice of semiotics as “a gay science.” As a new form of life consti-

tutively passionate and rigorously oriented, in constant search of the “missing links,” as he called them, between the moment of empirical analysis methodologically well-conducted, fundamental for reflecting on the functioning of languages without being nourished by *exempla ficta*, and the subsequent, necessary theoretical- epistemological reflection, in light of the general verification.

In this way, according to his friend Denis Bertrand, the apparent paradox between a thought radically based on the efficacy of simulacra in the production of the real, on the one hand, and on the other, its ability to understand actuality is dissolved: in fact, they are not like two separate and extraneous domains, but instead they turn out to be the one condition of the other.

After Fabbri’s death, three different homage events on some of his research interests were organized in Italy by the institutions he supported with his creativity and energy. One month after his passing, on July 2, 2020, a seminar was organized by the Centro Internazionale di Scienze Semiotiche of Urbino, which Fabbri helped to establish and directed until the end, in collaboration with the Centro di Studi Semiotici Umberto Eco of the University of Bologna. With the theme *Overpowering of Images. From veneration to destruction and vice versa*, the seminar advanced a semiotic perspective on current political affairs focusing on the practice of attacking and destroying – now common in very different and distant places – monuments and symbols of events and personalities once celebrated and now execrated.

In their contributions to this volume Lucia Corrain, Manar Hammad and Franciscu Sedda reflect on the dynamics of these processes of monumentalization/demonumentalization by studying different cases and contexts. They all succeed in bringing to the surface the question of the meaning and value inscribed and attributed to this kind of symbolic objects, and above all the prospectivity of perception and memory, which often leads to interpretative conflicts and actual acts of destruction. Neyla Pardo’s essay is also connected to this theme, dedicated to the analysis of a memory site far from any traditional and celebratory character, such as the work of the artist Doris Salcedo, a sort of counter-monument, made to commemorate the victims of the Colombian repression starting from the fusion of the combatants’ weapons.

The first session of the XLVIII Congress of the Italian Association of Semiotic Studies was inspired by another Fabbrian theme, *Identity and Collective Enunciations* (October 3, 2020). In this frame of thought, Pierluigi Basso offers an overview of the extensive research on institutional subjects’ ‘programmatic discourses’ and their complexities, including prescriptiveness, interpretation, and application. In this context, Basso discusses another of Fabbri’s seminal texts, *We are all double agents* (1988), in which he suggests that every social actor stands at the edge of networks of both explicit and implicit relations, between claimed and secretly assumed roles.

Tarcisio Lancioni, in turn, starts from Fabbri's text *Collective Identities. Overcoming the 'I' to be 'We'* (2019), where the focus is on the question of identity. Through an original recovery of Benveniste's theory of enunciation and, in particular, of the deictics of person, Lancioni proposes a rich articulation of the forms of construction of the discursive identity of 'We,' drawing from authors such as Deleuze and Guattari, or Bakhtin.

The collective subject is also the subject of passions, another long-running theme at the center of Fabbri's thinking, an indispensable complement to a semiotics of manipulation conceived as an articulation between passion and action, and emerging, for example, in moments of cultural explosion (Lotman). Isabella Pezzini takes up one of Fabbri's many interventions on *anger* (2016) and attempts to articulate it with *enthusiasm*, Lyotard's revolutionary passion par excellence, and finding it well exemplified in the recent filmography on Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. Moreover, the discussion on the strategic dimension of interaction and communication has its most extreme field of exercise, as rich in articulations and exemplary cases, in war and its arts, which Fabbri preferred to politics as an object of study. In his *Eulogy of Conflict*, the interest in the polemical side of signification is taken as central by Jorge Lozano, Fabbri's long-time *spar-ring partner*, who unfortunately passed away after him a few months later. Lozano participated in the third Italian event in Fabbri's honour, the opening of the Conference "How the sense of place changes: urban spaces and medial environments" (Rome, September 24-26, 2020). The Conference was organized by the Fédération romane de Sémiotique (FeDroS), the coordinating institution of Romance language semiotic research groups. In line with his way of thinking about semiotics, Fabbri was an enthusiastic supporter of FeDroS, as Jacques Fontanille explains at length in his article.

Last but not least, Federico Montanari dedicates to the maestro an analysis of the work of conceptual artist Dan Graham, author since the 1960s of devices of great interest, already discussed with Fabbri at the IUAV in Venice, in the light of his considerations on diagrams.

The volume is completed by reviews of recent publications that collect some of Fabbri's most important writings: *Vedere ad arte. Iconico e icastico*, edited by Tiziana Migliore (2020), reviewed by Valentina Manchia; *Biglietti d'invito. Per una semiotica marcata*, edited by Gianfranco Marrone (2021), reviewed by Francesco Mangiapane and *Rigore e immaginazione. Percorsi semiotici sulle scienze* (2021), presented by its editor, Pino Donghi.

We are thus beginning to implement Paolo's rich legacy, whose attention to the connections between past and future in current research, is now more than ever our task and responsibility.

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Punctum SEMIOTICS MONOGRAPHS, Vol. I

Paolo Fabbri: Unfolding semiotics/Pour la sémiotique à venir



Paolo Fabbri, maître à penser de la sémiotique

BY: Anna Mondavio

Avec son activité scientifique et académique, le sémiologue Paolo Fabbri a élargi les horizons de la sémiotique italienne dans de multiples directions. Publiciste, directeur de collections éditoriales, auteur pour la radio et la télévision, ami fraternel et également “voisin d’en face,” comme il a été dit en plaisantant, de Umberto Eco, puisque sa salle d’enseignement dans l’Université de Bologne se trouvait en face de celle de l’auteur du *Nom de la rose*. Fabbri a été également directeur de l’Institut Culturel Italien de Paris, entre 1992 et 1996, et de la Fondation Federico Fellini à Rimini.

Fabbri, qui a enseigné dans plusieurs universités du monde, s’est rendu à Thessalonique en 2019 pour la conférence intitulée ‘Fellini et le traitement diurne du rêve,’ organisée par le Département de Langue et Littérature italienne de l’université Aristote en collaboration avec l’Institut Culturel italien d’Athènes e l’Ambassade d’Italie en Grèce, et pour le congrès international de sémiotique organisé dans la même faculté . À cette occasion la communauté scientifique grecque a manifesté toute son estime et toute son affection à l’égard de Paolo Fabbri et ce volume, publié grâce aux soins du Société Hellenique de Sémiotique de l’Université Aristote de Thessaloniki et dédié à la mémoire di grand sémiologue, disparu en 2020, en offre un témoignage posthume. Mais ce volume constitue également une autre occasion précieuse de découvrir ou re-découvrir l’une des personnalités plus polyédriques du panorama culturel et académique italien de l’après-deuxième guerre et de mieux connaître un maître du dialogue et de l’échange interculturels. Et ce n’est pas par hasard que l’un de ses essais les plus connus a pour titre “L’éloge de Babel,” par lequel l’auteur propose une théorie de la médiation linguistique et culturelle

comme un espace privilégié de l'expérience humaine. Ainsi, même après sa disparition, Paolo Fabbri continue par son œuvre à être un point de repère pour nombre de générations de chercheurs, en Italie et à l'étranger, et à nous rappeler à nous tous l'importance de la confrontation et de l'enrichissement réciproques aujourd'hui plus que jamais, tâche et devoir indispensables pour tous ceux qui s'occupent, à tous les niveaux, de culture et de communication.



In the form of a biography. Semiotics as a way of life

BY: Lucia Corrain

Jacques Fontanille summed up Paolo Fabbri's intellectual personality like this: "unpredictable (he would never repeat himself, he would work a lot, and would always take up original intellectual stances, often anti-conformist). Paolo was very inquisitive, with an insatiable appetite for new objects, new problems; a virtuoso in the rhetorical invention, capable of constructing entire theories and models on a metaphor, on an allegory, on a single rhetorical figure; and benevolent (Paolo was not accommodating, he could also be very critical, but his intelligence was fundamentally generous, welcoming and warm). I was fond of him as though he were an older brother!"¹

For those who knew Paolo, this is a perfect summary. Taking it as our starting point, we will try to sketch Paolo's profile, with the acute feeling that it will be impossible to describe satisfactorily but only a small part of his many-faceted personality.

It is proper to start from his student years since his ideas were already quite clearly formed by then. In 1962 he graduated in Law at the University of Florence. His study companion, Pier Paolo Giglioli, recently recalled that Paolo used to say: "I want to be a notary public and earn lots of money so that I can spend my life reading."² There is no doubt that he fully realized his paramount wish.

¹ Personal communication by e-mail on 14 April 2021.

² Pier Paolo Giglioli, "Paolo Fabbri. Un ritratto del semiologo da giovane", *Memories of Pier Paolo Giglioli*, collected by Lucio Spaziante, *E/C*, <https://bit.ly/3sEtZRd> (consulted on 23 May 2021). In this memoir we can also see other moments of this initial period in Paolo's life.

After his degree in Law, he enrolled at Political Sciences again in Florence. From 1963 to 1964, he was an unpaid assistant in Camillo Pellizzi's sociology course. In this context, he met Lucien Goldmann, whom he defines as "sociologist and dialectical structuralist" and whose *Le due avanguardie* (Urbino, Argalia, 1966) would translate. As an unpaid assistant, he got involved with the Library of the Institute of Sociology of the Faculty of Political Sciences (Cesare Alfieri), which had substantial funds allowing him to purchase countless books. He began to read Claude Lévi-Strauss, Vladimir Propp, Roland Barthes, and other structuralist thinkers; it was when structuralism started to become established in Italy.

Subsequently, he made his first transalpine journeys. In Paris between 1965 and 1966, on a scholarship, where he attended the École Pratique des Hautes Études (VI^o Séction). There he attended the classes of Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss.³ Of that period, Paolo recalls:

Talking with Barthes, I put several observations to him, which Barthes, however, showed no interest in, so at a certain point, he directed me towards a friend of his who in that period was teaching a course on semantics. That is how I came to know Greimas. And I met a master.

At this point, his path was marked forever. Paolo's encounter with Algirdas-Julien Greimas⁴ was decisive and destined to develop into a crucial collaboration.⁵

Upon his return to Florence, on 18 December 1965, Fabbri (along with Pier Paolo Giglioli) interviewed Roland Barthes. The translation, recently rediscovered in Paolo's

³ The documents were uploaded to the website: <https://bit.ly/2W0L0Zs>

⁴ French semiologist of Lithuanian origins, born in 1917, in Russia, and died in Paris, in 1992. He is one of the founders of European semiotics and one of its greatest theoreticians. He was director of studies at the École des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales of Paris. Among his books: *Semantica strutturale*, *Del senso*, *Del senso II* and (with Jacques Fontanille) *Semiotica delle passioni* (all published by Bompiani); *Dell'imperfezione*, *Semiotica. Dizionario ragionato della teoria del linguaggio* (with Joseph Courtés).

⁵ An encounter that would leave an indelible mark upon him, almost like a tattoo (one of the themes he dealt with recently): indeed, many years later, following the request to give a definition of semiotics, he would say: "I abide by the definition of Greimas, who says that semiotics is the study of the systems and the processes of signification" (Paolo Fabbri, *Efficacia semiotica*, Mimesis, Milano 2017, p. 51). In summary, structural-generative semiotics constitutes the theoretical-methodological basis from which he would never separate himself again, becoming one of its most coherent and active interpreters. In an interview he would say: "Greimas was a real master not only because he took an interest in semantics but he had a strong orientation towards the human sciences: for him semantics was a science of man. In this perspective, his ambition, perhaps excessive, was to attribute to the semiologist the task of the construction of a conceptual organon for the humanities (that is what we do today on our textual analyses distinguishing the actors, the forces, or the subjects...). Thus, I started from the idea of semiotics as a model of human sciences. That organon should have had a linguistic root (because linguistics was further ahead than the other sciences, and in my opinion, it was even more so than economics or the other sciences). Added to this is the character of Greimas, who would give you total trust but at the same time exert terrifying control: he lived to produce his own work but also to produce you, it had never happened to me in Italy before and it would never happen again to me." (Interview provided by Simo)

archives, was published by Marietti in 2019. From 1966 to 1967, he worked as an assistant in the Decoration course, taught by Umberto Eco at the Faculty of Architecture of Florence, a course previously taught by Gillo Dorfles (1910-2018).⁶

Officially, his career as a lecturer started in 1967 in Urbino, where, until 1976, he was chair of the Philosophy of Language at the Institute of Languages of the University of Urbino. In July 1967 in Urbino, he organized, with Pier Paolo Giglioli, a seminar on the 'Methods of narration analysis,' to which he participated along with Umberto Eco, Pino Paioni, Alberto Cirese, and Tzvetan Todorov. Paolo Fabbri proposed an initial version of a work on Pinocchio: a theme that he carried forward throughout his life.⁷

The Urbino seminar was the incipit of what would soon become the first international school of semiotics after Jurij Lotman founded Tartu (Estonia). In 1970, he founded the International Centre of Semiotics and Linguistics, with the rector Carlo Bo, Giuseppe Paioni, and the contribution of Greimas. The Centre would soon become, especially during the summer, an outstanding center for exchanges, a hotbed of ideas, a phalanstery of discussion and friendship, where intellectuals coming from the world over could converse with colleagues and young recruits.

While he taught in Urbino – besides maintaining continuous relations with France – he was invited to California, to the University of San Diego La Jolla. In 1974 (spring), he was invited by Fredric Jameson (whom he knew in Urbino) to the Department of Literature.⁸ In 1975 and 1976 (spring), he was again in San Diego, invited by Alain Cohen. The 1976 semester proved an outstanding intellectual meeting-point: along with Paolo Fabbri, present at the same time at the University of San Diego is also Louis Marin, Hubert Damisch, Jean-François Lyotard, Michel De Certeau, and Jean Baudrillard.⁹

In those years, the University of La Jolla in San Diego (founded in 1960) was a unique place. It was dominated by Marcuse's influence, the feminist movement, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the strong presence of ethnic minorities. Therefore, the French intellectuals who worked there saw La Jolla as a real place of hope, a possible embodiment of the utopia dreamed of but prevented in Europe: a sort of multidisciplinary Eden.

The United States is a constant feature in Paolo's intellectual travels. In 1991 he was Visiting Professor at the Department of Italian Language and Literature of Toronto

⁶ On the climate of those Florentine years, cfr. "Gillo Dorfles e Firenze. Conversazione con Aldo Colonetti", 4 December 2013, <https://bit.ly/2W2vvQI> (consulted on 22 April 2021).

⁷ The volume Paolo Fabbri, Isabella Pezzini (ed), *Pinocchio. Nuove avventure tra segni e linguaggi*, Mimesis, Milan 2012, is a testimony to this.

⁸ In 1974 he was Visiting Researcher at the Language and Language Behaviour Center, University of California, Berkeley.

⁹ I wish to thank Alain Cohen who by means of an intense exchange of emails has allowed me to reconstruct accurately Paolo's years in California.

University. He would be there again in 2005 as Northrop Frye Professor in Literary Theory. On numerous occasions, he was Visiting Professor at UCLA: at the Department of Sociology in 1985 and the Italian Department in 2002, 2005, and 2006; and again as Speroni Chair in 2005.¹⁰

Between 1977 and 1983, Paolo Fabbri was associate professor of Mass Communications in the degree course in Art, Music, and Spectacle in Bologna (DAMS). His lectures were very well attended, also because by constantly moving between Italy and France, he was indeed a ‘trawler’ of French culture in Bologna. In Paris, Paolo worked with Greimas as *Director d'études*, associated with the Chair of General Semantics, a post he held until 1992, the year of Greimas' death. He then became *Directeur de Programme* at the Collège International de Philosophie, where he continued his semiotic work.¹¹

Undoubtedly, he was an intellectual who bridged the cultural worlds of France and Italy, in one of the most fertile historical moments of western culture in the second half of the 20th century: the moment of Jacques Lacan, Jean-François Lyotard, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Jean Baudrillard, Michel Foucault, Algirdas-Julien Greimas, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, René Thom, Bruno Latour, François Jullien, Paul Virilio, Paul Ricoeur, Michel Maffesoli, to mention just a few, of which Paolo is an integral part.¹²

Paolo's work addresses meaning and its expressions, its articulations. He examines how meaning is empowered to signify. He believed that:

Thanks to its substantial methodological apparatus, semiotics had a profound influence on the human sciences, and I believe that it can also be helpful for the other sciences. An example is that of biology, specifically Code Biology, which uses concepts very close to our own.¹³

Semiotics' utility lies in being a discipline with a methodological-descriptive vocation: the method allows for the description that leads to honing the ‘toolkit’ of the method. In this sense, semiotics is positioned as an ‘interstitial’ methodology, capable of producing conceptual organizations that find in anthropology, in sociology, in art history, in psychology, etc., sources of concepts reorganizable as models and reapplied with new criteria to the human sciences. In the semiotics practiced by Fabbri, meaning

¹⁰ Heartfelt thanks are due to Massimo Ciavolella who has reconstructed the chronology of the invitations to Paolo Fabbri in the United States and who reminded me that he had been invited to Los Angeles on other occasions as well to take part in important UCLA congresses.

¹¹ The teaching duties in France were numerous: Chargé de Conférences at the EHESS from 1977 to 1984; Associate Professor at the UER in Social Sciences, University “René Descartes,” Sorbonne, Paris 5 (October 1984-March 1985); Professor invited to the Department of Language Sciences, University of Limoges (2002), etc.

¹² Through the various interviews proposed in the two volumes the constellations of the personalities with whom in those years Paolo had woven fruitful intellectual relations were reconstructed.

¹³ Paolo Fabbri, *Elogio del Conflictio*, p. 117 [our translation].

is articulated with conceptual instruments to become meaning.

Returning to teaching, which comprises the quintessence of his existence, he then taught Philosophy of Language in Palermo. At the end of his three-year term in Palermo as an adjunct professor, he was confirmed as a full professor. He subsequently returned to Bologna, but his ties with Palermo – a city that hosted many international conferences on semiotics and visual semiotics – remained strong and were reinforced with every occasion.

Upon returning to the DAMS of Bologna in 1990, he was affiliated with the Department of the Arts. He didn't stay there for long, though, as he was appointed First Counselor of the Italian Embassy in Paris and Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Paris, a post he held until 1996. On his subsequent return to DAMS, his *Alma Mater Studiorum*, he took over Omar Calabrese's Semiotics of Art course. Calabrese, who had moved to the University of Siena, was the first to teach such a course in Italy and perhaps globally. Paolo's work at the DAMS was indeed tremendous and not only with the Semiotics of Art. As Director of the DAMS degree course, he organized the thirtieth anniversary of this innovative study program. The most remarkable feature of the anniversary celebrations was a 36 meters long red sofa, called *Sofà delle Muse*, placed on the 'crescentone' (an elevated part of the square) of Piazza Maggiore, from 21st to 29th September 2001. Anyone could sit on this huge sofa to converse, and many of the celebrations unfolded around it.¹⁴

Within the scope of the visual, besides the cultural references of his friend Omar Calabrese, Paolo would entertain even closer conversations with Daniel Arasse, Hubert Damisch, Louis Marin, others from the French school, and Nelson Goodman,¹⁵ and Meyer Schapiro.

If "the word is directly inhabited by one's own communication [...] it is also like this in the image: only that in the image the expressive systems are mostly not codified." And the texts, the visuals ones, in particular, involve, even going so far as to "transform" the observer-spectator.¹⁶ In this context, it is impossible not to recall the constant dialogue that Paolo entertained with the artists.

We should first consider Italo Calvino, an author who, as many have underlined, thought in images. The acquaintance between Fabbri and Calvino dated many years, going back to well before the publication of Calvino's *Il castello dei destini incrociati* (The Castle of Crossed Destinies). The novel came out in 1969, and in almost every one of

¹⁴ Cfr. the website <https://bit.ly/3z2BROw> (consulted on 20th May 2021).

¹⁵ With Nelson Goodman, Paolo had started a dialogue when he was at the University La Jolla in San Diego and would be a scholar ever present in his interests: apart from having been at the centre of a university course in Semiotics of Art in Bologna, Fabbri dedicated to Goodman an elaborate introductory essay in the Italian edition of Goodman's essays, which he edited: Nelson Goodman, *Arte in teoria, arte in azione*. Et al.: Milano, 2010.

¹⁶ Paolo Fabbri, *L'efficacia semiotica*.

its pages, there are pictures of Tarot cards in different combinations related to the various stories. Calvino himself recalls this in the 'Author's Presentation' – a part of the novel published in the 1973 edition: "The idea to use Tarots as a combinatory narrative machine came to me from Paolo Fabbri who, in the International Seminar on Story Structures, held in Urbino, in July 1968, delivered a lecture on *Il racconto della cartomanzia e il linguaggio degli emblemi* (The story of cartomancy and the language of the emblems)."

His relation with Nanni Balestrini was one of close friendship. Still, we could say that his connection with Valerio Adami (and his wife Camilla) has been 'historical.' He was also a member of the scientific committee of the European Foundation for Drawing, founded by Valerio Adami. Victor Stoichita, in a conversation recently dedicated to Paolo Fabbri, referred to something Paolo wrote in a piece on Valerio Adami, which effectively summarizes his *credo* about visual arts:

Semiotics is a constructive and projective discipline that often claims the exorbitant privilege of applying itself to visual texts from the outside to make them talk. But I am not part of that race that extorts, in a practical way, pictorial meaning to subsequently reformulate it in theory. I am more interested, more passionate in hypothesizing or imagining that the painter's activity has a complete sense in itself and in what he has to say about it.¹⁷

Another artist he had a keen interest in was Claudio Parmiggiani. He organized an exhibition of his work in Paris right after taking up his post as the Director of the Italian Institute of Culture.¹⁸ And then we should also remember Emilio Tadini and Eliseo Mattiacci (1940- 2019).

With regards to teaching, he ended his official career in 2009 at the IUAV of Venice – where he moved in 2003 – continuing to teach Semiotics of Art and Artistic Literature.¹⁹

It is necessary to go back once more to the travels and recall at least the numerous teachings at the University Complutense of Madrid, most times invited by Jorge Lozano (1989-1992, 1994, 2003, 2006). Then came Latin America (Brazil, Argentina, Peru), Mexico, Australia, Canada, Japan, Vilnius (Lithuania), Moscow, Geneva, Istanbul, and many other places. This is a unique accomplishment, which becomes even more impressive because Paolo never got a driver's license or drove a car in his whole life.

It is well-known that Paolo was a unique mind, innovative, with boundless culti-

¹⁷ See *Vedere ad Arte*, p. 73.

¹⁸ Cfr. *Claudio Parmiggiani. Porto sepolto* (catalogo della mostra) held at the Italian Institute of Culture / Institut Culturel Italien – Hotel de Galliffet, Paris 28 April - 28 May 1993.

¹⁹ He also taught Semiotics of Specialist Languages at the Faculty of Political Sciences, LUISS (Libera Università Internazionale di Studi Sociali) of Rome, from 2011 to 2015; Semiotics of the Sign at the Institute of Communication of the IULM (University Institute of Modern Languages) of Milan, from 2011 to 2013.

vation, and constantly abreast with the changing times. The arguments he took an interest in are endless. His curiosity was extraordinary, and he knew well how to transmit it during his lectures and talks, and always coupled with a calm and joyful attitude. However, two things cannot be left out even in a cursory survey on Paolo: his passion for teaching and his relationship with his students worldwide.

Teaching – except for the time he directed the Italian Institute of Culture in Paris – was a constant feature of his entire life. For him, it was the way to communicate generously and joyfully what he knew, what he studied. And his students greatly appreciated this. Cristina Girardi's recollections of her student years in Bologna are particularly pertinent, in this regard:

I attended Paolo Fabbri's courses with an enthusiasm I would never have expected [...]. It is not easy to explain the reasons that made the professor's lessons so fascinating. Still, I think that they all have something to do with the issue of 'discovery.' By listening to him, one discovered that we couldn't acquire knowledge without a solid reflection on the methods and the strategies of knowledge. We found that another way of doing lessons was possible: his teaching required dedication to listening, studying, developing a solid background. There was a continuous invitation to demonstration, encounters with other points of view, modesty towards readings carried out intuitively, in the absence of method [...]. I still preserve as a precious gift my notes of Paolo Fabbri's lectures, and now and again, I go back to read them. They still surprise me, not so much because of the many answers, but of the many questions I find written down in them.

And, on their part, the students would take Professor Fabbri's exams very seriously. One particular occasion is characteristic: one evening, at the end of a very long exam session, coming out from via Zamboni 33, we met a student who had taken the exam in the afternoon, and her hair was completely shaven. We ogled at her, and she explained that it was a 'vow' she made if she did well at the exam in Semiotics of Art. She did, and so she honored her vow.

Paolo was a very unusual lecturer. He conversed with the students on all possible topics and all the time, during the exams and the tutorials or simply over coffee at the cafeteria. In an interview he gave to Gianfranco Marrone, about *Rifondare la semiotica*, Fabbri says:

The master is not someone who educates or informs, but rather one with whom, alongside whom, and thanks to whom one can continue with one's research. It's not so much about teaching people to do it but about going along it together, albeit with differentiated roles, in defining the exact directions of

work. On the one hand, there is always the knowledge imposed by authority, persistent and wholly uninteresting. On the other, there is the idea of trusting the other, of the degree of reciprocal reliability. The student must first trust the master and the opposite; the master must choose whom to trust and to what point.

In 2019, on the occasion of being awarded the Sigismondo d'Oro prize by his city of origin, Rimini, Paolo went back to teaching. As he stated: he returned "to what has been the substance to my experience," and he argued that:

There is a fundamental difference between communicating and transmitting. By communicating, you need the shortest time possible and a lot of space (the journalists ask you to say something in two minutes that can then be broadcast worldwide). Transmitting knowledge calls for the opposite; you need small spaces (classrooms, laboratories) and a lot of time. To transmit culture, you need the opposite to communication; it seems like a paradox, but it isn't!

This summary survey on Paolo has privileged specific themes: his passion for books, teaching, and traveling. In concluding, we need to retake one of these threads: travel, this time involving his archive-cum-library. An intellectual's library functions like an accurate, full-fledged self-portrait. Paolo donated his self-portrait to Palermo, to the Semiological Circle, where Gianfranco Marrone, Dario Mangano, and their team make every effort to make it publicly accessible in due course.

Dear Paolo, I know what I was able to say about you is very little. Still, you have taught me that when you deliver a lecture, write an article or prepare a congress speech, you need to know where to draw to a close; you need to know the conclusion. And this time, I knew perfectly well how to conclude: I wanted to close with your self-portrait-cum-library. Because it will continue to talk about you, and together with your books, your articles, the volumes you curated, your precious notes, you will continue to teach a whole lot more. Thank you, Paolo!

Some thoughts on proxemics (and an update)

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I. Thoughts on proxemics¹

Naming a new discipline is an inherently semiotic act. It motivates us to take a fresh look at the signs expressing the phenomena under investigation while delineating a strategic space and the tools we need to cross it.

We are here concerned with the appearance of proxemics, a branch of semiotics that studies the significant articulation of human and non-human space. Nonetheless, the creativity of the act of naming is purely superficial. We know that a lexical definition has only limited scientific 'content'; a scientific concept only acquires its full significance when linked to other, similar concepts. If a concept cannot be constructed independently of its context, this is due to the apparent paradox that it was already there, virtually present and alive in the distinction that enabled its articulation. And this is true of proxemics, too. Its birth certificate was issued in the predefined space of general semiotics, which seeks to include the world of perceptible qualities in a hierarchy of metalanguages capable of describing its significant structure.

¹ English translation of "Condiderazioni (e aggiornamenti) sulla prossemica", in I. Pezzini and R. Finocchi (eds.) *Dallo spazio alla città. Letture e fondamenti di semiotica urbana*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2020, 185-202. The first part comprises an essay originally published in 1968, in *Langages* 3(10): 65-75, (special issue on *Pratiques et langages gestuels*), which the author comments on in the second part, in the light of research developments.

1. The proxemic act is a semiotic act aimed at the extralinguistic direction investigated by that discipline. But if the general sense is unequivocal, we cannot say the same for its specific routes. Thus, to understand the proxemic program's internal coherence, we need to recall the epistemological framework that made it possible.

Proxemic discourse is based on the fundamental premise: *culture=communication*, which has fostered the development of behavioral sciences in the United States.² Culture (i.e., how people assign meaning to the world around them and themselves in relation to others) consists of the coded behavior repertoires performed and interpreted by members of the social body in communicative situations. These highly structured behavioral models (patterns) are organized into sequences, articulated differently in different cultures.

If the members of a particular culture want to express themselves in a predictable and communicative way, they must learn to behave (and thus to speak, gesture, move in space, etc.) in line with these conventions.³ These models are organized according to the *paradigm case* of language: the analytical categories of linguistics are extrapolated into a vaster dimension of communication, enlarged to include all the ways one organism influences another. Behaviors are separated into minimal units (*behavioremes*) within a given level; these are incorporated as larger units unto a higher level, and so on. These units are arranged in series of structured sequences, which result in a 'programmed' behavior: the term 'program' denotes a generalizing abstraction inferred from the interaction between behaviors. Different cultures, therefore, manifest *idiosyncratic* programmatic settings: i.e., typical sequences of behavioremes located at different structural levels.

Rooted in transactional psychology, this semiotics of communication apprehends meaningful behavior, not in acting it, as a deliberate act of communication, but rather as the person's *being* during the communication, during the employment of a kind of knowledge as rigorously articulated as it is hidden.

To implement its plan, semiotics perceived in this way must proceed beyond the mutable surface of perceived behavior, the illusory game of signs at the level of the sensory event, and transcend the 'surprises of the world' towards its inherent structure (immanence). In this sense, the behaviorists refer to a *cultural grammar* or, more generally, draw parallels between the higher levels of social structure, on the one hand, and linguistic structure, on the other.⁴

² "It is taken as a given that language is the principal mode of communication for human beings. It is further assumed that language is always accompanied by other communications systems, that all culture is an interacting set of communications and that, communication as such results from and is a composite of all the specific communication systems as they occur in the total cultural complex" (Trager 1958).

³ "A society's culture consists of whatever it is one has to know or believe in order to operate in a manner acceptable to its members, and do so in any role that they accept for any one of themselves" (Goodenough 1957).

⁴ "The immediate constituents of a well-formed social event are real, from a psychological point of view, as are the immediate constituents of a well-turned phrase" (Brown 1965: 303-304).

The members of a culture learn the social structure in the same way as its grammar. The distinctive feature of these norms of social behavior, which renders them susceptible to linguistic processing, is the unconscious and obligatory nature of their learning and manifestation. Unevenly distributed across the various levels of consciousness, the rules and programs outline a complex typology of models arranged according to a cumulative stratigraphy of the social unconscious.⁵

The second function of this semiotics should be to formulate the systematic classification of communication contexts: a typology of the 'pragmatic' dimension should therefore be drawn up to incorporate programs and patterns into the social structure.⁶

2.1. The hypothesis that underpins proxemic research in 1968 falls within this theoretical matrix. In the researchers' words (notably of the linguist Trager), the communicative phenomenon needs to be explained *holistically* as "a total picture." A generalized *symbolic* comprises the following: a) *pre-linguistic* events (physical and biological events, voice sets, voice qualities, body set, body qualities, etc.), b) the *communication* which studies language and the phenomena bound up with it; *paralinguistic* (vocalization and voice quality) and *kinesic* (movements and gestures) phenomena, studied via the same techniques used in the phonemic analysis (see Hall and Trager 1953; Trager and Hall 1954). On the fringes of the semiotic studies of kinesics (Birdwhistell) and paralinguistics (G. Trager, H. L. Smith, R. E. Pittenger, N. McQuown, G. Bateson), the anthropologist T. H. Hall has identified a space covering "silent language." Hall started from the linguistic reading of the anthropology of manners (Hall 1955) and studying (with Trager) the North American lexicon concerning the semantic field of time and place. Subsequently, he made a drastic turn that led to the definition of proxemics: "the study of how man unconsciously structures microspace—the distance between men in the conduct of daily transactions, the organization of space in his houses and buildings, and ultimately the layout of his towns" (cf. Hall 1963b:1003, 1963a). This entails the entire problematic of the semiotics of information based on the linguistic paradigm. "Proxemics parallels language, feature for feature" (Hall 1963b).⁷ Therefore, Hall suggests, human behavior in space can be divided into *isolates* (units of behavior made manifest in the same way as morphemes), *sets* (or syntagms), and *patterns* (equivalent to grammatical and semantic rules). These elements are deployed on different levels of consciousness. Every communicative behavior, structured like a language, comprises three

⁵ The line of argument followed here was outlined by Sapir.

⁶ In this direction, see, for instance, Pike (1967), and the papers of psychiatric interest published by the Pittsburgh team, namely: Condon, Charney, Loeb, Brosin, and those by Bateson, Birdwhistell. For a bibliography, see Sheflen (1967). From an anthropological perspective, see Gumperz and Hymes (1964).

⁷ The spatial sign would have all the characteristics of language noted by Hockett (1958): arbitrariness, duality, interchangeability, displacement, and specialization. As with language, only in a more specialized and virtual form, proxemics would participate simultaneously in a digital and an analogue code.

levels: technical, informal, and formal. To use a spatial metaphor, cultural behavior can be described as a river: the surface flow corresponds to the technical dimension, the deep water to the informal, and the riverbed to the formal aspect (see Hall 1959).

For Hall, the handling of spatial signs, whose technical and formal aspects are known to us, requires a semiotic analysis of the in-depth dimension (*hidden dimension*) where codes of spatial relationships and social interactions are formed (Hall 1966). Like temporal coordinates (*time talks* following the rhythms of timetables, workdays, and meals, entertainment, and sleep, the occasions of being early and late), the spatial dimension is rigidly structured (*space speaks*)⁸ and derives from models and rules learned and fulfilled in an entirely unconscious way, and yet capable—for those who transcend the naturalizing incentives of their culture—of an eloquent obviousness. Intrapersonal distances, our spatial orientations, speak to us. Since we ‘hear’ them constantly swathed and almost camouflaged within complex semantic acts, we tend to demote them to external factors. Proxemics invites us, instead, to an immanent interpretation of this language’s structure.

- a) Like any other living organism, man possesses territoriality, a kind of symbolic projection into his surroundings that is no less real than his physical limits. This territoriality is configured: the observer can describe it the same way the active subject learns it. In crossing a space, our entire sequence of meetings (*transactions*) outlines forms of meaning encoded at the same level as our kinship rules, table manners, and etiquette. And yet, we approach this highly sophisticated symbolic terrain like we do sexual problems: by never speaking of it or jokingly. For reasons yet to be revealed, why people have to ‘be in their place,’ like the means with which they find that place, are suppressed. Therefore, it is essential that these spatial techniques, expressed in a culture’s silent language and till now forgotten or described inaccurately, find their precise descriptive ‘transfer’ in the tools of semiotics.
- b) The semiotics of architecture, urban and spatial planning introduces us to a higher level of complexity. Without resorting to the example of the Hopi Indian, who builds

⁸ Many elements are part of our everyday experience: respectful distance, heartfelt closeness (but also aggressive proximity and cold or contemptuous distance), the hierarchy of procedures and locations (the head of the table, my armchair, ladies/the elderly/our ‘betters’ first). The spatial arrangement of a railway station waiting room is nothing more or less than a sociographic index. Strangers maintain a certain distance from one another; if there are enough seats, the places they occupy will be scattered or far from one another. A family, by contrast, tends to keep together, with the children in the adults’ laps. None of which is very different from the way birds sit on telegraph wires. Our ethology has provided us with amazing parallels with both invertebrates and mammals alike. For example, species which touch as opposed to species which don’t (see Wynne-Edwards 1962). And what’s more: among strangers in close contact, *back-to-back* it is more tolerable than *face-to-face* or *side-by-side*. Visual contact seems to oblige us to interact: let us consider the communication networks that are established within small groups. In the subway, where face-to-face contact is unavoidable, we avoid embarrassment by averting our gaze: everyone is looking somewhere else! On the concept of somatic physical territoriality, see Calhoun (1962), and McBride (1960).

his hut *on* the road traversing a deserted area, the unconscious articulation of macro-spaces is clearly more intelligible, and its technical and formal dimensions more developed. All we need to do by way of explanation is compare the spatial perception of Western culture (which speaks in terms of lines bounding or joining surfaces) with the Japanese concept (expressed in spaces perceived in organic unities and points). We could cite numerous examples.⁹

Hall's hypotheses draw, by way of a contrasting method, on the pathology of the intra-and-interpersonal communication, which American social psychiatry has dubbed *alienation from interaction*.¹⁰ Cultural interaction is thus presented as a model of the structure of signification: it opposes and connects diverse behaviors that have the same meaning and vice versa. By noting, in some way, the gaps in our discourse about space, it indicates its variations. Thus, it imposes a precise description, a significant accumulation of materials, and reference points for approaching the semantic categories.

2.2.1. Proxemics developed in the direction of cross-cultural comparison. However, a preliminary distinction is necessary. Its definition is as interesting as its plan is ambitious. Still, given the current state of the research, we should distinguish two areas of unequal complexity and quite different in the extent of their elaboration.

To date, most of the results in proxemics have been provided by the unconscious structure of micro-space, how people evaluate the distance between themselves and others in daily life. Some of Hall's unofficial claims about spatial interaction, related to different degrees of social bonds, seem to be corroborated by empirical quantitative findings. According to this schema, the rules of interpersonal encounters are classified into eight distances in different areas. Therefore, there are generally considered normal and appropriate distances for each of the eight different variants of interaction. The progressive and continuous reduction of distance corresponds, for example, to a proportionate increase in the degree of intimacy between the parties. The overall quality of the interactions is more or less uniform within a region. But, it will change abruptly if we cross a spatial boundary, the exact threshold depending on each particular society's cultural norms. This game played by individuals, which necessarily varies in its gravity, is perceptible at the level of personal exchanges between peoples with differing proxemic structures. In a formal conversation between an Arab and a North American, the former tends to move forward to set the "right distance," while the latter draws back. These facts have been verified experimentally based on a scale developed as a

⁹ Truth be told, Hall draws on the sometimes questionable analyses of Benjamin Lee Whorf: in the language of the Hopi, the space reflected in it lacks the verbalization of three-dimensional spaces (a room, a cellar, a corridor etc.). For example, Turkish has no terminology for classifying the margins.

¹⁰ We have found Goffman's work to be essential for working on gesture and space. See especially Goffman (1957: 47-70, 1959, 1961).

tool for proxemic measurement.¹¹ Potential doubts about the selected sample do not detract from the value of the experiment. Arabs interact in a more direct face-to-face way, which can extend to physical contact with their interlocutor (at which point thermal and olfactory factors come into play); they tend to look you almost straight in the eye and use a higher-toned voice.¹²

Given these experiences, a) we attempted a general classification of micro-spaces. We distinguish a *space with fixed characteristics* (which includes the environment and which is an invariant dimension of the interaction), a *space with semi-fixed characteristics* (in which the variable spatial components are categorized), a *dynamic space* (which the individual can manipulate to define a framework suited to communication). And b) a draft of proxemic typology, which concerns many cultures that differ in how they employ the aforementioned factors. (For example, the proxemic system in the United States precludes the use of the olfactory code during formal interactions, while the Chinese system considers direct eye contact to occur by mistake, etc.) Finally, the critical role of the organization of space and its proxemic consequences at different levels of consciousness (technical, formal, informal) within more extensive sequences is highlighted. This is the case with c) *adumbrations*, informal indications preceding or surrounding formal communication sequences (usually the beginning and end), and which enable us to evaluate the 'covert' information always accompanying the use of limited codes.

Inability to comprehend *adumbrations* does not prevent us from receiving the message. But, it can render equivocal its global meaning in 'parataxic' communication; the short-circuiting of the signs will ultimately lead to aggression (Hall 1964). Therefore, the way space is managed can tell us much more about the 'tone' of verbal and gestural communication than what it marks or suggests. The content of the message itself is involved: it is meaning that requires proper handling of space. (In this sense, imagine giving vague advance indications in the internal relationships within strongly hierarchical communities.)

¹¹ To break up the substance of the proxemic content, the tool comprises eight data classes: a) postural-sex identifiers, b) sociofugal-sociopetal orientation, c) kinesthetic factors, d) touch code, e) retinal combinations, f) thermal code, g) olfaction code, and h) voics loudness scale.

¹² Every dimension is gradated differently: a) it distinguishes the genders and the three positions: sitting, standing, lying down, b) it includes another eight positions between *back-to-back* and *face-to-face*, c) it evaluates the direction of the gaze: direct (into the eyes of the interlocutor), semi-direct (towards the head), peripheral (at the body), external (around the body). See Hall (1963b).

2.2.2. We could examine proxemic procedures not only in their informational foundations – which we will do below –, but also from within the semiotics of communication itself.

American anthropology and linguistics have always distinguished between an *emic account*, an approach based on the pertinent features of the analyzed behavior, and *etic accounts*, characterized by observations which, as systematic and frequent as they are, lack objectivity and validity. The distinction was coined by Pike, who derived it from the contrast between the *phonemic* and the *phonetic*. Just as, to determine the total phonemic attributes of a language, we must analyze its vocal capacity into distinct sounds, identified as pertinent by anyone who uses it, so the evaluation of cultural skills is needed to specify the totality of the attributes which are pertinent in distinguishing and identifying the cultural behavior of the members of that culture (see Pike 1967).

The taxonomic and categorical criteria employed by proxemics are often presented as *home-made models* contrived for use either as preliminary schemata for collecting data or matrices for comparing *emic* models that have yet to be built. But this is *proxetic*, not yet *proxemic*.

This observation is particularly true of the second part of Hall's proposals, which relate to urban space, architecture, and territory.¹³ More even than the charming but inaccurate oppositions between the formal structures of spatiality in our and other cultures, we could explore at an *emic* level the unique analysis of the American lexicon of space (of acentric yet referential units like *crossroad store*, *corner*, *small shopping center*, *county-seat*, *small town*, *large town*, *metropolitan center*, *city*, and *metropolis*). However, the lexicon is not restricted here to its semantic components, which could allow it to be compared with the structural models of ethno-scientific lexicology,¹⁴ a far more essential endeavor, since Hall himself recognizes the absence of identifiable gradations in the transition from one category to another. Instead, proxemics entails interpreting body-environment transactions from both an *ethno-scientific* (spatial classification inter-coded into the natural language of a particular culture and susceptible to oppositional analysis) and an *ecological* (a cultural development of these *transactions*) perspective.

But as regards macro-space, proxemics remains at the level of indications: a comparison with ethnological studies of territoriality in animals; the possible use of the material of human ecology arranged according to structural principles; a transactional psychology with a tendency to structure perception as a communication event, of proto-semiological city planning, of painterly analyses of perspectival distance and topological positioning, etc. (see Hedinger 1961; Sebeock 1965; Barker L.G. and Barker L. 1961; Kilpatrick 1961; Lunch 1960; Grosser 1951; Dorner 1958). Without presuming that we

¹³ See, primarily for architecture, Eco (1967).

¹⁴ See the special issue of *American Anthropologist* (Hammel 1965) and the assessment of Sturtevant (1964).

exhaust the matter, we could add ethnological research and the study of historical psychology and sociology.¹⁵ In any case, the second proxemic hypothesis is in no way verified yet, and one may even wonder if the terminological development at the micro-proxemic level can be generalized and applied—in its present form—to the interpretation of macro-areas.

3. Given the proxemic discourse proposed so far, we need to verify the internal consistency of its concepts at a methodological level.

Hall's semiotics is located — given its more and more implicit informational matrix (Hall 1966)—at the level of the event's manifestation, a communication during which the conjoining of the signifier and the signified takes place. In fact, it only considers data relating to the signifier, while the problems of signification are put in parentheses. In contrast, the manifest conjoining of the signifier and the signified should not be limited to the analysis of discrimination systems (which can only provide exclusion principles) and extend to the structures of signification.¹⁶ Current proxemic methods, focused on recording the contrasts between the various known forms of spatial organization or describing the different communication channels, seem better suited to discussing the substance rather than the form of the content. However, in our view, the general epistemological conditions for a set of axioms and a minimal conceptualization that could support and justify the semantic description are still not in place.

Greimas made an attempt in this direction when he tried to shape a *semiotic system of spatiality*, starting with the French lexicon. Here, the oppositions clarifying the signifier's differences are incorporated into an analysis of the categories of the signification.¹⁷ One hypothesis about how the perception of space exists in different signifier systems of the French language (which requires a preliminary *etic* analysis) may allow us to define, using natural language, a set of semantic categories relating to space. We could subsequently treat proxemic behaviors as collections of semes whose oppositions drive the uncoupling of the various components. After that, we could define the hierarchical relationships between the units that articulate the proxemic.

¹⁵ For example, in France, in line with various methods and targets, Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, Meyerson and Vernant, Gurvitch.

¹⁶ "Recording the diverse deviations at the level of expression, however safe and complete the record may be, is simply a system of exclusions and will not provide even the slightest indication of its signification. Which is to say that the deviations in signification are not inferred by starting from the deviations in the signifier, and that semantic description forms part of a metalinguistic activity that is situated on another level, which follows the laws of the structured articulation of signification. Which are presented as constituents of an innate linguistic logic" (Greimas 1966).

¹⁷ This semiotic system of spatiality would include the signs *spatiality*, *dimensionality*, *verticality*, *horizontality*, *perspectivity*, *laterality*. For the incomplete part of the analysis, but also its particular capabilities, see Greimas (1966: 32-36) and Togeby (1965).

3.2. We should also extend the proxemic act to defining the field of distances in social relations when this is limited to pairs (*dyads*). These relations are likely articulated in the universal spatial category of *symmetry vs. asymmetry*. If transcribed into the code of social ties, this category would articulate the psycho-sociological universes of *solidarity* and *social status*.

Symmetry would be correlated with proximity = *close* (with liking, frequent personal interactions, mutual use of the familiar form of address).¹⁸ Asymmetry, on the other hand, would be associated with distance = *remote* (with indifference and disliking, rare and formal interactions, mutual use of the polite form of address). Or with the spatial relationships *before vs. after* and *up vs. down*, associated with the idea of superiority and inferiority (influencing *power vs. submission* and the asymmetric use of the familiar and polite forms of second-person address). The result would be a generalized model of the relationships which connect sets of positions and bonds with the interpersonal spatial dimension.¹⁹ If we did this, the theatrical space of society, the (proxemic) game with its masks and roles, would become clear. The formulation of the directives which, in Western society at least, prudishly conceal the rules of this space (thus concealing its castes) could also become evident through the revelation of the “hidden dimension.”

3.3. A more pertinent semantic framing can lead us to formulate a series of problems posed by articulating proxemic space in this way.

What is there in the way children learn spatial structure? Is the language learning model applicable to this semiotic system? Are there methods for dealing with the ‘multi-proximity’ found among peoples who assign different meanings to equal interpersonal distances? Is it possible to draw up an exhaustive typology of the proxemic models that feature in different cultures? Does proxemic acculturation exist in some form? Do different implementation techniques exist within the same proxemic model?²⁰ Can we talk about psycho-proxemics in the same way we speak about psycho-linguistics? Can we perceive the act of spatial management as a personality trait? Can we contemplate a proxemic pathology by inscribing it within the broader context of inaction? Can we envisage violations of spatial taboos—starting with the social gap or forced contact? And even, should we seek forms of architectural and spatial planning content whose substance will be simply space? Is there a meaning in ‘direction’?

¹⁸ See Brown (1965: 71ff), Brown and Gilman (1960). “The terms ‘solidarity’ and ‘status’ will be used in a maximally general way to characterize the two kinds of relations: symmetrical and asymmetrical” (Brown 1965: 73).

¹⁹ The study aims to define a universal and unchanging cultural model which would function in the same way whatever the form of address: the linguistic form used to address an inferior in a pair is also used reciprocally by friends in same-status pairs; among the unemployed or equal-status pairs, it is used reciprocally by strangers (1965, 92).

²⁰ As classified by Joos (1962) for language: familiar, *casual*, advisory, formal, cold.

Behold yet again the ritualized motions of the social scientist. While the natural sciences are aware of their problems, question their assumptions, and discuss their results, the social sciences question their problems, discuss their methods, and say nothing about their results.

Therefore, it is essential that the semiotician must do everything to standardize this space of configuration whose silent signs get all the attention and whose meaning gets suppressed. For American proxemics, derived from the semiotics of communication, it is possible to describe the overt behaviors of the *body-environment transaction* so that the unconscious symbolic dimension can emerge. The semiographic act alone will thus permit us to transcend factuality and behavioral individualism in the direction of a culture perceived as a system of expectation models about the behavior of its members. We must support this effort to go beyond the exclusion systems at the manifestation level through a semantic analysis of the signification structures.

This work has yet to be done, but it seems to us to be the only dependable way to articulate a spatial model that will spotlight universal semantic categories of a proxemic atlas that will illustrate the semiotic formation of the world in which Man is situated. This map of social spatiality will enrich the meaning of gesture itself, both our own and others. With a dual implication: the gesture of the other defines from the outside what the proxemic schema projects outside my body, adjusting the space of my gesture. We talk to the others, and we are spoken to by the others. Due to a similar interaction with the natural phenomenon we call *cavitation*, language impacts the spatial substance—in the same way that ultrasounds impact fluids—creating the gap, the difference, the arrangement in space, and, hence, the relationship and the meaning.

II. Proxemics in the long term

*Where will I find someone to forget the words,
so I can talk to him.*

E. Canetti

1. 1968 was the year discourse took the stage. It was a time keen on neologisms, even in the humanities, and especially in linguistics, where structuralism was hailed as the discipline pioneering the study of signification. Alongside Jakobson's terminological tools were added paralinguistics (Trager), kinesics (Birdwhistell, Pike), etc.²¹ It was in '68 that the term proxemics made its resounding entrance into the then-nascent lexicon of semiotics through the Italian translation of Hall's *The Hidden Dimension*. In the introduction, Umberto Eco (1968a) argued that proxemics, a cross-cultural typology of distances between human and non-human subjects, was, if not a new discipline, then "the first organic attempt at the semiotics of space." Eco had certain cultural and ideological reservations about proxemics, and had no illusions regarding its social benefits — "proxemics will not save the world," as he put it. But, he discerned its ability to uncover the rules of silent language, i.e., an intersubjective spatial grammar enabling us to create other articulations of meaning and new messages.

Still in '68 and starting from Hall's results, Eco (1968b) devoted pages 238–249 of his *La struttura assente* [*The Absent Structure*] to proxemics. As a Professor of Architecture at the University of Florence, he was intensely interested in the spatial arrangements of meaning. Hall did distinguish between fixed patterns of intersubjective distances, such as those in city plans, and semi-stable distances, such as those in squares or bars. Also, he distinguished between centrifugal and centripetal spaces, providing many cross-cultural examples from the design of built spaces.

Starting from Hall's anthropological matrix, Eco confirmed that the spatial connection between people in a relation of proximity or distance should take into account and justify the semantic value it takes in ethnologically and sociologically significant situations. Therefore, the architectural signifier does not reference a material object but rather a cultural signified. Hall would later elaborate in depth on this resolutely de-ontological stance via the concept of *extension transference*, proximate to Saussure's arbitrariness of the sign (Hall 1976). The semantic values of the sensory universes we live in and which inhabit us are expressed as cultural languages (*bodily communication*). Between physically co-present social actors, there are spatial bubbles of varying diameters; proxemic zones regulated by complex communicative conventions on how to place the

²¹ The first students of semiotics considered "Hall's work to be an essential text for all kinesiologists and paralinguists" (La Barre).

interacting bodies—human or non-human—in specific life-forms. At the time, this position found a theoretical control panel in writers like Gibson and Bateson. Even for Eco, these were human codes determining appropriate behavior both within and outside socio-cultural groups. Hall's distinction between *high context culture* and *low context culture*—the first explicit, the second implicit—did not fail to bring into the semiotician's mind Lotman's opposition between grammatical and textual modes of culture.²²

Nevertheless, and without explicit repudiations, proxemics would receive less and less support from Eco. It fell into neglect for several reasons: a disenchantment as great as the initial enthusiasm (e.g., Watson); an understandable distrust of the sweeping generalization of laboratory results; the transition from a 'strong' cultural theory of codes to the 'weak' theory of rhizomes; the division of sign research in a series of specialized semiotics; the attraction of the near-contemporary *linguistic turn* (1967) and the concomitant definition of general semiotics as a philosophical field based on semiosis.

In short, after a brief theoretical infatuation, proxemics remained a connotative semiotics, pending a 'denotative' and above all comparative methodology. Still, it did retain its anthropological appeal. Comparing the silent cultural languages of inter-personal distance can offset the obscurity of our cognitive and emotional relationships to tell us how many of the things we do not perceive or hear operate in ignorance of our forms of life.

2. During '68, the *Langages* journal dedicated its tenth issue, *Pratiques et langages gestuels*, to study gestural systems and methods. Edited by Greimas—who contributed with a memorable study of the semiotics of the natural world—the issue included papers by English and American linguists, including Birdwhistell and Cresswell, as well as Continental semioticians such as Claude Bremond, Julia Kristeva, François Rastier, and the undersigned. Proxemics formed part of a research project whose problematic concerned the relationship between the verbal and the visual (Bremond described the emphatic gestures used in comics!). It was a problematic destined to flourish as it anticipated the importance corporality would soon acquire in constructing and expressing meaning. However, the research dossier did not develop and continue as expected. By acknowledging proxemics as a *disciplinary project* appropriate for the study of non-verbal, natural, and constructed semiotics (rituals, ceremonies, theatre, circus, dance, pantomime, cinema, etc.), Greimas expanded the "proximation process" beyond the anthropomorphic interpretative version of significant and reciprocal variations into the

²² Hall's proxemics adds the cultural dimension, wherein powerful codes are distinguished from weak ones, to the dimensions of space and time. In terms of time, the distinction between a) polychronic ways of life, in which provisionality is perceived paradigmatically as simultaneity and b) monochronic ways of life, in which times are coordinated into sequences, is of interest.

dimension of distance and proximity. He included non-human actors both in his research (see Hall's research on the role the manipulation and control of distance play in the domestication of animals) and in intersubjective relations. He considered extensive and/or intensive distances, gradated and/or precise distances, situations both static and in motion. Regarding gestures, the Merleau-Pontian semiologist did not perceive them as translingual or suprasegmental but instead as part of general corporal textuality. A manifestation of the human body as volume and movement, creating syncretic texts that we can comprehend within the systems and practices of meaning.

For this reason, Greimas maintains his distance from proxemics as a super-linguistics of "kinematic features," constructed upon the phonemic model as interpreted by Hall and Edward Sapir. And he reaffirms the primacy of the semantic dimension, affording precedence to the form of the content, even for the inadequately formed character of expressive levels (see, for example, Laban's notation system on dance). Indeed, research on the semiotics of space, especially the studies of Manar Hammad, would take this direction. A deliberate and radical choice, exposed by François Rastier's 'Saussurean' critique: due to indifference towards the signifier and the absence of a reciprocal presupposition between the expression form and the content, we are led into non-naturalistic cognitivism.

A faux pas? Greimas' semiotics certainly lacks an interdefinition with a visual communication code such as the Italian sign language, i.e., a sign language with its corporal and grammatical dimensions (pronominality, visibility, modality, etc.), which has become an essential field within modern linguistics. And he refused to reconsider gestuality as a correlation between verbal-visual signifieds and signifiers. The latter are semiotic manifestations that induce us to consider the relationship between the sayable and the visible beyond any ontology.

What, then, is science? Science is a Golem.

H. Collins, T. Pinch

3. Today, the name of proxemics, once enthusiastically received as 'a new science,' is absent from cognitively-oriented studies of gesture (McNeil). Alternately, we find it as an adjective in qualifying the situational elements (the active and time/place-defining components) of conversation and therapeutic discourse analysis (Tannen).

Despite its exclusion from the discipline's keywords (Duranti), it seems to have retained its value in the related program of a semiotics of culture with a 'comparative and experimental' anthropological thrust. Due to its non-ontological and interactive dimension, proxemics is not limited to sensory interactions, face-to-face meetings in

micro-environments, lines of flight between interactive bubbles. Instead, it may extend “its scope to include all human behaviors during social interaction” (Finnegan 2002: 121–122). Subsequently, with scholars of gestures and interactions like Goffman and Kendon, the proxemic system remains a *silent language*, according to Finnegan. Independently of the extensive calculation of distances and categorical restriction (i.e., private, personal, social, and public space), proxemic conventions allow and involve supervised security zones, but also, signs or lines of intensity, following learned and not innate rules articulated by communities full of passion, communities both shared and conflictual. Violations of the more or less strict informal or ritual situations are unwitting or deliberate messages. The management of distances transforms the scope and meaning of spaces, both our own and others.

The humanities, which function ‘in the light’ of scientificity, presuppose signification in their mutable object. Despite not being ‘weak,’ their conceptual control panel is systematic, without being productive, hierarchical, measurable, and reproducible. They have the robust but irregular gait of a Golem. Minus the multiple blinders, the punctuated orbit which semiotics carves through the vast expanses of the semiosphere may detect proxemics once again. Which, unlike other, ordinary knowledge, has not aged since it offers not only sound advice but also models and paradigms.

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Institutions as double agents: programming discourses and modal adjustments

BY: Pierluigi Basso Fossali

1. We are all double agents

In his famous essay ‘Nous sommes tous des agents doubles’ (We are all double agents), Paolo Fabbri (1988) noted a progressive shift in communication strategies, from explicit modalities to forms of disguised influence. The latter have indeed become the privileged object of study of the linguistic and semiotic sciences. Alongside the rise of a rhetoric of disguised influence, Fabbri also noted that every social actor finds himself straddling networks of explicit and implicit relations, moving between roles claimed and roles assumed secretly. In short, every social actor experiences and, finally, considers the way he is implicated in social space as a *double agent*. We would like to make two enhancements to Fabbri’s theses, in part by making some extensions and shifts of relevance.

First, the thematization of the double agent has epistemological importance for us. It describes the essential condition of all semiotic enactments (*enunciations*) that explains the multiple and heterogeneous forms of *implication* (i) of the discourse, concerning its environment of reception (discursive image reflected by a semiosphere), and (ii) of the *instance of discourse*, concerning his speech content or any other semiotic production (discursive identity symbolized for the benefit of a noosphere). The epistemological consequences of generalizing a constitutively ‘double’ *enunciator* – who subjectively appreciates and problematizes this duplicity – unavoidably affect our concep-

tion of collective actors and institutions,¹ as well as of other forms of social involvement that seem in tension between themselves.

Secondly, we would like to show that the apparently explicit, declarative, and directive, if not injunctive *programming discourses* we find in institutional domains, incorporate the same 'duplicity' as informal, tactical, or even conspiratorial discourses do, even if this duplicity is dealt with through different dissimulation strategies and objectives.

Many consider *programming discourse* an autonomous discursive genre, potentially including cooking recipes, contracts, articles of law, instruction manuals, precept manuals, regulations, plans, guides, school instructions, game rules, propaganda texts, memoranda, and even weather reports, sermons, prayers or horoscopes. The hybridity of these *discursive classes* is enormous and requires appropriate clarifications that semiotics has begun to provide thanks to the contribution of Greimas (1979) and his famous text on the recipe for *pistou* soup, one of his few canonized texts and therefore discussed in all domains of language science. Despite this seminal text, one central question remains open. In the transfer of skills, *programming discourse* cannot but add to the *telling of how to do it* (e.g., the recipe) what *has to be done* – whether tacitly, in the form of an appeal or even a prayer, or expressly, in the opposite form of a peremptory injunction, accompanied with the threat of harsh penalties. Between these two extremes, there is a wide range of discourses in which the modal asymmetry of institutional roles (e.g., managers and executors, operators and users) is not reproduced on the level of knowledge distribution, since those dictating the program must trust and rely on the background knowledge and practical experience of those who will have to carry it out.

In this brief synthesis of two years' research on the programming discourses,² we want to highlight – inspired by Paolo Fabbri – how institutions are constantly forced to play double agents. On the one hand, they present a discourse illustrating methods of contingency control through the implementation of specific programs. In this discourse, on the other hand, they incorporate a reliance on other, delegated institutions, or directly on the citizens, regarding the execution of procedures that, in reality, are largely deficient and require a robust applicative sensitivity, as in the case, for example, of protocol adaptation to the idiopathies of hospital patients.

¹ From a semiotic point of view, we can consider institutions as organizing instances endowed with a history (thus, with a foundation and a tradition) able to offer: (i) structural opportunities for the categorization of values and their treatment; (ii) collective programs with an agenda, legitimate jurisdiction and procedural formulation; (iii) indicators of efficiency and effectiveness as models of inclusive interaction and exclusive cooperation.

² The results of this research, carried out from a series of seminars and symposia organized by the ICAR laboratory (UMR 5191, CNRS, ENS de Lyon, Université Lumière Lyon 2), have been partly published in Basso Fossali (ed. 2020) and in Basso Fossali (ed. 2021).

2. Social polarizations

Next to the responsibility for implementing institutional directives, there is also the responsibility for an informed interpretation of the situation that requires intervention. This additional demand creates a thorny hiatus between compliance with protocols and commitment to resort to one's own experience, if not to devise *ad hoc* solutions. Policies often have to flaunt control of the situation, aiming to rely on citizens' ability to react in the face of adversity or threats, bringing to light a circularity of mandates that contradicts the illusion of delegated responsibility. The ambiguity of institutional planning discourses is already inherent in their heterogeneity since they are presented both as discourses of guidance, to the point of suggesting blind execution (imagery of citizens under civic hypnosis), and as discourses of empowerment on the necessary reconstruction of society from below (the imagery of the mission: for example, in guides to emergency procedures, it is said to flee but also to help others in difficulty, even at one's own risk).

Inspired by what Paolo Fabbri (1991) has described as the "joyful Babel," we dare to suggest that he also saw the 'joyful conspiracy,' that is to say the fact that the institutions also speak of a secret union – a sort of *Gemeinschaft* (community) as opposed to the *Gesellschaft* (formal society) – capable of finding a 'common breath' (the etymological meaning of conspiracy³) to subvert the rigidity of a programming discourse that pretends to hold a power of control that it does not actually possess. In this 'joyful conspiracy' in which we are supposed to be both 'model citizens' and 'remediators of imperfect institutions,' the idea of a transfer of explicit competencies, exercised by the programming discourse, is subject to a comprehensive critical relativization of which the institutions themselves are aware. Thus, institutions recommend exercise and initiation, *instrumental programs* (Greimas and Courtés 1979: eng. transl. 246) embedded in the programming discourse, to be able to indicate two things: (i) learning places resistant to codification (due to a lack of knowledge or an excess of indeterminacy factors) and (ii) a qualitative shift in the delegation of responsibility that remains largely implicit. Indeed, we go from the institutional safeguarding of a coded action to the demonstration of an embodied knowledge, when it is not "good reflexes" in front of the emergency, reflexes which will be eventually judged (Basso Fossali and Thiburce 2021). Thus, the seemingly flatter and more rigid texts with almost no appeal, i.e., the programming discourses, turn out to be highly creative, often hypocritical, and in any case, almost always two-faced strategies of *social recomposition*.

³ See latin *conspirare*: *con* (together) and *spirare* (to breath).

The conformity to civic expectations that programmatic discourses solicit shifts:

- (first polarization) from a pedagogical and paternalizing point of view (directive speech acts) to an ethical and open-minded perspective (recommendations and appeals);
- (second polarization) from an eclectic homogenization of a specific association (community) to a cosmopolitan heterogeneity (humanity).

The tensions between the two polarizations underlie constitutionally unresolved civic passions, given the imperfection (incompleteness) and paradox (intractable internal contradictions) that established society embodies. Citizens are *double agents* because their integration into a given society requires both individual responsibility and formal delegation, a sense of belonging and a critical vigilance, the defense of heritage, and the reception of otherness.

In such a critical analysis of programming discourses, two theoretical perspectives are clearly at stake, dictating certain crucial assumptions: firstly, understanding institutions as not only strategic but also vulnerable; this leads us to describe how they try to remedy their lack of foundation and inefficiency. Secondly, closely connecting the idea of perceiving social actors, individual or collective, as double agents with the attestation of a scattered and irreducible presence of *double binds*. As a result, the programming discourse weaves the wide thematic area of the social paradoxes and becomes an overriding clue to grasp how society manages these contradictions over time, shifting the internal aporias and the institutional and individual burdens. After all, what hides behind the ordinary appearances of social interaction – the swarm of *second-order observations* and mutual suspiciousness – also questions all regulatory operations, which come to be hopelessly suspicious even of themselves, regarding their ability to organize the social and reduce meaning to law.

3. Programming discourses and their remedies

Although lacking a rigorous logic, *programming discourses* display a “syntagmatic intelligence” (Greimas 1983: 169) that makes them attractive as a model of collective action. Apparently, they do not need to insist on the appropriateness of the practice: indeed, there would be a tacit agreement on the value of cultural heritage or the wisdom of *institutions of meaning* (Descombes 1996), which would leave “in principle, little room for discussion or justification” (Jacques and Poibeau 2010: 7). In fact, recourse to the class of programming discourses is motivated precisely by the need to corroborate, or even reconstruct, the performativity of an area of social organization, given the ‘endemic’ lack of integration between emerging challenges and available but little-used, or as yet unexploited, techniques. The preference for generalizing the class of texts un-

derpinned by the idea of ‘programming’ (instead of instruction, guidance, regulation, etc.) is linked to this discursive tension between the application of what is already known (codified protocols) and the teleological ambition that cannot yet fully explain the structuring of its interventions (programmatic bases).

Opaque and recalcitrant objects, discourses that tell *how to do* must also regulate a tacit or controversial horizon of purpose – *to do what?* – and a modal network of delegations and social mandates – *inviting to do*. Programming discourses seek to integrate action into the organizational plan immanent to textuality, exemplifying at the same time a methodology, a purpose, and a mandate. Programming is about breaking down action into technical gestures and structuring the horizon of expectations and the modal framework of cultural transmission.

In the critical hiatus between modeling and simulation, the programming discourse deploys both its performative ambitions (imposing a rationality, or even a formalization of action) and its endless adjustments to the specific environment of executive practice, optimizing its performance through constant updates. The concrete implementation of a protocol is always an adaptation to the situation and the site.

While the use of programmatic discourse as a partition and script of an action to be carried out cannot saturate the interpretation of the latter, the project of its *enunciation* can at least propose a “design” for the distribution of modal loads between a “sender-manipulator” (Greimas and Courtés 1979: eng. transl. 184), who must be accredited or affirmed as a recognized institutional member, and a “receiver-manipulee” (*ibid.*), who must be certified as having the necessary competencies to adapt the program to the contingencies of a specific setting. The manipulation’s one-sidedness transforms into a circularity of mandates, radically changing the model of causal linearity of modalizations to the extent of requiring the description of patterns that replace each other in a non-consequential way (the social is always waiting for its recomposition).

In this sense, a programming discourse cannot be reduced to isolated performative acts (e.g., a directive speech act or injunction) since the programming dimension in itself implies a critical hiatus (spatial, temporal, or actantial) between aims and achieved results. It is worth recalling, in this context, the etymology of the term ‘program’ (πρόγραμμα) means ‘to write before.’ It indicates an intentionality seeking to set its goals (*base narrative programs*) when the spatial, temporal, and actantial conditions for their realization have not yet been met (it is necessary to go through *instrumental programs*⁴). Thus, the institutional ‘allography’ of procedures, based on notational texts, gives us what Fabbri (1988: 5) would call an “apocryphal world,” written, after all, autographically, by those who did not merely execute the *dictum*, to guarantee a close-knit, cooperative if not ‘conspiratorial’ reproduction of the social. But if “traitors love order

⁴ See Greimas et Courtés (1979, eng. transl. p. 246).

because they need stable points of reference to plot their machinations" (*ibid.*, p. 6), citizens cannot but experience as an unresolved paradox the simultaneous demand for procedural precision and room for maneuver, rigidity and flexibility, normativity and creativity.

Moreover, since a measure of adaptation to environmental contingencies is always necessary, we can recognize the specific way of anticipating the impact of the normative scope of programming discourses with an occurring setting, a given space of implementation: on the one hand, there will be discourses that accept *conditions of validity* only as a *horizon of rational and normative adequacy*, and on the other hand, discourses that are ready to be evaluated based on *conditions of success* (Habermas 1994) as a *horizon of testability* (Popper 1972). The *conditions of validity* are established based on jurisdiction and compliance with formal rules for the exercise of the illocutionary force of the speech acts realized. The *conditions of success* concern the results' conformity (and thus of the perlocutionary effects) to the initial purpose.

Discursive programming must manage a dialectic between respect for a normative framework and the development of a local and distinctive, if not creative, efficiency (as in school or professional learning). This *double-bind* – inscribed in an institutional field and distinguishing individual initiative – shows how linguistic action exemplifies the fact that any programming initiative is the interruption or even de-programming of another programming, including the resumption of customary formulas and ways of doing things.

The praxeological framework functions both as the ground for implementing the programmatic utterance's semantic potential and as the crossroads with other, not necessarily linguistic practices, or with variably unpredictable and indeterminate events. In practice, the recipient of the programmatic discourse finds himself more or less in the position of the double agent described by Paolo Fabbri: (i) he has to convert his loyalty to the *dictum* into a commitment to supplementing strategy with ad hoc inputs of reflection; (ii) he has to be at once a 'mercenary' of institutional tradition and a professional 'betrayal' of rigid, and hence obtuse, executive routine; (iii) he has to be part of a social apparatus and, simultaneously, strive to avoid a 'mechanical' pattern of action. In programming discourses, what is at stake is not so much truth, but a practical *rightness* (Goodman 1978); a rightness that requires a kind of actantial recasting: from an actant who is a follower of the organization to an actant who displays a 'schismatic' attitude when the protocol encounters circumstances unfavorable to its application. Inspired by Goffman's sociology, we can say that every institution functions more or less like a secret society that must mitigate its vulnerability, its negative image, by foregrounding a series of delegates deputized to defend its secrecy, its unconfessed ignorance, its poor handling of environmental complexity. Thus, the programming discourse is both a pretentious instance of deprogramming bad practices and a distrib-

utive device of non-knowledge that must be remedied on the spot, *in media res*. In its quest to provide an interface to everything that escapes procedural mediation, the institution co-opts social actors as apt infiltrators who command extra-procedural knowledge or skills.

4. Aspects and types of programming discourse

Programming discourses must be subjected to the analysis of at least three fundamental modal components that receive unequal combinations and are variously subject to internal, sometimes even paradoxical tensions: (i) the instructional architecture of a codified action (intervention design), (ii) the incitement to action that triggers the initiative (optative framework), (iii) the dissuasive device to use different forms of rationality and commitment (implicative recall).

Implicitly, all speech is a pattern of instructions, incitements, and dissuasions, leading the reader to follow the intended path of interpreting the text, avoiding arbitrary uses of its semiotic potential. In this respect, programming discourses are a specific class of enunciative productions that simply show (or at least do not hide) their 'instructional' purpose and modal asymmetry, often in a pedagogical if not patronizing tone. In addition, they indicate the shift from the immanence of textual space to a horizon of experience, a setting that only partially reflects the rational models and techniques available. Textual immanence becomes a structure of exemplifying a rational organization, considered in some way legitimate, which must be projected onto the pragmatic scenario according to appropriate adaptations. It is a discourse that intends to take charge of the operational direction of the actions to be undertaken, in terms of (i) technical structuring of the action, (ii) indication of the space and time favorable to taking the initiative, (iii) control of the efficiency and containment of the execution's side-effects.

To summarize, the notion of *programmability* crosses from side to side every semiotic practice, and on different levels: reflexive (programming of the act of enunciation), dialogic (programming of interaction), and transitive (programming of non-linguistic action). In this transition from one plane of relevance to the other, we note three crucial dimensions: (A) exemplification of order (the programming utterance is displayed as a model of rationality), (B) modal regulation (the enunciation of the programming discourse becomes a framework of responsibilities and implications), and (C) technical modeling (the programming discourse is presented as a notational text that has appropriately divided the action to be performed into stages and steps).

Any programming discourse is simply a proposal for normative planning of a sequence and/or a cycle of initiatives through the combination of three essential items:

- (1) the *updating of available competencies*: the programming discourse proposes a method of intervention and, if possible, a technical procedure in the light of a series of acquisitions (knowledge and skills) that the interlocutors should possess;
- (2) the *reduction of indetermination factors*: the programming discourse aims to reduce the frame of reference to the pivots of action and its pre-eminent risk factors, to absorb as many contingencies as possible in the form of explicit circumstantial variables and adaptive or compensatory action sequences. In this sense, the programming discourse may indicate cycles of action to be repeated, bifurcations of paths according to the reactions of the execution ground, strategic anticipations concerning the behavior of other instances involved in the same context and with different programs and competencies;
- (3) the *advantageous redistribution of modal burdens*: to solicit the interlocutors' competencies and guarantee the effectiveness of the processes presented, the programming discourse must compensate the modal force of the directive speech acts by rebalancing implications and exposure to results. This implies a sharing of responsibilities (validity) and guarantees concerning the reliability of the programs (participation in the success of the initiative and realization).

Programming discourse considers that it is possible to integrate action models into syncretic discursive structures through the qualification of (i) the actors, (ii) the space of operation, (iii) the optimal timing, and (iv) the intersubjective link (modal network). Proposing the normative planning of a sequence and/or cycle of initiatives involves three modules, always encapsulated in the discursive outcomes of the programmatic discourse, beyond their explicit or implicit manifestations:

- (a) the *political dimension of the proposal*, i.e., its organizational vocation that qualifies the enunciative initiative concerning the know-how promoted. Through two orders of variables (strategic vs. tactical, synthetic vs. analytical), we could propose the following systematization: (i) *strategies*: project (synthetic vision) vs. program (analytical vision); (ii) *tactics*: approach (synthetic methods) vs. process (analytical method).
- (b) the *conative dimension* that decides on the illocutionary regulation of the proposal: the modalities managed range from *having to do* to *wanting to do* something, which means moving from injunctions to recommendations (the dosage of duty), from appeal to suggestions (simultaneous dosage of duty and wanting), from encouragement to incitement (dosage of the will). Of course, these modalities can have an antagonistic declination, and therefore, the discourse will be a dosage of *not having to do* and *wanting to do* something or of *having to do* and *not wanting to do* something, thus proposing itself as counter-programming;
- (c) the *technical dimension of the proposal*, which involves structuring the initiative based on a balance between *in-depth knowledge* (information), *expert abilities* (knowing-

how-to-be, knowing-how-to-do), and *enhanced power* (equipment). Thus, there are notations or outlines if the structuring of knowledge prevails and devices or expedients if the structuring of equipment prevails.

The qualifications of (i) actors' competencies, (ii) space of exercise, (iii) timing, and (iv) intersubjectivity define the coupling of programming discourse with external variables. From this coupling, one can better appreciate the social roles of programming discourse, which can vary according to the degree of dependence or autonomy concerning the institutional arrangements that prepare the implementation scenario.

In this sense, we could distinguish:

- (a) the *protocol*, supported by an institutional device corresponding to an autonomous place of a cultural function's exercise (e.g., the verdict as a legal device enunciated by the judge at the trial's end);
- (b) the *procedure*, defining standardized programs validated by authorized third parties, but implemented when the institution encounters hard to handle environmental contingencies or operates outside its jurisdiction (e.g., emergency procedures in the face of flood risk);
- (c) the *programmatically discourse* that, even when enunciated by an institutional personality, only proposes the germinative and promising structure of possible reorganization of the field, given that the latter is still full of uncertainty and that there are no explicit procedures already validated to face the future (e.g., the editorial line declared by the new owner of a newspaper in front of the editorial board, or political discourse on public debt that has to justify the decisions to be taken without being able to know in advance the response of the markets and the articulation with the rapidly changing economic situation).

In programmatic discourse, it is admissible to suppose the existence of solidarity between the contents' rigorous programming, the rigidity of the organization's rules, and their inscription at the level of expression. This is true concerning the technical structuring of units and their combination, the schematic exemplification of a well-mastered organization. On the other hand, when the weakness of the programming discourse's 'directive' force depends on the enunciator's insufficient authority, it is easy to see that an overloaded and peremptory tone is preferred to the lightening of the plane of expression to compensate for the deficit of competence or accreditation.

In essence, textualization and its concomitant choices (genre, statute, medium, tone, etc.), reveals that the criteria for defining a class of discourse (the pivots of their validity) are not independent of the enunciative choices made to control an interactional regime (the fundamental stakes of their success), even if their intersection can be dramatized either in terms of factual adherence to norms (compliance with current protocols) or in terms of maximum ideal tension (utopian programmatic discourse).

5. Circularity of mandates

Taking our cue from Paolo Fabbri (2005), we can identify the semiotic articulation between grammar-based *instructions*, the *instructed actions* that are qualified as adaptable to situations, and finally, the *instructive practices* that, even in the course of their implementation, allow for a rethinking of the grammar framework. In its transpositions, the sense of doing is reproduced under the banner of new value frameworks, without ever incurring an ontological 'arrest.'

To this cyclic reproductive nature of meaning in programming, we have tried to suggest the need to identify the circularity of mandates. All programming discourses must manage the modal asymmetry between the *programmer-sender* and the *executant-receiver* and, in the case of an upstream proxy, between the institution and its delegate. Consequently, the distribution of modal loads must appear sensible and beneficial, even if the program's purpose is already validated as legitimate (rationally and morally) by the *doxa*, e.g., upholding a tradition. Programming discourse may include a dose of rhetoric to reduce and justify the initial asymmetry (someone decides on a 'program' that will affect other individuals) and thus obtain the real involvement of the *executant-receiver* – if possible, his commitment, as well. In this sense, programmatic discourses have a protagonistic role in elaborating social action as translators of the inadequacy of any individual or collective organism to realize (or preserve) the institution of society on its own.

In democracies, programmatic discourses indicate the reproduction of an asymmetry internal to the community, which should sooner or later be converted into a horizon of common interests. Consequently, this discursive genre's institutional framework can be explained in terms of an ideal circularity of mandates, ensuring that, after executing his program, the agent can appear as a *programmer-sender*. From this point of view, the paradigm of social security is exemplary: the ban sign 'No smoking' is a prescription which, locally, has the value of an injunction, but which refers to the mandate assigned to public institutions to safeguard citizen's health (from active or passive smoking). The recipient of the programming discourse will discover that the mandate he received was in fact an instruction referring to a law (tutelary) that protects him. If the circularity is thought to be socially evident, the programming discourse can work without a sophisticated use of compensatory rhetoric, and so the prescriptions can then be enunciated with a nonverbal clause or highly impersonal formulas, as if to signal the total reversibility between the sender and the receiver's roles (self-regulation of the community concerning good practices).

Of course, there are different institutional or informal contexts where polemical tensions prevail, and programming discourses are formulated with more asymmetric and constrictive modal charges. If the co-presence of a programming guideline and an

asymmetric modal charge is not a sign of the discourse class hybridity but its primary and founding communicative function, then any programming discourse, even the most peremptory, acknowledges a circularity of mandates that also breaks with the canonical horizon of narrative discourse that would impose a definitive appreciation of starting points and a final stage.

The programming discourse can resolve tensions between the 'neutral' nature of the technique and the distributed interest, which allows the clarification of the stakes that necessarily pass through the execution. This clarification, which increases the value of the mandate through the success or failure of its implementation, sometimes gives evidence that the slave's work is at the service of the master, but that the latter also becomes dependent on the services received, thus becoming his slave's slave (recall here the little Hegelian lesson).

Narrative discourse could only break this circularity with a series of tests pointing to an open horizon of results. Argumentative discourse would open up circuits of justification that could only blur the circuits of mandates towards a discussion of the reasons that drove them. It is this circularity, resistant to the argumentative and narrative folds of enunciation, that explains the normative nature of the programming discourse; it is as if this circularity could be productive and capable of ensuring a re-symbolization of the roles of the individual and /or collective instances involved.

Through programmatic discourses, apparently so conformist, social domains address their internal complexity by accepting heterogeneous contributions and thematizing values crossing their jurisdiction, such as security. Every organization has to protect itself against risks unanticipated by its systems. The outsourcing of specific procedures or their automatic execution is less a symptom of a social domain's confidence in its self-regulation than an attempt to remedy this lack of autonomous control by co-opting procedures developed elsewhere or carried out as if other apparatuses or instances guided them.

What programming discourses seek to achieve is a possible reconceptualization of the ways of making and unmaking society. In this sense, programming discourses, in their prosaic and conservative aspect, show a problematization of both the technique of 'saying' and the technique of 'doing,' which also explains the hiatus between ideologies and procedures highlighted by Foucault (1975). Indeed, procedures are applied both when the field of application is refractory to the public moralization of practices or to the ideology of the state (legal codes), and when not only responsible but also innovative answers are sought (training programs).

One of the fertile contradictions of programmatic discourse is, thus, the temptation to continually go beyond its initial mandate, i.e., to plan action according to a reasonable and shareable modal horizon. It undoubtedly focuses on this fundamental horizon to

guide (school instructions), to transmit and follow up on a practical tradition (recipes, notational texts, drafts to be taken up and completed), to optimize (recommendations), to keep an institution alive (protocols), to demonstrate (formalizations), to manage risks (guides for dealing with states of emergency), to fight against other programs (tactical plans), etc. Arguably, this 'surplus' of programming discourse comprises its actual symbolic capital.

6. Convergence between intentions and skepticism

Programmatic discourses cannot avoid showing the *programmer-sender's* intentional profile. Even the tacit connivance with the *executant-receiver's* intentionality (intersubjective agreement) reveals a distinct – and thus differential and asymmetrical – will, which may concern the adoption of principles of rationality, economy (the balance between means and ends), legitimacy (ethos), or elegance.

Programming discourse comprises an autonomous genre, serving to design frameworks of potentially converging intentions that achieve a plan of expression and reduce the critical gap between aims stabilization and resource utilization. Programming discourse does not merely relay some specific intentionality. It presents and filters it as a node of intentionality to be completed (Basso Fossali 2017: 197-202). It does not merely photograph an instrumental reason taken for granted but realizes the improbability of a unilateral semantic initiative - "Do I want to do on my own or am I following an assigned task?, Do I program or am I programmed?" If the argument can be reduced, or even canceled, it is because the programming discourse is itself a semiotic environment in which the critical hiatus between predication and the assumption of a given agency necessarily leaves room for a 'remediation' (subsequent mediation and possible refinement) of intentionality, towards either the confluence with institutional motivations, the emancipation of a creative process, or the relative compatibility of these directions.

If we have already noted a specific concern of the programming discourse in managing the asymmetry between the modal loads of the interlocutors, we must also underline its 'initiatory' aspect, sometimes exhibited and, at other times, disguised. Here, we should understand 'initiation' as an accessory to a discipline, a technique, a professional activity, or even the civic management of an emergency. Advancing an initiation into a way of doing things, set between *telling people how to do them* and *recommending that they do them*, amounts to acknowledging the challenges of managing the programmatic discourse's implementation complexity, notwithstanding privileged access to often highly sophisticated technical knowledge.

Joining a professional organization, attending ritual practices, assuming civic responsibilities means accessing a cognitive and affective posture capable of dealing with

the field's secrets. These secrets often concern the limits of a *modus operandi* and the side effects of the devices used. The social relies heavily on this 'joyful conspiracy.'

However, given initiation's contrast with habit, there is a constant skepticism about adopting parameters declared sufficient to guarantee critical monitoring of procedure implementation. Proper initiation entails not entirely trusting one's ability to handle situations, taking the precaution of testing the crucial steps, as well as doubting the adequacy of immoderately diligent models (see Murphy's law).

Programming discourse has a definite metalinguistic side that concerns the very 'proceduralization' of its use. This self-application intervention maintains a fundamental principle of this type of discourse: positioning oneself where counter-programming is needed (for example, against habits). At the same time, this self-application must remain 'self-critical,' because it is only through initiation into the implementation of programmatic discourse that the tensions between political transcendence, sometimes prone to paternalism, and technical immanence, usually informed by prudent skepticism (experience teaches the risks of the profession), can be appreciated. The fact that programmatic discourse cannot escape these tensions demonstrates its involvement in the 'society restoring' circuit, expressed in its double politics: its responsibility to hold together purpose and technique – hence, its over-modalization of doing – and in explicating ways of doing, without relying on the activation of already existing programming.

In conclusion, it is necessary to clarify that programmatic discourses are not irenic. They arise from a problematization of action and are part of a circuit of implicative modalities and symbolic exchanges. Finally, they incorporate a metalinguistic and critical tension since they can inform the reader about the limits of their ambitions and the adverse effects of their blind adoption.

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The iconoclasm of the everyday

BY: Lucia Corrain

*The monument is an artificial monument
that simulates reality, the truth, to impose its efficacy.*

Paolo Fabbri, "La comédie du monument," 1999

To begin with

Among his numerous interests, Paolo Fabbri (2020) reserved particular attention to the artistic, literary, and musical production of Alberto Savinio.¹ In an essay dedicated to him, he focuses, amongst other things, on the animism of the "statues in the making." In this context, he discusses *Flora*, one of Savinio's short stories named after its protagonist, a statue depicting a young woman "whose nose is mutilated yet smiling, burnt by time and made hairy by the moss, her air being that of a walker spreading the flowers she kept in her womb" (Savinio 1943a: 72).² Albeit being a statue made of stone, Flora becomes animated and narrates to Marco, the story's other protagonist, "the marvelous life of statues." She explains to him that statues "are not inanimate matter, as is commonly believed, but creatures that once were alive and then embalmed in stone, wherein they live forever, in the company of their soul and the memories of their mortal lives" (ibid.:73).

¹ Pseudonym of Andrea Francesco Alberto de Chirico – born in Athens in 1891 and died in Rome in 1952 – writer, painter, playwright and composer, he chose the pseudonym Alberto Savinio to distinguish himself from his brother Giorgio.

² *Flora* is part of *Casa 'La vita,'* a collection of sixteen stories in total. As the frontispiece states, they are preceded by "the author's self-portrait, a preface and a dedication, and accompanied by eight drawings of the author and nine 'eyes,' enriched by an apostille and a variant."

Fabbri's comment to this exceptional 'life' of the statues is very effective and, availing himself also of the writer's words, states that, in general, Savinio's statues have two possibilities:

they can petrify definitively, losing the "drop of life in the middle of the cold stone that animates them." But they "can also get warm and enlarge that drop," such as to "spread it throughout the body of marble and make it tepid and lend color to the lips and light to the eyes," to the extent of having a voice (Fabbri 2007: 419).

The statue of Flora belongs, without a shadow of a doubt, to the second category. But what motivated her to come back to life? What "warmed that drop of life in the middle of the cold stone and enlarged it to spread throughout the body of marble, making it tepid and lending color to the lips and light to the eyes?" (Savinio 1943a: 73-74). Flora chooses Marco because she sees him "so still and taciturn" as to believe "that he too was a statue, although looser in his movements and free to roam among the mortals" (ibid.: 74). And she falls in love with Marco, who reciprocates. Indeed, the statue finds "in the love of a man, Marco, the strength of the smile, the breath and a sound that comes from the heart of the stone," to the point of making her pronounce "a Latin vocative Marce" (Fabbri 2007: 419-420). Here you have, notes Savinio, "the metaphysical reason of every statue, that is the surprise and the appeal";³ here, essentially, the statue's animation is explained: "Loving is animating, the inanimate things are animated if they are loved" (Savinio 1943a: 250).

Both Alberto Savinio and Paolo Fabbri have certainly noticed in Flora's story the echo of the myth of Pygmalion: the sculptor who gives shape to the desired woman, Galatea. Whereas in Ovid's myth, the goddess Venus infuses life into Galatea (cf. Stochita 2006), Flora's statute is animated only by her love for Marco, a love whose end is ironic and tragic. In the heart of the night, Marco reaches Flora, and yearning to have intercourse with her, is strangled by the statue's stone limb. The following day, it was "necessary to break the statue's arm to release Marco's corpse" (Savinio 1943a: 80).

Flora's "life" originates in the "clairvoyant's wake," in a mind just awoken, in "an intensification of the dream that makes the visions visible." A moment when "dream fragments remain attached" (Fabbri 2007: 410), and where – once again, in Savinio's words (1943b: 183) – "the boundary between subject and object is obscured, if not completely canceled."

³ Savinio (1943b: 249). The protagonist's reaction is significant: "Marco, trembling with commotion, stared at the statue that was slowly coming to life. He listened to that dull voice, weak, that voice that came from afar, from the heart of the stone, from the bottom of the mountains, and in which the shadow of Latin crept through" (Savinio 1943a: 73).

1. Statue and / or monument

Savinio's story is discussed here not simply to recall one of Paolo Fabbri's intellectual passions but also to highlight its analogies with some recent actions that have brought statues to the forefront of public attention. Before delving into current events, however, it is necessary to clarify one thing. Flora's figure was meant to furnish a garden; the recently contested statues are instead *monuments* that become 'animated' on account of the values they represent and can provoke reactions that can go as far as their destruction. Flora's statue belongs to a genre of images capable of creating "special effects that make them 'come alive,' capable of simulating vitality," where the vivification of the image is fused "with the assimilation of image and body," while the case of monument destruction hinges "upon the mutual substitution of body and image" (Bredenkamp 2017: 137).⁴ Moreover, Fabbri (1999: 173) reminds us that "There is a nice term in Italian, which is 'monumentare,' that is to say 'making monuments,' implying the dimensions of a particular entity."

Among the monuments' peculiarities, as elegantly described by Robert Musil (2006: 64), "the most salient is a bit contradictory, namely that monuments are so conspicuously inconspicuous. There is nothing in this world as invisible as a monument. They are no doubt erected to be seen - indeed to attract attention. But at the same time, they are impregnated with something that repels attention, causing the glance to roll right off, like water droplets off an oilcloth."

The original meaning of the Latin word *monumentum* (derived from the verb *monere*, which means 'remember,' 'make one think,' 'advise,' 'warn,' 'exhort,' 'inspire,' as well as 'foresee' and 'announce') conveys the past to the present because of a memory projected into the future horizon. It possesses, consequently, a stratified temporality. However, a temporality that decays over time makes monuments fully-fledged machines of oblivion, contradicting their primary function as a mnemonic device. As Paolo Fabbri put it (1999: 175),

You can imagine the monument like a mirror device, susceptible to degradation. It is a document that has already undergone this degradation since, on the one hand, a monument wants to recall something; on the other, you mustn't forget that the term document comes from the Latin *docere*, that is, to teach something. Therefore, at the source of this, there is the degradation of a document that has lost its teaching function; then, there is the monument that degrades, and it too loses its function.

⁴ Bredenkamp (2017) speaks of a schematic iconic act when the statues can come to life and a substitutive iconic act in the case of iconoclasm. On iconoclasm cf. also Fredberg (1989) and Gamboni (2002, 2007).

If then, a kind of torpor afflicts monuments gradually, it is also the case that contrariwise, certain recent events have cast doubt on the 'impermeability' of the monuments by activating, or rather 'reawakening' their original meaning. It is noteworthy that, when they enter the dimension of oblivion, many of them can equally recuperate, suddenly, a memorial function, until then silent, that can activate or even implement actions of a destructive character.⁵ That character which, with somewhat different intentions, is foreshadowed in Savinio's story by the partial destruction of Flora's statue.

The monuments erected in public spaces in past eras involve the values of the society that express them, addressed to putting on a plinth the most eminent characters who have decreed its glory and fortune. But these monuments, made of stone or bronze and seemingly stuck in time, are cast into doubt by a society that changes at an ever-faster pace. This phenomenon highlights a peculiar aspect of monuments: although designed and erected to speak *ad infinitum*, that is, to last in time, preserve the enunciation they propose to the same enunciator who proffered it, the monuments bear witness to the changing times, to the cultural shifts that alter the equilibrium between the center and the periphery of the semiosphere. This produces the risk of semantic attrition between the "planned meaning" of a monument and its "meaning of use" (Marrone 2013, Panico 2018). Between, in short, what the artists or the authorities wished to communicate via bronze or stone artworks and what the people perceived as the meaning of the monument, in the context of their daily practices, needs, and cultural competence.

In this light, then, it is necessary to adopt a careful and acute gaze on the value changes, on the explosions *à la Lotman*, that affect culture in a given historical moment. Considered as manifestations of mainstream power and thinking, and hence as regulators of collective remembrance, monuments are among the first spatial texts to be invested with the public desire to redefine collective memory,⁶ dictating new modalities of evaluating what is memorable (cf. Violi 2017).

The current discussion on memorials undoubtedly concerns identity and, to the extent that our society is increasingly becoming multicultural, the issue becomes manifest actuality. Indeed, every monument tells a story rooted in the past and in the identity of the communities which made and preserved it.

⁵ The reference is to the volume by Gell (1998), where the theme of agency is analyzed.

⁶ Cf. Assmann (1999), Bassanelli (2015), Pinotti (2014), Piretto (2014), Violi (2014), Beyaert-Geslin, Chatenet and Okala (2019).

Current monument destruction is part of the iconoclastic wave that appeared in the late spring of 2020, involving numerous acts against monuments carried out by Black Lives Matter's antiracist movement. Soon after the death of the Afro-American George Floyd,⁷ in Minneapolis, on 25 May 2020, in the hands of a white police officer, an iconoclastic frenzy was unleashed in the United States and other parts of the world, affecting primarily those national contexts in which the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the field of social rights and opportunities (cf. Borghi 2020). George Floyd's death – whose full recording by a passerby became viral – operated as a generator of images, just as the iconoclastic acts that ensued generated, in turn, other images. As Bredekamp argues (2017: 172), the vast range of iconoclastic gestures evidences

the dilemma of iconoclasm: the fact that it strengthened that which it denied. For the iconoclast believed images to be lifeless, and yet, in destroying them as if they were living criminals, traitors, or heretics, he imparted to them the life he had just denied them. Measured in terms of the degree of his activity in relation to the image, the iconoclast may be seen to be more strongly motivated by these very images than were those who worshipped them. In their belief that along with the image was also destroyed that which is represented, iconoclasts are the agents of the destructive aspect of the substitutive image act.

Going back to the news stories, we need to remember that by 2017, in the United States had already begun the removal or destruction of monuments dedicated to Confederate army 'heroes,' erected in front of public buildings or the middle of city squares. The wave of destructive protests reached a peak in 2020 when some European cities were also involved, especially those having monuments celebrating persons whose reputation now seemed somewhat debatable on account of their involvement in the slave trade. The iconoclastic fury also involved the seemingly innocent monuments dedicated to Christopher Columbus. The protesters defaced or demolished many memorials dedicated to him because the great navigator had unwittingly become a symbol of all-conquering colonialism. In a radical wind-change, the exemplary nature and value of Columbus suddenly became narcotized, "frozen," as Umberto Eco put it (2007). An alternative memory of him as a culpable conqueror was activated in its place. In this way, a process of negative filtering was put into motion: from being the sign-image of the greatness of human ingenuity and the courage of discovery, Columbus is 'translated'

⁷ George Floyd, 46 years old, was killed during his arrest for having allegedly used a counterfeit banknote. During his arrest, a white police officer knelt on Floyd's neck for about nine and a half minutes while being handcuffed and made to lie face down; even when it was evident that he could no longer breathe, the agent refused to lift his knee until the doctors declared *rigor mortis*.

as a vulgar invader, responsible for having inaugurated the bloody conquest of the New World and the subsequent atrocities of colonialism, including slavery.⁸

As becomes evident, iconoclastic acts aimed at statues represent a fully-fledged memory war. They do not want simply to cancel the past but seek to reinterpret it from a different perspective, with the gaze of the ‘conquered.’ The monument thus becomes the place where a dialectical condensation occurs between knowledge, cognitive and modal competence of memory – in other words: what do I know about the past? All the while, a form of anachronistic collision is generated in the present time – *Jetztzeit* to use the words of Walter Benjamin (1974: 1046) – capable of revealing, through the instantaneous encounter with what rises from the past, a new meaning for both the present and the past.⁹ In other words, elements of a different culture enter the official semiosphere, producing – as Jurij Lotman (1993) argues – an explosion, a full-fledged rupture of the simulacra of codified doing.

After its construction, then, a monument acquires a temporal dynamic that involves at least two phases: its gradual narcotization/oblivion and its magnification/‘rewriting.’ Hence, the monument has an inherently polyvalent character; it is a two-faced Janus, linked to both remembrance and forgetfulness, in a way that is not always well defined since it is subject to cultural relativism. “The waves of culture – according to Lotman (1985: 144) – move in the sea of humanity. This means that the processes that occur are inseparable from the collective emotions.”¹⁰

2. Monuments, memory, and iconoclasm

This planet-wide iconoclastic movement finds in the questioning of history a form of teaching and poses the need to query the past. Fabbri himself writes – as has been seen – that the monument is a document and that, as a consequence, it also benefits from the Latin etymology *docere*: teaching (Fabbri 1999: 174). If we accept this idea, it is essential to understand how the past reaches and teaches us. On the ground of these simple considerations, what emerges is the need to understand the common sentiment regarding violence and the need to revolt towards inanimate objects like statues. Where should one search for an answer to such acts? As previously pointed out, monuments are the vehicles of recollection and memory. They are a warning coming from the past

⁸ For a still provisional list of the monuments subject to iconoclastic gestures in the next phase subsequent to the killing of George Floyd, cf. “List of monuments and memorials removed during the George Floyd protests,” cf. <https://bit.ly/3APCYSn> (accessed: March 2021).

⁹ The issue was analysed by Fabbri (1999: 174) as follows: “It is the movement of Benjamin: choosing the future; in that moment, return to the past, choosing the past and then return to the present.”

¹⁰ In Lotman’s writings, there are numerous references to history and memory, cf. Lotman (1984, 2006, 1993) as well as Lotman and Uspenskij (1975), Uspenskij (1976). In the past few years, semiotic interest in cultural memory has grown significantly. Cf. Mazzucchelli (2010), Panico (2020), Violi (2014).

to the present and can model the future, proposing a specific grammar. In other words, monuments tell us not only what to remember but also how to remember, with which cognitive and passionate intensity.

Consequently, statues are recognized both as social constructs bearing meaning and as semiotic evaluations, axiologies about the past, committed to 'solidifying' something recognizable and not subject to debate. Remembering these aspects is of fundamental importance as they suggest how the imaginaries are questioned through monumental cancellation and rewriting practices. Often, common sentiment articulates the discourse about monuments around considerations such as: "They have always been there, and no one cares about them anymore;" and even, "What problem can an inanimate thing weathered by time represent?" On the contrary, from a semiotic point of view, it is essential to reduce the ambiguity surrounding the forms of resemanticization because these reflect – as Eric Landowski (1989) suggests – the ways society gives meaning to its past. In response to the historical continuum as narrated via monuments, a lived history is interposed, liable to reconfigurations and re-elaborations that can also be seen as projections into the future.

It is on this basis that we need to approach the recent attacks on monuments. We need to inquire about the forms assumed by iconoclasm and vandalism, forms which concern not so much (and not only) pure and simple destruction but a semantic overturning of what is considered worthy of being part of collective memory. Paolo Fabbri returned to the issue of iconoclasm several times in the course of his lectures. In particular, in *Segni del tempo. Un lessico politicamente scorretto* (2004: 118-119), he provides an ingenious list of terms tied to contemporaneity, whose meaning he accurately defines. Among these, he includes iconoclasm. According to Fabbri, the images and symbols that the iconoclast attacks are not just any texts. They are semiotic objects perceived as activators of particular encyclopedic sectors that signify something else and refer to specific systems of values and meanings resisted by the subject performing the desecrating act (*ibid.*). It is worthwhile recalling Fabbri's exact words:

We know what this word means: "destruction of images" and not of just any image. The Byzantines destroyed sacred images, not those of the emperors, whereas, in our times, during regime changes, we destroy political images, not artistic ones. The iconoclast destroys symbols, that is, images endowed with meaning and value. [...] The perpetrators of September 11, 2001, are not just terrorists who hit the undefended civilian population of the planet's greatest military power. They certainly knocked down buildings, but they are above all iconoclasts. Their target, the World Trade Center, was the very symbol of the West's globalizing power, of its post-colonial economic rapacity. Or at least that is what we think, attributing it, with a cursory trial of the intentions to smart (human) bombs. But can we be so sure? In the meantime, let's remember that

“symbol,” etymologically, means “putting together.” By referring to one thing, the towers, and another, capitalism, from one signifier to a signified. But the symbols, unlike the Towers, are not isolated; they form a structure or, even better, they are entangled in a dense network of meanings. Let’s see. Forever the imaginary of power in Western culture has been represented by a triad of solid symbols: the king-priest, the warrior, the merchant-farmer. From the Indo-European prehistory up to the Middle Ages, the West perceives power as a symbolic bond, consensual or conflictual, between chiefs and popes, soldiers and athletes, farmers and businessmen. This dense network of symbols was precisely the target of the September 11 attack: the World Trade Centre, the Pentagon [...], and never the White House. A removal or censorship of a comprehensive iconoclastic attempt to annihilate the symbolic representation of power.

Among the numerous recent acts of iconoclastic destruction worldwide, we focus here on two cases, one English and one Italian, which both relate to colonialism, albeit with different nuances. Both these cases also have in common the production of other images, even if they concern acts of destructive iconoclasm and performative iconoclasm, respectively.

3. The English case: Edward Colston

Let us start from the English case, relating to the pulling down of the monument dedicated to Edward Colston. Colston’s substantial fortune as a merchant and his dedication to charitable works made him famous as a philanthropist and benefactor in an uncontroversial way, at least until the 1990s. At that time, Bristol’s Caribbean community started remonstrations concerning Colston’s particularly active role in the slave trade. There is no doubt that this activity had been one of the significant sources of wealth for Bristol’s economy.¹¹ From the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, slavery took on new characteristics and dimensions. The European merchants opened the transatlantic trade of African slaves towards the American colonies to exploit their labor in the plantations and the mines (Gee 2015, Layard 2020). As a man of his times, Colston was undoubtedly a slave-trader and at the same time a benefactor. The iconoclastic gesture that led to the toppling of Colston’s statue, as a result of this historical knowledge, came about on June 7, 2020, and was the work of the Black Lives Matter protesters. The statue was pulled down from its plinth using sturdy ropes and stomped on by the rioters (fig. 1). One of them went so far as to take a selfie with his knee pressed against the simu-

¹¹ Colston was a benefactor of the English city, who created scholarships, funded hospices for the poor, churches, schools, hospitals, bequeathing practically all of his wealth to charity, cfr. Figes 2020.



Fig. 1. Colston's sculpture is pulled down from the plinth with ropes. Bristol, June 7, 2020.

lacrum's neck, imitating the white police officer's gesture while suffocating George Floyd in the United States. After having been daubed in red paint, Colston's statue was dragged along the city streets for a third of a mile and finally thrown into Bristol harbor (fig. 3), among cries of jubilation (fig. 2).

A few days later, the famous street artist Banksy demonstrated his support for the Black Lives Matter movement (cf. Mazzucchelli 2017; Mazzucchelli, Vitale 2014). On Tuesday, June 9, 2020, in a post concerning what had happened in his birth city on the back of the antiracist protests, he suggested a way to make the best of Colston's empty plinth. He drew a backward falling statue, pulled down with ropes by four people (fig. 4). The drawing's caption, also posted on Instagram, opens with the question: "What should we do with the empty plinth in the middle of Bristol?" And he continues with the reply:

Here's an idea that caters to those who miss the Colston statue and those who don't. We drag him out of the water, put him back on the plinth, tie cable round his neck and commission some life-size bronze statues of protestors in the act of pulling him down. Everyone happy. A famous day commemorated.¹²

¹² Cf. <https://bit.ly/3AUyJVG> (accessed: January 2021).



Fig. 2. Colston's statue is dragged through the city streets after being splashed with red paint. Bristol, June 7, 2020.



Fig. 3. Colston's statue is thrown into the sea Bristol, June 7, 2020.



Fig. 4. Banksy's proposal for Colston monument, June 9, 2020.



Fig. 5. Marc Quinn's monument to protester Jen Reid placed on Colston's empty plinth. Bristol, August 6, 2020.

The rewriting proposed by the scathing street artist does not appear to be senseless. Through the 'freezing' of the durative action of the fall, Banksy suggests getting Colston's statue out of the water and putting it back on the plinth together with the figures dismantling it. This is, in effect, a redrafting of the monument that keeps 'alive' the semantics of all the memories it has come to bear. More precisely, Banksy demonstrates that Colston's memorial is characterized by many historical stratifications that need to be duly considered. With his provocation, Banksy activates a polyphonic system capable of presenting all the "semantic lives" of the monument, giving dignity and representation to all involved parties.¹³ What Banksy is planning on paper is an operation of memorialization to power, which keeps together situations that, otherwise, would be incomprehensible: making a memory of the practice of toppling, making a memory of the motivations that drove the protesters, creating a new memory of Colston.

If Banksy's proposal remained on paper, another artist became the protagonist of concrete action. On August 6, 2020, on the plinth left vacant by Colston's statue, the black and steel resin statue *A Surge of Power*, made by Marc Quinn and his collaborators (fig. 5), was placed. It portrays a young girl of color, Jen Reid, the same one who, with her arm raised and her fist clenched, had climbed

¹³ Franceschini (2020). Every space – as Francesco Mazzucchelli (2015: 96) observes – "envisages 'correct' and planned behaviours but at the same time it allows, up to a certain point, for unplanned practices that can also re-motivate the functions and meanings of the places." The case of Banksy aligns perfectly with this consideration.

onto the plinth after removing Colston's statue (cf. Hulme 2020, Morris 2020). Her image soon went viral, portraying her with a big curly hair framing her face, raising one gloved fist, and wearing a jean jacket, short dark dress, and black beret. These traits, symbolically recognizable as belonging to the international black community, were taken up by Marc Quinn in doing his work. He acknowledged that Jen "created the sculpture when she was standing on the plinth and raised her arm into the air." In the statements issued by Jen Reid, the meaning of her gesture is explicit: "It was like an electrical charge of power was running through me. My immediate thoughts were for the enslaved people who died at the hands of Colston and to give them power. I wanted to give George Floyd power, I wanted to give power to Black people like me who have suffered injustices and inequality. A surge of power out to them all."¹⁴ A follower's comment powerfully renders one of the meanings that the new sculpture seeks to convey: "This is awesome. Marc Quinn did an excellent job, and Jen Reid is a significantly better icon than slave trader Colston. Well done, Bristol activists."

Unlike Banksy's case, where the proposal was to 'monumentalize' the practice of pulling down the monument, thereby valorizing the action, the performance, in Quinn's case, it is interesting to observe how the substitution of monuments came about. Colston left room for a new form of memory, which actualizes the statue of the colonialist pulled down 'by difference,' without naming him. The statue of the colored girl takes on a higher meaning not only for what it represents at the figurative and plastic level but for the paradigmatic and syntagmatic relationship it creates with the statue that 'is no more,' that is with the image of Colston it proudly replaces. Besides this, we need to point out an important issue, which modifies the classical iconoclastic paradigm as traditionally thought. We are dealing with iconophile iconoclasts. Certainly, an oxymoron, but one that in practice finds its coherence, dissolving every doubt on such an association. Indeed, they did not just pull down the imaginary they rejected, condemning it to oblivion or defeat, but went ahead to generate new images, new signs. They deployed a different iconography to uphold their message. Not fully satisfied with the protest, they decided to 'fill in' the void they had generated. This meant that the 'old' monument did not follow the thematization of the absent but the rise of a new imaginary.

As often occurs in public opinion, there have been favorable and unfavorable responses regarding Marc Quinn's installation. Bristol City Council, in any case, had the sculpture removed on the morning of 16th July, and the city's Mayor demanded that the costs for its removal be charged to the artist.¹⁵

¹⁴ Cfr. <https://bit.ly/3swcxhn> (accessed: January 2021).

¹⁵ Morris (2020), cf. <http://artreview.com/marc-quinn-black-lives-matter-statue-is-not-solidarity/> (accessed: January 2021).



Fig. 6. Indro Montanelli in the corridors of *Corriere della Sera* (Photo by Fedele Toscani, 1940).



Fig. 7. Indro Montanelli's statue daubed with pink paint by feminist group Non Una di Meno. Milano, Giardini di via Palestro, March 8, 2018.



Fig. 8. Indro Montanelli in the corridors of *Corriere della Sera* (Photo by Fedele Toscani, 1940).



Fig. 9. Indro Montanelli's statue daubed with pink paint by feminist group Non Una di Meno. Milano, Giardini di via Palestro, March 8, 2018.

4. The Italian case: Indro Montanelli

The Italian case concerns Indro Montanelli's monument, made in 2006 by the sculptor Vito Tognani and erected in the public gardens of via Palestro that also bear the journalist's name. Montanelli is portrayed as seen in a photograph, taken in 1940 by Fedele Toscani, in the corridors of *Corriere della Sera*, where the journalist appears seated on

a pile of newspapers, with his Olivetti Lettera 22 typewriter on his lap and his index finger pointing towards the keyboard (fig. 6). Compared with the photograph, there is just one difference: his hat is placed laterally and not centrally so that the observer can better perceive the gaze, turned towards what he is writing and towards his interlocutor, the 'reader.' The monument – as has been said – has become “a text [that] can be analyzed as a semantic universe, within which values, actants, narrative plots, passions distributions of knowledge and power circulate, that is 'units' taken in a pattern of relations that constitute it” (Mazzucchelli 2010). Controversial already at the time of its inauguration, it has been the target of numerous protest actions in the past few years. In March 2018, the activists of the trans-feminist group Non Una di Meno splattered the monument with red paint, protesting against Montanelli's brazen public declaration that, in 1936, during his participation in the Fascist colonial campaigns, he had purchased an African girl to be his wife (fig. 7).

Apart from this practice, it is worthwhile recalling, in particular, what two student collectives of Milan enacted in June 2020, stating they could not accept: “that characters should be venerated, as examples to be emulated, who were engaged in slavery, colonialism, misogyny, fascism, and racism, with a mentality that did not countenance remorse” (fig. 8). And Montanelli, without mincing words, is branded by the group as:

A colonialist who made slavery an essential part of his political activity, [and therefore] cannot and must not be celebrated in a public square. In a city like Milan, which has received a gold medal for its resistance against fascism, the presence of [his] statue is a contradiction that we cannot accept.

This is at the heart of the statue's defacement with dripping red paint. The *Laboratorio Universitario Metropolitano*, taking every responsibility upon itself, stated that:

With this gesture, we also want to remember that, as we have been taught by global movements like Non una di Meno and Black Lives Matter, all struggles are the same struggle, in an intersectional mechanism of transforming both present and future. If the world we want is late in coming, then we will change it. No more slavery. No more sexism. No more racism.

Also, in Indro Montanelli's case, to give further meaning to the act of vandalism, four different works intervened, indeed triggered starting from the soling of the statue of the journalist. In Palermo, a mural was made portraying Montanelli's statue, and next to it, the face of the child Montanelli had purchased and married in Ethiopia. The street-artists – Mr. Cens, Betty Macaluso, and Ulrike H. (fig. 9) – state that in Montanelli's actions “is condensed all of the horror and the shame of the patriarchy and the Italian colonial crimes that infiltrate, like an open wound, a society that has never



Fig. 10. Ozmo's public art intervention *Monument to the child bride*. Milano, via Torino, 2020.



Fig. 11. Montanelli's statue with a puppet of an Eritrean girl on his lap, action by Cristina Donati Meyer. Milano, via Palestro Gardens.

stopped being colonial, fascist and patriarchal." A second provocation on the theme appeared in Milan, in Piazza Cavour, where Andrea Villa – known as the Turinese Banksy – put up a poster portraying the statue of Indro Montanelli wrapped in a condom ('preservativo' in Italian) bearing the words, playing on the double meaning, "Preserving history." Gionata Gesi, aka Ozmo, on a wall in via Torino, made the *Monument in Memory of the Child Bride*, where on a plinth rises Fatima-Destà (fig. 10), the 12-year-old child that Montanelli married in Eritrea, when "as a soldier, thanks to the controversial practice called 'madamato,' which allowed Italian citizens in the colonies to be temporarily partnered with local women."

The most recent act of vandalism against the statue has as protagonist the artist and activist Cristina Donati Meyer (fig. 11). Eluding surveillance, she climbed over the barriers and, after entering the Via Palestro gardens, she laid on the journalist's statue the doll of an Eritrean child and a sign saying: "The monument to Indro Montanelli is thus complete. There is no need to color the statue; it was enough to add on the knees of the old man the 12-year-old Eritrean child whom he took advantage of as a colonialist and fascist soldier." The above-cited practices are different by style, tone, and objective. What they do have in common, though, is the derisive aspiration. These actions act as full-fledged enunciations-affronts that provoke the typical and proverbial *in perpetuum* of the monument to manifest its semantic precariousness and easy conversion.

Here, we can speak of a performative iconoclasm because, in the attempt to cancel, a new narrative is constructed, involving new actants and new thematic roles. Montanelli, because of his color, ends up being catapulted onto the wrong side of history, seeing all his misdemeanors put on display. A conversion that takes on the characteristics of a resemanticization by default, that shows everything that in its design meaning was excluded: at the micro-level, the voice and the story of the young Destà; at the macro level, the Italian modality of representation (and thus elaboration) of the colonial past in the post-World War II era. Indeed, Montanelli is configured as the scapegoat for a more extensive process that sees him involved as a renowned 'referent.' Montanelli is not the only one to have taken part in the colonial campaign in Africa: in this case, he has become a sort of negative metonymy, targeted precisely for being the ideal type of a certainly bigger problem. A memory problem, a cultural amnesia that is concealed in the monument, is fuelled, is stoked.

To finish

Undoubtedly, we cannot explain the recent iconoclastic and vandalic acts against monuments in a unitary way. On the one hand, some believe that history should always be subject to critical revision and considered a living, ever-changing subject; public monuments must not be 'narcotized' and considered complicit with the powers that erected them. On the other, history often bears witness to the removal of monuments; suffice to think what can be described as the 'fall of the idols,' consequent to the end of Soviet totalitarianism between 1989-1990. Rather than finding a univocal answer, the semiotic gaze allows us to get our bearings in the battles for the cultural and collective memory fought over daily. Canceling, forgetting, rewriting are just a few of the cultural modalities that structure a change of perspective regarding the past, which always corresponds to making a choice that is deciding which new interpretation *ex post facto* (Lotman and Uspenskij 1975) is proposed of what has come about before.

Going back to the two examples, we need to observe the obvious consequences: an empty plinth in the city of Bristol (the statue was fished out of the water and protected because of its removal to a museum) and a freshly polished state in its place in Milan.

René Magritte's painting *L'au-delà* (fig. 12), dated 1938, resonates powerfully with the many plinths left vacant after the iconoclastic fury of 2020. The picture represents an empty plinth, placed in a barren landscape with a low horizon and a hazy sky. The plinth is 'uninhabited' and could be considered emblematic of the current wave of demonumentalization. At the same time, however, arises the question: for how long will it remain vacant?¹⁶

¹⁶ Cf. Stoichita (2006: 357).

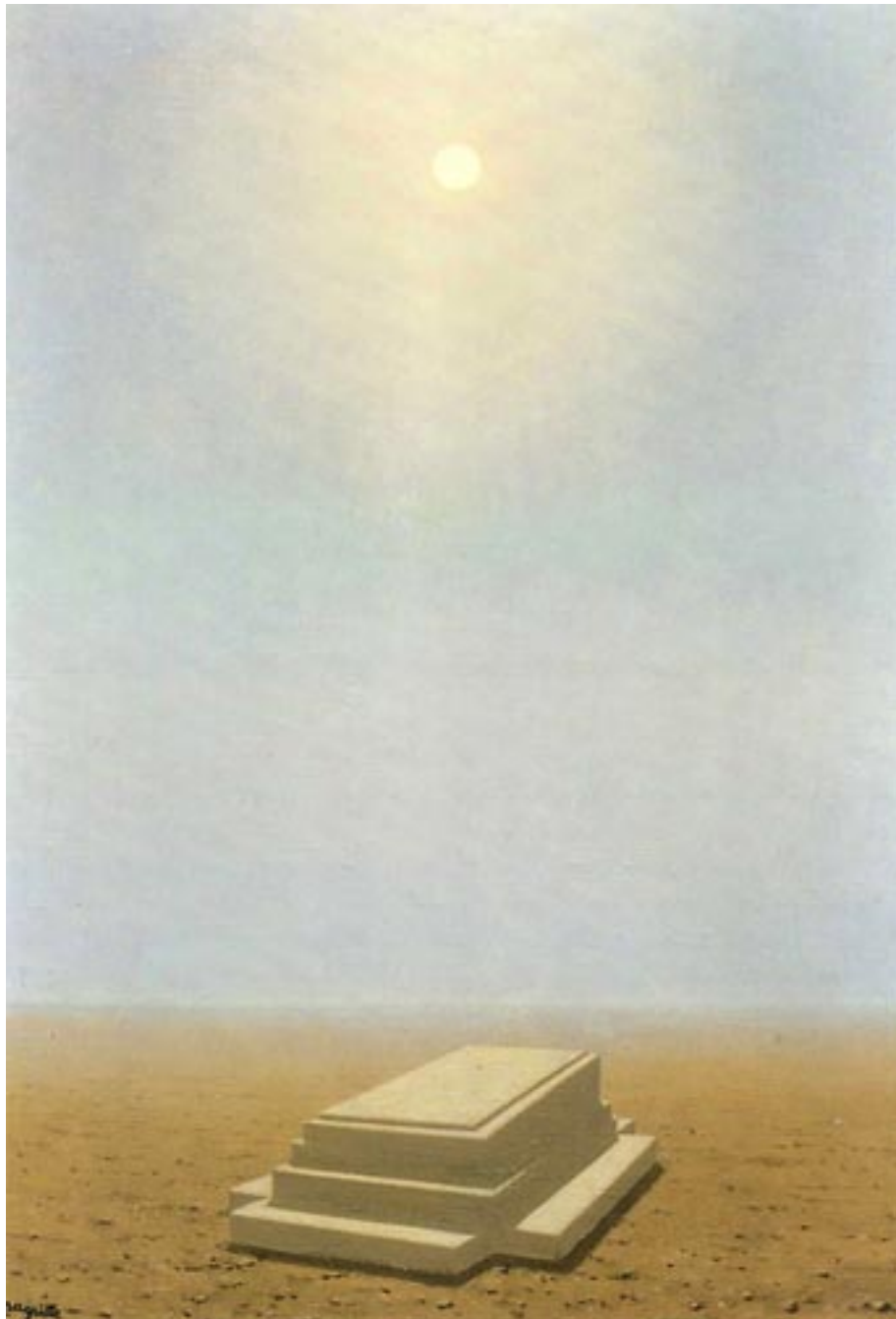


Fig. 12. René Magritte's *L'Au-delà*(1938), © René Magritte.

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*Art contains enough complexity
to have a future memory*

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Paolo Fabbri: *maître à penser, ami à présenter*

BY: Jacques Fontanille

1. Un hommage à Paolo Fabbri: un défi!

Dans le colloque de la Fédération Romane de Sémiotique (FEDROS), organisé à Rome du 24 au 26 septembre 2020, sur le thème ‘Come cambia il senso del luogo: spazi urbani e ambienti mediali,’ la première session était consacrée, hors thème, à Paolo Fabbri. Isabella Pezzini, organisatrice de ce colloque, a souhaité qu’à cette occasion un hommage lui soit rendu, et en particulier à propos de son rôle dans la création de la FEDROS, et elle m’a demandé de le faire. J’ai accepté immédiatement, par affection pour Paolo, et aussi en raison du lien étroit que je presentais entre sa conception et sa pratique de la sémiotique et la création d’une Fédération internationale, et par conséquent d’un réseau multiculturel et plurilinguistique. Interroger ce lien était une sorte de défi intellectuel et affectif. J’ai donc relevé le défi !

2. Le goût et les règles du jeu sémiotique

Dans une préface au recueil d’entretiens *Così parlò Umberto Eco*, Fabbri (2018) a intitulé son texte d’hommage à Eco : “*Maître à penser, ami à présenter.*” Paolo aurait peut-être aimé qu’on invente cette formule pour lui, et avant qu’il ne le fasse lui-même pour Eco. Mais elle existe: et elle peut servir de titre à mon intervention.¹

¹ Ce n’est pas la première fois que j’emprunte une des formules choc de Fabbri: *Sema et soma*, le titre de la première version de mon livre *Corps et sens* venait de lui. Fabbri, “Maître de l’invention formulaire?”

“Maître à penser, ami à présenter” est une figure de style bien connue, l’anagramme. Rappelons l’intérêt de Saussure pour l’anagramme, où il voyait l’un des procédés majeurs de la poésie indo-européenne, permettant de superposer au moins deux couches de signification, engrammées dans une seule suite de signifiants. Peut-être Saussure verrait-il dans la formule de Fabbri plutôt un *hypogramme*, peut-être avez-vous repéré aussi une ébauche d’*auxèse* (série de louanges), une touche de *diaphore* (répétition avec changement de sens de la préposition ‘à’ et de la diathèse du verbe à l’infinitif), un mélange d’*épanorthose* (rectification), de *parataxe*, d’*épanalepse* (répétition), de *dérivation*, de *substitution* et de *polysyndète* (répétition de mots de liaison), avec un soupçon de *métanalyse* (substitution entre syntagmes). Bien entendu, la figure préférée de Fabbri reste la métaphore, prolongée en allégorie, voire en mythe, mais j’y reviendrai.

Cette anagramme qui décrypte le lien amical sous le magistère intellectuel, est une belle illustration de la sémiotique telle que Fabbri la concevait et la pratiquait: c’est un jeu, fondé sur des règles identifiables, empruntées à la rhétorique, et, comme ce jeu porte sur les signifiants, il est *intraduisible*. Approximativement traduit en italien (*maestro di pensare, amico di presentare*), ce n’est déjà plus une *anagramme*, mais, selon Saussure, un *paragramme*, car il y a deux lettres-sons orphelines, le ‘s’ de ‘maestro’ et le ‘i’ d’ ‘amico.’ On peut le reformuler en anglais, en turc ou en lituanien, mais on perd alors entièrement l’anagramme, c’est-à-dire la coexistence littérale de deux significations, et l’extraction de la seconde à partir de la première: il n’y a plus de jeu, plus de signification cachée, plus de superposition à désintriquer. La traduction serait plus qu’ ‘imparfaite,’ en ce sens qu’elle déferait inéluctablement le mécanisme même de la transposition anagrammatique, en bref, le ‘travail’ de la signification dans le texte. D’une signification ‘en acte,’ ‘en travail,’ tourmentée, dans l’énigmatique épaisseur textuelle, on ne traduirait plus qu’une signification déployée, linéaire, apaisée, édulcorée, inerte.

Il faut alors remarquer que les traductions entre langues romanes, comme la précédente en italien, ou en espagnol (*maestro para pensar, amigo para presentar*), ou en portugais (*Mestre para pensar, amigo para apresentar*), présentent toutes la même caractéristique: la traduction affaiblit l’anagramme, mais incite encore à tenter de le reconstituer. Mais avec le roumain (*stăpân să gândească, prieten să prezinte*), l’écart grandit, et l’anagramme n’est plus même perceptible. Jouer avec les signifiants pour faire travailler des couches de significations amarrées les unes aux autres devient alors, quand le jeu s’étend à plusieurs langues à la fois, une interrogation pratique des limites de la traduction, voire, comme ici, des seuils de traductibilité.

Ce petit préambule sur notre ‘maître à penser’ et notre ‘ami à présenter’ est un peu plus qu’un jeu avec le goût de Paolo Fabbri pour la rhétorique: c’est aussi une manière d’évoquer sa manière d’aborder le sens, voire le sens de la vie. Il convoque des figures du prêt-à-penser, pour les retravailler jusqu’à ce qu’elles deviennent légèrement déroutantes, retournées, difficile à traduire, en somme pour les convertir en petites énigmes sémiotiques.

3. Plonger et naviguer dans l'infinie diversité des expressions

J'ai commencé par une citation, et j'aimerais poursuivre avec une autre citation, celle de Gianfranco Marrone qui rend hommage à Paolo Fabbri, dans *Libération*, avec une autre véritable figure de style épique: il s'agit de l'énumération, non pas des vaisseaux athéniens, mais des objets d'étude de Paolo:

Des communications de masse, des langues abrégées, du discours politique, de la communication publicitaire, des textes scientifiques, de la persuasion rhétorique, de l'information environnementale, du secret, des stratégies, de la dissimulation, de l'espionnage, de la guerre, du cinéma (notamment Fellini, mais aussi Antonioni, Hitchcock et bien d'autres), de l'art contemporain, de la poésie d'avant-garde, des miroirs, de la peinture hollandaise, des ombres, des passions (colère, vengeance, jalousie...), des villes et des frontières, des symboles cliniques, des actes linguistiques, des objets cryptiques, des blasons et de l'héraldique, des procédures de découverte scientifique, des poèmes chevaleresques, du raisonnement figuratif, des cartes de tarot, des paraboles évangéliques, des mensonges, des prophéties, des labyrinthes, des vidéos, de l'écologie, des langues de signes, de la pragmatique des soins médicaux, de la traduction, du camouflage, du processus de production perceptive et artistique, des anachronies, des images scientifiques, de la photographie numérique, du terrorisme. [...] Des tatouages, le drapeau de l'Union européenne, la Cène, etc. (Marrone 2020)

Pour moi, cette profusion d'objets est un mystère. A ce que je crois savoir, jamais Paolo n'a été pris en défaut de méconnaissance de ce dont il parlait. Paolo évoquait beaucoup de domaines différents, mais il ne se comportait pas en *ultracrédiparien* (celui qui parle de ce qu'il ne connaît pas – la tentation de tous les sémioticiens quand ils se sentent à l'étroit dans leur champ de compétence). Comment pouvait-il être pertinent sur une aussi grande diversité d'objets? On pourrait me répondre: il travaillait beaucoup;² c'est vrai, mais tous ceux qui travaillent beaucoup ne sont pas pour autant capables d'embrasser une telle diversité. Certes, c'était sa conception de la sémiotique: un *organon* qui doit être exploité dans *tout le champ des expressions sémiotiques*, pour tous les problèmes de sens locaux. Mais il aurait pu laisser aux autres le soin de réaliser son programme d'exploration de la vaste étendue des problèmes locaux; c'est d'ailleurs une pratique assez répandue dans les milieux universitaires. Au contraire, il en a donné l'exemple à lui tout seul.

² Au cours de la préparation du congrès de la FEDROS qui s'est tenu à Limoges en septembre 2019, consacré aux 'nudges,' il m'a écrit, en réponse à mon invitation: "J'accepte avec plaisir, mais tout de même, tu te rends compte que tu m'oblige à lire tout Thaler et tout Kahneman!"

Ce qui m'inspire une remarque plus générale, sur la sémiotique italienne d'inspiration structurale, en grande partie regroupée dans la FEDROS: pendant que d'autres sémioticiens, à commencer par les sémioticiens français (dont je suis...), s'acharnent à creuser les mêmes sillons pendant des décennies, à cultiver quelques concepts ou quelques modèles 'propriétaires,' qu'ils répètent trop longtemps, à chercher une spéculative légitimité en s'enfonçant dans des profondeurs épistémologiques dont ils ont de la peine à remonter, ces sémioticiens italiens, encore aujourd'hui, et j'espère pour longtemps, explorent le monde du sens tout entier, sous toutes ses facettes, sous tous ses angles, dans tous ses lieux, dans l'immense variété de ses objets. Paolo Fabbri est sans doute une exception dans sa manière d'embrasser et de parcourir une telle diversité, mais comme peut l'être un *exemplum*, c'est-à-dire l'image aboutie et complète d'une certaine manière de faire de la sémiotique.

4. Explorer la diversité, mais avec des exigences et des principes fermement tenus

Pour aborder sous un autre éclairage cette manière de faire de la sémiotique, j'ai relu la dernière édition de la *Svolta Semiotica* (Fabbri 2014) et de sa préface. Dans celle-ci, il rappelle notamment les quatre piliers qui soutiennent cette manière qui lui est propre ; il faut, écrit-il en substance maintenir absolument: (1) l'orientation épistémologique, (2) l'organon des méthodes, (3) l'intercession entre savoirs et pratiques, (4) l'exploration de toutes les expressions sémiotiques. Et il insiste infatigablement et avec enthousiasme sur le rôle central de la traduction, surtout de la *traduction imparfaite*, celle qui produit du sens qui ne serait pas accessible sans traduction et sans imperfection. Ailleurs, dans "Notes sur les identités collectives," il cite Lotman, pour qui "C'est l'imperfection de la traduction qui garantit la vitalité des cultures."

C'est l'essentiel de son épistémologie, qu'il partageait aussi avec Greimas, mais Greimas n'a pas pu en tirer toutes les conséquences, car sa conception de la signification, d'un point de vue empirique, précise-t-il (Greimas et Courtès 1979:353), comme "transposition, traduction, faire paraphrastique," est immédiatement verrouillée sur l'intentionnalité, et ensuite cartographiée sous la forme d'un parcours génératif qui décline les différents niveaux d'analyse de cette intentionnalité postulée: la dynamique de la traduction est alors formalisée sous forme de *conversions entre niveaux*, une formalisation inspirée par l'exigence irréalisable de *paraphrases métasémiotiques parfaites* entre les niveaux: la dynamique sémiotique de la traduction aboutit alors à l'aporie bien connue, les conversions ne fonctionnant pas, et pour cause! *Pour cause d'imperfection créatrice*: d'un niveau à l'autre, de traductions en traductions, la signification s'enrichit, se complexifie, se diversifie. Greimas l'avait compris, mais un peu tard: c'était dans

l'Introduction de *Sémiotique des passions* (Greimas et Fontanille 1991), un an avant sa disparition.

La leçon de Lotman et de Fabbri, c'est au contraire que non seulement la traduction est toujours imparfaite, mais en outre qu'elle doit l'être pour être sémiotiquement productive. Et pour aller jusqu'au bout de ce choix épistémologique et méthodologique, Paolo Fabbri se donne *des instruments pour produire des imperfections*: l'analogie approximative, la métaphore paradoxale, l'allégorie prise à contre-pied, l'anagramme intraduisible, la rhétorique, en somme, comme machine à faire travailler le sens et à défier la traduction. Il ne s'agit plus de la rhétorique décorative et faiseuse de style, bien entendu, mais pas plus de la rhétorique pour convaincre et persuader; il s'agit de *la rhétorique comme révélateur de significations inaccessibles et au-delà (ou en-deça) du sens commun*. Certes, à l'occasion, la métaphore ou l'allégorie peuvent plaire, attirer l'attention, susciter l'adhésion et une certaine forme de consentement, mais sur un mode qui s'apparente avant tout à une proposition et une acceptation de jouer. *Faire signifier avec Paolo Fabbri, c'est consentir au jeu et aux règles du jeu d'une signification en mutation permanente*.

Toutefois, à y regarder de près, ce jeu est des plus sérieux. Dans la *Svolta Semiotica*, et dans *Elogio di Babele* (Fabbri 2003), la métaphore et l'allégorie deviennent la passerelle entre la *cognition* (les inférences d'Eco) et le *récit* (la narrativité de Greimas). La métaphore transpose des schématisations abstraites dans des expériences sensibles et corporelles. Grâce à cette passerelle, la narrativité également peut être redéfinie comme une association entre l'action et la passion (l'actionnalité et la passionalité), et la figurativité passionnelle, la *tonalité thymique*, soutenues par des émotions et des mouvements du corps propre, seraient en quelque sorte le produit sémiotique de ce jeu des traductions (imparfaites).

5. L'organon, pour décrypter les apories et les contradictions

L'autre option épistémologique et méthodologique de Paolo Fabbri est l'"organon sémiotique," une sorte d'*art rationnel* (et non universel) qui fournit des modèles disponibles pour traiter des problèmes locaux. Paolo Fabbri récuse l'idée selon laquelle les modèles fourniraient une représentation générale ultime de la signification, et ne reconnaît comme objets pertinents que des univers de sens particuliers, localisés.

Paolo Fabbri était un grand professeur, un enseignant exceptionnel, mais qui n'a jamais été tenté par l'écriture d'un manuel. Fabbri faisait des leçons, des conférences, des cours, des séminaires, jamais de manuels. Pas de parcours obligé, pas de guide pas à pas, pas d'analyses canoniques exemplaires, pas d'exposé systématique d'une doctrine : car l'apprentissage de la sémiotique, c'est pour Paolo Fabbri d'abord l'appren-

tissage de ses apories, de ses contradictions, de sa difficulté à rendre compte de la spécificité de chaque problème local. Pour Fabbri, il n'y a pas d'exemple canonique à donner, pas de routines méthodiques à transmettre, car chaque objet analysé de manière suffisamment attentive oppose une résistance spécifique qui l'empêche d'être 'exemplaire,' et qui nous impose d'inventer des solutions. L'analyse exemplaire, celle qui fleurit dans tous les manuels, serait à cet égard, dans la perspective de Fabbri, une sorte d'imposture sémiotique, une analyse qui s'arrête avant de rencontrer et d'affronter le 'problème local,' avant de traiter sa résistance à une traduction dans le métalangage, et, bien entendu, avant d'inventer la solution qui répond à cette résistance.

6. Une Fédération pour mettre en œuvre un art sémiotique

Paolo Fabbri a joué un rôle essentiel, en même temps qu'énigmatique, dans la création de la Fédération Romane de Sémiotique. Sa conception de la sémiotique conduisait naturellement à cette perspective d'un réseau linguistiquement et culturellement très divers, *obligé de travailler en traduisant, et donc contraint à l'imperfection*, mais épistémologiquement cohérent, et partageant un organon de méthodes communes. En d'autres termes, un réseau de chercheurs bien armés (l'organon) pour s'interroger sur leurs propres différences, contradictions et malentendus (la traduction imparfaite)

Paolo Fabbri a été directeur de 2013 à 2020 du Centre International des Sciences Sémiotiques (CiSS) de l'Université d'Urbino, la version contemporaine du Centre d'Urbino qu'il avait contribué à créer avec Pino Paioni et tous les précurseurs des réseaux internationaux de sémioticiens. C'est à ce titre, dans ces responsabilités, qu'il a fait en 2013 une première proposition à Denis Bertrand, récemment élu président de l'AFS, lors du Congrès de l'Association Française de sémiotique qui s'est tenu à Liège en juin 2013: il souhaitait la création d'un réseau d'équipes de recherches en sémiotique, sur des fondements épistémologiques communs. Il avait probablement comme projet de reconstituer un réseau où le Centre d'Urbino aurait pu jouer un rôle organisateur. Il est aujourd'hui difficile de reconstituer les raisons pour lesquelles Fabbri a ensuite évoqué à cette occasion, comme possible tête de ce futur réseau, un 'axe' Urbino-Albi, mais ce ne sera pas sans conséquences.

Un groupe de sémioticiens motivés s'est réuni à Paris en mai 2014, en présence de Paolo Fabbri. Lors de cette réunion, Paolo Fabbri a expliqué à tous ce qu'il avait déjà proposé à Denis Bertrand un an plus tôt. Le groupe d'initiative a décidé alors l'organisation d'une table-ronde à Albi en juillet 2014, et d'une réunion de l'assemblée constituante de la Fédération, encore à Albi en juillet 2015. On remarque alors l'étonnant effacement de Paolo Fabbri, du Centre d'Urbino et de l' 'axe' Urbino-Albi : on note

aussi la mise au premier plan d'Alessandro Zinna et du Centre d'Albi. Paolo a néanmoins profité de l'occasion pour proposer que la première manifestation officielle de la Fédération, juste après sa création, soit un 'Festival de Sémiotique,' à l'automne 2015, à Paris. Ce festival n'a jusqu'à aujourd'hui, jamais eu lieu.

Festival? Pour des professionnels du colloque et du congrès, la proposition était presque une provocation. Car, outre le caractère 'festif,' un festival, comme le disent tous les dictionnaires est organisé "autour d'une activité liée au spectacle, aux arts, aux loisirs." La sémiotique est-elle ludique? Oui, *un jeu sérieux*. La sémiotique est-elle un art? Oui, *un art rationnel*. Cette seule proposition indiquait ce que Paolo Fabbri attendait de cette Fédération : une pratique de la sémiotique qui soit ludique, et qui soit un art majeur; une pratique reposant sur des règles du jeu explicites et partagées, et sur des esthétiques-éthiques en dialogue.

Lors de cette réunion de 2014 à Paris, l'essentiel du projet de la Fédération était déjà esquissé: les adhérents seront des équipes et pas des individus, la totalité de l'organisation reposera sur la représentation des équipes adhérentes; les équipes membres ne seront pas limitées aux pays de langue romane, mais devront pouvoir travailler dans l'une des langues romanes (on augmente ainsi le champ de la traduction et son potentiel d'imperfection !), et toutes devront partager le même horizon épistémologique. Cet horizon commun, en ce début du projet, dans le compte-rendu de la réunion établi par Denis Bertrand, était surtout constitué par un 'panthéon' d'auteurs qui ressemblait fort au panthéon personnel de Greimas (Saussure, Benveniste, Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Dumézil, Merleau-Ponty). Ce n'était donc pas encore la sémiotique telle que la souhaitait Paolo Fabbri.

L'un des objectifs alors assignés à la Fédération, *améliorer ou obtenir la reconnaissance des équipes de sémiotique au sein de leur propre institution de rattachement*, a montré, au cours des cinq années d'existence de la Fédération, qu'il n'était pas facile à atteindre, puisque des 'équipes' fondatrices de la Fédération ont déjà disparu depuis la création de la FEDROS. Comme les civilisations, les équipes de recherche sont des entités fragiles, qui résistent souvent mieux aux agressions extérieures qu'aux crises intérieures et aux comportements de leurs membres. Il faut dire et redire à tous les groupes qui adhèrent à la FEDROS que la Fédération n'est pas une institution de rattachement, mais seulement un lieu de coopération entre équipes de recherche. Appartenir à la FEDROS et y rester, cela suppose donc parallèlement une présence reconnue et valorisée au sein de l'institution universitaire où l'équipe de sémiotique est implantée.

Exister en tant que collectif, c'est la première règle du jeu. Paolo Fabbri n'a jamais travaillé seul. Partout où il s'est implanté, durablement ou plus brièvement, il a aussitôt réuni un collectif de chercheurs, un collectif où l'on puisse confronter les questions et les réponses, les problèmes et les solutions.

Pendant toute la période de préparation des statuts et de la création de la Fédération, de la fin 2014 à juillet 2015, cette question a été au cœur des discussions, et parfois des tensions. Quelques-uns n'auraient pas été fâchés que les individus puissent adhérer personnellement à la Fédération, que le rôle des équipes soit minoré, que les responsabilités au sein du Conseil d'Administration et du Bureau ne soient pas explicitement fondées sur la représentation officielle d'une équipe membre, et que certaines fonctions puissent être attribuées à titre individuel. Pour éviter cette dérive et cette banalisation de la future Fédération, il a été explicitement inscrit dans les statuts que personne ne figurerait à titre individuel dans le Bureau, et que tous ses membres y seraient élus en tant que représentants d'une équipe déjà adhérente, et acceptée comme équipe de sémiotique par le Conseil d'Administration. Dans l'esprit de la FEDROS, il s'agissait non seulement d'améliorer et d'élargir les coopérations entre les équipes existantes, mais surtout d'inciter les individus qui en avaient la possibilité à regrouper d'autres sémioticiens autour d'eux, et à créer de nouveaux groupes de recherches sémiotiques.

Paolo Fabbri ne pouvait que s'en réjouir : il avait toujours pratiqué ainsi.

Mais pendant deux ans, pendant toute la période où une controverse sur la création de la FEDROS se développait, et où, en même temps, se discutaient en détail ses principes de fonctionnement, ses attributions et ses compétences, ses objectifs, son identité visuelle, son plan d'action, du mois de mai 2014 au mois de juillet 2016, *Paolo Fabbri a fait entendre un silence assourdissant*, du moins en public. Un silence de Paolo, c'est un signe, c'est même un discours, une invitation à la traduction. Je ne me hasarderai pas à traduire ce silence, je noterai seulement les circonstances où Paolo en est sorti: il a été invité au colloque d'Albi, en juillet 2016, intitulé 'Utopies et formes de vie' (et organisé par Alessandro Zinna en son hommage, à l'occasion du prix qu'il venait de recevoir pour le 'radiochat').

Il faut alors remarquer que le retour de Fabbri dans les activités de la FEDROS coïncidait avec le moment où, en raison du thème même du colloque d'Albi, la Fédération pouvait enfin mettre en œuvre le noyau intellectuel de la sémiotique telle qu'il la concevait (cf. *supra*): 1) l'orientation épistémologique, 2) l'organon des méthodes, 3) l'intercession entre savoirs et pratiques, 4) l'exploration de domaines nouveaux et de problèmes inédits, et 5) la traduction imparfaite. Cinq principes pour fédérer les sémioticiennes et les sémioticiens. Ce moment était aussi pour lui une occasion de vérifier si le fonctionnement de la FEDROS était compatible avec son projet sémiotique personnel. Une coïncidence entre deux événements n'est pas une causalité, certes, mais ce moment particulier reste celui où Paolo Fabbri a choisi de rompre son silence au sein de la FEDROS. Espérons tous que la Fédération poursuive ce projet ambitieux et exigeant. Paolo aurait aimé qu'il en soit ainsi.

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Quand le sens n'est pas dans l'image détruite

BY: Manar Hammad

J'ai connu Paolo Fabbri à Urbino en 1971, lors du mois sémiotique réuni par Greimas, à l'organisation duquel Paolo avait joué un rôle appréciable. Ce fut le début d'une longue amitié, personnelle et scientifique. Je lui avais proposé de m'accompagner en Syrie, à Alep ville de mes origines, et à Palmyre ville sur laquelle j'ai beaucoup travaillé. Ce voyage n'eut pas lieu, en raison de la dégradation de la situation en Syrie à partir de 2011. Mais Paolo m'a rejoint au Liban en 2016, où nous avons visité la salle de Palmyre au Musée de l'Université Américaine de Beyrouth. On y voit vingt-quatre bustes palmyréniens dont les yeux vous interpellent par-delà les siècles et la distance.

Paolo aimait à dire que l'inventivité du réel était plus riche que la théorie. Ce ne sont pas ses mots exacts, mais l'idée est là. Pour cet hommage que nous lui rendons, j'ai sélectionné trois cas où des hommes ont porté atteinte à des objets du patrimoine, poussés par des motivations qui ne figurent pas au registre des raisons invoquées par les analystes rivés à leur bureau. Les trois cas sont archéologiques: la stèle de Mesha, inscrite à l'âge du fer et brisée vers la fin du XIXe siècle; des bustes funéraires palmyréniens détruits par des militants de l'État Islamique; et Madrasat Abu-l-Fawares, établissement d'enseignement de Maarrat an-Nu'man, dont les voûtes clavées furent badigeonnées de chaux teintée en bleu. Il ne s'agit pas de représentations à deux dimensions, telles qu'on en considère souvent lorsqu'on parle d'images, mais d'objets tridimensionnels auxquels une *forme* a été donnée pour *signifier* autre chose qu'eux-mêmes. Les altérations qu'ils ont subies par la suite attirent l'attention sur le fait que le sens n'est pas dans l'objet même, mais qu'il s'inscrit dans un enchaînement d'actes. Les

effets de sens différent, les actes étant surdéterminés par leur contexte de réalisation.

L'acte de détruire comporte, parmi ses effets de sens, une négation non verbale de l'objet atteint. Mais la négation porte en fait sur certains des effets de sens inscrits dans l'objet, alors que ce dernier en véhicule d'autres, privilégiés par d'autres perspectives de lecture. Visant à oblitérer du sens, la destruction signale une lecture particulière de son objet. De ce fait, on peut parler d'une *mise en évidence du sens par la destruction*.

1. Destruction et restitution de la stèle de Mesha

La stèle de Mesha est un bloc de basalte noir, arrondi en partie haute selon un modèle de stèle officielle courant en Orient à l'âge du bronze et à l'âge du fer. Au Louvre aujourd'hui, elle mesure 1,15m de haut pour 0,60m de large. Le texte gravé et le style de l'écriture permettent de la dater des environs de 800 avant l'ère commune. Le récit de sa découverte et des négociations pour son acquisition relate les étapes de sa valorisation et de ce qui mena à sa destruction. Nous restituons un récit résumé à partir d'une communication de Dupont-Sommer faite en 1974 à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres,¹ et d'une notice publiée par Annie Caubet sur le site web du Louvre.²

En août 1868 le pasteur alsacien F.A. Klein vit la stèle dans le village de Dhiban en Jordanie et en copia quelques lettres qu'il supposait phéniciennes. Il en parla à Jérusalem dans les milieux français et allemands (l'Alsace était sous contrôle allemand). Charles Clermont-Ganneau, qui occupait le poste d'interprète au Consulat de France, s'y intéressa vivement. En 1869, il envoya un émissaire copier quelques lignes sur la pierre restée sur place, puis constatant l'intérêt du texte, il envoya un deuxième émissaire pour réaliser un estampage en papier qui reproduise l'inscription entière. Durant cette opération, une dispute se déclara entre les villageois qui gardaient la pierre et les accompagnateurs de l'estampeur, lesquels prirent la fuite avec un estampage déchiré.

En février 1870, le comte de Vogüé fit une communication à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres au sujet de cette stèle, citant un courrier de Clermont-Ganneau pour le contenu de l'inscription.³ À la suite, un troisième émissaire fut envoyé de Jérusalem avec mission d'acquérir la pierre. Il découvrit que c'était trop tard: sollicités par des Français, des Allemands et des Anglais, tous désireux d'acquérir la stèle, les villageois avaient formé la conviction que la pierre contenait un trésor, de l'or qui valait plus que les sommes qu'on leur proposait. Quel autre motif pouvait mouvoir autant d'étrangers prêts à surenchérir? La pierre fut placée dans un feu vif, et lorsqu'elle fut

¹ Dupont-Sommer, André, 1974, "Un dépisteur de fraudes archéologiques: Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1846-1923), membre de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres," CRAI 118(4): 591-609.

² Site web du Louvre, Notice pour la stèle de Mesha, Antiquités Orientales AO 5056.

³ Une traduction établie par André Lemaire figure sur la notice du site du Louvre.

chaude, on l'aspergea d'eau froide et on l'attaqua à la masse, afin de la faire éclater et en révéler le contenu. Au constat qu'il n'y avait que des morceaux de pierre, ces derniers furent mis au rebut.

En 1873, Clermont-Ganneau acquit pour le Louvre quelques morceaux de la stèle brisée, mais des Allemands et des Anglais avaient déjà acquis, eux aussi, des fragments. Grâce à l'estampage et aux morceaux recueillis, Clermont-Ganneau fut en mesure de publier le texte de la stèle. Les acquéreurs allemands et anglais finirent par offrir au Louvre les morceaux en leur possession. En 1875, on reconstitua la stèle, avec ses lacunes récentes, et on l'exposa au Louvre. En 1876 Ernest Renan la faisait entrer au *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*.

Ce parcours narratif de l'objet archéologique le place au croisement de deux processus interprétatifs contraires, dans une situation non fiduciaire. Commençons par l'interprétation du 'découvreur.' La découverte présuppose une perspective occidentale, car la pierre n'avait pas quitté sa place depuis l'antiquité, la population locale la connaissait. Klein, Clermont-Ganneau, les allemands et les anglais de Jérusalem étaient intéressés par un texte inconnu dont l'écriture ressemblait à celle de l'Hébreu, inscrit sur une stèle de forme archaïque remontant à l'âge du fer. Cette pierre représentait un témoignage matériel contemporain de la Bible, extérieur à ce texte sacré, et son contenu était susceptible de confirmer la valeur historique du récit biblique. La stèle avait dès lors une importance considérable. Si elle apportait la confirmation espérée, elle n'avait pas de prix. Elle était au-delà de toute estimation monétaire.

Les caractères de l'écriture ressemblaient à ceux du phénicien archaïque, déjà étudié par Ernest Renan au Liban. Des points séparaient les mots, des traits séparaient les phrases. Sur les premiers extraits copiés, on reconnaissait les mots YHWH, ISRAEL, OMRI. Renan avançait pour la stèle une date vers 896 avant notre ère, on penche aujourd'hui vers une date proche de -800 EC. Le contenu du texte avait d'autant plus de valeur que son support matériel était ancien. En termes sémiotiques, la valorisation était fondée et sur le Contenu et sur l'Expression de l'inscription. Pour apprécier l'un et l'autre, il fallait posséder un savoir érudit, disponible au sein d'un cercle réduit de spécialistes.

Pour les villageois de Dhiban, la lecture de l'inscription était hors de portée, de même que la datation de la stèle ou son insertion dans une tradition de stèles officielles. Ils constataient qu'on venait de loin pour voir cette pierre, elle était donc désirable. On leur proposait de l'argent pour la laisser emporter. Plusieurs offres concurrentes firent monter les prix. Les récits dont nous disposons ne rapportent pas le discours exact des émissaires qui négocièrent la cession de la stèle. Ce qui est certain, c'est que les villageois ne crurent pas ce qu'on leur disait et ne firent pas confiance à leurs interlocuteurs. À supposer qu'on ait pris la peine de leur expliquer le mécanisme véridictoire d'un témoin matériel extérieur à la Bible, il est peu probable qu'ils l'aient cru. Car on leur pro-

posait en fait un marché, une transaction monétaire, et le reste paraissait comme de la poudre aux yeux. La partie cognitive de la valorisation étant écartée, il ne restait qu'une valorisation pragmatique. On leur proposait de l'argent en contrepartie de la pierre, la transaction était donc marchande, placée sur le registre matériel. Ils en déduisirent que cette pierre tant désirée devait contenir quelque chose de précieux. L'accès à ce contenu matériel pouvait peut-être passer par l'utilisation du texte inscrit, à la manière d'une formule magique. Mais il y avait un autre moyen d'accéder au contenu: il suffisait de casser pour voir dedans. Ce qu'ils firent. *Ils ne cassaient pas pour détruire, ils cassaient pour trouver.* Leur destruction ne porte pas le sens de négation de l'objet qu'elle atteint, elle projette de révéler ce qu'il recélait.

En prenant du recul par rapport aux événements relatés, le récit se ramène au croisement malheureux (non couronné de félicité) de deux perspectives interprétatives, l'une privilégiant le contenu sémantique et prêtant quelque attention à l'expression matérielle, l'autre écartant le contenu sémantique et supposant l'existence d'un contenu matériel. Elles ne pouvaient pas se conjoindre dans des conditions de félicité. Si les acheteurs avaient essayé d'installer un rapport de confiance avec les villageois, un accord aurait été possible. Mais les émissaires savaient qu'ils négociaient entre deux systèmes de valeur étrangers l'un à l'autre, l'argent ne pouvant servir de contrepartie à la certitude religieuse. Ils n'ont pas cherché un rapport fiduciaire. Avec des villageois, un rapport marchand et libératoire devait suffire. Ils firent face au manque de confiance, et à l'incrédulité résultante. Le texte gravé ne pouvait être la *vraie* valeur, puisque les acquéreurs voulaient la pierre elle-même.

En prenant du recul par rapport aux mécanismes sémiotiques en jeu, portons notre attention à la question de la *forme*. La forme cintrée de la stèle avait une importance certaine, puisqu'elle pointait vers des prérogatives royales anciennes, et que Mesha était roi de Moab. La forme de la stèle *validait* le texte qui commençait à la première personne "*Je suis Mesha, fils de Kamosh, roi de Moab, le Dibônite.*"⁴ La fragmentation de la stèle porta atteinte à cette forme, et il importa ensuite de la restituer pour l'objet à exposer au Louvre. À une autre échelle, la forme archaïque des caractères 'phéniciens' les situait dans le temps par des critères épigraphiques. Ces deux questions de forme (de l'Expression) ont joué un rôle certain dans la valorisation de la stèle et son authentification. Car le basalte a un âge géologique sans relation avec des événements historiques, et il n'y a aucun moyen de dater la taille de la pierre ou la gravure du texte. Restent les formes, non figuratives en l'occurrence.

En opérant un retour sur la suite narrative, on y distingue trois séquences. La première est celle de la découverte (la stèle existe, son texte est lisible). Elle se poursuit par l'exploration du sens, et la *véridiction* relative à l'objet (ce n'est pas une contrefaçon ré-

⁴ Dibôn = Dhiban.

cente). Cette phase est essentielle pour fonder la valeur véridictoire de la stèle pour un lecteur judéo-chrétien.

La deuxième séquence est celle de la négociation. Elle scelle le sort de la stèle, la plaçant sur l'isotopie économique marchande, pour un échange pragmatique étranger à la valeur véridictoire dégagée par la première séquence. En l'absence de contrat fiduciaire, ceci entraîne la destruction de la stèle.

La troisième séquence est celle de la *restitution de la forme* de la stèle, avec la restitution du texte à partir des fragments et de l'estampage. Cela procède par achat, par donation, et par les savoirs épigraphiques et archéologiques. La stèle restituée est appréciée dans le cadre d'un ensemble complexe d'idées valorisant les objets archéologiques et les textes anciens, indépendamment d'une foi ou de la croyance en la réalité historique du discours biblique. Les villageois de Dhiban restent exclus de cette épistémé. Leur acte destructif aussi.

2. Destruction de bustes funéraires palmyréniens

Les troubles secouant la Syrie ont favorisé le pillage d'un grand nombre de sites archéologiques dont les gardiens se sont trouvés impuissants face à des bandes surarmées, pour lesquelles les antiquités n'étaient qu'une ressource monnayable. À Palmyre, les hypogées (espaces collectifs de sépulture aménagés sous terre) contenant encore des sculptures n'échappèrent pas à la curée. L'entrée par effraction, le descellement ou le fractionnement des sculptures, leur évacuation, placent l'interprétation de ces actes sur l'isotopie économique.

D'autres isotopies s'imposent pour rendre compte des actes de destruction dont firent l'objet certains bustes palmyréniens. En juillet 2015, les services de propagande de l'État Islamique firent circuler des images où on pouvait reconnaître au sol quatre bustes palmyréniens attaqués à la masse par deux hommes, l'un corpulent et âgé en robe traditionnelle, l'autre jeune et athlétique, arborant une chevelure longue bouclée, en treillis de combat. En arrière plan, une foule colorée de tous âges assiste au massacre. Une courte missive accompagnait les images: l'État Islamique déclarait avoir arrêté des contrebandiers lors d'une tentative de passage en Turquie avec un chargement d'antiquités. Les contrebandiers avaient subi divers châtements, les objets avaient été saisis et détruits sur la place publique à Manbij. Cette scène ne s'inscrit pas sur l'isotopie économique, elle appelle une autre interprétation.

L'une des photographies est surchargée d'une légende en Arabe: *Le contrebandier détruit lui-même les idoles*. L'énoncé désigne l'homme corpulent en robe, en action dans l'image. L'énonciateur de la légende n'est pas nommé, mais le contexte de publication laisse entendre qu'on parle au nom de l'État Islamique. Le lecteur énonciataire restitue

un enchaînement dans lequel le fautif a été forcé de détruire l'objet de son larcin, dont il espérait un bénéfice. Ceci fait partie du châtimeur. L'État Islamique se montre comme Destinateur jugeant réglant l'événement. L'isotopie économique est là, puisque les notions de vol, recel, contrebande, privation de bénéfice sont présentes. Mais la syntaxe de l'action impose de comprendre que la valeur économique n'est pas une *vraie* valeur, et qu'on doit y renoncer par la destruction. Une autre isotopie de lecture s'impose, celle de la religion, impliquée par le terme *idoles* utilisé pour désigner les sculptures. L'énonciateur ne voit pas dans les bustes palmyréniens des représentations d'humains défunts, mais des représentations de puissances invisibles, de *fausses* divinités. Ceci vise un culte des ancêtres, alors que l'Islam rigoriste prône un monothéisme strict interdisant d'associer à Dieu une quelconque puissance transcendante.

L'image du jeune homme chevelu, en treillis, cassant un buste à la masse, appelle une autre interprétation. Dans la version dynamique en vidéo, on le voit se mouvoir. Ses mouvements et sa tenue le désignent comme un combattant étranger, un jihadiste venu rejoindre l'État Islamique. Il n'est pas là pour être puni comme le contrebandier, il est là comme exécuteur des hautes œuvres de l'autorité islamique. En l'exhibant par l'image, l'État Islamique envoie un message d'invitation aux éventuels candidats au jihad. Situé au niveau de l'énonciation, ce message se superpose aux messages précédents.

Les deux sujets des énoncés visuels détruisent des bustes en pierre, mais les deux destructions ne véhiculent pas le même sens. L'un le fait pour subir une punition, l'autre administre l'exécution d'un jugement. Tous deux se rejoignent dans la négation de la figuration sculptée sur l'isotopie religieuse, comme ils se rejoignent dans la négation de la valeur économique des sculptures. Ou plutôt, dans l'expression du mépris de la valeur économique potentielle, pour affirmer l'interprétation religieuse aux dépens de l'interprétation économique.

En somme, le message est étagé, certaines de ses strates étant surdéterminées par d'autres strates, mêlant intimement énoncé visuel et énonciation. Quatre isotopies sont en coprésence. Au niveau zéro de l'énoncé verbal, il y a l'isotopie économique relative au vol, recel, contrebande, et éventuelle vente. Cette isotopie est surdéterminée par une isotopie judicatrice et judiciaire, par laquelle le processus économique est condamné, menant à une destruction des sculptures pour signifier de manière non verbale le caractère non pertinent de l'économie. Cette isotopie est surdéterminée par le caractère religieux du jugement et la motivation profonde condamnant *la forme figurative* des sculptures. Cette isotopie est surdéterminée par l'invitation au jihad, sur une isotopie militaro-religio-politique de caractère syncrétique, caractéristique de l'État Islamique. Notons que l'isotopie archéologique est absente, écartée par la construction du message.

On détruit ici pour des raisons complexes et élaborées, non simples. Les sculptures palmyréniennes ne jouent qu'un rôle secondaire: d'autres objets auraient pu servir à la construction du message religio-politique final.

3. Badigeon bleu sur l'intrados des coupoles de Madrasat Abu-l-Fawares

La ville de Ma'arrat an-Nu'mân est une petite ville au sud d'Alep, sur la route de Damas. Elle figure dans les chroniques de la première croisade comme épisode atroce: après le passage rapide de la troupe des seigneurs, la troupe des manants investit la ville, la piller et massacra tous les habitants. Sans chefs organisateurs, les manants souffrirent de la faim dans une ville non approvisionnée. Ils en furent chassés par Nur ad-Din Zanki, qui repeupla la ville et la fit reconstruire. Le bâtiment qui nous occupe fait partie de l'effort de reconstruction et de réorganisation.

Madrasat Abu-l-Fawares est un établissement d'enseignement supérieur, destiné à former des administrateurs et des spécialistes du droit islamique. Elle fut construite au titre d'un *Waqf*, un bien institutionnel inaliénable, dont les frais de fonctionnement étaient financés par un ensemble de biens *waqf* producteurs de revenus. Les enseignants et les étudiants étaient payés sur les revenus du *Waqf*. Le tout a été payé par le fondateur, un commandant de cavalerie. La sépulture du fondateur était abritée dans une salle de l'édifice, pour que sa générosité lui attire le bienfait des prières des étudiants et des enseignants.

Malgré sa taille modeste, le bâtiment en pierre de taille est d'une qualité exceptionnelle. Une stéréotomie élaborée est exprimée dans le portail sur rue, où une voûte paradoxale tient en place alors qu'apparemment elle aurait dû tomber. Elle abrite une inscription de fondation. Le même soin est visible dans la stéréotomie des voûtes intérieures. En particulier, la salle d'enseignement est couverte d'une voûte clavée dont les claveaux sont visibles de l'intérieur et de l'extérieur. Elle est portée par des transitions à *muqarnas* aux quatre coins. La coupole d'entrée à douze pans est portée par des glacis triangulaires dièdres.

Classée monument historique, cette *madrasat* fait partie des joyaux de l'architecture médiévale syrienne. Lorsque les biens du *waqf* servant furent détournés et privatisés, le financement des études s'arrêta, l'enseignement aussi. Le bâtiment continua à être utilisé comme mosquée de quartier. À un moment indéterminé du vingtième siècle, les belles voûtes (coupoles et berceaux) furent badigeonnées de chaux teintée en bleu clair. On peut distinguer au moins deux couches de badigeon. Le *mihrab* (niche indiquant la direction de La Mecque) fut épargné, et sa pierre de taille reste visible. Le procédé du badigeon a été utilisé lorsque des églises avaient été converties en mosquées, et qu'il s'agissait d'en recouvrir les fresques narratives. Or ici, il n'y eut jamais d'images. Ce qu'on a masqué, c'est la belle stéréotomie des pierres de taille. La chose est étonnante, il reste à l'expliquer. La seule explication est qu'on a voulu cacher le trop grand soin mis à tailler la pierre, car c'était un trop grand attachement à la matière. Un jour, j'avais emmené avec moi un groupe d'amis pour leur montrer cette belle architecture. Le ha-

sard fit que l'appel à la prière venait d'être lancé, et que les fidèles arrivaient pour la prière collective. Je disais à haute voix que je regrettais le peu de soin qu'on prenait de ces belles voûtes. L'un des fidèles qui passaient me reprit, disant qu'ils n'étaient pas attachés à la pierre, mais qu'ils avaient des aspirations plus élevées. J'étais remis à ma place par un discours interprétatif: le badigeon mettait l'expression architecturale à distance, pour que les fidèles ne pensent qu'à Dieu. Par conséquent, le badigeon ne portait pas atteinte à ces lieux, il en atténuait les formes pour les rendre à leur fin ultime, un rapport exclusif avec le divin.

4. Récapitulation

Dans les trois cas choisis, la destruction porte atteinte à des objets patrimoniaux. Mais ce fait résulte de notre choix dans la constitution du corpus. Considérons les résultats analytiques. Dans les trois cas, il convient de réinterroger la notion épistémique de *réalité de l'existence des choses* pensées dans un univers sémantique donné. C'est une question ontologique qui détermine les acteurs présents dans le monde, visibles et invisibles. Le trésor existe pour les villageois qui gardaient la stèle de Meshah; les ancêtres existent pour les palmyréniens, dans le monde des morts, et on peut s'adresser à eux, solliciter leur action, rechercher leur voisinage et leur société. Pour les musulmans, il existe des *puissances invisibles, qu'il faut ne pas adorer*: elles ne sont ni fausses ni inexistantes, elles n'ont pas la dignité suffisante. Pour les croyants qui prient dans les mosquées, tout lieu est lieu de prière. Il n'est nul besoin de le construire, de le décorer, de tenir à sa forme. Le badigeon est purificateur: il *efface l'excès de présence* de l'architecture.

L'analyse des trois cas a mis en évidence la grande importance attribuable au *contexte* entourant l'acte portant atteinte à l'objet, le contexte jouant le rôle d'une énonciation par rapport à l'énoncé de destruction même. Si la destruction a un effet de sens de *négarion* dans tous les cas, elle ne nie pas la même chose partout. Comme le lexème NON en langue française, la destruction a la valeur d'un négateur universel, applicable à diverses choses, à différents niveaux. Il importe de reconnaître lesquels. Dans les trois cas considérés, l'intervention porte atteinte à la forme de l'expression, en l'occurrence une *forme spatiale*. Dans les deux premiers cas, l'action est précédée par une épreuve de *véridiction* qui sert, en dernier ressort, à justifier l'action destructrice.

Dans les trois cas, il y a asymétrie entre les systèmes interprétatifs investissant l'objet de sens: un même objet, un même acte, n'a pas la même valeur sémantique selon la perspective. Chacune des parties prenantes est convaincue de la justesse et de la légitimité de son interprétation. Le conflit est inévitable tant qu'un langage commun, et une interprétation commune, n'est pas négociable.

Us, and its body

BY: Tarcisio Lancioni

This article is not the result of a fully-articulated research project but rather an attempt at exploration, still tentative, developed from some observations that Paolo Fabbri contributed to the *Matera capitale della cultura* project. His reflections have had several partial publications: a short article in Italian, a more elaborate version published in the Italian journal *aut aut*, another version in Spanish, and one in French.¹ But because Paolo never limited himself to repetition, each take contains something new.

All these writings are about “us/we,”² the first-person plural pronoun and the political implications of its uses. My exploration, based on these articles and some of Paolo Fabbri’s references, can be considered as a preliminary reflection on the processes of constructing collective identities (*us*, in fact) – implied, or only suggested, by the pronoun’s semantic organization – and on how these are manifested; how they become ‘a body’, i.e., something perceivable that one can identify with, in the discursive space.

Taking this path, I will rely mainly on the suggestions of two other authors. The first is a dual author, a *we*, a collective voice that is not only taken up and relaunched in the aforementioned articles but that has always accompanied Paolo’s explorations. I am talking about Deleuze and Guattari, from whom, in this specific case, the concept of the *collective assemblage of*

¹ See Fabbri (2020a, 2019a, 2020b, 2019b).

² Unlike English, in Latin languages there is no pronominal differentiation between subject and complement. So while English distinguishes ‘we’ from ‘us,’ Latin languages use only one term (noi, nous, nosotros). Although, they may use particles to specify ‘us,’ as a complement, particularly in reflexive expressions.

enunciation (*agencement collectif d'énonciation*)³ is taken up. The second is Mikhail Bakhtin, an author Paolo Fabbri certainly loved less and whose recent revival he often looked with some suspicion. He is, though, a scholar indirectly summoned by Deleuze and Guattari, who cite him as one of the few, at the time of *Mille Plateaux* publication, to have dealt with the collective, supra-individual dimension of enunciation.

The concept of the *collective assemblage of enunciation* has been part of semiotic thinking for some time. It was, for example, employed by Denis Bertrand in his important article 'L'impersonnel de l'énonciation,' of 1993, where he proposed a reconsideration and fine-tuning of the concept of *enunciative praxis*. Some crucial reflections relating to this concept started to develop with *Sémiotique des passions* by Greimas and Fontanille, in 1991, regarding specifically the complex dynamics of the event "que constitue la rencontre entre l'énoncé et l'instance qui le prend en charge" (Fontanille 1998: 271).

Instead, Paolo takes up the concept of the *collective assemblage of enunciation* to suggest the transitive, provisional character of the identity of *us/we*. An identity that is taken and continuously transformed in the discursive flow, as indeed happens with all other pronouns, but with one crucial difference: plural pronouns do not limit themselves to having a purely positional value, since they always imply a further semantic dimension: *we*, or *us*, never indicates only the position, reversible, of the speaker.

The *collective assemblage of enunciation* is not an organically defined concept employed to explain a specific phenomenon. As often happens with Deleuze and Guattari (too often, their detractors would say), it is a concept-process, in continuous transformation, that takes shape in the discourse's flow that contributes to reshaping it. I will not try to give it the stability it does not have, but I will limit myself to making a few suggestions, as I believe Paolo used to do.

Deleuze and Guattari introduce the *collective assemblage of enunciation* when discussing what we might call the pragmatically constrictive dimension of language. Language presents itself as something that one is forced to obey and used essentially to make one obey. It is, in short, the area evoked by Barthes' aphorism about the "fascist character of language." While, however, for Barthes, it is the *langue* that is "fascist," on account of being an abstract system of rules, which necessarily imposes its constraints so that one can express oneself and speak in specific ways, for Deleuze and Guattari, it is instead a question of *discourse*, of the illocutionary implicitness of discourse, since generalized illocution constitutes for Deleuze and Guattari, at least in *Mille Plateaux*, where the theme is developed, the essential character of language. More in our semiotic terms, I would say that the question of the *collective assemblage of enunciation* places us in the realm of the implicitly manipulative dimension of meaning.

³ For the English translation of Deleuze and Guattari terminology, I will refer to Brian Massumi's translation of *Mille Plateaux* (University of Minnesota, 1987).

Discourse, say Deleuze and Guattari, is interwoven with “order-words.”⁴ Under the guise of information or referentiality, *order-words* (or “watchwords”) circulate continuously through discourse, constantly taken up and repeated by it. We can understand *order-words* in a double sense. On the one hand, as a motto condensing a vision, and, thus, constitutive of a suprapersonal order, what ‘must be respected and kept in mind,’ to which one must conform. It is the widespread discourse, made of sentences already given and continuously repeated, in which any semblance of ‘subjectivity’ dissolves. It is the kind of discourse that Heidegger would consider inauthentic because it relieves the *Dasein* from the burden of choice. It is the same kind that preoccupied Paolo Fabbri in his reflections on chatter and gossip, and that, in general, cannot fail to interest semiotics, decidedly less interested in authenticity than in the social and collective dimension of every life-form.⁵

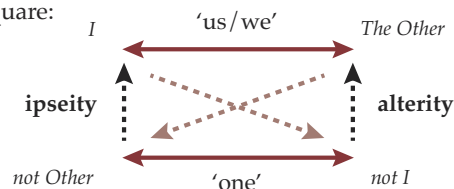
On the other hand, the *order-word* is also the word in which one recognizes one’s self. Therefore, it no longer appears as the expression of the impersonal ‘one,’ but instead, like that of a collective ‘us/we,’ recognizing themselves in the same order-words, as their bearers. Through their diffusion, they serve to differentiate ‘us’ from the Other.

This circulation of order-words from one saying to another, which for Deleuze and Guattari constitutes the *collective assemblage of enunciation*, within which the order-words make ‘plot’ and constitute ‘regimes of signs,’ seems to open up two dimensions: one of *neutralization*, through which the impersonal ‘one’ is expressed – the *Monsieur-Tout-Le-Monde* summoned by Eric Landowski (1987) – and one of *complexification*⁶ through which a defined collectivity is expressed – an ‘us/we,’ in which the Ego and the Other recognize themselves in a shared environment built in opposition to a different, further estranged Other. Picking up again the reference to Heidegger’s *Being and Time*, we might suggest that the ‘one’ is not necessarily the first form through which Being-ness, the *Dasein*, recognizes itself in the world. As Heidegger notes, “the Self of everyday *Dasein* is the *they-self*, which we distinguish from the *authentic Self*” and “if *Dasein* is familiar with itself as *they-self*, this means at the same time that the ‘they’ itself prescribes

⁴ This is the expression chosen by Brian Massumi to translate the original French *mot d’ordre*. In the footnote, the translator adds this explication: “Mot d’ordre: in standard French, ‘slogan’, (military) ‘password’. Deleuze and Guattari are also using the term ‘word of order’ literally, in the double sense of a word or phrase constituting a command and a word or phrase creative of order.”

⁵ I think it is fair to point out that Heidegger does not attribute an explicit negative value to this way of being-in-the-world, which is, moreover, impossible, since it is the average, habitual, typical condition of being-in-the-world, and indeed constitutes its primary mode, from which the others, and therefore also authenticity, can derive.

⁶ On the semiotic square:



that way of interpreting the world and Being-in-the-World" (Heidegger 1962: 167).⁷

The Dasein can instead be given, and perhaps this is indeed its primary form, precisely as 'us' starting from what is close and defines a 'we' that takes shape through the order-words, through the 'identity signs' of what appears closer in the "letting something be encountered in circumspective concern," to which Heidegger links the theme of affectivity constitutive of being-in-the-world.

We can illustrate the distinction between these two poles of collective enunciation in terms of a different tensive structuring, where 'one' would correspond to a low-intensity extensional circulation, whereas 'us/we' would involve a reduction of extension and an accentuation of intensity.⁸ In both cases, the semiotic field, although tensively articulated, presents itself first and foremost as the place of an 'already said,' of an impersonal that dominates over any effort at subjectification, which, we might add, is also characterized as the way of generating new order-words whose success is determined by the extent and intensity of their recovery, and in which the semiotic praxis is always primarily and essentially 'social.'

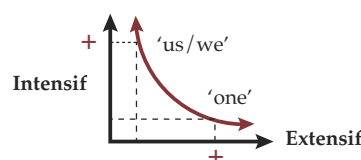
It follows that the 'us/we' always comes before the 'I': every voice is already full of other voices, Deleuze and Guattari suggest. Indeed, the primary form of discourse is the free indirect discourse, which always assumes a previous enunciation that merges with the 'I.'

Although, as mentioned above, the theme of the impersonal dimension of enunciation, starting with the idea of an enunciative praxis, has been widely incorporated into semiotic discourse, a certain gap seems to remain; a difference that we need to take into account in further developing the forms of impersonality.

Despite accounting for the presence in discourse of semiotic forms deposited in culture by use and designed precisely to account for the impersonal dimension of enunciation, enunciative praxis continues to isolate a singular instance from the discursive flow to make it the implicit center of discourse. The idea of an 'already said,' sedimented by the use that contributes to structure, the utterance continues to project the image of an enunciating instance, properly subjective, which completely controls the enunciation operations. On the other hand, Deleuze and Guattari's proposal stresses that the order-words' emergence and permanence in the discursive flow are independ-

⁷ John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson translate the German impersonal form 'Man' as 'they,' while other interpreters suggest 'one' as an alternative (then 'they-self' becomes 'one-ness'). What is important here is the foundational character of the *impersonal* as the primary form of Dasein's presence in the world in Heidegger's perspective.

⁸ The reference is obviously to the tensive model proposed by Claude Zilberberg (see Fontanille and Zilberberg 1998).



ent of the control of the enunciating instances.

They are, instead, 'placed' by a discursive plot that develops 'by itself.' The utterance can then express elements that do not depend on an instance of control; for example, the order-words manifested in discourse are not a generic impersonal, the 'they/one' sedimented by history, but an 'us/we' one adheres to and preceding the Ego, which, by pronouncing them, inscribes itself in them.⁹

Returning to the thread of the discourse from which we started, the idea of a situation of enunciation, of collective assemblage, allows Paolo Fabbri to underline the unstable, continuously mobile, and variable character of the 'us/we,' in which the identities profiled are continually formed and broken up. Therefore, it would be a characterization very close to the 'one,' within which occasional forms of collective self-identification would pulsate, ready to unravel and reform in different aggregates. Re-reading Deleuze and Guattari, however, we have seen that semiotic bodies are constituted in the form of "regimes of signs," concretized through networking. These are proper "social bodies,"¹⁰ stable and durable, through which 'supportive' forms with a greater capacity for permanence are structured (collective identities).

Let us advance the following hypothesis. The first form, close to the 'one,' would be linked to the discursive flow's occasional character and momentary order-words, without implying any other form of identity, nothing that would impose 'self-identification' beyond the occasion itself. The second would be that of the lasting 'us/we,' in which a community recognizes itself irrespective of any specific occasion, in what we might call a process of *naturalization*. A process that makes the social aggregates in which one recognizes itself appear as *objective*, 'natural' entities, rather than products

⁹ The idea of enunciative praxis refers to semiotic patterns and forms deposited in culture by repeated use. This, as Paolo Fabbri suggested in the final debate at the 2019 AISS Congress in Siena, demands to include the *langue* as well, which would differ from other schemas only by degree of generality. At the same time, it would allow to extend the concept (as a summoning of schemas) also to semiotics without *langue*, such as iconographic compositional schemas in painting. Perhaps more than the impersonal (all schemata necessarily tend to be impersonal), enunciative praxis allows us to account for the multiplicity of semiotic forms that contribute to structuring any text or discourse. However, I am not so sure that it really tells us anything more about enunciation than the classical model (On the relations between Enunciation and Enunciative Praxis see, for example, Fontanille 1998). I also have a little doubt about the relevance of the 'modes of existence' model as a mechanism, certainly simple and effective, to account for the dynamics of enunciative praxis. According to this model, enunciative praxis consists in *actualizing* and *realizing* semiotic forms sedimented by use (*potentialized*). But, for a use to sediment, it must be repeated and how can something that has not been sedimented be repeated if sedimentation itself is the condition for repetition? This point touches a fundamental question in the conception of language, or of the semiotic in general, which we find at the heart of Deleuze and Guattari's reflection on the *collective assemblage of enunciation*, through the opposition of the model, they call "chomskyan", of competence (but which is proper to every idea of *langue*) against Labov's idea of a language in continuous variation, in which the *langue* would not be a tendentially stable form that serves as a type for every enunciation, with its regulated variations, but only a 'statistical' *a posteriori* construction.

¹⁰ The idea of 'social body' is understood here as the result of a collective construction of expressive figures (the regimes of signs) through which a form of identity that is not individual can be made perceptible, such that individuals can recognize it. The same concept is used by Gianfranco Marrone (2001) in a different sense, to denote the dimension that is both intimate and collective of the 'body' that while it is 'one's own,' it is also always 'textured' by the images and narratives with which cultures conceive it.

of the social dynamics and bargaining. In this case of the 'us/we' identity will be defined by long-term programs and stable shared values. However, its permanence, the permanence of 'us,' rests, beyond the narrative orientations, on forms of discursive concretization, i.e., on the necessary adoption of characterizing figurative traits, of a stable and recognizable perceptible 'body': that of flags, of uniforms in the broader sense, of slogans, but also a haircut or a clearly labeled food style. Of order-words in short, or perhaps, generalizing, we better say of *order-figures* which have precisely the function of structuring the phenomenal body of a collectivity.

It seems, then, that there are other differences in constructing the collective identity we enunciate using 'us/we.' One is mainly linked to what, in Greimasian terms, can be called *narrative*, i.e., a process which develops from selecting a core of values and is concretized in *narrative programs* or projects;¹¹ or, alternately, through the typical inclination for relevance that leads to choosing the same values. The other appears to be defined instead, in the first place, 'somatically,' based on the identification of homogeneous figurative traits that stabilize the 'us/we' in a recognizable body, which acts as the reference point for generating self-identification effects.

These two forms of 'us/we' refer to different processes. I would like to exemplify this by taking up another suggestion by Paolo Fabbri, again from the AISS congress in Siena mentioned above. Paolo recalled a passage in which Louis Marin (1999) dwelt on the alienating effects generated by the discursive strategy adopted by Stendhal in his autobiography to stage his own history and the spaces in which it evolves. Then, Paolo pointed out how in such a situation the narrator was induced to resort to the combination of two different substances, interweaving verbal semiotics and visual semiotics: the first to express the 'internal' knowledge of the Subject, the second to represent himself from the 'outside,' to place himself in an environment. In this way, Paolo emphasizes, the presupposed enunciating instance finds itself assuming a phenomenally 'impossible' point of view, which requires one to put himself outside his self so that he can see himself as a 'he' placed in a particular environment, projected onto a specific background, and from which it is also possible to observe and describe his facial expressions, postures, gestures, etc.

Regarding this doubling of perspective and betraying Paolo's preferences, I take up a reflection by Bakhtin from his essay 'The Author and the Hero.'¹² It is a phenomenological observation concerning the inevitably asymmetrical position of the perceiving, phenomenal Subject with respect to the Other, to any 'you' or 'he.' The asymmetry arises from the fact that the perceiving subject has an 'inner' vision of himself, his thoughts, feelings, or projects. In contrast, he may have only a partial and incomplete

¹¹ It is to this type of organization that the concept of 'collective actant' is usually referred. See, in particular, Greimas, A.J. (1976) and Landowski, E. (1989).

¹² A book that, with due caution, could be read as a work on the forms of *enunciated enunciation* in literary discourse.

vision of his own phenomenal aspect, which excludes, for example, his face and what it expresses or the aesthetic relation between himself and the environment in which he is placed. This same Subject has, on the contrary, only an external phenomenal vision of the Other, who, according to Bakhtin, supports the 'practical' dimension of interactions. In this context, we don't define the Other but only make a sort of prognosis about what we can expect or not from him.¹³

This condition determines precisely an irreducible non-coincidence of the experiences of the interactants, although they can interchange the pronouns 'I' and 'you': one sees of the other what he cannot see of himself, and of which he can only get an idea from the signs that the other sends him. On the other hand, he knows of himself things that he cannot know of the other. Thus, there would never be a coincidence of the phenomenological field of presence: positional actants cannot exchange positions. Bakhtin writes:

I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his gaze (his head, his face, and its expression), the world behind his back, and a whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not to him. As we gaze at each other, two different worlds are reflected in the pupils of our eyes. It is possible, upon assuming an appropriate position, to reduce this difference of horizons to a minimum, but in order to annihilate this difference completely, it would be necessary to merge into one, to become one and the same person. (Bakhtin 1989: 23)

This leads Bakhtin to distinguish two forms of subjectivity, a *phenomenal* and a *cognitive* one, the former characterized by a kind of extra-locality, a uniqueness of position/location concerning how the world unfolds, effectively making impossible the construction of a collective, supra-individual position, i.e., of an 'us/we.' Such a 'construction' is, in contrast, possible for the cognitive subject, whose lack of a specific location enables it to integrate different cognitive perspectives.

Assuming that the 'us/we' is always the integration of the I with the Other, with some Other, we can suggest, contravening Bakhtin's conclusions, that we are dealing not with the contrast between a (cognitive) possibility and a (phenomenal) impossibility but with two distinct and equally possible integration perspectives. To distinguish them, we can provisionally call them *Assimilative* and *Projective*. In the first, the Other is integrated, assimilated to the Ego since the latter perceives himself 'from the inside.' In the second, the Ego integrates with an Other, phenomenally perceived from the outside. In the former case, the Ego incorporates the Other, whereas, in the latter, the Ego incorporates himself in the Other, with the Other effectively incorporating the Ego.

¹³ And in this prognostic attitude, we might note, what will be "seen" of the other, more than his individual identity, will be the characters that make him part of one or more collectives, his hypothetical "us/we".

Thus, we will have an 'us/we' insofar as others are equal to me, and an 'us/we' insofar as I am equal to others.

A third perspective to be taken into account in the processes of construction of the identity of the 'us/we,' on which Paolo Fabbri insists in the articles mentioned above, is the one that imposes a relational definition, since there is never a 'us/we' that is not defined, not only with respect to the 'I,' which it encompasses, but also in opposition to a 'you' or a 'them': the neighbor, with whom we are confronted, and the 'alien,' who, as Paolo states, is the one about whom we do not care.

As we already said, these pronouns do not merely indicate positional actants but are charged with a specific semantic depth, which Fabbri exemplifies by showing how they 'react' differently when approached to a verb such as 'to believe.' 'We believe' suggests a solid adherence to preached values; 'You believe' insinuates a certain degree of doubt regarding preached values, while 'They believe' signals their laughable unacceptability.

Both of these other collective subjects, you and them, do not stop, in their constant mutability, to send us signals about who we are and assign us an identity (as you or them) with which we have to deal. Everyone is always subject to an external gaze that assigns to him a collective identity before an individual one, in the predictive game Bakhtin spoke of, in establishing what someone can or cannot expect from *us*, thus reminding us that alterity is always relative. In the other's eyes, 'we' never cease to be Other; the outcome of the same cultural construction strategies, which place us beyond a border or threshold of identity by someone, of another 'us/we' that is also built around other *order-figures*.

To conclude, in an entirely provisional way, we could therefore begin to articulate the forms of construction of the discursive identity of 'us/we' according to three different perspectives, which I summarize as follows:

- 1) *Transient vs. Stable*. The first is the ever-changing outcome of the *collective assemblage of enunciation*. That which leads the Subject to place himself within a discursive flow and submit to its rhythm and related order-words, and in which the 'us/we' emerges as a temporary concretion in the territory of the 'one,' the 'they' of subjective neutralization or, in Heidegger's terms, of the discharge of all individual responsibility. The second appears instead to be founded, using Deleuze and Guattari's terms, on *order-figures*: order-words, images of order to which the Subject connects in a stable form and which constitute a kind of phenomenal collective body, common to those who adopt them, and through which the 'us/we' emerges as a 'positive' figure, through which one agrees to 'take charge,' actively, with reason, and perhaps even more, with passion.

An example of this collective body is what Paolo Fabbri calls *Identity Repertoires*, regarding the construction of the patriotic and sovereignist 'us/we.' Although these

are certainly not the only identity traits that plot, in the form of *order-figures*, the *collective assemblage of enunciation*, they continue to remind us who and how we should be. Another example is that of the *media acts*, which Deleuze and Guattari propose to integrate with the *speech acts*, through which the illocutions of the market and the associated must-appear circulate: thin, fit, integrated, happy, and so on. In this regard, and quoting the highly esteemed François Jullien, Paolo Fabbri reminds us of the risk of exchanging the *same* with the *identical*, the universality of ethical and political values with the globalized uniformity of economic and political consumption. Two possible horizons of the cultural production of the 'us/we' to which we are incessantly called to adhere.

- 2) *Projective vs. Assimilative*. All of the above cases seem to suggest that the 'us/we,' whether transitory or stable, are mostly projective, the outcome of the work of social conformity that pushes individuals to adhere to the 'right' position, to integrate into the positively valued group, moved either by the particular occasion or by the more sedimented and recurring *order-figures*. In any case, it would be an integration based on the desire to be first and foremost part of something visible and recognizable. A will exercised through the assumption and the further relaunch of the *order-figures*: discursive actions that contribute to giving a phenomenal body to the collective identities to which one adheres. The second perspective, the one we called *Assimilative*, is undoubtedly more complex since it is not based on the assumption and revival of a constituted and recognizable social body. On the contrary, in this perspective, each Other should be integrated with the Ego in its uniqueness to be united with its uniqueness, giving rise to a sort of partitive rather than integral 'us/we.' Therefore, not a *mass* 'us/we,' linked to order figures, but a project-based 'us/we,' in which each Other is integrated for its own 'uniqueness.'
- 3) *Active vs. Passive*. The above-mentioned *assimilative* 'us/we' is undoubtedly the most distinctly active form of self-integration into a collective identity, juxtaposing cases in which the Ego is captured in the flow of the *collective assemblage of enunciation* and brought to act projectively. However, these two perspectives are opposed by a third one, in which the 'us/we' is suffered in a completely passive way since it is assigned from the outside. Which hardly happens according to the projective or assimilative perspectives that one would have chosen.

It is in this context that we can place the 'forced' integrations of the 'us/we,' that are those determined by a suffered designation of otherness, which forces the excluded to recognize itself in a collective in which it would not necessarily want to be identified, and thus to reflect on what would make it equal to the others to which it is assimilated, frequently based on order figures imposed from the outside: the mark, the collective stigma, which generates a 'us/we' that we could call 'defensive.'¹⁴

¹⁴ Regarding this issue see my analysis of Joseph Losey's *The Lawless*, in Lancioni (2020).

This last suggestion serves to remind us that before being 'I,' we are in any case 'us,' at least from the others' point of view. This is because, at the same time, we are also 'you' and 'them,' not because the roles are symmetrical but, on the contrary, because the identities associated with them inevitably remain asymmetrical, whether stable or transitory.

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Eulogy of conflict

BY: Jorge Lozano

It is tough for me to talk about Paolo Fabbri, a person who has been close to me in many roles: friend, master, colleague, and partner in crime. Not many people know it, but, together with Louis Marin, we founded a secret society called *Honor, decency, and dignity*. Its creation took place near Urbino during a summer dinner. Among many possible options, I have chosen to focus on one particular element, a category, a constant isotopy of Paolo Fabbri, the polemical peace / conflict dimension. A few years ago, I proposed to him to publish an interview book on this topic. When Paolo accepted the project, I named it *Eulogy of conflict*, playing with his encomium of conflict and the plenitude of social action. According to Fabbri, we can find the polemic and strategic dimensions of conflict in any text. That is why I have appreciated Fabbri's recurring references to the great Georg Simmel and his view of conflict as a form of socialization.

In my opinion, all of Fabbri's work is characterized by his constant preoccupation with the polemical and conflictual dimensions. For example, in thinking about the concept of sign – whether referential or inferential – he was only interested in its strategic dimension, considering it not as optimizing resources but as the interdependence of actions. According to Fabbri, just as it was for Erving Goffman, communication is above all strategic interaction.

¹ This text is a transcript of the speech I gave in Italian, on September 24, 2020 at the FedRoS International Conference "How the meaning of the place changes", collected and translated by Bianca Terracciano.

Fabbri applied this assumption to all types of signs. For example, he studied camouflage as a simulation and dissimulation strategy, which serves both to defend and to attack. He has taken and dedicated courses, dissertations, and publications to the problem of secret, cryptography, and infiltration in wars and espionage, speaking of which I recall his article “We are all double agents.”

He dealt with meaning, without referring to Louis Hjelmslev as Umberto Eco, but to Émile Benveniste, sharing a controversial view of the meaning determined by the enunciator, as in the case of the face of the Medusa who petrifies her enemies with her gaze. He was undoubtedly an innovator because he adopted theoretical concepts considered ‘impressionistic,’ such as Jurij Lotman’s *explosion*. In this space – as he liked to say – meaning appears as smoke because it is untranslatable in the “turbulence” caused. The militant Fabbri is a hyperbolic thinker, but then his detractors assume his positions, renaming them with the formula of the “principle of cooperation of dialogue,” which Jürgen Habermas thought refers not to the society but the community. The difference between Fabbri and Habermas is that the former does not idealize communication as a transparent and cooperative process but considers its dark and hidden side, the manipulative side, the implicit. Therefore, we cannot speak of truth as correspondence between saying and doing but as a meaning effect of the discourse.

Fabbri’s perspective was markedly polemical even when he referred to Saussure, for whom signification depends on difference, and hence, the sign alone cannot signify. Just as in conflict situations, signs need other signs to signify, establishing dynamic and changing relationships between them. He was never interested in anything referential or inferential. So much so that he was delighted to study the untranslatable. When he talked about the untranslatable in terms of the reserve of translation possibilities for the future, following Lotman’s theories, he sported a happy baby-face.

Thanks to Lotman, Fabbri states that we should understand translation as involving not exclusively verbal signs but also all kinds of non-verbal ones too (*transduction*). In this way, translation becomes a battlefield of constant negotiation of signifieds to generate cultural innovations and creolizations. As a result, he wrote *Eulogy of Babel*, taking Babel as an occasion to celebrate difference. There, he brilliantly analyzes the relationships between word and image, sculpture and fashion, architecture and dance, as exercises of intersemiotic translation.

I owe many things to Paolo, almost everything. He was the first, with Umberto Eco, to speak to me about Lotman, not so much on the typology of cultures, but about playing with untranslatability, with intersemiotic translation. Yes, Paolo played, and he proved that he could be a Professor without being boring or being a baron by the aristocracy, not by power. As a personal memory, I can say that in thirty-five years, he had heard me in twenty-five thousand congresses, and only once he congratulated me on my research when I discussed the concept of semiosphere with Francesco Marsciani in Venice.

I take the liberty of saying that the problem is history, which everyone is dealing with nowadays. When I started studying semiotics of history, the French (especially the sixth section of the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales) complained about the subject of my studies and the applicability of my analytical categories. Umberto Eco spoke of the history of semiotics, and, in response, Paolo Fabbri suggested: “if they talk about the history of semiotics, we talk of the semiotics of history.” He had no interest in the history of semiotics, pointing out that 1) Democritus atom was different from Niels Bohr atom; 2) to make a mathematical equation, you did not need to know who Pythagoras was; 3) if we researched semiotics, diachrony was a mortal sin; 4) why study history? At some point, after years of debating, he listened to me, albeit a little, and began to glimpse the possibility that semiotics could enter into a dialogue with history.

The last conversation I had with him concerned his contribution to *Versus*, on the topic of the future, that I edited with Daniele Salerno. For this issue, I asked Fabbri for an article on counterfactual history. When we discussed this at his home in Rimini, where I spent a few days, he suggested that I demonstrate that history can also handle the future. Here is another polemic position. In the end, he did not write the article but only some preparatory notes. It seems that the last words he made his wife Simonetta read were precisely about history. It is highly significant that *Versus*'s issue on 'Future. A Time of History' is dedicated to him since the title reflects his view on the subject.

Jacques Fontanille, in his homage to Paolo, made a list – in Umberto Eco's style –, an exceptionally long list of the different topics he had analyzed. We traveled and did many things together because he could aim high, had an enlightened vision of the world, and for this, he created a school of thought. Furthermore, in common with Umberto, I have never met anyone with whom I have laughed more. Having learned so much from him all the while having so much fun makes me miss him terribly.

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For an Interventionist Semiotics

BY: Anna Maria Lorusso

Fabbri through Eco

“While the natural sciences know their problems, question the hypotheses, talk about the results, the social sciences question their problems, talk about their methods, and are silent about the results.” This is how Paolo Fabbri in one of his latest writings, dedicated to proxemics, demarcates – as he has done so many times in his work – the distinctive character of the social sciences in which he includes semiotics (Fabbri 2020). For him, there is no doubt that semiotics has always been a social science and not a philosophy. “Eco wants to die a philosopher,” he said. Not me, he implied.

It is precisely in his confrontation with Eco that Fabbri frequently defines his position. Eco serves him as a term of difference to better specify his point of view, which is radically different from the interpretative and philosophical one, but which has also taken on specificities regarding the structuralist school in whose field he is undoubtedly rooted. Therefore, through a comparison with Eco, I will reflect on some aspects of Fabbri’s positions, helpful in thinking about semiotics today: its potential, its specificities.

1. Starting from the sign

Let us start with the fundamentals: the sign. It is, I believe, precisely in the theory of the sign that the position of Eco and Fabbri differ radically. The point of discrimination is Peirce. Peirce’s theory of the sign does not question the distinction between the two levels of language, the two faces of the Saussurian sign. There is no distinction between expression and

content because this is only pertinent to a structural analysis (based on planes, functions, and figures) of a language system. In contrast, Peirce is mainly interested in a logical typology of signs and a logical-theoretical reflection on knowledge.

Peirce's sign is not a linguistic sign (which could be the premise of a grand opening in semiotics) but a logical operator. Peirce is interested in reflecting on the mechanisms of reasoning. Thus, on sign functions as a referral operator within a synechistic semiosis that does not distinguish between real, logical, and sign and considers the chain of references the flow of interpretants.

However, as quite rightly Fabbri notes, once the referral mechanism has been identified and the interpretant correctly defined as (any) mediating representation rather than an interpreter, who might be the referral operator when we move on to the concrete terrain of meaningful practices? What is the instance that takes care of the translations-transpositions that the Peircian model, adopted by Eco, outlines?

According to Fabbri (1998: 58-9), Peircian semiotics stopped on the threshold of this aporia, failing to address how the chain of interpretants is articulated and produced. The subject is as much a sign as the signs he interprets (see, the final part of the essay "Some consequences of four incapacities," CP 5.264-5.317), but how and when does it happen that different levels of consistency and agency differ?

Eco does not go much further; he does not want to. In his *A Theory of Semiotics* (Eco 1976, ch. 4), he defines the subject as the result of the social and historical segmentation of the world, a way of looking at the world, the abstract function that connects certain expressions to specific contents (which, as such, can only be investigated as a system). And even later, the subject will be seen, in a Peircian way, as an integral part of the encyclopedic net of which it is an element, but without raising the articulation problem.

2. Subjects and enunciations

The fact is that Eco does not address the problem of enunciation, by which I mean a plan for putting the repertory of signs in process, a mediation between *langue* and *parole*. Peirce had worked on the repertory in his essay on speculative grammar (see CP, vol. 2, Book II) but not on the process because he was interested in a logical reflection. Eco had also worked on the repertory (in his 1973 book, *Il segno*, this attitude is quite clear and is still evident in Eco 1984, ch. 1), only to shift his attention to the nature of the inferential-interpretive procedures that generate semiosis, organize it, energize it: from perception to categorization and nomination, from the stabilization and organization of semantic paths to their potential mobilization in translation. This progressive shift is evident in *Kant and the platypus* (Eco 1997) and excludes the subject, even if Eco him-

self admits it would be a valuable research direction. And he admits it by citing Paolo Fabbri and the question of enunciation:

Fabbri recommends making the concept of enunciation central to all the paragraphs that follow, such as the one on prostheses and the one on mirrors and impressions. I believe that the presence of the subject with his point of view is central – even if not expressed in terms of ‘enunciation’ – in the other parts of this chapter, and in particular in the one on mirrors. (Eco 1997: Ch.6, n.16)

But in reality, in the pages following this passage, Eco does not include the subject in his reflections, except as an abstract instance: as an observer-interpreter, who risks falling into the deceptions of the mirror image (believing the mirror image an index, or considering it an imprint, in short believing it to be a sign that refers to a plane of reality), without realizing that what the mirrors provide are substitutes for perceptive stimuli. In these pages of Eco, the subject is a pure actant: the functional position of a dynamic. However, enunciation is another thing. Enunciation (arising in the linguistic field) is putting in process the potentialities of a system, even actantial ones, with all the resulting ‘filth’: not precise correspondences to imagined theory, but subjective and circumstantial inflections, aberrant interpretations which, even if they do not invalidate the logical scheme of development, can nevertheless force it, and, in the future, direct it to further bending.

Eco imagines subjects of *exempla ficta* (exemplary from this point of view is “Tiny Tim’s Story” / “Storia di Pinco” in Italian,¹ in Eco 1997, as the title of § 3.7.2., where Eco pretends to narrate the history of someone, a subject but is only telling a typical story, an *exemplum fictum*) while, modeling of the level of enunciation means placing oneself on the terrain of processes, therefore of the effective practices of meaning management. Of course, enunciation comprises a (significant) theoretical problem; it is not that we cannot make a theory about it, and numerous studies prove this. But if we evoke the issue of *who* carries out the referral of the Peircian chain of signs, a possible path (perhaps also desirable) is to see what actually happens in the practices of meaning. Or rather: this is what Paolo Fabbri hopes for, explicitly defining another point of distance from Eco.

In *La svolta semiotica* (Fabbri 1998, pp. 30-31), Fabbri defines the levels of semiotic analysis: an initial *empirical level*, with a concrete object of observation (very different from an *exemplum fictum*); a *methodological level*, in which the concepts useful for the analysis must be defined and inter-defined; a *theoretical level*, in which the ‘operational’

¹ Pinco in Italian (in the colloquial idioms of Italian) is a proper name that is used to refer to any person; therefore, to say “History of Pinco” means to tell the story of a generic character, any character. Since in English, the proper name Pinco means nothing, the translator substituted it with the character Tiny Tim, a child from Charles Dickens’ *Christmas Carol*, to mean any child.

concepts identified at a methodological level receive definition and justification within a general framework; and an *epistemological level*, in which that previously defined theoretical level takes on a philosophical position.

As these levels make clear, for Fabbri, semiotics is necessarily *empirical* – it starts from the concrete level of meaningful practices – and, in an equally necessary way, it must be generalizable (elaborating concepts of theoretical scope and, thus useful outside that concrete case of analysis). However, we should remember that for Eco, semiotics need not be empirical. It can be (and, in its purest form, it should be) a philosophy of language, questioning the general rules and possible means of making sense. He reiterates this conviction in his *Intellectual Autobiography*, one of the last texts he wrote:

the first question of a general semiotics is close to the capital question of any philosophy of language: what does it mean for human beings to speak, to express meanings, to convey ideas, or to mention states of the world? By what means do people perform the task? Only by words? And if not, what is there in common between verbal activity and other signifying or communicative activities? (Eco 2017: 27)

Fabbri disagrees with the distinction (in Eco 1984, § 0.4) between general semiotics and a range of specific semiotics. According to him, it is a hierarchization that doesn't make any sense in semiotics. That is why Fabbri was a social scientist and Eco a philosopher: distinct vocations.

3. The power of models

One point at which they could meet (and partly did) is that of *modeling*: both, after all, create and conceive models; they believe that semiotics somehow thrives on models. But are they really talking about the same thing? My impression is that Eco uses 'models' in his theory to synthesize semantic or pragmatic schemes or organizations that govern semiosis in general. In *A Theory of Semiotics*, we find two models of sign function. Of central importance is the KF model (discussed in § 2.10), which explains the component analysis of the lexeme and its reformulation as SRM (reformulated semantic model, § 2.11). There is also the Q model – Quillian model – of semantic memory. The second part of his book talks about the perceptual model and the semantic model to define *ratio facilis* and *ratio difficilis*. In *The Role of the Reader* (1979), the word 'model,' in addition to designating an abstract type of textual organization – the 'model reader' – is widely used to define the levels of textual cooperation (figure 0.3 in the book): a diagram, in short, displaying the various components (intensions, extensions, and actualized content) that intervene in textual interpretation. In *Kant and the Platypus* (1997),

he speaks of a model to describe the typical situation of a thought experiment; or uses it as the near equivalent of the Kantian scheme and even as a scheme for managing the multiplicity of experience. In short, for Eco, the model is the diagrammatic synthesis (visual or schematic) of a broad-scope theory, helpful in framing the general functioning of semiotic processes or for handling, in a Kantian sense, the multiplicity of experience.

For Fabbri, models are concepts that must emerge from empirical analysis and must emerge from the bricolage of various disciplines called together on that empirical case. It is not just a difference of 'moment': for Eco, the models would arrive first, and then they would be applied to the development of reflection; for Fabbri, practice comes first, and from there, one deduces models. If we place ourselves in a circular perspective (which I believe I can attribute to both scholars, in the sense that they both semiotics lives in the theory-practice-theory-practice circle, etc.), the moment is not relevant. On the other hand, what substantially changes is the *functional role* of the model: for Eco, the model synthesizes logical-symbolic relationships, of which the empirical reality will then offer variants, tokens; the models are the premise for in-depth philosophical analysis and entail the synthesis of past studies. In this sense, they are synthetic and mnemonic devices (often visualized): they capture the essential structures of a theoretical proposal. For Fabbri, the model does not have a diagrammatic form; the model is a tool (organon) added to the semiotician's toolbox to increase the intelligibility of experiential data: it is one with the descriptive methodology, not with the epistemological heritage. For Eco, the model is the synthesis of a theoretical premise employed to confront empirical reality. For Fabbri, the model articulates an observational activity; it is the manifestation of this articulation. As such, models are central: there is no semiotic analysis without modeling.

Modeling is the specificity of semiotics: producing concepts that are susceptible to application, that is – like all models – partially adequate for a possible application, but at the same time with a sufficient character of abstraction. (Fabbri 1998: 95)

In this tension between the empirical level and generalisability, we should also note Fabbri's caution in using models. Fabbri does not hesitate, for example, in placing himself in the tradition that goes from Saussure to Hjelmslev and then Greimas. Still, he never applied the famous Greimas square, 'the model' *par excellence* for the Greimasian school. His models are always personal (he focuses on specific objects) and 'timid.' Fabbri knows that models are central. They are what semiotics must strive for, but precisely because of the importance he attaches to them, he is cautious, elaborating a few of them. He knows this is a difficult task.

However, my impression is that Fabbri's investigation is always much more 'local' than Eco's reflections, not because of Fabbri's propensity for *impromptu* writing or theo-

retical laziness, but because of his absolute respect for Hjelmslev's categorical norm – the empirical principle. According to Fabbri, the *scientific* vocation and the *empirical* vocation for semiotics must be one. This is the core of (and in a certain way justifies) a semiotic legacy full of exemplary analyses (not *exempla ficta*) and reflections on individual practices or texts. All these manifest a brilliant analytical approach (aware of how to proceed through the four levels mentioned above) without becoming general semiotic theory. The premise is general: given the vast field of meaning, to be able to talk about it, we must know how to articulate it, that is, to transform meaning into signification, but this articulation is only locally traceable. There is no general theory of the articulation of meaning. There are no universal models of signification, apart from a few major operational logics: narrative, of course, and strategic functioning, translative functioning, the adaptive functioning of subjects (I am thinking of *camouflage*). But saying that the practices are strategic does not yet mean saying how they are articulated: this – the specific work of semiotics – can only derive from the analysis of specific objects of observation. As Fabbri acutely puts it, it is a work that is more *explicative* than *explanatory*. It does not involve explaining the causes but making explicit the principles that form and articulate meaning. About tattoos:

Those who practice semiotics as a marked discipline – intensive compared to the empty extension of 'everything is a sign' – pay attention to the meaning and value that tattooing has for the actors involved and the communicative meaning of integumentary signs. Semiotics, pluralist and relativist, more than an explanatory – 'this is why we tattoo ourselves' – is an explicative discipline that practices descriptive judgments to identify pertinences and find systems of coherence, aiming to avoid prescriptive and proscriptive judgments. (Fabbri 2021: 85)

4. To intervene on meaning

I will now consider another point that seems central to Fabbri's semiotics and radically differentiates him from Eco. Fabbri's semiotic approach is *performative*, whereas Eco's is *philosophical*. Fabbri questions the *effects* of signification practices and meaning management, whereas Eco addresses the *reasons* for signification processes. Both are interested in the logic of meaning, but one in a socio-structural perspective, the other in a philosophical-semantic perspective.

Regarding specific themes – like translation, ideology, or lies – both convergences and divergences are evident. These themes define a common ground of choice for both and, indirectly, evidence some shared readings, such as Jakobson, Prieto, and Lotman.

Eco has devoted many essays to the theory and practice of translation. As regards ideology, he offers (in *A Theory of Semiotics*) an explanatory key of extraordinary (and perhaps unsurpassed) interest. Eco has made the lie, finally, not only a key to defining the sign (his definition of a sign as what can be used to lie has become almost an *adage*) but also the starting point of a broad reflection on the false and its forms.

In each of these themes, Eco begins his investigation with some strong assumptions: the Peircian sign theory and the continuous chain of interpretants; the premise of the encyclopedic network, with its possible rhetorical paths of narcotization and valorization; Peirce's idea of a community of interpreters who, in the end (but we do not know precisely when) define what is true, that is, reasonable interpretations, thereby undermining what has no confirmation. And each time, against the background of an already consolidated semiotic theory, Eco formulated general principles for that field of application or specific models of functioning: the negotiation principle for translation, the model of ideological discourse, principles of falsifiability (and unfalsifiability) for lying. In short, general proposals, theoretically justified, to look at the world.

Fabbri does something quite different: he starts with concrete examples. For instance, in discussing translation, he traces various current translation phenomena (from science to media, from politics to art, or vice versa, of course), from the 'translation' of enunciative devices in painting to the translation of zombies from cinema to the political arena. When considering ideological discourse, he analyzes specific cases, i.e., manipulative images, such as that of the iconic photo of '77 with the shooting man, a symbol of the Anni di Piombo in Italy, or the blurred boundary between ideology and myth in the comic character Tex (cf. Fabbri 2004). In discussing lying, he does not examine the relationship with reality or the constitution of interpretive habits but *camouflage* practices, such as simulacrum plays and ways of appearing. The latter concern not only language – on which Eco focuses instead – and are outside both a logic of correspondence and a logic of interpretative canonization. In other words, he looks at the effects of a range of signification processes, restoring semiotics to the task of 'unmasking reality' inspiring Barthes's first steps in semiology. This is why I view Fabbri's semiotics as performative: it has an immediate intervention force. As he stated in his famous 1973 essay on mass communication and the evil eye of sociology: "semiotics does not practice an *ars inveniendi* but an *ars interveniendi*" (Fabbri 1973: 51).

To conclude

I set out on this comparative investigation not to decide which of the two semiotics – Fabbri’s and Eco’s – is better, but to highlight different identities of semiotics and their implications. Semioticians can choose their own identity space, either in the great sphere of philosophical knowledge or in the even wider one of social knowledge.

If semiotics is a philosophy, we cannot ignore the question of its logical and theoretical models. It must define its devices and limits to be a *critical and general* reflection.² Critical because it has to focus (in line with Kant) on defining the domains of reasoning and interpretative analysis; and general because it has to be capable – depending on the field chosen – of elaborating abstract models, general theoretical tools applicable to this field. Abstraction, in this case, is not a problem but an asset.

If semiotics is a social practice, it cannot fail to be *empirical and performative*. It must start from an experience that is multiple, then elaborate concepts that concern the relationship with that multiple, and subsequently investigate the effects that the signification processes produce and articulate signification models that could make the meaning of the world more intelligible. It is an ‘interventionist’ semiotics: one that intervenes in the world to make it more readable. Abstraction, in this case, would be a significant limitation, a factor of ineffectiveness.

Whether as a philosophy of language or as the study of signification, we should not forget that semiotics is and must remain *scientific*. It must, therefore, strive to find adequate concepts – as Fabbri argues, “semiotics is constructivist, not deconstructionist” (Fabbri 2017:151) – and interdefine them; it must explain the problems it investigates (even if it does not know them a priori), justify its conclusions, and always be ready to start over. As we said at the beginning, remaining silent about the results is because there is no linear progress but rather a constant exercise, which always finds us *in the midst* of meaning. Recalling Fabbri’s words in his 1973 essay mentioned above, he and Eco have two common enemies: vulgar *causalism* and *spontaneism*.

² I discuss in depth these aspects of Eco’s philosophical vocation in Lorusso (2021).

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Marked Semiotics: Tactics and Strategies

BY: Gianfranco Marrone

1. A Form of Life

One of Paolo Fabbri's most recent papers, his plenary speech at the XIV Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, held in Buenos Aires on 9th-13th September 2019, was entitled, 'Para una semiotica marcada.' What does this refer to? We might say that it refers to knowledge concerned with *intensity*. First, for its technical meaning: a term from semiotic metalanguage is used to define semiotics itself. Secondly, for its emotional and psychological meaning: practicing the science of signification as a constitutionally passionate form of life. A knowledge that is in no way ascetic or loftily detached from existence; a knowledge that holds tightly to life as it founds research into meaning conceived as both signified and direction, perception and corporeity. But why play with Jakobson's famous, not to mention highly delicate terminology, by proposing a 'marked semiotics'? And how should we understand this particular expression?

The idea of marked semiotics has a primarily *tactical* value but is also, in other senses, more broadly *strategic*. It is tactical when it comes to other semiotic theories, or those presumed as such, which constitute a field of studies as vast and varied as it is (precisely because of this fact) epistemologically imprecise. It is strategic with regards to the project for a semiotics 'with a scientific vocation,' that hailing from the best structuralist traditions (linguistic, anthropological, philosophical, sociological) and leads to the science of signification elaborated by Algirdas J. Greimas and his school, of which Fabbri has long been an eminent exponent and roaming scholar.

2. A Tactic

The tactical value of Fabbri's gesture lies in the fact that, by occupying the position of the marked term, it pushes any other supposedly semiotic theory into a non-marked position. Undoubtedly, this is quite extensive, probably imperialistic, certainly invasive, and yet, at the same time, vague, imprecise, and ambiguous. In the notes from the Buenos Aires conference, we find a long list of unrelated themes and problems that, as far as Fabbri was concerned, constituted non-marked semiotics: pop-philosophy, cultural studies, ideological criticism of the media, information and communication theory, philosophy of language, cognitivism, recurring referentialism, a reaffirmation of naturalism and ontology, a return to the question of the origins of languages, the philology of Peirce's texts, etc. What is striking here is not the list's items (in themselves potentially noteworthy) but how dizzying it is.

We still read how non-marked semiotics consists of "taking concepts or citations without worrying ourselves about the theoretical system into which they are inserted." This leads semiotics to a kind of "planned obsolescence" caused by an "evident eclecticism [...] comparable to the pre-Saussurian heteroclysis of language." It ends up accepting everything that claims the label of semiotics, a practice not tolerated by any serious discipline, which demands, as it should, a "common epistemological minimum" and "some kind of internal articulation of its concepts." This phenomenon, as Fabbri observes, explains the paradox that in a period "of extremely high signicity and virtualization" (like the one we currently live in), semiotics – in its non-marked version – is unable to claim its place "among the knowledge capable of providing interesting analysis and effective answers."

Marked semiotics aspires to establish itself as a competitive brand (no wordplay intended) in the scientific arena, both in the varied field of *semiotic studies* – as a specific, epistemologically founded, and structured knowledge – and the broader territory (to use another of Fabbri's expressions) of the human and non-human, natural and non-natural sciences.

3. A Strategy

The idea of marked semiotics has also a broader strategic value, aiming at clearly defining the internal physiognomy of the research on signification. Over the years, Paolo Fabbri attempted several times to take stock of this. For example, in the opposition between the "semiotic gaze" and the "evil eye of sociology" proposed in a lengthy article written in 1973 (Fabbri 2017). Perhaps, however, his idea of semiotics is best illustrated in *La svolta semiotica* ([*The Semiotic Turn*], Fabbri 1998). The image of semiotics provided

here is particularly enlightening, especially (given what is relevant to us here) in the first chapter of the book, where he talks about “semiotic levels and missing links.” This issue is crucial for gaining an in-depth understanding of the pertinence and boundaries of the science of signification and is almost entirely missing from both previous and later semiotic debates.

Fabbri identifies four different levels in signification research. The basic idea is that semiotics is configured like a research project on meaning (as the slogan goes: *making meaning capable of signifying*), which, while favoring neither pure philosophical theory nor the simple application of pre-established models to any odd object, involves four different, yet closely interconnected research levels.

3.1. Empirical level

On the first of these levels, the semiologist’s work is above all the *empirical analysis* of signifying wholes, a tangible encounter with meaning-rich data which must take place. No science would be possible without direct contact with the significant world. Even before configuring itself as a general hypothesis on the function of languages, communication, and cultures, semiotics makes a fundamental claim for describing these languages, communication, and cultures and, therefore, emphasizes the pragmatic value of its intellectual labor. A theory that does not provide an empirical case study is, according to Fabbri (1987), a scholastic one.

The human and social sciences’ established praxis has a structural orientation and includes semiotics thanks to its empirical basis. However, the empirical terrain we propose to analyze is not merely a collection of data, comprising pre-existing positive entities readily available to the observer’s gaze. Instead, data are constructed and reconstructed by analyzing the underlying systems of meaning. In other words, data are configured as *texts*, in a broad sense. By studying their internal and external dependencies (on other texts, on discursive categories, contextual situations, and culture in general), its implicit theories are dis-implied through its particular descriptive project. As Fabbri writes (1998: 26-27), “If semiotics has [...] a scientific vocation [...], it is the obligation to engage [...] with all those complex practices of signification from which it is possible to dis-imply mechanisms of meaning.” Similarly, “if semiotics is a philosophical discipline, it is not because it investigates what philosophers say about signs, but because it works on the texts’ underlying *images of thought* that it wants and knows how to analyze.” Therefore, naturalism or positivism cannot possibly be employed by the science of signification without getting out of the paradigm.

3.2. Methodological level

Given its constructivist nature, for empirical analysis to be effective, we require a *method* that enables us to focus on the collections of signifiers. Directing our gaze in this manner, we can find the pre-established pertinences that transform the primary perception of any presence of meaning into an actual *text*. A signifying machine that, by mixing with multiple other texts, constitutes the dynamics of cultures, which Lotman (1990, 2008) calls the semiosphere. From this perspective, semiotic analysis is textual analysis as it reconfigures sensitive data in terms of precise forms - processes and systems of signification. Textual analysis works, as Fabbri states, in the same way as a *Gedankenexperiment*, a thought experiment that, as Kuhn (1977) teaches us, has the same explanatory value in science as experiments carried out in a lab. Not, however, as often happens in philosophy, by working on *exempla ficta*, but working on cultural texts constantly translated by one another. In this sense, the semiotic method avoids both the procedural rigidity of specific logics and the siren calls of *anything goes*. Fabbri does not presume a *canon* in the Kantian sense, i.e., using a set of *a priori* principles to regulate the legitimate use of the cognitive faculties. Instead, he draws on Latour (1996: 84) to talk about a semiotic *organon*, “a kind of rational, non-universal art that provides models and principles for the function of local cognitive and discursive knowledge” (Fabbri 1998: 71). Furthermore, says Fabbri (2000: 53-67), the application of models does not rely on any automatism, instead requiring specific feasibility or application theory principles.

3.3. Theoretical level

From here, we pass to the third level, that of *theory*, in which the analytical method's categories (such as actant, actor, competence, performance, discourse, space, time, etc.) become concepts that are inter-defined among themselves. Not all methods work equally well in textual analysis. It is not enough to invoke the rationality of an organon; it is also necessary to measure its reach and efficacy in terms of theoretical reflection. Rather than approaching the text using incompatible methods or heterogenous interpretative categories, the semiotic organon must be scrutinized by a theory that ensures the interaction of models and categories by inter-defining them – e.g., what is the relation between actant and actor, competence and performance, enunciation and discourse, etc. In this way, analytical categories become concepts, reorganized within an all-encompassing framework that controls not only their explanatory value regarding textual and cultural dynamics but also theoretical rigor. If the analysis is to be productive, it must be founded on a theory; a theory not presumed *a priori* but based on the outcome of previous analysis. A virtuous circularity is required to prevent any distinction between a presumably pure theoretical moment and a subsequent interpretative moment. The semiotic analysis of texts, Fabbri often states, is not the use of an elaborate

method in advance but indicates the direction of a theory to come. Hence the famous comparison: just as the ethnologist, when faced with other cultures, is led to question themselves and their interpretative categories, in the same way, the semiologist, when faced with a text, must be able to abandon pre-established models in the name of the more effective tools of description and comprehension (Greimas 1976). The text is the semiologists' area of investigation; the resistance they encounter transforms into a stimulus for further research.

3.4. Epistemological level

Finally, once the concepts have been theoretically inter-defined, they must be scrutinized by a broader *epistemological reflection* to evaluate their philosophical and theoretical consequences. Thus, if, in theory, concepts such as *to be* and *to do*, *subject* and *object*, *difference*, *relation*, and so on, are inter-defined elements, functioning on that level as 'primaries,' on an epistemological level, they become the object of philosophical investigation and must be discussed in depth. This opens a dialogue with forms of philosophical reflection operating in the same fields of inquiry, for instance, hermeneutics, logic, phenomenology, or the analytical philosophy of language. Therefore, it is necessary, at this level, to clarify apparently self-evident notions, such as the oppositions nature/culture, animal/human, and even life/death, interrogating ourselves more generally not only on the issue of the nexus between deduction and induction, as predicted by Greimas (1966) in *Structural Semantics*, but above all between forms of scientific research. Just as Saussure (2002) stated in his famous essay on the 'double essence of language,' and Fabbri himself (2014) remarked, we must not place linguistics with either the natural sciences or the human sciences, but in a third sphere, that of semiology. This argument recurs in Cassirer's final work (1947), devoted to the foundations of structuralist epistemology; and again in Greimas (1970), who states that semiotics is located in the "exceptionally narrow gap between logic and metaphysics," adhering to neither the rigors of the first nor the reflections of the second.

4. The Missing Links

Though different, these four levels of semiotics are inseparable parts of the same research project. Their hierarchy is logical, not evaluative, and does not exclude any bidirectionality. Whereas empirical analysis requires adequate methods and theoretical notions justified by those methods, epistemological reflection presupposes a theory, a method, and the textual support anchoring it to empiricism. Epistemology, theory, methodology, and empirical analysis must not proceed autonomously. If we do this, there is the risk of explanatory fallacy and the inability to understand the phenomena

studied by semiotics. Just as, for example, the semiotic analysis of passions is entirely useless without considering the nexus between reason, passion, and action, so a reflection on sensoriality will be misleading if we do not clarify the kind of perceptual experience we refer to, the body image we presuppose, or the idea of cognition we derive from it. Therefore, Fabbri concludes that semiotic research aims to search for the *missing links* that unite and organize these four fundamental levels, occupy the interstitial spaces, and construct bridges between research instances often considered in a dangerously autonomous manner.

It sometimes happens that a philosophical hypothesis is directly linked to a textual description, without any theory or method connecting them, or that a methodology is adopted in empirical analysis without theoretically inter-defining its categories. Or even that a method refers directly to an epistemological basis bypassing theory altogether. Also, as Fabbri states, it can often happen that semiotic theory is developed without any epistemological basis. The missing links are not pieces to be inserted into the mechanism, like the missing pieces of a mosaic under restoration. They are not pertinent notions to be brought into play, nor models to place in the cracks between one level and another, much less textual objects or things of the world. Instead, the missing links are the relations to be built between levels, passages between different instances - separate yet inter-related - of the phases of semiotic work, of happy fertilization throughout the meta-linguistic hierarchy. The result is this: "So, in conclusion, these are the missing links: that which connects epistemology to theory, that which connects theory to a method, that which connects method to empirical description. Unfortunately, inside the black box of semiotic research, the absence of these links allows us to identify a typology of different kinds of semiotic currents: those that push philosophy to the analysis of elementary signs, those that put the texts in direct contact with the theories, using them as illustrations, and those that use entirely blind and irresponsible methods" (Fabbri 1998: 29). We might add that all these are forms of research that, by avoiding the links required to connect the levels, remain in that vague field of non-marked semiotics.

5. A Disciplinary Project

According to Paolo Fabbri, this is the strategy of marked semiotics or, if you prefer, the image of the science of signification. Marked semiotics is not just a sectarian and, according to some, provocative slogan. It is a disciplinary project that, taking stock of the recent past (the structural perspective of the human and social sciences), aims to consolidate contemporary developments and open up further research prospects into the formal articulations of the different human and social sciences languages. Provided, of course, we are clear about the meaning and value of the semiotic levels and their inter-

linking. For this reason, we will, in conclusion, attempt to further clarify some fundamental points while also attempting to understand (as far as is possible) what exactly is next at stake.

5.1. A Collective Dimension

First and foremost, we must bear in mind that all the themes and problems the four levels bring together can make semiotic research appear as a fearsome, if not hopeless, task. How to conduct a textual analysis and simultaneously elaborate a method, construct a theory that reconsiders the method, and an epistemology that interrogates the theory?

The response, implicit in Fabbri's working method (and the essays collected here), is simple. On the one hand, we must remain alert as we continually jump from one level to the next; on the other, we must open up the research to a collective and well-organized dimension. As Fabbri loved to say, it is a case of a dialogue among equals since only group work can produce significant results. From this point of view, the long-time research into passions (more than twenty years of shared work and not yet finished) is exemplary. Only in this way what is left unthought on one level can become the object of study in the next one. This is where the idea of the scientific community makes perfect sense.

5.2. Filiations and Alliances

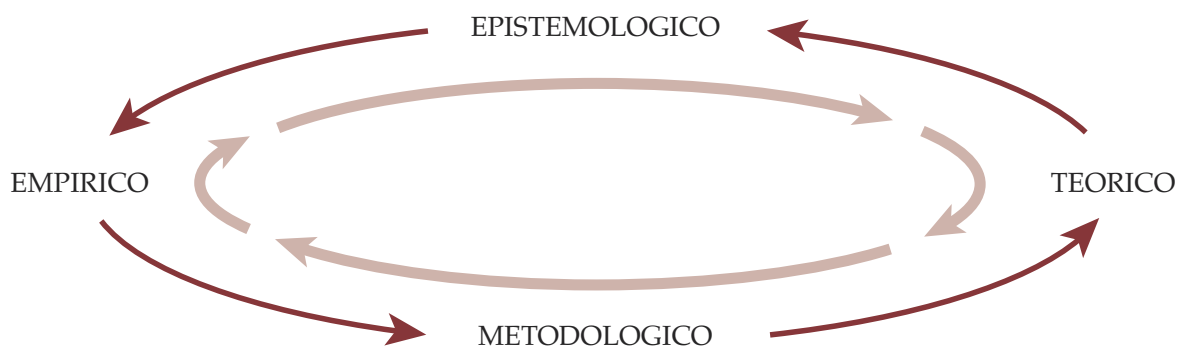
Research into signification, rooted in a structured community of actors, is delineated by its filiations and alliances, but most of all, its internal organization. Fabbri could barely stand the expression (and the idea of) a 'standard semiotics' (coined, he said, by Jean Petitot as a calque of the 'standard models' of physics) as an established set of categories and concepts to be embalmed before effectively seeping out into a phantom *post-*, as fashionable as it is suicidal. Advancing research, a fundamental imperative, does not necessarily demand an abdication (exhibited as euphoric, but in reality, rather painful) of the results acquired in terms of models for analysis, investigation methods, inter-definition of concepts, etc. Instead, it would be the classic (and this is not his expression) throwing the baby out with the bathwater. The progression of semiotic work must occur in multiple directions and on various levels and always part of a community of intentions and projects. Fabbri deduces that marked semiotics, rather than following the siren calls of novelty and proposing a new theoretical model at every opportunity, has ample room for maneuver both when it builds on solid foundations and when it rethinks, in terms of signification, the methodological and theoretical elaborations derived from similar, parallel or adjacent research in anthropology, linguistics, sociolinguistics, media sociology, sociology of science, philosophy, literary and art criticism, etc.

5.3. Pertinence and Presupposition

We must not confuse the four levels of semiotic research with the model of the generative path of meaning. Using the term 'level' in both cases could give rise to this confusion, leading us to search for improbable analogies between, for example, discursivity and theory, narrativity and methodology, and so on. However, this would be utter nonsense. These two schemas share the principle of pertinence and the logic of presupposition and, thus, a particular idea of hierarchy. But these are very different things. The four levels we have examined organize the tracks and the stakes of research, whilst the generative path orders a supposed (non genetic!) generation of meaning into stages by progressive concreteness and complexity (or, if we look at it from the opposite angle, by gradual abstractness and simplification). Perhaps what does need to be said about this powerful schematization is that it deals simultaneously with a model of description (which distinguishes and organises the questions that, over the course of the analysis, are asked of the text) and a general form of the semiotic theory (which arranges the semiotic conditions of every text). From this perspective, the generative path perfectly represents the link between the methodological and the theoretical level of semiotics, categories of analysis reconsidered as inter-defined concepts (the reason why, if needed, the path should be revisited but maintaining the non-missing conjunctive role). It is no coincidence that semiotics has worked so much on the connecting link between method and theory.

5.4. A Circularity

Another link that is not entirely missing, though it still needs to be strengthened, is between the epistemological and empirical levels. The hierarchy between the levels, and the logic of presupposition, do not exclude a circularity between them. We should not envisage the levels in terms of ascending or descending verticality, with the empirical sitting on the lowest step and the epistemological at the top. These two levels often come into contact with one another and must do so, so the four levels are organized in a circular way:



Why? Certainly not to re-propose the praxis (rightly criticized by Fabbri, as we have seen) according to which every philosophical hypothesis can find a text (literary or otherwise) to lean on, skipping the contact between method and theory. In other words, not all links work. As we have seen, the empirical and epistemological levels meet on a different terrain, which defines and clarifies the constructivist character (and therefore contrary to any positivism) of semiotics regarding its objects of analysis. Even within semiotic studies, we often think in terms of an opposition between world and language, reality and representation, society and discourses, immediacy and mediation, field and desk, practices and texts, etc. But these oppositions are not pertinent from the perspective of a marked theory of signification.

This is because every presumed reality always exists within some system of meaning, making the world (as Fabbri often reminds us) a reservoir of other languages, beyond the so-called 'natural' (verbal) languages, by utilizing different substances of expression but the same forms. The relationship between the world and language is not, therefore, one of representation but of translation. The language re-says what is already signified, and vice versa. The idea of translation, of transduction between different languages, of trans-codification (on which Fabbri worked extensively) is one of the few points shared by the various semiotic perspectives, from Peirce to Jakobson, from Greimas and Lotman to Paolo Fabbri. As Greimas (1970) insisted, in opposition to existentialism, meaning is already there; it just needs to be made to signify, to be articulated through signification. This is something that the social actors, individuals or collectives, do in their daily life, in their social rituals, in their linguistic and semiotic expressions, long before the arrival of the semiologist. We live in a continual flux of texts, and it is the task of semiotics to re-invent them (from the meaning of the Latin term *inventio*). This is why any empirical object studied by semiotics already exists in a network of meaning; whatever is present in cultural dynamics is already a signifying object filled with value. Textual analysis cannot help but re-direct its meaning because of its descriptive aims, which are to be made explicit.

5.5. Nature and Culture

Finally, let's consider some current stakes, those involving the link that is still often missing between the theoretical and epistemological levels. A lack that causes a fair number of misinterpretations and, as we have seen, several escapes from the semiotic paradigm and its necessary markedness. Indeed, it would seem that much research into human and social sciences exists within a profound contradiction, and not just in semiotics. But let's limit ourselves to the latter. On the one hand, resurgences of positivist objectivism return to the surface. In its attempt to couple signification with, for example, biology or neuronal mechanisms, research effectively naturalizes signification, releasing it from its constitutive socio-cultural differences and thus universalizing it.

On the other hand, semiotic studies are beginning to digest and modify some of their foundations. For instance, the idea that the famous opposition between nature and culture (which Greimas posited as the basis of every collective axiology) has nothing universal or necessary about it, is very recent. We know how anthropologists (Descola, Viveiros de Castro, Ingold, etc.) and the sociologist-philosophers of the sciences (Latour, Callon, Stengers, etc.) have powerfully recalibrated its reach. So, not only is there not a single nature from which multiple cultures constitute themselves through differentiation, but many ethnicities across the planet do not even understand what nature separated from culture is, or vice versa. The regularly reappearing in public discussion concept of the Anthropocene offers nothing new from this perspective. And animist beliefs do not belong only to distant and indiscernible cultures but circulate freely within our own.

Fabbri insisted that semiotics has a secret weapon, a unique ability in dealing with such urgent and highly delicate questions: that of being a science of discourses, of possessing excellent tools (distributed throughout its various levels) for analyzing and, therefore, deconstructing and de-potentializing social discourses, dis-implicating them from their implicit theories. The same goes for the discourse of sciences, both human and non-human, natural and non-natural, and semiotics discourse itself, which must also be articulated in a semiotic way. Like all kinds of content, the sciences' contents exist according to their form. Sciences create complex and elaborate discourses about them. Through equally apposite forms of expression, these discourses speak to us more effectively than any conceptualization that tends to sideline them, overlooking their particular meaning.

6. Diplomacy

Semiotics must not take the content of the sciences as it is, as the sciences themselves (or their mythologization) presume, behaving as if it is not semiotically, discursively formed. Something like that would be naïve and amounts to an abandonment of its specific scientific objective. The dialogue with other sciences, be it collaborative or conflictual, passes through a double binary. To discuss as equals means reciprocity and provisionality, by definition. But to reconstruct their content forms and compare them demands taking as a starting point their intrinsically semiotic pertinence. Imperialism, arrogance, haughtiness? Not at all, Fabbri insists. It is quite the opposite: servility, placing tools at the service of others to suggest constant translations between languages and between discourses, including those of all the sciences. In all this, the semiologist takes the role, handed to him by a specific philosophy, to mediate between human and social discourses (Deleuze and Guattari 1991) to make possible their encounter and conflict while navigating through it all the necessary 'diplomacy' (Stengers 1997).

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From Venezia back to Paolo Fabbri. Dan Graham: 'Mirror Power' Strategies¹

BY: Federico Montanari

Dan Graham, one of the most influential conceptual artists and performers, began his work in the Sixties alongside and in opposition to the poetics of artists like Sol LeWitt or Bruce Nauman, placed in the Conceptual Art universe at the edges of Minimalist Art. The *antiphrastic* character of his work makes it particularly interesting for the problematics of visual and art semiotics. What kind of visual rhetoric and systems does it involve, though? The hypothesis I would like to develop here concerns strategies and connects closely to Paolo Fabbri's paramount interest in conflict, interactional strategies, and tactics. Graham's work deals with technological, rhetorical devices and "technological diagrams" (another theme that, through Foucault and Deleuze, interested Fabbri). It is also about political discourses and issues expressed *indirectly* through artistic means.

This paper aspires to be both an analysis and a 'homage to a vision.' To Paolo Fabbri's vision too. It deals with the cultural politics of Graham's exhibition at the Contemporary Art Museum of Los Angeles (first visited in February 2009) and,

¹ This article is based on a paper (never published before) presented at the IAVS (International Association of Visual Semiotics) Conference, in Venice, several years ago, under the chairmanship of Paolo Fabbri. It is therefore intended as a double tribute: to the teacher, maestro, professor and friend, and to the scholar who had dedicated himself, especially in recent decades, to images and the visual arts, and gave an innovative impetus to the semiotics of art and visual studies. The latter is evidenced in the recent extensive collection of essays *Vedere ad arte* (edited by Tiziana Migliore) whose title translates as 'seeing in' through art or 'to see artistically.' The collection demonstrates the breadth of Fabbri's vision in analyzing different artists. I therefore propose this excursus on the artist Dan Graham, hoping that Paolo would have at least appreciated the idea of a dialogue on art as a form of experiment (as shown by Graham). I think he would have said: a mental, perceptual and emotional experiment.

specifically, his idea about the “two-way” interconnection between aesthetic and perceptual research. But what do these “two-way” poetics and rhetoric – which Graham declared in a sort of aesthetic-political-anthropological manifesto – consist of?

Anticipating a point, Graham is interested in rock music, particularly in subcultural, underground movements from the late 1970s and early 1980s, such as hardcore Punk, or with collaborations with Kim Gordon and the Sonic Youth group in their early stages during the 80s. But there are no “quotation” references from music and subcultural research to plastic and visual arts practices here. Apparently, this interest in hardcore punk or art-new wave rock, with their energetic pulsations and energies, seems not having nothing to do with Graham’s poetics (based on experimentalism, technologies, as well as conceptual lists of words, schemas, or, later, or in installations composed by cold materials such as glass walls, mirrors, in light structures often made of metal). On the contrary, we find here a critical capacity of connecting and exploring directly, going inside all these forms of expression: no quotation, perhaps no remix, but exploration. Graham is against ‘arti-stars,’ as he states, “I was never successful. Artists and musicians knew about me, but I think the work was always too early.”² Musical and socio-cultural forms of expression are then “passed” through hybrid displays, concrete techno-devices invented by Graham.

Interestingly, this invention of these hybrid devices – from Graham’s early works, with lists of words, or pseudo-journalistic reportages, scientific tables, statistic surveys, diagrams; up to mirrors, inside large metallic and glass installations furnished by craters, with pathways within them. Or, from the 1970s, the building of the famous semicircular pavilions (Figure 6) and labyrinths, using oversized metal panels and glass mirrors, recalls classical figures like the labyrinth or the mirror.

But, firstly, we will try to provide a short map of Graham’s poetics. Graham is one of the most influential artists from the research area called Conceptual Art since the ‘60s. With Graham, this field overflows and breaks away towards other directions: crossing Minimal Art, but, again, with a specific political-aesthetical status. Let us proceed in describing some examples of his poetic account. Starting from the sixties, “conceptual” deals also with a metalinguistic attitude, meta-reflection about art, and, at the same time, a new way of making theory. Since then, art research has been interested in verbal language and analysis: words and texts (*strictu sensu*) are considered artistic objects. In this context, words and objects are often connected, for instance, by artists like Joseph Kosuth. Paolo Fabbri repeatedly stressed Kosuth’s relevance to the philosophy of language and even invited him to IUAV University in Venice to give lectures and seminars. Graham, on the other hand, is fascinated by Lévi-Strauss and the french *nouveau roman*.

² See the review of the 2009 Los Angeles exhibition in *The New York Times*: <https://nyti.ms/3j4wPvH> (accessed online on February 2021).

But Graham's work is quite different. He starts from in-field research: about writing activities, like reportages or "journalistic essays," or a "parody of popular sociological texts illustrated" (cf. Butler 2003: 1). What does this mean? What is the difference between finding a theoretical meta-language and exploring, even mimicking the language of science and investigative social research, or even journalistic inquiry? Again, indirectly, it does seem to express an indirect parodic or ironical view.

Lists, reportages, and utterance devices

One of the first Graham's works, *Homes for America*, is a series "of amateur-seeming snapshots of suburban architecture" (1966-1967, Fig. 1; see, Alberro 1999). Or, he works on pseudo-reportages with titles like *Eisenhower and the hippies*. The idea, however, is "writing as if it were an essay." Another example, but with a different kind of technique and expression (a sort of diagram, a "scientific table"), is a sort of socio-psychological statistical table: *Side effects/Common Drugs* (1966, Fig. 2). It looks like the result of scientific research, but it is a form of painting and, simultaneously, a sort of simulated reportage on sixties culture.

What is, in deep, the instance of these kinds of works? According to some critics and Graham himself (Graham 1999), this idea concerns a critical analysis of the phenomenological model of minimalism: this is the 'content' (tentative and value) of a poetic way. So, if there is a metalanguage, it becomes a glance and a point of view turned against itself: against art itself, or, better to say, against its possible 'canonization.' Secondly, this critical analysis deals with demolishing an uttering subject (even if this subject is a 'minimal' one). Confronted with a crisis of the subject, of an ego 'corroded' by the media and our society's consumption and market practices, the artist counterattacks in a multidimensional way. Graham is a great inventor of forms, producing a new perceptual-political glance on everyday life.

Yet, utterance devices (transformed later in complex technological tools even in a pre-digital era) become more complex and articulated by superposing perspectives, glances, and points of view. Graham claims that "[his] work is for children and parents on weekends" (quoted in Butler, cit.: 1). Indeed, his projects have a playful, game-like dimension, particularly his numerous sculptural pavilions. And this becomes evident in how much the public enjoys these installations. However, his work is not for 'fun'; it is about perception, action, cognition. It looks like scientific experiences or about social and political situations. As mentioned above, many of Graham's works at this first stage appear to be in the form of journalistic inquiries, scientific investigations, or lists of words and grammar definitions (see Fig. 1, 2, and 3).

alization will deal with experiments on processes and enunciative materialized processes: technological experiments using devices (videotapes, screens, and so on) that manipulate space and time perception, as well as glances, points of view, feedbacks.

This passage, this tension, on one side, between political and social content and, on the other, the 'critical analysis,' as well as metalinguistic analysis of the phenomenological model of the Minimalist and Conceptual art, provokes a new invention. A sort of 'inner point of view.' What does it mean, and which point of view is intended here? We introduce a poetical hypothesis starting directly from inside Graham's work. The hypothesis is about mirrors.

From Mirrors to Diagrams

At a certain point in his career, Graham started to include mirrors (see also, on this, on the idea of reflection, Jeff Wall's presentation, in Graham 1999) in constructing his object devices. Mirrored walls, as later used as separating walls for his pavilions, are at the same time transparent and mirrored. Or even the construction of installations producing "mirror effects," thanks to technological instruments and cameras capturing, through closed-circuit videos, a person's entering these pavilions or in a given space, showing it with a few seconds delay on a screen. Again, 'sound mirrors' are obtained by analogical technological devices that reproduce a person's voice with a delay. Or, finally, craters, semi-mirrored, made of steel.

As we know, the theme of the mirror is another issue that had aroused Paolo Fabbri's interest. Conversing with Umberto Eco's thoughts on the same topic, Fabbri had devoted one of his courses at the University of Bologna on the theme of mirrors several years ago.³

According to our hypothesis, by introducing mirror devices, Graham is not only working with a figure, or a theme (also coming from art history), a shape or a 'concrete' metaphor, but advances a strategy; specific tactics able to manipulate hosts, spectators, observers: subjects, captured inside these mirroring devices. This new phase in his work, involving writing and diagrams, is about using experimental mirrors in performances and installations.

What does it mean that Graham constructs 'diagrams' using technological devices? (At that time, through analogical technologies, such as automatic videotapes, cameras, screens, photocells, and slowing down images, see installation example here below).

³ Paolo Fabbri's 1999 class at the University of Bologna (https://www.paolofabbri.it/corsi-e-lezioni/aa1998_1999/) was dedicated to the issue of mirrors: proposing both examples from art history and, as we said, in a 'dialectical discussion' and theoretical dispute with Umberto Eco's semiotic analysis of mirrors. Eco returns to the theme of mirrors in *Kant and the Platypus*, where he conceives them as "prostheses" (Eco 1987, 1999). It is an honor for me, as it was for other scholars, to have been able to take part in these classes.

The idea of the diagram is taken up by Fabbri, starting from Deleuze (in a conceptual and dynamic framework that comes, on the one hand, from Foucault, but partly also from Peirce's semiotics).

According to Fabbri (2020), Deleuze's idea is that diagrams are devices (not necessarily technological) present in art. For example, in his analysis of Francis Bacon's work, diagrams are schemas that not only represent (such as an emblem or an icon) something that recurs constantly and often in a mysterious way within an artist's work but also something that activates forces and tensions in the painted space. To put it differently, a diagram, according to Fabbri – quoting Italo Calvino and discussing an artwork by Eliseo Mattiacci – could be, for instance, a snake form represented in different ways:

All'altezza degli occhi di chi guarda, in una delle tre lame si trova la forma anomala di un'onda solitaria che potrebbe essere la forma diagrammatica di un serpente. La Spira infatti è la voluta della linea intorno al polo della spirale e comporta l'immaginario ondulatorio e vibrante della elasticità. Ma l'onda qui vale soprattutto per il suo fronte di energia e di propagazione verso di noi. È un'onda d'urto, diagramma di forze di dislocazione e di perturbazione.

At the observer's eye level, in one of the three blades, there is the irregular shape of a solitary wave that could be the diagrammatic form of a snake. The Spira, in fact, is the line's volume around the pole of the spiral and involves the undulatory and vibrating imagery of elasticity. But the wave here applies above all to its energy front and propagation towards us. It is a shock wave, a diagram of forces of dislocation and perturbation. (Fabbri 2020: 301, my transl.)

And, for Deleuze, about Bacon's paintings:

To say that the diagram, in turn, is a stopping point in the painting is not to say that it completes or constitutes the painting; indeed, on the contrary. It acts as a relay. We have seen that the diagram must remain localized, rather than covering the entire painting (as in expressionism), and that something must emerge from the diagram. (...) It does in fact remain localized, no longer in surface, but in depth. When the curtain striates the entire surface, it seems to be in front of the Figure, but if we look closely, we can see that in fact it falls between the two planes, in the interval between the planes. In occupies or fills the shallow depth in this sense remains localized. The diagram always has effects that go beyond it. As an unbridled manual power, the diagram dismantles the optical world, but at the same time, it must be reinjected into the visual whole, where it introduces a properly haptic world and gives the eye a haptic function. (...) The diagram acts as a modulator (...). (Deleuze 2002: 138)

Here Deleuze talks about Bacon and his “colorism.” But the idea of “modulator,” as well as of “relay,” is, more or less implicitly, present everywhere also in Graham’s work. Even though we deal with an entirely different artistic universe, we find the same ‘double problem’ of the diagrammatic agency in Graham. According to Deleuze (ibid.), this concerns two demands: “the demand for a homogenous ground (...) and an aerial armature”; and the “demand for a singular specific form,” with unknown forms of variation. Using different materials, Graham builds up other kinds of diagrams: through architectural and metallic installations (pavilions, Fig. 5, 6) and by using machines and technological devices which manipulate not colors but space and time that, similar to experimental sets, provoke singular variations. For instance, the famous installation *Present continuous/past(s)* (1974) is named after verb tenses.

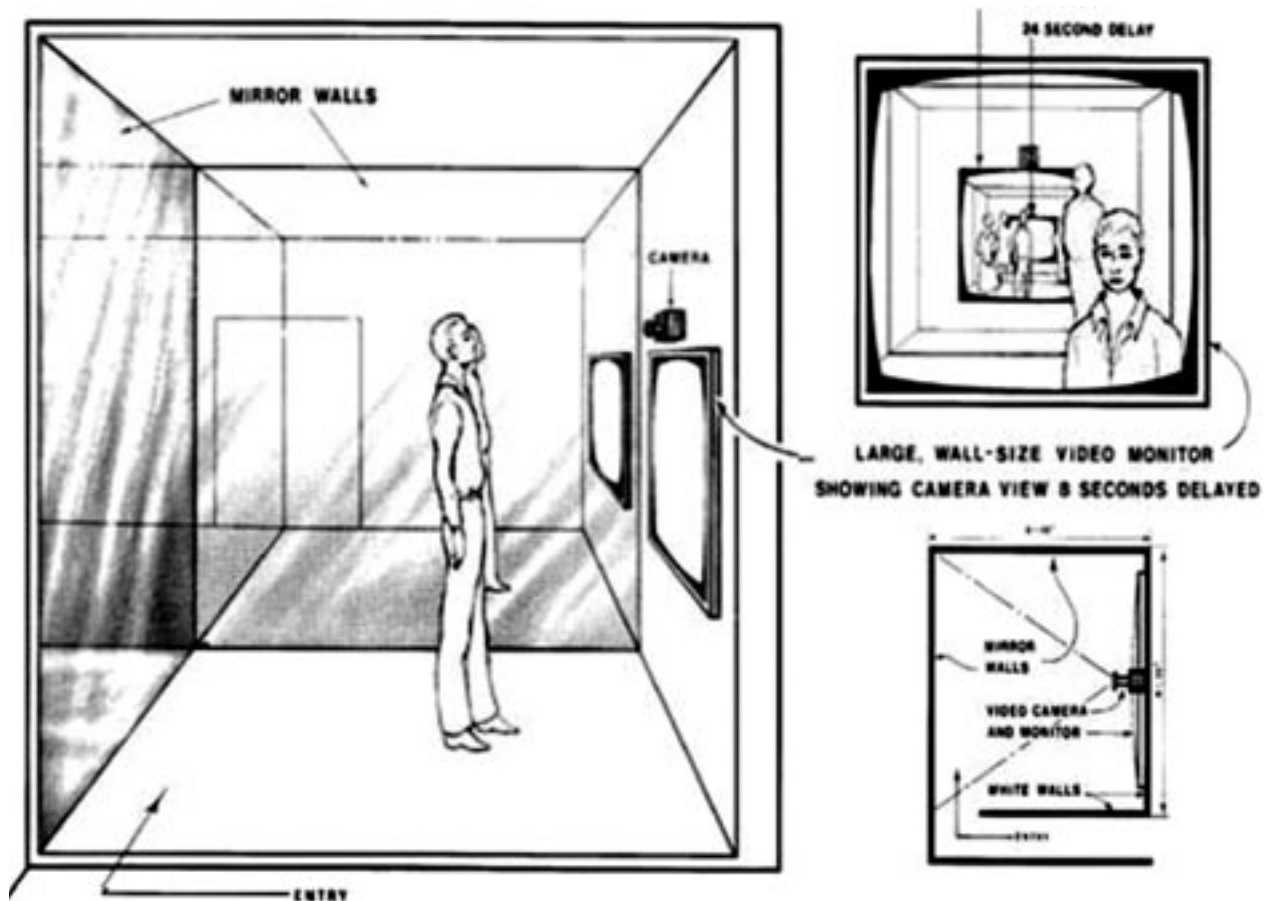


Fig. 4. Schema of *Present Continuous Past(s)*, installation (from Alberro, Graham 1999).

Thanks to these devices, Graham deploys spatial structures that embody effective ‘observational tactic,’ recording and manipulating the spectator’s passage or presence. The idea is about inventing, building up, or provoking a new form of subjectivity. Graham describes his installation (Fig. 4) as follows:

The Mirrors reflect present time. The video camera tapes what is immediately in front of it and the entire reflection on the opposite mirrored wall. The image seen by the camera (reflecting everything in the room) appears eight seconds later on the video monitor (via a tape delay placed between the video recorder recording and a second video recorder playing the recording back). If a viewer's body does not directly obscure the lens's view of the facing mirror, the camera tapes the reflection of the room and the reflected image of the monitor (which shows the time recorded eight seconds previously). A person viewing the monitor sees both the image of himself eight seconds ago and what was reflected on the mirror from the monitor eight seconds ago of himself, which is sixteen seconds in the past. (Graham 1999: 39)

From dis-embodiment subjectivities to re-embodiment conceptual art: Graham's spatio-temporal machines

After having worked on techniques of disembodiment, intending to show the naked glance of the observer and denouncing subjectivity and 'normalized' point of view, Graham proceeds in a second parallel phase. It starts with a kind of new 're-embodiment' in rediscovering subject-oriented materiality. But these two phases, or moments, as we have already seen in Deleuze's reading of Bacon, albeit by other means, are not separated. They are, in fact, the result of connected and parallel work. A punctual phase, or event, and appearance of a process, as in the process-installation of *Present Continuous Past(s)*, and later with the construction of cages, scaffoldings, labyrinths/pavilions. That is to say, exploring the links between the physical and phenomenological effects of frames, glasses, and, finally, mirrors.

Here Graham advances thanks to the use of different materials and processes: again, through socio, psycho-technological experimentation, but also re-inventing new links between materials such as mirrors, sounds, and also music. But, first of all, the most famous and essential elements of Graham's poetics are constituted by Pavilions. These famous spatial objects could be considered, indirectly quoting Graham, as *Edges and Hedges* (Fig. 4) and emblematic of his artistic work. Frames and cages delimiting the paths and, at the same time, creating magical effects and walkways, as if inside a hall of mirrors in an amusement park:

Deceptively simple in form yet philosophically complex, [the pavilions] initiate a phenomenological and kinesthetic experience in which the viewer participates as subject and object, participant and passive or disembodied observer. (Butler, cit.: 1)



Fig. 5. Dan Graham in 1982, photographing his 'Two Adjacent Pavilions' at Documenta VII in Germany. Art, he says, "is his 'passionate hobby'" (© New York Times, courtesy of Dan Graham).



Fig. 6. A typical Graham's 'Pavilion' (© courtesy of Chicago Art Review).

On the one hand, the pavilions (Fig. 5 and 6) represent a sort of reinvention of a tradition (from the Renaissance to public spaces, to gardens); but, at the same time, they propose a synthesis (a sort of emblem and blazon) of whole Graham's art. The rhetoric of surfaces and edges, material elements, spaces, and gazes. These hedges and pathways are sometimes made of two-way mirrors; or glass, providing diverse surfaces, dimensions, and paths.

Other essential characteristics of those pavilions and other installations are a time/space superposition and connections (as seen in the *Present/continuous (Pasts)* installation). In the sense that these spaces function as real traps (scientific traps like those used by researchers), capturing both visitors and light. As in a scientific experiment, but somewhat humorously and ironically, a form of capture is produced to study both the visitors' movements and reactions and the light itself due to the transparencies paths and the mirrors. The critical issue here, as also emphasized by several Graham critics and scholars, is the theme, typical of contemporary arts, of the relationship with the observer and the observer's role to the object (artistic as well as cognitive and pragmatic). However, in Graham (who was a pioneer in this field, thanks to his installations, including technological ones, as mentioned, and earlier performances and hybrid texts), this element is taken to its extreme consequences, in an experimental way.

From a topological and spatial point of view, an ambiguous playing occurs between internal/external and inclusive/non-inclusive spaces: see the spiral forms of pavilions. As said, they look like 'mirror houses.' But there are other parallel tactics. Pavilions are a reinvention and a synthesis. They resume previous artistic contents and expressive forms, either from art history or a specific artistic style.

Pavilions also provide, as said, glance superpositions. Persons inside these pavilions can see themselves “captivated by the effect of the mirrors and glass through which they could see each other, and in which they could also see their reflections.”⁴ Reflective/non-reflective; Obstruction/Non-obstruction: these elements and oppositions create a tension between these elements. But Graham generalizes these ‘visual struggles’ in a provocative and ironical way. Who are the spectators? And who active participants? They are trapped and are physically part of the artwork.

Music and images. What kinds of sound and music?

Finally, “sound is material.” Graham’s statement derives from his interest in avant-garde and popular music experimentation. He is mainly involved in rock and popular music history as a ‘popular surface’ for perceptual experiments. As anticipated, there is in Graham a genuine interest in ‘rock structures’ and rock historians and critics’ writing. But the artist re-invents here another History:

The function of both popular and extremist music in contemporary culture has long been a point of intellectual inquiry for Graham in his analyses of the social implications of cultural phenomena. Here he documents Minor Threat, a hardcore band from Washington D.C., in a performance at CBGB in New York. Distinguished from punk music in that it developed in suburban areas, hardcore, as typified here by Minor Threat, is seen by Graham as a tribal rite, a catalyst for the violence and frustration of its predominantly male teenage audience. The raw quality of Graham’s documentary style mirrors the crude energy of his young subjects and the hardcore subculture of the 1980s.⁵

Graham is also the maker of the video documentary *Rock my Religion*,⁶ which starts with the Punk movement and music of the early 1980s, through Patti Smith and other 1980s groups and goes back to the origins of rock, especially the more rebellious and alternative kind of rock, like The Doors. In this documentary and other works and interviews, Graham connects the origins of rock’n’roll with Jerry Lee Lewis and punk’s rebellious rhythms and agitated dancing with the Shakers, one of the strangest sects of the North American religious universe of the Puritan and Quaker diaspora. Nowadays,

⁴ From the description of Graham’s pavilion exhibition “Beyond,” in the garden of Walker Garden Art Center, 2009 (<https://bit.ly/3k5urUx>) “Walker Garden technician Noah Wilson happened by and was asked what kind of ongoing upkeep the piece required. His response: ‘Mainly washing off 10,000 thumbprints and kisses at the end of each day.’”

⁵ From 2002 catalogue’ exhibition, “Dara Birnbaum and Dan Graham”, Dia, New York, diaart.org: <https://bit.ly/3y0B8fF> [accessed 03/2021].

⁶ For further information see Moma website: <https://mo.ma/389Y5md> See also: <https://vimeo.com/8796242>.

only a few small communities remain. However, Shakers have become famous after Aaron Copland's *Variations on a Shaker Melody*, incorporated in his highly popular *Appalachian Spring* orchestral suite, and for their minimalist furniture design, which has also been revived recently. According to tradition, the Shakers performed their religious services by dancing animatedly and in groups. Ann Lee, the founder, was a Quaker, and according to her belief, the return of Christ could be perceived by the ecstasy caused by shaking the body. She went so far as to say that she was the second incarnation of God.

Graham's claim is that there is a connection between the 'communal' utopian history of those religious dissident heretical minorities and "ecstatic youth cultures" (from Puritans dissidents and Shakers to "straight edge punks"). Also relevant is Graham's idea that besides dance-induced ecstasy and anticipating the Second Coming, the Shakers somehow represented a form of communitarian resistance to the imminent transformation of the world by industrial capitalism.

Interestingly, Graham finds a connection with John Martin, an English romantic painter of the early 19th century, initially considered of little value but later rediscovered. Graham deals with him in a video made for Tate Gallery, with some clips included in the documentary *Rock my Religion*. In his colorful views of strange and apocalyptic landscapes, Martin depicted paradise, or sometimes the fires and fumes of future industries (in this respect similar to Turner and luminist American painters), but also bizarre sex scenes hidden in Arcadian or paradisiacal landscapes, or again of Doomsdays. In this connection, as well, he seems to represent a lost communal and ecstatic utopia.

But what do all these apparently bizarre and distant connections mean in relation to what we were saying about the gaze, the observer (even in Graham's experiments, pavilions, and installations), and also with regard to Fabbri's ideas about the 'diagrammatic' issue in art? With respect to Graham's poetics, we hypothesize that he constructs a sort of meta-history of the gaze. But this meta-history is always political. Linked to a utopia, not only that of Shakers or rock or punk but also about the relationship between the subject and his way of looking at and locating himself – in a Goodmanian way (another of Fabbri's philosophical references) – in the world.

This re-narration is part of Graham's glance devices, displays, and machines. Attempting to use Deleuze in the context of education practices, Cole points out that:

Gilles Deleuze inextricably ties up the ways in which power works through and in language with affect. The problem that confronts us is, therefore: What is affect, and how does it relate to language and power? Deleuze suggests that we get different answers to these questions depending upon whom we ask, and as such, resists outlining a clear definition of affect anywhere in his oeuvre. (Cole 2009: 1-2)

The author specifies that there are two possible models of viewing the relationship between affect and power. The first is “undermining scholarly authoritarianism” and the second is “developing unexpected social-cultural relationships.” I think that Graham’s idea concerning art, the gaze and the observer’s point of view, and power, is this: to think of a “two-way” modality of questioning this gaze by developing “new, unexpected relationships.” A social concrete utopia of art (and a critical semiotic glance) very close to Paolo Fabbri’s teaching.

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The semiotic landscape of memories in the Colombian post-agreement period¹

BY: Neyla Graciela Pardo Abril

PAOLO FABBRI:

memory and the path of semiotics in Latin America

Exploring the semiotic routes of Latin America from Mexico to Argentina in the company of Paolo Fabbri was, for me and all Latin Americans, an engaging scientific and human experience. He was a great master of conceptual rigor with a deep sense of what it means to build science with signs. His courteous and lucid presence advocated a transdisciplinary semiotic for social sciences and humanities, recognizing that all sign systems require explanations, conceptualizations, and meta-definitions with their interrelationships. His great sensitivity to art filled our minds and hearts with multiple reflections on the meaning and sense of all expressions of Latin culture. Paolo, Professor Honoris Causa of the University of Lima, leaves among us a perennial legacy for Latin American semiotics.

“Understanding is to catch with the mind that it can always lie; understanding is to feel in all senses and with all senses. In that visit, therefore, I understood the sense of the monumental [...] and its relationship with memory.” (Fabbri, 2020)

¹ The Colombian Group of Media Discourse Analysis (Colciencias) works with the SPEME research network through ONALME (National Observatory of Memory Processes) on collective memories and processes of memorialization. Questioning Traumatic Heritage: Spaces of Memory in Europe, Argentina, Colombia (SPEME) is funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 cooperation program. This program is the result of a joined work between universities and technical institutions in Europe and Latin America (Project ID: 778044).

1. The construction of memories through spaces

The present study is formulated in the framework of the human rights violations and humiliations still suffered by the victims of the Colombian armed conflict. This conflict has been shaped by the political-economic elites' systematic use of all forms of visual semiotic resources to legitimize discourses of war, injustice, and marginalization. To this purpose, institutional communication has appropriated values, identities, goals, and interests and reproduced them in public spaces through all available technological resources. These visual discourses aim to justify, deny, or partially recognize 9.106.309 victims registered by the National Information Register as of December 2020 (Victims Unit, 2020). Therefore, it is a communication that constructs a sense of identity for victims through the management of actions and values anchored to the post-agreement period in Colombia.

Since November 2016, when the government and the FARC-EP signed the Peace Agreement, the various Colombian social collectives are expected to build a vision of a shared past. In remaking the memories of a country that suffered more than sixty years of armed conflict, the focus is on three types of victimizing actors: those of an illegal nature, namely, the guerrillas and the paramilitaries; and of institutional order, the armed forces of the State and those who, in the service of the State, victimized civilians. The commemorative practices developed in connection to the armed conflict are multiple and diverse. They range from placing a stone and creating a garden or a forest to constructing a dedicated space in the form of a monument, a house, or a memory museum. In 2018, the first counter-monument in the country was created, aiming to commemorate and dignify the victim. *Contramonumento* is an anti-monumental and anti-celebratory project which, as Fabbri (2020) points out about *The Eyes of Horus*, contains a mysterious suggestion. However, the secret of the work has no trace of occultism and dispenses with any mysticism or metaphysics.

Fragmentos is a memory space that includes the artwork *Contramonumento* and is defined within a critical perspective on commemoration. Its social function enacts the revitalization of the peaceful sense of coexistence related to the signing of the Peace Agreement, as one of the multiple commemoration actions that aim to transform the meaning of the socio-territorial space in which it is inserted. Its semiotic landscape is in Bogota and comprises a space held together with sheets of corrugated black flooring. It resulted from the melting of 8,904 weapons surrendered by guerrilla members who reintegrated into civilian life. The Colombian artist and sculptor Doris Salcedo invited a group of women, victims of sexual violence during the armed conflict, to shape the metal floor tiles. Victimized women hammered for days the metal sheets, signaling their shaping role in forging the meaning of the peace-building and reconciliation process.

The conceptualization of the counter-monument does not involve a unified set of criteria. However, authors such as Stevens, Franck, and Fazakerley (2012) elaborated a systematic understanding of this phenomenon in terms of aesthetic space for interaction. The dialogic character of the counter-monument implicates its role in offering a critical and alternative perspective. As a memorialization practice, it resemanticizes and revitalizes memories embedded in specific socio-historical landscapes interpreted as signic fabrics under permanent construction.

Young (1992; 1999) first identified the rise of the counter-monument in place of the traditional practice of monumentalization regarding how Germany memorialized World War II events and, in particular, the Holocaust. Resisting conventional forms of public memorial art, the counter-monument gives collective memory new formal dimensions, collectivizes its expressive forms, and reworks the meaning of what is remembered. The counter-monument is an artistic expression that updates an aesthetic, refashions traditional forms of remembering, and transforms the durability, meaning, and evaluation of the events and their actors.



Image 1. View of the sculpture 'Fragmentos' (©Juan Fernando Castro).

The visual narratives formulated by *Fragmentos - Contramonumento* are an essential part of the memorialization process required to build peace in Colombian society. They become a source of knowledge by functioning as architectural and art objects capable of mediating, socializing, re-signifying, and preserving memory, both personal and collective. They aim to restore the meaning of life for the victims; they open up an empathic dialogue with the human condition to bring forward the victims' experiences and expectations. At the same time, they underline the victims' dignity and tacitly challenge their marginalization and victimization by official narratives. The memory space and the artwork installed in Bogota provide the city with a memory device insofar as they offer a space-time for the development of collective life by interweaving cultures, ethnicities, intersubjective relations, and subjectivation-inducing dialogues. By narrativizing, moreover, the tensions of political confrontations and interests, they generate discourses that make diversely represented and materialized memories socially visible.

2. Semiotic landscape: notions and tensions

To analyze the symbolic fabric and narratives of *Contramonumento-Fragmentos*, we draw upon Multimodal and Multimedia Critical Discourse Studies (Bezemer and Kress 2017; Abousnougga and Machin 2011; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). Our fundamental purpose is to unravel the semiotic modes and their interrelationships entailed in *Contramonumento-Fragmentos*, to elucidate and interrogate its semiotic-discursive resources and visual strategies. To reveal, moreover, the ideological motivations and interests underpinning these resources and strategies and flesh out their socio-political and cultural implications for Colombian society. The starting point is Peirce's (1991) idea that every communicative process is a production of meanings that interrelates each sign component: representamen-object and interpreter and, in this interaction, operates with its semiotic object (Merrell 2001).

Following Kress (2010), the semiotic, multimodal, and multimedia observation involves the interpreting interlocutors within the socio-cultural and historical-political conditions in which the sign unit or semiotic object is produced and where the motivational relationships and interests of its production, distribution, and interpretation become evident. The designer-producer creates and materializes a sign sequence to be interpreted, configuring a complex and new sign unit crossed by the interests, motivations, and, in general, the sensitivities of the interpreter in which the new perspective assigns meanings in correlation with what Kress calls "semiotic work."

The concept of semiotic work makes it possible to propose the agential role of the producer and the interpreter in whose interlocution points of view, frames, and, in gen-

eral, ideological positions are materialized. Explaining the semiotic character of *Contramonumento-Fragmentos* implies the exploration of the context of its production and interpretation. In a socio-cognitive perspective, Van Dijk (2012, 2016) points out the value of the context in meaning production processes, insofar as the context provides the knowledge necessary to generate meanings in concrete, historically, and culturally defined societies.

Contexts are subjectively constructed by the participants in a semiotic interrelationship and comprise socially shared knowledge and representations. *Contramonumento* is a work that articulates subjectivity and intersubjectivity: "Today I feel that it is my best work [...] it is a one hundred percent collective work; it arises from the signing of the peace agreement between the Government and the FARC, they allowed me to build it" (Doris Salcedo in El Espectador 2018: para. 5). The context enacts and establishes relation purposes, interests, agency, and knowledge about the environments of the semiotic object, the resources involved in its production, distribution, and interpretation, and determines the meaning creation processes (Kress 2010).

To recover the semiotic resources constituting a semiotic object requires recognizing and identifying the materiality of the modes to unravel the degrees of familiarity with nominating function (Panofsky 1972). This provides the construction of the thematic-conceptual units with their contextual relationships to unravel the symbolic values where a semiotic object's meaning is determined by the ideological positions it embodies. The interpretation interweaves layers of meaning that lead to the understanding of the process of creation of materialized meanings in semiotic-discursive resources and strategies to make explicit how visual discourses, as a space of memory, communicate ideologies, axiologies, attitudes, and beliefs. The interrelationships between semiotic modes and their materialities are approached based on the relationships in a semiotic object. Barthes (1997) formulates three types of interrelationships for visual modes (image-verbal): anchoring, illustration, and amplification which have an explanatory-interpretative function for understanding a semiotic object. Martinec and Salway (2005) and Martinec (2013) widen the Barthesian proposals regarding the status of logic-semantic relations by integrating their characteristics.

Contramonumento-Fragmentos creates an act of visual communication in which not only a designer-creator participates but is anchored to collectives that propose to co-participate in the process of signification, for the structuring, creation, and socialization of a complex weave of sign units constituting diverse visual narratives. It is a matter of studying a network of meanings expressed in a complex semiotic unit in which design, production process, and a diversity of interpretations serve as a frame of reference for the configuration of a semiotic landscape. The formulated landscape results from communicative action and interaction whose material and symbolic resources coexist and are perceived as a unit with specific socio-cultural functions. Following Pezzini (2014),

the semiotic landscape is a space of transactions between what is perceived as an environment, articulated to the context for human action and sociopolitical, cultural activity. It is a symbolic space where social actors position themselves in a relationship of otherness.

In this act of communication, as pointed out by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001), we perceive the making of a design, understood as a creative process that establishes a responsibility of sign production and involves knowledge, ideologies, emotions, beliefs, and attitudes. The object of our analysis is recovered as a complex representation able to project a desirable future. The communicative purpose in the artwork and the memory space, as in any discursive process, produces a set of representations materializing in a multiple sign system.

The artwork and the memory space express perspectives and points of view by privileging the achromatic tonal scale, voices, backgrounds, silences, and lights. From absence-presence, multiple and diverse stories are made visible that, by virtue of their testimonial character, create indexical and iconic markers of factual evidentiality linked to the cultural sense of the coexistence of achromy, and the forms that include black and white and the color earth, implying pain, death, uneasiness, and silence. The gardens are incarnated with greens, and the color of nature connects the paths to provide symbolic meaning to life. The work and the space are proposed as silences and absences-presences, building a semiotic landscape with which, as the artist expresses, “Violence cannot be glorified” (Doris Salcedo in *El Espectador*, 2018, para. 3).

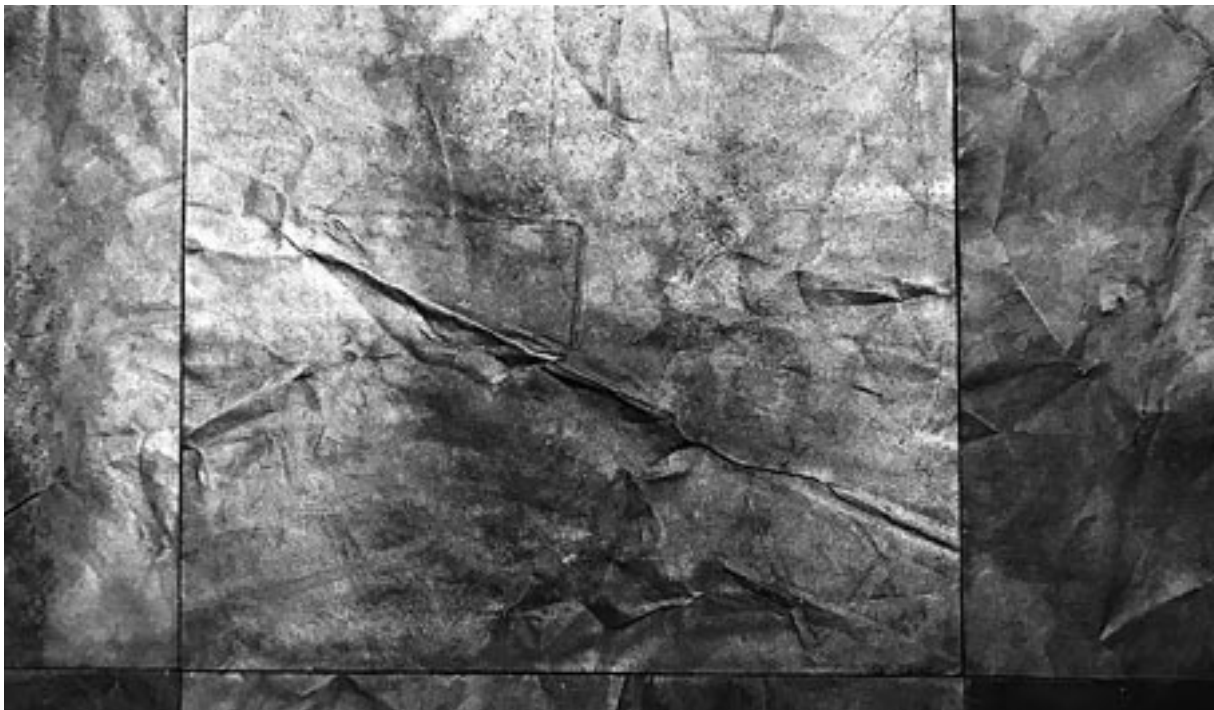


Image 2. Floor, conceptual and material basis of the *Contramonumento* (©Fernando González).

The conceptual proposal of the sculpture in *Contramonumento* creates the sense of loneliness and emptiness to update the meaning of death and impossibility, summoning the bodies to transit between pain, abnegation, and impotence to derive from this visual narrative. The principles that transform death into life and past into a future of expectation allow inferring what vital transformations need to be achieved to construct peace.

This is a privilege for a person who has worked from the testimonies of the victims of violence. It is extraordinary to have 37 tons of unused weapons on a floor that becomes a space of art and memory, which is open to any citizen and generations of artists, present and future, to continue elaborating the narrative of the conflict. (Doris Salcedo, *El Espectador*, 2018: par. 2)

3. Approaches. A commitment to the reconstruction of memories as a source of peace

The analysis of *Contramonumento-Fragmentos* requires that we understand the role of the political-economic and cultural elites in formulating an architectural-artistic work that commemorates the victimization of women as representatives of the vulnerable and victimized sectors in the Colombian armed conflict. This exploration is crucial to understand and explain the ideological function that the work proposes to the Colombians who access it. Resolution 2736 of August 6, 2018, issued by the Ministry of Culture (Mincultura 2018), outlines with some degree of clarity how we can understand the process of commissioning the work. The regulation and financing of the memory place and the artwork proceeds in compliance with points 3.1.5 and 3.17 of the Final Agreement (2016) with resources from the national budget executed through Fondopaz. It is a political-administrative decision in which the government assumes the security and control of weapons and executes the procedure which, according to Granada Garcés Arquitectos (2019), includes constructing three monuments in Bogotá, the UN headquarters (NY) and Havana.

The descriptive, analytical, and interpretative phases operate on the corpus of visual character. In the first phase, the characteristics of the sign systems are made explicit and systematically described to provide an account of the appropriate resources used in the design of the strategy that promotes narrative and is embodied in the semiotic device. In the second phase, we examine the semiotic landscape's thematic unity and anchorage in art and architecture. In addition, we discuss how the point of view is formulated and how the socio-cultural problem of the post-agreement peace-building process is represented in the framework of the *Contramonumento-Fragmentos*. In the third phase, we identify the set of representations about the anchors between the Colombian

armed conflict and the signing of the Peace Agreement, located in a stage where different forms of violence have been encouraged.

Identifying the system of values formulated in what is expressed is explained in the relationships that vary from the ways of experiencing - knowing - explaining, to recover the sense of the emotional proposal. Furthermore, it is interesting to recognize how the concretion of social action is represented from art to verify the socio-cultural and political implications derived from the proposal space-work of art.



Image 3. Anchoring between *Contramonumento* and *Fragmentos* (©Juan Fernando Castro).

4. Resistances and searches for new voices

The exploration of the semiotic resources involved in the visual narrative that is created and distributed socially from *Contramonumento-Fragmentos* makes it possible to evidence the coexistence of space and sculpture by iconically formulating war and its violence as a route that makes the validity of the conflict omnipresent and links it coherently to the possible transformation. The pre-memorialization processes are conceived symbolically, demonstrating that humans appropriate symbolic fabrics to materialize their points of view on all their realities. We can trace symbols through all stages of human artistic development; there is a long line of artistic uses of symbols as carriers of meaning in their representations and manifestations. Ricoeur (2003) conceptualized the symbol as a structure that carries meaning and sense where there is a tran-

sition from the direct to the indirect, from the literal to the figurative, and from the primary to the secondary. Thus, the symbol is an invisible signal reference that makes it possible to update a hidden reality that creates knowledge when perceived and represented. Granada Garcés Arquitectos (2019: par. 4) formulate in her report some nuclear aspects for the analytical procedure that is the object of this reflection.

The sculptural work mentioned opposes glorifying violence or monumentalizing weapons. It was decided to create a GROUND that today is the physical and conceptual basis of this equitable place that inverts the power relationship conferred by the rifles.

This starting point allows us to unravel the relationship between the sense of power and the symbolic configuration created in the sculpture. The visual narrative in *Contramonumento - Fragmentos* enacts the potential of those who interact with the statue and the space to evoke stories and events that, when represented, update the communicative act and foster cognitive forms to organize experiences, memories, and silences. Through these narrative functions, interrelated processes are elaborated for the production, interpretation, and socialization of meanings in the act of communication designed and materialized in the space and the sculpture so that the coexistence of the victims, who experienced the conflict, generate the meanings implying desires, expectations, and interests to manage the sense with their interlocutor, by experiencing the narratives that update the memory space and the artwork. This interaction brings about the connection between art and politics, space and victimized beings, resistance, and the emancipatory promise of the work of art is formulated. The design and construction of *Fragmentos* and the creation of the *Contramonumento* projected the ideas of hope, repairation, a sense of future amid violent and marginalizing social conditioning. In this relationship, the voice and presence-absence of the women victims are expressed, formulating the relationship that goes from their political action through art to heal their wounds to give way to life and the future.

Contramonumento - Fragmentos is a dual unit that creates emptiness, silence, absence-presence. *Fragmentos* is a memory place projected to allow artists to create, make visible, and converse through legitimate and institutionalized transgressions. The sculpture symbolically proposes the disappearing human; it is empty and melts into a black, solid, and hammered material, opening a dialogue with silence. The sculpture has the communicative and aesthetic function of taking over and occupying space, creating the sense of being the manifestation of a place to be experienced.

Fragmentos, as memory space, creates a dual sensation by proposing to the visitor-transgressor a subjective and at the same time normalized relationship with height. At 10 meters high, the minimalist architectural space creates an intertextual connection with the sacred places of the West – churches, Greco-Latin temples – where height is a symbol of the relationship between God and man. On the other hand, the white-painted

walls create a sense of lightness and tranquility and implicate the notion of innocence. The contrast between the white of the walls and the black of the floor with its textures provides the balance between transcendence and human finitude.

The interlocutor is assumed to be someone able to give meaning not only to objects but also to structure and forms. It is silence, embodied in each expression of the victim's pain, to become evocation, narratives, and memories. The symbol in work is a sign that recalls something absent, imperceptible, representing emptiness and silence, updating and making the victim-women perceptible. From philosophy, it is known that the borders of the language mark the limits of reality: what is not expressed but is silenced as the only route to obtain validity to the unspeakable thing. Reality is incarnated in a symbol in which the objects and beings that are suppressed are replaced by the symbol that occupies the empty place created when otherness is lost.

The semiotic process taking place in the presence of a sculptured artwork that recovers and constantly updates images and narratives of violence against women gains presence in the artistic object. In *Contramonumento*, the interlocutor-passerby enters a fragmented space where the distance between the work of art and what it embodies in its representation provokes multiple interpretations and recreations, providing meaning to the artistic creation. The representation itself is based on the idea of absence by substituting violence for its sensitive representation. When the voices and their testimonies are absent, their representation appears.

The visibility of women's victimization is a rebuke and, above all, an exercise of aggressiveness and a way of building resistance and formulating a strategic position in the face of social inequality. MMCDs has referenced the multiple ways in which the victims are discursively represented. In this case, visibility formulates presence-absence and silences structured in *Contramonumento*, overcoming nominalization or passivation to present a face and a voice in silence as a source of memories, iconically recovered in each trace of texture produced by the victim's vital force.

The absence and presence in work recover the duty to be of the artist. It proposes a space that becomes iconically horizontal to make possible a route in which the mind, the logic, and the rationalities, converge with the feeling to symbolize the absences and the presences. *Contramonumento-Fragmentos* creates a space and memorialization process in which the content and its container harmonize the meaning of death and life. The metaphor of life as a route aims to resist, engage with the world-territory, and suggest the need to walk on *Contramonumento*. It also puts itself in an interactive relationship with the inaccessible universe of the ways of knowing to articulate the past, to perceive it and interpret it in other ways enacting the senses and the rationality on that reality, and to allow to overcome the states of absences and silences, where learning is tensed and the transformations of a state of things and of the ways to approach them with new sensibilities take place.

Fragmentos is the convergence of ruins and relics with the route and the void left by violence, internal warfare, and still unfinished conflict. The work allows that in the dialogue and with the presence of the interlocutor, it is possible to develop the process of remembering from the black floor to build, from a white space in coexistence with the ruins, the sense of a possible future. Granada Garcés Arquitectos (2019, para. 4) point out that from its genesis:

The artistic project highlighted the need to create an architecture that is at the same time invisible, horizontal, and without hierarchy where the existing vestiges, open and unfinished, of what were once the domestic volumes of a house [...] The shape of the floor and space resulted from occupying the negative of what used to be the house, inverting the inside and the outside, encapsulating the ruins as if they were relics.

The architectural intervention's description implies transforming the objects and their functions to form a memory space that invites artistic interventions involving de-anchoring and re-readings of the war. Thus, that art it shelters is transformed into a creative and healing act. In this way, *Fragmentos* is an archaic device: the ruins and abandonment of a colonial house in an unusual juxtaposition with another new device: a minimalist construction, which provides a recontextualization superimposed by the artist's need, desire, and hope to create a sense of peace. Space integrates the sensory and the phenomenological, giving form and content to a device that links different temporalities, creating the sensation that the past is in force, is still alive, has presence and materiality. Simultaneously, space's routes, gardens, and walls warn of the transformative potential of those who participate in the dialogue.

Contramonumento embodies stories, testimonies, and diverse voices, unrepeatable, dissimilar, silenced, that formulate a world in a floor that is walked on. *Contramonumento* marks the space imposing the perceptive tactile and auditory experience of the space-time environment of *Fragmentos* to activate processes of memorialization and action when walking on the sculpture. The artist appropriates the characteristics of the material that embodies the work, enabling the passerby to merge with the work through the sensation of friction created by the sense of cold, loneliness, silence, absences, and presences recovered in the artwork's rough, cold, and black texture.

The set of logical-semantic relations are interwoven to widen and project space-time and artistic creation making it possible to pre-shape the future and life from the absence of the human. The floor is built with 1296 tiles, made with the melted weapons surrendered by the FARC-EP. As the artist points out, it is a collective work involving the active, fiery participation of the victimized women, aimed at creating a texture symbolizing victimization. The sculpture is a 16 cm high monolithic surface that coexists and merges with the ruins and modernity of *Fragmentos*.

The architectural work includes three rooms linked to a corridor. This spatiality also configures the concept of the urn in entirely transparent and luminous rooms. This space shaped since antiquity as a container of remains and ashes iconically amplifies the sense of commemoration. The urn performs two functions: it connotes death and the pain of violence, but it also makes it possible, through a process of recontextualization, to build the sense of being present. The visualization gives way to a sense of the future and life. In this way, it produces a message for the survivors and their families, but especially for their interlocutors: the conflict, the violations of rights, and the humiliating life transformation in an alternative way. The ruins that symbolically incarnate the violent past are united with the gardens that give meaning to life materialized in the essentiality of being, through native and wild plants that include three trees that symbolically recover the survivors; it is integrated into a work that fills with meaning through the minimalist concept of presence. The absent bodies find a way to connect with the *Contramonumento* and dialogue with its inhabitant in transit (Granada Garcés Arquitectos, 2019).

The sensory experience with space has different possible reading levels. When integrated from the base to the floor with *Contramonumento-Fragmentos* creates an actual spatiality to be translandscape while activating the imagined space of a country of violence to be repaired and overcome. It is a material space that integrates a modern building with a house in ruins, allowing to recover the sense that this semiotic device is not an external potentiality. It is the force that incarnates each being: victim or victimizer, survivor or visitor and, an evoked space, in which the collective memories converge that aspire to have a place in the memory of all the generations of yesterday, today and the future, in the pact for the non-repetition.

The reflection elaborated concerns the socioeconomic and political framework of the post-agreement condition, where there are a great many memory narratives in multiple forms. A set of these narratives is installed in the discourse of the State, the mass media, and the institutions with a socializing function or those who effectively access the use of information technologies. We can distinguish two positions: the mediated and institutionalized discourses embodying hegemonic voices, whose purpose is to homogenize networks of meaning; and narratives of resistance comprising divergent perspectives and experiences, whose objective is to articulate the human need to build equity, justice, respect, and dignity for those whose rights have been violated. It is, therefore, about the reconstruction of a multiple and polyphonic past.

We can understand the narratives of resistance as those semiotic-discursive expressions that, as a political act, recognize the inequalities inherent to the current political-economic system, expressing contradictions and paradoxes, articulated to critical positions that highlight the social need for permanent transformation. They are discourses that often involve collectives and active subjects, represented as contestants to

the hegemonic discourse. The narratives of resistance point out the phenomena of marginalization, discrimination, and inequality, understanding that there are social acts and facts of oppression in the semantic-pragmatic base of these concepts. When related by the hegemonic powers, they are eliminated from the collective memories.

Contramonumento - Fragmentos is a creation that enables participation. As a space-time unity, it is characterized by openness and accessibility. The visual proposal articulates perception-knowledge-dialogues and materializes a discourse of resistance, positioned from the perspective of the artist and the silenced voices of the victims. The dialogical expression is represented as a sculpture capable of breaking with the conception of beauty established for this type of art objects and monuments. *Contramonumento* shows the horror of violence to find its correlation in the coexistence of creation in the counter-hegemonic forms in the frame of hegemonic exercises. It also verifies Gramsci's thinking, as quoted by de Santos Sousa (2017: 28), since it remarks an account of the affinities between the Latin American left and right when faced with the phenomenon of hegemonies, typified as:

[...] the set of ideas about society and interpretations of the world and life which, because they are highly shared, even by the social groups harmed by them, allow political elites, [...] to govern more by consensus than by coercion, even when they govern against the objective interests of majority social groups.

Counter-hegemonic discourse is at the service of strengthening hegemony. This contradictory act is expressed in multiple ways in collective action and social life. It becomes particularly interesting when it is verified in the narratives anchored to globalization, where shared ideals transit and exclusion, invisibility, and inequality, among other forms of discrimination, domination, and vassalage, are normalized. In the history of Latin America, these phenomena are the result of an unequal distribution of power that in Colombian 'democracy' is expressed in the systematic access to the political and economic power of the two traditional parties whose ideas are increasingly close, and their sources, increasingly conservative with tendencies to the ultra-right. The systematic denial of alternative political forces and the violence, which ranges from the most structural to the most symbolic - exercised in all its expressions - are historical factors that mark abusive power exercises. The Colombian majorities, according to de Santos Sousa (2017: 15), permanently face "limited or destroyed life expectations" by those who exercise political-economic power that, in alliance, involve all areas of social life.

Contramonumento-Fragmentos include the agency of the victim; in this case, the presence and the stories represented in the sculpture elaborate the sense of the capacity to determine one's destiny as a woman-victim who assumes a place of privilege during more than seventy types of human rights violations executed with impunity by guerrillas, paramilitaries, and the state armed forces as well as public officials. The visibility

of the victimization of women is not only a rebuke; it is, above all, an exercise of agency and a way of building resistance and formulating a strategic position in the face of social inequality.

Beyond the sculpture's conceptualization and origin and the memory space, the defining presence of the institution is asserted. The recognition of the government of former president Juan Manuel Santos and the FARC includes an action that enhances the sense of verticality. The creation of the artwork and the construction of the memory space makes visible the State's presence by determining the conditions imposed by the location of the memory space concerning the seat of government, emphasizing the centrist position historically characterizing the state's role. This verifies the center-periphery ideology that has governed the sociopolitical and cultural life of the country. The development of the violence anchored to the Colombian armed conflict was outlined and executed in the peripheries, so the physical rupture between the center and the periphery is inverted to establish a hierarchy of memory linked to the control of the State. In this way, the condition of victimizer and violator of human rights, and one of the nuclear actors in the armed conflict, the State, is rendered invisible.

The exercise of neoliberal policy is inserted in the memory space and the counter-monument transforming the symbolic object into a market object. It thus makes it possible to explain why a memory space is created at a strategic point of the country's capital, whose most regular visitors are tourists, academics, students, professionals, and other such select groups who consume a particular type of art in direct relation to their condition as a consumer of symbolic values. The political-artistic strategy in a mercantile logic produces a coexistence of the tension between globalizing and neoliberal ideologies to liberating positions and collective builders of transforming ideologies for peaceful coexistence. The crisis of distinction, formulated by de Sousa Santos (2003) to refer to the ideological struggles in Latin America, becomes concrete here.

The promise of perpetual peace, based on trade, on the scientific rationalization of decision-making processes and institutions led to the technological development of war and the unprecedented increase in its destructive power. (de Sousa Santos 2003: 60)

Following the approaches of Bezemer and Kress (2017), the semiotic landscape embodies social changes. It concretizes instability and temporariness in the various domains of social life where meaning emerges in social interaction, typically in the form of a dialogue. This explains why the discourse represents the neoliberal market as the natural condition of choice. The choice is based on personal taste that leads to individual style, through which it is formulated that social meaning themes subjectivity/identity.

The changes in the semiotic landscape have been and continue to be caused by social changes in the different areas of social life articulated to politics and the socio-cul-

tural conditions involved. The social and economic changes caused by the predominance of neoliberal markets have fostered a shift in the emphasis and valuation of subjectivity and the citizen's transformation into a consumer. Diversity and the neoliberal capitalist market together have diverted attention and focus from the individual agency.

The conjunction of the semiotic resources making up the visual narrative enables the symbolic fabric to multiply meaning, generating a multidimensional semiotic space where confluent and divergent meanings are formulated. These explain the unifying and integrating capacity of the semiotic-discursive resources and ensure the coherent perception of the unit. This phenomenon of semantic amplification is derived from the signic interaction that makes Peirce(1978-80) called infinite semiosis, where narratives' cognitive and action power is installed.

Conclusions

It is approached a case that enables a systematic visual analysis of the representations of the semiotic landscape, created from the space-time relationship by the Colombian artist Doris Salcedo in the sculpture *Contramonumento* installed in the memory space *Fragmentos*. This unit is conceptualized as a semiotic landscape in which systems of signs are woven to formulate multiple meanings. They are a reference point in interpreting for diverse social actors coming from different roles and backgrounds. It is inferred that the work of art defined as a counter-monument is materialized through a conjunction of techniques and visual materials that give it meaning, support, and symbolic value. Through this conceptualization and the recognition that the semiotic landscape is a multiple and diverse set of visual narratives, the representations formulated concerning semiotic-discursive principles and their semantic-pragmatic connections are discussed.

Contramonumento-Fragmentos, as a semiotic unit, represents the violence against women in the Colombian armed conflict. The activation of the cultural codes proposes a political-social and historical place to interpret the representations formulated by the designed, produced, and socialized landscape. This analysis has been based on the perspective that the representations that come from the semiotic landscape carry much more than the images created to be seen. They are fabrics of categories that relate the modes or systems of signs and the material support that distributes those representations with their meanings. These fabrics structure a set of knowledge and know-how that synthesize realities, in this case of a socio-historical and political order. In their foundation, the multiple forms of knowledge formulate variables and codes that acquire meaning in markers of validity, legibility, and dialogical interactivity amplified in each victim, in each witness, and each subject of memory.

The artwork and the memory space are resignified and, through the process of inhabiting *Fragmentos*, acquiring a revealing sense that when experienced connects the memories that are the foundation of the work of art with its aesthetics. It also enables the passerby to establish a dialogue with himself, with the victims and the perpetrators, reformulating the memories and their representation in a manner that activates transformative agencies. The absence-presence in the *Contramonumento* is a testimony of what is silenced, of what is not recognized or denied, of the facts that Colombians have historically lived. It implies the voices and the acts of internal violence that are actualized as Colombians walk, as Colombians travel through the essential double dimension of the human being: life and death. The symbolic unity is materialized in space-temporalities that allow the interpretation of the coexistence of the aesthetics of the ruin, anchored to a minimalist space that enables the journey to these moments and places, different resistances in the search for agency and the rescue of the dignity of the being and its identity.

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The Theater of Passions. Anger and enthusiasm in Ladj Ly's *Les Misérables*

BY: Isabella Pezzini

1. Passions as semiotic turn

The interest in emotions and passions, and the integration of a theory about them into the semiotic project, has been crucial to Paolo Fabbri's intellectual journey, in close correlation with the development of this theme in Greimas' research from the 1980s until the publication of *Sémiotique des passions* (1991) with Jacques Fontanille. It is one of the central topics that characterize the semiotic turn that he proposes: as an alternative to a semiotics that risks being too cognitivist and focused on signicity, one capable of dealing with this different and more complex dimension of meaning, along with all its theoretical-methodological consequences (Fabbri 1998-2001).

Fabbri recognizes that Roland Barthes, his constant source of inspiration, expressed at a very early stage the necessity to explain, on a theoretical level, the dimension of subjectivity and affectivity, as he did in *Le plaisir du texte* (1973), or *Fragments d'un discours amoureux* (1977), despite the limits of his translinguistic approach, albeit integrated by Lacanian psychoanalysis. More radically, for Fabbri, it was a matter of "reworking and rethinking in toto the dimension of passion," articulating it with the theory of action developed within the semiotics of narrativity. A necessary clarification, in fact, since the connection between action and passion was already its fulcrum. The choice of the term 'passion,' apparently obsolete, to indicate the new semiotic object, is linked to the philosophical tradition, but in a polemical way, to "separate the problem from its usual opposition to reason, reconnecting the notion to the concept of action" (Fabbri 2001: 36). As Descartes had already argued in

his short treatise *Passions of the Soul* (1649), passion is “grammatical and communicative at the same time.” Hence, it “is the perspective on the action of the person who is caught and transformed by this action.” From this point of view, Fabbri recommends a rereading of Aristotelian rhetoric (Barthes 1970) in which, however, instead of being kept distinct, argumentations and passions are linked together to observe “what types of actions and reasons provoke certain types of passions.” Therefore, the suggested orientation is to configure these elements together, rather than compile typologies and combinatorics from the simple to the complex, as often happens in the philosophical tradition. It will thus be a matter of “defining the passions not by deconstructing a single pathemic phenomenon into its ultimate elements, but by starting from specific discursive universes. Taking, for example, some forms of passion (avarice, jealousy, etc.) and trying to describe them in their overall internal structure, in the discontinuous or continuous processes they occur, in the synonymic chains that can be generated, in the narrative transformations of various levels and entities to which they lead or of which they are an effect” (Fabbri 2001: 39).

In this way, we will differentiate between the terms of the lexicon of passion variously inscribed in each language and what Fabbri calls the “patemas,” i.e., the semantic prototypes resulting from a thorough analysis that, through the explication of their different components (modal, temporal, aspectual, aesthetic), highlights their dimension not as “states,” but as “processes of the mind.”

An exemplary passion under these different aspects, also historically, is *anger*. Achilles’ anger plays a critical role in the *Iliad*, giving incandescent substance to the Homeric poem. Anger has a significant role in Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso* but also in the Bible, as divine anger, before the coming of Christ and his opposed, forgiveness-oriented message. During a conference dedicated to ‘Collective Passions’ (Pezzini and Del Marco 2012), Fabbri resumed discussing this topic starting from *Ira. La passione furante* (2010), a book by Remo Bodei, a fellow philosopher and already author of a key study on passions in Spinoza (Bodei 1991), which, at the very beginning of its 15 pages long thematic bibliography, cites the classic of the semiotic analysis of passions, the Greimasian *colère* (1983), and also Fabbri (Fabbri and Sbisà 1985).

Indeed, Bodei refers to a basic definition of anger that is remarkably similar to the one Greimas’ lexical analysis of anger (*le colère*) starts from: “Specifically, the painful element of anger is given by the bitter realization that I have been treated in the opposite way than I expected or presumed to deserve” (Bodei 2010: 114, trans. mine). As usual, Fabbri proceeds to enrich the bibliographical coverage, mentioning many other texts in addition to those cited by Bodei, all the while indicating additional directions of research.

However, why is there so much interest in anger? Anger corresponds exemplarily to the passions crucial in the broader framework of strategy and personal and inter-

personal manipulation and can even be simulated in a calculated manner. In particular, anger pushes the affected subjects to a limit beyond which they “go out of their minds,” confirming the entanglement – unravelable, according to the semiotic hypothesis – between the cognitive, pragmatic, passionate, and aesthetic dimensions.

Wrath is a passion of value, the “disordered motion of the offended soul.” The person who “suffers” an offense, real or imaginary, related to an accepted value, individual or collective, can choose between different reaction patterns: the violent and aggressive response, immediate or postponed (revenge) to restore the violated balance or dark resentment, or, changing the register, patience, kindness, humility, indifference.

Bodei's book was published when Europe was agitated by the movements of the so-called *Indignés*, named after Stéphane Hessel's book *Indignez-vous!* (Hessel 2010; Marrone 2012), an effort to awake minds to the failures and injuries of prevailing European fiscal and social policies. However, Fabbri observes, the philosopher's perspective on political anger management gives low credibility to the performativity of these movements, in the belief that, with the advent of Western democracies, the time of “intense passions” and of great hopes is over. Following a philosophical tradition that goes from Aristotle to Norberto Bobbio, Bodei argues that now the essential thing is to orientate collectivities towards the passions of moderation and wisdom, such as docility and magnanimity. It is a vision that Fabbri does not entirely share, on the one hand, fascinated by the “black heart” of anger, and on the other, attentive to historical cases in which wrath acted as the driving force of an explosive harbinger of change:

In this excessive, extreme, exalted, and uncontrollable transport lies perhaps the black heart of anger. In that heated, immoderate, and sometimes sublime moment, the ego is outside itself, and passion becomes the subject. Wrath is an experience of the non-ego: destruction seems to happen to others and elsewhere. Nevertheless, it is intersubjective and theatrical enough sometimes to deserve the admiration of others (...). And who knows? Perhaps the virtuous ‘middleness’ of the myth is not in the middle. Could there be a middleness of extremes? Therefore, I would have hoped for a tribute to the Enragés of the French Revolution, who shouted “Oh rage!” in their manifesto of the Convention and a tribute to their representative Jacques Roux, a Catholic priest and Babeuf's mentor, who committed suicide while being imprisoned by Robespierre for extremism (sic!). So why not? A hint to the Enragés of '68 and the junkyards of the banlieues and dormitory cities. Until the next edition! (Fabbri 2012: 50, trans. mine)

The thesis propounded by Bodei at the end of his study appears almost ethological, in any case, focused on an interesting bodily metaphor, which is entirely pertinent also to a somatic analysis of the phenomenon of passion:

As long as indignation does not turn into fanaticism, this scheme does not apply to indignation directed by conscience, that is to say, the desire to fight injustice or lead others to the observance of shared principles (...). By being angry or participating in the wrath of an entire community, I stand proudly on myself, appearing more prominent and more threatening, as do those animals that, arching their backs and raising their fur, become larger to seem more frightening. Anger is always connected, to some extent, to relationships of power and, often, to the aggressive defense of one's physical or psychic space. (Bodei 2010: 114-115, trans. mine)

A well-known topic in the semantic analysis of passions is the generality and translatability of their patterns. The boundaries between the semantic field of one passion and another are fuzzy and often do not lend themselves to the discrete categories of classes. That is why we must pay special attention to the nuances by comparing lexical classes (synonyms, parasyonyms, antonyms), on the one hand, and to untranslatability, on the other. The lexical untranslatability of some passions in languages other than their language of origin (e.g., the Brazilian *saudade* or British *serendipity*) can be more of an opportunity than a limitation. On the one hand, it can indicate a lack in the target language, which is always interesting from the point of view of cultural diversity; on the other, it can induce translation in other semiotic systems.

2. Anger on stage

According to Fabbri, sometimes the "transduction" of passions works better in other semiotic substances than language, all the while inviting us to examine the montage between past and present, imagination and actuality. Cinema offers us such an opportunity, with two different versions of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862). The first is Tom Hooper's musical (2012), an explicit reinterpretation of the novel, in which, thanks to music and dance, there are plenty of scenes of extreme passions, in both love and battle. With the same title, the second movie is Ladj Ly's directorial debut and winner of the Grand Jury Prize at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival. It is set in contemporary times and ends with a quote from Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*: "There are no such things as bad plants or bad men. There are only bad cultivators," evidently referring to the failure of intergenerational and institutional relationships in the French banlieues, which he investigates beyond the superficial scuffles between youth gangs and the police.

The film begins with the journey of a group of teenage boys, the story's protagonists, to the center of Paris, where they participate in a scene of collective enthusiasm, chanting the Marseillaise for France's victory at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. However, the film ends with the boys' cold explosion of rage against the neighborhood policemen.

The *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité* of all French people of any origin and history proclaimed briefly under the banner of soccer end up dissolved into extreme polarization. The movie poster fixes the film's opening moment, with the Champs Élysées flooded by a multi-ethnic crowd and the horizon dominated by an Arc de Triomphe surrounded by the halo of celebration colored smoke bombs. It is no coincidence that all significant Parisian events take place here. Napoleon commissioned the Arc de Triomphe to celebrate his victories. After various vicissitudes, the monument was completed in 1836, during the reign of King Louis-Philippe, who meant it to express a renewed spirit of reconciliation by celebrating all those who had fought for France between 1792 and 1815, whether they were revolutionaries, monarchists, or imperialists.



The movie narrates teenage boys' everyday life in the Paris suburb of Montfermeil, their tense relations with both the adults who variously dominate neighborhood life and the team of policemen assigned to maintain order. One policeman, in particular, nicknamed the 'little pig,' stands out for his aggressiveness and arrogance, and systematic gratuitous abuse. A particularly violent episode is filmed with a drone by one of the boys. This aggravates the situation that climaxes with the boys' final revolt, who lure the policemen into a potentially lethal trap inside a labyrinthine building.

The narration of the transformation of the boys' discontent into a revolt against the injustice suffered, the crushed dignity and respect, is very interesting from the aspectual point of view. There is

a progressive escalation that affects the spectator to the point that it becomes unbearable. However, the "hot flames" of anger, instead of exploding in a disorderly fashion, are transformed into a cold strategic calculation and rational planning. Fundamental to this development is the theme of the internal cohesion of the various groups that confront each other in the movie. There is a continuous disintegration/reconstruction of relationships both within the police team and within the neighborhood. Cohesion seems to be the vital ingredient, the indispensable addition to sanctioning the effective constitution of the collective actant/actor, which marks the passage once again from *omnis* (partitive unity) to *totus* (integral unity) (Greimas 1976). It is a term used in textual

linguistics to define a fundamental textual property. According to the dictionary, though, its first meaning comes from physics and relates to the attraction/repulsion pair well known in the semiotics of the relationship between subjects and objects of value:

Cohesion

1. the act or state of cohering; tendency to unite
2. physics: the force that holds together the atoms or molecules in a solid or liquid, as distinguished from adhesion
3. botany: the fusion in some plants of flower parts, such as petals, that are usually separate. (Collins Dictionary)

At the beginning of the movie, there is no cohesion among the three cops, although their chief recommends it as their principal value when she teams them up together. One, in particular, a newcomer named Chris, does not share Stéphane's arrogant methods or the acquiescence of the other one and tries to change things and "do the right thing." In the end, however, the police squad's cohesion is achieved as a visceral reaction in the face of danger. Initially, the neighborhood's multi-ethnic community seems cohesive, but, in reality, it suffers from the arrangements imposed by the ruling powers (Dumezil's three powers: political -the mayor-, religious -the imam-, commercial -the drug dealer). In the end, a new subject emerges, a collective actor/actant, constituted by the group of youngsters (on this occasion all dressed in the same way), completely united, no longer prey to anger – which was there before, like humiliation, resentment, and pain – but with a kind of cold enthusiasm in carrying out the plan of revenge, regardless of cost. Thus, I would add this element to the configurations already described. Also from Collins Dictionary:

Enthusiasm

1. ardent and lively interest or eagerness
2. an object of keen interest; passion
3. archaic: extravagant or unbalanced religious fervor
4. obsolete: possession or inspiration by a god

In 1989, Jean-François Lyotard published *L'enthousiasme: la critique kantienne de l'histoire*, a small book on enthusiasm and its value in battle, comprising a lecture he gave in 1981, at the inauguration of the Center for Philosophical Research on Politics established at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. Lyotard takes up Kant's theses on po-

litical history to verify if and to what extent they can have relevance in understanding post-modern politics, whose blandness, dullness, and meaninglessness compared to previous interpretative schemas – the recently defunct ‘great ideological narrations’ – he had already denounced. In his discussion on the meaning of history, Lyotard refers to Kant’s view of the French Revolution. Kant essentially argues that humanity is progressing, which he identifies as the increasingly articulated shift from nature to culture in its various specifications. In his essay on *The Conflict of Faculties*, written in the mid-1790s – when the French Revolution was still in progress (the conventional date of its end is 1799) – Kant made a statement that seems particularly interesting today:

The recent Revolution of a people which is rich in spirit, may well either fail or succeed, accumulate misery and atrocity, it nevertheless arouses in the heart of all spectators (who are not themselves caught up in it) a taking of sides according to desires which borders on enthusiasm and which, since its very expression was not without danger, can only have been caused by a moral disposition within the human race.

Today people are much more spectators of facts and history than direct protagonists. In Ly’s movie, the spectatorial dimension is firmly inscribed: the policeman’s abusive behavior is filmed with a drone and a smartphone, and the game of enunciation – seen by the critics as ‘documentaristic’ – creates a spectator synchronized with the unfolding of the story events, and directly invited by the ending quote to reflect critically on them.

In this sense, some of Lyotard’s remarks on Kant’s text seem pertinent to me, as he points out that the “clause” dominating the elaboration of the sign of history, that is, its meaning takes place not only on the historical scene, in the deeds and misdeeds of the policemen or actors depicted, but also and above all in the feeling of the obscure and distant spectators (the theatre of history) who watch them, understand them, and who distinguish in the noise and fury of the *res gestae* what is right and what is not (Lyotard 1986: 51).

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Verba non volant. Oral expression in the teaching and theoretical reflection of Paolo Fabbri

BY: Maria Pia Pozzato

Many believe that oral and written discourse relates to two different communication techniques and that each of us is more versed in one or the other. However, Paolo Fabbri, one of the most important European semiologists, while being the brilliant author of many essays, is most famous for his complex yet lively and captivating eloquence. Wherever he taught, he fascinated hundreds of people, in Italy and France, in the United States, in Canada, or Latin American countries (and, to my knowledge, he could do so fluently in Italian, French, English, and Spanish).

During his teaching in Bologna, I attended his lecture conferences between 1975 and 1995, well after my university studies were over, as did many of my peers. Because attending one of Paolo Fabbri's lectures was an experience that was culturally enriching as well as entertaining: a rare ability that did not detract from the seriousness of his teaching.

Having been a student of both Umberto Eco and Paolo Fabbri at the same time, I remember very profound differences in the way they set up their lessons. It is well known that Eco was also brilliant, with a boundless culture and a great sense of humor. However, perhaps because of his Jesuit education, he followed a different strategy. For him, the Lesson, which I deliberately write with a capital letter, had to be an almost spiritual exercise in which the patience and application of the students became the price to pay for learning. I remember endless dissertations on the qualities a caravel had to have to be called a 'caravel.' Or the interminable hours on Renaissance

mnemonics when expounding his reflections on ‘perfect languages.’ Not to mention the parade of crazy theories, elaborated over the centuries, when he reflected on hermetic semiosis. Eco destined for other occasions the witty remarks, the brilliant associations, the unusual quotations, in short everything concerning intellectual *divertissement*: dinner with friends, colleagues, and students; newspaper articles; conferences at conventions; novels; and sometimes even essays. In class, on the other hand, it was as if he was constructing a competence together with his students, step by step. The lessons served him to bring into the classroom and share the reflection on a subject he was reflecting on for the first time.

To get back to Fabbri, when three or four hundred of us crowded into Lecture Hall III in Bologna, to attend one of his lectures, we knew that we would acquire knowledge by osmosis, through a contagious sharing achieved through a speech full of highly cultured references but always ‘in the first person.’ Theoretical reflection alternated with personal anecdotes, sometimes even intimate, which created a kind of empathy in each listener. In presenting himself in class, Fabbri also tended to develop a competent simulacrum of the listener. In other words, he treated all of us, even the younger ones, as if we were intelligent, educated, prepared, and this gave us a sort of confidence in our possibilities, even if we knew, of course, that we were not so good. While Eco was showing a knowledge under construction, opening a building site together with the students, Paolo Fabbri was inviting us to dance, pretending (as an academic expedient) that his listeners were already aware of a wide range of references that he took for granted. We would furtively jot down names and works and then go and look for them and study them. With Eco, we would go on a military-style forced march with him, manning unknown outposts little by little; with Fabbri, we would have a *pas de deux* during the lessons, but then we would chase after an always unequaled knowledge. So the two methods were effective, even though they were completely different. Anyone who attended their lessons in those years knows what an enormous privilege this was, not only because of the two scholars’ intrinsic quality but also because having two such different teachers, who taught different semiotics in such different ways, was in itself a formidable formative experience, which inoculated us forever from any form of dogmatism and uncritical adherence to ideas or people. As Fabbri put it in writing:

At least for a semiotician, learning means making someone distance himself from his ‘pre-judgments,’ from his already acquired knowledge. It means adopting a critical decentralization concerning himself, adapting to new objects, new subjects, and new points of view. [...] The relationship to the pupil often introduces turbulence into the ‘program’: the unexpectedness of emergency and oratorical improvisation. (Fabbri 2020b: 47, my translation)

At a time like the present, when students only go to class in preparation for exams or take pictures with their mobile phones of the PowerPoint slides used by the lecturer, the image of that crowded, silent classroom is decidedly vintage. People went to listen to Fabbri for the sheer pleasure of doing so: in its gratuitousness, the action of attending one of his lectures, perhaps sitting for two hours on a step of the amphitheater-like classroom due to lack of seats, was what we might call a *beau geste*, something that lies at the intersection between loyalty to a teacher and the aesthetic ability to capture the beautiful, the interesting, the pleasant in existence without any immediate benefit.

Paolo Fabbri has entrusted much of his talent, intelligence, and intellectual generosity to oral discourse. One might therefore think that much has been lost. However, his speeches have been recorded on many occasions, making it possible to recover them and put them down on paper. Moreover, many of his conference speeches have been turned into essays. However, special thanks are due to Gianfranco Marrone who had the idea of collecting in one volume the transcriptions of twenty-one conversations-interviews Fabbri had with as many people from 1998 to 2016. For reasons I will explain in closing, the title given to the book was very apt: *L'efficacia semiotica* (2017). In his preface, the editor underlines the fact that the collected materials are only apparently heteroclitic. In reality, reading the various interviews consecutively, or even in random order, a specific research horizon emerges defined by points such as structuralism, textuality, storytelling, enunciation, passions, semiosphere, and the constant dialogue with the disciplines of linguistics, anthropology, communication theory, art history, and literary criticism. Thus, even if some specific themes particularly dear to Fabbri recur in his reflections – such as strategies, camouflage, zombies, prophecy, falsehood, terrorism, etc. – his discourse is structured by his constant epistemological reflection on the distinctiveness of structural semiotics. His long professional career and immense culture allow him to outline a highly articulate history of the linguistic, philosophical, ethnographic, and anthropological ideas from which the particular semiotic paradigm known as *École de Paris* has emerged. The paradigm to which he has remained fundamentally faithful over the decades.

Yet, as he did in his courses, Fabbri insists on theory's socio-historical character in some of these conversations. Rereading Thomas Kuhn, in particular, he embraces the idea that in every age and disciplinary field, there are people who share certain basic assumptions and organize them into increasingly structured paradigms until other theories, initially confused and tentative, supplant them and relegate them to the attic. Frequent references to Kuhn and the idea of the historical alternation of paradigms clashed somewhat with his adherence to the Saussurian-Hjelmslevian paradigm. Has structural semiotics also had their day? Judging from what Fabbri said in an interview with Francesco Marsciani in 2014, it would seem so: "I have friends who think that semiotics was one of the greatest intellectual failures of the last century, and others,

even less friendly, who say that semiotics is a fashion of the 1970s" (Fabbri 2017: 246, my translation).

The tone is, however, evidently ironic. Fabbri was a great believer in the semiotic turn in the Humanities, the latter being a discipline of signification based no longer on the notion of *sign* but on that of *text* (Fabbri 1998). Undoubtedly, many philosophers, linguists, literature, and mass media scholars have long since decreed the death of semiotics. However, if we look at their references, we see that they are not up to date and that all these people who find semiotics out of step with the times have only read the semiotic classics of the 1960s and 1970s.

In general, semiotics is criticized for three major prejudices: 1) using linguistic models for what is not linguistic in the strict sense, such as visual communication; 2) reducing complex texts to standard, straightforward, and abstract narrative models; 3) saying in an abstruse and complicated way what can be expressed more simply, without using technical terms.

Fabbri's interviews invalidate all three of these outdated perceptions of semiotics. First of all, the vast scale of its application disproves the idea that it can only deal with linguistically expressed or translatable *sub specie linguistica* objects. And who better than Paolo Fabbri to demonstrate this: he taught for years Semiotics of the Visible and has written extensively on the visual arts, as evidenced by the collection of essays *Vedere ad arte*, mainly dedicated to his analysis of many works of contemporary visual art (Fabbri 2020a).

As for the accusation that semiotics is unnecessarily complicated, Fabbri's view is quite clear:

It is the world that is complicated, not the explanations we give of it. Natural language is not naively given and simple, whereas explanations are complicated. No! The natural world and language are complicated, and they are already given. And we cannot revoke or reconstruct them. But we can try to re-specify them, and the mechanisms of re-specification are of very great complexity. (Interview collected by A. Toftagaard in 1998, in Fabbri 2017: 21, my translation)

Here Fabbri suggests that semiotics is currently under attack because, in an age of simplification, its path is that of complexity, not of complication. Its formal vocation is viewed with suspicion because everything must be immediately 'explanatory,' empirical, quantifiable. Moreover, Fabbri does not cease to reiterate the need for interdisciplinarity, an equally fraught concept in an age of vigorously defended disciplinary boundaries, especially in the academic sphere. Semiotics, Fabbri argues, is "a methodological discipline with an interdisciplinary vocation" (Fabbri 2017: 289, my translation), not linked to any particular theme or medium.

As Fabbri suggests in an interview collected by Gianfranco Marrone in 2016, semiotics is not easy to 'sell.' He distinguishes the *guru* from the *master*: the former, histrionic protagonist of festivals, provides information; while the latter trains. We can also find the (negative) figure of the guru in the short essay "Riflessioni sull' insegnare" ("Reflections on teaching"), where Fabbri observes that "the figures of the verbose professor, the not always impassive technician and the often silent guru are opposed by the discursive genres of teaching, training and *maternage*" (Fabbri 2020b: 48, my translation). And the discipline, in turn, would be effective in breaking worn-out habits of thought, finding levels of translatability between different languages, and even discovering, through confronting the cultural Other, what is still "unthought" by one's culture. Referring to the work of the sinologist François Jullien, Fabbri says: "I do not go towards China, that is towards the exotic, but towards 'my' exotic, that is towards something I have not been able to think" (Fabbri 2017: 259, my translation). Among the plethora of themes explored in the interview collection, a crucial moment of the contemporary cultural debate emerges: the return to ontology, to which Fabbri counterposes a 'cultural deontology':

When Eco claims that there is a fundamental ontology, he is forced to resort to a metaphor, that of the hard core. [...] This is why the so-called deontology cannot be established on operating principles based on a 'last resort,' but on the idea of a cultural confrontation. This is why I am interested in Jullien's reasoning when he says that the relationship with other cultures is an essay in deontology. (Fabbri 2017: 291, my translation)

In short, again and again, the two masters of Italian semiotics do not stop talking, perhaps even bickering, making the semiotic field fertile for all of us and for others to come. The *vis polemica* is part of the game; indeed, it is the game: in concluding his "Riflessioni sull' insegnamento," Fabbri refers to another great European semiotician, Roland Barthes, accepting one of his ideas:

Research is not the exercise of the cogito but the cogitamus. Thinking together in the diversity of points of view, which enter into relation through the adjustments of the relevance of a standard method. In this sense, every researcher is a relativist: an activator of relationships. (Fabbri 2017: 48, my translation)

The conversation continues, *verba non volant*.

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The “posterior past” of the new iconoclasm

BY: Franciscu Sedda

Introduction

Paolo Fabbri (2015), reflecting on the destruction of Palmyra by ISIS, argued that the iconoclast goes to “strike the enemy in the intense zone of his/her values.” In the same vein, I want to argue that *iconoclastic acts enhance values and raise awareness of them*. It may seem paradoxical, perhaps even offensive, but I believe that, if properly framed, the iconoclastic gesture could be thought of in these terms.

Besides, the iconoclastic wave that swept the West before the pandemic can be thought of as a translational hub of other configurations, other practices, other meanings. In this sense, it sensitizes our gaze to grasp the changes in the shape of space and time typical of some contemporary subjectivities. This sensitization helps us perceive issues beyond a simple conflict between memorial perspectives: the paradoxical relationship between the iconoclast and the cult of knowledge; how public space incorporates and generates frustration due to its indifference to memory pluralism; the rise of a new temporality based on a ‘posterior past’ that the iconoclastic gesture projects into the future.

1. More than a matter of perspectivism

At first, the recent spate of statue destruction appears as a revolt against forgetting the causes and passions of the defeated, the dominated, the subaltern, the victims of history, or those who rightly or wrongly consider themselves in this way.

Milan Kundera’s celebrated aphorism seems a fitting rubric for contemporary iconoclasm: “The struggle of man

against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (Kundera 1981). Another appropriate approach is Lotman and Uspenskij’s emphasis that a constant struggle is fought around memory: a struggle for existence (Lotman and Uspenskij 1975).

Both these insights are undoubtedly pertinent in understanding the iconoclastic phenomenon. Still, the fact that the recent iconoclastic events in the West involve monuments that many consider insignificant opens up other questions.

The first question concerns the awareness of values. We only realize the value of most of the statues populating public space until it is questioned. Like the overwhelming majority of citizens, the overwhelming majority of monuments appear asymbolic, value-neutral, if not invisible. This is true until someone puts their finger on the wound and reminds us that it is still sore and can reopen.

The second question, tied to the first, is related to the perspectivism of memory and perception. From an iconoclast’s perspective, monuments embody the historical and social relations connected to the events that produced them. Though unversed in Deleuze and Guattari (or Fabbri, who re-reads their work), the iconoclast sees a repeating, mocking refrain in the monument, a refrain full of injustice and negative vibrations (Deleuze and Guattari 1991: 166-177; Fabbri 2020).

Many people, on the other hand, confronted with the iconoclastic act or the events’ iconoclastic potentiality, adopt an iconophilic attitude, thinking that most monuments don’t mean a lot, after all. Therefore, they can and should remain where they are.

Hence, a radical clash of perspectives arises between the bearer of common sense, for whom the statues are mainly inconsequential urban decoration, and the protesters, who perceive them not only as condensing a questionable past but, above all, a mortgage on the future — a fable in the making.

Iconoclasts take the petty-bourgeois justification of those scorning the demolition of statues (“there is no need to tear it down or remove it because it no longer means anything”) as evidence of the penetrative power of the values the statue stands for. In their view, insouciance signals the naturalization of these values, their integration into the deep structure of experience to the extent that people are not even aware of them. Thus, by defending the statues, they unwittingly yet effectively protect these values.

Of course, there is no lack of those who defend a monument because they see their identity embodied in a straightforward way and find the continuity of a lived experience in their presence. But, for classical iconoclasts, that presence offends their identity and dignity. Hence, the simplest reason to tear down the monument. It is the clash of perspectives that the monument most easily incorporates.

However, we can also pose the question in another way. In a context in which memory expands, pluralizes, to the point of fragmentation, the presence of a monument is significant not for what it affirms but for what it denies. The presence of a statue

speaks of all the statues that are not in its place, that do not have the possibility of occupying the public space, all the statues that have not been built or have not even been contemplated. The monument that occupies the public space speaks of all the identifications that public space has excluded or continues to exclude.

2. The statues and the memory of the future

The iconoclastic fury we witnessed before the pandemic arrived makes us feel that memory still matters. The demolition of statues, this intense social work around monuments that has saturated our screens, tells us that memory is neither absent nor irrelevant, not even today, in an age of apparent presentism, of a social life devoid of temporal extension.

A struggle for cultural existence develops again around memory. Different memorial programs and different forms of trust and destination collide around the same objects or statues (Hammad 2020). If previously, memory appeared to be a relic of the past, a static or very slowly evolving repertoire within history in the making, today it seems that the memory of the past lies in the future, the perception and debate that the iconoclastic action inaugurates.

Memory has always served to build identification patterns orienting future action. Today, however, it is an act that opens up to the future from the present to orient our perception of the past. The need of a part of the collective to question the past forces the rest of society to remember something forgotten or perhaps never really known.¹

Irrespective of what involved parties think, demolishing a statue or desecrating a shared memory inherit to the future a debate about the future’s memory of the past. A memory to be remade: to find oneself again or to finally separate, to rebuild the collective on a new basis, or to build new collectives that relate to existing ones on other grounds.

3. Against the statues, for knowledge’s sake

Contemporary iconoclasm speaks to us of this inversion of the mechanism, of the sensitization to memory. And of the fact that today we are called to rebuild the memory of the past every day. We live in an information-rich society, capable of ensuring the past’s multi-voicedness. What bothers many is showing indifference to this wealth. What

¹ Renan (1997[1882]) stressed, for example, that nations are based on the ability to forget together. In particular, the ability to forget the violence that a part of the collective has operated on the others at the moment of their foundation.

bothers part of the public opinion is that the knowledge of the past, of its injustices, does not produce any noticeable effects on the present.

Behind the attack on what a statue represents, an all too denotative meaning around which common sense tears its clothes, the frustration for a knowledge that does not become collective consciousness is somewhat less noticeable. Instead, what moves the iconoclastic gesture in-depth is the conviction that a particular kind of knowledge of the past refrains from producing difference. It avoids, for example, the recurrence of racial or gender discrimination in self-declared democratic and pluralist societies.

Different things happen in other contexts, like in territories occupied by a foreign aggressor or in societies that experienced authoritarian regimes. In these cases, the attack on statues aims to challenge the anesthetization of collective memory, perceived as one of the root causes of the evils suffered by the collective by external or internal (more or less) enemies.

In other words, looking at contemporary events against the light, one glimpses in the iconoclastic gesture the attempt to react to the modal-emotional condition that an ancient Persian saying highlights: "There is nothing more frustrating than knowing a lot and powering nothing." In a society where we know everything (or think we know) about the past and its injustices, this does not seem to change anything. The iconoclastic gesture stands as compensation for the lack of power.

However, here too, common sense and analytic sense, moral comprehension and semantic comprehension of action diverge or become stratified. On the surface, the gesture of those who knock down statues appears as a substitute for not bringing about immediate change. A kind of translation into the public space of that spectacular sensationalism that dominates the media scene, in which the demolition of the enemy through insult, offense, ridicule, the rumor seems to be the only form of political action. The only change that politics can control and produce in a world in which it appears unable to control anything, in which it is more the product than the producer of events.

More profoundly, at the level of being but of a partially unconscious being, the iconoclastic gesture affirms the value of knowledge instead. It demands that knowledge should count. What is known, often laboriously unearthed about past personalities and events, deserves not only intellectual recognition but an active role in reshaping the collective's public identity, starting from its spaces. The iconoclasts may appear naive in believing that new historical knowledge offered by ongoing research is entirely accurate, consensual, and directly transferrable to the framework of present relations and meanings. As if a constant principle of identity dominated history. Notwithstanding these misunderstandings, we should acknowledge that our local iconoclasts are perhaps the last to believe that "knowledge is power." Or at least it should be.

4. In favor of monumentalization

Following the rhetoric of our times, everything that happens around the statues occurs through the web. Organizing to tear down statues, testify that you have demolished statues. Everything is done through social networks, perhaps even as a function of them. It's hard not to arouse *likes* and *engagement* by posting a video of a demolished statue.

As for the Arab spring or other revolutions that broke out unexpectedly, so also for contemporary iconoclasm, some argue that what lies behind them is the tribal drum of the web, its instrumental or existential logic. This presumption is both true and false.

What is undoubtedly true is that the young people who often animate iconoclastic movements are involved, through social media, in the daily work of defining memory. There is no need to be digital natives: our social actions, however involuntarily or consciously, contribute to the ongoing generation of memory. Today, memory has to be built day by day, every day anew.

Clearly, speaking of memory does not mean a static and inert deposit but the knowledge that frames the passions and values that touch us, that guides our experiences. Consider the daily death of public figures, be they politicians, artists, stars, athletes, etc. Every day social media ask us to participate in a kind of monumentalization. A reverence, or a collective cognitive and affective stance, concerning figures whose existence until then may have been entirely indifferent to us.²

In reality, this also happens in smaller spheres through social media-based forms of mourning, especially during the current pandemic, where face-to-face rituals have become almost impossible. Or, in institutional spheres, where the protagonists of the web quickly become reference points of the ‘civil’ debate, if not the champions of politics.

If ‘social death’ leads to an instant form of monumentalization, the death of a monument lends itself to being instantiated. The very act of demolition becomes a monument, a moment to be fixed in images, a moment that captures, fixes, monumentalizes the work on memory itself. Banksy, with his usual genius, has captured and translated this dynamic into an image.

² On death and web rhetorics, see Sisto (2018) and from a semiotic point of view, see Mangiapane (2018: 51-54).



5. ... or against monumentalization?

In the current lashing out at the statues, we may ask ourselves if there is at play the implicit influence of a behavioral poetics from another sphere of experience. For the current generation that takes to the streets and is not afraid to tear down a statue, art is in no sense something contemplative. The only art that exists is the one that stands on the street; it is street art that says and does something about the world.

This art is also an art of the ephemeral, intimately linked to contingency. A removable art or made itself to be removed, contested, violated. Like graffiti artists do when they write over other graffiti, carrying out a game of valorization by denial, identifying themselves through the very act of denial. Is it possible that this practice, which the younger generation has incorporated since birth, plays a role in the ease and speed with which the protest against statues has taken root on a global level?

Is it possible that in this lashing out at the statues, this disfiguring or removing them, there is a generational effect, precisely of a specific cultural sensitivity that refuses monumentalization in itself?

It seems somewhat contradictory: on the one hand, these generations are children of languages that foster the monumentalization of experience; on the other, they appear immersed in languages that privilege the ephemeral. Yet, in reality, the short circuit is resolved in the everydayness of these experiences: a new monument every day. The rhythm of our recent experiences makes monumentalization omnipresent but monuments ephemeral.

Just like in contemporary populism – what we might call “social populism” – there is a need for ‘leaderism,’ but leaders are idolized and torn down at breakneck speed

(cf. Sedda and Demuru 2018). All the more dizzying because this compulsive rhythm makes the burning relationship between the strong man and the loser, the idol and the meteor, perceptible. Two moments of the same inevitable story.

6. The unexpected aspect of iconoclastic memory

Evidently, contemporaneity offers us a new, paradoxical and elusive, even unexpected aspect of memory. To deal with it, we need to turn to the concept of *aspectuality*, that is, to the form of the temporal process.

We have just seen, for example, how a stable and contingent time coexists in the tension between a constant monumentalization and ephemeral monuments. But this is only one of the aspectual dimensions that we can grasp in the demolition of the statues.

Earlier, we saw how memory, as captured by contemporary iconoclasm, is placed in the future instead of the past. To fully realize the inversions and paradoxes that make our polychronic time meaningful, we must seek the connections linking the phenomenon under discussion with other discursive practices of contemporaneity.

Those sensitive enough to grasp the value of reopening memory, of projecting it into the collective’s future debates, public space, and shared conscience, are also those who prioritize the issue of climate change. The fact that the current generational movement bears in its name a reference to the future - *Fridays for Future* - has not prevented scholars from noting the peculiar form of time of their discourse. Greta Thunberg, who gave birth to and represents this movement, constantly raises a paradoxical temporality called ‘anterior future’ (Bertrand 2021: 79).

Greta’s future is a *future of the past*. It is a future that the present generation feels expropriated, a future that, in many ways, seems already lost. The current generation reverses the time of revolutionary utopias, for example, that of ‘68, in which young people took to the streets to conquer the future and, trusting in the power of the imagination, demanded the impossible. They thought they could get it all immediately. Hence the perception of a dystopian, apocalyptic movement, which – even if it brings hope, even if it appears as a provocation to an action that we cannot postpone – to save the future, we must declare it stolen, compromised, lost, already passed.

The game of reversed temporal processes becomes evident and reveals its intimate coherences. If the future is in the past, the past can only be in the future. Thus, the ‘anterior future’ incorporated into environmentalist sensibility joins the ‘posterior past’ nourishing the iconoclastic sensibility.

The iconoclastic past is, in many ways, a matter of posterity. In a first sense, because it is in favor of a future community. In a second sense, because knocking down a statue

raises the question and choice about its replacement, and, more generally, about the past's value for the future. Who deserves to be 'in place of'? Is it necessary to fill this empty place? Can the future escape monumental logic? What role the memory of the past can and must play in the community's future and spaces? It is up to posterity to determine the place of the statues and the past.³

It remains a fact. If saving nature must be declared already compromised, to affirm culture, it will be necessary to compromise its symbols. The 'naturoclasm' that deprived people of a future is answered with a 'culturoclasm' that reopens the past.

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³ If we admit that we proceed in history as Benjamin's angel, with our backs to the future, this past to be determined in the future is posterior because it is literally behind us.

The rigors of imagination. An interview with Paolo Fabbri

BY: Pino Donghi

PAOLO FABBRI

Rigore e immaginazione. Percorsi semiotici sulle scienze.

Edited by Pino Donghi, Afterword by Stefano Traini. Milano-Udine: Mimesis, 2021, 152 pp., ISBN 9788857579092 (pbk).



The question begging to be asked was how come semiotics, in our age of communication, was nowhere near the inner-circle pantheon, nor even a leading discipline, within the social sciences? Gaining momentum and popularity towards the end of the 1950s, following Roland Barthes' publication of *Mythologies*, the academic fashion for it continued unabated until the early 1980s. So why did it end up being regarded by many as a self-absorbed discipline, given to navel-gazing?

It was with this question in mind that Pino Donghi undertook an on-off but continuous interview-cum-conversation with Paolo Fabbri, which started at the end of 2017 and ended forcibly, sadly with his death, in the spring of 2020. Until the lockdown imposed the use of web conferencing, the interviews were carried out in person, sometimes in the comfort of Fabbri's home near Rimini.

The written script, redacted where necessary, makes for interesting reading as the reader takes in the travelogue of Fabbri's grip on the subject, which refers principally to the state of semiotics in Italy. Fabbri, discerning as ever, points out that there are several backward several possible answers as he tackles the 'dated' shape of his beloved discipline, a field of interest to which he devoted his entire life via his teaching, lecturing, research, and numerous studies.

He argues that there were general influences, outside and beyond the field of semiotics here in Italy, an unbroken heritage as regards the supremacy of a historical-naturalistic cultural stance in academia, that contributed to resisting semiotics, including the diffidence of glottologists, for instance, or the approach of traditional Italian linguistics researchers. On the other hand, there were also, and continue to exist, reasons that are wholly internal to the discipline itself.

Broadly speaking, during the 20th century there were two major paradigms, to use Thomas Kuhn's words, milling about in semiotics: one loyal to the North American philosophy of Charles Sanders Peirce, and the other following the European tracks laid down in *A Course in General Linguistics* by the Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure, followed by the lessons of the Dane Louis Hjelmslev, and ending with the structural semantics of Algirdas Julien Greimas. Greimas had to make a life-saving escape from communist Lithuania and taught in Egypt and Turkey before ending up in Paris and becoming a naturalized French. He was Paolo Fabbri's professor and mentor. Fabbri's opinion in hindsight was that Umberto Eco had made interesting attempts to create bridges between the two approaches as he borrowed from Peirce's vision of semiotics. The outcome, however, was less than successful.

The effort of trying to combine two perspectives that by definition are not given to 'merging,' where the sum of the parts cannot create a whole, led to a process of what Fabbri called mutual sterilization, a lowering of their respective immune systems and one that has condemned semiotics to a 'flat' theoretical attitude when it comes to the analysis of texts.

This foundering came about at a time that happened to coincide with certain world events and a cultural outlook that Umberto Eco looked into with his *Turning Back the Clock: Hot Wars and Media Populism*. The Italian title for this collection of articles is *Il Passo del Gambero*, literally translating as the 'gait of the prawn,' alluding to the way prawns swim backward. Eco reckons that this was the social attitude of Western countries now that they had let go of notions of large-scale collective progress as an ideal, following on from the youth movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the consequent disillusionment. We may look to the future with our social attitudes, yes, but we seem to be 'swimming' backward as we do so, retreating into a more personal rather than collective outreach where our purposes are concerned. The age of 'small is beautiful' makes this an age looking to more localized, private, short-term, or even ephemeral goals.

This attitude also percolated to theories, that went from major to minor, from full-scale 'fighting for' ideals to what Fabbri calls 'guerilla' cultural skirmishes. As a result, semiotics began to go down the route of one-off essays and articles via newspapers and weekly magazines or through the various books penned by brilliant intellectuals such as Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes. Their brilliance is unquestionable; they were

uniquely effective in drawing impressionistic brushstrokes of the social movements and mores. The trouble was they were not founded on, nor had the support of, a scientific method.

It was Fabbri's firm conviction, instead, and in this he furthered the baton of Greimas's most powerful legacy, that a semiotic approach ought to work "in vista della scienza," i.e., keeping science in mind, keeping it well in sight. Semiotics should strive to follow the most formal method possible within its reach, as modern science does so that it will prove to be accessible, applicable, and truly advantageous for all scholars in the field addressing the meaning of whatever text they are dealing with.

Worthy of note, also, as regards the workings of semiotics in Italy specifically but more widely afield when it comes to structuralism in general, was the way semiotics implicitly presented itself as critical of Marxist philosophy; this did not sit at all well with the intelligentsia and intellectual zeitgeist within Italy.

Contributing factors to the status of semiotics in Italy (and perhaps not just in Italy) as we have seen then was a defensive attitude towards 'external' disciplines beyond its borders struggling with, and concomitant to, the 'split' and ambiguity presented by the two 'internal' paradigms, as well as the expedient provided by the *'il passo del gambero'* approach (the idiosyncratic short-cut impressionistic descriptions of social realities) and, last, the hostile attitude on the part of a great many intellectuals. The current dated/out-of-date state of semiotics in Italy can easily be attributed to these factors in answering our initial question.

To counteract this Fabbri was adamant that what was needed now – as it always had been – was to take up the methodological framework provided by Greimas's body of work. In brief, a 'marked' kind of semiotics, *'una semiotica marcata,'* one that would take over from the sort of pop analysis that became fashionable as of the mid 1908s. What semiotics needs is *'rigore e immaginazione'* – this the title of the book edited by Pino Donghi – i.e. both scientific rigour and the sort of imagination that Fabbri culled from Italo Calvino. Calvino was also known for his philological study of the Italian language and cultural evolution; he argued that the accepted understanding of a line of development that began with Dante, Petrarca, Boccaccio down to Leopardi and Manzoni was incomplete. What's missing is the line connecting Galileo and Ariosto. Ariosto can be considered the epitome of how imaginative thinking can be transposed onto prose fabricated with the greatest rigor. And Galileo, for his part, has every right to be included in the company of great Italian writers; indeed, he ought to be recognized as one of the inventors of Italian prose (Leopardi was of this opinion too), which he used in a very imaginative way as he described his rigorous scientific observations. The conclusion Paolo Fabbri came to was that semiotics has to become similarly more rigorous and more imaginative, a manifesto combining Galileo Galilei and Ludovico Ariosto.

Fabbri did not doubt that scientific literature could become an object of study – one of the most interesting and challenging – of semiotic analysis. His thoughts on this issue are presented in the second part of the book, comprising a set of four essays originally published in the proceedings of Spoletoscienza. Spoletoscienza was an annual conference ground devoted to the dissemination of the culture of science, held during the town of Spoleto's summer Festival of Two Worlds, and created and organized by the Fondazione Sigma-Tau. It was held from 1989 to 2011 and Paolo Fabbri was a frequent, highly regarded, and most influential speaker.

The third part of the interview is concerned with a discourse about science (*Sui discorsi della scienza*) and the above-mentioned essays help to bolster the scope of the interview with Fabbri. He analyzes the crucial difference between the kind of scientist who observes and catalogs the physical and biological aspects of nature and the kind who goes into a laboratory to invent and produce new elements. This is a very important distinction, highlighting the difference between observation and manipulation. With the invention of the laboratory with a capital L, modern science introduced the question of the far-reaching social and political consequences of its undertakings.

All of this is of extraordinary interest to whoever is concerned with the analysis of meaning. As are extraordinarily interesting all of Paolo Fabbri's observations. As Stefano Traini notes in his afterword to the book, Fabbri was a giant of an intellectual who was capable of combining method and imagination, scientific rigor, and impressionistic descriptions.

Is it too much of a stretch of the imagination to consider likening him to Galileo and Ariosto when it comes to his place in semiotics? Paolo Fabbri was a real *Maestro*, whose absence is regretted worldwide.

Seeing double, seeing beyond. Paolo Fabbri's gaze on art

BY: Valentina Manchia

PAOLO FABBRI

Vedere ad arte. Iconico e icastico.

Edited by Tiziana Migliore. Milano: Mimesis, 2020, 488 pp., ISBN 9788857563947 (pbk).



Barbara Kruger, Federico Fellini, Matthew Barney, Luigi Ghirri, Maurizio Cattelan, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Christian Boltanski, Alberto Savinio. And again Nanni Balestrini, Giorgio De Chirico, Mimmo Rotella, Bruce Nauman. These are just some of the artists that Paolo Fabbri, one of the most important semiologists in Italy and elsewhere, professor in Bologna, Venice, Palermo, student of Algirdas Julien Greimas, a colleague of Umberto Eco, a friend of Italo Calvino, has been looking at since the beginning of the 1990s.

Vedere ad arte (Seeing Artfully¹) is dedicated to all of them, exploring, together with their works, the most diverse territories – from painting to performance, from photography to video art, from futurism to conceptual art. The book, edited by Tiziana Migliore, is divided into thematic sections: *Scritti pedagogici* (Pedagogical writings), *Prassi di enunciazione* (Praxis of enunciation), *Eristica del senso* (Eristics of the meaning), *Trasmutazioni e metamorfosi* (Transmutations and metamorphoses), *Sostanze del mondo* (Substances of the world), *Intercatture verbosive* (Verbovisual interchanges), *L'opera nello spazio* (The work in space), *Schermi dell'apparire* (Appearance Screens). Published on the occasion of Fabbri's eightieth birthday, the book offers a dense and bountiful compendium of his reflections and analyses on the arts and artists but which, on closer inspection, is much more than this.

¹ All translations from Italian are by the author.

For those fortunate enough to have known the recently departed Paolo Fabbri, who had the opportunity to converse with him, to listen to him lecture or speak at a seminar, to receive his precious pieces of advice, or even just to read his writings, this book is not just a collection of his works on contemporary art. Leafing through *Vedere ad arte* is like observing an artist's portrait of its author, a representation that not only precisely reproduces the features of the original but also paints details that we would not otherwise have grasped and that instead make up the whole of his figure – here, in particular, as an expert of art and signification, one of the many faces of his multiform semiotic research that Gianfranco Marrone (2020) has attempted to explore, “going from memory (therefore leaving out who knows how much).”

For those who do not frequently venture along semiotic paths, however, but more often between art and images, these essays are an opportunity to grasp at work the semiotic approach to the visual and the visible and, in particular, to follow the trajectory of Fabbri's always discerning gaze, master of many other gazes to come, through the multiple engagements that this book opens and relaunches between semiotics, image theory, art history, and art criticism.

The semiologist's gaze on images, it should be pointed out, is not that of the iconologist, in search of already given correspondences between figures and meanings, nor is it that of the philosopher – “the semiologist does not suffer from ontology,” Fabbri wrote, but from “nostalgia for the ontic.” It is a double gaze – *on* things and *through* things – which, in its highest moments, just as in these writings by Fabbri, manages to recompose this double movement into a single one; that is, to be acute and exact in looking at things as they appear and, at the same time, to see through them the overall sense that links and structures them. It is in this way that semiotics, “a constructive and perspectival discipline,” “often attributes to itself the exorbitant privilege of applying itself from the outside to visual texts, to make them speak.”

Fabbri has been and remains an undisputed master of making images speak according to their language – which is not enclosed in words and dictionaries but made up of minimal elements, of lines and colors, shapes and materials, and of their peculiar configuration. And he has convincingly shown to all those who see in semiotics only a “science of signs,” as the dictionary says (freezing a discipline in a syntagm, which is inadequate to restore even the thought of Ferdinand de Saussure), or worse still a handbook for the deciphering of codes, or a machine to fabricate cold structures, that semiotics is instead a way to account for the fact that every object, every event, and every artwork – every text, in its irreducible specificity – does not replicate unambiguous, fixed and already given meanings but is the result of a fine weaving (*textus*) of fields of forces and meaning that can be grasped and described. And it is precisely thanks to that “double seeing” that perceives the artworks' structure without forgetting their singularity that we can better understand their vibrant surface.

In the essay “La Sfinge incompresa” (The Misunderstood Sphinx), for example, the analysis of Paul Klee’s *Sphinxartig*, although rigorously conducted, semiotically speaking, first on the level of expression and then on the level of content, is not a cold dismantling of figures in minimal strokes but proceeds in a continuous counterpoint to Klee’s thought, moving between the delicate yet dense surface of the small watercolor “in the guise of a sphinx,” the painter’s writings and critical literature, listening to the specific way in which multiple senses stratify and collaborate in artistic creation.

Klee writes in his diaries:

An idyllic picture of Bern would have to show the following things: 1. The Zytgloggegügel [clock cock], which sings ‘Call you my fa ...’. 2. A drunken foursome of singers who serenade this bird. 3. Two polyps [policemen; cops] in rubber shoes pondering whether they will triumph over the four or succumb in the end. 4. The arcades of Bern, which arch over the scene [...]. “A stroke of lightning in the night; the day screams sharply in its sleep. Faster, Mr. Canine, you’ll be late for Frau Gfeller’s dinner date / where you’re invited to a full plate.” Suchlike things I am now able to express with a certain precision, and this by line alone, line as absolute spirituality, without analytic accessories, simply taken for granted. (Klee 1964: 278)

For this reason, Fabbri notes, to best approach, from the outside, this line that is so rich it does not need “analytical accessories,” “the best readings are those that have made explicit, as far as possible, the subtlety and grace of the devices that construct Paul Klee’s ‘manner.’ And that have been able to find not the uniqueness but the multiplicity of meaning, not a generic ambiguity or reversibility, but the rigorous and explicit stratification of meanings.”

The constant attention to the specificity of individual works and individual authors is one of the driving forces behind the analyses in *Vedere ad arte*. It is one of the hidden threads that this book has the merit of bringing to light so clearly.

On Valerio Adami, for example, painter and friend of semioticians and semiotics, ceaseless combiner of languages and signs, as in *Sinopie*, his collection of notebooks, and in *Et in Arcadia Ego*, Fabbri allows himself to make a veritable declaration of the poetics of his research:

I am interested, I am more passionate, in hypothesizing or imagining that the activity of the draughtsman, of the painter, has an overall sense in his doing and in his saying about this doing. In his own way and manner, it is up to the semiologist to understand how Adami does not make use of a preordained iconological vocabulary, of units of meaning before the text, commensurate

with a pre-existing objective or subjective reality. Instead, he creates a lexicon of signs, immanent in his frescoes, paintings, and drawings, which it is up to us to disimplicate.

The artwork creating its own world, transforming what exists into material for new universes of meaning, is another of the threads that run through the plot of *Vedere ad arte* and Fabbri's reflections. Fabbri, indeed, has also proposed a "semiotic reconception" of Nelson Goodman's aesthetic thought and the idea of *worldmaking* and has contributed, in the direction of true interdisciplinarity, to having some of his aesthetic writings translated in Italian; for example, "Art in theory" and "Art in Action" (in *Of Mind and Other Matters*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1984, pp. 108-144, 146-188), published in *Arte in teoria, arte in azione* (et al., 2010) and prefaced by Fabbri's essay "Una ricognizione semiotica" (A semiotic reconception).

Therefore, the sense of matter and material is never given but rather recreated each time by the artist in a continuous struggle with them within his creative vision. As is evident in visual artists such as Nunzio and for example in his *Sarai d'ombra, a seraglio* made of burnt wood, of which Fabbri writes: "As for wood, the exclusive material of the main installation, Nunzio treats it as opposed to lead, unlike other artists who use bronze and look for the original tree in a wood. I am thinking of Penone."

Even the works of Claudio Parmiggiani, famous for his material traces, exemplify the continuous re-creation of matter in the artist's hands: "Parmiggiani's 'materiology' – not materialism – has been commented on at length, as has his allergy to the virtual: for him, 'language is inside the material: paper, canvas, wood, earth, fire, and smoke.' I would add the subtle bodies of dust, which can erase the contours of things or leave a trace in the negative and as if by subtraction (see his notes *De-localzioni*)."

It is, therefore, a mistake for anyone who wants to move around the surface of an artwork questioning every single element as if it were in itself the bearer of meaning; as if the artist had no choice but to draw on a pre-established store of symbolic and iconological values capable of circulating and transforming themselves throughout the ages, cultures and artistic expressions.

This is the heart of the essay on Bill Viola's *Ocean Without a Shore*, in which the focus of Fabbri's reflections is on the water as it comes into play in the installation, as an "operator of revelation," that is, as responsible for the multiple narrative positions it triggers in the discourse of the work.

At first glance, it is the easiest work of art to describe that a viewer can imagine: a character in black and white appears at the bottom of a frame, a sort of door; he moves towards us, and at a certain point, he is hit by a downpour of water; then he chromatically changes from grey to a color with highly defined shades;

he looks towards our space and then, after a pause, he turns around, crosses the thunderous curtain of water again and disappears into the grey background.

In Viola's installation, Fabbri shows, moving from the description of what is happening to the *intra*-vision (a prefix that recurs in these pages) of what that happening may mean, the water is not the substance water; "the old iconology would lead one to question the meaning of water in itself," but here, instead, it is the flow, the roar, the movement that animates the water and pours it over the figures, making them appear and then fade away.

And how can we read the continuous passing of water, given that in Bill Viola's work, "contemporary technologies give time to time," linking together image, movement, and time? According to Fabbri, who in his essay on *Ocean Without a Shore* enters the work and at the same time, thanks to the mediation of the semiotic gaze, immerses himself in the artist's imagination, the water that rhythms the installation stages "the taking shape of ghosts," the return to life – corporeal and tangible – of the dead and their punctual and cyclical dissolution in a potential dimension ready to propose them again. "The dead are not dead," as in a line from the poem by Senegalese poet Birago Diop, serves as the video's intertext.

The analysis, which in the essay is enriched by many other elements and branches out into ideas ready to become other avenues of research (from the analysis of the opposition between diaphanous and perspicuous to the emergence of ghosts, from Schopenhauer to Savinio), would not be complete, however, if it did not dwell on what Fabbri defines as "Viola's iconology, both physiognomic and passionate," originating from the artist's attention to deepening the pathemic dimension of his figures, and more generally to the expression of human emotions. This interest was also documented by Viola's participation in the seminar on the passions held by the Getty Research Institute for the History of Art and the Humanities in Los Angeles (1997-1998), and then in the volume *Representing the Passions* (2003). Even in the wave that incessantly moves and transforms the figures, what emerges on this level is a definitive disconnection between life and death, between what remains and what tries to return but can not.

Therefore, it is only within a specific framework, that of the individual work and, broadening the perimeter, that of the artist's world, that it once again makes sense for a semiologist like Fabbri to talk about iconology: an iconology that is paradoxically singular, because it is unique, and irreducible to any system other than that which, we might say with a different metaphor of vision, the work itself gives us to see.

"With Fabbri, researching means penetrating everyday chaos, learning to organize perception, distinguishing, seeing beyond and otherwise," Tiziana Migliore (2020) recalls, in her closing essay, aligning research with the double vision, "beyond and other-

wise,” that runs through these writings. “It is to pass on the idea that a particular form of knowledge, semiotics, manages to transform the opaque dynamics of social and individual systems and processes into signification.”

It would therefore be valuable to put ourselves in his perspective – that of semiotics – and try to continue to cast our gaze over there, where Fabbri was aiming, continuing the dialogue between knowledge and science (both human but also “inhuman” sciences, as he loved to repeat). Keeping the horizon of images as a fixed target, but without forgetting to look at it through the viewfinder of the double gaze of semiotics.

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Being Paolo Fabbri, Marked

BY: Francesco Mangiapane

PAOLO FABBRI

Biglietti d'invito per una semiotica marcata.

Edited by Gianfranco Marrone, Preface by Stefano Bartezzaghi.
Milano: Bompiani, 2021, pp. 416. ISBN 9788830106536 (pbk).



Il due giugno del 2020, poco più di un anno fa, veniva a mancare Paolo Fabbri, eccezionale testimone dell'avventura intellettuale semiotica novecentesca. A un anno da quel triste giorno si moltiplicano proposte e progetti che provano a unire i puntini dei tanti percorsi imboccati nel corso della sua vita di studioso, ricercatore, intellettuale. A far da *fil rouge* fra queste iniziative è una chiamata alla riflessione intorno al problema di come continuare, ovvero di come mettere a frutto la sua eredità materiale (le migliaia di libri che stanno diventando una biblioteca a Palermo) e spirituale. È in questo quadro che si inserisce *Biglietti d'invito. Per una semiotica marcata*, a cura di Gianfranco Marrone, appena pubblicato nella collana *Campo Aperto* di Bompiani. Libro che ha un titolo tutto un programma, i cui esiti riverberano in me attraverso il filtro potente delle memorie personali (sono uno fra i tanti studenti folgorati dai suoi "biglietti d'invito") frammisto al senso umano di mancanza che si prova quando si perde una persona cara. Ogni riflessione generale, allora, non potrà che presentarsi a me attraverso questo filtro e questa enigmaticità.

La prima cosa che mi viene in mente per entrare in tema è una chiacchera in un momento di pausa fra un'attività e l'altra. A margine di uno dei tanti seminari che teneva a Palermo, mi confessò come una delle peculiarità della sua condotta di professore che più confondeva i suoi colleghi fosse il fatto che egli, con gli esponenti del pensiero filosofico di cui si tratta all'uni-

versità, mantenesse una sorta di conversazione aperta, chiamandoli in causa non tanto come autorità da cui far discendere una qualche verità (ipse dixit) quanto come compagni di merende, in un atteggiamento vivacemente pugnace quanto scanzonato. Era quest'aria di famiglia, la ruvida schiettezza della sua loquela di fronte ai grandi del pensiero a mettere a disagio i colleghi. Essi lo guardavano, in un misto di stupore e invidia, scomodare Nietzsche o Foucault, Platone o Aristotele, senza mai avere il coraggio di buttarsi nella mischia, mostrandosi riluttanti ad accettare il suo biglietto di invito alla conversazione. Fabbri questa diffidenza dei suoi colleghi, e il senso di estraneità che ne discendeva, lo rilevava con rammarico. Ma poco male, se è vero che erano gli studenti a essere i reali destinatari dei suoi biglietti, i veri invitati. E di studenti ne aveva molti, dispersi in ogni angolo del globo in cui si fosse trovato a insegnare. Come ricorda Stefano Bartezzaghi, direttore della collana e suo allievo al DAMS di Bologna, nella bella introduzione, per gli studenti Paolo Fabbri era innanzitutto una voce. Stridula. Marcata. Che spiccava rispetto alle altre. E annunciava un corpo, smilzo e capelluto. Oltre che un gesto: lo scanzonato mettersi a tu per tu che faceva impallidire i colleghi, affascinava i suoi allievi, che venivano educati a mantenere nei confronti della cultura un medesimo atteggiamento, quello di chi senza troppi riguardi scrolla la polvere dalla storia del pensiero per metterla, in azione, letteralmente in gioco.

E allora seguire le sue lezioni significava srotolare intere bibliografie, mettendo in connessione autori lontani nel tempo e nello spazio, diversi per formazione e campo d'azione, oltre che per modalità espressive e medium utilizzato. A suggello di tutto ciò arrivavano interminabili liste di libri (provate a scorrere le 40 pagine di referenze in questo volume) da cui ognuno avrebbe poi piluccato a piacimento, proprio grazie al biglietto di invito che da Fabbri gli era stato recapitato. E, d'altra parte, senza rendersene conto, imparava anche un metodo di lavoro che era quello della "semiotica marcata," per cui il semiologo assume il ruolo di garante e intercessore della reciproca intellegibilità dei discorsi, andando oltre la superficie per rivelarne la posizione politica, il terreno comune oltre le differenze retoriche di superficie, oltre ogni specialismo. Di un tale atteggiamento ognuno si porta il suo ricordo. Per coloro i quali hanno frequentato i suoi corsi negli anni 90 rimane indimenticato, per esempio, il suo "affondo" sulla guerra, di cui adesso rimangono carte e appunti in attesa di essere schedati nella nascente biblioteca palermitana a lui intitolata. Ma basta scorrere le pagine di questo ricco volume per toccare con mano come per ognuno dei saggi in esso contenuti (biglietti di invito, per l'appunto), che inanellano temi diversissimi – da Wikipedia all'improvvisazione jazz, da Pinocchio agli zombie, da Arcimboldo a James Bond – si dipani ogni volta una nuova conversazione, resa possibile soltanto dalla sua intercessione, dalla sua instancabile attività di segugio-lettore forte, di scrittore transitivo, interessato a gettare oltre l'ostacolo dell'intraducibilità la speculazione critica.

Ma che cos'è una semiotica marcata? Qual è il metodo di una tale intercessione? A spiegarlo ci pensa Gianfranco Marrone nella postfazione al libro. La marcatezza è un fenomeno messo in luce dalla linguistica, disciplina che Fabbri non si stancava di considerare a fondamento della scienza della significazione contro le derive filosofiche del suo dirimpettaio Eco. Un termine marcato è quello che esibisce una qualità specifica per cui può essere identificato rispetto agli altri termini che non la posseggono, in modo che l'assenza di quella proprietà sia tanto significativa quanto la sua presenza. Prendiamo il plurale inglese. Come è noto esso è dato dall'aggiunta della *s* a un qualsiasi nome. È proprio il fatto che i termini plurali siano *marcati* con la *s* a rivelare la natura significante di quelli che la *s* non esibiscono. Il fatto di non possedere la *s* significa che essi sono singolari, o, se si vuole, *non plurali*. Si capisce come il primo vagito del senso non sia nell'opposizione fra termini aventi qualità opposte (buoni versus cattivi) quanto quello fra uno sfondo indeterminato (non marcato) e un termine che fa una fuga in avanti staccandosi dal resto, sottolineando la propria differenza, ostendendola di fronte al prossimo. Sebbene possa sembrare il contrario, è, infatti, il termine non-marcato a costituire la norma, a determinare lo spazio comune; è il non-marcato il modo del potere, l'ovvio così ovvio che non ha nemmeno bisogno di essere detto. Ed è forse proprio l'insofferenza verso l'ovvio – di cui si vuole già, a partire da Roland Barthes, denunciare il carattere opprimente per il singolo e oppressivo per la società – a ispirare la nascita della disciplina semiotica. Di fronte alla melassa in cui tutto è uguale a tutto, si può scegliere, allora, di prendere posizione, attraverso il gesto politico fondamentale di segnare la differenza. Differenza, per esempio, rispetto alla regressione della semiotica palesemente non marcata a corpo indeterminato, senza una posizione epistemologica, un quadro teorico, una metodologia, un'apertura al mondo sensibile dell'esperienza, una poltiglia pop, *cultural*, in cui tutto può andare con tutto e basti affermare di fare semiotica per essere considerati semiologi (e trovare un posto all'università). È la malattia della semiotica dei nostri anni, la sua deriva pop senza posizione, senza epistemologia, che finché ci sono stati, insieme, i maestri Fabbri ed Eco hanno sempre combattuto.

È solo con un sodale spirito di gruppo, con un *noi* marcato (cfr. il saggio sull'identità) che può strutturarsi un progetto semiotico che aspiri a diventare una teoria della cultura: è così che la semiotica marcata diventa un programma collettivo, in cui ognuno si intesta una parte del lavoro, specializzando la propria expertise ora sugli aspetti epistemologici, ora su quelli teorici, metodologici o empirici, contribuendo a ricucire, grazie al proprio contributo, gli anelli mancanti che legano insieme la struttura del senso, parola chiave che marca la vocazione fenomenologica di una tale missione.

Ma questo *noi* – lo si è visto – arriva come una chiamata individuale. La semiotica marcata è, infatti, una semiotica emotiva, *intensa*, che pervade la persona, i suoi affetti, la sua individualità. È per questo che è delicata. La delicatezza è forse la qualità che più di ogni altra contraddistingue il pensiero semiotico di Paolo Fabbri. Prendere la pa-

rola (ovvero rinunciare alla comoda posizione, popolarissima in accademia, di non dire niente di pericoloso, di significativo), sembra voler intendere Fabbri, significa indicare – ostendere – la propria fragilità: chi si crede di essere costui che osa marcare la propria differenza? Con tutto il peso esistenziale – che già Roland Barthes avvertiva – di essere marcato e quindi visibile e quindi facile bersaglio.

Ma d'altra parte, ancora più in profondità, la marcatezza è soprattutto una promessa di fedeltà che si fa con se stessi: ti obbliga *esserti fedele*, a mantenerti *intenso*, a rifuggire dal pericolo di diluire la tua posizione fino a renderla indistinguibile dal resto. Di fronte a questo rischio bisogna stare all'erta, scegliendo, se è il caso, di rovesciare il tavolo. È quello che Fabbri ha sempre fatto, cambiando mille sedi universitarie nel corso della sua carriera (professore errante ma non chierico vagante), avendo preferito svolgere il suo ruolo intellettuale attraverso mille incarichi e mansioni (ha per esempio diretto centri di cultura molto diversi fra loro come quello di cultura italiano a Parigi o ancora quello riminese dedicato a Fellini) pur di salvaguardare la propria promessa. Avendo pure cambiato settore scientifico – decisione che mai viene perdonata in accademia – per continuare a essere Paolo Fabbri, marcato.

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