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Ricerche e argomenti / Research and discussion

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Semiotics, Deleuze (& Guattari) and post-structuralism
Further opening questions?

Abstract. The main purpose of this paper is to propose a discussion and review about some points coming from post-structuralist thought, particularly concerning Deleuze's philosophy. Starting from Deleuze's thought there are questions that, even perhaps known, seem, today, critically interrogate and fruitfully challenging the epistemological basis of Semiotics. The intention is to examine here some of these basic concepts – such as, immanence, expression, intensity, dynamism, production – particularly from Deleuze's philosophy (in collaboration, it is important to remember, with Guattari), because of their circulation and specific impact on Semiotics. The hypothesis is that this questioning may obtain, as a result, a sort of "positive tension", useful for today's semiotic research.
Keywords: Deleuze; post-structuralism and semiotics; expression; immanence; structural dynamics.

The aim of this article is to discuss and proposing a review of some questions spreading from post-structuralism – with a specific attention to Deleuze's thought – that seem, also today, to interrogate and fruitfully haunting the epistemological basis of Semiotics. I would like to examine here some basic, even if perhaps known, concepts, particularly from Deleuze's philosophy (in collaboration, it should be remembered, with his philosophical comrade, Guattari[1]), because of their circulation and specific impact on Semiotics. The hypothesis is that this questioning has obtained, as a result, a sort of "positive tension", useful for today's semiotic research.

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[1] See, Deleuze 1986; Patton 1996; Vaccaro 1997b; Fabbri 2005. Guattari's work should be remembered regarding semiotic questions: cf. Guattari (1987); Fabbri (1998b, 2005). See also Dosse (2007: 233), concerning the fact that Deleuze considered «Felix comme le trouveur de diamants et que lui était le tailleur»: about this parallel character of discovering and cutting.

1. Systems of an immanence. Expression as a symmetry brea-king in semiotic systems

Let us start by a description of the concept of immanence. If there is a concept which is representative of Deleuze's thought is a renewed and radical idea of immanence. But what is the relevance of this conception for Semiotics? According to Deleuze, immanence is not only a category (methodological or epistemological one) but, in a more radical way, is a sort of basic dimension which gives origins to knowledge and concepts. It is firstly important to remember that immanence dimension in Deleuze can exist only when it is in connection with the idea of "expression" (Deleuze 1968b: 159). Here we find a first interesting (and sometimes underestimated) point for a critical confrontation between Deleuze and Semiotics. All of the aspects and categories of expression come, as it is well known, from the Deleuze's work on Spinoza. In Spinoza, as discussed and interpreted by Deleuze, expression deals with the capacity – starting from medieval philosophy (*ibid.*) –, to imply, connect, explicate or explain something. Expression is related to the immanent dimension in this way: we know the elements of a reality without finding causes or external ex-plicative elements, but through the "intrinsic" ways in which this reality is expressed, in its evolution, in its differentiated articulation, related to the idea of an intensive potential. In this way, for Duffy (2006: 240-241):

It is according to the logic of expression, that the variations of a finite existing mode's degree of power, of power to act, are determined by the dynamic nature of the relations in which it is further differentiated [...]. This dynamism, which deter-mines the variations of a mode's power to act and therefore of "what is expressed", is actualized in the concept of intensity[2].

Here, in Deleuze's analysis of Spinoza (see also Deleuze 1981), we can find a first basic path concerning the link between Deleuze and Semiotics: the contrast concerning the same definition of sign. More specifically, it is important here to remember Spinoza's critique of the idea of sign: the contrast between the idea of sign and that of expression. Signs are, in Spi-noza, according to Deleuze's interpretation, effects of a partial knowledge or of misunderstandings, such as superstitions, revelations, prophetic signs or prohibitions, which, Spinoza emphasizes in particular in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. They could not do other than make us obedient; or as partial symptoms, for which we do not yet know the causes. Semiotics has long discussed the transformation of the idea of sign in particular with Hjelmslev, in favour, as known, of the concept of "semiotic function" (see

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[2] For Duffy this concept of intensity (as a qualitative transformation) is in deep contrast with Hegel's Spinoza interpretation.

Caputo 2010: 137, 149, 197-198). From antiquity to Peirce, the idea of sign (as a classifiable element), or "the standing for...", can be nowadays conceived as a sort of an «epistemological obstacle» (*ibid.*). For Deleuze, this should be rethought as part of a history of philosophy: where it is possible to find another path, emerging especially thanks to the "heresy" of the "apostate" Spinoza. Particularly, thanks to Spinoza, we are facing a new apparition, according to Deleuze, of the concept of expression against the idea of "sign" (see Deleuze 1968b, 1981)[3].

This is not the place to describe in detail Spinoza's framework. But we will resume some basic points relevant for this confrontation between Semiotics and deleuzian thought. Let us briefly remember that the radical nature of Spinoza's thinking regards the very idea of immanence, what Banfi (1969) refers to as "it has to be". Or, quoting Yovel (1989), «Spinoza's heresy» deals with the principle of immanence (as well as his reputation as the «atheist and Jewish», champion of free thought, and his link with anti-clerical circles, Christian dissenters and «libertarians» of Amsterdam, Leyden and Rjinsburg). For Spinoza, immanence is the capacity of conceiving mundane existence[4] as the only real *being* possible, a source of ethical values and political power and therefore a denial of any kind of transcendence (see also Nadler 2001). For Spinoza, the immanent dimension is the one that implies itself. It should be remembered that the basic concept of attribute, in Spinoza (Deleuze 1968b: 18), is defined as "points of view on substance": they are auto-expressive forms of the substance (*ibid.*: 323). We find here an anticipation of the idea of «absolute immanence» as defined by Deleuze in his later works.

One of the central points in Spinoza's philosophy, as Banfi (1969) stressed is known as the concept of "common notions" (*notiones communes*). In Spinoza's philosophy this key concept represents a kind of intermediate level between sensible knowledge and the third, higher level of consciousness. These, we recall, may be generalizations derived from experience, but

[3] Spinoza was (although obviously a "classic" of philosophy), according to Yovel (1989), considered a sort of "outsider" in the official history of philosophy, even if his thought is continuously rediscovered (from Hegel to Nietzsche). In recent decades, the return of Spinoza's philosophy is connected to the cultural fortune of Deleuze and Guattari's writings, especially after the derridian, and later, Foucault's impact in the United States; and also to the radical political thought (i.e. with Negri and Balibar).

[4] According to the very known Spinozian concept, "*Deus sive natura*", this deals with the immanentist concept of the unicity of substance, of "all is one, one-all": God, or in other words, Nature (see Banfi 1969). This concept is at the heart of Spinozian legacy, particularly in Enlightenment and Romanticism thought: as it is known, it is linked to the "Spinoza dispute". For a definition of the immanentist "rupture" in Spinoza, concerning also the new reading of plotinian emanationism, see Negri (1998) which refers to an «horizontal emanationism», as well as Deleuze 1968b. See, concerning the renewing of Spinozist interpretation, Matheron 1969; Wolfson 1934; Deleuze 1968b (also concerning the legacy of Arab and Hebrew philosophy, in particular Maimonides; see, Wolfson 1934).

they are not "mere abstractions", Banfi adds. This involves the construction of a "dilemma of infinite modes", but also, and at the same time, the resolution of this dilemma[5]. Here, with this concept, Deleuze comes back to Spinoza[6].

Deleuze (1968b) captures and highlights another key aspect of Spinozian ethics. Along with immanence we find here the "expressive" dimension, expressionist ethics. In Spinoza, "understanding" (both the capacity to understand and to feel) is, at the same time, "*explicatio*" and "*expressio*". The unfolding of causal forms must not be understood as a priori schemes, but as a "de-implication" of the mechanisms and internal connections from the substance. This is yet another Spinoza's famous proposals: parallelism between the soul and the mind, as the "*idea corporis*", and the body as "*idea materiale mentis*", which are reflected in one another. This parallelism, however, seems to be interesting to another level: the expressive level and what is "expressed", in terms of meanings and signification processes. Thanks to Deleuze's reading, this additional point emerges: expression as capacity and process of creating sense. In this direction Damasio (2003) proposes, in his book *Looking for Spinoza*, a sort of anticipation, in Spinoza's thought, of the models of embodiment that, even partially, modern neurosciences and cognitive researches have developed. According to this idea, an organism needs to produce different kinds of images, schemas and "mappings" of itself, both internal and external to the body.

Beyond the complexity of Spinoza's thought and its current reinterpretations, there is a point which seems to be very important for Semiotics: the link between the immanentist position and the concept of expression. Deleuze and Guattari, in their work on hjelmslevian semiotics (1980), insist in connecting the hjelmslevian principle (methodological, epistemological) of immanence to Spinoza's (philosophical and ontological) immanentism. In their interpretation there is a dynamic concept of semiotic systems that dramatically challenges semiotic structural models: that of "inter-strata" dynamical relationships (cf. Hjelmslev 1957). It is about the idea according

[5]   According to Banfi's reading (1969: 214-215), very close to that of Deleuze, Spinoza's "*notiones communes*" (common notions) consist in the understanding of bonds: "the system of relations that ties sensitive data amongst themselves. When Spinoza speaks of these '*notiones communes*' he did not mean to speak of scholastic universals: rather his criticism of the Aristotelian-scholastic universals is definitive [...] they are simple abstractions, they do not capture the structure inside the real." (my transl.). Instead Spinoza's common notions would be, for Banfi, the "system of relationships that determine the real": starting from the existence of "infinite modes" of the substance they are a "dilemma of the finite", the attributes, end up returning to the dilemma itself of the substance of the world (Banfi 1969; Spinoza, *Etica*, II, 37).

[6]   According to Duffy (2006) the Deleuzian interpretation of Spinoza, offers a "structural-genetic" (resuming Gueroult's method of the history of philosophy), in search for schemas of "structural" order.

to which is important to "look" inside internal links between strata (see, in this regard, Zinna 2008; Bondì 2012). Caputo (2010) and Galassi (1999), have stressed the importance of the sub-logic dimension in Hjelmslev's semantic categories, being organized in forms of co-participation and tension. But here, in deleuzian-guattarian interpretation of Hjelmslev, something more seems to be relevant.

In Semiotics, and in particular in greimasian structural Semiotics (see, Greimas 1966, 1985), the "immanent dimension" is opposed to the "manifestation dimension". And precisely on this point Deleuze and Guattari proposal becomes interesting: immanence is seen not only from a methodological point of view (see, Zinna 2008; Caputo 2010) but, also, in its relationship with the concrete dynamics of semiotic systems. For Deleuze and Guattari, the role of expressive substance is a dynamic process that touches the manifestation level, thanks to the potential transformational processes. We could think the immanent dimension as a sort of generalized "horizontal" plane: manifestation that takes on the expression as a transformative potential for languages. According to this hypothesis, we are not dealing neither with a primacy of the expressive dimension, nor with a primacy of content, or in a kind of expressive "autonomy" – a sort of "generative path of expression", as it was partially anticipated by Greimas, and with greimasian' scholars, such as Fontanille (2004, 2015), in re-opening a critical discussion within semiotics itself (see also, on this point, Marsciani 1992). According to Fontanille (2015) it is necessary to think a generative path of expression as a stratification of different "immanence planes" (resuming this concept in a partial mixture from Deleuze, and from Hjelmslev) of more increasing degree of complexity, such as texts, objects, situations, strategies, etc. The Fontanille's definition of immanence and of plane of immanence is:

L'immanence est le principe qui permet de définir le champ des dépendances dont l'analyse sémiotique doit rendre compte. Ce champ étant délimité en ne retenant que des dépendances homogènes, on peut dire alors qu'il forme un plan d'immanence (Fontanille 2015: 263).

Deleuze seems to propose something more: to think, in other words, a "transforming" function of the expressive level. We don't need an expression "in itself" because any component that comes into play inside a potential semiotic system is susceptible to become an expression, faithful to hjelmslevian intuition. The novelty seems to be the way in which a semiotic system becomes "asymmetric", compared to Hjelmslev's position (with its levels of expression and content as "functive designation", "interdependent" and "solidarity", through the layers). Could the semiosic mechanism consist precisely in this breaking of symmetry?

There is always a "potential" inside a semiotic layer, say Deleuze and Guattari (1980: en. tr. 49), a «dimension of the expressible or expression as a condition of a relative invariance». Anything can become an "expression", but this becoming could produce the asymmetry that can trigger the semiosic mechanism. It is well known that in Hjelmslev there cannot be expression without content, or content without expression. However, the interpretation that Deleuze and Guattari carry on, thanks also to Spinoza, of Hjelmslevian semiotics seems to stress a "productive" and, at the same time, generative-expressive dimension. It deals with «une histoire un peu cachée, un peu maudite», of philosophy, Deleuze (1968b: 299) argues. And finally (*ibid.*: 163): «L'expression, en effet, a ce double aspect: d'une part est miroir, modèle et ressemblance, d'autre part germe, arbre et rameau».

2. From Immanence Plane to Intensities

There is another definition of plane of immanence provided by Deleuze and Guattari, that will be given later, in *What is Philosophy?* (Deleuze and Guattari 1992).

The plane is a horizon for concepts and practices. But at the same time it is made of waves, say Deleuze and Guattari, like the water's surface, or a space. It is inhabited and paved with concepts but, in fact is not a concept or an object.

it is essential not to confuse the plane of immanence and the concepts that occupy it. [...] But it only receives a concept if we determine its components [...]. Movements or elements of the plane, therefore, will seem to be only nominal definitions in relation to concepts so long as we disregard the difference in nature between plane and concepts. But in reality, elements of the plane are diagrammatic features, whereas concepts are intensive features (Deleuze and Guattari 1992: en. tr. 39).

In this important passage we perceive the double nature of the plane of immanence: from one side, horizon, environment and territory concerning the invention of concepts and practices, and on the other side, space for the diffusion of intensities.

We know that another concept has been developed by Semiotics, starting from Deleuze's thought and legacy: the concept of intensity, and the introduction in narrative-structural semiotics of categories having to do with the so-called tensive dimension[7]. The concept of intensity provided a real trigger concerning the creation of the idea of "tensive" semiotics.

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[7] See, for instance, Zilberberg (2006) and Fontanille (1998; Fontanille and Zilberberg 1998), but also, in a pioneering way, Fabbri (1985), and with an anticipation in Jakobson; and in general thanks to the opening of research on passions, beginning with Greimas and later on, with Greimas and Fontanille (1991; cf. Fabbri and Pezzini 1987; Marsciani and Pezzini 1997).

We find here a sort of creative "short-circuit" between already existing categories in linguistic-semiotic research, such as that of "intensive" (as opposed to "extense" or "extensive", following Hjelmslev, and from a very long logico-philosophical tradition) and those of tensive and intensity (particularly with Deleuze, but also in linguistics, with Guillaume[8]). Deleuzian-guattarian philosophy has produced in this way a powerful variation in Semiotics. Zilberberg (2006) emphasizes how we can think dynamically about linguistic-semiotic categorization thanks to deleuzian theory. Traditionally, in philosophy, intensity has to do with a qualitative nature and extension with a quantitative nature. Deleuze, instead (here close to hjelmslevian concepts), sees these "two natures" as co-implicated.

Could the study of this tensive dimension in Semiotics create further results, beyond the "schematization of the values of values" (it is the basic form of value systems as "intensive" and "extensive") as proposed by Zilberberg and Fontanille (1998)? We should remember that for Deleuze (1968a: 187) intensity is «qui est en lui-même différence» and «pure différence en soi»: dynamical elements, likely to expand and stabilize (in extent) themselves becoming a system[9]. As Deleuze and Guattari emphasized, we are faced with a deep link between intensity and the concept of structure: a "motion" of the structures, beyond the idea of oppositional relationships. «Partout les couples, les polarités supposent des faisceaux et des réseaux; les oppositions organisées des rayonnements en toutes directions» (Deleuze 1968a: 72). Deleuze, in works such as *Difference and Repetition* and *The Logic of the Sense*, developed the idea of "real" profundities[10] conceived as "surface tensions": waves (surface "differentials") and "events" that cross the material of language, of perception and sense[11]. But it is important to remark that in Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of space and surface become also a notion of territory.

[8] See Fabbri (2014) on Deleuze. For Hjelmslev (1943; 1935: trad. it. 199) "Intensive is the case in which content is concentrated" and "extensive" is the case in which it tends to expand. Cf. Caputo (2010: 90-93), concerning the relationships between categories, especially from Jakobson (marked/unmarked), Hjelmslev is looking for operating modes for semio-linguistic categories: pre-logical transformations (or "sublogical") as basic "dimensions" of topological (directional and spatial) and dynamic (concentration/expansion) nature (see Hjelmslev, 1935; Galofaro 2006; see also Zilberberg 2002).

[9] Zilberberg (2002, and in www.claudezilberberg.net) emphasizes the "musical nature" of this definition: intensity as qualitative variation.

[10] Again, not far from Hjelmslev's reading (see, Caputo 2010), as well as by the same Deleuze and Guattari 1980.

[11] Deleuze connects a Leibnizian idea (the "minute perceptions" and the forms of material "folding") with the modern theory of perception and systems (from *Gestalttheorie*, albeit overcome in a dynamic sense to, especially, Simondon). All this, in general, breaks with a conception of identity that, according to Deleuze, pervades the history of occidental philosophy. In this regard, one of the important influences on *Difference and Repetition* is Althusser, with his "denunciation", "in the philosophy of Hegel, of the omnipotence of identity, namely the simplicity of an internal principle" (Deleuze 1968a: en. tr. 86).

For coming back to this concept of space and territory, according to Fontanille (2015: 223ff.) «[...]territoire n'appartient pas au métalangage de la discipline: Il s'agit donc de savoir si cette notion peut faire l'objet d'une construction sémiotique explicite». If we think to Deleuze and Guattari's vision, territory represents a basic dynamics of the immanence plane: with its capacity of building up frontiers and, at the same time, breaking them, deploying lines of escapes.

3. Texts as Archives

Another challenge, proposed by Deleuze to Semiotics, deals with the definition and the "dimension" of textual phenomena. Inside Semiotics the debate about the nature of textuality has expanded in several research directions. Some scholars maintain the idea of text (even if in its "broader" conception), others think it should be reconsidered in favor of a wider taxonomy of "kinds of experience" (see, concerning this debate, Violi 2007; Fontanille 2004; Basso 2008; Lorusso 2010[12]); or related to "levels of pertinence" and various "formal instances" (Fontanille 2004). In any case, Deleuze, thanks also to his interpretation of Foucault's thought (1986), seems to offer a perspective, which opens up the possibility to avoid those fatiguing oppositions, perhaps too narrow and rigid. As it has been well emphasized (Fabbri 2005), Deleuze sees networks of texts ("corpora") as able to connect cultural-discursive and social-historical formations. Again we find Deleuze's role: as a "mediator" and "translator", in this case of Foucault's ideas (Fabbri 2005). From *L'Archéologie du savoir* and *Les mots et le choses*, to Foucault's last writings, according to Deleuze's interpretation, discursive and textual networks would be traversed by two major production regimes, strictly connected (although equipped with autonomous characters): the "visible" and the "articulable", that can be thought also as the "sayable" or "expressible". These are, for Deleuze, two-dimensions that constantly intertwine throughout the history of textual production: from social practices (with the famous re-reading of the foucaultian prison example[13]), to aesthetic formations, to relational forms of power, or technologies of bodily governance, health care and disease, to arms and weapons (Deleuze uses precisely these kind of examples)[14].

[12] On the other side, socio-semiotics (Landowski 2004; Marrone 2010), ethno-semiotics (Lancioni and Marsciani 2007), seem to preserve, even if in enlarged way, the validity of the idea of the text.

[13] The very famous example "of prison" is reanalyzed in a "hjelmslevian manner", through an expressive level (prison, with its forms and contents, words, codes and laws and related "crimes") and a content level (the prisoner's prison system, with its regime of visibility, which is also articulated through form and substance).

[14] See Deleuze 1986. The concept of diagram in Deleuze is borrowed only in part by

It is important to remember that Deleuze, thanks to his Foucault reading, as stressed again by Fabbri's crucial interpretation (2005), tries to reconstruct a double model. From one side the "visible" is explained through "pictures" (not strictly pictorial and "visual"): complex and integrated figurative organizations that hold together meaning systems, providing not only descriptions, but sketches, or basic, fundamental knowledge schemas; hence the link with the definition of diagram, as production of "pure" functions. Deleuze insists that they can "in-form" a particular cultural universe. It seems here that this "visible" dimension could be similar also to the definition of figurative, as intended by Greimas. In dialogue with Ricoeur, Greimas remarks the importance of the figurative level as a product of "complex and global configurations", equipped with an almost gestaltic productive and organizational force. However how discursive-semiotic formations are chained together (and inside themselves)? Deleuze (following and "translating" again Foucault) calls them "curves": trajectories and complex chainings of discourses able to express and to articulate the visible dimension.

On a more general level, what seems important for Semiotics, in this "Foucault's rework" made by Deleuze, is the idea of text as made up of extended "layerings" of meanings inside societies and cultures. Texts are seen as accumulations: "accumulators" which are connected to each other often in unpredictable and dynamic ways. These deposits[15] can break up, giving rise to new discursive islands and archipelagos.

These movements (local and/or historic, short and/or long-term events) can be investigated with maps and cartographies, observations of semiotic layers and pathways. However, we will always have to take into account some "escape routes": unexpected breakages, produced locally inside these social and discursive-textual formations. Deleuze insists on this point: during this multi-layered textual activity, potentially divergent and alternative paths are always created. The intent (also political) is clear, both for Deleuze, the "reader", and Foucault, the "writer". According to Deleuze (1986) social dimension and cultures can never be completely mapped. Or rather, there are possible maps of cultures and discursive universes (this is one of the slogans coined by Deleuze and Guattari in their definition of

Peirce, and developed as an analysis of the figurative (his work on Francis Bacon and the two books on cinema). Following Foucault, in Deleuze diagrams aren't only demonstrative "patterns", or sites of reasoning processes, as in Peirce, but are real configurations that give another dimension to texts and languages. The diagrammatic seems to be a language "inside" the textual form, a figurative reasoning that connects the various components (images, situations, written texts). The diagram is a generative form (Deleuze 1986: en. tr. 60-61; see also Fabbri 2014). Deleuze highlights also the relationship between diagram and the definition of power in Foucault.

[15] The geological model can already be found in Foucault, but becomes explicit in Deleuze and Guattari 1980.

the famous "rhizome" model, reiterated in *Mille plateaux* 1980). However, in this understanding, there are no guaranties of preferred and default pathways, as Eco (1975; 1984) instead seems to propose in his definition of encyclopedia (coming from his rereading of the deleuzian-guattarian "rhizome" concept)[16]. The rhizomatic model is by definition connective, a-centric, without default inputs or outputs[17]. Deleuze and Guattari (1980) insist on the fact that, in concrete situation, there is not absolut (and idealistic) opposition between "rhizome" model and root/tree model – against a new dualism, and «the rhizome is reducible neither to the One nor to the Multiple» (*ibid.*: 23)[18].

Deleuze stresses, in his re-reading of Foucault, some more relevant points: first, we are faced with historical-cultural immanent formations, made up of (heterogeneous) texts; second, these heterogeneous texts are interconnected through *dispositifs* (apparatuses) internal to the texts themselves (regarding layers and semiotic layering, Deleuze and Guattari refer here again to Hjelmslev); finally, inside these contacts zones, "folds of subjectification" are created. In these folds of subjectification strategic actions become manifest: between power-holders, holders of knowledge and classes, sexes, or let us think to Foucault's examples, such as prisoners, poors – as studied in *Discipline and Punish* or in *The Birth of the Clinic* – fools, conscripted soldiers, salaried workers; as well as, today, the new migrants and refugees; but also, on the other hand, those who are subjected to new forms of power. In these folds, conflicts take place; these strategic-conflictual zones are generally in contact with something which is "external" to the semiospheres' matters[19]. Deleuze emphasizes that this space is neither something of "ineffable" or absolutely irreducible, nor totally "other". This "external", this outside space, seems to be a very crowded place, a site of surplus of meaning and of significance: a site of "deposits" and "withdrawals", of materials and elements in continuous transformation. Deleuze, thanks to Foucault, insists on this point: also when we deal with memory (cultural memory, forms of forgetting, and forms of remembrance), we always find out struggles. Deleuze, in *Proust et les Signes* (1964), as it is

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[16] Cf., for elaboration and commentary on Eco's theory, Paolucci 2010.

[17] There is a description of this model in the first chapter of *Mille Plateaux* (Deleuze and Guattari 1980), that we would like to remember here, even if it is well known, because of its questioning of the "tree" model that would have dominated western philosophy, against this horizontal model: "a plane", like a steppe, a shrub, a garden, to continue the botanic metaphor.

[18] In this sense, the Web or Wikipedia don't resemble the rhizomic model, having the form, even if more complicated, of an encyclopedia.

[19] In this respect Deleuze helps us to re-establish connections between Foucault and the idea of "extra-system" from Lotman's semiosphere model and, at the same time, the hjelmslevian definition of "matter". It is a connection that could require further critical research.

very known, anticipates this point: inside *La Recherche* we discover not only work on "memorial signs", but instead the traces and premonitions these signs (of conflict, or of love) throwing towards the future.

4. Expressive chainings

Let us take a step backwards and resume our analysis of Deleuze's *A quoi Recconnaît-on le Structuralisme* (1972). We can see possible connections with later moments of Deleuze's thought, as well as with some of the philosopher's important premises (but, we insist again, also with Guattari's ideas). This essay specifically refers as a date to 1967. Just ten years earlier, Hjelmslev (1957) had stated that, in next "few decades", the idea of structure, intended as an "an autonomous entity of internal dependencies", would have "taken control" of linguistic thought. Deleuze's "maneuver" was located, on the one hand, inside a research and interests in a specific conception of history of ideas[20]. And, on the other hand, this essay connects to the point where we can find his book on Spinoza and the question of expression, as well as *Différénce et répétition* and *Logique du sens*.

Deleuze here picks up, again, a conceptual "network". We must recall the concept of "imaginary" as opposed to the "real", especially in lacanian theory. In regards to this point, as is well known, Deleuze insists on one more concept: the idea of an intermediate level, the "symbolic" order. That is, utilizing the prevailing concept at the time, the "symbolic" dimension of semiotic and language systems. Obviously, as Deleuze says, structuralism begins with linguistics, but what matters here are some specific elements of this paradigm. In those years the reference points are Lévi-Strauss's study of myths, Lacan and Althusser, but Deleuze puts in his assessment again the idea of a dynamic connection. The "discovery of a 'third realm'", the "symbolic" (a word[21] that later seems to disappear from Deleuze's writings) one, that involves the idea of a "genesis", says Deleuze, of semiotic-linguistic structures. Languages, semiotic, Deleuze and Guattari would say, are "production sites". This conception of structure already contains the idea

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[20] The essay was published in *Histoire de la philosophie* (edited by Chatelet) along with previous essays (the first work, on Hume, 1957, the latter on Kant and, with a significant cross-over, in the mid '60s, on *Proust et les signes)*.

[21] "Symbolic" here stands for "semiotic" at that time. The symbolic sphere, as "semiotic" and linguistic terrain is used also by Lévi-Strauss (discussing Mauss) and by anthropology. Even if it is well known that for Hjelmslev symbols are "mono-level structures", symbols isomorphic to "their interpretation" like chess, logical-mathematicians symbols (see Caputo 2010; Zinna 1987). From here, as it is well known, Greimas and Floch propose to think about other kinds of structures, like the "semi-symbolic" ones. See, for a discussion of the definition of symbol, Eco (1984: 246ff.) which yields yet another useful idea of symbol: as a "condenser" of different contents.

of some links with the other two dimensions (the "real" and the "imagi-
nary"). Or rather, it is able to generate and produce them, just as they are
connected. Here we find again another problematic point for the semiotic
paradigm: Deleuze no longer talks of generativity but of "genesis". Albeit
this genesis occurs through a new type of understanding, in the form of
"auto-production", of a "productive-machine" (Dosse 2007: 273; Dawkins
2005), coming from the structures themselves.

In short, the presence of a semiotic-structural dimension means that
the same tripartite division, at that time in vogue (real, imaginary, symbol-
ic), will come out radically transformed in favor of other deleuzian-guat-
tarian concepts. They deal with an (albeit special) ontology, or better,
ontogeny, precisely because it is both dynamic and stratified. Its different
levels originate from each other through internal splits and folds. Even
in Semiotics, we can find an idea that seems not to be very far from this
one, albeit in a much more specific way (limited to the epistemological
level, within the greimasian generative model). This idea arises from the
conception of "modes of existence" that transform themselves into each
other: the virtual, actual, potential and realized, as Greimas would have
said (cf. Marsciani 1992)[22]. Structural organizations are, from this deleuzian
perspective, no longer seen as "a priori forms" but as something seem-
ingly paradoxical: they create themselves producing new bonds. Deleuze
and Guattari's struggle is to free Semiotics from a kantian conception of
structure. Starting from Deleuze's examples: goods, economic systems, as
well as various forms of bodily expression, sexuality, emotional systems
(Foucault), or myths (Lévi-Strauss), are reformulated as self-producing de-
vices, through new reorganizations and connections. If, today, these ideas
seem perhaps obvious (or containing some dated items), we do not agree
with this evaluation. And we are not trying to recall "the good old days"
of a concept, or of an era (a revolutionary era[23]), but to assess what these
concepts have brought us, today.

In those years Deleuze was working also on *Logique du sens* (1969), in
which he considers the philosophy of the Stoics and elaborates Carroll's
Alice in Wonderland, and his "Snark paradoxes", with a parallel work on

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[22] Marsciani (1992) insists on this point, as a moment of crucial epistemological
innovation inside semiotics, perhaps overlooked: modes of existence are no longer only
just typical of the enunciation level, but are part of the whole model of the generative
process, according to Greimas; conceiving it as phases of the successive production of
meaning. See also Zinna (2008) and Caputo (2010: 83). For a broader definition of the
modes of existence, see, Deleuze and Guattari (1991).

[23] Guattari, we recall (cf., Dosse 2007: 209-211) in addition to his critique of psycho-
analysis and psychiatry, was involved in militant groups active in may '68, and he would
continue to work inside revolutionary networks and movements, up to his participation,
in his last years, taking part to environmentalist movements, anti-war and antimilitarist
discussions and struggles; Deleuze expressed proximity with the French May's uprising.

the definition of meaning derived from logics (particularly with Frege and Russell, *ibid.*: 23). Deleuze's interests concern the mechanisms of common sense reversals. He conducted there "micro-experiments" on the forms of utterances and their propositional content, searching for pre-individual and pre-subjective logic structures. In my opinion, however, they are not at all different moments of Deleuzian theory. The analysis of propositional forms, of logical paradoxes, is immediately brought back to the above theory, further developed in his book on Foucault. In *The Logic of the Sense*, he resumes also Benveniste, and, precisely, the issue of a typology of propositional contents[24]. But Deleuze argues that, even before representing, denoting or describing, propositions are chained together, in processes producing something new: new events, new meanings. We may ask how a "series" of propositions is constructed, but the real question regards, again, the production (or auto-production) of meaning. The question of seriality will be expanded by Deleuze, including poetic, literary and musical forms: from logics and philosophy to aesthetical texts – referring to music research of the period, such as Messiaen and Boulez, that would remain an important part of Deleuze's work – for arriving, during the '80s, to cinema and painting. In particular, the problem lies not as much in the tracking of combinatorial mechanisms through which series (parallel) of assemblages of sounds, phrases, or stories are connected to each other, but to assess what new events result from those assemblages[25]. According to the interpretation proposed in this paper, this question represents a capital point in Deleuze's philosophy in relationship with Semiotics. There is no substantial difference or separation between theoretical research and work on aesthetical texts: it is again a problem of parallel connection and chaining. Although in Deleuze's philosophy different phases can be recognized (for instance, the research on Spinoza's metaphysics, or on Stoics logics and, later, on cinema or paintings, with Bacon), the effective work is

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[24] According to the traditional tripartite division: indication or designation, manifestation of the subject and, finally, assertion or signification.

[25] In the paper on structuralism, Deleuze detects other "parameters" (some of which we have already examined): the seriality, the process of difference and differentiation, the concept of "empty boxes" (*case vide*); as well as the principle of localism, well known and important also for structural semiotics and contemporary linguistics, especially with Hjelmslev (1935: 92-97). Regarding seriality, Deleuze insists on one important point: if seriality regards a "déplacement", a rhythmic temporal unfolding of the structure, the principle of localism deals with a kind of "internal theater", of topological configuration, that could support the languages and the phenomena of the signification: "[...] dans un espace proprement structural, c'est-à-dire topologique. Ce qui est structural, c'est l'espace, mais un espace inétendu, pré-extensif, pur spatium constitué de proche en proche comme ordre de voisinage, où la notion de voisinage a précisément d'abord un sens ordinal et non pas une signification dans l'étendue" (1972: 196); On this, see also Hjelmslev (1935: 198-199). For more details, see Petitot 1985, and, for subsequent developments, again on "localist" and spatial structures (even if, it seems, more distant from Semiotics), see Petitot 2010.

about chainings and forms of translation. Cinema is connected to Peirce's and Bergson's thoughts, as well as theory of perception is linked to Proust analysis of *La Recherche*.

More generally, according to Deleuze, we are looking for "singular points", that is, events produced by the interaction between various assemblages, while being, at the same time, their source, as stated by Deleuze in *Logique du Sens* (and as already indicated in his more systematic piece, *Différence et répétition*). The problem is developed along these lines: we no longer need to find predetermined functions (or "subjects that fill these functions") but processes, events, that deform a given system. The famous figure of the "*case vide*", the empty box, is strictly related with this idea of dynamical mechanism, and it cannot be identified with "the subject" as, on the contrary, stated by other authors. On this point, we cannot agree with Claudio Paolucci's otherwise important reading (2010: 460), where he writes: "The great error of the structuralist and poststructuralist theory (Deleuze, Foucault, Lacan) was to identify the subject with the empty box: on the contrary, the subject is always something like an occupant without a place, occupant that constitutively lacks its place because it doesn't have its own place. The subject is never empty [...]" (my transl.). The idea that the subject is full (in Semiotics it would be better to say stratified and composite) is an essential point also for Deleuze (the subject is traversed by heterogeneous instances). The fact that subjectivity is always, for Deleuze, an occupant "without a place", or better to say, it always misses "the place" because it is always "a little bit further", it is exactly what is repeatedly asserted throughout his work and, more important, in his work on aesthetic production (let us think of his work with Carmelo Bene). Therefore, it is unclear where this "big mistake" is. If we want to allude here to a critique of the definition of "subject of enunciation" in Semiotics (from Benveniste, to Greimas, up to Fontanille) judged too "personological", i.e. related to regulations and default representation of enunciation subjects, this is exactly what Deleuze and Guattari denounce too. The problem, if anything, is to remember the inter-subjective (and therefore social and power) regulations of enunciative structures (already, moreover, very present in Benveniste). In this respect we can remember that the last parameter regarding the structural model is, for Deleuze (1972) "from the subject to the practice". On the contrary, the "*case vide*" is exactly the description of the basic mechanism of the structural operation, says Deleuze. It is the exemplification of an event that, appearing in a semiotic system, causes a variation, produces new meanings. It poses the fundamental problem (for structural theory as well as theories of systems) of innovation and change.

Another famous example is the "refrain" (*retournelle*) model (developed with Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*, 1980). But, even if known, I would like to remember that refrain is either a "small motif", or a "whirlpool": like a

vortex that spins, appearing and reappearing inside elementary structures, i.e., in song structures. This, we think, is the best representation and development of the "empty box" idea. An entity that, circulating inside structures, could be either the focal point, the conjunction of levels, maintaining of continuity (as repetition), or an openness to further transformations (as difference: consider jazz invention, as stressed also by Paolo Fabbri, where a refrain could become a main theme, a "standard", that can be varied later, up to its possible rupture thanks to improvisation).

Finally, "all structures are infrastructures", says Deleuze (1972). What does this mean? He is not looking for an "ultimate cause", nor trying to play roulette with a sort of combinatorial analysis. The issue is to get to the bottom of the idea in which the bonds and the structural components are produced in "the middle" levels: inside, in-between different levels of semiotic systems, which gradually constitute heterogeneous forms of aggregation ("consistency", as Deleuze says).

What does this idea add to structuralism? And in which way is it contemporary, and not to be taken for granted? And, most importantly, can it help current Semiotics? We believe that we could better understand the broader scope of this philosophical-epistemological proposal by linking it, as was said, again to its "surroundings": such as Deleuze on Spinoza and "the problem of expressions", as well as his work with Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* and his book on Foucault (see again, Dosse 2007: 468).

5. Again, signs of the time

A very important part of Deleuze's work, as said, and as it is well known, is dedicated to the forms and practices of aesthetic research (from the analysis of language and work of the painter Bacon, to two books on cinema, to the writings on literature such as the collection *Critique et clinique*). But Deleuze's theory is a continuous and intertwined network between theoretical and specific "sample" studies. In this respect, Fabbri (1997, 2005) recalls Deleuze's interests (accentuated from a certain point on, present in all of his work, intersecting with that of Guattari) in the discussion of the status of "signs". In this regard, it is well known that his two books on cinema (Deleuze 1983, 1985) – not initially well received, especially by French cinema studies scholars (Dosse 2007: 480), and later enthusiastically taken up by filmologists, they were also initially little regarded by semiotic scholars – start from Peirce's semiotics. The latter is interpreted here as a sort of taxonomy of signs, like a chemistry, a kind of "periodic table of elements". However, let us recall that Deleuze, while is working on peircean triads (and debates their developments and combinations), meets again Bergson's philosophy. And the central questions

become here: a) the transformations and interconnections of images and b) the relationship between images and matter. If in *Logique du sens* the issue was the "expressibility of the proposition" (the ulterior sense produced in surplus by the propositions), here, discussing filmic theories of enunciation, this issue returns. Asking what the expressible consists of, in filmic sequences, implies addressing not only the question of the images' meanings, but a wider problem. It addresses the expressive level, as a philosophical concept, which, for Deleuze, has to do with an experiential or existential level.

Deleuze can no longer settle for Peirce's categories of firstness, secondness or thirdness (why not, therefore, a "zeroness"?, adds Deleuze, however, neither provocative nor in mockery). He believes that the work of conceptualization, also in Semiotics, consists in revealing the passages and transformations "between" images and signs. The peircean semiotic categories will no longer be sufficient for Deleuze precisely because they are tied to their inferential status. As well as the semiotics of cinema (in that moment the debate is primarily influenced by Metz) seems, for Deleuze, to limit itself to the recognition of visual utterances. The point, for Deleuze, seems to be another: it is about "to dig into" the material of the film, into the assembling and construction modalities of that material. Of course, even within the history of cinema (as for philosophy), the problem is again finding the conceptual and expressive movements that punctuate this history.

The relationship between images and thought is conceived not as a study of the relationship between "representation" of the world and cinema, but concerning the status of cinema in relation to society (remembering the idea, from *Foucault*, Deleuze 1986, that semiotic "strata are historical formations"). That is, the cultural transformations, the way in which films produce images, then becoming material for a new form of reality.

Again, also in this case, for Deleuze, "to express" is also "to explain": explaining the potential implications of construction processes inside texts (i.e., filmic texts). Deleuze starts, no doubt, from a taxonomy of images, but from this taxonomy he switches to the discussions of possible "laws". From the laws he goes in search of micro-mechanisms that govern a chemistry, or a "microphysics" of meaning, echoing Foucault's concepts.

Deleuze proposes to work on productive micro-mechanisms (similar, in part, to some current semiotic research paths, see Fontanille 1995), on syntax and the invisible processes that occur in the depth, and on the threshold, of textual-cultural systems. But perhaps there is still a difference: Semiotics mainly works "vertically", in terms of stratification, to study the generative levels of meaning (and, in particular, the analysis of these layers, shapes and formed substances). Deleuze (and Guattari) insist, instead, to work on the "infra-strata" diffusions (and "sub-strata", see Deleuze and Guattari 1980,

ch. 3) of these micro-processes: observing the material transformations which may invade semiotic systems, undo and rebuild their layers, and not only when such systems are taken to be stabilized, formed and stratified.

Is this position incompatible with Semiotics, as it works on the forms of meaning systems? Or is it an invitation to expand Semiotics, to "radicalize" it?

In any case, the concept of infrastructure returns. Deleuze (1972: 213) writes:

> Dans chaque ordre de structure, certes, l'objet = x n'est nullement un inconnaissable, un pur indéterminé; il est parfaitement déterminable, y compris dans ses déplacements, et par le mode de déplacement qui le caractérise. Simplement il n'est pas assignable: c'est-à-dire il n'est pas fixable à une place, identifiable en un genre ou une espèce.

In short, the problem is not the "unspeakable", but the dynamics, the un-assignability of the basic components of a structure. If the structure, according to Deleuze, and to structuralist vision, is made up of links, not "atoms", it deals with processes and dynamics, not static relationships. So far, besides this important insistence on dynamic and transformative levels in semiotic systems, and beyond the pushing in favor of a "semiotics of matter", here we find out several elements of proximity and continuity with the structural-semiotic paradigm, in its evolutionary phases. Perhaps a further effort, in this dynamic and morphogenetic perspective, could be required, according to deleuzian vision.

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