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Narrativity & Multimodal Communication in the Age of New Media

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Introduction: Narrativity and multimodal communication in the age of new media

BY: **Nicolae-Sorin Dragan**, Guest Editor

"His cool, white, flower-like hands, even, had a curious charm. They moved, as he spoke, like music, and seemed to have a language of their own."

Oscar Wilde ([1890] 2006: 21)

"When he spoke, his hands shaped his thinking, emphasized nuances, anticipated difficulties, and questions."

Mircea Eliade (1997: 46)

Like many readers, we have experienced narratives in various communication contexts during our lifetime. For example, my grandmother would often take reflective pauses when telling a story, inviting me to go beyond the exigences of reality and step into the meaningful universe of the narrative. We found this oriental way of presenting to others the charm of narrative, in which a narrative does not exhaust its meanings with the literary traces of the text that describes it but seeks its meanings in the construction of other narratives, told on other occasions, in our meetings with an old man of the village that built wells. In this man's shared narrative experiences, we noticed for the first time how two of the universal paradigms of knowledge, in Solomon Marcus's terms (2011), *narrativity* and *multimodality*, can meet coherently and surprisingly. It is also the theme for this special issue of Punctum, which extends a recently published special issue of *Cybernetics & Human Knowing* (2022), where we tried to capture the interrelationships between narrativity, cognition, and communication in various communication situations.

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Regarding narrativity, human beings have developed the *instinct of narrativity* as one of the fundamental solutions to the problem of transmitting thoughts and experiences from one mind to another (Greimas and Courtes [1979] 1982; Fisher 1987; Bruner 1991; Haidt 2012). Our minds resonate when we build and share meanings with the *otherness* in narrative forms (Stephens, Silbert, and Hasson 2010). Thus, we are emotionally and cognitively motivated to engage in cooperative behaviors (Zak 2012). Through narratives, we can restore to otherness both the unpredictability of the real, with the paradoxes and the spectacle of ordinary life and its possibility, the prolongation of the real in possible worlds. Understood as a specific form of semiosis characteristic of human *Umwelt* (Cobley, 2014), narrativity fascinates with its distinct ways of meaning-making. According to Petrilli and Ponzio (2001, 2020), narratives "suspend the order of discourse offering a space for reflection, critical re-thinking, dialogue, encounter, hospitality" (2020: 48). This is because most of the time, a narrative "always say more than they say, and often something else than they seem to say" (Pleșu 2012: 13). Narratives do not provide clear answers; instead they stimulate their search (Pleșu 2012). In this way, they offer a space for mediating meanings, in which people can build their meanings based on their experiences. From this perspective, the narrative is one of the *universal paradigms* of human knowledge and communication (Marcus 2011), which functions as a signifying practice by which people give meaning to complex phenomena and experiences.

As we suggested earlier, the paradigm of *narrativity* connects in the most challenging ways with another fundamental human communication paradigm: multimodality. People express meanings through narratives by choosing between semiotic resources and/or modes available to them in a particular social situation and moment (Jewitt and Henriksen 2016; Kull 2018). Traces of multimodality in narrative experiences can be observed both in *natural narratives*, like those mentioned earlier, and in *artificial narratives*, which have a "'constructed' nature and occur in specific 'storytelling' contexts" (van Dijk 1975: 285). In natural narratives, where the narrator organizes and presents the experiences of the real to the audience, certain aspects of multimodality can be directly observed. We can have direct access both to the literary dimension of the narrative and to the way the narrator uses different semiotic resources in his effort to convey in a coherent, consistent manner the universe of meanings of the narrative. In other words, the narrator's unique multimodal way of narrating is directly accessible to the viewer. This is what Dorian Gray, Oscar Wilde's hero, does when he captures the charm of another character's multimodal behavior, or how Mircea Eliade describes the multimodal style of his illustrious professor, Nae Ionescu, through multimodal meaning-making practices of the *exbodiment* type that explain how "structures of embodied multisensory experience, such as image schemata and force gestalts, may visibly manifest themselves, at least to certain degrees, in the form of dynamic, ephemeral gestural and corporeal signs produced with speech" (Mittelberg 2013: 756).

In terms of artificial narratives, the meaning-making practices of a narrative are multimodally mediated. In today's multimodal society (Baldry 2000; Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; Norris 2004), where new information technologies are expanding rapidly, revealing a dynamic information ecosystem, new opportunities are emerging to explore long-standing issues, such as the interplay between narrativity and multimodality. Whether we are discussing natural or artificial narratives, multimodality can be understood as a performative aspect of narrativity. Things are not limited here, however, and precisely for that reason, the articles included in this special issue also explore other sides of the complementarity of the two paradigms, focusing on the multimodal dimension of narrativity in the context of digital culture.

In "Deleuze's meta-cinematic framing: Multimodal meaning-making in Installation Art," Sotirios Bahtsetzis offers a detailed reflection on the multimodal meaning-making practices specific to cinema, or the *seventh art* as Ricciotto Canudo (1922) called it, starting from Gilles Deleuze's problematic of the *image* "as the formative ground of our thinking." Bahtsetzis extends the Deleuzian understanding of the cinematic device to contemporary Installation Art and curatorial practices in a way that emphasizes the complementarity between narrativity and multimodality in imagining new worlds and, at the same time, allows the viewer's perspective a privileged role in describing and understanding the world.

Explosive cultural processes, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, inevitably generate narratives through which social actors try to make sense of reality. In "Healthcare workers Vs. Coronavirus: A semiotic study of the Hero-Villain narrative articulation of the Covid-19 pandemic," Sebastián Moreno Barreneche examines one of these hegemonic narratives that have been weaved around the COVID-19 pandemic. Taking narrativity as a "key principle in the articulation of social discourses," Barreneche focuses on how the hero-villain narrative structure shaped the discursive construction of the coronavirus as a villain and the healthcare workers as heroes. Moreover, through analyzing a series of multimodal visual artifacts, the author draws our attention to the socio-political consequences of this type of narrative, which contribute to the "discursive construction of a human *Us*" in ths challenging times of the Covid-19 pandemic, and "how these contents serve to construct the idea of solidarity" in meaning-making practices.

Camelia Cmeciu, in "Representing agency and action in the #storiesfromvaccination governmental campaign in Romania. A multimodal approach," captures another aspect of the Covid-19 pandemic, namely that of health communication campaigns launched online by institutional actors. Cmeciu analyzes a range of multimodal narratives used "as a persuasive strategy in health communication campaigns" on the #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign launched by the Romanian Government in April 2021 and draws crucial conclusions about their implications for healthcare professionals. But, of course, how the multimodal cohesion aspect, respectively the multimodal representations of agency and action across multimodal narratives on

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which such institutional communication campaigns are built, have consistent, persuasive effects on audiences remains an open topic for further research.

In "Concept formation and the text in digital culture," Aleksandr Fadeev examines how the young generations acquire the concept of text in contemporary digital culture. His valuable epistemic effort involves incorporating Lev Vygotsky's theory of concept formation as a methodological foundation for researching the process of meaning-making in educational practices.

In the following article, "Contemplating post-digital narrativity: Co-active, multimodal meaning-making on Instagram and its implications on learning," Anastasia Topalidou Laskaridou, Nikolaos Papadopoulos, and Dimitrios Koutsogiannis propose an 'adaptive digital ethnographic' approach to a multimodal teenage narrative on Instagram Stories. Their rigorous analytical approach to their case-study allows the exploration of critical aspects of the multimodal dimension of narrativity specific to the new digital ecosystem. In their perspective, the multimodal narratives of a thirteen-year-old teenage girl on Instagram can be seen as a model for understanding meaning-making practices on digital interaction platforms and the sociocultural trends in constructing meanings in the digital environment. By extension, such digital ethnographic research models also have a learning dimension, which the authors call "post-digital literacies pedagogy," one of whose objectives is the cultivation of a "critical media-discourse awareness."

The last contribution of this special issue, "Spatialization as a perceptual basis for information: how perception becomes a narrative," is authored by Didier Tsala Effa and concerns the spatialization of data as a perceptual basis for information. Upon reading it, I recalled a particular sequence from *The Bit Player*, a film about the life of Claude Shannon, the father of information theory. In this sequence, Shannon explains that he came up with the idea of understanding information as "the resolution of uncertainty" by recalling the simplest binary choice exercise people do when throwing coins into the air. In a similar vein, Didier Tsala Effa's analysis of the ways we represent data spatially clarifies how this activity shapes our perceptual experiences, creating premises to transform them into narratives.

All the articles selected to be part of this special issue of *Punctum* aim to bring together contributions that explore the multimodal nature of narrativity (Page 2010), the particular ways in which the two universal paradigms – narrativity and multimodality – can combine in a joint effort to advance our understanding of the complexity of the new realities of digital culture.

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Deleuze's meta-cinematic framing: multimodal meaning-making in Installation Art

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BY: **Sotirios Bahtsetzis**

ABSTRACT

The article discusses multimodal meaning-making in the context of video and multi-media installation art and related curatorial practices. It draws on the Deleuzian concept of pure duration or 'time-image,' understood as a Foucauldian dispositive (Panagia) and, thus, as a broader heuristic device in discussing the viewer's experience engulfed in installations. It discusses non-discursive aspects of meaning-making while focusing on the viewer/ participant's subjectifying, multi-sensorial, kinaesthetic, performative, and time-based experience of an exhibition. We discuss installation art as a temporal situation, constructed on the difference between represented or narrated time and subjective or reception time (Petersen), following the phenomenological category of the artwork as a 'temporal object' (Ingarden). The paper aims to offer novel interpretive tools for investigating our current shifting sensorium engaged in meaning-making. It also maintains that installation art constitutes not only a compelling cultural strategy for "imagining and imaging the world" (Rodowick) but also the means to understand how modes of perception converge in producing subjectivity.

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Introduction

It has been often attested that the overall objective of Gilles Deleuze's two cinema books *L'image-mouvement. Cinéma 1* (1983) and *L'image-temps. Cinéma 2* (1985) is not to produce another film theory but to rethink the image concept as the

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formative ground of our thinking. Deleuze attacks the immutable and rigid notion of representational thinking understood both as an aesthetic category and as an attribute of the philosophical notion of the subject – "the notion of the mind as a mirror" (Rorty 1979: 12) – since he distrusts all kinds of representations in philosophy, that is, either mental images (dreams, memories, fantasmata) or even visual metaphors (Deleuze 2004: 57). The Deleuzian cinema implies a paradigmatic change not only in how reality is perceived but most significantly, in the meaning-making within any thinkable reality. In this regard, cinema for Deleuze must be somehow linked to the notion of subjectivity, echoing Bernard Stiegler's later thesis of the "cinematic constitution of consciousness" (Stiegler 2011: 15). Since for Deleuze cinema is assigned "a restoration of the laws of the process of thought" (Deleuze 1989: 211), filmic devices relate both to consciousness and subjectivity, compelling the philosopher to maintain that "we had always had cinema without realizing it" (Deleuze 1986: 3).

Deleuze's level of generalization makes his theory transposable to the domain of visual arts. We assume first a conceptual analogy between the aesthetic devices of late modern exhibition-making of engulfing the viewer, exemplified in installation art, and the primary filmic devices (the frame, the shot, and the montage) of filmmaking. Installation art breaks with the traditional separation, cemented in art theory since Lessing's essay *Laokoon oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (1766) and his famous division of the arts into spatial and temporal art forms, striving to combine space and time into a unified concept. One of the essential conditions characteristic of installation art is "its special ability to unfold its material so that it stretches out in time, and hence the temporal structure of the viewer's reception also becomes stretched" (Petersen 2015: 199). As Anne Ring Petersen has demonstrated, installation art has numerous possibilities for the representation of time since it can press it together, expand it, speed it up, put it on standby, or fragment it (190).

Most importantly, Petersen's distinction between "represented time" (the temporal structure inherent in the represented motif of the work of art) and the "time of reception" (the temporality related to the viewer's experience during the decoding of what is represented in the work of art) is a fundamental feature of installation art. However, these are intrinsically intertwined, so a distinction between them makes sense only as a tool of analysis. In this respect, being present inside an installation comes much closer to experiencing a musical piece, which according to Roman Ingarden, is a "temporal object" [*Zeit-objekt*]. He aptly distinguishes between played music, which is the various and individual performances of a musical work, by their nature unrepeatable and always differing, and the notated music, the work that remains 'the same' in all the modifications to which it submits. While the single performance is real and tied to the here-and-now, the work in the form of the musical score is a "purely intentional" object withdrawn from actual time (Ingarden 1989: 106).

Ingarden draws on his teacher Edmund Husserl, who "defines as temporal the object constituted in its duration as flux or flow, and whose flux is coincident with the flux of consciousness of which it is the object" (Stiegler 2009: 5); a statement that describes installation art in the best possible way. As inherently spatial constructs, installations are, thus, becoming pure temporal objects in the moment of viewing since they are directly linked to the experiential temporality of their actual or prospective viewers. An installation can spread its elements out and separate them clearly using spaces, thus, forcing the viewer to perceive it in succession, even when this reading is not dictated in a linear manner. The spectator's engulfment in it and his encounter with the various exhibition spaces considered as a spatiotemporal situation, can best be analyzed using a spectator-oriented methodological approach to describe the film viewing experience. In these terms, we can rethink the temporal filmic devices forming the conceptual backbone of Deleuze's cinematic typology as being fundamentally spatial since they produce a dynamic space that encompasses or even produces the viewer's sensorial embedment in the exhibition's site. The cinematic dispositive, comprising the increasing spatialization of the time-based film art and the temporalization of the viewing experience in installation art, describes not simply a different aesthetic mentality based on the experience of modern cinema but rather the emergence of a spatiotemporal perception-image. Eventually, we will argue that both installation art and the curatorial practice that informs it embody, more than any other media, the meta-cinematic condition of consciousness for which "the world advances to a meta-cinema" (Deleuze 1986: 59), that is, as an equivalent to thinking itself.

The cinematic dispositive

Deleuze's implied meta-cinematic account of the world seems equivalent to Michel Foucault's concept of the "visibilities" [*visibiltés*]. It was Deleuze (1989b: 57) who pointed out that the Foucauldian notion of visibilities constitutes a nodal point for understanding Foucault as a visual historian and not only as the founder of discourse analysis – an observation to be further developed by John Rajchman (1988) and Davide Panagia (2019). According to David Rodowick, Deleuze's radicalism consists in the fact that cinematic "strategies for imagining and imaging the world"are conceived as "assemblages," or "technological" and at the same time "spiritual automata where each era [the era of the movement-image and the era of the time-image] thinks itself by producing its particular image of thought (1997: 5). Foucault's dispositive is for Deleuze not unlike his sense of cinema as an assemblage machine, that is, a site of the complex movement of perceptibility and actions that goes beyond the hegemonic representational regime of perception (and power) (Panagia 2019: 724), as this has been exemplified in Foucault's conceptualization of disciplinary apparatuses

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[*appareils disciplinaires*], notably in Bentham's penitentiary building of the Panopticon, or Charcot's Salpêtrière Hospital. This implies that, unlike an apparatus, the Foucauldian dispositive does not necessarily aim at the disciplinary normalization of behaviors but bears witness to their possible questioning or undoing of the apparatus. Therefore, they allow various constructions of the world and the subject, and thus visibilities to unfold. Deleuze describes the dispositive complex as a "multilinear ensemble" that holds "curves of visibility," "curves of enunciation," and "lines of force" (1992: 159, 160). We will explore this statement in more detail later on.

Deleuze proposes a taxonomy of the dispositive-as-cinema that reflects filmic narration's aesthetic devices, i.e., frame, shot, and montage. He appropriates Henri Bergson's philosophical ideas of *Matter and Memory* (1896) to outline the first articulation of the cinematic dispositive. The latter has three different modalities, which correspond to the three different aspects of the movement-image/shot: the perception-image (films related to the perceptual process), the action-image (films linked to the narrative process), and the affection-image (films associated with the expressive process). Deleuze defends here Henry Bergson as a thinker of the cinematic consciousness precisely because, in his view, Bergson first pointed out the importance of movement and duration to spectatorial activity. Bergson's concept of "real movement," which means concrete duration within time, is associated with "movement-images" or "mobile sections of duration" (Deleuze 1986: 11). According to Deleuze, these have been the basis of the early twentieth-century American popular film (comedy, musical, and western). Movement is not equivalent to "an order of poses or privileged instants" but instead to an informational set of "any-instants-whatsoever" [*instants quelconques*] (Deleuze 1986: 4), meaning images of different kinds and from various points of view. Rodowick explains Deleuze's conception of spatiotemporal linearity, characterizing the regime of the movement-image, by using Buster Keaton's films as an example of silent Hollywood cinema:

> In Keaton's film, every division, no matter how unlikely and nonsensical, is mastered by this figure of rationality, where the identification of movement with action assures the continuous unfolding of adjacent spaces. The consequence of this identification is *the subordination of time to movement*. Time is measured only dynamically, as a process of action and reaction rebounding across contiguous spaces through match-cutting. (Rodowick 1997: 3; author's emphasis)

However, this type of montage accounts for an automatic spectatorial "psychomechanism" with a quasi-sensomotoric and affective impact on the spectator. Drawing on Sergei Eisenstein's and Walter Benjamin's concept of the shock in film, Rodowick

clarifies Deleuze's point as follows: "At the most fundamental level, cinematic movement, whose essence is a montage, produces a shock in thought communicated directly, physiologically and mentally, to the spectator" (Rodowick 1997: 182). Eisenstein's conflictual montage, which Deleuze calls the "dialectical automaton" (182), affects the body with sensations and causes involuntary reflex actions in an almost Pavlovian way. In this regard, it can be described and explained in terms of the suture theory.

Deleuze's cinematic dispositive, seen as the quintessence of cinema, achieves its full impact with the emergence of the "nonorganic or crystalline regime" of the time-image, a concept he introduces in *Cinema 2*. Both the instant (e.g., the still image and the long-exposure photo), the leading device of imagery before the emergence of cinema proper, and the sensorimotor unity of the movement-image, dominant in the pre-war film, are now contrasted with the aesthetic devices of the post-war European modernist and the New American film. This presents a third type of dispositive: the pure duration or the time-image, the cinematic dispositive proper.

This duration is disjointed from diegetic spaces or actions, which have been deployed to direct our attention to the perceptual, the narrative, or the expressive process. Instead, these become autonomous, purely optical and sound (tactile) images, free from the sensory-motor association of the movement-image. This development equals an absolute emancipation of the senses. For Deleuze, as for André Bazin, Italian neo-realism signaled this new beginning, "an impulse to leave the primacy of motion and linear narrative mode behind, in favor of increasing reflection on, or denaturalization of, cinematic representation" (Rebentisch 173). Drawing on Deleuze, Julianne Rebentisch notes:

> Moreover, the relative independence of the individual shot and the associated heightened significance of the interval between the individual images imply an increasing reflection on time, which here no longer appears as merely derivative of movement, as time represented indirectly, but comes to the fore in the dimension of representation itself. (Rebentisch 1997: 173f)

In the last chapter of *Cinema 1*, entitled 'Crisis of action-image,' Deleuze determines the five characteristics of the new emerging time-image to be "the dispersive situation, the deliberately weak links, the voyage form, the consciousness of clichés, [and] the condemnation of the plot" (Deleuze 1986: 210). The influence of new narrative literary modes (stream of consciousness, the Nouveau Roman) on modernist cinema had a significant role in this transformation. Alain Resnais' film *L'Année dernière à Marienbad* (1961), based on a screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet, presents a convenient example. Its storytelling is elliptical (often marked by extremely long takes with minimal camera movement and jump-cuts), following all five characteristics mentioned above. Using

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what Deleuze, drawing on mathematics, calls "irrational" intervals (*interstice*), a crack or fissure within linearity, links between sequential shots do not adhere to an obvious temporal or causal narrative coherence. This type of film is opposed to the era of the movement-image, which is based on a rational ordering system (with the so-called continuity system in montage epitomizing this system) intended to make the story legible and smooth running, giving the appearance of continuous time and space.

Deleuze's somewhat erratic commentaries on Bergson's notions of movement, image, cognition, and time aim to explain his cinematographic concepts (Deleuze 1991: 9). Most notably, cinematic flow is understood in a temporal (and in this respect, Bergsonian) context, and defined as duration. Bergson meets in this context suture film theory, which proposes an inevitable and predefined identification of filmic time with the spectator's time, allowing for percepts and affects to be transferred from one to the other. Successful suturing presupposes a rational ordering system (the continuity system by editing) intended to make the story as legible and smooth running as possible, thus, rendering us unconscious that we are experiencing the passing of time with and through the camera eye. Suture assumes, in this regard, the spectator's unconditional identification with the mechanical camera eye – and, more precisely, with what it shows us from its vantage point. This is evident in the way, for instance, in the 1970s, Jean-Louis Baudry conceptualizes cinema as a "simulation machine"capable of offering the subject "representations mistaken for (actual) perceptions"(Baudry 1992: 705). Duration is understood by Bergson, on the one hand, in psychological terms and on the other as a pure philosophical category. At the same time, visual perception is introduced as an agency of differentiation between different ontological levels, that is, the virtual and the actual. Despite Bergson's critique of cinema in *Creative Evolution* (1907), Deleuze defends Bergson as a thinker of both the virtual and the cinematic consciousness. Specifically, he considers Bergson the first to point out the paradox of movement and duration in spectatorial activity and the autonomization of time in the novel, non-deterministic understanding of the filmic time.

The autonomization of time flourishes during the advanced cinema era, with its distinctive regime of the time-image shattering the linearity of temporal succession and meaning-making. Temporalizing the image as pure duration means that this new cinema "could not transcribe events which had happened, but necessarily devoted itself to reaching the event while happening, sometimes by cutting across an 'actuality,' sometimes by provoking or producing it" (Deleuze 1986: 206). For Deleuze, a direct time-image is a "temporal structure" that "goes beyond the purely empirical succession of time in terms of past-present-future. It involves a co-existence of different durations or duration levels; a single event can belong to several levels. The sheets of past co-exist in a non-chronological order" (Deleuze 1989: xii). In Rodowick's account, "time no longer derives from movement; 'aberrant' or eccentric movement derives

from time. (…) there are images of disorder, instability, and diversity; in short nonlinear relationships" (Rodowick 1997: 5, 16). Or, as Deleuze puts it:

> There is no longer linkage of associated images, but only relinkages of independent images. Instead of one image after the other, there is one image plus another; and each shot is deframed in relation to the framing of the following shot. (Deleuze 1989: 214, original emphasis)

As Rodowick puts it, "deframing … presumes a virtual relation with the Whole that is the regime of the time-image" (Rodowick 1997: 186; Deleuze 1986: 17). To delink and deframe images entails assuming the coexistence of percepts and affects, or even percepts and meaning-making. With the help of the montage, images are deployed in the cinematic dispositive proper not to create the effect of linearity, unity, and identity but actually to disrupt them. The time-image is linked to one of Deleuze's principal concepts in *Bergsonism*, the notion of memory as a virtual coexistence of past and present. For Deleuze, "the past and the present do not denote two successive moments, but two elements that coexist" (Deleuze 1991: 59). This notion of time also has consequences for the constitution of our psychological consciousness: "it is *all* our past, which coexists with each present. … The whole of our past is played, restarts itself, at the same time, on all the levels that it sketches out" (Deleuze 1991: 59, 61; original emphasis).

This is why we come across some puzzling Deleuzian statements such as: "The past is 'contemporaneous' with the present that it *has been*" (Deleuze 1991: 58; original emphasis). However, after reflecting upon this sentence, which describes the modalities of memory and time, we may surmise that it also provides an excellent description of modernist cinema. The cinematic experience is always a kind of a déjà-vu, an already seen, actualized, or embodied in the present and bearing residues of our past, with all of them "coexisting..[and]..repeating each other" (Deleuze 1991: 61). This is an excellent reason to follow Deleuze's assumption that the screen is "the frame of frames" (Deleuze 1986: 14) and cinema advances to a dispositive of the brain (Deleuze 2007: 287-296).

The reference to *Bergsonism* (1991) – Deleuze's 1966 book on Bergson's philosophy – also accounts for understanding one of the crucial characteristics of modernist cinema: the link between cinematic experience and memory. Memory is not necessarily understood literally as recollection, as in the case, for example, of the stylistic devices of the flashback or dream sequences. Memory doesn't necessarily occur through utilizing psychological imagery. In the regime or the time-image, images fluctuate between actual and virtual; they record or concern memory, and they confuse mental and physical time, real and virtual conditions (Rodowick 1997: 79-118). In Deleuze's terminology, this happens in cinema through the deployment of 'crystal-images.' Understanding

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memory as the virtual *coexistence* of past and present, Deleuze views the 'crystal-image' as the *event* of recollection, an event both virtual and actual. The irreducibility of the crystal-image "consists in the indivisible unity of an actual image and 'its' virtual image" (Deleuze 1989: 78).

> What constitutes the crystal-image is the most fundamental operation of time. […] time splits in two dissymmetrical jets, one of which is launched towards the future while the other falls into the past. […] The crystal-image is, then, the point of indiscernibility of the two distinct images, the actual and the virtual, while what we see in the crystal is time itself, a bit of time in the pure state, the very distinction between the two images which keeps on reconstituting itself. (Deleuze 1989: 81, 82)

Mirjam Schaub takes the cinematic image as constitutive of the simultaneity of different aspects of meaning or, better, the *multiplicity of meaning*. The logic of succession, linked to speech, is now replaced by the logic of simultaneity, embodied by the crystal-image. An image understood as a bearer of virtuality is opposed to the system of language (that system of fixed meaning based on the sequential arrangement of words that structures time). Such a transition from the temporality of the sayable (*l' énonçable*), linked to the written or oral linear continuity, to the temporality of the visible (*le visible*), connected to the simultaneity of the image's perception, constitutes the actual philosophical ground of Deleuze's post-representational thinking. Such a significant change of medium from speech to visual comes with an effort to devise conceptual tools – notably in the two books on cinema – that analyze the seemingly erratic, disconnected, and certainly not unidirectional aspects of visual and kinaesthetic perception.

According to Rodowick, Deleuze criticizes Christian Metz's notion of the filmic *énoncé* and his theory of narrative derived from the *grande syntagmatique* "for assuming that meaning is only linguistic meaning, and for reducing the image by subtracting its most visible characteristic: movement" (Rodowick 1997: 6f). Instead, and according to Deleuze,

> [the image-components of cinema comprise a moving] signaletic material that includes all kinds of modulation features, sensory (visual and sound), kinetic, intensive, affective, rhythmic, tonal, among the verbal (oral and written). Eisenstein compared them first to ideograms, then, more profoundly, to the internal monologue as a proto-language or primitive language system. But even with its verbal elements, this is neither a language system nor a language proper. It is a plastic mass, an a-signifying and a-syntaxic material not formed linguistically. (Deleuze 1989: 29)

As Schaub points out, in Deleuze's late philosophy, notably his book on Bacon and the two cinema books, his early problematics of temporality returns, bringing about the replacement of the philosophical term of time by the notion of the image (Schaub 2003: 12). This differentiation should also be linked to the diversified concept of the Deleuzian (and also of the Foucauldian) dispositive, which is of two kinds: a dispositive of visibility and a dispositive of utterance (Deleuze 2007: 344). A crystal-image is a model of time, understood as a system used to visualize and explain abstract and complex relations and conditions. It is also a dispositive of visibility, meaning, a physical and institutional mechanism, and a particular knowledge structure whose power is based solely on visual thinking. Crystal-images are models of thought that are self-aware of their status as devices of perception, action, and affection. For that reason, crystal-images are contextual and medium-reflective. When Deleuze calls them 'mental-images,' he tries to clarify that meaning is produced not only by utterances but also by visual percepts, which can model, control, and determine people's gestures, behaviors, opinions, or discourses. In what follows, we propose that crystal-images are produced not only in modernist cinema but also in installation art, understood as a time-structuring medium.

The dispositive of installation

Exhibitions are spatiotemporal phenomena, simultaneously visual, haptic, and corporeal. According to Paul O'Neil,

> an exhibition is a temporary, architectonic structure that possesses potential planes of interaction for the viewer, which I would describe as: (1) surrounding the viewer who moves through it, (2) interacting only partly with the viewer, and (3) containing the viewer in its space of display. (O'Neil 2012: 92)

O'Neil's notion of the exhibition, indicative of installation art, will be discussed in connection to David Bordwell's notion of the spatial percept (Bordwell 1985: 101) to describe the exhibition goer's multi-sensorial and kinaesthetic experience. Bordwell's method involves analyzing the filmgoer's cognitive processes while perceiving the film's non-textual, aesthetic forms. His term 'spatial percept,' comprising both viewer space and represented space in the film, functions as a fundamental category in his approach.

Drawing on Bordwell, an analogy can be established between film viewing and looking at an installation piece. This analogy suggests that with film, just as with a display of artifacts, there is a differentiation between a positivistic notion of an "empirical space," i.e., the display's modified interior and its evident architectonic anchoring, and

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the spatial percept, i.e., how the viewer experiences this installation (Bordwell 1985: 101). However, applying the concept of spatial percept in the context of an exhibition means differentiating between a spatial percept experienced collectively (viewers will agree about the visual content of the installation) and a subjective and unique percept for each viewer. This distinction reformulates the differentiation mentioned above between represented time (the temporal structure inherent in the represented motif of the artwork) and reception time (the temporality related to the viewer's experience and decoding of the artwork's representations). As Petersen observes, "in installations, as a whole, the represented time is not something that exists separately; it is partly a product of the viewer's reception and dependent on the reception time, which is always a perceptual and subjective time whose course is determined by the constantly changing positions that the viewer must adopt in the space" (2015: 231).

To explain how reception time is structured, we must draw on Deleuze's typology, specifically on the moving *shot*. This will act as a guiding principle in understanding the installation's structure. As we have pointed out, the moving shot constitutes the film's primary aesthetic device for Deleuze: "The shot is like the movement which continuously ensures conversion, circulation. It divides and subdivides duration according to the objects which make up a set; it reunites objects and sets into a single identical duration" (Deleuze 1986: 20). This echoes Bordwell's account of the frame: "The perceptual act is not a kind of snapshot of the whole picture. Viewers search the composition, fixating briefly but repeatedly on certain regions […] areas most likely to provide information about objects' identities and depth relationship" (Bordwell 1985: 102).

The use of the shot as a heuristic device – which, in contrast to the photographic frame, has a temporal nature – seems to allow for a further conceptual analogy between viewing a film and observing a display. The ultimate goal of the installation is to position a moving viewer into an artificial system with an appeal to his subjective perception. When attending an installation, we act as wanderers, traveling from one element to another, from part to whole, and from whole to parts. This visual method entails a particular temporal structure whereby "the experience of succession participates in a dialectic interplay with an experience of simultaneity" (Petersen 2015: 197). Meaning resides in this interplay of succession and simultaneity. The same also holds for film since, in principle, the shot device implies the sum of all possible perceiving options and perceivable views offered to the viewer. In this regard, the spectator's focus on specific areas and objects offered to view correlates to the organizing mobility of the film shot, which, similarly, installs the spectator into an artificial perception system.

To further elaborate on this analogy between film- and installation- viewing, we consider the third filmic device and constitutive pillar of filmmaking: the *montage*. With montage, we don't mean the mechanical act of editing, but the creation of the

successive interchange of images, the filmic sequence that accounts for the final spatial percept. Montage is paramount to film because it employs the stylistic device that creates the actual rhythm of the viewing experience. For some filmmakers and scholars, it constitutes the critical cinematic mechanism. As Bernard Stigler, drawing on the birth moment of the montage, or what has been called the 'Kuleshov effect,' remarks:

> In fact, it is this cinematic effect that ceaselessly produces a particular consciousness, projecting onto its objects everything that has preceded them within the sequence into which they have been inserted and that only they produce. And in fact, this is the very principle of cinema: to connect disparate elements together into a single temporal flux. (Stiegler 2011: 15)

Can we establish a further analogy between film viewing and observing an installation based on the notion of the montage? The arrangement of objects in display in installation pieces often follows the narrative modalities enabled by the filmic device of the montage. Viewing an exhibition means moving from one painting on the wall or an object on a pedestal to the next one linearly. However, installation art entails a broader sensory experience, rather than floating framed points of focus on a neutrally painted wall or displaying isolated objects on a pedestal. An installation offers its viewer maximum freedom in the arrangement of views/percepts since the viewer is expected to be immersed in the sensory and narrative experience surrounding him. In this regard, installation bestows an unprecedented importance on the observer's inclusion in what he observes, always based on an implicit instruction to choose various paths in the piece and form his points of view. The maker of an installation holds the facilitator position of an individually concluded subjective experience since the spatiotemporal percept created is neither an entirely subjective nor an utterly arbitrary construct. Moreover, as Deleuze points out, montage is often pre-described and pre-included in the function of the film shot, as "there is a circulation between [frame, shot, and montage] which enables each to contain or prefigure the others" (Deleuze 1986: 29). This is also true in exhibition experience.

For the exhibition goer, every change in viewpoint generates a new observable situation. This is equivalent to listening to a musical piece whose auditory experience differs with each performance. Although in contrast to, at least, conventional music compositions, the duration of experiencing a display is not pre-described. The display resembles some modernist compositions, whose notation is provided by the composer, but their arrangement is decided by the performer spontaneously during each performance. In both cases, a set degree of aleatory, chance, and indeterminacy plays the principal role. This implies a significant distinction between a notion of space comprising all possibly perceivable vantage points, views, and percepts as conceived by

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the artist or the curator, collected into the total perceptions of a displayed artwork (all optional routes that all viewers can take inside the space), and a specific viewing subject's actually achieved spatiotemporal percept – the realized cinematic effect of the exhibition-goer's movement. Forming the various subjective viewpoints when experiencing installation art establishes an aesthetic device, which accounts for open, generic, non-causal, utterly disjunctional spatiotemporal percepts, lacking a standard quality to compare or ensure an impossible all-inclusive totality. However, installation art's control over the rhythm of passing the time and the arrangement of images/percepts offered to its viewer does not conceal the constant conflict between disinterested criticism and sympathetic involvement but exploits this conflict for the benefit of the second.

Such differentiation is crucial because it establishes the characteristic quality of viewing within the exhibition situation: a constitutive flux. As Nikolaus Hirsch observes, "exhibition making implies the concept of exposing objects and materials, but it also exposes a particular concept of time; or, more precisely, it creates different time zones and asynchronous rhythms between curatorial strategies, artistic practice, and institutional architecture" (2014: 66). However, instead of acknowledging the conflict between time zones as a challenge of contemporary installation, one should see the asynchronicity as the actual gain of the exhibition-goer's experience. "Curating in this context means delineating temporary positions, or, in other words, curating time" (Hirsch 2014: 67). Incidentally, this *curated time* is the spectator's durational experiences while strolling the exhibition, which seems to be orchestrated following an invisible score that overlies the exhibition space, as Hirsch maintains.

The spatiotemporal percept is always novel due to the temporal character of each exhibition-goer's perception modalities, similar to the film or music experience. Or, in the words of Rodowick, drawing equally on Bergson and Deleuze: "with respect to movements, duration is singular, qualitative, and unrepeatable" (1997: 21). This flux is characteristic of the specific montage in films of the time-image regime.

> This montage construction might better be characterized as "differential," since sequences are formed not through linear succession in space and chronological succession in time but through the incommensurability of space and time reasserted in every irrational interval. […] the differential relations: "between" images and sounds are furrowed by *pure virtuality*; the force of time. (Rodowick 1997: 179; author's emphasis)

And this brings Deleuze away from suture theory and closer to Bergson's ideas on cinema. Describing the viewing of a display concerning its reception modalities as a spatiotemporal flux formed by differential sequences of percepts might account for

various curatorial practices related to installation art. Understanding the viewing of a display as the attempt to create a personal space of duration corresponds with Rebentisch's account of installation art, which drawing on Russian-American artist Ilya Kabakov's notion of the installation as 'an abandoned scene' compares it with Gertrud Stein's experience of modern theater concerning the metaphor of the landscape (Rebentisch 156: 146-155; Stein xxix-xxx). The effort to create a subjective feeling of temporal flux is evident in cinematographic installations, which use the aesthetic device of the loop, the presentation format, often dispersed across several monitors and screens or even in relation to other objects in the room.

The Canadian artist Stan Douglas has extensively elaborated the notion of duration as a flux in film viewing and installation art display. His *Journey Into Fear* (2001), a 16mm film installation with a total running time of 157 hours, consists of a computerized loop of 15 minutes-long commonplace dialogues on value and truth. The cyclical and elliptical narrative structure aims to intensify the experience of duration. The set for Douglas' video is a replica of the wood-paneled quarters in a container vessel at sea, as seen in a like-titled 1975 Canadian thriller. It functions as the ironic counterpart of the initial film set, which in this regard and probably against the director's intentions, is understood by Douglas as a prefiguration of an archetypal installation: a disconnected, generic, and emptied space. Both set and characters are treated in Douglas's adaptation as props, moving the spectator's attention away from the narrative fabula and redirecting it to their own subjective perceptual (and, incidentally, affective) constructions. Speech and image together form an involuntary *déjà-vu*, which frames our conscious life: an actual direct image of our cinematic consciousness. Installation art can create a powerful narrative since "it can fictionalize a space in a way that singular objects seldom can," as Brandon Taylor maintains (1995: 151). In addition, it can also create conditions for reflection and even introspection regarding one's identity.

Rebentisch maintains that any installation aspiring to transform the dreamlike black box of classical cinema into a contemporary exhibition space and "to release the conscious activity of the audience from its illusionist, spellbound latency" (2012: 174) needs to deconstruct illusionism. Installation art has, in this regard, much in common with experimental film (or 'art film') discussed by Deleuze. The experimental film often exposes the entire cinematic apparatus by "exhibiting and reflecting on, not only its means of presentation (camera, light, editing, and so on) but also its forms of presentation (dark room, projection on a vertical screen, frontal arrangement of seats)" (Rebentisch 2012: 174). Douglas' *Journey Into Fear* does the same not only in breaking down filmic illusionism into its components and exposing the tricks based on which the narrative of a film is sustained but in demonstrating how the temporality related to the viewer's experience is formed by the temporal structure inherent in the installation piece.

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Journey Into Fear is a commentary on installations as crystalline temporal objects, understood as devices that unsettle received perceptual modalities. This condition accounts for the display's materialist immanence against an illusionist effect. Perhaps, it is also one of the reasons for many people's resentment of this novel artistic medium. Such a display system replaces the transcendental place of the artwork's magical or dream-like self-assured presence with the immanent and somewhat inconsistent quotidian site of the viewer's presence. It points towards the evidence of our internalized cinematographic consciousness, which doesn't reassure identity but questions it. As the trailer of Resnais's film *L'année dernière à Marienbad* announces: "What really happened 'last year'? You, the viewer, must answer these questions. Observe carefully. An object, a gesture, a décor…." A film of flux, like Antonioni's *L' Aventura* (1960), "whose ironic title points to spaces where any decidable action or interpretation has evaporated leaving characters who wait, who witness only the passing of time as duration" (Rodowick 1997: 13), can be compared with the disconnected and emptied spatial percepts of Michael Asher's installations or the highly suggestive Barbara Bloom's installations, to name some of the forerunners of the medium.

It is highly tempting to classify the various approaches to installation art according to the Deleuzian typology of the time-image. However, such an attempt would be a Sisyphean endeavor considering the amplitude and variety of existing practices. Still, one should stress the insights gained concerning the meta-cinematic conditions of displaying art, which means that the time-image modalities account for a subjective utilization of *time passing by*, an appropriation of the filmic apparatus in favor of the beholder, and an autonomization of the artwork's inherent temporality. In Walter Benjamin's famous essay on the artwork, the film is associated with the aura's decline in the twentieth century. However, the aesthetic devices of modernist art film, as described by Deleuze, have succeeded in initiating the temporization of experience and reintroducing, at least to an extent, a novel auratization. This reintroduced form of subjective and individualized *uniqueness* parallels the aesthetic experience of the various curatorial devices associated with installation art.

In this regard, the spatial percepts of installations enabled by the exhibitionary dispositive account for the formation of specific subjectivities. As with all social constructionist theories, it is self-evident that the individual is understood not in an essentialist but a performative manner, i.e., not as an autonomous and sovereign entity but rather as an *effect* of the discourse in which it partakes. Clearly, the workings of the dispositive may fail, be disrupted, or even subverted. All these eventualities account for subject formation in ways other than expected. As Gillian Rose maintains, Foucault's arguments regarding the subjugating nature of the apparatus do not rule out the latter as a research topic. However, researchers associated with Foucauldian analysis have not yet proceeded in this direction (2007: 185). Rose's

statement implies that "the notion that different audiences might react differently to the same image is so rarely acknowledged conceptually, that the methodologies that flow from that conceptualization therefore also neglect the processes of audiencing" (Rose 2007: 191). By allowing for a complexity of personalized, visual attachments and identities to evolve and offering the freedom to identify with them via exhibition-making, models of subjectification are constructed, replicated, and naturalized, often without conscious control. This allows for the open-ended understanding of the exhibitionary dispositive as an identity-maker. In this respect, one must agree with Rebentisch's view that installation restores to film, if not the quality of genuineness or originality, then at least an auratic uniqueness. This does happen, but not for the reasons Rebentisch suggests (175). The auratisation effect should be related solely to the viewer, who becomes an integral part of the installation piece.

We can find an ideal example of an exhibition visitor's time becoming the curatorial practice's actual content in how the curator and collector Ydessa Hendeles organized her exhibition *Partners* at the Haus der Kunst (Munich, 7.11.2003 – 15.2.2004). Hendeles divided the exhibition space into three sections, placing the artworks in a dialogue with one another and other everyday objects. The distinctive feature of the exhibition was that every visitor moved through its three sections in a non-linear manner, having to revisit already-seen areas to access the rest and, thus, entering another passage and another curatorial construction. Mieke Bal described the exhibition as "a meta-exhibition – an exhibition exploring the nature of exhibiting" (2007: 72), while Ernst van Alphen clarified Hendeles's unique spatio-narrative technique quite insightfully:

> All of Hendeles's exhibitions deploy narrative principles in particularly efficacious ways. Those narrative principles are so productive precisely because they are not pre-established – that is, they do not project a coherent meaning (a fixed, conventional plot) from the outside on the combination of selected objects. The narrative of Hendeles's exhibitions manifests itself as a process that takes place during the visit to the exhibition. Through the visitor's walking tour, going from one work to another, the narrative comes about. It is the walking tour that becomes the narrative. (Alphen 166)

This personal narrative is bound to the memory recollections triggered by each viewer's encounter with the exhibited items. In this way, it advances a time-intensive viewing to the durational dispositive of the time stored, condensed, or extended not only in the works but also, and most significantly, in the display arrangements and curatorial choices. The Hendeles example highlights the subjective character of displaying as a constitutive feature of contemporary curatorial practices that aim to facilitate the individual experience of the exhibition-goer. However, we should not see this

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experience as service provision in times of neoliberal governmentality (Foucault 1991) – as a crude and unsophisticated understanding of the notion of experience implies (Serota 1997). Instead, it relates to the emergence of subjects and ideas through the exhibition structure. Exhibitions like the one curated by Hendeles expose the classical cinematic apparatus and uncover the hypnotic, illusionist cinema effects by *internalizing* the apparatus. They *make* the beholder the apparatus. Not an apparatus in the sense that suture theorists understand cinema, but as a Foucauldian dispositive that subjugates viewers while also offering comprehension of themselves. Jean-Luc Godard's insight concerning this is revealing:

> When the spectator looks, the camera is inverted – he has a kind of camera in his head: a projector projecting. And furthermore, when Lumière invented the cinema […] when he invented the [movie] camera, at the same time, the viewer served as the projector; the same apparatus served both of them. (Godard 145)

Godard provides an excellent description of the visual dispositive, the psychological automaton (not the automated *psyché*, as suture theorists might argue) we find at work in both modernist film and contemporary installation practices. This automaton understood both in its materiality and its informational structure (informational as in computer science understood as processed, stored, or transmitted data), may account for the Deleuzian cinematic consciousness. This automaton responds to the properties of each exhibitionary dispositive, which entails architectural settings (display structures, lighting, pedestals, frames, gallery furniture, seating, and overall exhibition design), pedagogical devices (labels, explanatory videos, guided tours, etc.), exhibition rituals (e.g., prohibition on touching objects and images enforced by warders), as well as various visual documents (e.g., plans and exhibition designs, spatial layouts, installation photographs and publicity shots of visitors). Meaning is made possible through specific material practices.

This accounts for a materialist-performative understanding of the dispositive. The emancipating properties of contemporary display practices (deployed deliberately as content-makers in installation art) derive from their potential to function as a dispositive proper, not as a metaphor of time but as a temporal object, which is fully embodied, individualized and spectator specific. It is precisely this property that both crystalline film and contemporary installation share, which enables them to act against what Deleuze calls image *clichés*, meaning both the snapshot, the set phrase, and the stereotyped thought. His critique of *clichés* goes hand in hand with his philosophical program of establishing an emancipated subject:

> They are these floating images, these anonymous clichés, which circulate in the external world, but which also penetrate each one of us and constitute his internal world so that everyone possesses only psychic clichés by which he thinks and feels, is thought and is felt, being himself a cliché among the others in the world which surrounds him.[...] Under this power of the false, all images become clichés, sometimes because their clumsiness is shown, sometimes because their apparent perfection is attacked. (Deleuze 1986: 208-9, 214)

The main objective of Deleuze's 'cinematology' is to establish a novel consciousness of selfhood, notably, a de-personalized, residual, and truly temporal subjectivity (Deleuze 1990: 256). This endeavor poses an aesthetic but also and primarily an ethical problem. Despite suture theorists' Platonic understanding of the cinematic apparatus as a simulation machine that perpetuates Cartesian dichotomies between thinking and the world, Deleuze's meta-cinematic dispositive adopts the notion of a phenomenal and empirical subject that remains structurally incomplete as it is always within the temporal flux.

> The form in which undetermined existence is determined by the I think is the form of time [...] my undetermined existence can only be determined in time, as the existence of a phenomenon, a phenomenal subject, passive or receptive, appearing in time. So the spontaneity of which I am conscious in the I think cannot be understood as the attribute of a substantial and spontaneous being, but only as the condition of a passive ego feeling that its own thought, its own intelligence, by which it says I, takes place in it and on it, not by it. This is the beginning of a long, inexhaustible history: I is an other, the paradox of inner sense. (Deleuze 1995: 86)

The problem, which Deleuze repeatedly addresses throughout his oeuvre, aims to give an account of the diversity of spatio-temporality that characterizes his prospective philosophy of immanence after the modern demise of theo-metaphysics. For time to be thinkable and livable for us, it is not enough that it is pre-given, cohesive, linear, and representable, i.e., *present in person*, reaching us from non-empirical *a priori* concepts outside the material world. Instead, we should reinstate time in the realm of flux or, vice versa, temporize the intelligible subject following the paradigm of the time-image.

Deleuze embraces the cinematic image, notably crystal-images, as his key philosophical concept in understanding identity through inverting the traditional metaphysical relationship between identity and difference. According to Deleuze, the classical image of thought is Eisenstein's dialectical automaton, which Rodowick calls "a

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Hegelian cinema of the sublime" (183f). In such a Hegelian cinema, image, concept, and affect enforce the dialectical sublation of differences "through principles of continuity and resemblance, contrast and association," which ultimately establishes a constant and firm identity. The latter inevitably raises questions of origin and end, limits and border, inside and outside. In contrast, for Deleuze, identities are produced only through differentiation processes; that is, all identities are effects of difference, of multiplicities of meaning. In doing so, "internal difference" receives an ontological privilege over identity (Deleuze 2004: 32).

This relates to film since an important narrative principle in the film is repetition; specifically, repetition with changes or shifts, the principle of one thing as a result of another, suggests a development over time. This issue is taken up again in Deleuze's cinema books through the notion of the 'interval,' i.e., the invisible gap between two subsequent images [*l'entre-deux*]. The interval brings differentiation within contemporaneity, allowing a narrative to unfold by creating a causal relationship between a before and an after. We read time in the intervals between static images since we are compelled to fill the gaps and make meaning out of the succession of fast-moving images we perceive(see Petersen 2015: 230).

It is a concept expressing a purely immanent (i.e., contained within) dimension of time, "time livable of itself" (Marrati 2008: 85). In Deleuze's long-standing preoccupation with the "plane of immanence" and the "image of thought," such a temporality based on pure difference is understood as a "becoming other or virtual." This principle also applies to the notion of the subject, for the meta-cinematic dispositive of contemporary installation embodies the materiality or mediality (what Stiegler calls "tertiary memory") of such a differential and, effectively, virtual notion of subjectivity. The time-image communicates "only time, the impersonal form of time that divides the ego from the I and disjoins all forms of identity, in the subject, or the image, as a force of becoming" (Rodowick 1997: 188). Installation exemplifies the establishment of a late modern decentered subjectivity while going against the modernist conception of an autonomous, centered, and universal subject (Bishop 2005: 130-31; Petersen 2015: 413-14). The subject model reflected in installation art parallels the Foucauldian dispositive's understanding of the self as a performative and intersubjective entity inscribed in a specific knowledge/power network.

From a poststructuralist perspective, identity is constantly recreated as an effect of the situations in which a person is involved. We introduced the notion of the "situative experiential formation" to clarify how installation structures the viewer's experience and self-understanding based on his bodily presence inside a constructed situation (Bahtsetzis 2006). Seen from the perspective of Deleuze's deconstruction of the theory of the cinematic apparatus, installation constitutes a meta-cinematic dispositive that exceeds the boundaries of the apparatus itself, as well as the

epistemological conclusions and conceptual difficulties of the modernist subject that relies on it. Precisely to the degree that we, along with Deleuze, recognize the decisive agent of this development – what Stiegler calls the *cinematographic* (2011: 26) – as the main characteristic of contemporary aesthetics, installation art advances to a paradigmatic non-semantic (meta-iconic, meta-discursive and post-representational) dispositive of ontological inquiries, that is, an emblematic crystalline dispositive for imagining and imaging the world. If the artist's role is to imagine what it would mean to create a radically new image, such an endeavor might also account for a process of imagining a fundamentally new self for the viewer.

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Healthcare workers Vs. Coronavirus: A semiotic study of the Hero-Villain narrative articulation of the Covid-19 pandemic

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BY: **Sebastián Moreno Barreneche**

ABSTRACT

This article examines one of the hegemonic narratives social actors worldwide have used since 2020 to make sense of the Covid-19 pandemic: the one articulated around the hero-villain dichotomy. We can find this standard adversative structure in various narratives such as myths, fairy tales, novels, movies, and the social sphere in general. The pandemic has not escaped its explicative power. Since March 2020, healthcare workers have been widely represented as heroes – and even superheroes – fighting to protect humanity, while the novel coronavirus is typically depicted as an evil creature – a monster – threatening human life. After introducing narrativity as a key principle in articulating social discourses, the article analyses the role of the hero-villain narrative structure in the Covid-19 pandemic focusing on how it shaped the discursive construction of the virus as a villain and the healthcare workers as heroes.

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1. Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic became a global issue in the first months of 2020. A relevant milestone in its development was Wednesday, 11 March 2020, when the World Health Organization classified it as a *pandemic*. The Covid-19 pandemic was (still is?) a phenomenon characterized by its globalism, multidimensionality, and explosive character. Regarding globalism, it was a phenomenon that affected the whole world and required multilateral coordination

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(e.g., between national and local governments) and central governance (by the World Health Organization, the European Union, and other international organizations) to manage effectively.

It was a multidimensional phenomenon since it did not only involve a biological/medical dimension – related to the contagion, preventive measures, healthcare treatments, and deaths – but also other dimensions like the economic, political, environmental, and religious. The biological dimension triggered multiple symbolic, discursive, and cultural phenomena. These phenomena relate to how individuals and societies *made sense* of this unprecedented and disruptive event. Therefore, we can approach a pandemic as a biological, natural, and medical event that causes discursive, cultural, and symbolic phenomena.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic had an explosive character. Given the speed of infection and circulation of the virus, the passage from a state of "normal life" to a "pandemic mode" was extraordinarily rapid and did not allow a smooth transition. In many countries, schools closed from one week to the other, people were not allowed to leave their homes or cities, and telework became a rule. As a result, individuals had to adopt new practices and interactions in their everyday life without much time for transition or adaptation.

Practices and interactions are two key objects of interest for social semiotics, the branch of general semiotics interested in how social reality is constructed as an effect of sense through and in discourse. Over the past four decades, this research field has seen significant theoretical, methodological and empirical developments (Floch 1990; Landowski 1989, 2005, 2014; Fontanille 2008, 2015, 2021; Marrone 2001; Ventura Bordenca 2022; Verón 1988; de Oliveira 2004, 2013; Demuru 2019; Hodge & Kress 1988; van Leeuwen 2005). Even if social semioticians around the world differ in their concepts and basic tenets, they share a common interest in sense-making within the social sphere, in particular through the study of meaning-making as a *process* that is dynamic, open, extended in time and in *vivo*.[1]

Social semioticians took an interest in the Covid-19 pandemic from its early stages.[2] The "new normality" brought along new practices (confinement, washing hands more frequently than before, disinfecting things with alcohol, wearing facemasks, etc.) and interactions (online meetings and lessons, avoiding touching

[1] In spite of this common interest, a unified, general and encompassing social semiotics is still a task to be accomplished. This is the case because the theoretical enterprise it proposes is huge: anything ranging from signs to forms of life and including texts, objects, practices, and strategies (Fontanille 2008), amongst many other objects of study, might be of interest for social semioticians.

[2] Some examples are Sedda (2020), Landowski (2021), Leone (2020; 2021), Migliore (2021), Escudero Chauvel (2020) and Alves (2021), among many others.

the body to greet other people, video calls between family members and friends, etc.), while an explosion took place at the discursive level, i.e., the level related to sense-making of the pandemic in and through discourse. One example of this dimension is the individual and collective actors' attempts to blame particular individuals or social groups for introducing the virus into their countries, like when Donald Trump called it "Chinavirus" during a press conference (Perrigo 2020; Moreno Barreneche 2020a).

This article focuses on the narrative dimension of the Covid-19 pandemic. More precisely, it examines one of the hegemonic narratives many social actors worldwide used during 2020, and 2021 to make sense of this biological phenomenon: the one articulated around the 'hero versus villain' narrative scheme. This standard and transcultural polemic structure can be found in narrative texts ranging from myths to advertisements, including fairy tales, fables, novels, movies and other cultural products with a narrative component. Different theoretical perspectives converge in suggesting that narratives make sense of human experience both in individual and collective terms. Therefore, they are linked to *a cognitive* function. For Claudio Paolucci (2012: 313), "once the continuum of experience is given, something must segment it and give it form." From a semiotic perspective, that 'something' would be narratives.

The Covid-19 pandemic did not escape the explicative power of narrativity. This article focuses on how the narrative articulation hero vs. villain was used to make sense of the pandemic. Specifically, on one side, there were the healthcare workers, discursively constructed as heroes – and even superheroes – fighting in the front line to protect humanity (Moreno Barreneche 2021). On the other side, was the novel coronavirus, discursively constructed as an evil creature or monster threatening human life (Moreno Barreneche 2020b). As argued below, this narrative confrontation triggered an axiologization – positive in the case of the healthcare workers, negative in the case of the virus – that occurred almost intuitively around the globe thanks to humanity's shared encyclopedic knowledge and, in particular, to its familiarity with the 'hero versus villain' narrative scheme.

The following section introduces the principle of narrativity and discusses the role of narratives in articulating social discourses used to make sense of experience and everyday life. Subsequently, the attention shifts to studying the 'hero versus villain' narrative scheme in the Covid-19 pandemic (section 3) and the resultant discursive construction of the virus and the healthcare workers (section 4).

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2. Semiotics and the principle of narrativity

Based on Ferdinand de Saussure's relational approach to meaning and value, Algirdas Greimas believed that "the production of meaning is the production of difference, the production of oppositions" (Greimas & Ricoeur 1989: 559). This relational premise guided Greimas' work and the Paris School semioticians, in general. According to Greimas' semiotic theory, the analysis of specific texts should be organized in different levels and always pay attention to the sets of oppositions that make meaning possible.

For Greimas, semiotic analysis begins at the narrative level, a deep (as opposed to the surface) and abstract level that becomes discourse (empirically perceivable through the senses, with a specific plot, characters, a time-space location, etc.) in the act of enunciation. As Greimas claims, "the semio-narrative level must be distinguished from what I call the discursive level since individuals are the ones who fabricate discourse. They do so by using narrative structures that already exist, that actually coexist with individuals" (Greimas & Ricoeur 1989: 555). The production of specific stories with specific characters and plots is grounded in existing narrative structures that individuals use as matrixes or molds to construct stories. The semiotician's task, therefore, is to render that narrative structure visible through the analysis of specific texts.

Scholars working in various disciplines and embracing different theoretical perspectives have shown great interest in narratives to explain how individuals make sense of their lives (Bruner 1991; 2003; Ricoeur 1983; 1991; Somers 1994; Salmon 2008; Campbell 1992). In particular, semioticians have privileged the role of narrativity in sense- and meaning-making (Paolucci 2012; Fabbri 1998; Lorusso, Paolucci & Violi 2014; Pessoa de Barros 2017). For Greimas and his followers, the concepts of *narrativity* and *narration* refer to different things. They take *narrativity* as the principle allowing human beings to make sense of experience in narrative terms and *narratives* as cultural devices grounded in a plot. However, in the semiotic perspective, every discourse is narrative since the discursive and the narrative are different but coexisting levels. While the narrative structure is essentially abstract and empty, located at a deeper level of signification, all the diverse specific narratives are discursive products shaped by this abstract and empty narrative articulation.

The principle of narrativity will provide the general framework for studying the narrative configuration of the Covid-19 pandemic following the adversarial logic of a hero versus a villain. Greimas saw in narrativity the overarching organizing *principle* of discourse (Greimas 1970, 1986; Greimas & Courtés 1979; Greimas & Ricoeur 1989). Maria Pia Pozzato (2007: 70) states it is "the abstract organizational principle of sense placed at the level of the semio-narrative structures of Greimas'

generative path." Greimas had a *universal* conception of narrativity. As he argued in a well-known exchange with Paul Ricoeur, "when we speak about semio-narrative structures, we are dealing with kinds of universals of language, or rather with narrative universals. If we were not afraid of metaphysics, we could say that these are properties of the human mind" (Greimas & Ricoeur 1989: 555). Therefore, as Gianfranco Marrone (2007: 7) argues, the concept of narrativity functions as

> an interpretative hypothesis of the deepest cultural and ideological systems, assumed to be almost universal. Hence the idea that narrative structures contribute to the underlying semantic articulation of texts and discourses, both explicitly narrative and non-narrative, but also of concrete social practices and lived experiences.

In this sense, as the Italian semiotician elaborates,

> in the variegated field of human sciences, it is therefore evident that narration is by no means a practice and a set of contents that can be circumscribed within the literary, imaginative, and fictional sphere only; on the contrary, narration should be considered a supposedly universal phenomenon endowed with its own logics that produce and, at the same time, articulate human and social meaning, giving a form, and therefore consistency and value, to collective and individual experience, which is more or less codified and more or less institutional (Marrone 2007: 8).

Marrone (2007: 8) proposes that narrative models function as the "source and purpose of individual and collective action, and thus as a general form of experience and semantic engine of every micro- and macro-social transformation." This semiotic account links the concept of narrativity closely to those of experience and everyday life since it makes narration "the primary form of human and social experience, as a profound model of attributing meaning to the world of men and things" (Marrone 2007: 10).

For this reason, narrativity has become relevant for semioticians interested in cognitive science. For Claudio Paolucci (2012: 302), narrativity is a "deep form" that we can find in any discourse and, therefore, strongly linked to cognition since "stories provide a set of tools that can assist human cognition in organizing experience and knowledge." This is the case because, as Paolucci (2012: 302) claims, "narrativity operates as a mediating factor capable of managing our encyclopedic knowledge by adapting it to the situation." This idea is especially relevant to our case study. For example, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the 'hero versus villain'

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narrative structure fulfilled a specific social function related to mediating how individuals and societies made sense of an unknown, unprecedented, and exceptional situation through what they already know (Eco 1997; Dagatti 2021).

One of our main theses in this study is that the hero-villain narrative articulation served the purpose of *making sense* of the biological event in a story form that opposes characters that confront each other in the quest to achieve specific narrative programs. That story – one of the human heroes that stand for and protect humanity fighting against the biological 'monster' – is a concrete narrative shaped by the principle of narrativity and results from using an empty narrative structure – 'hero versus villain' – as the matrix for the discursive creation of the specific story. Moreover, this was (still is?) a story that societies tended to assume would have a happy ending, as usually happens in hero-villain narratives.[3]

Paolucci (2012: 303) argues that "if for the cognitive tradition, narrativity always represents a form of thought that has the role of structuring cognition, for the semiotic tradition narrativity is the form of meaning that structures thought." For semioticians, the principle of narrativity is relevant because it structures thought: "if thought turns out to be the amorphous mass not yet articulated or segmented by semiotic structures, the syntagmatic form of this articulation is of a narrative nature for semiotics. This means that narrativity behaves as the semiotic form capable of giving meaning to thought" (Paolucci 2012: 304). That is why, from a semiotic perspective, the idea that "narrative is a basic way of shaping experience – intra-psychic and inter-personal, micro- and macro-social, phenomenologically lived and culturally filtered" (Marrone 2007: 10) functions as a disciplinary tenet.

Three more aspects are worth mentioning before analyzing the hero-villain narrative structure during the Covid-19 pandemic. The first is that narratives exist as *virtual* entities, actualized in different narratives through specific enunciation acts (i.e., acts of textual production). For example, the narrative scheme 'hero saves damsel in distress' can take different discursive forms, i.e., characters, spatial and temporal settings, plots, etc. The various Disney movies that use this narrative scheme for their plot provide ample illustration of this. As Greimas (1989: 557) argues,

> narrative structures do not exist per se but are a mere moment in the generation of signification. When the subject of enunciation says something, he utters a durative discourse and proceeds by means of figures that are linked up. It is the figures that bear the traces of narrative universals.

[3] The slogan "*andrà tutto bene*" ["everything will be all right"], which had a broad circulation in Italy during the hardest moment of the pandemic, shows this dynamic in a clear manner. Cf. Salerno & Lozano (2020).

The second aspect relates to the nature of the concrete discursive configurations that enable researchers to gain access to the virtual narrative scheme. Here comes into play the methodological emphasis of social semiotics: anything can be used as a semiotic resource to produce sense and meaning, from words to gestures, including images, music and the tone of voice. Therefore, different modalities (verbal, visual, gestural, musical, etc.) become relevant in studying sense- and meaning-making. Since cultural products are made of different substances or modes, *multimodality* and *syncretism* are crucial to understanding meaning-making as a process involving different substances (Kress 2010; Machin 2007). Here, the idea of *text* understood broadly as anything that correlates a dimension of the expression with one of the content is crucial. Following Paolucci (2012: 304),

> It is impossible to account for cognition independently of the semantic and cultural structures that articulate it (since thought proposes itself as a purely amorphous mass before the appearance of the latter); therefore, if we want to study these structures, we must operate on the basis of empirical manifestations (texts), so that we can find there constant forms of structuring of meaning.

Social semiotics is, therefore, an empirical science practicing a type of textual analysis, i.e., one that works with concrete corpora and studies how specific configurations on the expression level evidence units of meaning on the content level. For example, when examining the narrative dimension of sociocultural phenomena, analyzing specific texts (literary, visual, audiovisual, musical, etc.) enables researchers to understand how these are meaningful and how signification occurs.

To conclude, a third relevant aspect to consider when studying the role of narrativity and narratives in sense-making is related to the circulation spaces of the texts shaped by a specific narrative scheme. In our era, digital social media are central to everyday life. These platforms have become spaces for the emergence, circulation, and consumption of discourses and texts, sense, and meaning. Since these new media usually coexist closely with traditional mass media, some scholars have proposed to define this situation as *hypermediatization*. It is in this context that the Covid-19 pandemic occurred and the narrative configuration analyzed in the next section emerged around the globe to make sense of the pandemic.

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3. The 'hero versus villain' narrative articulation of the Covid-19 pandemic

We must analyze specific texts to gain access to the underlying narrative structures. Our study begins with analyzing a mural painting from the coastal town of Supetar, on the island of Brač, Croatia. Figure 1 shows a mural on the wall of a small construction located on one of the town's main roads.

Figure 1. Mural painting on the wall of a testing center in Supetar, the island of Brač, Croatia. Source: photograph taken by the author, August 2022.

The image is multimodal – or syncretic, in Greimassian terms – since it includes words and images. The words TEST and COVID19, two nodal points in the pandemic's discursive dimension, are written in two different colors: black and red. A possible interpretation of these words is that the small building with yellow walls was used to take samples for PCR tests. In the painting, the words do not stand alone, although their presence would have been enough to indicate the site of a public COVID-19 testing centre. Besides the referential function of language revolving around the message "this building is a Covid-19 test center," the painting also includes semiotic resources that convey a different, non-referential message.

The author of the mural painted two other figures on the wall. These are not easy to describe since they do not resemble anything from the natural world in an obvious – or hyper-realistic – manner. On the upper right side, we see five blue bubble-like shapes. One is substantially bigger than the rest and has features we could recognize as a *face* (closed eyes, an open mouth, sharp teeth) and a *gesture*. Based on the reader's cultural encyclopedia, it could be interpreted as a fictional character, such as a Pokémon. On the mural's left side, we see a black figure with anthropomorphic features such as a head, arms, and legs wearing a light blue facemask. However, it does not have a face or any other trait that might give it neither individuality nor human nature. These two characters are presented in a specific relationship that can be interpreted as a situation: the black, anthropomorphic character is punching, has punched, or is about to punch the blue bubble-like shape with a face, who is expressing an emotion that could be read as pain, fear or surprise, among others.

At this point, the reader might find this detailed description unnecessary. Anyone living in 2023 understands that this painting relates to the Covid-19 pandemic; that the blue bubble-like shape is the coronavirus and that the black character wearing a chirurgical mask to protect himself from the virus stands for humanity. Moreover, we could easily recognize the image as a specific occurrence of a broader narrative scheme that, since March 2020, has been used worldwide, i.e., that which represents the coronavirus as an enemy to be defeated. This narrative scheme justifies the red cape that the black character wears. The representation makes of that character *a (super)hero* thanks to the use of the cape; a semiotic resource culturally codified as a distinctive trait of fictional super heroic characters like Superman, Batman and others.[4] Therefore, the image evidences an axiologization – or valorization – of the two characters: while the anthropomorphic character is axiologised positively, that is, in *euphoric* terms, its enemy is axiologised negatively, that is, in *dysphoric* terms. This axiologization is grounded in the narrative structure that determines that one of the plot characters must be good/virtuous and the other evil/malicious. The result is a value-loaded representation.

The interesting aspect of Figure 1 is that only a few of the characters' traits are necessary for the underlying narrative structure to be recognized in cognitive terms. For example, the blue bubble-like shape could have been green, the black character did not need to wear a cape, and the situation depicted did not have to be a punch in the face. In semiotic terms, the specific figurative configuration of Figure 1 expresses a virtual narrative structure that was brought to life in this particular case as we see it, but that could have been different, like in Figure 2.

[4] This does not mean that every superhero must wear a cape to be such a thing. In this sense, the cape is not a necessary condition for a character to be a superhero, but it functions as an index of the superhero identity, just as smoke functions as an index of fire: if you see someone wearing a cape, then he/she is probably a superhero, just as smoke indicates that a fire is on nearby.

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Figure 2. Mural in Kazakhstan. Source: Cohen (2020).

The mural depicted in Figure 2, from Kazakhstan, also includes three 'bubbles' that stand for the coronavirus but these do not present any traits that might be read off being a living (human, animal) creature and/or having a personality and, with it, intentions and emotions. The virus representation in this mural reflects the three-dimensional model created by the United States Centre for Disease Control in 2020 to represent the novel coronavirus visually. There is also an anonymous figure – in this case recognizable as a human thanks to the more realistic representation of the body – that is fully covered – including the face – by a white suit replicating those that healthcare workers used to treat patients infected with Covid-19.

However, the white suit has in the chest the yellow symbol of Kazakhstan's flag: this inclusion functions as a cultural reference to the universe of superheroes since its position resembles that of the emblems that superheroes like Superman, Batman, Captain America, and Spiderman wear on their chests. The mural also conveys a relationship between these two characters, generating a situation: confrontation. This adversarial narrative structure is figurativised in discourse through the pose of the healthcare worker, who is ready to hit and whose closed fist is surrounded by a white and yellow shape that can be read as a semiotic strategy to set a focus of the action. Unlike the mural in

Figure 1, this one includes more characters besides the attacking healthcare worker and the coronavirus. A non-aggressive healthcare worker consoles two patients, and all wear chirurgical facemasks, like the anthropomorphic character in Figure 1.

While in Figure 1, we saw the virus had already hit, and in Figure 2, the virus is about to be hit, Figure 3 presents the same narrative scheme in the form of a healthcare worker in the moment of hitting the virus. As opposed to the previous ones, this mural does not include traits that axiologize the human character – like capes and other symbols – or the virus – like malicious gestures – in any particular way. The interpretation of the situation as advantageous for the hero (following the logic of the situation, 'hero defeats villain') depends on culture and is not readable as such in the image. Here, the virus could be the hero and the healthcare worker, the villain defeating it. However, the virus shape – a three-dimensional bubble with spikes – and the human's facemask are the same as in the previous images. Moreover, in the three images, the healthcare worker is placed on the left side and the virus on the right. We can interpret this topological decision as a resource guiding the movement of the action. It also makes the opposition between the two characters visible, as it is customary in sports, video games, or other social practices that imply confrontation.

Figure 3. A mural in Vila Nova da Gaia, Portugal. Source: Buğra Kanat (2021).

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Figure 4 presents a mural in Jakarta, Indonesia, which is also based on the conflictive narrative structure that opposes a man wearing gloves, a facemask and protecting himself with a shield (similar to the one used by Captain America) to the virus, represented as small red balls with spikes that move swiftly towards the man and hit the shield. The man is wearing the Indonesian flag on his shirt, and the shield also has its colors. Once again, the conflictive narrative scheme is in action, and the two characters involved are a human and the virus; however, the situation is inversed for the human character in comparison to the three previous images, since instead of attacking, he is now *defending* himself. Although not clearly visible, the man protects a woman embracing a girl, and both wear facemasks.

In concluding the analysis of pictures that evidence the use of the hero versus villain narrative scheme (to which we can add many other non-visual texts), it is worth examining a child's drawing (Figure 5). The drawing evidences the cognitive relevance of the hero-villain narrative scheme to make sense of the coronavirus and the Covid-19 pandemic: in the picture, two characters – Sara and the Corona Monster – are caught in the middle of a fight. The fight is represented through an edgy orange shape with the word BAM inside. This semiotic resource is taken from the culturally coded repertoire of superheroes comic books. Moreover, Sara is wearing red boxing gloves, while the monster presents traits that demonize it, such as frowning, sharp teeth, and holding its arms up in a threatening manner.

Figure 4. Mural in Jakarta, Indonesia. Source: Marcus (2021).

Figure 5. Drawing shared by Sara Rollof. Source: House of European History (2020).

As shown in the description of the figures presented so far, the conflictive narrative scheme that opposes the virus to humanity is a meaning-making structure that can have multiple manifestations regarding the characters it shows and the established relationship between them. As we have seen, the standard figurativization of the narrative scheme is that of a *fight*, including violence and physical hits. However, other products use the narrative scheme without figurativising it as a fight. Instead, they use *games* such as hand-wrestling or tug of war. While the semio-narrative structure at the deep level remains the same – a conflict between a good/virtuous and an evil character – the forms it might take are different: on the one hand, there can be an *antagonistic* discursivisation, when the opponent is considered an *enemy* that we must eradicate; on the other hand, there can be an *agonistic* discursivisation, when the Other is seen as a *legitimate opponent* that must be defeated but not necessarily destroyed, like in a game. However, some modes of bringing that narrative scheme to life might be more frequently used than others, like in the figures analyzed so far, where the discursivisation is antagonistic and takes the form of a fight or war (Cassandro 2020; Testa 2020; Dagatti 2021).

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Figure 6. Street art depicting the coronavirus in Gland, Switzerland. Source: Marcus (2021).

4. The characters shaped by the 'hero versus villain' narrative structure

As discussed in a previous section, the narrative configuration shapes the semantic value of the units involved, i.e., it impacts its characters' specific features and traits. We have seen above that the virus has been normally axiologised in dysphoric terms, while healthcare workers are axiologised in euphoric terms. To figurativise these values, different semiotic resources and discursive strategies are used. For the virus, a standard strategy of constructing an enemy (Eco 2012) is evidenced in Figures 6, 7 and 8.[5]

According to Umberto Eco (2012), throughout history, the standard representation of the enemy has followed specific semiotic mechanisms. More precisely,

> the enemy must be ugly because beauty is identified with good (*kalokagathia*), and one of the fundamental characteristics of beauty has always been what the Middle Ages called *integritas* (in other words, having all that is required to be an average representative of a species; by this standard, those humans missing a limb or an eye or having lower-than-average stature or "inhuman" color were considered ugly). (Eco 2012: 5)

[5] For a more in-depth semiotic study of the discursive construction of the coronavirus as a monster, see Moreno Barreneche (2020b).

Figure 7. Street art depicting the coronavirus in Gaza. Source: Marcus (2021).

Figure 8. Coronavirus-themed piñata. Source: Jasso (2020).

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In cultural terms, we can express ugliness through aesthetic and *ethical* semantic values. Visually representing the coronavirus draws upon a limited set of recognition traits, i.e., a circular shape with spikes, often crowned to create an isotopy for the idea of a *corona*virus. However, to represent the virus' ethical traits, i.e., its alleged intentionality of destroying humanity, other semiotic resources are employed to express a dysphoric axiologization. In almost every visual representation of the virus as an entity with intentionality and emotions (as in figures 1, 6, 5, 7, and 8), it is depicted with gestural traits and attitudes that convey the idea of danger or threat, like frowning, an open mouth with sharp teeth and a malicious smile, among others. In the encyclopedic knowledge of the model reader, all these traits evoke movie and cartoon villains for that is how the virus was represented since March 2020. As argued above, these figurative traits are shaped by the underlying narrative structure, which requires two units to work: a good and virtuous character (the hero) and an evil one (the villain).

The hero-villain narrative structure also shapes the representations of the hero, in this case the collective actor of the healthcare workers.[6] The coronavirus was a new entity, invisible to the human eye, that entered our cognitive horizon through the pandemic. In contrast, the collective actor of the healthcare workers preexisted as part of the *continuum* of professional activities. However, the speed of the contagion disrupted their working routines, methods and everyday life – they were forced to adapt quickly to save the lives of thousands of patients infected with the new Covid-19 disease. In this context, the social value and meaning associated with this collective actor changed radically. A different, more aggressive, violent, heroic – and even super-heroic – type of agency was ascribed to it.

We can find different modes of representing this collective social actor in texts worldwide. To begin with, there were *collective* (Figure 9) and *individual* (Figure 10) representations.

Drawing on Jean-Marie Floch's (1986) distinction between a *referential* and *mythical* relationship between discourse and what it represents, one could argue that these two murals are referential since they depict healthcare workers *as they are*, i.e., without any added meaning. This is the case even if the individuals shown in the images do not exist and are mere inventions of the artists. However, the fact that these images are painted on public walls adds a second layer of sense that transcends the *referential* dimension, which is *mythical*. These images say something about the individuals depicted just by the fact of being the object of a mural in the public space. This is the case even if those individuals do not correspond to real individuals.

[6] For a more in-depth semiotic study of the discursive construction of the healthcare workers as heroes, see Moreno Barreneche (2021).

Figure 9. A mural depicting healthcare workers in Porto, Portugal. Source: Pacheco Miranda & Pinto da Costa (2020).

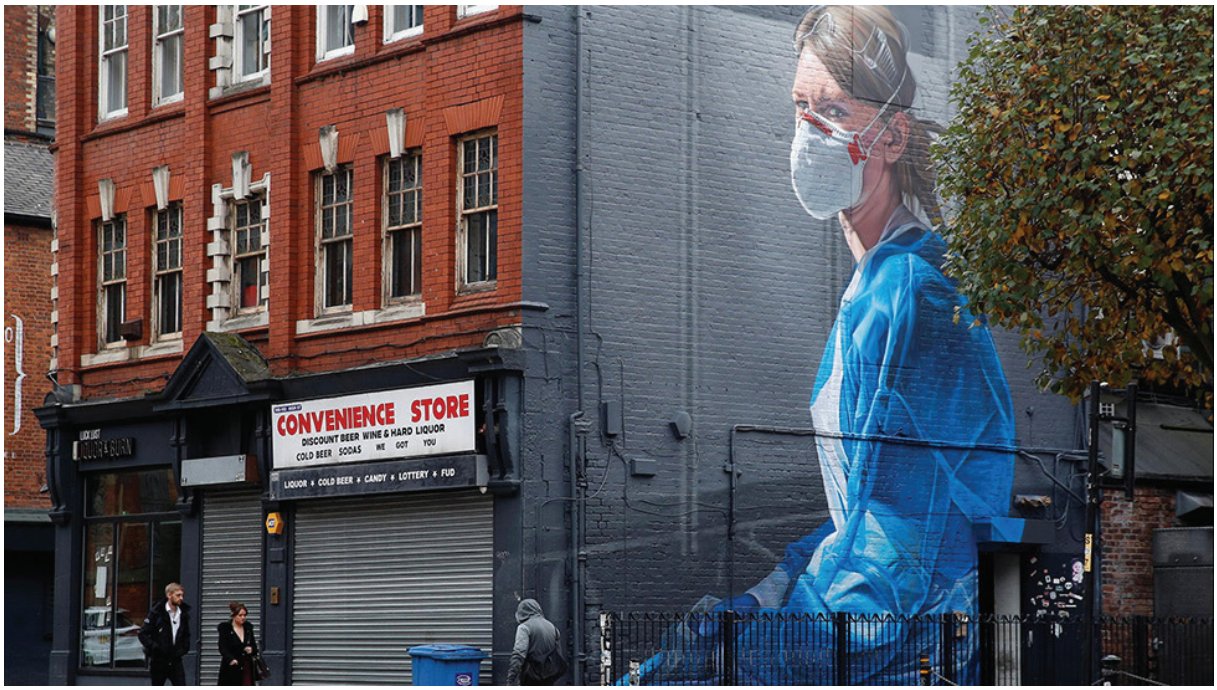

Figure 10. A mural depicting a single healthcare worker. Source: Marcus (2021).

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Figure 11. Street art depicting a healthcare worker in Denver. Source: Suri (2020).

The *strategy of mythification* is visible in other cultural products which depict the healthcare workers individually or collectively through semiotic resources that eliminate any possible interpretation of the text as merely referential. Figure 11 shows a single healthcare worker, recognizable by the attire, the facemask, and the stethoscope hanging from the neck. Next to the signs of professional identity, however, there are semiotic resources that have a mythical character and add a second layer of meaning: wings (the cultural reference seems to be the guardian angel) and, like Sara in Figure 5, boxing gloves. Figures 12 and 13 also depict single members of this collective actor (the former also uses the attire and stethoscope; the latter only the attire), but they add a second layer of sense by using two culturally codified symbols: Wonder Woman's crown and Superman's emblem. Figure 14 makes the same association by juxtaposing an image of healthcare workers and one of the superheroes (Flash Girl, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow). Figure 15 also exploits the superhero imaginary by using *an emblematic practice*: opening the shirt wide to reveal one's true superhero identity, otherwise hidden underneath an ordinary appearance.

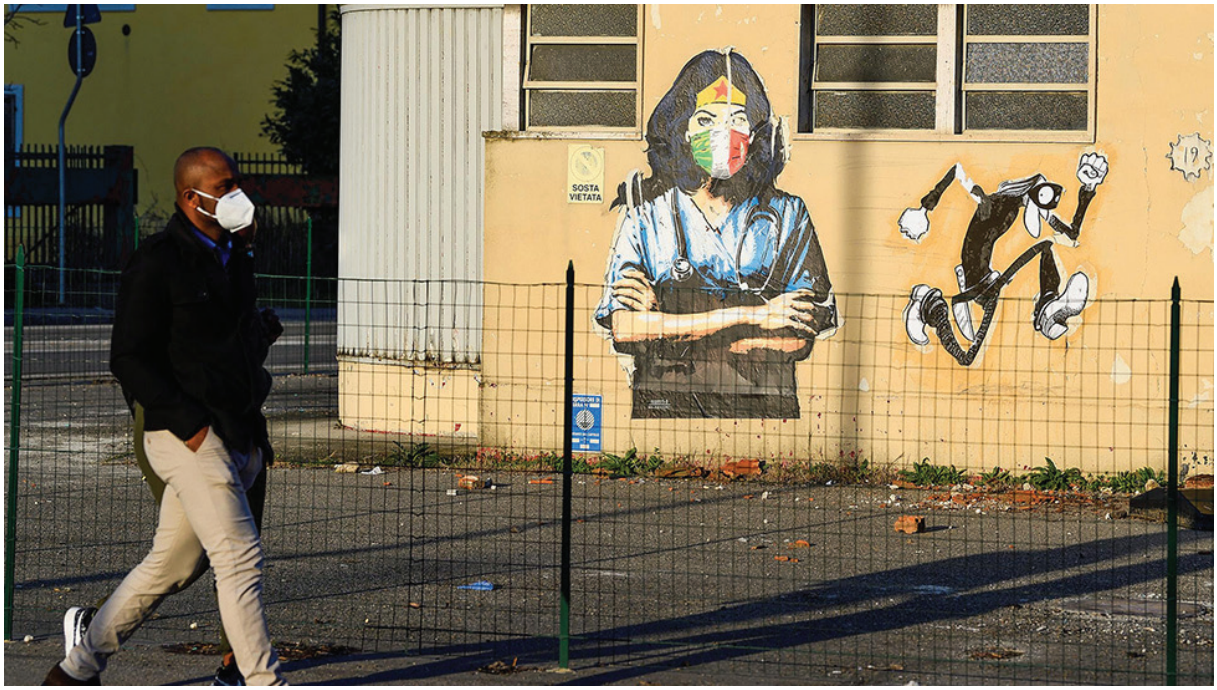

Figure 12. Painting of a female healthcare worker in Codogno, Italy. Source: Marcus (2021).

Figure 13. "Super Nurse" mural in Amsterdam. Source: Mitman (2020).

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As all these images evidence, there seems to be an overarching narrative, found at Greimas' level of the semio-narrative structures, that made the healthcare workers the story's heroes by employing culturally coded semiotic resources related to the encyclopedic domain of the superheroes. Before the pandemic, this apolitical collective used neither violence nor physical force in everyday life to accomplish their professional tasks. However, these images represent them through the mediation of semiotic resources and social discourses that show violence and the use of physical force or that activate narratives coded in culture that imply their use, such as those of superheroes.

In this sense, the healthcare workers became prominent heroes – and even superheroes – in social discourse *thanks* to the Covid-19 pandemic, the explosive context that allowed their positioning within the public sphere – and discursive construction – as a critical professional group in the efforts to stop the coronavirus. This positioning and discursive construction is independent of the individuals that are part of the collective. In this sense, there is an interesting tension between the anonymity of an 'everyday hero' and the celebrity of a superhero both as such and as an ordinary human being, like Clark Kent or Bruce Wayne (Eco 1964).

Figure 14. Source: Metro (2020)

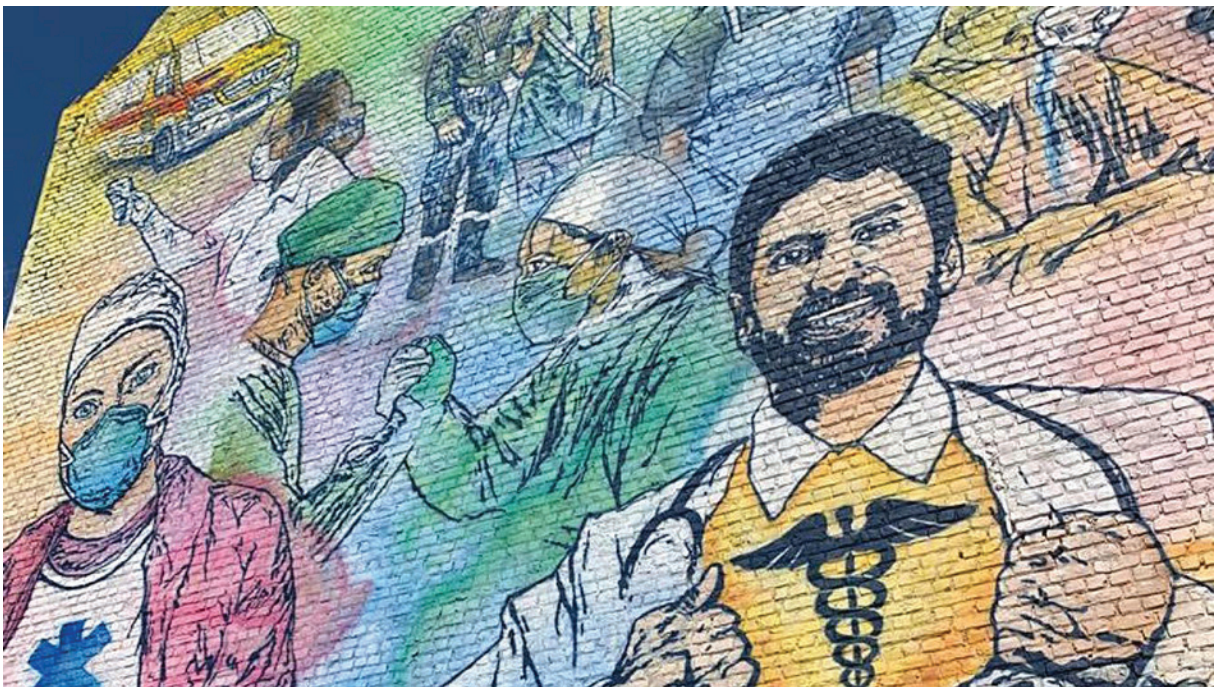

Figure 15. A mural depicting healthcare workers in Ixelles, Brussels. Source: Nord Éclair (2020).

Moreover, during the Covid-19 pandemic, different types of heroism were used to frame the healthcare workers' representation. While some texts present them as superhuman, tireless, and ready to tackle all challenges, others show them tired, exhausted, and even defeated. In the second case, heroism is constructed in less idealistic and more realistic terms, even with a tragic component that resonates with models of heroism traceable even in antiquity, like Antigone or Oedipus.

Besides the images discussed here, other events ranging from recognition to practices evidence this mythical construction, such as the fact that different international organizations and media outlets use to refer to them as *heroes* (United Nations 2020; France 24 2020; La Nación 2020) and "fighting in the frontline" (Time 2020). Moreover, prizes were awarded to this collective actor, for example, in Spain (El País 2020). Also, people clapping hands on balconies and windows to applaud health workers became a daily routine between March and May 2020 in various countries (La Libre 2020). Nevertheless, this is only one possible discursive strategy to figurativize the euphoric axiologization of this character as informed by the hero-villain narrative scheme. Other resources that do not imply the use of physical force or that do not even use the social imaginary linked to the universe of superheroes can also convey this meaning, like the gesture used in Figure 16. In this picture, the healthcare worker makes a heart gesture with his hands while looking the reader in the eye (a frontal glance is also found in Figures 9 to 15). We can interpret these signs as expressing loyalty, commitment, and compromise.

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Figure 16. A mural of a healthcare worker in Dublin, Ireland. Source: Mishra (2022).

5. Concluding remarks

The purpose of this article was to render visible the discursive articulation of the Covid-19 pandemic grounded on the 'hero versus villain' narrative structure. Through analyzing different texts (mainly visual, but we can also find the meaning-making mechanism in journalistic texts, videos, documentaries, interviews, and other cultural products), we argued that we could see this narrative structure at the deep semio-narrative level as the matrix for the creation of social discourses of the pandemic. Moreover, it was shown how the structure shapes the representations of the two main characters involved in it, the hero and the villain, and how these are axiologised in euphoric and dysphoric terms, respectively, through the use of culturally codified semiotic resources (gestures, signs, etc.) and social discourses (superheroes, enemy, etc.). In this sense, the role that social imaginaries of

heroism and superheroes played in bringing this narrative structure to life during the Covid-19 pandemic is quite visible. The question remains about the appropriateness of these imaginaries – and even the 'hero versus villain' narrative scheme – to make sense of a pandemic.

This article could be a first step to conducting further research, including a comparative analysis of different types of representations worldwide and at different times of the Covid-19 pandemic. How did different societies make sense of the pandemic? Is the resource to the 'hero versus villain' narrative scheme universal? What are the different representations of the healthcare workers and the virus, and how do specific cultural parameters shape these? Besides, extending the study to other more dynamic and fast-changing cultural products, like social media posts, memes, and WhatsApp stickers, would be relevant. Finally, like in the study of any social discourse, it is essential to contemplate the diachronic dimension, i.e., how discourses emerge and fade over time. In short, once a narrative structure has been postulated, we should test it empirically. This article focused on the use of the 'hero versus villain' narrative structure to make sense of the Covid-19 pandemic. It does not claim that this was the only narrative structure, but only one frequently used.

The article should have demonstrated the relevance of the principle of narrativity in the academic attempts to explain how individuals and societies make sense of experience and everyday life. The question is open regarding if the Covid-19 pandemic can be considered everyday life or if it was perceived as a state of exception, even if it lasted a couple of years. Whatever the answer to this question, it is clear that the narrative articulation of the pandemic studied here revolved strongly around heroism. In this sense, analyzing specific texts can help us understand how we make sense of our experiences, individually and collectively.

An issue requiring further discussion concerns the socio-political consequences of narratives like the one studied in these pages. On the one hand, since discourses shape the social, the discourses that turned healthcare workers into heroes pressured them to keep working since there are high social expectations of them and their work to which they must conform. On the other hand, this positioning enabled a position of enunciation from which individual healthcare workers could give advice and even preach from a moral point of view about what individuals should do or avoid doing. Moreover, of sociological relevance is the issue of how the narrative structure discussed in these pages contributes to the discursive construction of a human Us thanks to the existence of the evil virus and how these contents construct the idea of solidarity. All these questions remain open and require further research.

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ABSTRACT

Vaccination continues to be one of the most debated topics worldwide, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic and in countries like Romania, where the COVID-19 vaccination rate is very low. Studies showed that in public pro-vaccination campaigns, despite the tendencies towards using evidence-based content strategies focusing on factual information delivered by experts, emotional content through personal stories also triggers a positive engagement in fostering vaccine confidence. In April 2021, the Romanian Government launched a new Facebook campaign entitled #storiesfromvaccination/ #povestidelavaccinare. Drawing from two concepts (point of view and multimodality) relevant to narrative online health messages, the study has a threefold aim: (1) to investigate the online engagement of the narrative perspectives in the #storiesfromvaccination campaign; (2) to provide a comparative analysis of the multimodal cohesion in the Facebook #storiesfromvaccination multimodal texts posted by various message sources; (3) to identify the various representations of agency and action in the interplay of the three metafunctions (experiential, interpersonal and textual) in the personal stories from vaccination.

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"knowledge is never 'point-of-viewless.'"
(Bruner 1991: 3)

Introduction

To change people's attitudes and behavior regarding a health issue is the ultimate goal of every communication campaign. The attitudinal, normative, and behavioral shifts (Murphy et al. 2015: 2117) intended by health authorities and practitioners depend on the effectiveness of communication strategies. This is even more challenging when COVID-19 immunization is seen as a solution to stop a global pandemic. Research suggests two main ways of learning and knowledge related to health communication (Hinyard and Kreuter 2007; Dahlstrom 2014): the *paradigmatic pathway* focusing on scientific evidence and the *narrative pathway* emphasizing personal experiences. But the choice for a specific way of processing the information is closely related to, at least two aspects. On the one hand, the postmodern medical paradigm has triggered doubts about science and authority legitimacy (Kata 2012), thus increasing vaccine hesitancy. On the other hand, socio-political factors in a specific region may play a significant role in the citizens' reluctance toward experts. This is the case in Eastern Europe, one of the regions with the lowest levels of trust in science (Wellcome Global Monitor 2020), where the rise of populism may have influenced the citizens' distrust of specialists (Mihelj et al. 2022). Having one of the highest distrust rates in national authorities (Haerpfer et al. 2022), Romania, along with Bulgaria had the lowest vaccination uptake in the first months after the COVID-19 vaccination campaign started (Walkowiak et al. 2021).

In the context of the COVID-19 vaccination, the Romanian Ministry of Health began an online information campaign on vaccination in December 2020, while the six health ministers tried various content strategies to convince Romanians to get the jab. The first strategy focused on what mass media labeled "the militarization of the communication in a pandemic" (Popescu 2021), Valeriu Gheorghiță, a physician lieutenant colonel at a well-known military hospital in Romania, was appointed as the head of the communication campaign. During Vlad Voiculescu's mandate (USR-PLUS[1]), a shift could be observed, and narrative-based strategies were implemented. Thus, in April 2021, the Romanian Government launched a new Facebook campaign entitled #storiesfromvaccination/ #povestidelavaccinare, awarded the first prize for the best user-generated content at the national social media competition Webstock.

Starting from two concepts (point of view and multimodality) related to narrative online health messages (Machin and Mayr 2012; Chen et al. 2015; Nan et al. 2015; Chen et al. 2016; Nan, Futerfas, and Ma 2017), the study aims:

[1] USR-PLUS is a liberal alliance formed in 2019. Two parties united to form this alliance: Save Romania Union (USR) and the Freedom, Unity and Solidarity Party (PLUS).

(1) to investigate the online engagement of narrative perspectives;

(2) to provide a comparative analysis of the multimodal cohesion in the Facebook #storiesfromvaccination multimodal texts posted by various message sources;

(3) to identify the various representations of agency and action in the interplay of the three metafunctions (experiential, interpersonal and textual) in the personal stories from vaccination used in the #storiesfromvaccination governmental pro-vaccination campaign in Romania.

1. The roles of narratives in health communication

Narrative effectiveness in health messages has been a topic greatly studied in the literature. Research suggests that unlike statistical information, narrative information as a communication strategy brings forth higher level of comprehension of the world (Dahlstrom and Ho 2012), of understanding and interest in health messages (Dahlstrom 2014), triggers identification with the characters in the story (Nan et al. 2015) and self-referencing by reminding people of their own experiences (Chen et al. 2016), includes "mental imagery of story events and emotional engagement" through transportation (Green 2021: 89), diminishes message resistance by lessening counter-argumentation (Hinyard and Kreuter 2007), or generates empathy, dramatic chronology using culturally resonant language (Larkey and Hecht 2010).

But despite these advantages of narrative communication, researchers make a plea for a hybrid usage of narrative and statistical evidence type in health messages (Hinyard and Kreuter 2007; Betsch et al. 2011; Dahlstrom 2014; Nan et al. 2015; Loft et al. 2020; Pedersen et al. 2020) to increase an attitudinal and behavioral change. In the same line, World Health Organization (2021) advised on a blended approach to tailoring the content strategy on COVID-19 vaccination to improve the effectiveness and acceptability of these messages with the target audiences. Whereas an evidence-based approach is suitable for the communication of potential risks, personal stories about vaccination are better suited to address fear about vaccine safety and they "can be part of an authentic, personal approach to communicating via social media" (WHO 2021). However, the reluctance towards vaccination is closely related to the postmodern medical paradigm where health experts are contested and non-experts seem to have a powerful voice especially on social media platforms, wanting to share their stories of vaccination online. In this line, health communication professionals should align their content strategy with this urge for personal experience shared online. Citing previous research, Dahlstrom (2014) suggests that narratives are more engaging and easier to understand than conventional logical-scientific communication. For example, the analysis of the strategic communication of HPV vaccination online campaign in Denmark highlighted the

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effectiveness of personal stories in creating higher engagement rates and positive dialogues on Facebook (Loft et al. 2020).

Defined as "a representation of connected events and characters that has an identifiable structure, [being] bounded in space and time, and [containing] implicit or explicit messages about the topic being addressed" (Kreuter et al. 2007: 222), narratives in health communication have been studied considering the point of view (POV) concept (Chen et al. 2015; Nan et al. 2015; Chen et al. 2016). Stories are delivered by different sources who turn into narrators developing various perspectives on a phenomenon. Differentiating between a 1st-person point of view (POV) narrative, on the one hand, and a 2nd-person POV and 3rd-person POV narratives, on the other hand, researchers consider that a 1st-person singular viewpoint encourages "an internal, vicarious experience" whereas a 3rd-person POV promotes "an onlooker's perspective" (Chen et al. 2015: 978). The effectiveness of the POV narratives has been tested in various experiments on health messages (about colon cancer – Chen et al. 2015; caffeine overdose – Chen et al. 2016, or HPV vaccination – Nan et al 2015; Nan et al. 2017 etc.). The results highlight a polarization between the effects of narrator perspectives upon experiment participants: either 1st person POV was perceived as more effective upon identification and self-referencing, or POV did not affect the two mediators at all, but had an influence upon the severity perceptions, 1st person narrative messages leading to greater risk awareness.

Unlike previous studies using experiments, the effectiveness of the narrative perspectives in #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign will be tested considering the online engagement triggered by each type of the narrative messages. Therefore, a first research question is the following:

RQ1: Which narrative perspective triggered more engagement in the #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign?

2. Theoretical framework: Multimodality and point of view

Multimodality highlights that (1) meaning is formed of various semiotic resources (writing, speech, image, layout etc.) that have distinct potentialities and are constantly reconfigured, (2) meaning implies the production of multimodal wholes formed of semiotics modes as "stratified configuration of semiotic resources together with the materialities that those resources engage" (Kress 2010; Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016; Bateman 2017: 167). Therefore, it is essential to observe how language alongside with "images, photographs, diagrams or graphics (...) work to create meaning" (Machin and Mayr 2012: 9).

Theo van Leeuwen (2005: 230) provides a detailed insight into the multimodal cohesion between an image and a text and he proposes two main links. On the one hand, the *elaboration relation* that includes specification (the image and the text illustrating each other) and explanation (the image and the text paraphrasing each other). And on the

other hand, the *extension relation* that embeds similarity (the image and text content being similar), contrast (the image and text content being contrastive) and complement (the image and text adding more information to each other).

Drawing on the systemic functional linguistics (Halliday 1984; Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), multimodality adapted the SFL metafunctions (textual, interpersonal, ideational) to the SF-MDA text and image system (experiential, interpersonal and textual) (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016). Transitivity is embedded in these semiotic resource metafunctions referring to "who does what to whom, and how" (Machin and Mayr 2012: 104). Thus, transitivity implies agency and action. Machin and Mayr (2012: 105) state that analyzing agency and action refers to three aspects of meaning: (a) participants (people, things, or abstract things) – include the 'doers' of the process and the 'done-toes'; (b) processes – represented by verbs and verbal groups or by vectors suggesting the relationships between participants; (c) circumstances (how and when something has happened). As observed, agency is enacted not only at the level of humans, but it is an attribute of abstract things or concepts as well. This aspect was also highlighted in the research on health communication. Chen et al. (2015: 977) studied the linguistic agency in cancer communication and discovered that language assigning agency to humans than to disease increased the susceptibility convictions. Therefore, in this article I will make the distinction between human agency language and vaccine agency language relating the latter to van Leeuwen (2008)'s category of exclusion within the participant roles (see the codebook in section 3).

Whether we talk about characters (narrative theory) or participants (multimodal approach), both should be related to the concept of point of view or perspective. As mentioned in section 2, three points of view (POV) were studied in the literature on health communication, relating POV to the first, second, or third person. But in this article, I will draw on Friedman (1955)'s typology of points of view because it provides a more comprehensive insight into the role of the participant as a narrator. Therefore, I will adapt four main POVs from Friedman's typology to the analysis of the multimodal #storiesfromvaccination posts: *I as protagonist* – the narrator tells his/ her own story in the first person (Friedman 1955: 1175) – *I as witness* – being a character within the story, the witness-narrator tells about others making his/ her thoughts, feelings, and perceptions available to the reader (Friedman 1955: 1174) – *editorial omniscience* – the narrator is intrusive, knows everything about the characters and makes generalizations about some phenomena – and *neutral omniscience* - the narrator is not intrusive, the authors speaks in the third voice, the mental states and the settings are narrated as if they had already occurred (Friedman 1955: 1173).

Drawing on various operationalizations on multimodality (van Leeuwen 2005; van Leeuwen 2008; Machin and Mayr 2012; Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016) and on the point of view concept (Friedman 1955), the following research questions will be addressed:

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RQ2: How does multimodal cohesion differ in the #storiesfromvaccination multimodal posts narrated from various perspectives?

RQ3: What thematic patterns are present in the multimodal representations of agency and action narrated from different perspectives?

3. Methodology

CrowdTangle, a public insights tool from Meta, was employed to extract all the #storiesfromvaccination Facebook posts from the public ROVaccinare (ROVaccination) Facebook account. The time span covered the beginning of the #storiesfromvaccination campaign (April 5, 2021) and the end of the first since the start of the COVID-19 vaccination campaign in Romania (December 19, 2021). ROVaccination started a challenge for those who got vaccinated to post their photo in the PROvaccinare/ PROvaccination group and to write about the reasons they decided to get the COVID-19 vaccine using the #storiesfromvaccination hashtag. Some of the users' stories were used as posts on the ROVaccination Facebook page, they were put in inverted commas in order to attribute the content to those persons who posted in the PROvaccination group.

The first stage of the research consisted in coding all #storiesfromvaccination Facebook posts according to the points of view and in assessing the posts according to their engagement rate that represents the percentage of users engaging in the content (likes, shares, comments) (Pedersen et al. 2020). Following Bonsón and Ratkai (2013), the popularity (likes), commitment (comment) and virality (shares) of the posts containing stories were assessed.

Drawing on the literature on points of view (Friedman 1955; Chen et al. 2016), four points of view (POVs) were considered:

- 'I as protagonist' – the multimodal Facebook posts including the personal stories told, in the first person, by those persons who got vaccinated.
- 'I as witness' – the multimodal Facebook posts embedding the stories (first person) narrated by those persons who accompanied other persons who took the jab. For example, a mother telling the story of her boy who got vaccinated.
- 'Editorial omniscience'– this POV was assigned to the organization (CNCAV[2]) running the #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign and it refers to those multimodal Facebook posts where the organization presents details about the vaccination management process (from events to aspects related the interaction with commenters).

[2] The Romanian Government formed the National Committee for Coordination of anti-COVID-19 Vaccination Activities (CNCAV). It was formed of representatives from various ministries among which the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Internal Affairs

• 'Neutral omniscience' – the multimodal Facebook posts including organizational stories (third person) about people who got vaccinated.

The second stage of the research consisted in the selection of a random sample (25%) for each type of POV. Therefore, the final sample was formed of 79 multimodal Facebook posts (image and text). The multimodal Facebook posts were imported into the QDA Miner 6.0.3-Wordstat 7.1.19., a mixed methods software, the coding of the data being manually conducted.

The starting point for the multimodal analysis was the systemic functional multimodal discourse analysis – SF-MDA text and image system (Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016) that relies on Halliday's functional grammar (1984). The codebook was developed following the various operationalizations on multimodality (van Leeuwen 2005; van Leeuwen 2008; Machin and Mayr 2012; Jewitt, Bezemer and O'Halloran 2016; Dhanesh, Duthler and Li 2022). The following categories were taken into account as codes:

Experiential metafunction

• Text: (a) participant roles (*exclusion* – agency is assigned to diseases, vaccination; *genericization vs specification* – individuals are represented as a class or as identifiable persons; *collectivization vs individualization* – individuals are represented as groups or not; *nomination vs functionalization* – individuals are represented as unique persons or they are represented through their functions/ activities performed; *identification* – individuals are represented through kingship relations or physical characteristics (van Leeuwen 2008); *us vs. them division* (polarization between vaccine supporters and opponents); (b) processes (*material, mental, verbal, behavioral, relational, existential*).

• Image: (a) narrative representation (*narrative theme* – main action, goal, characters presented; *no narrative theme*); (b) setting (*natural versus staged setting*); (c) participant roles (*exclusion, individualization, collectivization, generic, specific, agents, patients*); (d) processes (*material, mental, behavioral, relational, existential*).

Interpersonal metafunction

• Text: (a) call to action; (b) exchange of information (*subjective vs objective*).

• Image: (a) angle (*high, low, eye angle*); (b) shot (*close up, medium, long*); (c) address (*direct, indirect*).

Textual metafunction

• Text: (a) types of sentences (*active vs passive*).

• Image: (a) information value (*center vs margin; upper vs lower; left vs right*).

The codebook for multimodal cohesion followed van Leeuwen's two relations (2005): elaboration relation including the categories of specification and explanation and the extension relation focusing on similarity, contrast, and complement.

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Since semiotic resources metafunction categories are intertwined in a multimodal Facebook post, the third stage of this analysis focused on a cluster/ co-occurrence analysis which allows grouping objects/ topics based on their similarity, thus offering the researcher the possibility to identify the thematic patterns in the data set (Péladeau 2021). Concordance analysis was the fourth stage of the research. Using WordStat7.1.22, concordance (aka Key-Word-In-Context, KWIC) was performed for the most prominent clusters for each narrative perspective. Words and phrases were considered for the concordance analysis in order to identify the syntagmatic patterns (Ngai et al. 2022) and the thematic focus of the texts (Baker and McEnery 2015). Therefore, the purpose of this analysis will be to provide an insight into the thematic patterns combining the metafunction categories within each of the four narratives.

4. Findings

4.1. Points of view and engagement

The content analysis showed a prevalence of 'I as protagonist' narrative (n=164 posts), followed by 'I as witness' POV (n=64 posts), 'editorial omniscience' point of view (n=60 posts) and 'neutral omniscient' narrative (n=20 posts). For the first research question on the degree of engagement rate (ER) of each narrative, it was found (see Table 1) that editorial omniscient narrations triggered the highest engagement rate (2.43%) and total of interactions (m=2344.75), being the narratives with the highest commitment and virality. It was followed by neutral omniscient narrations and 'I as witness' point of view. An interesting aspect is that although omniscient narrations had the highest mean values for engagement rate, they triggered a polarized attitude having the highest mean values for anger and laughter reactions whereas the love reactions were more associated with the 'I as witness' narration and the sad reaction with the 'I as protagonist' narration.

Table 1. Descriptive analysis - mean values (M) and standard deviation (SD) for interactions and engagement rate by point of view

Point of view	Total Interactions M(SD)	Likes M(SD)	Comments M(SD)	Shares M(SD)	Love M(SD)	Wow M(SD)	Haha M(SD)	Sad M(SD)	Angry M(SD)	Care M(SD)	Engagement rate (ER) M(SD)
I as protagonist	1761.91 (2682.32)	1238.38 (1570.23)	218.59 (407.75)	120.68 (520.13)	84.09 (133.50)	2.77 (6.35)	27.34 (65.52)	43.08 (219.66)	7.56 (13.53)	19.39 (54.13)	1.74 (.016)
I as witness	1969.70 (1883.68)	1409.96 (1244.43)	196.70 (280.67)	84.88 (148.54)	191.33 (229.93)	2.86 (5.27)	23.39 (50.47)	18.37 (73.20)	13.58 (33.19)	28.60 (44.21)	2.08 (.014)
Editorial omniscience	2344.75 (4591.95)	1231.38 (1712.50)	369.37 (859.99)	544.11 (1913.33)	42.70 (58.89)	18.77 (53.90)	72.12 (138.35)	23.44 (87.00)	35.02 (155.74)	7.62 (14.52)	2.43 (.028)
Neutral omniscience	2203.33 (1969.56)	1459.11 (1111.03)	308.62 (525.39)	130.74 (166.10)	160.11 (200.94)	4.51 (7.57)	102.40 (250.97)	7.59 (15.92)	16.25 (26.48)	13.96 (14.85)	2.03 (.014)

Although the 'I as protagonist' narratives did not have the highest mean values for interaction and engagement rate, three narratives of this type are in the top five Facebook posts with the highest engagement rate alongside with 'editorial omniscient' narratives. Thus, two editorial omniscient narrations reporting on the efficacy of previous vaccines had the highest engagement rate (a story about a vaccine from 1910 achieved an ER of 17% and a story about a vaccine from 1853 achieved an ER of 13%). The three 'I as protagonist' narratives with the highest engagement rate focused on the story told by a doctor from Intensive Care Unit (15% ER), on a story told by a layperson after having taken the vaccine (11% ER), and on a story told by a child who got the jab (8% ER).

4.2. **Multimodal cohesion across narratives**

The frequency analysis (Figure 1) showed that the extension relation of complement prevails across three points of view ('I as protagonist', n=34, 'I as witness', n=11, and 'neutral omniscience', n=5), the images and the texts adding more information about each other. Therefore, this conjunctive relation of complement (Schubert 2021) could serve as a persuasive technique to determine the online user to read the text to find out more details about the persons/ things depicted in the photos. For example, the visual representation of the persons who got vaccinated foregrounds only a material process where the person is portrayed as a patient and the nurse depicted as an agent who performs the act of vaccinating. But the text brings more insight into the story of the person who got the jab, foregrounding aspects related to name, age, occupation, or his/ her thoughts about the COVID-19 vaccine benefits (Table 2).

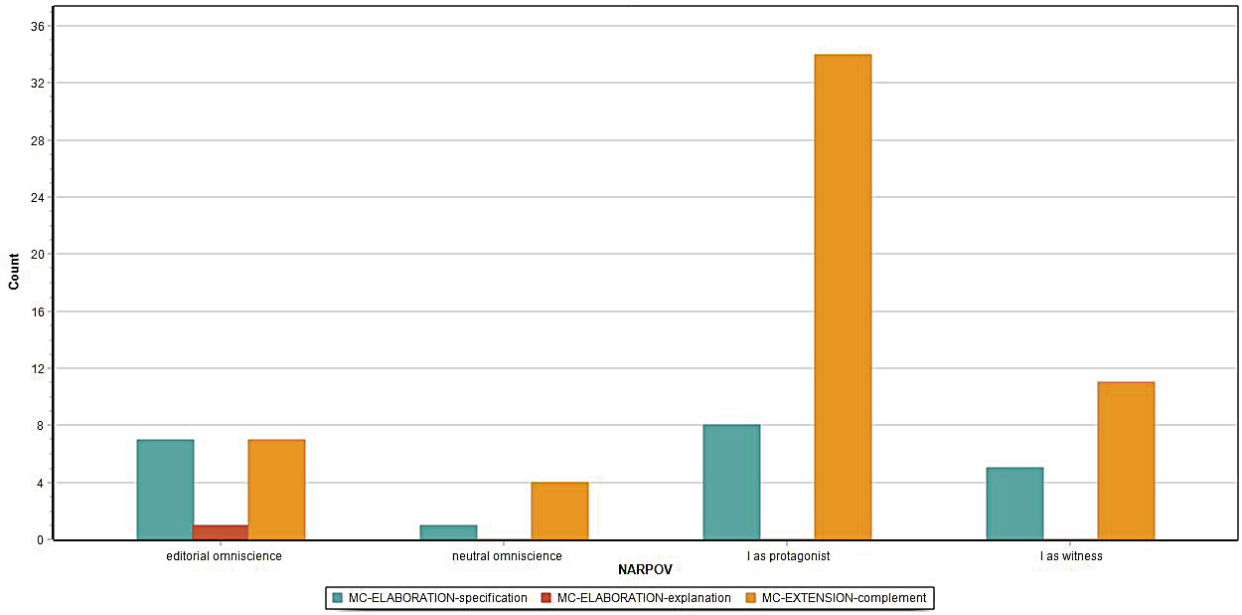

Figure 1. Frequency analysis of multimodal cohesion (MC) across the four points of view.

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The editorial omniscient narrative embeds a mix of multimodal cohesion categories (complement, n=7 and specification, n=7). The photos of people getting the jab during a vaccination caravan and of doctors at the vaccination centers are images that provide specification of the management of these centers, illustrating, for example, the number of people getting the jab at the caravan through the usage of a high angle shot (Table 2).

Table 2. Multimodal cohesion across POVs in #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign (examples, our translation)

Multimodal cohesion (category)	**Point of view**	**Visual images**	**Words in Facebook posts**
Complement	I as protagonist	young boy being vaccinated by a nurse	"My name is Cristi, I am 13 years old and today I got the vaccine even if I am afraid of needles".
Complement	I as witness	young boy being vaccinated by a nurse, his mother standing by his side	"My autistic son was vaccinated with the 2nd dose on March 13, 2021. (…) He was very brave."
Specification	Editorial omniscience	a high-angle image from the vaccination caravan at Obor Market, in Bucharest	"Obor+Pfizer+Johnson&Johnson = Love (…) 312 persons got the Johnson&amp vaccine and 86 persons got the Pfizer vaccine. You could get vaccinated at Obor, on Saturday and Sunday, from 8.00 to 20.00".
Complement	Neutral omniscience	British producer, Charlie Ottley, holding the vaccine certificate issued at the caravan at the Bran Castle	"Charlie Edwarrd Ottley was responsible and got vaccinated. Looking forward to meet him at the Bran Castle in the following 100 years. Charlie Ottley is a British journalist, former BBC producer and he lives in Romania now."

4.3. **Thematic patterns**

4.3.1. *The 'I as protagonist' & 'I as witness' narratives*

The co-occurrence analysis outlined the dominance of two clusters within both 'I' points of view:

- At a verbal level, the textual metafunction was rendered through active sentences and it combined with a subjective exchange of information (interpersonal metafunction), and nomination and individualization as participant roles and behavioral and mental processes as parts of the experiential metafunction.

Figure 2. Facebook photo, May 11, 2021 - #storiesfromvaccination campaign (the persons' faces were covered by the author) (https://www.facebook.com/ROVaccinare)

• At a visual level, the co-occurrence included material processes combined with a narrative theme which was rendered through the left-right information value and participants roles highlighted through inclusion emphasizing the individualization role and patients. This cluster also included direct address and eyelevel angle as parts of the interpersonal metafunction.

As observed, material processes are present at the level of visual representation. Being processes of doing, they imply an actor performing an action and a goal or the participant at whom the process is directed (Machin and Mayr 2012). The action of vaccination is visually represented but the sequence of stages is differently portrayed. The visual identity of the actors is foregrounded through the usage of two types of actors. The narrator as a patient addressing directly the viewer is being vaccinated by another actor, the nurse, who becomes the doer of the action (see figure 2). Therefore, the visual representation within the 'I as protagonist' and 'I as witness' narrative embeds a lack of the narrator's agency and a control of the action on the part of the expert (the nurse).

At a textual level, the co-occurrence analysis outlines an opposite situation. The active sentences (e.g., "We were at the center, and we passed with flying colors") render the narrator's control of the action. Unlike the co-occurrence of the visual metafunctions, at a verbal level, behavioral processes dominate. Embedding the "the material and the mental into a continuum" (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 255), behavioral processes also refer to actions, but conscious beings are supposed to experience these activities (Machin and Mayr 2012: 109). The conscious beings who are actually the narrators could be identified through their names and/or age ("My name is Cristi, I am 13 years old and today I got the jab" – 'I as protagonist' narrative; "He is David, he is 14 years old, and he suffers from autism. (...) He wanted to get the jab even from the emergency state" – 'I as witness' narrative). Therefore, the textual individualization and nomination complement the visual identity of each narrator as protagonist or narrator as witness.

The difference between the two 'I' narrative perspectives could be observed at the level of thematic patterns:

• Four major themes were present in the 'I as protagonist' narrative (Table 3): personal experience from vaccination, vaccine benefits, trust in science, delegitimation of vaccine opponents.

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Table 3. Themes and keywords in the 'I as protagonist' narrative in #storiesfromvaccination campaign (our translation)

Themes	**Related keywords (words or phrases, frequency-crosstab results)**	**Context of keywords retrieved via concordance**
Personal experience from vaccination	first dose (26), side-effects (16), fever (14), disease (13), Pfizer (12), booster dose (11), absolutely nothing (8), ICU (5), oxygen saturation (4)	• Personal reporting on the number of doses taken, on the (lack of) side-effects ("At the first dose, me and my wife got some fever for two days. I will keep you posted after we take the booster. Update: absolutely nothing.") • Personal reporting (laypersons and medical experts) on the severity of the COVID-19 infection ("In November I went through COVID and I stayed in bed two weeks."
COVID-19 vaccine benefits	normal (20), want to (18), dear ones (17), safety (16), pandemic over (10), be responsible (5)	• Reporting on individual benefits of vaccination ("I love sports and I got the jab because (…) I want to go to school, to take part in competitions, to meet my friends again.") • Reporting on collective benefits of vaccination ("I wish from the bottom of my heart for the pandemic to be over"; "let us be united for our safety and that of our loved ones").
Trust in experts	science (18), doctor/physician (12), instructions (10), weapon (6), efficient weapon (5), sources (4)	• Acknowledging the importance of science in the decision-making process of getting the jab ("Because we are responsible, because I trust science, because we are sure that vaccination is the only way of surviving this cruel virus") • Legitimizing doctors as experts ("I chose Pfizer at my doctor's advice and taking into account the allergist's recommendations) • Using metaphorical representation to legitimize vaccination ("Vaccination is now the only weapon against the pandemic (…)")
Delegitimation of vaccine opponents	No/not (212), should (19), astrazeneca (16), never (13), antibodies (12), respect (10), unvaccinated (5), Astra Zevzeca (5), lack of respect (4)	• Criticizing the vaccine opponents' (online) behavior ("(…) I have never understood the way of thinking of those who give laugh reactions at serious posts. I will never understand those who lack empathy and show lack of respect towards his/ her acquaintances"). • Using sarcasm to debunk fake news ("Astra Zevzeca rullz! People from the Mogosoaia Centre do their job. (…) We are waiting for the 5G signal! (…)") • Expressing gratitude towards the medical experts ("Out of respect for these people who fight every day for our lives")

• Three major themes were present in the 'I as witness' narrative (Table 4): witnesses to personal experience to vaccination, vaccine benefits, involvement of authorities.

Table 4. Themes and keywords in the 'I as witness' narrative in #storiesfromvaccination campaign (our translation)

Themes	**Related keywords (words or phrases, frequency-crosstab results)**	**Context of keywords retrieved via concordance**
Witnesses to personal experiences from vaccination	my child (21), first dose (21), proud (20), mother (10), pain (8), neighbors (5), fever (5), daughter (5), autism (5), son (2)	• Witnesses' (Parents') proudly reporting on other persons' (children's) getting the jab or on the first symptoms after vaccination ("He is David, he is 14 years old, he suffers from autism. (...) David wanted to get vaccinated since the emergency state (...) I am very proud of my child.")
COVID-19 vaccine benefits	to be (10) not to (8), want normality (5)	• Reporting on individual benefits ("She is Iulia. She is 12 years old. (…) She wants to travel again in the country of the cherry blossom and of the manga comics.") • Reporting on collective benefits ("We want normality. We do not want to be afraid of getting infected again.")
Involvement of authorities	Vaccination centre (16), lady doctor (14), answered me (14), god evening (10), questions (5), empathetic (4)	• Dialogic communication with the representatives from the centre of vaccination ("Good evening, at the vaccination centre, there is a doctor who will be seeing your little girl and he/ she will give you advice!") • Expressing gratitude towards experts ("(...) doctors and nurses from the vaccination centre were very empathetic and helped him (my child) to go through this experience").

Being a health campaign on vaccination promotion, it was obvious to find a positive evaluation of vaccination in both narrative perspectives in most of the posts. As observed in the two tables, the thematic patterns have common themes, such as personal experiences from vaccination and vaccine benefits but there are also different themes. For example, the trust in science and delegitimation of vaccine opponents' themes are present in the 'I as protagonist' narrative whereas dialogic communication with authority is present in the 'I as witness' narrative.

The legitimizing of vaccination was mainly performed through personal experiences told either by laypersons (35 posts) or by medical experts (5 posts) or role models (3 posts) in the 'I as protagonist' narratives. The same personal experience was present

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in the second type of 'I' narrative but this time, the stories about 'my child', 'mother', 'daughter', 'son', or 'neighbor' were told by witnesses. Since 'my child' was the most frequent phrase (n=21), we could infer that parents were the most active narrators about their children's experiences from vaccination.

Words such as 'first dose', 'side-effects' or 'fever' were the most salient phrases in the 'I as protagonist' narrative, highlighting one important communication strategy in health campaigns, namely the acknowledgment of people's fears and risks (Guidry et al. 2017; Petersen et al. 2021). The blending of recounting the personal experiences of various information sources is in line with previous research indicating that effective vaccination communication messages could be provided by both experts and laypersons (Motta et al. 2021).

The presence of possible risks alongside with individual and/or collective benefits of COVID-19 vaccination in both 'I' narratives is consistent with previous research (Petersen et al. 2021) showing that a balance between these two elements may trigger more people's confidence in authorities in the long run.

The presence of the 'trust in science' theme in the 'I as protagonist' narratives is in line with prior (inter)national studies which have found that vaccine supporters express their trust in scientists (Pența and Băban 2014; Faasse et al. 2016; Cmeciu and Coman 2021). As mentioned above, laypersons were mostly used as message sources (in 81% of the Facebook posts) in the 'I as protagonist' narrative and the parents' stories about their children's getting the jab were mostly frequent in the 'I as witness' narratives (in 69% of the Facebook posts). This finding reflects the postmodern medical paradigm (Kata 2021) where the common people seem to claim authority when promoting vaccine communication (Breeze 2021).

Delegitimation of vaccine opponents is one theme specific to the 'I as protagonist' narrative and which fits within this postmodern medical paradigm. Words such as 'no', 'not', 'never', 'unvaccinated', or 'lack of respect' highlight the negative-laden position of Romanian pro-vaccination sources towards the vaccine opponents. Mental processes of disliking vaccine opponents were employed to verbally depict the antagonist relation between the two groups. Sarcasm was used by vaccine supporters to mock the opponents' convictions that the Astra Zeneca vaccine was not good (play upon words – Astra Zevzec/ Astra Addle-brain instead of Astra Zeneca) and that the COVID-19 vaccine contains a 5G tracking microchip. The presence of this indirect criticism towards the vaccine opponents emphasizes an epistemic superiority that is associated with vaccine supporters (Toth 2020).

Involvement of authorities is a theme present in the 'I as witness' narratives. Openness in dialogic communication between authorities and parents is emphasized through a frequent usage of greeting formulas ('good evening') and an expert from the vaccination centre as a conversation protagonist ('lady doctor'). On the other hand, emotional support for the children who got vaccinated is highlighted through the usage of the word 'empathetic'.

4.3.2. *The 'neutral omniscient' narrative*

This perspective implies a shift in the position of the narrator. Whereas the 'I as witness' narrative focuses on narrators who are family members or acquaintances of the protagonists who took the jab, the 'neutral omniscience' narrative reveals the organization as a narrator telling the stories of either laypersons, experts (nurses from Intensive Care Units) or of role models (war veteran or Charlie Ottley, the British producer and director).

The dominant co-occurrence at a verbal and visual level is the combination between relational and behavioral processes and nomination and individualization as participant roles. Setting an example was the main theme that emerged in this narrative perspective (Table 5). The retrospective action had a two-fold nature: actions in the past for which the role models were known and the action of having got the jab.

Table 5. Theme and keywords in the 'neutral omniscient' narrative in #storiesfromvaccination campaign (our translation)

Themes	Related keywords (words or phrases, frequency-crosstab results)	Context of keywords retrieved via concordance
Setting an example through role models	Is (18), got (10), vaccinated (7), had (10), wanted (6)	• Reporting on participants' retrospective actions ("An example of morality at 101 years old (...) Ion Procopie is the most respected, loved and well-known was veteran from the Tazlau Valley and he got vaccinated against COVID-19").

4.3.3. *The 'editorial omniscience' narrative*

The co-occurrence analysis showed the following clusters at the visual and verbal level within this type of narrative:

• At a textual level, the active sentences at a textual metafunction combined with collectivization and exclusion as participant roles. The experiential metafunction enacted through behavioral and relational processes also co-occurred with call-to-action as part of the interpersonal metafunction.

• At a visual level, the dominant cluster was formed of two parts: on the one hand, collective agents as participant roles combined with behavioral processes and on the other hand, exclusion was combined with relational processes.

As observed, the editorial omniscient narrative brings a shift in the type of agency present in the Facebook posts. Whereas nomination and individualization as participant roles were present in the two 'I' narrative perspectives and in the neutral omniscience perspective, the editorial omniscient narrator focuses more on an exclusion role and on collectivization as an inclusive role.

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Three main themes were identified (Table 6): vaccination efficacy, COVID-19 vaccination management process and fight against the infodemic. The two Facebook posts where the vaccine agency language prevailed triggered a high engagement rate (17% and 13% engagement rate achievement). The topic on the efficacy of vaccination in general embedded relational processes serving to characterize and identify (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004: 210) the benefits of immunization in society ("Vaccines save lives"; "Vaccination is the only way to protect against COVID-19"). This form of agency assignment to vaccines was also present in the second theme and it coincides with what van Leeuwen (2008) identifies as an exclusion role and provides to the organization as narrator the possibility of making generalizations about vaccination and of construing a metaphorical representation of specific vaccines ("Obor+Pfizer+Johnson&Johnson = Love"). Collectivization was employed to enhance either the efficacy of vaccination caravan through the usage of a numerical quantifier to delimit the class-membership of

Table 6. Themes and keywords in the 'editorial omniscient' narrative in #storiesfromvaccination campaign (our translation)

Themes	**Related keywords (words or phrases, frequency-crosstab results)**	**Context of keywords retrieved via concordance**
Vaccination efficacy	vaccination (136), against COVID-19 (53) reduces the risk (33) help(ed/ ing) mankind (22) saves lives (22) across pandemics (22) vaccines had (22) protection against (20)	• Reporting on vaccination efficacy across centuries ("Vaccines save lives! A vaccination certificate from 111 years ago. Vaccines have been helping mankind to go through pandemics since ages. Vaccination is the only way to protect against COVID-19".)
COVID-19 vaccination management process	Johnson (38), Pfizer (14), Obor (12) wait for you (14), Timisoara (10), caravan (4)	• Reporting on various vaccination locations (Obor, Timisoara) and the types of vaccines available ("Obor+Pfizer+Johnson&Johnson = Love. 398 persons got vaccinated at the Caravan from Obor"). • ("We are here for you! We are waiting for you to get vaccinated!")
Fight against the infodemic	get informed (20), official sources (20), fiction (15), information (12), false (6)	• Informing the public about SARS-CoV-2 variants ("Omnicron – truth or fiction? (...)" • Calling for action against fake news ("We have information that might destroy the conspiracy theories about vaccination (…)"; "Get informed only from official sources!"; "Signal the false information!"

those who got vaccinated ("398 persons got vaccinated at the Caravan from Obor") or the availability of healthcare professionals from the vaccination centers as a group.

Fight against the infodemic was a theme specific to the editorial omniscient narrative and call to action as part of the interpersonal metafunction prevailed in this narrative. Phrases such as 'get informed', 'official sources', 'fiction', or 'false' indicated that the organization as a narrator had an active position in the debunking the fake news.

5. Conclusions

Multimodal narratives as a persuasive strategy have been researched for their effectiveness in health communication campaigns (Hinyard and Kreuter 2007; Betsch et al. 2011; Dahlstrom 2014; Nan et al. 2015; Loft et al. 2020; Pedersen et al. 2020). At the same time, point of view has been an aspect related to narratives that has raised researchers' interest (Chen et al. 2015; Nan et al. 2015; Chen et al. 2016). The analyses in the present study outlined that the narratives in the #storiesfromvaccination Facebook campaign predominantly embed a multimodal cohesion focused on an extension relation, the image and the text complementing each other. The photos mainly served to visually identify the participants in the stories depicted in the Facebook posts, but the written words carried more internal cohesion providing a comprehensive and detailed portrayal of the protagonists. This finding is in line with previous research on multimodal cohesion in advertising (Schubert 2021), showing that visuals depend on words for their clear interconnectedness. A discrepancy in the representation of participants in terms of agency and action could be observed. Whereas the visual representation depicted the narrator as a patient upon whom the action (material process of vaccinating) of an external actor (healthcare professional from the vaccination centre) is performed, the verbal representation showed the narrator as an agent ('I as protagonist' point of view) or as a co-agent ('I as witness' point of view) carrying out behavioral processes, thus showing agents capable of actions and of expressing their feelings.

Another important aspect that may have practical implications for healthcare professionals refers to the engagement triggered by the four types of narratives. The analysis of the whole data showed that editorial omniscient narratives were the most engaging posts. Therefore, stories told by organization as an authorial narrator triggered the greatest commitment and virality. Within these posts, the organization provided expert insights into vaccination by assigning agency to vaccines that were represented through relational processes. But three 'I as protagonist' narratives ranked among the top five posts with the highest engagement rate, the personal experiences from vaccination serving as persuasive strategies for other online users. Therefore, a hybrid usage of third- and first-person point of view narratives would be recommended to engage online users in an online campaign on health issues.

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The analysis of the thematic patterns also revealed an indirect polarization between vaccination supporters and opponents. Although no stories told by opponents were employed in the Facebook campaign, the narrators made references to the opposing group through the usage of sarcasm trying to debunk the fake news or they urged online users to actively participate in getting the information from official and expert sources.

This study has some limitations as well. The data set was formed of the public Facebook posts uploaded on the ROVaccination public page. As mentioned above, some of the posts were taken over from the PROVaccination group where the #storiesfromvaccination challenge was initiated and posted on the official ROVaccination page. Although the users' personal stories were put in inverted commas in the ROVaccination posts, it is clear that a selection of these stories was made by the Romanian authority. Therefore, further research could focus on interviews with the communication practitioners in charge of the #storiesfromvaccination campaign to determine how the selection of the online users' personal stories was made. Although the research provided insights into only one online campaign, these findings could serve as starting points for comparative analyses of online campaigns on health issues from different countries. Moreover, only narratives as persuasive strategies were considered. But further research on agency and action could be carried out in other types of persuasive strategies.

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Concept formation and the text in digital culture

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ABSTRACT

During cultural-historical development, our learning processes have evolved to using diverse "symbolic artifacts – signs, symbols, texts, formulae" (Kozulin et al. 2003: 15) as mediators of knowledge and meaning. The phenomenon of a text became one of the most advanced of these mediators, as it goes beyond the mere mediation of knowledge. According to Lotman, the text is a semiotic system "capable of transforming messages received and generating new ones, a generator of information" (1988: 57). The evolution of digital culture and the new media environment have shaped the representation and interaction with texts by "changing the static printed text into a dynamic one" (Ojamaa and Torop 2020: 52). Digitality, multimodality and transmediality became intrinsic characteristics of texts in the new media environment. While this emphasizes the value of acquiring the concept of the text within formal and informal education as an "intellectual device" (Lotman 1988: 55) and a cultural tool for accessing knowledge in digital culture, the semiotic and cognitive processes beyond the acquisition of the concept of the text remain under-researched. The paper represents the first step in the broader study of how young learners acquire the concept of the text in contemporary digital culture. The research aims to identify semiotic processes behind acquiring the concept of the text in digital culture. To this purpose, we introduce Vygotsky's theory of concept formation (2012) as a methodological tool for semiotic research in learning and education.

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Introduction

The dominant way of human learning is the process mediated by symbolic tools (Vygotsky 2012). The processes underlying human learning evolved from learning through direct stimulus towards complex mediated forms of learning through "symbolic artifacts – signs, symbols, texts, formulae" (Kozulin et al. 2003: 15). The process of symbolic mediation in learning was described by Lev Vygotsky in what we know today as cultural-historical theory (Yasnitsky et al. 2014). On the one hand, it emphasizes the role of symbolic tools in human cognitive processes. On the other hand, it gives a socio-cultural perspective to the learning processes by acknowledging that the evolution of culture and society also influences how we receive, interpret, and share knowledge.

According to the cultural-historical theory, culture introduces various symbolic means for mediating knowledge, such as signs and sign systems (Yasnitsky et al. 2014: 47-62). The role of signs and sign systems in learning has been widely addressed in recent semiotic research in the fields of edusemiotics (Semetsky and Stables 2014; Olteanu and Campbell 2018; Deely and Semetsky 2017), emphasizing the role of semiosis and semiotic engagement, and semiotics of culture (Ojamaa et al. 2019) with its focus on the role of text, culture, cultural communication processes and media in conceptualizing education. In the course of cultural-historical development, texts have become one of the most sophisticated mediators in learning. According to Lotman, the text is a semiotic system "capable of transforming messages received and generating new ones, a generator of information" (Lotman 1988: 57). The recent cultural shift, brought about by the evolution of digital culture and the new media environment, has shaped the representation, functions, and relations between texts by "changing the static printed text into a dynamic one" (Ojamaa and Torop 2020: 52). Digitality, multimodality and transmediality have become intrinsic characteristics of texts in the new media environment, inevitably changing our conceptual understanding of a text, especially as a mediator of learning.

Recent advances in semiotic studies (Ojamaa et al. 2021; Ojamaa and Torop 2020) show the value of analyzing text's different aspects and functions in digital culture and the new media environment. The results of such studies can work as a foundation for developing educational practices at schools by elaborating the concept of the text as a tool for accessing knowledge mediated by diverse forms of texts in contemporary digital culture. However, the semiotic processes underlying the concept formation of the phenomenon of text in formal and informal learning and during individual development still need to be researched. Thus, we face the question of how semiotic science can address the process of learning the concept of the text in general and in the context of digital culture in particular.

Thus, our study aims at identifying semiotic processes underlying the acquisition of the concept of the text in digital culture. To do so, we employ Lev Vygotsky's theory

of concept formation (Vygotsky 2012: 103-222) in our methodology. While Vygotsky's theory builds a methodological link between semiotics and psychology, it also makes it possible to examine the formation of meanings of complex abstract phenomena as a process. Consequently, Vygotsky's theory of concept formation is not merely a research tool for describing the processes underlying the acquisition of complex meanings but also a sophisticated methodological tool for semiotic studies aiming to investigate diverse psychological, cognitive, and semiotic processes, including learning, memorizing, or meaning-making.

Our study aims to (1) identify the role of text as a semiotic phenomenon in learning from the perspective of the semiotics of culture; (2) analyze the change in the concept of the text in contemporary digital culture and the challenges it provides for learning practices; (3) address Vygotsky's theory of concept formation as a tool for analyzing learners' acquisition of a concept of text in digital culture; and (4) formulate the principles underlying the acquisition of the concept of the text in contemporary digital culture.

2. Learning, text, and digital culture

In contemporary culture, the phenomenon of text represents one of the key carriers of information and knowledge (Ojamaa and Torop 2020; Ojamaa et al. 2019). As a result, texts play a significant role in human learning processes from a very early age. Many semiotic studies have emphasized a text's significant educational role (e.g., works by Juri Lotman). More specifically, the semiotics of culture considers the notion of text as a critical unit for "its conceptualization of education" (Ojamaa et al. 2019: 155). The following section addresses the concept of the text as a source of learning and provides a brief overview of the changes brought to the concept of the text by contemporary digital culture.

2.1. Learning through texts

The educational value of text as a semiotic phenomenon originates from its function as a mediator of information and from its multifaceted role in culture, social and artistic communication. As a result, acquiring the concept of the text is necessary for developing various cognitive and semiotic tools for accessing, analyzing, and sharing knowledge communicated in culture within various forms and mediums.

In this study, we will rely on the notion of text established in the framework of the semiotics of culture and, more specifically, that was introduced by Juri Lotman (1988). Lotman described the text as a complex semiotic system with specific functions, boundaries, and relationships with the reader (Lotman 1977, 1988). He also described it as "a complex system storing diverse codes capable of transforming messages received and

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generating new ones, a generator of information with the traits of an intelligent person" (Lotman 1988: 57). In other words, the text represents a mechanism of meaning generation. This emphasizes another essential role of text in the context of learning. According to Lotman, the phenomenon of text possesses three main functions (Lotman 1994, 1990: 11-19): communicative function (conveying information from a sender to a receiver), creative function (generation of new meanings), and memory (preservation of various information).

Another important feature of text in learning and education is its ability to "[m]anifesting intellectual properties" (Lotman 1988: 55). A text "becomes an interlocutor on an equal footing, possessing a high degree of autonomy" (Lotman 1988: 56). Thus, in terms of the learning process, text plays several different roles, including (1) conveying information, (2) collective memory, (3) mediation aspect in autocommunication, (4) dialogic function, and (5) mediation of cultural context (Lotman 1988). According to this perspective, learning via a text can be addressed as a learner's dialogue or communication with a text (Ojamaa et al. 2019: 155).

Semiotics of culture conceptualizes education based on the notion of text and provides a sophisticated analysis of learners' "dialogue or communication with the text" (Ojamaa et al. 2019: 155) in the context of acquiring diverse educational literacies. In this respect, the key literacy that originates from acquiring the concept of the text is cultural literacy. It presupposes the development of "[h]abits of reading and interpretation, skills of textual analysis, strategies of keeping texts in cultural memory and texts as mediators of (historical, mythological, psychological) time and space" (Ojamaa et al. 2019: 155). In contemporary digital culture, this literacy can be considered an umbrella term for other related literacies, inducing media and transmedia literacies. As a result, the semiotics of culture research in the context of learning and education provides a sophisticated analysis of the phenomenon of text, which can serve to develop learning and teaching practices in the context of acquiring the concept of the text.

In addition, the phenomenon of text features an educational value in the context of cultural literacy when we deal with artistic texts. Lotman defined the phenomenon of artistic text as a text that "can be viewed as a multiply encoded text" (1977: 59). Artistic texts are essential elements of the cultural communication processes, including cultural auto-communication, transmediality, and crossmediality (Ojamaa and Torop 2015). From the educational perspective, understanding textual dynamics is essential for contemporary learning as a means to access knowledge mediated via artistic texts.

The value of acquiring the concept of the text within general education practices also has cognitive and developmental dimensions. According to Lev Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory (2012), one of the main aspects of specifically human learning is that it is mediated via symbolic tools. These symbolic tools can be represented by

"different signs, symbols, writing, formulae…" (Kozulin et al. 2003: 23). When internalized, a sign system "plays a role of a stimulus-means in any psychological operation" (Ivanov 2014: 497) and cognitive processes, including behavioral control, learning, memory, meaning-making, etc. Thus, sign systems act as "inner psychological tools" (Kozulin et al. 2003: 24; Kozulin 1998). An essential aspect of psychological tools is that they are primarily products of culture, which emphasizes the significant influence of culture on human psychological and cognitive development. Following Vygotsky's theory, we can consider a text one of the most sophisticated psychological tools (Kozulin 2003), a complex symbolic mediator of human psychological and cognitive processes. As a potential psychological tool, therefore, text plays a vital role in various psychological processes, including learning, memory, and meaning-making.

The development of the learner's reading behavior and analytical skills concerning literary texts has been a focus of many educational policies within formal education (Milyakina 2018: 571-572). We can argue that in general education, the concept of the text has been traditionally learned in literature courses, which limits the description of the concept of the text to the phenomenon of a written literary text. However, this does not cover the needs of contemporary learners, who are involved in daily communication with a diverse range of popular culture texts of various modes and modalities.

2.2. The concept of the text in digital culture

The development of digital culture and the introduction of new media have shaped the representation of text in culture and the possibilities for establishing relations with its metatexts (Ojamaa et al. 2021; Jenkins 2010). As a result, the evolution of digital culture has introduced new learning and reading behaviors and thus shaped the current understanding of literacy (Kress 2003). The reason for this is the specific characteristics of a text that have become explicit in digital culture, such as digitality, multimodality, interactivity, and multiplicity.

Digitality. One of the essential changes that the digital age brought to the textual and reading experience is the introduction of digital text. This resulted in "turning a static printed text into a dynamic one" (Ojamaa and Torop 2020: 52). According to Ojamaa et al. (2021: 738-739), it is not only the paradigm of text that has been changed by digitality but also the intertextual relations. The evolution of a digital text has been influenced mainly by the divergence processes in culture, which can be characterized by multimodality, multiplicity, and fragmentation (Ojamaa et al. 2021: 739-742). The new paradigm has initiated a change in the reading experience, conceptualized under *digital reading* (Ojamaa and Torop 2020). This process does not merely presuppose a different mediation of meanings but also requires readers to acquire different skills that will allow meaning-making within digital reading (Ojamaa et al. 2021).

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Multimodality. Digitalization has made available a broader range of modes and modalities for mediating meanings. As a result, multimodality became an essential characteristic of most texts in the digital era. However, multimodality is not limited to merely the diversity of representation of a text in various modes and modalities. According to Gunther Kress, the evolution of modes and the spread of texts among them presuppose "[t]he changes in the conditions surrounding literacy" (Kress 2003: 35). The meaning is conveyed not only through a text itself but also via the sign systems through which a text is communicated. Finally, Kress points out that "we need now to gather meaning from all the modes which are co-present in a text" (Kress 2003: 35). From the learning and reading perspective, it provides an additional dimension to the acquisition of the concept of the text in the context of contemporary culture.

Interactivity. Another feature of textual experience brought about by the increasing digitalization of texts and the introduction of new media is the aspect of interactivity (O'Neill 2008). As regards the concept of the text in the digital age, interactivity significantly influences how one communicates with texts, namely shaping the communicational function of texts (Lotman 1988) and making it more explicit. Digital interaction made another step in moving a text toward a more fluid phenomenon by shaping its boundaries. The studies (e.g., Beauchamp and Kennewell 2010) addressed the diverse educational potentiality of interactivity, which includes its role in the ICT in teaching and learning practices. In addition, recent studies (Sánchez-García and Salaverría 2019: 8) emphasize that interactivity's educational role is not limited to increasing the learner's engagement but extends to impacting the cognitive and psychological processes involved in learning. The principle of interactivity in textual experience has been widely explicated in digital platforms, where the reading experience is based on the principle of convergence and divergence in culture and where "textual fragments are presented in a manner that allows for the creation of a holistic understanding of the text" (Ojamaa et al. 2019: 155).

Multiplicity and fragmentation. According to Ojamaa and Torop, digitalization "ascribed a new meaning to concepts such as repetition in culture or intertextuality" (2015: 68). Digital culture has made the production and sharing of text much more effortless. As a result, it led to a more active role of a reader in contributing to the textual multiplicity and cultural autocommunication processes. Thus, a famous classical novel may receive hundreds of adaptations and new versions in various art forms, modes, and modalities. An active role of readers in participatory culture, e.g., fun fiction, turns them into prosumers through various everyday tools, e.g., smartphones. At the same time, prominent content creators (i.e., publishing houses, film studios, etc.) also actively participate in this process, making new versions, adaptations, spin-offs, and other metatexts of the original stories. One of the examples of the process of multiplying a text in culture is the process of transmediality, which Jenkins characterized

as a "dispersal of media content across media platforms" (Jenkins 2010). The evolution of a text within transmedia practices is related to "the aspect of transformation: expansion of narrative onto different media platforms, changes and additions of meaning brought along by this growth" (Ojamaa and Torop 2015: 62). Thus, a famous classical novel may be a part of a vast transmedia universe, which consists of various adaptations (cinema, theater, comic books, etc.) of the story in various modes and modalities, products of participatory cultures (fanfiction, memes, etc.), references in other texts or marketing products. Each version does not merely multiply the original text, but contributes to the unified whole.

Given the almost unlimited possibilities in mediating meaning through various sign systems, a text in its cultural semiotic framework remains the key mediator of meaning and knowledge. However, by reshaping the relational and representational characteristics of texts, digital culture has also changed the conceptualization and perception of a text as a unified whole. A text cannot be associated with merely printed texts anymore. As a result, digital culture introduced the phenomenon of digital text, which in the semiotics of culture is characterized by "multimodality (combining verbal and pictorial channels), variability (appearance of one text in many versions) and fragmentation (reading fragments instead of whole texts)" (Ojamaa et al. 2021: 738). The introduction of a digital text also brings with it new habits of reading, known as digital reading (Ojamaa et al. 2021).

This introduces a challenge specifically for literature courses, where young learners are usually supposed to acquire the concept of the text. Therefore, it is crucial to address "the distance between formal educational environments and the extremely active 'digital lives' of teens in social media and online environments" (Scolari et al. 2018: 810). The changes that happen to the concept of the text in digital culture also emphasize the need for contemporary education, psychology, and semiotic science to develop an understanding of how young learners acquire the concept of the text within formal and informal educational practices.

3. Learning the concept of the text in digital culture

While recent semiotic research has variably addressed the phenomenon of textuality in digital culture, the analysis and topology of digital texts, and their role in contemporary cultural communication processes, few attempts have been made to examine how the understanding of the phenomenon of text is developed and used in meaning-making.

A methodological tool that we can use for such analysis is Lev Vygotsky's theory of concept formation (Vygotsky 2012: 103-222), described in the framework of what

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we know today as cultural-historical theory (Yasnitsky et al. 2014). The value of Vygotsky's theory for semiotic studies relies on its ability to address higher psychological processes through a semiotic perspective by providing the "understanding of human high psychic functions on the base of describing the dominant role of the signs" (Ivanov 2014: 488). The methodological value of Vygotsky's approach is, to a significant extent, supported by empirical research conducted by him and his colleagues.

In the following section, we will describe Vygotsky's theory of concept formation as a potential research tool for semiotic studies that address how internalized meanings develop from highly iconic units to complex relations systems.

3.1. **Vygotsky's theory of concept formation**

The process of young learners' acquisition of the phenomenon of text in contemporary digital culture can be addressed through Lev Vygotsky's theory of concept formation (Vygotsky 2012: 103-222). Thus, we can consider a text as an abstract concept, a complex system of meaning which can be learned, memorized, and applied in diverse cognitive, creative, or educational tasks.

According to Vygotsky's experimental findings (Vygotsky 2012: 103-222), every concept undergoes a specific development course. In Vygotsky's theory of concept formation, concepts are essentially meanings of words (Miller 2014: 28). One of the outcomes of Vygotsky's empirical studies was his argument that meanings do not act as static units but are dynamic systems that can develop (Vygotsky 2012: 225).

The concept formation process may undergo several stages of meaning development, whose outcome is not always clear to the researcher. However, as described by Vygotsky, the general tendency of concept formation involves moving from the meaning based on one's own experiences and representations of specific objects or phenomena toward complex systems of meaning, possessing a higher degree of generalization, abstraction, and symbolic mediation. In semiotic terms, it is a movement from highly iconic relations toward more complex symbolic relations. A simple example taken from Vygotsky concerns how young children and adults use a similar concept, such as the concept of a 'flower.' The main difference is represented in the system of relations, therefore "[f]or an adult it refers to an abstract concept designating a class of plants, whereas for a child it may name a particular object in the garden or may refer to anything growing out of the ground" (Miller 2014: 30). The different uses of the same concept and its iconic-symbolic relations may be due to both ontogenetic reasons and educational interventions.

Concepts, as meanings, have a primarily cultural origin and can be learned differently. Margot Berger adds that "in a concept, the bonds between the parts of an idea and between different ideas are logical and the ideas form part of a socially-accepted system of hierarchical knowledge" (2005: 158). The theory of concept formation is especially valuable for semiotic studies as it draws the attention of scientists to the way

one internalizes and acquires a meaning of a particular phenomenon, a part of using signs which often remain hidden from semiotic research. During his studies, described in the well-known *Thought and Language* (2012), Vygotsky experimentally demonstrated that the meanings one acquires from culture could develop. This allowed Vygotsky "to overcome the postulate of constancy and unchangeableness of word meaning" (1987: 245), widespread in science at the time of his research.

Vygotsky (2012) distinguishes between several stages of concept formation. First, he describes how conceptual thinking evolves in the course of psychological and cognitive development, which corresponds to "different structures or kinds of generalization" (Miller 2014: 33). This includes pre-conceptual thinking, thinking in complexes, and the development of potential concepts. Secondly, the theory provides us with the main types of concepts, including spontaneous (everyday) concepts, pseudo-concepts, and scientific (or real) concepts corresponding to the different stages of meaning development.

Vygotsky distinguished *spontaneous concepts*, in his terms *everyday concepts*, as those acquired spontaneously by young learners and not introduced as a coherent system of relations within the course of education or pedagogical interventions (Vygotsky 2012: 155-221). These concepts rely on one's experience (including the perceptual one), informal learning practices and communication with others. This type of concept is more dominant among young children, but some of them also remain in adulthood. When a child encounters a particular phenomenon or a word in different contexts and situations, they begin to identify various characteristics that are inherent for the given phenomenon and keep remembering such regularities (Kikas 2010: 114). As a result, the meaning of a particular phenomenon is formed through a series of encounters with it in either the perceptual world (senses) or through mediated experience (communication, reading, etc.), spontaneous concept "is saturated with experience" (Vygotsky 2012: 204). However, due to the unsystematic introduction of the phenomenon the identification of these regularities may not always be conscious, which leads to the situations when the "explanations may vary in time and by topic" (Kikas 2010: 116) and thus keep the spontaneous concepts to be very limited with the young learner's own experience. As Vygotsky pointed out "[t]he development of spontaneous concepts knows no systematicity and goes from the phenomena upward toward generalizations" (2012: 157).

While *scientific concepts*[1] normally develop from spontaneous concepts, their nature is significantly different. According to Vygotsky, "[t]he development of a scientific concept, on the other hand, usually begins with its verbal definition and

[1] The notion "scientific concept" does not have any connection with scientific definitions, but is used in the article in this form, as it was used in Vygotsky's original research "Thought and language" (2012).

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its use in nonspontaneous operations — with working on the concept itself" (Vygotsky 2012: 204) and "[by] being applied systematically, gradually comes down to concrete phenomena" (ibid: 157). Thus, not only the scientific concept itself, but also its introduction relies on symbolic means, which is a significant difference in terms of learning processes. Scientific concepts develop in the course of explicit instruction (Miller 2014: 33) and thus "benefit from the systematicity of instruction and cooperation" (Vygotsky 2012: 157) that leads to the conscious acquisition of meaning in the comparison to the spontaneous one in everyday concepts. Scientific concepts are also semiotically different from spontaneous concepts. As a result of relational verbal meanings, "the information [in scientific concepts] is coded and organized in sign systems (mainly in spoken language)" (Kikas 2010: 114). In other words, scientific concepts "are mediated by symbols" (Kikas 2010: 116).

It is also possible to distinguish between an intermediate form of concepts called *pseudo-concepts*.[2] These concepts represent the type of meaning structures "which externally seem as scientific concepts (words heard from adults) but are in essence everyday concepts" (Kikas 2010: 117). Pseudo-concepts represent "the generalization formed in the child's mind, although phenotypically resembling the adult concept, is psychologically very different from the concept proper" (Vygotsky 2012: 127). While this type of concept is only a foundation for the further conceptual development, it provides a significant perspective for pedagogical approaches. Pseudo-concepts may either serve as a foundation for the formation of real concepts, or form what is called a synthetic concept or synthetic explanation, which represent "concepts, modified and constructed based on experience" (Kikas 2010: 117) and which may continue to "exist even after children have learnt scientific knowledge in school" (ibid.: 126).

Eve Kikas, in her empirical study (2010) on the way children form concepts of clouds, rain and rainbow, illustrates these different types of concepts. In this study, children were asked several questions in order to identify the meanings they developed about various phenomena during their own experiences and school education. Thus, the examples of spontaneous concepts of clouds included the understanding of clouds to be 'smoke,' 'foam,' or even 'cotton wool' and 'marshmallow' (Kikas 2010: 121-122). Kikas identified that among synthetic explanations, "clouds were identified with rain, which means that the children have possibly heard that rain comes from clouds," or also "made of mist" (Kikas 2010: 122). As regards synthetic concepts, Kikas pointed out that "children make analogies with perceptible phenomena and modify verbally heard information, or they do not provide the whole necessary information" (2010: 122).

[2] In Vygotsky's works the notions is spelled as "pseudoconcept," in our work we are using the spelling of the notion inherent to the contemporary research.

3.2. From an everyday to a scientific concept of text

The elaborated differentiations of various stages of concept formation and development of meaning, provided in Vygotsky's theory of concept formation, can serve as a useful methodological tool for the semiotic research of the acquisition of meanings and learning about complex abstract phenomena. This allows semiotic research methodologies to look at meaning-making as a dynamic process and a process of constantly changing structures in the context of learning and psychological development. One of the applications of the theory of concept formation can be the study of learning diverse cultural phenomena.

Acquisition of the concept of the text is a necessary step for a contemporary learner to be able to access, analyze and share information in the context of digital culture. The development of a concept of text can potentially be a key to the young learners' development of many necessary skills and competencies that originate from the role of a digital text in contemporary culture. Thus, a valuable approach to developing learning and teaching practices is to understand better how learners acquire the concept of the text in digital culture and how they can develop it from an everyday to a real concept.

The phenomenon of text in contemporary digital culture represents a complex abstract concept. This makes it a concept that is very difficult (if possible) to learn within individual perception and experience, i.e., via spontaneous learning. Since having a symbolic nature, learning the concept of the text presupposes almost exclusively symbolic mediation. Lev Vygotsky described mediated learning as a form of learning that conveys knowledge via various signs or sign systems (Fadeev 2019; Kozulin et al. 2003: 15-38) rather than via direct experience and interaction with an object. During human cultural-historical development, symbolic mediation became the dominant way of learning, memorizing, and functioning of other higher psychological functions (Ivanov 2014; Kozulin et al. 2003). Since such abstract concepts as text always presuppose mediated learning, any educational intervention must consider whether signs and sign systems that are involved in the mediation are also available for a learner. The specific semiotic nature of the concept of the text and its ability to be mediated via an almost limitless number of sign systems makes it a unique symbolic mediator, the acquisition of which "enable[s] the explaining of the world in a more integrated manner, allowing for new predictions" (Kikas 2010: 116).

Mediated learning involves not only purely symbolic mediation but also mediation through communication, namely "human mediation" (Kozulin et al. 2003: 19). Thus, learning the concept of the text happens as a result of active interaction with others, such as peers, teachers, parents, who themselves "conceptualise meanings" (Kikas 2010: 116) and present them to a learner in "a ready-made" form. According to Vygotsky, verbal communication is "able to predetermine the path of the development of generalizations and its final point - a fully formed concept" (Vygotsky 2012: 129).

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However, the weak side of verbal mediation is that it cannot guarantee the formation of a real concept due to the impossibility of conveying the structures of thinking (ibid.). Thus, learning and teaching the concept of the text presupposes significant challenges for contemporary educational practices.

> Spontaneous concepts that confront a deficit of conscious and volitional control find this control in the zone of proximal development, in the cooperation of the child with adults. That is why it is essential first to bring spontaneous concepts up to a certain level of development that would guarantee that the scientific concepts are actually just above the spontaneous ones. (Vygotsky 2012: 206)

The value of acquiring the concept of the text in contemporary culture and developing it to the level of a real concept originates from the two main aspects. First of all, it is the role of text in cultural communication processes that makes acquiring the concept of the text a necessary step in accessing knowledge mediated via various forms of texts in contemporary culture. Secondly, developing scientific concepts of diverse phenomena from educational and developmental perspectives is valuable. As Vygotsky argued, "[t]he strength of scientific concepts lies in their conscious and deliberate character" (Vygotsky 2012: 206), while the main difficulty that relates to the spontaneous concept "lies in the child's inability to use these concepts freely and voluntarily and to form abstractions" (ibid.: 157-158).

Acquisition of any scientific concept does not happen in isolation from previously learned knowledge. This is another aspect of the concept formation process, where Vygotsky's theory provides additional input. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory argues that the development of the next stage in the formation of a concept relies on the previous stage, utilizing a previously established system of knowledge. According to Kikas, learners' previously gained knowledge also "affects how they interpret the new information" (2010: 116). As a result, the development of scientific concepts contributes to the development of different structures of thinking and cognitive development in general, which Vygotsky compared with "the effect of learning a foreign language, a process that is conscious and deliberate from the start" (Vygotsky 2012: 206).

Establishing the correlations with previously learned information can be especially important when dealing with the concept of the text in digital culture, considering the amount of experience young learners receive about various aspects of digital texts in the context of informal learning. This also works as a reverse process when mastering a particular concept influences the concept formation of other phenomena by "giving new meanings to perceptible phenomena" (Kikas 2010: 114). This can potentially be very relevant to the concept of the text due to being one of the most essential

elements of cultural communication processes and one of the key mediators of knowledge in education. Thus, acquiring the concept of the text can serve as a foundation of meaning structures for learning about other cultural phenomena.

The role of previously learned information represents why the development of pseudo-concepts features so much importance from the perspective of learning and teaching. According to Vygotsky, pseudo-concepts represent one of the earliest forms of concepts that young learners develop and "which externally seem as scientific concepts (words heard from adults) but are in essence everyday concepts." Pseudo-concepts represent a necessary step in concept formation due to young learners' inability to spontaneously acquire complex meaning structures, namely real concepts, conveyed via human or symbolic mediation, "[t]he lines along which a complex develops are predetermined by the meaning a given word already has in the language of adults" (Vygotsky 2012: 128). At the same time, the pseudo-concept provides a crucial pedagogical perspective as it "enables children to communicate effectively with adults and that this communication (the intermental aspect) is necessary for the transformation of the complex into a genuine concept (the intramental aspect) for the learner" (Berger 2005: 159). The main problem with pseudo-concepts is that while being similar to real concepts in their form, they are still explained through everyday experience. In the lack of pedagogical interventions aimed to establish the necessary conditions for young learners "for conceptualising the new information or when they lack necessary tools (knowledge or skills) for creating relations, pseudo-concepts develop into synthetic concepts (i.e., concepts, modified and constructed based on experience)" (Kikas 2019: 117).

Given the diversity of digital and printed texts that young learners deal with daily, as well as the representations of the concept of the text in the limited terms of literary education at secondary schools, we may suggest that the main focus of contemporary educational interventions concerning the development of the scientific concept of text in digital culture should be on supporting the further development of already established pseudo-concepts of text among young learners.

Considering Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and the understanding of the concept of the text within the semiotics of culture, we can formulate the following aspects regarding learning the concept of the text in digital culture:

1. The concept of the text represents a complex abstract concept that can be acquired as a symbolic psychological tool providing young learners with access to knowledge mediated in digital culture via diverse types of texts. Mastering the concept of the text gives learners more flexibility in accessing, analyzing, and sharing knowledge.

2. Learners do not develop the concept of the text simultaneously, as concept formation always undergoes specific stages of development (described in Vygotsky's research). As with any other concept, it takes time to proceed from pre-conceptual

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thinking toward what we can call a scientific concept. Therefore, forming the pseudo-concept of text and the symbolic mediators available to a young learner deserve specific attention in educational practices.

3. The key to successfully acquiring a text as a complex concept and a potential psychological tool is to build connections with the young learners' previous knowledge, e.g., their experiential knowledge, informal learning practices, and structured pedagogical interventions.

4. Recent studies (e.g., Kikas 2010; Berger 2005) demonstrated that it is also essential to find a variety of tasks and possibilities in teaching and representing the concept. Thus, finding "different possibilities for interpreting the phenomenon" (Kikas 2010: 125) is necessary. In literary education, the text is typically perceived as merely printed materials (or at least their digitized versions). This establishes a narrow understanding of the phenomenon and does not provide the necessary resources for acquiring the scientific concept of text as a psychological tool necessary for accessing knowledge in digital culture.

5. According to Vygotsky, the essence of the concept formation is (a) focusing attention; (b) selecting distinctive features; (c) analysis and synthesis: "it is a functional use of the word, or any other sign, as means of focusing one's attention, selecting distinctive features and analyzing and synthesizing them, that plays a central role in concept formation" (Vygotsky 2012: 114).

6. Another aspect of acquiring any concept in general and the concept of the text, particularly, is the social and cultural context in which the concept is acquired. Since this is where the meaning originates, and thus "social world determines the ways concepts need to develop" (Berger 2005: 156).

7. The essence of a successful acquisition of any concept is its context and practical application, no matter at what stage of development a particular concept is. In other words, "for learning, not only internalising but also externalising process is of importance" (Kikas 2010: 117).

4. Conclusions

The purpose of the given study was to identify the processes underlying the acquisition of the concept of the text in digital culture and to introduce Lev Vygotsky's theory of concept formation as a valuable methodological tool for contemporary semiotic studies in researching learning, memorizing, and meaning-making.

The study has shown that the phenomenon of text represents a crucial symbolic mediator in contemporary digital culture. The evolution of digital culture has enriched the possibilities for the representation of texts and for enhancing the possibilities for metatextual multiplicity, emphasizing the educational dimension of the concept of the

text. The role of text as a source of learning and educational device originates from the functions of text, which include conveying information and meaning generation, as well as from its developmental role as (one of the most advanced) potential psychological tool. As a result, acquiring the concept of the text provides young learners access to knowledge mediated via diverse forms of texts incorporating various sign systems.

In this study, we proposed the methodological foundations for incorporating Lev Vygotsky's theory of concept formation as an analytical tool for researching the processes of meaning-making, i.e., concept formation, learning, and memorizing. As a result, Lev Vygotsky's approach to studying higher psychological processes allowed us to look at the semiotic processes from a different perspective. In other words, we can look at the internalized signs not only through their levels of relations and complexity of signification but also, we can look at them in dynamics as a process of gradual change and development.

The study presented here attempted to set the ground for describing the processes behind acquiring the concept of the text in contemporary digital culture. The concept of the text is related to a complex abstract cultural phenomenon, which is difficult to acquire through direct experience and interaction with an object. Thus, learning mainly occurs in a mediated form, including symbolic and human mediation.

The symbolic nature of the phenomenon of text as well as learners' diverse experience with various forms of texts, especially the digital ones, in contemporary popular culture, requires researchers and educators to focus specifically on the variety of synthetic concepts aroused in the formation of the concept of the text among young learners.

Considering the findings both of Vygotsky and of recent research (e.g., Kikas 2010; Berger 2005), the educational practices addressing the development of the concepts of text need to focus on its functional uses, the analysis, and synthesis of its distinctive features, the cultural and social contexts of its possible application, as well as the externalization and explicit practice of its use as a concept. Further empirical research is required to identify the specific explanations related to the different stages of the formation of the concept of the text in digital culture, as well as to explore semiotics' potential to contribute to the educational practices aimed at supporting the learning of the concept of the text in digital culture.

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Contemplating post-digital narrativity: Co-active, multimodal meaning-making on Instagram and its implications on learning

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ABSTRACT

The paper addresses the post-digital, multimodal narratives of a thirteen-year-old teenage girl on Instagram. Post-digitality refers to the ontological assumption that the online is inseparably intertwined with the offline world. On the other hand, narratives are understood as sociocultural, perspectival, and interactional discursive nodes co-produced by the teenage girl and the platform. The fine-grained interpretation of our data draws upon a transdisciplinary framework combining several theoretical and methodological approaches, most prominently social semiotics and semiotic technology, narrative studies, new literacy studies, and critical sociolinguistics. The qualitative analysis of our data follows the logic of nexus analysis, highlighting the design of the post-digital, multimodal teenage narratives on Instagram Stories and the software's complex role in co-crafting situated storytelling. The main research findings indicate that Instragram's affordances, i.e., its technological, semiotic, social, and algorithmic features, function as co-active, non-human agents with which the adolescent girl strategically negotiates to produce her multimodal narrative work. Finally, we argue that educational policy should acknowledge the affordances of the teenage-platform multimodal narrative synergy and the need for a post-digital critical literacies pedagogy.

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1. Introduction: The narrative turn and the new media

Narrativity has been a key concept in human thought since Aristotle's time. Throughout history, people have found myriad ways to narrate their stories orally or in writing. Indeed, "storytelling is integral to the way we structure, account for and display our understanding of our human condition and experience" (Thornborrow 2012: 51). A wide variety of scientific paradigms, ranging from literary theory to semiotics, have explored the concept of narrative offering insightful work on narrativity. Out of these, Walsh (2018:11) claims, "some have gained some ascendency at certain periods," leading to the so-called 'narrative turn' (De Fina and Johnstone 2015), a term referring to "the transition of narrative study from literature to social sciences" (Davies 2015:396) that from the late 1970s onwards has developed in several competing perspectives.

In the early days of this interdisciplinary endeavor, one could notice, as Gee (1991) put it, a "charge of formalism," a trend in narrative analysis to look for formal patterns (Hodge and Kress 1988: 204). Through the years, narratives have been explored regarding text and structure, sociocultural variety, interaction, and power discourse. Thus, analyzing narrative has become one of the most prominent areas of inquiry for any approach to meaning-making.

For meaning-makers, narratives are indisputably privileged means to express their worldviews. Still, we must raise questions about how, where, when, and why narratives unfold. Meaning-making is a historically and socially situated process that also applies to its narrative aspect. The new media seem to have a profound effect on meaning-making, effectively "reshap[ing] the ways in which we make meanings" (Domingo et al. 2015:264). Consequently, acknowledging the role of new media on narrativity is necessary for understanding the digitally-based forms of meaning-making.

Our research focuses on a specific form of new media, *social media*, as new spaces for unfolding narratives. Nonetheless, these spaces are:

> (pre-) designed for distinct and specific communicational purposes: for the production and display of identity for instance; or as 'hubs' or nodes for the distribution of information, etc. These 'platforms' are tightly designed and controlled spaces with affordances that are social, physical, and semiotic in their effects. (Kress 2014:12)

To Kress's inspiring approach, we can add the conceptualization of social media as *algorithmically* designed socio-technical spaces with *affordances* (Bucher and Helmond 2018) that influence how social media users construct their *multimodal* meanings and, specifically, their stories.[1]

2. Narrativity in retrospect: Perspectives and relevant literature

As noted, narrative research has led to an ample range of contributions. In this section, we review the existing approaches to narrativity to situate our approach in this broad field of research. A full survey (like those of De Fina and Johnstone 2015; Thornborrow 2012) is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, we focus on reviewing the approaches that have contributed to shaping *post-digital, multimodal narrative synergy*.

2.1. The foundations: Narrativity in the social sciences

In the social sciences, the most-cited perspective on narrativity is that by Labov and Waletzky (1967), who suggest that narrative elements can perform five functions. Later, Labov (1972) expanded the functions to six, namely *abstract, orientation, complication action, evaluation, resolution*, and *coda*, "creating one of the most influential models for analyzing personal narratives" (Gimenez 2010:199). Thus, from a sociolinguistic perspective, a narrative is seen as a chronologically organized textual sequence serving specific functions.

While this model is helpful for several possible applications, many researchers argue that it mainly fits data elicited during isolated, context-less settings, such as research interviews (Gimenez 2010; De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012). This line of critique has led to the emergence of more situated perspectives, like Hymes's and other sociocultural approaches, as well as that of Conversation Analysis, which we will consider presently. However, Labov's view on narrativity still has much to offer and we have accordingly adjusted his framework to fit our study of social media narratives (see section Four).

For Dell Hymes and his "narrative view of the world," storytelling is one of the principal modes of human communication, in which "denotational, cognitive, affective and interpersonal aspects combine" (Blommaert 2006: 234). He framed his

[1] Throughout this paper, we use the terms 'narrative' and 'stories' interchangeably. In the literature, one can find more nuanced approaches to this matter. For instance, Hodge and Kress (1988:229) explicitly distinguish between these terms, with "narrative [referring] to the organization of the world as constructed by a text [while] story refers to a generic type of narrative, ordered in particular formal, textual ways, contingent on the social organization." See also Cobley (2001), Ochs and Capps (2001).

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approach to narrative as a cultural genre through his notion of 'ethnopoetics,' aimed to reconstruct the aesthetic functions of narrativity. This approach is often praised for contributing to the "uncovering of the poetic quality of storytelling" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: xi). However, in modern societies, the notion of culture is much fuzzier than in Hymes's time, resulting in the need for more nuanced understandings of storytelling practices.

In parallel with Hymes's ethnographic research, scholars such as Scollon and Scollon (1981), Heath (1983), and Gee (1991, 2014) paved the way for a view on narratives "not simply as texts but rather as complex communicative practices intimately linked with the production of social life" (De Fina and Georgakopoulou 2012: i). This interconnection between storytelling and social practice also implies a linking between the former and the concept of *discourse*,[2] in the sense that social identities (and social reality more generally) are discursively constructed through narratives (Gavriely-Nuri 2018). This recent linking of narrative and discourse in the broader field of Critical Discourse Studies has reconceptualized narrativity, associating it with power and authority.

2.2. **Interactional approaches to narrativity**

Researching narratives in sociocultural practice entails an alternative approach that perceives narrativity as deeply rooted in our particular contexts. Another alternative comes from Conversation Analysis work, where narratives are interpreted "as highly embedded in surrounding talk and deeply sensitive to different participation roles" (De Fina and Johnstone 2015:156), highlighting the significance of the interlocutors' role in a specific instance.

The contribution of this particular interactional paradigm is supplemented by other interactional yet more 'flexible' approaches to narratives, notably the so-called 'small stories research' paradigm (Georgakopoulou 2017a; 2017b; 2019). This paradigm emphasizes the "largely unscripted, naturally occurring" (Thornborrow 2012:51) range of storytelling activities that traditional narrative analysis did not consider worthy objects of study.

Specifically, small stories refer to small, fragmented, co-constructed, often open-ended tellings of events (Georgakopoulou 2017b). These stories share a lurking anti-essentialist assumption of "self, society, and culture which stresses the multiplicity, fragmentation, context-specificity, and performativity of our communication practices" (ibid: 267). In the last decade or so, there has been excellent work informed by this paradigm (see, for instance, Georgalou 2015; Page 2012), especially in the case of

[2] In Gee's (2014:201) terms, discourse is understood as the "ways of combining and integrating language, actions, interactions, ways of thinking, believing, valuing, and using various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity."

stories on social media that differ from conventional narratives because of their multimodal, multi-authored, mundane, and post-digital nature.

Another example in this "cohort of more flexible approaches" (Dayter 2015:1) is the approach of Ochs and Capps (2001), who identify five dimensions of narratives: tellership, tellability, embeddedness, linearity, and moral stance. These five dimensions comprise a framework accounting for the narrative's structural and contextual aspects (Page 2015), which makes it appropriate for analyzing new media narrativity.

The above approaches have answered the call to shift attention from canonical narrative structures toward a more flexible, relativist conceptualization of narrativity as a *scalar* concept (ibid). Perspectives on stories that occur naturally in everyday contexts have proved of great significance for our work, along with another recent trend in the social sciences, that of multimodal analysis.

2.3. **Multimodal narrative analysis**

Multimodality is a crucial concept of Social Semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988; Kress 2010; van Leeuwen 2005), a paradigm that aims to shift the emphasis on language as central to human communication toward a more holistic view of *semiosis*. Attending to semiosis in its full multimodal spectrum (Bezemer and Kress 2016:15) entails paying careful attention to every *semiotic resource* meaning-makers use in producing, distributing, and interpreting *signs*. Semiotic resources are

> the actions, materials, and artifacts we use for communicative purposes, […] together with the ways in which these resources can be organized. Semiotic resources have a meaning potential, based on their past uses, and a set of affordances based on their possible uses, and these will be actualized in concrete social contexts where their use is subject to some form of a semiotic regime (van Leeuwen 2005:285)

Communication and meaning-making have always been multimodal (see Kress 2010). However, the new media and social media revolution in the *post-digital*[3] era (Maly and Blommaert 2019) has foregrounded the semiotic forms constituting the multimodal texts of the 'new communicative order.'

Multimodal narrative analysts (De Fina and Johnstone 2015; Page 2010, 2012, 2015) have explored the affordances of each semiotic resource employed by multimodal narratives, the role of their social, economic, and political contexts, as well as notions such as authorship, space and time.

[3] The concept of 'post-digitality' entails the assumption that the revolutionary phase of digital media is a thing of the past. Nowadays, the online is inseparably intertwined with the offline world.

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2.4. Narrative design as synergy: New media affordances and subjectivity

The perspectives discussed so far have allowed us to stress the importance of structure, context, and interaction to better understand narrativity as a *process*. Yet, existing literature seldom acknowledges the role of the specific actors, affordances, and discourses found in new media (for notable exceptions, see Georgakopoulou and Bolander 2022; Georgakopoulou, Iversen and Stage 2020; Topalidou Laskaridou 2021).

Recent social semiotic research has studied how the *design* of the new and social media affects both meaning-making and the related social practices under the umbrella term 'semiotic technology' (Djonov and van Leeuwen 2018; Papadopoulos 2020; Poulsen and Kvåle 2018). These studies have examined the semiotic, social, and algorithmic affordances that impact meaning-making, leading us to explore the nature and function of *non-human actors* (Koutsogannis et al. 2020) in meaning-making. We aim to extend this line of research to social media narratives to understand how the *social media platforms'* built-in semiotic, socio-technical, and software logic impact meaning.

Affordances are the ways social media make specific actions possible while constraining others. They include each semiotic resource's affordances, socio-technical affordances like interactivity, synchronicity/asynchronicity, content permanence, manageability, searchability, mobility, and reach (see boyd 2010; Madianou and Miller 2013), as well as algorithmic affordances like metrification, datafication and algorithmic circulation of content.

In our research, we try to determine how the teenage social media user strategically negotiates with Instagram's semiotic, social, and algorithmic affordances to produce her multimodal narrative work. Specifically, we employ the notion of *perceived affordances* (Bucher and Helmond 2018), which names how users engage with affordances based on their subjective uptake of how they function.

Our turn to subjectivity is affected by the sociocultural and the interactionally oriented approaches to narrativity, which have shifted the focus from 'monologic' (De Fina and Johnstone 2015) to negotiated perceptions of identity, mainly the interconnection between storytelling and the building of identities in social practice.

Subjectivity is a rather complex notion. Here, we take it to comprise four interacting concepts coming from various disciplines: *interest* (Kress 2010), *habitus* (Bourdieu 2002), *enacted agency* (Nichols and Campano 2017), and *micro-hegemonies* (Blommaert and Varis 2013). Interest refers to the social, cultural, affective, and material experiences of human beings that inform their engagement with the world (Bezemer and Kress 2016: 27), their "habitual way of being in the world" (Gee 2014: 162). This implies that the agency of each individual is *enacted* (Nichols and Campano 2017) in relation to different networks of people, objects, and environments, networks full of micro-hegemonies, meaning the multiple sets of norms governing the minutiae of social life.

3. Methodology

In our single-case study (Yin 2018), we analyze the Instagram narratives of Eva,[4] a thirteen-year-old teenage girl[5] chosen because of her intensive engagement with the specific platform. Employing an 'adaptive digital ethnographic' (Hine, Kendall and boyd 2009) and 'connective' (Leander and McKim 2003) approach, we identified the multimodal teenage narratives on Instagram Stories[6] and studied their design, motivation, and enactment.

Adaptive digital ethnography involves "applying flexible routes to fieldwork over time to suit the mobile, ever-shifting landscape of social media" (Georgakopoulou 2017b:272). In more detail, we entered the "zone of identification" (Pan 2014), participating in the Instagram community and observing social action as it unfolded.

Following Leander and McKim's recommendation (2003), our approach was connective; to understand the production conditions of Eva's narrative better, we maintained direct contact with her. This also constituted our 'triangulation' method, for Eva was always 'on alert,' either to confirm or to refute our emerging hypotheses.

Data collection involved the researchers' engagement to comprehend the semiotic and sociocultural trends on the platform environment, monitor Eva's actions, and collect[7] her 'digital artifacts' (Yin 2018), namely the narratives she posted on Instagram Stories. Our study's data comprise a three-episode narrative of affection, developed over one and a half months. Next to that, we also used informal conversations with Eva and field notes.

Our research endeavor's ethnographic orientation was deemed highly appropriate to the 'kaleidoscopic' and complicated (Blommaert 2015) narrative reality of Instagram. Its complexity is partly an effect of the social platform's affordances. Thus, Instagram was placed under concrete examination as a semiotic technology co-shaping the teenage girl's semiotic and social practices. In effect, Instagram was approached not just as a contextual factor but as an active non-human actor in meaning-making.

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[4] 'Eva' is a pseudonym, chosen by the research participant and used here to ensure confidentiality.

[5] Given that our case study involved an underage participant, we took care to have her parents' written consent before engaging in conversations with her.

[6] Stories is a feature of Instagram, "launched as chronologically ordered multi-modal collections with a beginning-middle-end case study continuity and permanence, relative to the single feed and the moment" Georgakopoulou (2017a: 327-328). To avoid confusion, we mark Stories as a feature with a capital S, separating them from stories as the telling of events.

[7] We collected our data through screenshots for a longitudinal research project on meaning-making practices on Instagram.

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3.1. Nexus analysis as a framework for multimodal narrative analysis

In the post-digital era, *platform-mediated* narratives unfold in the offline-online nexus. In other words, online digital practices intermingle with the more conventional, offline ones. This complexity will be aptly highlighted by analyzing our data following the logic of nexus analysis (Hult 2017; Scollon and Scollon 2004).

We approach each digital artifact as a 'nexus of interdiscursivity' (Koutsogiannis 2020), in which many global and local discourses are mixed. Therefore, we adjust Scollon and Scollon's (2004) framework for nexus analysis to the specific needs of researching social media (See Figure 1 below). In particular, the *sign of engagement*, represented here as an arrow, is essentially a *sign-complex* (Bezemer and Kress 2016) compiled by five Stories. Therefore, Eva's multimodal narrative forms our inquiry's 'point of entry.' In addition, the three intertwined circles surrounding the nexus, namely subjectivity, affordances in *place*,[8] and discourses in place, correspond to different aspects of the sign-complex.

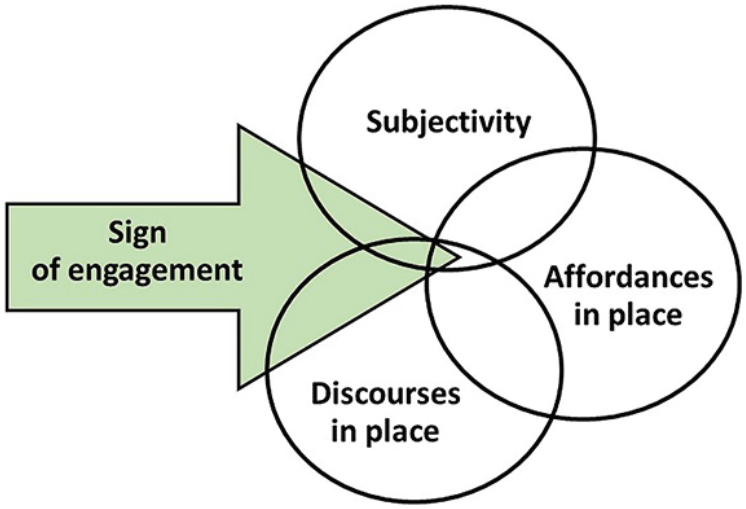

Figure 7. A model for Nexus Analysis of multimodal narratives (adapted from Scollon and Scollon 2004).

Altogether, our multimodal analysis of Eva's narrative aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Do platform affordances play any part in storytelling? If so, how does this happen?

[8] The emphasis on affordances *in place* relates to the historically and socially situated function of the semiotic, social, and algorithmic features engaging in narrative action. In contrast, the notion of discourses in place stands for "the wider circulating discourses that are already present […] when the action occurs" (Hult 2017).

2. How does Eva perceive and recontextualize the medium affordances in her narrative practices?

3. What are the implications of the assumed teenage-platform synergy for literacies and learning?

4. Analysis

We start the analysis section with a concise overview of the feature of Stories, focusing on the design and the affordances offered for meaning-making. Then, we turn our attention to the multimodal narrative of Eva, analyzing the 'where,' the 'what,' the 'how,' and the 'why' of the story.

4.1. Instagram stories: Design and affordances

The feature of Stories is a multimodal text environment first launched by Instagram in 2016 to enrich user-generated content on the platform through 'the sharing of the moment' (Instagram 2016[9]). Stories can be synchronous or asynchronous 'artifacts,' five to fifteen seconds each and up to one hundred consecutive posts, available for round-the-clock viewing and interaction. Thus, ephemerality comes under the spotlight, giving prominence to the spontaneous and mundane of everyday life. This aspect of storytelling is essential in the platform ecology, as Instagram focuses on the 'present,' the constant user-generated content mobility. The saliency of the feature of Stories layout on the Instagram interface further amplifies this. The Stories' placement on the top level of the interacting screen 'invites' users to engage with them as soon as they open the app.

The arrangement of the posts reflects 'algorithmic suggestions,' informed by the personalized interests of the users, their interactive habits, and the 'timeliness' of each post. For example, Instagram algorithms order the content of the 'horizontal axis,' the top level on the platform interface, according to the specific 'algorithmic identity' (Chenney-Lippold 2011) formed by the 'mining' of each user's data.

To conclude, the semiotic, socio-technical and algorithmic design of the feature of Stories allows users to 'digitalize' their multilayered everyday life. Their affordances give users various possibilities to produce, disseminate and interpret meanings. At the same time, they constrain the action(s) by establishing 'chronotopic'[10] (Blommaert 2015) rules and socio-semiotic 'regimes' (Djonov and van Leeuwen 2018).

[9] https://about.instagram.com/blog/announcements/new-ways-to-share-with-instagram-stories-and-instagram-direct (Access: 5/9/2022).

[10] Blommaert (2015:124) employs the Bakhtinian notion of 'chronotopes' to refer to the "intrinsic blending of space and time in any event in the real world." We extend this conceptualization to social media to stress the 'timespace' configurations affecting social action in the online-offline nexus.

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4.2. **A post-digital, multimodal narrative of affection**

Eva tells the story of her unrequited love for one of her schoolmates. The narrative consists of five seemingly unrelated Stories, which recite Eva's one-sided affective story. The recipient of her love is symbolically represented as orange through diverse materials (objects, printed paper), written text,[11] and orange-colored resources (e.g., the orange heart emoticon, Figure 2). The five screenshots depicted below compose what a *narrative nexus* which includes "multiple, active co-tellers, moderately tellable account, relatively embedded in surrounding discourse and activity, […] temporal and causal organization, and uncertain, fluid moral stance" (Ochs and Capps 2001:23). As research on small stories has aptly demonstrated, this "ambient, unfolding narrative composed of many fragmented and ephemeral pieces of information" (Dayter 2015:8) comprises a certain quasi-linear, yet flexible, structure that eventually presents a complete narrative of the events.

Indeed, each Story separately cannot account for a complete, independent story. However, if approached as a nexus, by the end of the sequence, the data depict a whole, self-contained narrative, which we can summarize as follows: The online narration begins *in medias res* since the story has been underway for a certain period at the offline level before its online 'onset' (Figure 2). Adjusting Labov's terms, the first Story depicts Eva's attempt to orientate a specific audience to her love story, while the next one (Figure 3) can be seen as a consequent elaboration providing even more information. In addition, the second Story explicitly incorporates a co-teller whose Story Eva reshares. In the last piece of data (Figure 4), Eva 'stages' a Story trilogy that implies the complication of her narrative and signifies the resolution and coda of her story.

Throughout her narrative, Eva provides nuggets of her evaluation of the events depicted through her 'semiotic work' (Kress 2015). A work, moreover, that is always *post-factum* since all her Stories are shared *after* carefully editing the *multimodal ensembles* (Bezemer and Kress 2016) she creates. Despite the immediacy and spontaneity discourses surrounding Instagram's Stories feature, which privilege the impulsive, unreflective 'sharing of the moment,' Eva always tries to regulate the uptake of her narrative. All the while relating current events, her telling can best be described as *frozen synchronicity* (Topalidou Laskaridou 2021:125). The narration of the moment becomes thus controllable, a strategic choice that, according to Eva, "aims at avoiding" a possible "face-threatening act" (Brown and Levinson 1987) from some of her Instagram 'haters,' in case her data were unfiltered and hence vulnerable to criticism.

[11] 'Portokali' means orange in Greek.

The story format in Labov's (1972) work, recontextualized here by Eva to suit the narration of her affective story, functions as a mechanism of coherence. This reminds us of Blommaert's (2005: 84) claim that "narratives are never flat but always structured into units, segments, episodes." Even though small, fragmented, and complex, Eva's narrative is no less exciting and valid than any typical story. In more detail, the fragmented and episodic elements of narrativity on Instagram can be 'reconciled' with the notion of structure through Blommaert's (2018: 44) concept of *constructure*, a term that combines two others – structure and construction – to name the fact that any social event – storytelling in our case – is always ordered, but in a dynamic and unstable, unfinished and non-unified way.

Therefore, narrativity on Instagram is a 'scalar concept' (Page 2015) that often falls outside the *canonical narrative schema*. Likewise, our research leads us to view narratives as 'grammars of experience' (Hymes 1996), i.e., emerging through social action and always situated in specific sociocultural contexts. The Instagram platform environment surrounding Eva's storytelling allows life sharing in miniaturized form (Georgakopoulou 2017b:269), selecting from a default semiotic repertoire. Platform affordances facilitate narrativity's interactional aspects by providing call-to-action interactive buttons and resharing possibilities. Eva utilizes these (see Figure 3) to involve a co-teller in her story, proving that her affective story is worth sharing. This visual narrative stance-taking (Georgakopoulou 2017a; 2017b) positions her audience as recipients while simultaneously ensuring the multiple tellerships of the story. The platform's socio-technical affordances allow Eva to co-construct an affective account that *indexes* her subjectivity and immerses the reader. In this way, she tries to stand out in the Instagram ecology and ensure her post-digital, offline social success.

To conclude, her narrative's aestheticized and multivocal nature relates to her post-digital socialization through the construction of a successful online persona – similar to the influencers' discourse. This particular post-digital nature of narrativity is also evident in that, to correctly interpret her love story, extra-situational, 'offline' knowledge is necessary since, as indicated above, Eva symbolically constructs the recipient of her affections as an 'orange.' Thus, her narrative is associated with 'insiders,' with people in her intimate circle (Davies 2015:405).

Stories are consequently shaped by the situated context in which they unfold. Whereas Eva seems to acknowledge some of the platform's semiotic and social possibilities, she subconsciously acquiesces to the algorithm's agentive role in her meaning-making processes. As noted above, her semiotic and social choices are informed by the opaque action of non-human agents that provide her with meaning-making and content-circulation resources. In this way, algorithmic affordances heavily influence the tellership and tellability aspects of the teenage narrative

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by co-constructing the story and making it relevant for Eva's audience. In the following subsection, we examine each part of the story in even more detail, focusing on the multimodal realization of the narrative in conjunction with Instagram's role in this process.

4.3. **Narrativity as adaptive synergy**

In the first image, we observe Eva visually orienting her insider audience to the story setting (Gee 2014). She achieves this by carefully creating a multimodal ensemble containing semiotic resources such as images, objects, emojis, layout, color, and written language.

Figure 2. The visual orientation of the setting

Specifically, she photographs herself holding an orangeade, placing it at the center of the picture to attract viewers' attention. This semiotic choice invites two interpretations. On the one hand, it supports *deixis* (Ledin and Machin 2017), the presentation of the object to the viewer, to foreground her subjectivity as the person about to consume the product. On a deeper level, this symbolic game creates a narrative suspense that only insiders can interpret since she does not elaborate

further on the object, except for including abstract elements, such as the written text 'Yasss' and the heart emoticon. Hence, a contextually informed interpretation is needed to understand the *affective metonymy* hidden in plain sight.

Eva presents the protagonist of her narrative through the metonymic association of the object standing for the person. The object depicted is not of interest in itself; instead, it is used to imply the unnamed character. Concurrently, the use of the orangeade operates as a metaphor for Eva's affective feelings. The embedding of the heart emoticon reinforces this to add another "non-verbal affective dimension" (Kern 2015:179) to her narrative, prompting her intimate audience to interpret the post in a non-referential way. The emoticon chosen is the heart icon, an emblematic index of affection on Instagram, and a ubiquitous interactive sign (Adami 2014). Eva's selection of the heart emoticon relates to her 'algorithmic imaginary' (Bucher 2017). Based on a rather abstract perception of an algorithm and its functions, she assumes that by "choosing the heart, the post will reach more users because the heart symbol is everywhere on Instagram." Lastly, the emoticon's orange color further reinforces the Story's interpretation as a narrative of affection since it connotes the teenage boy referred to as 'orange' within her intimate peer group.

The sign-complex Eva creates by adding semiotic elements to the photograph taken is an explicit effort to draw attention to her work, making the visual arrangement salient because "Instagram specializes in pictures," as she explains. This action proves Eva's realistic perception of the socio-semiotic affordances that affect her social activity on the platform.

This *design of the audience's design* (Topalidou Laskaridou 2021, adjusting Androutsopoulos 2014) is greatly influenced by the discourses in place, especially the representation of materiality as congruent with entertainment and pleasure. Eva assures that "Instagram is a sponsor of what you do in your life. Not showing what you do equals the action not taking place."

We left the analysis of the written text "Yasss"[12] last because it proves to be an excellent way to transition to the next part of the story by discussing the role of language in Eva's multimodal synthesis. What is of great value here is not the text itself but its typographic elements. Contrary to her usual font choice (see Figures 3 and 4), in the example under examination, she chooses, out of a predefined set of typographic features, a light, calligraphic, neon-like font to *stand out from the mundane*. This aspect highlights the emotion's uniqueness, yet with a platform-afforded resource intended precisely to mark the concept of 'uniqueness.'

[12] A pun associated with 'Yesss,' indicating Eva's affirmative evaluation of the story.

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In the second sign-complex of the narrative nexus, Eva reshares her best friend's meme[13] concerning the former's love story, thus making her friend an active co-teller. The co-teller's meme is a multimodal artifact comprised of an exaggerated image of the familiar cartoon mouse Jerry, combined with a two-fold anchorage of the image (Barthes 1977). On the one hand, the co-teller anchors the image's content with the written text on top: "Eva every time she talks or stands next to the orange" (translated from Greek by the authors). On the other hand, Eva herself anchors the meme by tagging her friend and thanking her ("Eucaristume tn [friend's name] giauto") for the creation of the story under examination.

Figure 3. The multivocal realization of the narrative

[13] A broadly circulated cultural genre (see Varis and Blommaert 2015).

Both 'anchorings' are realized in Greeklish, a writing system in which the Latin alphabet is used to transcribe Greek words (Koutsogiannis 2015). Using Greeklish plays a central role in the narrative process by marking the target audience, including all age-appropriate recipients that understand and use this writing system, while excluding others who do not meet the 'criteria' to engage in the interpretation of the narrative.

Concerning the function of another verbal element, the interactive tag of the co-teller's Instagram account, Eva exploits networking as a 'surplus value' that increases her social and symbolic capital. She connects, thus, the participatory culture in social media (Jenkins, Ito and boyd 2016) with the tellership dimension of narrativity.

Before turning to the staged resolution and the story's coda, it is worth mentioning that in the example used, Eva enhances the tellability of her story by resharing and 'positively' evaluating her friend's initiative. This is semiotically marked when she expresses her apparent 'inconvenience' by sarcastically thanking her friend: "We thank [friend's name] for this." She also visually disapproves – somewhat ironically – her friend's action by adding two clapping hands emojis. Far from being dismissive, this evaluation is profoundly positive, as the whole multimodal ensemble acquires an increased functional load that confirms the narrative's worthiness. At the same time, using the first grammatical person[14] in expressing her 'gratitude' constitutes a proposed 'applauding' uptake of the story, which we can interpret as a 'demand' in Halliday's (1985) terms.

The last part of Eva's story contains the closure of the fragmented narrative, staged as a *resolution trilogy* comprised of three interrelated screenshots (Figure 4), providing her audience with the information that her story has ended. One may notice that between the second and the third example is omitted what Gee (2014) names 'Crisis,' a notion related to the Labovian 'complication of the action,' the fact that the story has come to a point where it needs a resolution. This omission proves the need to perceive narrativity as a post-digital process. What led to the end of the love story is found in the offline level of social action, which we can only restore ethnographically.

While the second screenshot of the resolution trilogy implied the crisis, namely the symbolic cut of an orange-depicting printed paper, our direct contact with Eva helped us understand that her love story ended because the feelings she expressed to her teenage crush were rejected.

[14] In Greek, the first-person plural is integrated, as a morphological category, in the suffix of the verb.

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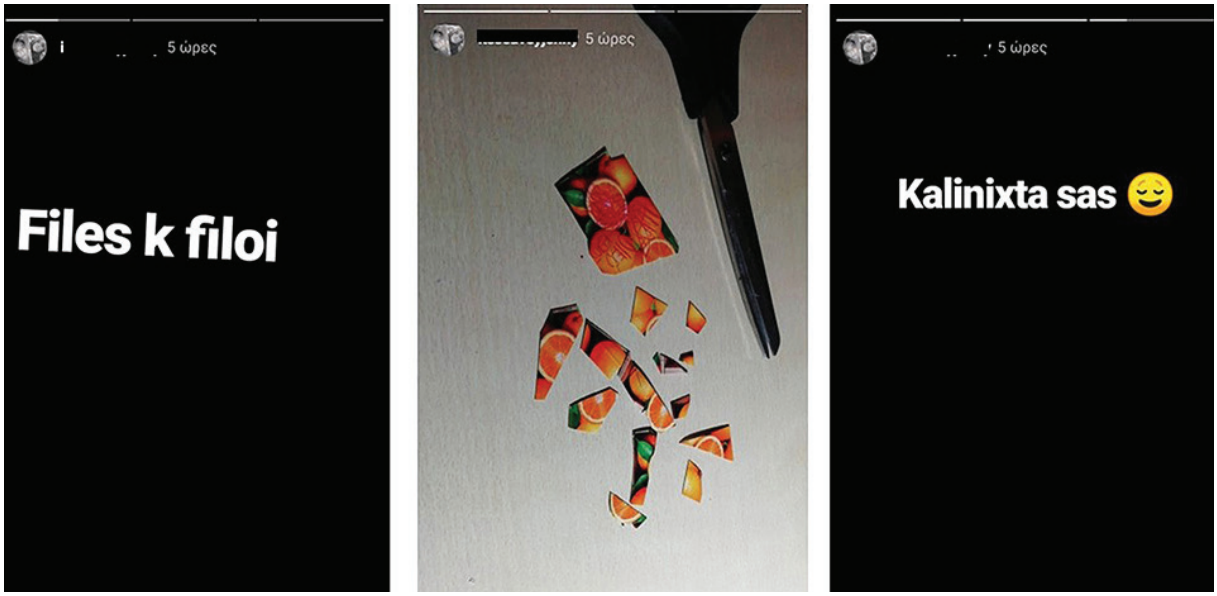

Figure 4. The resolution trilogy: the closure of the fragmented narrative.

Returning to the final trilogy, the first and the last screenshots frame the action with written text in Greeklish, beginning with the address "Files k Filoi" [female and male friends] and closing with the phrase "Kalinixta sas" [Goodnight all], accompanied by an emoticon expressing 'relief.' The last screenshot functions as the coda to her story, signaling the transition back to the real world.

Eva says the dark background in the framing screenshots achieves several goals. First, given that she recognizes the black color as a symbol of grief, she embeds it in her narrative work to express her moral stance toward her rejection. Second, by contrasting the black background and the written text in white font, Eva indexes her habitus as 'being in the network' (Androutsopoulos 2015). Thirdly, by combining the black-and-white antithesis with the shortness of the texts, she tries to ensure the visibility of her content, a practice informed by her engagement with Instagram Stories, where the swiftness of the reading process necessitates the visual saliency of the content.

Overall, our analysis coincides with the critical observation that:

> Users' [narrative] practices do not develop in a vacuum. They rather develop in a constant dialogue with the affordances of [the] online environment and its prompts or directives for specific modalities (e.g., Jovanovic and Van Leeuwen 2018). As a result, some types of action and behavior are promoted at the expense of others, and similarly, some type of content is being prioritized and valued more by the algorithms of a given site (Georgakopoulou and Bolander 2022:7).

The semiotic, social, and algorithmic features Eva deploys to create her multimodal narrative demonstrate that this narrative addresses a specific audience and that the tellers themselves are distributed, starting from her best friend and including Instagram itself as a 'third author' (Eisenlauer 2014). In such a manner, teenage subjectivity can be understood "as part of an assemblage of materialities, networked sites of knowledge creation, and semiotic processes through which they are basically constituted and in continuous flux" (De Fina 2019: 5).

The intertwining of teenage subjectivity with the affordances and the discourses in place allows us to (re-)conceptualize the Instagram platform as a techno-chronotopic, adaptive environment that transforms teenage narrative activity. This assumption leads us to the critical issue of the post-digital, multimodal narrative synergy's broader political and educational implications. Accordingly, we will now examine how this new narrativity impacts the learning and pedagogical potential of teenage engagement on Instagram.

5. Discussion: Toward a post-digital critical literacies pedagogy

In 2003, the late Gunther Kress predicted that the dominance of images and the medium of the screen would cause significant changes in the forms and functions of writing. As our research has demonstrated, this prediction has come true, at least in the case of Eva's multimodal narrative action on Instagram. The online world is increasingly mediated by new media affordances, semiotically and socio-technically. To narrate her love story, Eva combines semiotic resources in many ways, adapts this semiotic work to her perceived social and algorithmic affordances, and 'invests' in self-projection to achieve her goals in the online-offline nexus.

Accordingly, she appears to be quite literate in the Instagram social medium, employing a remarkable "constellation of knowledge, skills, and practices" (Kern 2015:240) in her storytelling action. However, whereas she recognizes and successfully engages with some of the affordances and discourses in place to produce her distinctive, multimodal meanings, this awareness is proved to be intuitive, resulting from her habitus. She does not realize that her engagement on Instagram is partly an effect of the platform-afforded ways of being and acting in the online environment. Indeed, Instagram's 'delimited' and predesigned features reflect specific naturalized platform discourses and sociocultural trends, which, combined with the algorithmic content personalization, prompt Eva to engage in a platform-promoted, controlled action, entrenching herself in the social and algorithmic bubbles.

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Therefore, a first step toward what we call 'post-digital literacies pedagogy' would be the 'cultivation' of a "critical media-discourse awareness" (Georgakopoulou 2019) that would allow Eva to upscale her already developed socio-semiotic awareness toward the meta-realization that meaning production, dissemination, and interpretation requires a critical reading of the textual and contextual (f)actors in place. A critical media-discourse awareness perspective could be combined with what Carrington (2018) calls "critical data literacies." The latter aim at making the teenager aware of the principle that "texts – printed or multimodal or algorithmic – are not neutral" (ibid: 70) but structure readers' experiences, highlighting the necessity of an apt reading of the world based on learners' agency. More precisely, regarding narrativity, a critical approach would entail the (meta)awareness of the possibility of different viewings and interpretations of the world, helping learners to discern the socially and textually situated nature of narratives, especially in the case of new and social media.

As we have demonstrated, the socially situated nature of narrativity on Instagram must be post-digital since Eva's multimodal narrative unfolds in the online-offline nexus. Eva's complex strategies to attain her post-digital interests – strategies involving evaluating and selecting social and semiotic resources toward synthesizing sign-complexes – may be creative and apt for the social platform environment. And yet, they differ radically from the literacies required in educational contexts (Koutsogiannis and Adampa 2022). The truth is that educational institutions are often slow to acknowledge the new social and textual realities (see Koutsogiannis 2017; Papadopoulos 2020), resulting in the well-known 'home-school mismatch hypothesis' (Luke 2004). Solving such a broader problem is beyond the remit of our endeavor. Still, we believe that a post-digital critical literacies pedagogy, coupled with an appropriate semiotic toolkit, can help learners develop a 'multimodal grammar' (Cope and Kalantzis 2020), enabling them to engage with the post-digital socio-semiotic new media landscape critically.

6. Conclusion: Contributions, limitations, future directions

Hymes (1996:115) argued that narrative is a universal language function, yet our analysis has shown that narrative is a *fundamental function of semiotics*. Eva's narrative of affection on Instagram Stories may fall outside the "narrative canon" (Page 2010: 423) but should be confronted as "equally worthy data" (Georgakopoulou 2017b: 266). Such data not only meet the minimal requirements for narrativehood, namely temporal order and thematic consistency but also allow for an updated view of narrativity as an adaptive synergy of subjective agents in unity with the affordances and the discourses in place.

Hence, narratives are understood as perspectival and evaluative (Walsh 2018), social and interactional multimodal discursive nodes, co-produced, in our case study, by the teenage girl's habitual, agentive, and micro-hegemonic action and the technological, semiotic, social, and algorithmic features of Instagram. Eva's identity is thus discursively constructed through narrative co-action rather than just a result of this process.

Our conclusions draw on our personal interpretation of the data, which could be a limitation of our single-case study. We overcame this potential limitation by ensuring a connective (Leander and McKim 2003) approach with the research participant. Still, we should acknowledge that we interpreted the co-active role of medium affordances in the teenage-platform synergy in a way that reflected our own beliefs and discourses, what Foucault (1984) referred to as the "ontology of the present." Consequently, to make broader generalizations about narrative reality in new media, our findings need to be complemented by future research.

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Spatialization as a perceptual basis for information: how perception becomes a narrative

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BY: **Didier Tsala Effa**

ABSTRACT

According to enaction theory, information perception results from a coupling between the individual and data in the perceptual space. Consequently, the minimal condition of achieving perception is that there be something to act upon, i.e., a salience or a hook. Data emerge in the background and become preponderant. But, being at first only a sensation, these data can only be constituted as information if they persist in the perceptive field. One should be able to leave them and return to them in the logic of topological continuity, for example, association, similarity/dissimilarity, divergence, etc. Our hypothesis is that there are logics that transform these data into information. We posit that, in addition to being spatializing, they embody above all the perceptual gestures that make these data legible. Such is, for example, the status of the various supports that serve as structures of data inscription available on the digital applications: lists, tables, diagrams, and cartographies. Starting from sensorimotor theories, in connection with the enactive approach, we intend to establish the semiotic conditions of these supports as a perceptive basis of information.

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1. Introduction

Is semiotics condemned to spatiality? Yes, because it deals with signification, but it also deals or should deal, with meaning. Meaning, in reality, is only effective as a seizure, that is, as an activity. Even better, meaning is, above all, proper to the subject and the way he couples himself with his environment.

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The forms (Fontanille 2008) given to perceive – signs, texts, scenes, practices, supports, etc. – would be, thus, indeed, only that of the subject. Would be, in effect, only interfaces of interactions from which the subject's activity is supposed to unfold. Such is our hypothesis. It is an enactive hypothesis, one that posits signification and, in the long run, meaning, as first embodied, that is to say, primarily as being the result of a coupling between the world and the subject.

Enaction leads to the abandonment of any idea of representation of the world under the model of cognition (Varela, Thomson & Rosch 1993), that is to say, as a pure structure, material and outside of itself, whose states we will only have to activate in order to know it. So for the enactive approach, the world, as a given, is a whole that includes us entirely. And we only acquire knowledge of it through action and our interaction with the world. In short, it is how perception emerges, that is, as a mode of knowledge that is in question here.

For this approach, reducing perception to a strict sensory modality is impossible. It will produce provisional, even fleeting sensations, which, at best, would only be of interest as alerts to the possible presence of something. The central idea is that perception as a mode of knowledge is a mode of exploring the world, mediated by the knowledge of what we call sensorimotor contingencies. Any knowledge becomes possible only as a result or consequence of actions via which the subjects interact with the world, according to their experiences, intentions, capacities, etc. That is why we speak of enaction.

This happens in visual perception, as demonstrated by cognitive researchers Philipona and O'Regan (2005) in their study of the scope of these sensorimotor contingencies. In their experiments with sensory substitutions on blind people, they have shown that the distal perception we typically obtain through vision can also be obtained via a camera retransmitting on the skin with the help of tactile pecks of the objects in space. According to Philipona and O'Regan (2005):

> Visual sensation thus seems to be able to emerge from tactile stimulation in the same way as natural retinal stimulation from the moment the subject is confronted with a mode of interaction with his environment (which corresponds to) a law similar to that of the natural visual system. (cited in Pfaënder 2009: 72)

Our intervention aims to highlight the centrality of spatialization in this loop between sensation and action on the world. The initial question concerns the foundation of these sensorimotor contingencies. In the sensation/action loop (LeBlanc 2014), the subject acts on the world and obtains sensations, but the reverse is also possible. Therefore, we always hope that there are things in the world from which we will receive a sensation and on which we will act. Immediately afterward, the question is what these things are and to what extent they are supposed to solicit and alert the subject.

In the theory of enaction, we consider these things as data, in the sense of potentially perceptible objects of the world. In other words, we can explore them freely. Whether these data can be more or less localized is immaterial. However, it is always up to the subject to determine their presentation while interacting with the world. As such, they are perceived by the effect of stabilization, which makes them forms, in the sense that we speak of information or sketches, that is to say, following Husserl (1929), as "lived of consciousness" that we discover little by little. Something is formed, out of which can emerge knowledge and, in the long run, a stabilized sense, which is not there yet. To achieve this, there is a need for an interpretative gesture or an interpretative intention (which can be active or not). It is in this perspective that we place our intervention.

Spatialization becomes an issue when we question the principles guiding the interpretative actions and allowing to reach these forms as stabilizing effects. It is useless to propose that these forms are specific to each subject. Two persons are alerted by the same data. Still, they do not perceive the same form and, even less, do not bring the same interpretative tension to the fore, even if it is possible to somehow constrain the perception by guiding the perceptive actions. Due to the action/sensation loop, each subject always draws the contours of the form from the present data. From the outset, we leave behind any a priori reading that would like the data to be the manifestation of already constructed and pre-existing forms.

2. About meaning and salience: from Husserl

Let us take things from the beginning. Resorting to sensorimotor theory amounts to positing that the perception of information is constructed by the body of the subject acting in conjunction with its environment. According to Fabien Pfaënder (2009: 61), who wrote a thesis on this subject in 2009, and from whom we will borrow most of our arguments, this amounts to saying that "the perception of information is constructed through the environment [...]. In other words, in the environment, we find readable data structures from which it is possible to draw information." Result or resultant of the coupling between the individual and the data of the perceptive space, it is evident that these structures are all in the actions which determine them.

Nevertheless, the minimal condition of the action, points out Fabien Pfaënder (2009: 82), is that "the is in range something on which to act. A minimal structure of catch in the loop of action must be found somewhere in the loop of action/sensation. To paraphrase Husserl, one could say that all perception is the perception of something [...] Something emerges from the ambient noise which corresponds perceptually speaking to a hook."

The most heuristic term would be for us here that of salience.

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> The notion of salience, as we know, is, above all, linked to the emergence of a figure on a background. Resulting from the analysis of visual perception, this notion makes it possible to explain why we distinguish forms where one can only see noise. Applied to the perception of language, for example, this notion also offers many perspectives: why are certain linguistic elements understood and retained more easily than others? Why do certain discourse referents become preponderant and likely to be recalled by the simple mention of a pronoun? (Pfaënder 2009: 82)

So there is a background and potentially one or more multiple saliences. That is the issue. Fabien Pfaënder (2009) proposes the term "perceptual neutral" or "sensory neutral" to designate this background, out of which each component can become at any moment a hook or a salience, in this case through the effect of perceptual discontinuity. But for that to happen, this effect must last, i.e., be reversible. A sensation must be able to be found again. One should be able to leave and return to it, thus constituting a minimal sensorimotor loop. The sensorimotor loop allows the subject to reach this salience, i.e., a stable interpretative tension.

Conversely, it would only be a fleeting presentation, or we would face multiple variations. Thus, for example, if one notices a small pile of sand on a beach, one cannot return to it if one passes a finger on it. On the same beach, one can see a multiplicity of grains. Still, it is not possible by observing them to isolate a motive, in particular, if it is perfectly flat: in the one and the other case, there would not be stable discontinuities, but of the neutral.

We argue that a sensation is reversible, if it is possible by an action to find this sensation. For Fabien Pfaënder (2009), the interest of the reversibility viewed in this way is that when we say "to find," we do not speak precisely of the same sensation. And this is because enaction makes each sensation integrate the experience of the preceding sensations, which makes them different. In other words, with such reversibility, the interest of which is that it allows us to stabilize the action, we end up with a reference point, which would be the equivalent of a proto-spatialization. This is indeed the whole point of salience. So we will say that reversibility is the minimal condition for spatial perception.

But Fabien Pfaënder (2009) makes an additional point. If salience, as a discontinuity or reversible change, is punctual, it does not allow for efficient support of action, just a space can be built around the point, which does not lead to any cognitive consequence other than the sensation of a somewhere or a something. We should further problematize this salience to indicate a direction, confront one state of the world, then another and another, and so on. This displacement is, according to him, the basis of any understanding, i.e., of any signification that allows the play of the primary logical

principles of association, divergence, similarity, or dissimilarity, but also of opposition or difference. These principles enable salience to migrate towards constructing a space where one can come and go. This is the very foundation of reversible change. Fabien Pfaënder uses the figure of the line to formalize the possibility of these principles. He suggests that "the line allows one to move from an area A of perceptual space to an area B and back again, thus allowing the comparison of these two areas perceptually and cognitively" (Pfaënder 2009: 87).

Thus, the line is a sequence of reversible changes of the same nature, which we can explore from one direction to another. In other words, next to supporting an action like salience, the line simultaneously guides it by proposing a movement between these two zones. It is, therefore, an attractor. Not only does it suggest a structure, but it also guides the actions throughout this structure.

We understand this part of the line even better as an attractor when we imagine the constraints accompanying its exploration. For a topological exploration, for example, this can be done by continuous tracking or small movements to avoid taking one's eyes off it. It is thus maintained as an invariant through identical actions. Conversely, it is also possible that the subject leaves the line. For example, Fabien Pfaënder (2009) presents the case of a conversation at a social cocktail party:

> If one follows a conversation at a social cocktail party, and the conversation pauses, the gesture of listening, the dynamic of following the conversation is interrupted, generating a perceptual void, which plunges one back into the discomfort of the space to be explored that the line and its attractive power made it possible to avoid. (Pfaënder 2009: 91)

But it is the same in the other perceptive modalities. The stake is that of the place of the line as a guide of the actions. We need a perceptual gesture to prolong it; otherwise, we fall back and sink into a perceptual void. There are several possibilities in this respect:

– The line (of the conversation) is interrupted and does not resume. The action is discontinued, and the subject falls into a perceptual void. Subsequently, an essential part of the exploration could be devoted to finding new hooks. For the perceptual gesture, the most economic attitude would be to return to the line one has just left and start again in another direction, hoping to find something else. In general, it is better to stick to the perceptual void.

– The line crosses another line almost orthogonally. The inertia of the tracking action makes the exploration continue in the direction of the tracked line. If the line continues, the action will tend to pursue this line. If, on the other hand, the line does not continue, the exploration stops quickly, and it is then necessary to return to the line left to resume one of the two possible orthogonal lines.

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– The line crosses another line tangentially. At this point, there may be ambiguity, depending on the slope of the tangent. It is then possible that one passes from one line to the other without realizing it. This can be disorienting, introducing bias and randomness into the feeling of guidance. We could resolve the ambiguity by using another line.

– The line stops and then starts again. In this case, the notion of gesture takes on its whole meaning. The inertia of the gesture pushes it to continue in the same direction. This is called the situation of good continuation.

For the continuation, these possibilities expressed thus in perceptive terms of line following can find an echo at first sight in the Gestalt theory by highlighting the importance of the gestural dynamics for the constitution and the structuring of the perceived space. This is, for example, what explains phenomena such as optical illusions. It would then be a question of associations. However, this would reduce perception to simple phenomena of the subject's attention, as if it were a question of restoring prior arrangements of objects. The demonstration we develop with the support of Fabien Pfaënder's (2009) proposals is much more complex.

3. Some perceptual constraints of spatialization

Taking support on the sensorimotor loop, the facts of spatialization do not proceed from the subject's attention. Instead, it is a dynamic perception that proposes as an analytical grid the lines and perceptual gestures they generate. It is thus necessary to understand how these lines form the basis of spatial perception.

Everything depends on the questions that interest the subject in his environment. In any case, everything that supports a path becomes important when reading spatial inscriptions. The stake consists in analyzing first these spatial inscriptions using the perceptual bases that structure them as guides or constraints for their capture:

1) perceptual neutrality;

2) the non-reversible change, that is to say, any discontinuity inside the perceptual neutral which is not yet a hook ;

3) the hook, i.e., the reversible change

4) and the line as an attractor.

It is through these perceptual bases that perception transforms into a narrative.

By way of illustration, let us refer to three configurations of these spatial inscriptions among those retained by Fabien Pfaënder (2009), that is to say, three constraints that lead to three narrative possibilities: the list, the first primary structure of inscription of spatialization, the table and the diagram.

3.1. **The list**

As a structure of inscribing spatialization, the list, at first sight, puts in the same space elements that belong to the same set and have the same nature without any necessary relation between them – for example, a shopping list or a list of things to do. There is, therefore, as a bonus, a principle of homogeneity. This very fact also generates a reading order. As a presentation, the items or elements in a list are always situated in an implicit hierarchy due to their order of succession. We can reinforce this hierarchy or try to smooth it out, as in the case of the round lists generally used to anonymize the agreed signatures of a document. Such a reading would then be of the order of the Gestalt, obeying only the logic of the presentation.

Things unfold differently if we consider the list from an enactive perspective, i.e., by considering the sensory-motor loop. Everything starts from the logic of organization that presides over the inscription of the list:

> The list implies discontinuity and not continuity. It presupposes a certain material arrangement, a certain spatial disposition; it can be read in different directions, laterally, vertically, from top to bottom, as well as from left to right, or vice versa; it has a beginning and an end marked by a limit, an edge, just like a piece of cloth. (Goody 1978: 143)

According to Goody (1998), these boundaries are not only high and low; they are the boundaries between the perceptual void and the perceptually salient features that make up the list. By varying these boundaries and the overall shape of the list, we can obtain different types of lists whose perception changes and thus the interpretation.

The first example to consider, the most common one found today, is the list of search engines. These lists are similar whatever the search engine, with the common characteristic of being arranged vertically. According to Fabien Pfaënder (2009), it is possible to attribute this characteristic to a cultural habitus, but this would be going too fast since the reading of the contents of these textual lists is horizontal. Now, if the global list were in the same direction, we would be in a situation where we would be guided perceptively to read the complete line, at least from the beginning, until the end of the screen. In any case, the guidance would push to this action, which would be painful, with the risk of being constrained by perceptually neutral or, at best, non-reversible changes. The choice of the vertical layout has a perceptual explanation (Pfaënder 2009). The idea is to break the horizontal reading gesture by a radically different direction for the global direction of the list. Thus, when the list is vertical, we can emphasize its composition in distinct elements by highlighting the salient features), but by forming a homogeneous whole (i.e., by implementing a line as an attractor). For example, we play with sizes, colors, font sizes, graphic data, line breaks, and graphic

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blocks on Google lists. These games provide highlights that allow us to change the reading rhythm or focus on this type of specific information, depending on the targeted perceptual gain. One can also play with the location of the support. In this case, studies have shown that on a list produced by a search engine, whatever the page, only the first three blocks of lines are optimally viewed. In other words, for an advertiser, for example, it seems more interesting to be visible in these positions just after page 1 than to appear in the 6th or 8th position on this page.

3.2. **The table**

The table is a spatial structure that combines elements whose organizing principle in rows and columns makes it possible to achieve data groups in two dimensions. First, the play of their juxtaposition and the gesture of reading, which guides the perception, induces logical relations. These relations can be of order, similarity, or dissimilarity. The interpretation, that is to say, the narrative of the painting, is born from its course. For this, the rows and columns for rectangular pictures, and the meridians and parallels for circular pictures, must follow two directions as far apart as possible.

Furthermore, the relationships within a given direction of rows or columns must all be of the same type, with the same difference; otherwise, we would contradict the organizing principle of the table. In other words, by spatializing in the form of a table, we force data to respect this organization. This is, therefore, what we must take care of.

The work maintains the term that verifies the differences between the two directions. To do this, the terms must be compared two by two by a back-and-forth effect, which makes it possible to check the coherence of a row or a column by straight-line movements. A table is not simply the boxes placed next to each other but a homogeneous space construction. We find the double meaning of the line very concretely, both as inscription (the squares, as a hook to perceive: this is a painting) and as gesture (as a homogeneous construction when we consider the enactive perspective). This leads to a very constrained analytical reading: the relations that the columns induce are a powerful perceptual and cognitive grouping principle.

The illustrations used by Fabien Pfaënder (2009) induce a multicultural and historical reading of paintings. According to him, paintings are multicultural and enjoy a high degree of historical exploitation, so we find traces in various civilizations or practices. Simply taking the case of paintings with classical lines and orthogonal columns, these are read reasonably from the edges, as it is difficult to find one's way once inside. The edges constitute more stable and comfortable reference points than the core or the lines. The opposite happens with hemispherical or semi-hemispherical boards. The latter direct all reading actions at an equal distance from the center or directly toward the center of the painting, which is of crucial importance. Such is the perceptual principle. Paintings inscribe spatialization in fundamentally analytical ways, and this constrains the perceptual gesture, i.e., the interpretative activity. It is the same for the various other forms of paintings. The calendar, or

in this case, the Aztec calendar, when they are read as paintings. But as we know, it is mainly about the diagram, which can also be considered a primary structure, even if it can be seen as one of the concrete manifestations of the picture.

3.3. **The diagram**

The diagram differs from the table and the list by not containing any logic that presides over its inscription, allowing greater freedom of reading. It is enough to establish relationships between data, according to an ad hoc criterion, to make a diagram. As regards their presentation, whatever the form, we read diagrams in two orthogonal directions for bar charts and from the center outwards for pie charts. But the other difference between the list and the chart is the type of reading it allows. Where the table mainly gives rise to an analytical reading, the diagram also has a synoptic reading gesture. Thus, one can access the value of a specific data item, as with the table and its difference from the locally associated data. Still, one can also access the overall form of the data, depending on what is being sought. This is what the different types of diagrams that we can imagine show. For example, bar charts have a planar implementation that makes it easy to read them analytically, like a table. But even if this is possible, synoptic reading is less obvious. Through its form, the diagram is supported by a linear reminder that guides us in two directions, with the obvious risk of seeing each data item divided and subdivided into smaller data items, and so on. This is part of its very essence, as the relations between data are the first thing to count, which is relatively weak. Reading guides can be quickly disseminated to give rise to only fleeting salient points. If we look closely, this is how many economic reports are read as soon as the data are written in diagrams.

However, pie charts work differently. Implementing this form of diagram offers a reading of the complete division of a data set. The circle implies completeness, indicating that there can be no other possible divisions. Consequently, analytical reading is impoverished because the angle forming the value of individual data is not easily measured. On the other hand, comparisons between areas are effective. And there are many different types of diagrams, including graphs and maps.

4. Conclusion

This rather introductive study, based on the sensorimotor approach and loop, this rather introductive study aims to interrogate the perceptual bases presiding over the inscription of data spatialization as information. Starting from the perceptual neutral, the salience, the spatial attractors, and the lines, as a minimal guide that organizes the perceptual gesture, we find a certain number of primary structures which, by their implementation, appear as the translation of constraints that accompany the data entry, the list, the table, and the diagram. From the point of view of their inscription, these

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constraints, however strong, are never manifest from the start. They operate only at a meta-level; in other words, as an integrated discipline which, without intervening directly in the content of a story, for example, affects its form nevertheless. We propose to call such a way of operating 'in-discipline.' Through some perceptual act, a sensation, the subject isolates a salience, which induces an orientation. It is this act that converts perception into information.

Implications

Although speaking of narrative, it is evident that what is in question here is no longer the content of the discourse, in Hjemslev's sense of the term, i.e., the semantic signified. It is not this signified that concerns the semiosis. To grasp a narrative is not simply to access a story's content as one could understand it. Instead, it primarily involves revealing a particular capacity of the subject or the addressee in connection with a discursive heterogeneity perceived as a mass of data. In the framework of pure content, the subject or addressee is only an observer who receives the narrative or the story as it unfolds. In this case, however, he becomes an 'experiencer'. To perceive data is to be affected by it and subjected to orientations. These orientations serve as a basis for the constraints that we establish here.

Thus, we must consider these constraints as the narrative's order or path. The addressee – for example, a reader – is strongly influenced by this order which, in the end, becomes the narrative background: heterogeneous data, which becomes a list, or the same data taken as a diagram or a table. But it will never be the same story for one reader or another. Of course, this would be an opportunity to introduce the idea of "task" as one of the components of the Person-Artefact-Task triptych proposed by Finneran and Zhang (2003) to justify the conditions intended to accompany the experience of flow. The task, they argue, "can influence the occurrence of flow. Whereas a goal-directed task – like searching for information on a brand's website – has utilitarian benefits, situational involvement, and instrumental orientation, an experiential task – such as entertainment – involves undirected search and has hedonic benefits, ritual involvement, and enduring involvement" (Finneran and Zhang 2003).

In sum, we can introduce here the concept of diegesis, taken as one of the modalities through which a story is formed. But this definition needs to be sufficiently stabilized. We suggest not going further with it at the moment.

Returning to our purpose, albeit briefly, one initial question we posed concerned the moment when the hook or the salience constitutes itself. A hook or salience constitutes itself when something reversible occurs, that is, when the perception of something becomes stable. We registered this stabilization as a proto-spatialization. Setting forth from a perceptual perspective, we argued that this is the first step that permits us to talk about

all the constraints we isolated as the basis from which the perception could become a narrative. These constraints work in the background, i.e., as modifying filters or what Oana Culache and Daniel Rareș Obadă (2014) call "resources suited," with an obvious spatial effect. They can segment the data, highlight it, veil it, magnify it, etc. This is why they are fundamental to converting data into information and narratives.

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Lire le spectacle vivant:
de la praxis à l'actualité et vice versa

BY: **Maria Baïraktari**

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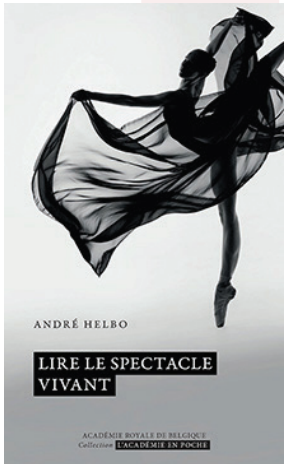

André Helbo

Lire le spectacle vivant

Bruxelles : Académie Royale de Belgique, 2022, 136 pp., ISBN (version imprimée) 978-2-8031-0828-2, ISBN (versions numériques) 978-2-8031-0829-9, 978-2-8031-0830-5.

Lire le spectacle vivant, publié au début de 2022, est un dépôt de recherche critique sur les arts du spectacle vivant et sur leur fonction dans la société d'aujourd'hui, signé par le professeur émérite à l'ULB André Helbo. La première de couverture captive le regard, faisant allusion au noyau thématique du livre, c'est-à-dire l'aspect éphémère des arts du spectacle vivant : le mouvement d'une ballerine en habits noirs agités par son geste gracieux se met en relief par le contraste d'un arrière-plan clair et s'immobilise pour toujours (en image médiatisée), par l'objectif du photographe.

Dans ses cent vingt-trois pages où la densité d'informations inclues rencontre harmonieusement la pensée analytique et ouverte à l'interdisciplinarité de son auteur à travers l'optique sémiologique, André Helbo présente une structure concentrique: cinq chapitres dont la brièveté est un distillat fonctionnel pour le chercheur dans le domaine, mais aussi pour tout lecteur, formant un corpus nettement hiérarchisé, ce qui caractérise d'après nous les livres d'André Helbo dans leur ensemble.

Parmi les axes principaux du livre, l'auteur expose avec précision et délicatesse une problématique approfondie sur les approches disciplinaires du domaine développées du 20^{e} au 21^{e} siècles, les enjeux posés par l'aspect événementiel qui caractérise les arts du spectacle vivant, leur place et leur rôle parmi les interactions sociales, ainsi que la posture

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du chercheur, tenant en compte des divers détails épistémologiques émergeants. Il amène ainsi graduellement le lecteur à un cadre d'étude dans lequel la sémiologie sert de base pour la construction d'approches souples aux exigences de la fluidité et de la transformabilité de la représentation, suivant une multiplicité de paramètres socio-politiques et culturels qui définissent l'objet analysé.

Le Professeur belge, créateur de la filière et du programme Erasmus Mundus d'étude des arts du spectacle vivant, encourage la dialectique et souligne le rapport relationnel entre les notions de 'présence' et de 'médiation' tout le long du livre. La thématique de la "présence" du spectateur et de l'acteur, *du hic et nunc* benjaminien inévitable dans la conception et la réalisation du spectacle vivant, constitue le point de départ du premier chapitre du livre où nous trouvons un panorama de définitions autour de la terminologie utilisée depuis la deuxième moitié du 20^{e} siècle à nos jours, commençant par les fameuses *Ars de la scène et des ars d'interprétation* à la typologie: *arts du spectacle, arts de la représentation et arts du spectacle vivant*. André Helbo, toujours prudent face à des définitions et des catégorisations qui traceraient des lignes de démarcation définitives et à courte vue, dénoue le fil qui concrétisa graduellement ce 'champ innovant' à travers différentes étapes qui le mirent par la suite en lumière de façon de plus en plus systémique, globalisante et exhaustive de détails pendant les dernières décennies.

Dans sa 'Petite archéologie du concept' (chapitre 2) Helbo se focalise sur la théâtralité (détrônée par la 'performativité'), le texte en question(s), le son, le corps et l'image. Il présente ainsi de façon transversale (et en parallèle avec les différentes théories existantes) les optiques exposées lors des divers approches et débats, depuis Anne Ubersfeld, Roland Barthes et Marco de Marinis sur le texte et le 'texte spectaculaire,' jusqu'au 'postdramatique' de Hans-Thies Lehmann et la domination scénique du corps et de l'image dans les performances d'aujourd'hui. La question des limites est primordiale: Quand "le spectacle vivant déborde de son périmètre institué pour se décliner en de multiples processus de spécularité," on a la création "de formes métissées, qui échappent à toute catégorie et qui empruntent autant aux arts du spectacle qu'aux arts médiatiques ou aux arts visuels" (p. 25). Sous cette perspective, les frontières entre les diverses facettes du spectacle vivant (danse, théâtre et performance) deviennent fluides et facilement déplaçables, ce qui doit être pris en considération pendant le choix de la stratégie de légitimation qui concerne l'objet esthétique.

Entre autres aspects intéressants du livre, un point fort appréciable repose sur la mise du chercheur au premier plan. Plus précisément, l'auteur met au centre de son étude la posture du chercheur et sa subjectivité de la vision à assumer, deux sujets qui font naître une série de questions. Le sémiologue, ayant fait la mise au point sur les repositionnements théoriques existants, il se consacre ainsi à la question de la nécessité d'une description de l'objet ou bien de sa modélisation. Le chemin vers la réponse est tracé dans son troisième chapitre ('Décrire l'objet ou le modéliser?') où il souligne la spécificité de la démarche ainsi que le rôle des procédés empiriques. Il

trouve indispensable la définition de l'objet d'analyse en passant par la notation, la segmentation et la dynamique de la signification (issue du Cercle de Prague et des formalistes russes qui proposent l'analyse de petites unités du phénomène spectaculaire voir Otakar Zich, Jan Mukařovský et Jiri Veltruský pour arriver à Patrice Pavis qui repère les fameux quatre vecteurs dans une macro-séquence de représentation: les accumulateurs, les connecteurs, les sécateurs et les embrayeurs. Dans ce cadre, les documents et l'archive génétique sont des recours empiriques qui éclaircissent à leur tour certaines pistes de la recherche mais qui s'avèrent souvent impuissants devant toute tentative de définir le fonctionnement de l'objet et sa réception. Helbo ajoute ici un grand défi pour le chercheur: l'incapacité de l'archivage multimédia de s'opérer de 'manière neutre' (p. 56), puisque la vidéo ou la photo "sont de traductions en un autre langage, ce qui ne manque pas de constituer un handicap épistémologique." Et cela au moment où le chercheur doit affronter en même temps une multiplicité de paramètres et de pratiques qui conduisent le plus souvent (tantôt à travers la génétique du spectacle vivant tantôt à travers la pratique sémiotique 'totalisante' d'après Ubersfeld ou polyphonique d'après Barthes) à des contraintes parues lors de l'étude de la représentation et son aspect unique, instantané, fluide et éphémère.

Le quatrième chapitre se consacre aux "modèles et aux savoirs experts." Il est subdivisé en quatre unités: (1) De l'objet au quasi-objet, (2) L'expérience, la relation, et le cadre, (3) La présence, Préexpressivité et ostension, (4) L'acteur et la corporéité. Ces pivots se développent sous l'angle de la situation actuelle qui promeut des modèles globaux et qui combine la vocation explicative ainsi que l'expérience du sujet, directement liées au sens. André Helbo esquisse le contour des études sémiologiques, neurosémiotiques, historiques et anthropologiques afin de toucher des relations polyvalentes et synthétiques, comme celle du texte en tant "qu'ensemble contigu" (p. 64), le rôle du récepteur et la relation entre l'acteur et le spectateur. De cette façon, il illumine les différentes périodes de l'histoire de la critique du spectacle vivant, centrées par exemple sur la parole (*logos*), l'image (*icone*) ou le corps (*soma*). André Helbo met en perspective la réalité de l'expression artistique actuelle qui apporte de plus en plus de nouvelles pratiques considérées comme métissées et hybrides, ce qui impose de nouvelles questions sémiotiques de base sur la relation signe-objet. En ce sens, l'orientation d'une modélisation se dirige souvent par l'instabilité de cette relation et les critères appliqués. D'une part, la vision subjective du chercheur ne doit qu'être assumée. D'autre part, cela n'empêche pas une systématisation des processus de la recherche qui tient en compte la problématique de l'expérience ainsi que les attitudes déjà familières au chercheur comme le triptyque description-compréhension-interprétation et la construction 'coopérative' de l'énoncé. Par extension, une approche de contextualisation sociologique se fonderait par exemple sur les *habitus* de Bourdieu, qui définirait en gros la relation public-salle. Sur ce point, Andre Helbo se réfère au présupposé d'un "spectateur modèle" (p. 72-73), c'est-à-dire présent et attentif, qui participerait à la construction d'un sens fondé sur la double énonciation qui caractérise

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l'interaction entre comédien et spectateur. Le caractère singulier du spectacle vivant d'ailleurs (en contraste avec la répétitivité possible du spectacle enregistré) amène le chercheur à cerner les modalités qui actualisent la 'présence' à travers 'l'ostension.' Dans cette perspective, le corps de l'acteur, posé au centre du spectacle vivant, incarne sa dimension du non répétable. La conclusion du chapitre est systématisée: André Helbo y présente les traits spécifiques du spectacle vivant dans le cadre espace-comédien-spectateur où la théorie n'a qu'à suivre l'aspect 'évolutif' du spectacle vivant (p. 85). Le cinquième chapitre (' Le cadre spectaculaire et le spectacle vivant') pointe les relations développées entre ces trois derniers facteurs, les horizons d'attente du comédien et du spectateur, l'intentionnalité de la mise en spectacle et les mécanismes qui construisent le 'contrat' lors du spectacle vivant. Il s'agit d'ailleurs d'un contrat plutôt en crise, due à une multiple réappropriation de l'intention de l'auteur qui conduit "de la dénégation au dissensus" (pp. 114-119).

Lire le spectacle vivant démontre encore une fois la nécessité d'ouverture des horizons à tout niveau de la recherche. D'après nous ce livre, à travers la brièveté la plus attentive, donne une image complète de ce qu'une 'lecture' des arts spectacle vivant implique. André Helbo nous invite à un processus de questionnement continu sur la place du spectacle vivant dans l'expression artistique et alors sociale et politique au 21^{e} siècle. Les différentes démarches épistémologiques du passé et les rapports internes entre les disciplines conduisent de plus en plus à des débats féconds sur la systématisation de modèles adaptables aux exigences des transformations d'optique, suivant une mise en priorités qui suit les défis de l'actualité. Il s'agit surtout d'un langage polysystémique et métissé dont le spectateur et notamment le chercheur essaie d'hiérarchiser les modes d'énonciation et faire la reconfiguration de toute donnée afin de conclure à des réinterprétations consécutives qui feront appel à leur tour à ses compétences sensorielles, perceptives, cognitives et empiriques. Par conséquent, André Helbo met de l'ordre dans un cadre en plein mutation qui exige des 'métamorphoses' successives, théoriques et pratiques et qui signalent à leur tour de nouveaux rapports entre émetteurs et récepteurs, elles impliquent de nouvelles pistes de réflexion sur "les sens du collectif{ (p. 12) ainsi que des voies de recherche adaptables à de nouvelles 'lectures' du spectacle vivant, sous l'optique d'un esprit de disponibilité envers un langage syncrétique.

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From the body to the body, through the body: steps to an embodied semiotics of culture

BY: **Valeria De Luca**

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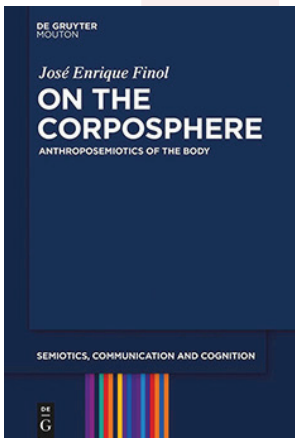

José Enrique Finol

On the Corposphere. Anthroposemiotics of the body

Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter 2021. 259 pp, € 114,95
(HBK, ISBN: 978-3-11-069685-1)

For researchers without access to the Spanish language, this book, the English translation of *La corposfera. Antropo-semiótica de las cartografías del cuerpo* originally published in 2015, represents a true immersion in the thought and research of Venezuelan semiotician José Enrique Finol. Indeed, as Kalevi Kull states in the foreword, this book inaugurates, in the collection *Semiotics, Communication, and Cognition*, a vast translation project aimed at bringing work from other parts of semiotics to the English-speaking world on a global scale. It is, therefore, no coincidence that the work immediately displays three main characteristics.

The first concerns the semiotic transversality of the study object, the body in all its states, mediations, practices, and representations, and the transposability of the analytical methodology developed through various case studies. The second is what we could call Finol's theoretical 'ecumenism,' which he carries out by mobilizing and, more or less explicitly imbricating several semiotic approaches – Greimasian, socio-semiotic, pragmatic – which, in this way, can be addressed and exploited by an international audience.

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The third, on the other hand, refers to the socio-cultural singularity of the analyses conducted. Granted that the body, as an operator of semiosis, shapes the identity and the imaginaries of a given society and culture, it is all the more legitimate to claim a culturally and geographically situated point of view, as the case studies from the Venezuelan society testify. This cultural anchorage and the attention paid to the 'ritual' dimension of the bodily practices motivate the link between two fundamental terms of the volume, i.e., the corposphere as part of the Lotmanian semiosphere and the perspective of an anthroposemiotics of the body, which conceives the bodily phenomena as "part of history, a culture, and society, but also as the result of a show, as sense; a sense that, in turn, marks the society and culture to which it is actively articulated. We start, then, from the hypothesis that the body is not only an anthropological object, that is to say, a social and cultural object, but also a space full of meanings, full of senses that are based on the active semiotization of its morphology and of its totality" (p. 15).

The book consists of ten chapters in which theoretical proposals, exemplifications, and analyses alternate, to which is added a very rich bibliography (16 pages) with classic references from semiotics, but also from philosophy, sociology, literature, anthropology, and the arts, with particular attention to the Spanish-speaking production. The following presentation will focus on the global perspective that runs through the book and some of its variations.

Let us begin with an observation: the author undertook a considerable task, which the different chapters of the book reflect, namely the examination of the semiotic potential of the body in its wholeness, from the articulations of its anatomy (chapter 2) to its dramatizations (chapters 6 and 7), even its absences and camouflages (chapter 9) while passing by the spaces, the borders, and the bodily, imaginary, media, social and technological thresholds that it installs and which retroact on the experience and the practices of the subjects and the human collectives (chapters 3 and 4). This rich cartography of objects, practices, and disparate semiotic regimes builds up from four general articulations of the body: 1) "language: a system of signs," 2) "object: speeches about the body," 3) "space: scenario of other signs," 4) "reference: objects modeled by the body and whose mere existence *speaks*" (p. 18, emphasis in the text).

Thus, in the first chapter, this distinction allows Finol to distinguish three main levels of the human body (upper, middle, lower) and to thematize the axiological investments of which different parts of each level have been the subjects in both diachrony and synchrony. In particular, it examines the meanings and roles associated with the gaze, the torso, the navel, the hair, the hands, the feet, the sexual organs, and so on. Thus, continuity appears between ancestral meanings of a religious matrix and the transformations brought about by contemporary secular and social rites and practices. To this thematic distribution of the human morphology is added a differentiation between the interior and the exterior of the body, itself linked to a

distribution of values having a religious or scientific ground, and one concerning the opposition of gender between parts of the body and values traditionally associated with masculinity or femininity.

It is from the morphology and articulation of the body space that it is then possible to investigate the borders and the sexual, media, and imaginary limits of the bodies as the subjects experience the world lived by their bodies. In this perspective, to think in terms of corposphere means for Finol "to encompass all signs, codes, and processes of signification in which, in different ways, the body is present, acts, signifies" (p. 82). Thus, body and space are indissociable. Certain practices, like scarification, break the borders between the inside and outside of the body, whereas proxemics, the glance, clothing, and pornography (chapter 4) regulate the distance and the borders between bodies and between the body and the environment.

Therefore, since "the semiotic place is a space of transits between the possible meanings, the meanings under construction and the senses ultimately made. It is a process, contrary to what could be thought, multi-linear and not uni-linear" (p. 213); the different ways of observing the body (language, object, space, reference) are always integrated into bodily networks that manage, for example, the relations between presence and absence (chapter 11). In particular, the semiotician distinguishes three body networks: 1) 'extero-corporal,' concerning the relations between the body and the environment; 2) 'inter-corporal,' referring to the relations and the interactions between the bodies, and between a body and a non-body, 3) 'intra-corporal,' concerning the difference between 'internal' and 'external' body (cf. p. 215ff). In the cases of photography, sculpture, and of the interaction between bodies and objects represented or physically present in a given space – whether urban or of the image – this articulation allows distinguishing four types of anthroposemiotic categorizations of the bodies that Finol names as follows: a-phenomenical, para-phenomenical, pro-phenomenical, ultra-phenomenical (*ibidem*). In brief, these correspond to different modes of the presence of the bodies, in the meaning that Jacques Fontanille gives, which are the result of diverse ways of articulation between matters and energies, and which can thus give place to several figurative manifestations of the tensions and the adjustments between the flesh and the envelope (cf. Fontanille 2004).

In this respect, the case study of the *Misses* ritual (chapter 7) is emblematic because of the very nature of the rite which, "although modified and adapted to current times and media, continues to fulfill its main function of being an expression, and at the same time a model, of fundamental values of the society that generates them or of the means that they impose on societies" (p. 170). In this sense, the rite includes and crosses a space and operations which affect the body morphology, a techno-symbolic space that acts in the background of the sensory transformations of the bodies, and a practical and mediated space that remedies these same representations. The author

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analyzes the syntax of the beauty contest, a major television event in Venezuela and neighboring countries. Throughout the different moments of the show, we can observe how an implicit conception of beauty, also linked to identity issues (national and/or transnational concerning the Caribbean identity), fabricates ultra-mediatized bodies through which one seeks to naturalize this same fabrication. Thus, investments of a political type can be grafted onto bodies that are now totally disembodied from their experiential thickness but fully integrated into the imaginary, social, and technological environment shared with other bodies.

Because of all these elements, we can affirm that Finol's work outlines a general model of the body and its semiosis, aiming at understanding, on the one hand, the properly somatic constraints before the construction of meaning and, on the other hand, the interactions experienced in several spaces of meaning that also refer to anthropological macro-configurations of sense-making.

Examining the meaning of certain gestures in social rites (chapter 6) is, in this sense, emblematic: the micro-modifications of the military salute allow the gesture to be transposed to other practices while keeping a semi-symbolic anchoring of their meaning. However, in the case of kinetic analysis or co-verbal or non-co-verbal deictics —as in the case of dance (cf. De Luca 2021)— the mode of semiosis of gestures does not seem to be reducible solely to the semi-symbolic mode. Algirdas Greimas (1968) had already noted the difficulty of segmentation and constitution of a gestural syntax precisely concerning the objective of identifying *cultural projects*, from which a typology of the various gesturalities (mythical, practical, mimetic, ludic) followed.

If we turn to the typology of the different declensions of the body and the examination of its morphology, we cannot fail to notice the resonance of this model with the *figures of the body* set up by Fontanille (2004). Finol does not mention them explicitly, but we can assume that this articulation is underlying his methodological approach. Indeed, the distinction between *body-flesh*, *body-envelope*, *body-point*, and *body-hollow* (*corps-chair, corps-enveloppe, corps-point, corps-creux*) encompasses both the morphology examined by Finol and how the opposition between inside and outside is thematized by other objects (clothing), media (the photographic image) and semiotic practices (rites). In the same way, the Venezuelan semiotician's observations about movement and spaces installed and experienced by the body can be related to the *fields of the sensible* (*champs du sensible*) identified by Fontanille as syntactic macro-configurations of the interaction between the body and the senses, without being limited to each of the senses taken singularly (touch, smell, hearing, vision, taste, movement). In this respect, exploring the variety of cultural valuations associated with the different declinations of poly-sensoriality would have been interesting. All the more so as they manifest themselves in practices (such as food or funeral rites) having a solid anthropological basis, which Finol does not fail to mention.

To conclude, the anthroposemiotic vocation of the book may be linked to recent proposals put forward in post-Greimasian semiotics (cf. Fontanille & Couégnas 2018). Taken together, the link between the semiosphere and the modes of world-making by human and non-human collectives can perhaps become clearer. Nevertheless, the original point of the book remains, in our opinion, precisely the idea of conceiving the body as a corposphere, which can only encourage analysis of the forms of translation or integration of culturally situated patterns in other socio-anthropological organizations.

Finally, we can only welcome the publication of this ambitious book concerning the fields of work that it opens for future research.

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An event in global *Semiotikland*

BY: **Anne Hénault**

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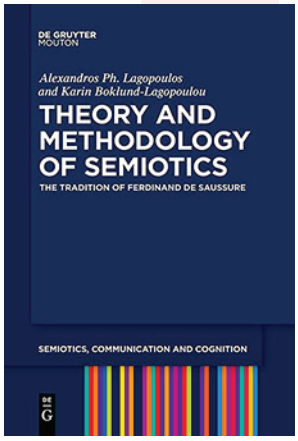

Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou

Theory and Methodology of Semiotics: The Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure.

Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2021. 357 pages. ISBN hardback 3110616238, paperback 978-3-11-099158-1

The recent publication of *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics*: The Tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure (which we will refer to here as TMS) by Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou is a veritable event in global *Semiotikland*. The initial aim of the two authors, Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos (semiotician, architect-engineer, urban planner, and social anthropologist) and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou (semiotician, specialist in medieval and comparative literature), was to provide a much-needed manual of Saussurean semiotics, drawing from their ongoing research and teaching at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. This aim is fully attained in the first half of their book and greatly surpassed in the second.

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1. A gnoseology clearly explained and subscribed to

Two parallel commitments fully underpin the book. They are affirmed from the outset in the first chapter, quite agreeable to read due to the concrete examples which illustrate it and the vigorous clarity with which these initial principles are posed. This chapter ("What is semiotics?") briefly asserts the importance of differentiating carefully between the theoretical

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order, i.e., scientific work, and the lived social order of communication and practice. These two areas of action operate with quite different principles, laws, and data, which implies that these two kinds of undertaking demand distinct mental attitudes:

(a) Regarding the theoretical order, the necessary commitment is to be guided only by the unpredictable rationality ruling the discovery of the laws progressively revealed by scientific research. This principle is valid for all scientific domains. From this rationality, with its seemingly unpredictable and capricious rhythms of development, originate tangible and lasting theoretical benefits. We should not mistake the enduring respect they inspire for idealism. Quite the opposite, such a commitment represents profound compliance with the laws of the real, revealed only by respecting the procedures established through a succession of previous discoveries constitutive of each particular scientific domain. This cognitive attitude is sustained throughout the book, but with significant differences from pages 153-154 to p. 233, i.e., in all of chapters 1 to 7. Such a commitment is no longer an issue for disciplines that have attained a genuinely scientific level of performance. Semiotics cannot escape this rule as long as it conceives itself as a scientific project built on cumulative knowledge.

(b) Regarding the lived social order, interactive and practical, the issue is not to violate the moral and sapiential principles ruling our living together and our intersubjective and intergroup behavior. The last 100 pages of *TMS* (chapters 8 and 9) establish a catalog of fourteen models of communication prevalent in societies where speech and text matter. The results of the theoretical work presented up to p. 233 are then examined, in chapter 8, in the light of the global model of communication established by this catalog and then, in chapter 9, considered in sociological terms before being compellingly consolidated in the book's concluding paragraphs (pp. 335-336).

By now, it should be clear that, beyond the project for a university textbook duly completed, an entirely different cognitive adventure, deeply inspired by the views of Ferdinand de Saussure, is at play in the work of Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulou.

2. What semiotic theory is at issue in the book?

As the subtitle of the book indicates, it is essentially a presentation, in-depth and didactically very clear, of the semiotics of signification, i.e., what Saussure envisaged as "semiology" (a term borrowed from medicine but quite new for the language sciences at that time and radically different from the "semantics" taught by Michel Bréal between 1868 and 1897).

At the end of a remarkably concise, detailed, and precise itinerary, the reader – whether a student, a researcher in semiotics, or an informed humanist – will have

acquired a panoramic view of what has been learned and implemented to date of Saussure's semiotic intuitions and views, and of the principles and procedures which the semio-linguistic school known as the School of Paris has been able to derive from them so far. Though this is the central axis of *TMS*, the authors have also set themselves the task of following, analysing and occasionally trying out most of the various forms of semiotic research currently active worldwide. In addition, the structure of the book displays a true complementarity between the semiotics of signification (Parts I, II and III) and the semiotics of communication (Part IV).

Given the current state of semiotic research and teaching worldwide, such a pedagogic and demonstrative manual of Saussurean semiotics is indeed both an essential act and an achievement, Why? Because, after its intensive elaboration and unification under the firm rule of A. J. Greimas, the founder of the School of Paris,[1] who was a demanding taskmaster, semiotic research, always at least nominally of Saussurean inspiration, has in practice become rather elusive both as theory and methodology. It has been greatly diversified, if not fragmented and even diluted, into a number of trends which at the present time no longer debate their respective results and do not make much effort to operate with criteria of scientific admissibility.

TMS takes note of this situation, without overlooking either the vagaries of basic research or the fact that major discoveries that reshape and regroup the principal axes of research cannot be planned by decree. At times there is a long wait before the sudden appearance of a new talent which succeeds in identifying a feasible new way forward, as was the case for Greimas with the systematic utilisation of the modalities: starting in 1974 (the beginning of the seminars on the modalities at the EHSSS[2]) and up to *Du sens II* (1983), this new orientation began to allow us to glimpse the possibility of a linguistico-semiotic work actually founded on a semiotics of the sensible and the passions. There is a brief reference to this in *TMS*, the authors of which are less enthusiastic about this semiotics of the continuous: they consider that the researchers of the second and third generations have not yet succeeded in bringing their work up to the level of the semiotics of the discontinuous, i.e., the semiotics of action which is currently considered by many, and notably by the authors of *TMS*, as the standard, the semiotics of reference.

[1] With a certain coquetry, Greimas considered it appropriate to thus call his School of semio-linguistics, because in the beginning it was developed in Paris, by himself together with the international research group GRSL-EHESS (the Groupe de Recherches en Sémio-linguistique of the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales), whose loyalty Greimas, as the author of *Sémantique structurale*, had secured and which he set to work and steadily augmented around him from 1964 onwards, initially with his seminar at the Institut de Mathématiques Henri Poincaré, and later with his permanent teaching at the EHESS until his death in 1992.

[2] The École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales was formed out of Section VI (Sciences Économiques et Sociales) of the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) and became an independent institution in 1975 [transl. note].

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The book by the Lagopoulos couple is indeed a courageous and necessary work, in the sense that it is not satisfied with peaceably presenting the achievements of this standard semiotics as elaborated and tested at the end of the previous century. Its 360 pages, dense, clear, indispensable and attractive, are not a mere textbook: they take a strong position, and consequently, because they bring to the table powerful new observations concerning the semantics of isotopies, they reopen the much-needed scientific debate to which Saussurean semiotics was constantly subject during Greimas's lifetime.

3. Composition of the book

TMS is composed of four major parts. Part I ("The field of semiotics") opens with a brief and humoristic introduction ("What is semiotics?") that starts from the shared pleasure of an example of the spontaneous semiotics of the male dress gleaned from a British novel by Lee Child, *Tripwire* (1999), continues with the evocation of the multiplicity of signification systems marking social life and closes with a warning: to begin to acquaint oneself with this young and redoubtably abstract discipline, one should know that "It [semiotics] is an autonomous area of knowledge, which, as all scientific fields, has a systematic theory, and its concepts constitute a strongly coherent system."

Chapter 2 ("A brief history of semiotics") starts with Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Peirce, the founders of modern semiotics, and explores the vicissitudes of the publication and initial diffusion of their work. It continues by discussing, in historical succession, the nine principal variants of European semiotics (Russian formalism, semiotic theory, and Marxism, Vladimir Propp, the Prague linguistic Circle, the linguistic Circle of Copenhagen, the Tartu-Moscow School, French structuralism and semiotics, cognitive semiotics, poststructuralism, and postmodernism). This retrospective account ends with a summary overview of semiotics in the USA.

This section offers a helpful reminder, even for the most experienced researcher. Late in his life, Greimas sometimes worried about all these data and concepts that must "be kept together in mind" to nourish the flair, creativity, and scientific soundness of a true researcher, so that the right questions may be posed and some promising directions eventually be found. The perilous leaps between concepts, which call forth strong research ideas, rely on these long chains of reasons provided by the history of ideas while waiting for the time when it will be possible to consolidate the outlines of discoveries, based on *ad hoc* demonstrations. A rigorously targeted enumeration, as the one we find in chapter 2, can generate some inspired shortcuts on the part of even our most creative researchers.

We note that "The semiotics of *langue*" (Part II) is followed by "The semiotics of *parole*" (Part III), following the symmetry imposed by the Saussurean theory of the structuring oppositions of the semantic categories. From this moment, a kind of playful automatism appears in the organisation of the whole volume, with articulations resulting from the systematic projection of semantic categories from one chapter to the next; these sequences sketch out a conceptual architecture that is practically self-generated: *Langue* (ch. 3) vs *parole* (ch. 4); syntagmatic (ch. 4) vs paradigmatic (chs. 5 and 6), but that can also be described as narrative theory or textual semiotics or syntax (ch. 4) vs isotopies (chs. 5 and 6) or semantics (ch. 5); that is to say, on the one hand, work on the narrative syntax as opposed to work on the semantics; on the other hand, detailed verbalisation of the qualitative dimension based on isotopies (ch. 5) vs techniques for the quantitative analysis of isotopies (ch. 6); standard theory (chs. 3-6) vs non-standard theory (ch. 7); semiotics of signification (chs. 1-7) vs semiotics of communication (chs. 8 and 9).

Part II comprises only chapter 3, ("The basic concepts of *langue*"), with twelve sections in which the authors present, clarify, analyse and discuss the validity of the main theoretical points which European semiotics has so far adopted from the teachings of Saussure and the debates which they still generate. This critical evaluation of the principal theoretical *acquis* (gnoseology, principles, operational concepts) owed to Saussure invokes, whenever this may be suggestive, a sample of the debates through which each of these concepts or procedures have been semiotically validated according to the "*inter-rationalité*" (Gaston Bachelard) through which the semiotics of the discontinuous was constructed internationally starting in the late 1940s, with all that had been understood semiotically up to that time of Saussurean theory,[3] including Greimas's famous *Sémantique structurale* (1966) and the journal Communications (1964-1981).[4] This is why Umberto Eco, at that time the very young and very famous author of *La structure absente* (Paris 1972), is at times the target of precise and severe objections (pp. 61-66) on the part of the authors of *TMS*. The negative remarks made by Eco at that stage regarding Saussurism are

[3] We recall the first moments of the cognitive adventure which was destined to set off the semiotic spark in France: for the deux amis [transl. note: The Two Friends, title of a short novel by Maupassant (cf. Greimas 1976)], Roland Barthes and A.J. Greimas, it started in Alexandria, Egypt, but also in France and Turkey. Each time they were surrounded by intense proto-semiotic epistemological circles (which they were constantly constructing locally on the occasion of each of their new assignments). This emerging semiotics quickly became Saussureo-Hjelmslevian and then, after Hans Reichenbach's work on the construction of a symbolic notation for narrative calculations had been tested by semiotics, the theory became Saussureo-Greimasian for younger researchers, welcomed into the scientific debate after the first presentations by Greimas at the Institut Henri Poincaré in 1964-1965.

[4] See Barthes 1964, as well as 1968, 1981.

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re-evaluated in relation to the level of abstraction[5] on which Saussure actually locates his theory of language.

In Part II, the radical renewal brought by Saussure to the theory of language is carefully contextualised and clarified[6] as it figured in the course of the debates it raised across Europe throughout the 20th century, though there is no mention of the famous article by Greimas *Actualité du saussurisme* (1956).

4. The semiotics of parole (textual semiotics)

If Part II could rightly be entitled "The semiology of Saussure", Part III – at least chapter 4 – could have as title "The narratology of A. J. Greimas". Here, the presentation of narrative theory and its applications are fully in compliance with Greimas's standard theory, as presented in his two volumes of *Du sens* (1970 and 1983), the first volume of *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (1979) and also in *Maupassant: La sémiotique du texte* (1976). Toward the end of chapter 4, we find a fascinating example of canonical narrative analysis applied to a story of the very early Middle Ages, *The life of Saint Alexius*.

On the other hand, implicitly, but with significant connotative effects, within Part III, the set of chapters 4, 5, and 6 is juxtaposed, as a positive model, to the relatively negative model evoked in chapter 7 ("Late and post-Greimasian theory"). In effect, without explicitly stating it, chapters 4, 5, and 6 are devoted to the description and implementation of the standard semiotic theory elaborated, tested, and diffused by Greimas "in the best years of his scientific fecundity." In contrast, in chapter 7, the authors express a certain disillusionment with the nature, assessed as rather disappointing, of the propositions of the later Greimas, renouncing his brilliant work of

[5] On page 64 of TMS, we read: "Saussure's position ... excludes the relation of the sign to the external world". It would seem to us more exact, and more consistent with the general tenor of *TMS*, to write: "Saussure's position shifted the possibility of a rational and demonstrative work on verbal signification towards a conceptual level which tends to objectify and make explicit not only verbal significations but also all other ways of making meaning. This, for the Saussurean school, implied that it should be possible to construct biunivocal symbolic notations not dependent on the idiosyncrasies conveyed by natural languages and quite close to the kinds of analysis carried out in laboratories or in the workplaces of structural engineers, neither of which can be accused of using signs that have no relation to the outside world." This is not the case with Peirce's Semeiotics, which rests on the spontaneous naturalism of a more figurative philosophy.

[6] It is true that, paradoxically, Greimas in his *Actualité du saussurisme* does not specify his mental relation to Saussure and the lessons he drew from him (contrary to what we read in *TMS*). It is as if, concerning Saussure, Greimas suspended his teaching mission in order to be able to fully live this relation of definitive inspiration. He reads Hjelmslev through *his own* Saussure, without even bothering to make explicit what this Saussure is; he is as it were "kept for himself", though always ready to re-emerge in the slightest oral epistemological debate, for example at Cerisy-La Salle, in the seminar or in a remarkable dialogue with a young researcher whom he supervises, in the form of a furious "*Et Saussure alors!*" (What about Saussure, then?!).

the narratological period – discontinuist yet admirably coherent and innovative – to opt for work that is continuist but lacking coherence and true theoretical creativity. The second volume of the *Dictionnaire* (1986) is seen as the regrettable reflection of this late period, as the counter-example of what the coherence and scientific rigor of semiotic work should be.

We have already pointed out the symmetrical arrangement of a semiotics of signification vs. semiotics of communication. The set of chapters 2-7 of Parts I, II, and III implicitly develops *The semiotics of signification*. In contrast, Part IV, comprising chapter 8 ("A global model of communication") and chapter 9 ("Social semiotics"), is explicitly entitled *The semiotics of communication*.

Nevertheless, an important reasoning emerges, in the form of an explicit counter-argument, in the last two pages of the book. This reasoning takes on an almost musical power, evoking the chords struck at the end of an opera or a symphony, saturating the book's final paragraphs, first with the names of Saussure and Hjelmslev and then with Saussure alone.

Chapters 4-6 combine theoretical accounts and demonstrative practices on all kinds of texts, verbal or non-verbal (among them the formal analysis of the medieval *Life of Saint Alexius*). In contrast, chapter 7 expresses disappointment and criticisms concerning the later Greimas and requests clarifications of the incoherent, scattered, and weak propositions of a hypothetical semiotics of passion, through which the Greimassians aspired to produce a semiotics of the continuous vis-à-vis the still thriving semiotics of the discontinuous that this book approves of. It is true that 30 years after the loss of the author of *Sémantique structurale*, the Francophone school of semiotics has no definitive results to show in order to establish a semiotics of the continuous.

However, with chapters 5, 6, and 7, the multi-headed enunciating subject of *TMS* is no longer a teacher who is himself the student of two giants, Saussure and Greimas. The book becomes something more than a textbook. The semiotic work chronicled in these chapters is the expression of an autonomous group, speaking in its own name about a semiotic work that, at this particular moment, it alone could do. TMS is the expression of the *Semiotic School of Thessaloniki*.

Chapters 5 and 6, particularly, labeled in principle as qualitative approach vs. quantitative approach, begin, as all the others, by marking their relation to the existing literature on semantics and its isotopies while showing little dependence on this literature. Subsequently, they present the results of a research that has carried further than anyone before the analysis of the qualitative and quantitative networking that characterizes the semantic play of isotopies. Starting from p. 152, under the title "The empirical textual network and the hierarchy of isotopies," the Semiotic School of Thessaloniki demonstrates some of its theoretical results and how they can be visually rendered through graphs and diagrams. The section concludes with interesting results concerning a semiotics of spatiality, accompanied by an application to the spatial discourses on the city of Thessaloniki.

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All this fertile work of both theoretical and applied research on the semantics of isotopies allows us to hope that it may be in this direction that some important contributions could be forged to the semiotics of passions, which is presently lacking many of the conceptual and experimental tools necessary for the realisation of its ambitions.

5. Effectiveness of theory and methodology of semiotics: The tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure

That which is formulated, with moderation and fairness, in this book constitutes a trigger for a vital debate which all researchers committed to the question of the semiotics of passions need to support to guarantee the progress of this new research horizon, the necessity of which was evident well before the required semiotic paths had been envisaged that would enable it to be pursued in perfect coherence with the undisputed *acquis* of the discipline.

In the most glorious period of this collective research, Greimas's apparent boldness was compensated by his profound prudence. He confessed, privately, that he always had a head start of at least three years concerning the theoretical and practical views he submitted to the collective work of the seminar. Is this perhaps still the case today? Have we not underestimated the real significance of works such as *De l'imperfection* (1987)? We still need to await some new results before this book finds its proper place in the Greimassian schemas.

6. Some paths to follow, perhaps?

In the present condition of our discipline and on all continents, two or three generations of researchers lay claim to what has been diffused, little by little, of the semiological views of Saussure and his first European disciples. These generations have a poor understanding of each other. Simultaneously, epistemologists from the hard sciences have begun to publish precise assessments of the last generation of semiotic works. Their voices will be influential in continuing a work of classification comparable to that accomplished by *TMS*.

Actual discoveries cannot be planned but assert themselves when the general state of knowledge is finally sufficient for a new synthesis to emerge. This is what happened, in its own time, with the narratology of the discontinuous. The beautiful analyses of Michel Arrivé, and especially chapters II and III of his *À la recherche de Ferdinand de Saussure* (2007), among which "La sémiologie saussurienne entre le CLG et

la recherche sur la légende" [Saussurean semiology between *CLG*[7] and the research on the legend], demonstrate by what painful pathways the concepts of semiotics had to pass before finding their proper form. As in all the hard sciences, the eureka moments of semiotics are dearly paid for.

This is the reason why, in response to the justified objections of Lagopoulos and Boklund-Lagopoulou on the current state of research in post-Greimassian semiotics, we hope to see a series of live exchanges and debates as intense as those that marked the progress of semiotic theory between 1975 (the beginning of the work on the modalities) and the death of Greimas in February 1992, to create the conditions for some tangible progress on the semiotics of passions, which seems to have become one of the necessary points of passage of semiotic research.

7. To conclude

In conclusion, *Theory and Methodology of Semiotics: The tradition of Ferdinand de Saussure* by Alexandros Ph. Lagopoulos and Karin Boklund-Lagopoulou is an essential work:

(a) Because it is a profoundly responsible manual for a university initiation in semiotics.

(b) Because it creates the conditions for a constructive inter-rationality to debate, as much as necessary, on the *acquis* and the latent perspectives of all actual research orientations of semiotics in general and, in particular, on the semantic subtleties of the semiotics of passions. Though it is true that this approach has been on the agenda of semiotic research since 1977 and had already begun to take shape in the various prepublications realized after that date before the appearance of the more important publications starting in 1991 – among which *Sémiotique des passions* [The semiotics of passions] and some other works by the same group duly examined by *TMS* – it is also true that it would have everything to gain by such an extension of the research.

(c) Because its theoretical work testifies to a rigor and an exigency far above the fray, and because these qualities are the expression of a mindset indispensable for the transmission and perpetuation of the scientific quality, and thus the raison d'être of the research that has given birth to semiotic theory, as it was imagined and made possible by the entire scientific work of Ferdinand de Saussure.

[7] The *Cours de linguistique générale*, the book on Saussure's theory constructed from lecture notes by two of his students (see Saussure, 1968-1974) [transl. note].

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