

THE RESOURCES OF THE
SEMIOLOGIST:
OPERATORY IDEAS FOR A SEMIOTICS
OF THE EFFECTS OF MASS MEDIA

Any act of communication is a drama with three characters: a transmitter, a receiver and the world which is their subject. *Someone* speaks of *something* to *someone*. The messages sent during this drama usually have three functions that are easily shown to be assured by specific meaningful forms: “expression” by the transmitter, “representation” by the world, “involvement” or “concern” by the receiver. It is this last property that interests us here, the one that those familiar with the literature of linguistics find under various names: appeal, conative, injunctive, imperative function... through which “language is used as a means to lead others to adopt a certain behavior”.¹

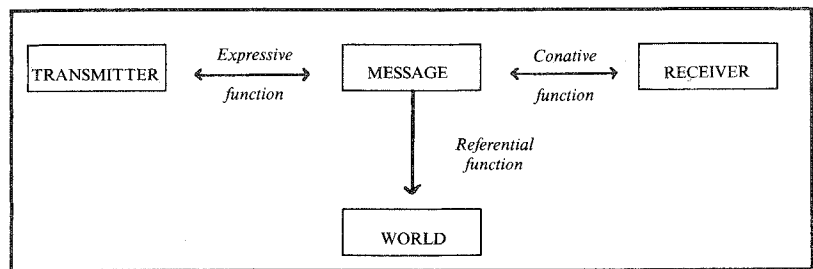
This theme has inspired numerous works in the field of the sciences of language, works that are particularly marked by the discoveries of pragmatic linguistics.² However, results thus obtained on the micro-units that make up the statements of language have obviously not inspired researchers working on macro-messages conveyed by mass media (the press, television, publicity, etc.).

Translated by Jeanne Ferguson

¹ J. Dubois, *et al.*, 1973, p. 216.

² Among the precursors, K. Bühler, and R. Jakobson, 1970, ch. 11. In the group of pragmatians, J.L. Austin, 1970; J.R. Searle, 1972; O. Ducrot, 1972.

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Thus in the field of mass communication, where there is constant inquiry as to the effects obtained on receivers, semiotics today finds increasing application. Nevertheless, the tools (that is, the conceptual models within a rational discipline) proper to this science and allowing an approach to the subject are seen to be, paradoxically, non-existent or imprecise in the works of those who practice it, as we shall see.

This paucity of semantic models of influence, in contrast to the large number of works departing from them, is not caused, as we might think, by the difficulties within the object of study itself. Actually, it is only the perpetuation of circumstances that the discipline found when it entered the field of “communication studies” in which then reigned a psychological empiricism essentially concerned with obtaining the effects of messages on individuals through polls: semiotics applied to mass communication then opposed itself, decreeing “the abandonment of the pre-eminence given to the receiver”, and challenging as “not pertinent... the idea of the effects of a message”.³ This initial refusal (as well as an old mistrust with regard to the theme itself) was the main cause for the still-present hesitant statements of semiotics on the subject and, correlatively, of the irresistible attraction exerted on it by models that are external to the discipline, as we shall see. Since we are now assured of the strictly circumstantial nature of the lacunae mentioned above, we can always imagine a remedy for them. This is what I propose to do, following a three-stage procedure.

First, through a series of *definitions* and with the aid of the

³ G. Peninou, 1972, p. 12; J. Durand, 1981, p. 131.

normal concepts within the discipline, I shall delimit the field in which the subsequent considerations will be contained. The second phase, *description*, will be supported by a group of semiotic studies taking up the question of the influence of communications. In the third phase, these will be given a critical discussion that will bring up some problems that are insoluble from the semiological point of view unless we adopt a different circumscription of the field of effects we wish to study. This is what we will proceed to do during the third part, entitled *demarcations*, at the end of which a theoretical and observational field, stricter and more operatory than the preceding because of a semiotic approach to the “power” of mass communications,⁴ will be indicated.

1. DEFINITIONS

These remarks will be on a theme whose specification must now be established on the basis of the three “characters” given above, through which we have seen that the question is one of *semiotic models allowing the prediction or inference of the effects of messages within mass media*.

1.1. *The semiologist “in transmission”*

An initial limitation within the vast area thus projected is a radical distinction concerning the practice of semiological analysis. The matter of the effects of a message, like that of meanings in general, may be approached using two types of data: we may inquire into the effects sought by the message and accessible through a study of its internal characteristics, an analysis called *in transmission* or *in camera*. Or, we may inquire into the real effects obtained by collecting opinions of the receivers that we confront with the message, an analysis called *in reception*. Finally, and most impor-

⁴ The facts given in this paper are from the corpus of semiotic studies discussed below, whose reading led me to this work which is also largely beholden to it in its theme, its descriptive content and its axes. I thank Aliette Defrance (Département des études de publicis conseil), France Kreitmann (ECOM), Fanny Viélajus (CLM-BBDO) and Yves Krief (SORGEM studio) for having given me access to these documents, as well as all the more or less anonymous analysts without whom this work would have been impossible.

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tant, we may synthesize by combining both kinds of analyses, rationally articulated in a global sequence; this is the only one of the three procedures that is really thorough. We will deal exclusively with the models of influence used and utilizable in the first case, when, at his worktable, the semiologist sets himself the task of estimating what the effects of the message he is examining will, in reality, be. This message is his only “corpus”; interviews are excluded. We notice that the cases eliminated by this clause are *in fact* a negligible quantity in present semiological production, but the clause is especially important for its implications *in truth* or *in theory*, to the degree in which the two opposed approaches require distinct precautions at the level of their analyses, as can be imagined.

1.2. *The “semiologist as such”*

Mass-media messages, in general, are crowded with various indices and properties. Confronting this multiplicity are two broad strategies for analysis. *Generalist approaches* form the first group: ingenuous or cultivated, at times even masterly, they offer for study the globality of the message as well as all the diversity of the phenomena produced in it and are concerned only with the essential. If one day this horizontal reading must be given a name, we can call it “medialogy”. In its erudite version it assumes a pluridisciplinary formation on the part of its practitioners. *Specialist approaches* make up the second group. The analytical strategy here is, if you like, vertical, because its reading progresses through “delving” into a field of facts having strictly defined boundaries. By tradition and vocation, the semiology of communication is an approach of the second type, constrained by its domain of facts, method and theory to respect a certain number of conditions that make a discipline of it, in the two meanings of the word. This fundamental criterion is not always respected in applied studies on mass media, where it is not unusual that the label “semiology” mostly covers generalist studies for various reasons that do not correspond to any necessity within the discipline. In any case, each time that it is a question here of semiotics or of the semiologist, at times with the qualification “as such”, it will be to those with a specialized approach that this work is exclusively devoted.

1.3. *Models of the semiologist*

Now, what are these conceptual models of the semiologist in question? This term, as well as those of “structure” and “figure” that will soon accompany it, designates abstract entities, belonging to the “competence” of the semiologist, instruments formed of concepts collocated in operatory schema that the analyst uses to estimate the effects of the messages he studies. These models and figures, let us now make clear, are the only instrumentation of our man. Without terrain, without a laboratory, closer to the logician than to the sociologist, he has nothing to offer but the rigor of his thought, namely, that of the conceptual tools he uses. What is, then, the practical function of these tools, before we give their content?

They intervene during the second of the three logical phases that are connected in any analysis in transmission. The first is *observation*. It consists in gathering all the data during an introspection in which the analyst, faced with the “corpus” and his semiologist’s hat put aside, listens to his intuitions as a responsive subject. At this stage, he thinks of and then records a quantity of correct or aberrant facts that the messages suggest to him (emotions, sensations or associations). At the time of the second stage of *descriptions*, putting his hat back on, he makes a selection and then a conceptualization of the data, using the instruments furnished by his discipline. Only facts that can be grasped in the language and through the models of semiotics will be retained; only relations, deductions and hypotheses belonging to the theory will be kept (at the outcome of that form of “mental experimentation” constituted by the proof of commutation to which all practitioners of the sciences of meaning have recourse, forcing the objectivization of meanings within the markers that carry them). This permits him to reach the third and last phase, *generalization*, by means of which he will finally be able to detect what meanings, among those he gathered and then selected, will be immediately perceived by others than himself (belonging to more or less sizable groups, whose sociological extension he will usually be able to define, if only vaguely). The accuracy of his generalizations thus largely depends on the quality of the conceptual tools he used to arrive at them. This fact being established, let us return to the models of influence

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that we will be dealing with. They may all be described as deriving from an abstract but simple *structure*, presenting a unique architecture for the relation of influence.

Originating with the transmitter	a message	fact	Something	to the receiver
A	(X	R	Y)	B
TRANSMITTER	→ FACTOR	→ RELATION	→ EFFECT	→ RECEIVER

Let us consider this *structure* as an abstract formula located far up in a ramified logic reproducing a hypothetical schema of organization and creation of semiologic knowledge. At the end of the chain, far below, there would thus be real statements, those that may be read in the texts:

- *Breaks in constructions (X) of this discourse attenuate (R) the inattention (Y) of the spectator.*
- *The pronoun "our" (X) here connotes the strong adherence to a group and releases (R) emotions (Y) by establishing a strong relation of involvement (R) between the transmitter and the receiver.*
- *The good structuring (X) of this message facilitates (R) the comprehension (Y) and adhesion (Y) of the receiver.*
- *Due to (R) the construction (X) of this message, the entire affective and emotive stock (Y) of the receiver is invested in the personage and thus in the product.*

It will be said that these statements actualize *figures* that are in fact a specification of the general *structure* seen above, due to the replacement of the generic concepts of "factor", "relation" and "effect" by more operatory descriptive concepts ("pronoun", "relation of involvement", "comprehension", etc.).

We can now place the notion of *model*. We will designate in this way entities located at an intermediary level of depth with regard to the "surface" of texts, between the figure (superficial) and the structure (profound). Here we meet the archetypes of the semiolo-

gist, the schemas that shape his thought, the thematic options that orient his method, his “themata”, as they say.⁵ These are fixed configurations incorporating in a stable series a determined type of factors, relations and effects, sufficiently vague to cover a large number of figures and often legitimized through competences that are outside the discipline (related sciences or common sense). These are the entities that will henceforth interest us.

2. DESCRIPTIONS

As announced above, the explanatory method used here is to rely on actual semiotic texts that will be submitted to criticism. To this end, I have analyzed about forty “study reports” self-named semiotic. Quite recent (1978-1983), these documents give analyses of various messages: television, radio, the press, commercials on television and radio, advertisements and posters. In all cases, they are completed studies presented as applying the knowledge and models already established in order to arrive directly at “operational” conclusions, permitting the decision-maker who ordered them, and to whom they are confidentially addressed, to choose and act. Thus detailed justifications (confidence is a preliminary necessity) and developments on abstractions (theory is not well thought of) are excluded. The description of the models and even the figures of reference are thus carefully set apart by non-academic wording which facilitates rapid reading but also sets up serious obstacles to critical reading.⁶

2.1. *The five models of influence of messages*

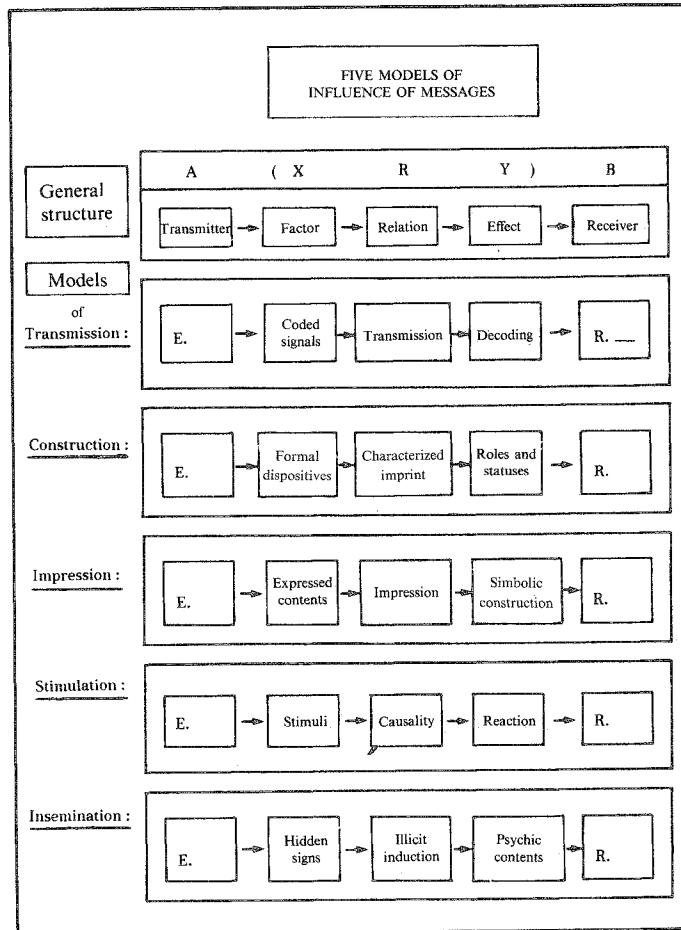
I have enumerated five models of influence, making up the essential of the conceptual tools or the mechanisms of thought, that

⁵ Cf. G. Holton, 1981.

⁶ Why was the critical research not extended to “academic” texts? Because university research in this field is inadequate, differently from studies of pure application whose production is, inversely, far from negligible in quantity. Thus, in 1982, of the 259 French agencies of study and counsel polled by Self-Marketing, 26 said they were currently using semiological studies and 24 said they had already used the technique. We may estimate that the number of semiotic studies produced in the sector in 1982 is not below 150 but probably not above 400.

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authors solicit when they must reflect on the theme of effects: models of Transmission, Construction, Impression, Stimulation and Insemination. This instrumentation, which could be called basic, this veritable "panoply" (there are texts in which it is deployed in entirety), we will now briefly detail.



2.1.1. *The model of Transmission*

Accepted formula: *a message, by virtue of the fact that it contains certain coded signals (X), will transmit (R) these signals to its receivers, whose resultant activity will be a certain interpretive decoding (Y), symmetrical to the initial coding.*

The Transmission model refers to a category of data which it would be tempting to put at zero degree of efficiency, because they are so little specific. In fact, the model is used by semiologists to describe the components of the cognitive activity of interpretation (“decoding”) of messages, that is, the foundation itself of communication. It is respected sources of inspiration that here lend their vocabulary and at times their competence: cybernetics and the theory of information. For example, the effects (Y) are presented as the functioning of a “competence”, allowing the “treatment” of the information, the “recognition” or not of “intelligible” or “erroneous” “signals” within the framework of the decoding activity generated by the message and deemed symmetrical with that which served at the time of coding. We sometimes find specifications of these effects (Y), connected to the presumed variations of “noises” in the transmission (R): we then speak of “fatigue”, “effort”, “irritation” linked to a foreseeable incomprehension; or on the contrary, to “well-being”, “ease” in listening, “satisfaction” accompanying and “coloring” the fundamental activity of decoding by the receiver.

2.1.2. *The model of Construction*

Accepted formula: *a message, by virtue of the fact that it contains certain formal dispositives (X) can symbolically affect (R) a certain role or status (Y) in its receivers.*

Here it is the sciences of signification (general linguistics, structural semantics, narratology) and no longer that of information, that serve as a source of inspiration. A formalist conception of efficiency, according to which the X factors are semiotic dispositives (pronoun forms, modalities, the location in space of the characters, etc.) is released from the concepts invoked (mainly at the level of *figures*); the Y effects are “*actantial*” categories, forging

an image of the receiver with the aid of virtual roles and statuses. Finally, the *R* connection is a semantic relation in which *Y* is *indicated* to the receiver by means of conventional procedures of interpretation. It is thus a matter of a procedure of assignation in the two meanings of the term: *attribution* (of a *Y* role to *B*) and formal *convocation* (of *B* in its new “place” *Y*). In our texts, at the level of figures, the dispositives (*X*) and the effects (*Y*) of “interpolation”, “implication”, “injunction”, “designation”, “qualification”, “connotation”, etc. are thus systemically signaled; through them is manifested a tendency to take up a position in some authoritarian forms, become archetypal (such as the imperative, which from the beginning gave its name to the “conative function”, often called “injunctive” or “imperative”).

2.1.3. *The model of Impression*

Accepted formula: *a message, by virtue of the fact that it expresses certain contents of thought in certain ways (X) is able to impress (R) upon the mind of its receivers a certain imprint having certain properties (Y).*

Whatever its descriptive value may be, this conception clearly has its roots in the common opinion according to which certain messages are able to imprint their content in minds, leaving their traces, like the sculptor in his stone or the printer on his paper.⁷

The subject of marketing, whose military penchants are known (cf. the ideas of “target”, “campaign”, “penetration”), brings a certain coloration, lexically speaking, to the expression of the Imprint model. The effects (*Y*) are thus especially described, at the level of figures, with the aid of ideas of “impression”, “mark”, and especially of “impact” modulated according to differences in intensity (“rhetorical figure with a very strong impact”), indelibility (“good memorization”) and degree of penetration (“profound impression”). For the origin (*X*) of these effects we essentially call on those kinds of factors that are the “repetitions” of semantic categories and their “saturation” by the addition of complementary signs, factors considered suitable, through the relations *R* of “bolting”,

⁷ “He would have a convincing conversation with him and his language would be as the burin of an expert scribe” (Albert Cohen, *Belle du Seigneur*).

“anchorage”, or “penetration” to effectively install the presumed effects.

2.1.4. *The model of Stimulation*

Accepted formula: *a message, in virtue of the fact that it expresses such or such an aspect (X) of reality can cause a reaction (R) of certain psychophysiological phenomena (passions or emotions) in its receivers.*

This conception descends directly from experimental psychophysiology, here literally transposed.⁸ It envisages communication from a firmly realistic (and not formalist) point of view by considering messages as transparent “windows” opening upon realities (X) that can elicit psychophysiological reactions (Y) because of mechanisms (R) often related to reflexes or automatic responses acquired by the receivers in daily life. Thus, at times, the “strength” and the “talent” of an actor, the “beauty” of a landscape, the “intensity” of an exciting situation appear as factors, (X) as effects (Y), *emotions* (“sensations”, “pleasure”, “drowsiness”, “sorrow”, “intense affective involvement”) and *passions* (“friendship”, “belonging”, “sympathy”, “favor”). This model thus also provides objects to be analyzed that are not immanent but external to the messages, whether it is a matter of referent, mental laws founded on habit or experience, or emotions following the reception.

2.1.5. *The model of Insemination*

Accepted formula: *a message, by virtue of the fact that it bears certain hidden signs (X) can secretly induce (R) certain thoughts (Y) in the receivers' minds.*

The shadowy sources used by our final model are as much occult sciences, esoteric symbols, cyphers and cryptography as are currents of research on hypnosis, secret persuasion and subliminal messages.⁹ We thus have a model for analysis of surreptitious

⁸ At the junction of behaviorism, reflexology, the theory of apprenticeship and the stimulus-response theory, systems having spectacularly influenced the field of communication studies.

⁹ Cf. W.B. Key, 1974; V. Packard, 1957.

communications in which occult inductive signs (X) (esoteric contents, subliminal images, hidden symbolic forms, such as anamorphoses) cause the unfolding in the mind of the receiver of representations (Y) or mental states due to unadmitted and underhand designs (R) (the factors “suggest”, “inspire”, “make think of”, “are associated with”, “unconsciously induce the idea that”¹⁰). This model thus appears as the technical version of a popular conception of propaganda, according to which the receiver sees himself in certain cases, and against his will, secretly inoculated with beliefs of whose origin he is ignorant or deluded.

3. DEMARCATIONS

Independently of the question of their validity, I am somewhat reluctant to consider the last three models as relevant to semiotics, primarily cautious because of the extent of the factual field they present, generously englobing an entire palette of physiological and psychical phenomena usually studied by other disciplines. One immediately asks why semiotics should suddenly find itself authorized to extend its domain by invading that of others? Even though it may seem superfluous to make a case out of this subject, which many perhaps judge to be understood, we will attempt to explain some principles considered fundamental in the core of semiotics (dealing with representations) and that convince us to remove these three models from the technical language of the semiotics of *effects*, a hesitant discipline still searching for its principles. My intention in so doing is not so much to polemicize as to introduce these principles into the discussion, because their adoption after the “second phase” of description of X , R and Y (see 1.3 above) allows the selection of classes of stable and pertinent phenomena from among the chaos of uncertain observations, from which a consistent semiotic deduction may be developed.

The discussions in question all derive from one constituent

¹⁰ Cf. for example this analysis of the Gioscardian slogan: “*Il faut un président à la France*”. “*À la France*” makes one think of the expression “*à la page*”, “*à la carte*”, “a flower *à la boutonnière*” and must *unconsciously* give the idea of aristocracy through style (published by “*Stratégies*”, signed “a semiologist”. My underlining.

principle of semiotics, inscribed in its name, that I shall consider as an admitted postulate and thus eliminated from the discussion until there is convincing proof to the contrary: this is the principle according to which the discipline can only deal with *facts of significance*. From all evidence, the result is a criterion of pertinence for the selection of the objects to be studied that, for convenience, we will here call the *criterion of significance*. I recall it for the record. Without going into detail, let us put into opposition, for any message, the exterior reality it treats and the expression it gives this reality through its own proper means. On the one hand the world, external or transcendent to the message (the real, the denotation, the referent, the represented, the expressed) and on the other the internal or immanent circumstances in the message, unfolding on the sound or video track (significations, conversations, persons represented, stories). Semiotics, which is not a natural science, has as we know always on principle limited its field to the realm of “circumstances that are immanent in the messages”, the only reality it is effectively equipped to study.

Of course, all internal circumstances do not automatically become an object of study for the semiologist, because of a second, classic, opposition between two categories of events: on the one hand those that we will call *expressions* (indices, symbols, action markers) that are “fixed” elements or from the repertory of collective knowledge, within a body of conventional rules interiorized in the culture of individuals, through which ties are established between material supports (sounds, movements, graphics) and their agreed-upon meanings, collective rules thanks to which there is more or less agreement on the meanings of the signs.¹¹

A class of phenomena, which we may call here *items*, may be opposed to *expressions*. These *items*, grouping together the various facts and inferences that the messages at times contain and which, being without meaning in the culture of the receivers, in the strict sense, “non-meaningful” (but not necessarily inconsequent), are filtered then discarded at the time of reception, since they do not operate within that form of “treatment” of the messages which is the activity of interpretation.

¹¹ Cf. for a valid discussion, J.R. Searle, 1972, p. 72.

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Semiotics, a science of signs, is obliged by definition, as may be imagined, to renounce items, faced with which it is technically powerless.¹²

There is perhaps no need to persist: the *criterion of significance* sets up a frontier between the facts that the semiologist can deal with and those that are inaccessible to his methods, leaving him only events having the double characteristic of being immanent in the message and ruled by conventions. Now, what are the implications of this double restriction concerning the identity of *Xs*, *Rs* and *Ys* that are retainable in the field of semiotics?

3.1. *Referential or immanent factors?*

Let us imagine there is a fear that a forthcoming film on the Algerian War may cause some social upheaval. A semiologist is called upon in the attempt to see the matter clearly. If he remains dispassionate, he must, logically, distinguish two categories of phenomena that may be produced: on the one hand, various reactions imputable to the immanent order (*X*) of the “filmic” (*X* = the dramatic qualities of the story, the talent of the production, photography) and on the other hand, the mass effects imputable to the “pro-filmic”,¹³ the underlying reality, at the same time anterior, exterior and transcending the story which, possibly, may not even mention them (*X* = the historical facts of the drama, the social and political anguish that accompanied it).

Because of the criterion of significance, the analyst must, if he is authorized, consider the “filmic” expressions, leaving aside the historical and social dimensions of the “pro-filmic” background, which he will relegate to the specialist in politics, psychology and sociology, all more professionally concerned than he is with the predictability of the reactions to real social events—even when they are presented in a film.

¹² “Cleaning-up operations”, notes T.S. Kuhn, are a constant activity in all scientific disciplines (1983, p. 46). The “cleaning-up” proposed here is, keeping within proportions, the homologue of the one scientific phonology introduced. This discipline was in fact established thanks to the rejection from its field of study of non-meaningful sounds (which none the less are not without extra-linguistic information such as medical or esthetic). Thus *phonemics* formed a new branch of the sciences of language and was thereafter distinguished from *phonetics*, later linked to articulatory physiology and acoustical physics.

¹³ Cf. M. Cohen-Seat, 1953, pp. 7-9.

This is obviously not the opinion of the practitioners of the model of Stimulation, who readily invoke reality as the *X* factor and choose to work with the stimuli coming from “behind the screen”, from the essence or substantiality of the beings or things that are shown and not with the way in which they appear or are shown, which theoretically invalidates it as a semiotic model. However, there is more: in calling upon realistic factors and those of the medium which would behave in a quasi-natural manner, after probably having “broken through the screen”, the Stimulation model also makes the error of ingenuously transferring to the rank of category for analysis what is only one of the elements of the situation to be analyzed, namely, the illusion of reality that the audio-visual, differently from the textual, imposes on its receivers—even semiologists, it seems. This ingenuousness—for practical reasons this time—deprives our model of the ability to be simply plausible: we cannot help thinking, on the contrary, that between reality and its reflection, between a being in flesh and blood and its cathodic image, there must be a substantial difference in effect.¹⁴

3.2 *Natural or expressive factors?*

The model of Insemination purports to treat semiotically phenomena of surreptitious induction using imperceptible signals. Our discussion of it will be brief, insofar as this type of item (unmeaningful for the designated receivers) is clearly excluded by the criterion of significance. Because of this criterion, it follows that the color red is not a pertinent marker for the semiologist unless,

¹⁴ It must be recognized that, though the distinction between reality and representation is a work tool easy to apply when it comes to writing, it is less clear in audio-visual because of this first obstacle: the *impression of reality*. The *superimposing* of registers is the second obstacle. In reporting, for example, we distinguish at least two superimposed levels of communication of equal importance to the question of effects: that of the presentation constructed within the audio-visual message and that of the presentation constructed by the individuals represented in the message, largely through their language. This superimposing of registers requires the repetition of the analysis for each of them and the addressing at each stage of the problem of distinction between referential and immanent factors. The *multiplicity of expressions* is the third obstacle. In fact, audio-visual transmits multicode messages. The semiologist, like the receiver in front of his television set, must thus mobilize not only his linguistic competence but also his ability to “read” the codes of gestures, clothing, music, narrative and others as well. For each of them he must re-pose the fundamental question of the distinction between immanence and exteriority.

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within the message he is analyzing, it is intended to have an effect through the intermediary of its coded values (interdiction, blood, revolution). It will no longer concern him if it acts through the intermediary of its decorative or stimulating values. However, there is no culpable semiotic passion in the matter of *double meaning*, however minimally it may be signaled as such (allegory, pun, spoonerism, palindrome, irony, anagram). From the time the image or the text becomes cryptic, and the designated receivers have no warning nor any key (an *unsigned* double meaning, a *cyphered* message, *subliminal* images) the semiologist, as a consequence of the same criterion must shift the duty of calculating its effects to some other specialist, if he is lucky enough to find one unwise enough to accept the mission.¹⁵

3.3 *Real or ideal effects?*

Realism, called in question with regard to referential factors, is just as much excluded at the time of estimations of *Y* effects, likewise for theoretical reasons. To demonstrate, let us turn aside for a moment and look at the phenomena grouped within the *expressive function*, symmetrical with that which we are examining here. What of it? For any expressive behavior (satisfaction for example), we admit that it is absolutely necessary to distinguish the source of the expression (the actual feeling experienced by the person) from its coded representation (mimetics or interjection of satisfaction) so as to bear in mind the possibility of an alteration (simulation or exaggeration of the real feeling). Generally, care is taken not to confuse the real psychic life of the individuals with its dramatization during its acts of communication. The description

¹⁵ The problem is greatly over-simplified because, in reality, the opposition between *expression* and *item* does not originate in the marker itself but in the culture of its interpreters: certain *items*, insignificant for the larger public, function instead as instructive signals for subjects having certain professional cultures (*symptoms* for medicine are such esoteric signals, as are *rattles* for the automobile mechanic, *heavenly signs* for the hermeneutic, *frustrated actions* for the psychoanalyst and, generally, all indices used in specific practices requiring interpretation). Finally, we must note that the frontier between *expression* and *items* is unstable. In fact, the divulgence of professional cultures is a constant social phenomenon and thus also the correlative appropriation, by the wider public, of the *expressions* figuring in these cultures: after the infatuation for psychoanalysis, watch out for the absent-minded person who in public makes a slip or does the wrong thing.

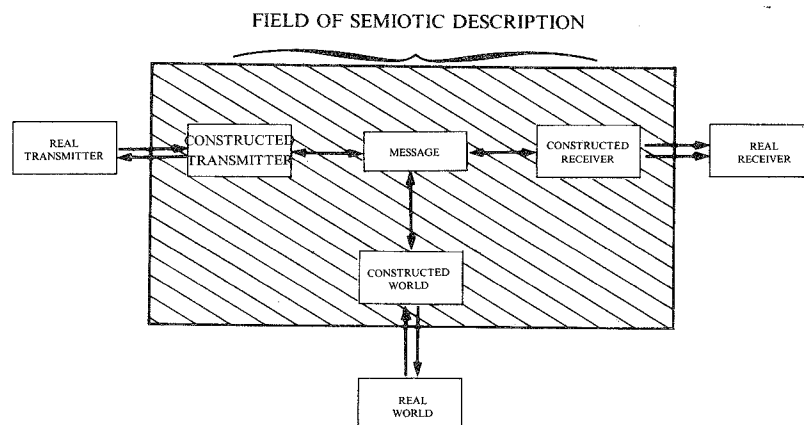
of the “representational” components forms the field of semiotics. That of “real” psychic life supposes different interpretive competence, allowing, for example, the revealing of the presence and incidence of those “prisms” that are lies, sublimation, the unconscious, for which semiotics is not equipped but which are taken over at its boundaries by psychoanalysis, graphology, socio- and psycholinguistics, etc.¹⁶

The same is true for the *conative function* and the *Y* effects it includes: here no more than elsewhere is the semiotician able to grasp, beyond the symbols projected in the message, the real co-extensive “experienced” of their reception. Here it is equally indispensable to distinguish on the one hand the totality of the *effects ideally constructed* by the message and which are immanent in it, homologues of expressions for the “expressive function” and representations for the “referential function”, and on the other hand, the *real transcendent effects* of the message, homologues of visceral, psychological sources of the expressions as well as the referent of the representations. The first groups the roles and definitions proposed symbolically in and by the communications to their receivers that the second extends to the real psychic experience of individuals, exterior to the message. The first designates coded entities, the second natural phenomena that spread from them during the reception. Only the first concerns semiotics, that leaves the study of the actualization, including the considerations of the prisms that alter the “necessity” for reading (absorbed, distant, credulous, involved listening) to other disciplines, as the following schema illustrates.

To establish the ideas, let us imagine a poster for a pornographic film (“X”) showing an enticing girl whose immobile display of seduction, largely coded, has the symbolic effect of making a

¹⁶ Must we remind ourselves that semiology is by definition not able to cover the sciences of psychic life? This is certainly the conviction of Saussure (cf. “Semiology would form a part of social psychology and consequently general psychology”, 1969, p. 33) and also that of Chomsky (cf. “Linguistics thus characterized is simply the domain of the psychology that concerns itself [with] the aspects of the mind [corresponding to the knowledge of a language]”, 1970, p. 48). This is why, *even when he works in reception* on interviews, the semiologist “as such” has no access to real psychic effects but only to their expression in the discourse.

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virtual partner out of whoever looks at her. The task of the semiologist is to describe this attractively-offered status. Through principle (of pertinence) he will stop at the threshold separating the “coded” and the “experienced” that would be its correlative in the actual reading of the poster by the man on the street: in plain language, the semiologist does not experience the excitement, only the “interpellation”.

This theoretical motif thus suffices to deduce the extrasemiotic nature of the models of Impregnation and Stimulation, that undeniably go beyond the limits of the field because they seek to describe and to anticipate from and beyond the meaningful constructions the correlative psycho-physiological realities of the interiorization of these expressions by the receivers (through the realist concepts of “emotion”, “sensation”, “memorization”, etc.).

3.4 Consequent or inherent effects?

Let us return to the above-mentioned poster and the results we may expect from it. A new division will allow us to oppose, on the one hand, the effects inherent in its reading, produced *in* and *by* it within what we will call the *moment of reception*, contemporary with the reading. On the other hand, there are its consequent effects, certainly coming from the poster but in addition supposing the intervention of external factors, together defining a *moment of repercussion* that is not exclusively cognitive. As an example of

consequent effects let us use the purchase of a ticket for the film by the receiver, an action that certainly finds its origin (or pretext) in the poster but whose form and final result depend on many other factors (availability and personal tastes of the person, for example) and in order to be suitably anticipated again requires the aid of disciplines that are outside that of messages.

Clearly, everything that in our models refers to *Y* effects consecutively issued from the confrontation with messages is eliminated by this application of the criterion of immanence: it is irritating to insist on the fact that a semiologist would not be able to predict a “correct memorization” nor the adoption of a behavior, especially in buying, that he could not address the question of changes in opinion nor that of lasting “psychic identifications” (as distinguished from “semiological” identifications).¹⁷

For good measure, we will add a methodological argument. The consequent effects, not encoded in the message but inferred from it, are separated from their initial *X* cause by natural processes that are often complex, analyzable on multiple levels. The analyst who would attempt to be strict in anticipating these successions solely from the message must include in his calculation all the intermediate stages separating the cause from its possible consequences, taking into account the variants, ramifications and uncertainties at each level. The intrinsic difficulties imposed by this task are self-evident and the reason that, in this type of case, analysts prefer to call upon study techniques allowing the direct observation of the desired phenomena.

3.5. *Inspired or projected effects?*

One final distinction remains to be introduced. We will say that a *Y* effect is “projected” by a message when this latter is its cause and explicit vector. In this case, the effect is characterized by being and integral part of the meaning of the *X* expression that conveys it, to the point that, for the receiver, not to receive this effect means not to understand the message. For example, a message containing an order (=X) has, as projected effect (=Y), to provide the receiver

¹⁷ Cf. C. Metz, 1977, p. 61-80, in particular concerning “semiological identifications”.

with a new alternative, to obey or to disobey, an effect attached to the act to the point that it would be contradictory to claim to know the one and know nothing of the other. In the same way, in cinematography there is a figure known as the “subjective camera” (=X) that allows the spectator to see the world through the eyes of an off-screen personage, with this particular projected effect (=Y) called “secondary identification” of the first with the second, a coded effect that requires an apprenticeship on the part of the receiver, whose experience and comprehension are indispensable to the intelligent understanding of the account.

Projected effects thus have a double characteristic: on one hand they make up an attempt at pressure on the receiver, who himself sees proposed by them a specific situation (a particular role, a new alternative, a point of view of the world); on the other hand, there is a *signified* pressure, with markers (=X) and conventions (=R) that give meaning and effective value within a given culture, so much so and so well that any subject having this culture will feel the effect in question and any cultivated semiologist will be able to anticipate it as surely as, watching a chess game, an aware observer will be able to reveal new situations (=Y) that each move (=X) imposes on the adversary, through a simple analysis of the positions on the board (=the message).

To this category of effects projected by the message is opposed that of *effects inspired* in the receivers.¹⁸ Under this term are grouped the elaborations whose analyzed communication is the occasion or the stimulus without being the messenger, essentially produced by the action of chance added to that of the imagination of the reader. Here, in the broadest sense, are located those communications called “evocative”, that “give ideas”, “inspire personal, imaginary, meaningless, erroneous, ill-humored” interpretations, etc. Considered as inspired are thus all inherent or consequent effects of which the receiver appears at the same time the source and the sole agent, that is, for which, primarily, there is no

¹⁸ Inspired effects are symmetrical with the spontaneous and falsely spontaneous significations of H.P. Grice (F. Recanati, 1978, p. 174 *et seq.*; E. Goffmann 1973, A, pp. 12-16; and L.J. Prieto 1975, pp. 15-16). The *inspired/projected* opposition is inspired in turn by the Goffmannian opposition of *acted/conceded definitions* (1968, pp. 230-238), and it is not without a connection with the pair *perlocutory/illocutory* (J.L. Austin, 1970).

expression (=X) in the message showing openly that the transmitter intentionally sought that effect, which thus has no immanent and plain marker. Secondly, for which the result (=Y) obtained is apparently spontaneously produced by the receiver, depending on his "free will" and not on a forced reception; effects, that, thirdly, suppose for their propagation non-conventional psychological processes (=R) in the highest sense of this term, but not necessarily informal nor contingent (as is the case with reactive or associative processes or those of condensation or displacement, etc.).

In this case we are again confronted with phenomena that, real as they may be, are nonetheless extra-semiotic, because of motifs into which we do not need to go further at the moment.

* * *

It is now time to conclude by precisely defining the intention of all this work and what it, in turn, intends to *construct*. The announced aim was to contribute "instrumentation" to the discipline, from which arises all this series of "precepts for the direction of the semiologic mind", materialized in five rules to be interiorized within this interpretative machine that is the *semiologist as such* when he is *in transmission*, an imaginary being constructed for the needs of the cause and who, quite obligingly, effectively operates "within" and "according to" a *discipline* that borrows from general semiology the substance of its project, from which it makes its *model*. The latter is prescribed to result in representation (simulation, reproduction, anticipation) of the *effects of meaning* conveyed by the messages studied as well as of the identification of *markers* ("significations") that bear them and the characterization of the *interpretative relations* that unite the markers to their significations. More concisely, the semiotic of effects becomes the discipline of study interested in the *expressions that make up the situations of reception* (X R Y). We will thus have the confirmation of what, alone among the five models presented above, that of Construction, had, with regard to the rules explored here, a semiological pertinence that, in our opinion, establishes it as origin and matrix of the semiological approach of effects.

In addition to this model, the discipline receives here, in accordance with its fundamental principles, and with the guarantee of the *criterion of significance*, a beginning of a field of observables

conceptualized with the aid of five paradigms which we have good reason to believe are specific and pertinent: it is a matter of classes of *immanent* and *expressive* factors and classes of effects that are conjointly *ideal*, *inherent* and *projected*.

It is thus clearly a question of an initial approach “preparing”, more than proceeding the operations to come, that is, the introduction and definition of a body of semiotic *figures* of efficacy, as well as the articulation of their complementary disciplines: psychology, sociology, esthetics, etc., that can treat the totality of the remaining effects (*natural*, *referential*, *real*, *consequent* and *inspired*) as well as more complex combinations. But that is another matter.

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