Post-Structuralist Semiotics: A Reading

CHAPTER FIVE

Post/structuralist Semiotics

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INTRODUCTION: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN SEMIOTICS

Structuralism can be variously characterized. Epistemologically, it mainly entailed a move from essence to relation, from identity to difference and from continuity to discontinuity. Historically, Saussure's linguistic structuralism (1916) sought to understand language as network of relations, as system of differences and as articulation of discontinuities. A legacy of Saussure's linguistic structuralism, structural semiotics, posited that meaning stems from difference (Greimas 1966). Structuralist semiotics did not focus on the full ontology that underlies the elements of a difference but, rather, on the empty phenomenology that characterizes their relation (Eco 1968). This focus on absence more than on presence, on phenomenology more than on ontology and on relation more than on elements has constituted the strength of structural semiotics, but also its weakness. On the one hand, this approach was able to overcome both the impressionism of subjective approaches to meaning and the positivism of objective perspectives on it, stressing the importance of inter-subjectivity in language and cultures (Greimas and Courtès 1979). On the other hand, such focus prevented structural semiotics from effectively connecting the sphere of language with that of the body, with that of society and with the concepts that these last two spheres inevitably entail: agency and power.

In the sphere of semiotics, therefore, poststructuralism consisted, first, in an attempt at reconnecting structures (that is, the outcome of relations, differences and discontinuities) with an external dimension that different branches of this trend have variously identified in society (socio- and social semiotics), in culture (anthropological semiotics and semiotic anthropology, ethno-semiotics, cultural semiotics), in history (mainly Yury M. Lotman and the semiotic school of Moscow/Tartu), in phenomenology (tensive semiotics, the semiotics of practices and forms of life), in economics (mainly by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi), in cognitive sciences – a trend that originated in Eco's work (especially *Kant and the Platypus* 1997) but then expanded in the specialized branch of cognitive semiotics – and also in natural sciences (with bio-semiotics and etho-semiotics). That is not to say that all these branches of semiotics are poststructuralist, but rather to suggest that, in dialogue with them, structuralist semiotics that was conceived in the wake of Saussure's linguistic structuralism and Greimas's structural semiotics nuanced its tenets, even at the fundamental level of epistemology, and became poststructuralist in anchoring the relational, differential, and discontinuous concept of structure into a more substantial ground.

On the one hand, and depending on the adopted perspective, these transitions were seen as 'fertilizations': structural semiotics was finally relinquishing the ivory tower of its pure abstraction and was delving into the life of meaning, wherein texts do not mean in isolation, like animals in a zoo or like plants in a greenhouse, but in the meshes of their complex connections with their contexts, meshes that are sometimes so thick that it is hard to distinguish texts and contexts, discourse and co-discourse, semantic features and pragmatic conditions. On the other hand, and from an opposite perspective, these transitions were seen as 'contaminations': substantiating structures through the various poststructuralist approaches meant marring the purity of the structuralist view, whose rationale precisely consisted in overcoming the presumptuous subjectivity or the illusory objectivity of previous approaches. In the end, reaching an equilibrium between these two extreme poles, on the one hand, abstract structuralism without connection to phenomena and, on the other hand, concrete poststructuralism disintegrating the heuristic potential of structuralism, has proved a matter of personal moderation and style. The best poststructuralist voices, at least according to the present author, were those who did not diminish the heuristic power of thinking reality and language through structural articulations but were nonetheless able to extend this articulatory approach to non-immediately linguistic and semiotic areas, such as social patterns, anthropological settings, material conditions, economic dynamics, political frames, biological characteristics, mind functions and even brain features. From within structural semiotics, therefore, several authors could become poststructuralist without becoming anti-structuralist.

Mostly Francophone structural semiotics and mostly Anglophone Peircean semiotics evolved for the most part independently, especially in the first and most important stages of their elaborations. Nevertheless, it is worthy noticing that, as structuralist semiotics – or at least some of its authors – evolved towards some kind of poststructuralist semiotics, they also implicitly and increasingly blurred one of the most important epistemological and even ontological frontiers between the two semiotic schools, that is, the frontier between a conception of meaning ultimately based on discontinuity (Saussure, linguistic and semiotic structuralism) and a conception of meaning ultimately based on continuity (Peirce). Indeed, as structuralist semioticians embraced more and more continuity in their philosophies and analyses of meaning, many of them naturally yielded towards Peirce and his semiotics. It is not evident that a symmetrical movement of 'continuity semioticians' towards structuralist semiotics has also taken place, but, as it shall be seen in the subsequent sections, that must be explained not as a result of a supposed superiority of 'continuity semiotics' over its discontinuous counterpart, but as a consequence of the disequilibria in the linguistics and geography of academic semiotics: structuralism reached Anglophone North America when it had already been challenged, and in many cases academically superseded, not by poststructuralism but by anti-structuralism (and mainly deconstructionism).

MAPPING THE GENESIS OF POSTSTRUCTURALISMS

The Franco-Lithuanian semiotician Algirdas J. Greimas, as it is well known, had combined Saussure's linguistic structuralism – read through the glossematics of Danish linguist and semiotician Louis T. Hjelmslev – with some elements of Noam Chomsky's theory of language, Vladimir Propp's survey of narrative structures in Russian folktales, George Dumézil's inquiry about the Indo-European civilization and some tenets of Claude

Lévi-Strauss's structuralist anthropology in order to elaborate first a new structuralist comprehension of meaning, then a complex method meant to analyse narrative texts as structural machines where sense is produced through the articulation of patterns of differences among opposite elements (mainly at the semantic level). Greimas's method is too complex and elaborate to be effectively summarized here. In this context suffice it to say that, for Greimas and his school, a narrative text (but also any kind of signifying object, narrativity being for Greimas the general dynamics through which meaning is created and shared) can be decomposed through an inverted pyramidal structure known as the 'semiotic path', where the patterns of meaning that characterize the text are arranged and analysed from the most abstract and deep to the most concrete and superficial, each layer in the pyramid being both a 'conversion' (according to the semantic meaning of the term) and an enrichment of the previous layer. The deepest and most abstract layer in the semiotic path is, according to the Greimasian method, that in which an abstract value becomes meaningful (i.e., it becomes matter for signification and communication) through its difference with an opposite value. The so-called 'semiotic square', a logic diagram elaborated by Aristotle and other ancient philosophers, was adapted by Greimas and his school in order to articulate and visualize the possible semantic relations between a value and its counterparts. Such a static arrangement of semantic relations starts to become a dynamic narrative when it is 'converted' into a more superficial, and more concrete, layer of the semiotic path, denominated by Greimas and his school 'the fundamental narrative grammar'. This section of the pyramid seeks to account for a common characteristic of narrative texts; although what they ultimately signify and communicate is the triumph of a value over its counterparts, such signification can take place only insofar as values are embodied in a story. Greimas and his school interpret this narrative embodiment as a tension between a subject, which is deprived of a value, and an object, which embodies that same value.

The Greimasian method is a rich repository of semio-linguistic tools that can be used to analyse how different 'morphologies of meaning' take shape, are signified and are communicated. Over the last three decades, however, this method has been shown to have many limits. These are the most relevant:

1. a certain inefficacy in dealing with the philosophical problem of time[1];
2. a certain inefficacy in dealing with the materiality of signification, paramount for the study of the 'semiotic ideologies' and the 'economies of representation' that underlie most language phenomena (Keane 2007)[2];
3. a certain inefficacy in dealing with meanings that do not emerge from patterns of binary differences (e.g. black vs white) but from positions within a continuum; the need to develop a method to account for non-discrete[3] forms of meaning is primarily in relation to narratives that do not embody an opposition between opposite values but rather signify a movement between two positions within a continuum[4];
4. a certain inefficacy in tackling the problem of how the Greimasian method might be inaccurate and, therefore, need reformulation, when applied to 'non-Western' cultures; the analysis of 'non-Western' narratives could therefore require extensive re-elaboration of the whole project of structuralist semiotics.[5]

Genuine poststructuralist semiotics sought to cope with these difficulties without turning into anti-structuralist semiotics, according to an understanding of the prefix 'post' that is going to be explained below.

CHRONOLOGICAL VERSUS LOGICAL POSTSTRUCTURALISMS

Dealing with poststructuralism implies the same difficulties entailed by dealing with any intellectual trend denominated through the usage of the prefix 'post-'.[6] It is not immediately clear, indeed, and it should, therefore, be specified, whether this prefix means 'after' in temporal or in conceptual terms. The first choice gives rise to a chronological definition, whereas the second one brings about a logical understanding of the word and its meaning. The first acceptance implies that there was a certain phenomenon – in this case, an intellectual trend – and that, at a certain stage, after a certain watershed, this trend was replaced by a new course that, while based on the first one, was distinctively different from it. The second acceptance implies that there was such a phenomenon – an intellectual trend – whose features nevertheless proved inadequate under certain respects, so that it was necessary to develop a new, characteristically different version of the same intellectual stance, which nevertheless was superseded not in temporal but in conceptual terms.

Both angles of definition, moreover, present a common difficulty, which consists in a consubstantial lack of autonomy. No matter how a 'post-' movement is determined, indeed, either chronologically or logically, such determination cannot be intrinsic but must be, to some extent, extrinsic, that is, dependent on a previous definition of the term to which the suffix 'post-' is added; that is the case for one of the latest arrivals in the family of such word, 'post-truth': first, it is not clear whether 'post' indicates 'after' (chronological definition) or 'beyond' (logical definition); second, it is impossible to define 'post-truth' without actually giving a definition of what 'truth' is. Here a problematic divergence arises between, on the one hand, the intellectual need of determining the meaning of words and the articulation of concepts and, on the other hand, the way in which 'buzz words' circulate in society: lay people and sometimes even academics speaking of 'post-truth' do not feel the urge of precisely defining this expression but use it exactly because of its imprecision, because of its fuzzy semantic boundaries. This has happened and continues to happen with all 'post-' denominations, including 'post-structuralism', begetting three main effects: (1) an aura of 'newness' is bestowed on the 'post-' phenomenon, whereas the 'pre- "post-"' phenomenon is given one of obsolescence; (2) an aura of 'definiteness' is attributed to the latter term, whereas one of 'indefiniteness' is given to the former; this second dialectics is intertwined with the fact that a 'post-' phenomenon is always vicariously defined; (3) depending on the axiological value that is cast onto the 'pre- "post-"' phenomenon, its 'post-' version is connoted with an opposite axiological flavor. In cases like that of 'post-truth', such last dialectics is clearly defined: no ideological trend openly despises truth (although some philosophical movements, like sophism, casuistry or deconstructionism, tend to relativize its value), so that 'post-truth' is inevitably connoted and talked about with a negative taint, although with characteristic vagueness, in academic and intellectual circles as well as in media and digital social networks.

The axiological dialectics between 'structuralism' and 'post-structuralism' is not as clear. On the one hand, some intellectuals and scholars have positively connoted the 'post-' in order to welcome a new intellectual trend that would have logically superseded 'structuralism', overcoming or, at least, problematizing those aspects of it that were seen as undesirable. Such intellectually undesirable dimension of structuralism (at least, from a poststructuralist perspective) deserves an in-depth analysis; yet, it can already be concisely evoked as involving what was considered an excessive theoretical rigidity in

its attempt at grasping the meaning of reality, wherever this meaning might be found: in the mythological analyses of structural anthropology; in the textual interpretations of structural semiotics; in the socioeconomic readings of structural Marxism. On the other hand, however, some other intellectuals, and mostly those who had endorsed structuralism, would continue to support it or, later on, were nostalgic about it and negatively connoted the '-post' in 'poststructuralism', lamenting exactly what others were praising, that is, a perceived blurring and consequent weakening of the theoretical framework that structuralism was credited to be able to project around the phenomena of reality; poststructuralism, it was claimed from this perspective, came after structuralism but was able to supersede it only chronologically and, worse, only rhetorically, as a new 'ugly' fashion supplants a previous one.

THE PARADOXES OF POSTSTRUCTURALISMS

The field of research, scholarship and publications covered by structuralism, from Ferdinand de Saussure on, has been so wide and multifarious that poststructuralism too has inherited it; in a way, all aspects of reality that had been considered from a structural point of view could now be seen from a poststructural one. Surveying the entirety of this cultural production exceeds the limit of a book chapter and would not be completely pertinent in a handbook devoted to semiotics. There is, indeed, a lot of structuralism in semiotics, as there is a lot of semiotics in structuralism; yet, these two intellectual trajectories do not entirely coincide. Although a branch of semiotics, mostly the Francophone one, stemmed from linguistic structuralism and, later on, from anthropological structuralism, and although the School of Moscow and Tartu was also essentially a derivation of such trend, semiotics as it was conceived mostly in the Anglophone world, stemming from the thoughts and works of Charles S. Peirce, not only was not historically structuralist, but was also, from a certain point of view that will be specified later, anti-structuralist, so that it could not give rise to a proper poststructuralist version of it either. That did not rule out, however, that certain trends of poststructuralism also influenced a development of semiotics in branches of it that were not originally influenced by structuralism. The present chapter will limit itself to dealing with poststructuralism in the semiotic field; yet, it must start from the consideration that, in semiotics as in other disciplines, the paradoxical situation often took place in which poststructuralism developed chronologically after structuralism, but could not logically supersede it, because this latter had not actually been fully developed beforehand. That happened not only in those semiotic areas that were not primarily based on structuralism, but also in those developments of semiotics that claimed to have overcome all the shortcomings of old-style structuralism.

The editorial history of structuralist semiotics throughout the world offers a good example of such dynamic. The publication, in 1966, of Algirdas J. Greimas's *Sémantique structurale* [structural semantics] marked a breakthrough in the history of semiotics as the most ambitious attempt at capturing the laws that organize meaning in view of its expression from a structural point of view. Other previous works had tried to develop a structural understanding of semantics and to establish semiotics as a distinctively structural endeavour; yet, it was exactly with the publication of this work that, also in hindsight, the foundations of structural semiotics were laid. When prestigious French publisher Larousse first published *Sémantique structurale: Recherche et méthode* in 1966, an audience for this theoretical proposal already existed, and was powerfully seduced by it, despite the undeniable difficulty of its metalanguage. Thanks to Paolo Fabbri and Pino Paioni, the core

of Greimas's theoretical perspective was made available to the Italian audience already in 1967, through the booklet *Modelli semiologici* [semiological models], published by Argalìa, Urbino, in 1967. The first full translation of *Sémantique structurale* was Italian too: *Semantica strutturale: Ricerca di metodo*, translated by Italo Sordi, published by another prestigious publisher, Rizzoli, in Milan, in 1969. In the same way, throughout the 1970s, Greimas's work was translated by several European prime publishers. In 1971, Gredos, one of the most credited Spanish publishers, published Alfredo de la Fuente's translation of Greimas's *Sémantique structurale*: *Semántica estructural: Investigación metodológica*. The same year, in 1971, Jens Ihwe published a German translation: *Strukturale Semantik: Methodologische Untersuchungen*; the translation appeared by Vieweg Verlag in Braunschweig, an old and prestigious publisher specialized in the publication of the writings of great scientists like Albert Einstein and Max Planck. That is revealing of how Greimas's proposal presented itself and was received in continental Europe: as a scientific method for the analysis of meaning. In 1973, Haquira Osakabe and Izidoro Blikstein published a Portuguese translation, *Semântica estrutural*, in São Paulo, by Cultrix and Edusp. The chronology and geography of these publications reconstitute a map of how the Parisian school of structural semiotics was about to spread in the following years, with strong concentrations in Italy, Brazil, Spain, but also Denmark and Finland. Gudrun Hartvigson translated *Sémantique structurale* in Danish in 1974; it was published by Borgen, in Copenaghen, under the title *Strukturel Semantik*. In 1979, Eero Tarasti published a Finnish translation, *Strukturaalista semantiikkaa*, by a publisher called 'Gadeamus'. Between the second half of the 1960s and the late 1970s, the intellectual society of continental Europe, and especially that of Latin and Scandinavian countries, was already dominated by structuralism, and Greimas's methodological proposal succeeded to gain its core.

Examining this list of translations, though, one is prompted to ask: what about English? What about the language that, already in the mid-1960s, was becoming the vehicular language of the world, first in mass culture, then also in the scientific discourse? The first English translation of *Sémantique structurale* was published in 1983, by the time Greimas's *Du Sens* (1970), *Maupassant* (1975), *Sémiotique et sciences sociales* (1976), the *Dictionnaire* (1979) and *Du Sens II* (1983) had already been published in France and translated into several languages – mostly Italian, Spanish and Portuguese – each of these works progressively refining and redefining the theoretical perspective of Greimas and that of his school. The English translation appeared in Lincoln by the University of Nebraska Press, a fine publisher that nevertheless does not compare with the giants of US academic publishing. The main translator and author of the introduction, Ronald Schleifer, was then a Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma.

How to explain such delay and somewhat peripheral publication? Greimas's metalanguage was hard but not impossible to translate, as it is demonstrated by the rapidness and quality of translations in other languages. The book mainly bears on a corpus of French examples, Bernanos's novels, but that was not a problem in English either. Bernanos's *Le journal d'un curé de campagne* ['The Diary of a Country Priest'], published in French in 1936, had been translated into English immediately, in 1937, and soon became a classic. In order to find an answer, it is interesting to analyse how translations rendered the title of *Sémantique structurale*. Indeed, this first title is followed by a secondary title that in French reads: 'recherche et méthode' ['research and method']. The Italian translation of it had already downplayed its assertiveness: 'research and method' became 'ricerca di metodo' ['research of a method']. The ambitiousness

of Greimas's title, however, was toned down especially in the English translation: 'An Attempt at a Method'. In December 1984, the journal *Modern Languages Notes* published a lucid review of this English translation. Robert Con Davis, also Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, convincingly explained why *Sémantique structurale* was translated so late into English, so peripherally, and so timidly. Already in 1975, Jonathan D. Culler had published *Structuralist Poetics*, appeared by one of the most central US academic publishers, Cornell University Press. In 1976, one year later, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak had translated, also for a major US academic publisher – Johns Hopkins University Press – Derrida's *De la grammatologie*, which was originally published, nevertheless, in 1967, one year after *Sémantique structurale*. The geography of the US translation of French scholarship therefore inverted its chronology: whereas Derrida's deconstructionism was meant as a post-structuralist reaction to structuralism, in the United States, the chronology of such dialectics was reversed: Greimas, who was the founder of structural semantics, was presented to the English readership as a somewhat vintage neo-structuralist reaction to deconstructionism. Paradoxically, the US audience became familiar with deconstructionism before knowing structuralism, and knew structuralism only as a post-deconstructionist, neo-structuralist wave.

In dealing with poststructuralism in semiotics, therefore, one should distinguish at least between three different cases: first, intellectual works that, while placing themselves firmly at the core of semiotic structuralism and actually contributing to its development, construction and expansion, somehow anticipated a critique to some of its features and the possible solutions to be envisaged; these works can be defined as proto-poststructuralist; second, proper poststructuralist works that chronologically came after that structural semiotics and, more generally, semiotic structuralism had been developed; works in this second category conducted a systematic analysis and critique of structural semiotics, and explicitly sought to turn the theoretical page, abandoning the foundational concept of structure in favour of less rigid heuristic concepts; third, poststructuralist works that, although adopting the label of 'poststructuralism', or being categorized as poststructuralist works by their readers, were actually produced in intellectual and scholarly contexts that were ignorant of structuralism, and where poststructuralism was received as a fashionable buzz word more than a term indicating a response to a previous and now undesirable philosophical and theoretical stance; works in this category, some of which nevertheless acquired intellectual dignity despite their evident anachronism, could be defined as pseudo-poststructuralist.

PROTO-POSTSTRUCTURALISMS

As regards the first category of works, which have been tentatively defined as proto-poststructuralist, a curious but central phenomenon should be observed. Many trends in human thought and scholarship often develop organically, or at least in a way that resembles that of living organisms; new original ideas are first ventured by visionary pioneers, receive a cold reception in the beginning – or are even ostracized – until they gain momentum, conquer an increasingly wider audience and – either by their own force or because they are pushed by mysteriously complex agencies – become the mainstream. At this stage, they start to inspire new creations, but also imitations by epigones that blindly adhere to the new trend as if it were a religious creed. Such automatic adhesion characteristically also involves the radicalization of some of the tenets of the original trend, an extremization that, in some circumstances, reaches such a level of paroxysm

that ends up transforming the initial proposal into its own caricature, and leaves even its initiators quite sceptical about the outcomes of the trend that they themselves had inaugurated. It is from this point of view that Marx's famous sentence, 'Je ne suis pas marxiste' ['I'm not a Marxist'] can be interpreted.

In hindsight, Ferdinand de Saussure too, had he had a chance to read the structuralist works that were written in his wake, could have affirmed 'je ne suis pas structuraliste' ['I'm not a structuralist']. Indeed, the publication, in 1916, of the first version of the *Cours de linguistique générale* gave rise to the diffusion of a vulgate on Saussure's linguistics and semiology, which would often exaggerate some of their theoretical principles, such as the necessity to develop a completely intrinsic analysis of language, focusing exclusively on the synchronic dimension and excluding the study of the diachronic one. A corollary of this extremization also consisted in the emphasis, within such vulgate, on the absolute arbitrariness of the sign as a relation between signifier and signified in language. From this point of view, then, the *Thèses* that Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Sergeyevich Trubetzkoy presented in 1929 at the famous congress of the Hague (Durnovo et al. 1929) can already be considered as 'proto-poststructuralist', in the sense that precociously pointed at the necessity of recuperating the idea of the importance of time in relation to that of structure.

Simultaneously, however, the *Thèses* can also be considered as 'pseudo-poststructuralist', since they reacted not as much to Saussure's thought, and maybe not even as much to his writings, as to the vulgate that had stemmed from them and that was already championed by several enthusiastic followers in Europe and in the United States. In the following years, indeed, and especially between the 1930s and the 1940s, several scholars, including Émile Benveniste in France, Mario Lucidi in Italy, Henri Frei in Switzerland and Luis T. Hjelmslev in Denmark, contributed to a new and more balanced interpretation of Saussure's structuralism, with greater consideration for the value of time and history in the structuralist understanding of language and meaning. Such interpretive work was also complemented, in the 1950s, by Robert Godel, who philologically reconstructed Saussure's thought through a systematic study of his manuscripts and of those of his pupils (*Sources manuscrites du* Cours de linquistique générale [manuscript sources of the *Course of General Linguistics*, 1957), an effort that was later expanded and further specified in the 1960s by Rudolf Engler.

Similarly, la *Struttura assente* [the absent structure], published by Umberto Eco in 1968, was already eloquent in its very title about the ontological angle from which the author intended to look at the concept of structure and, as a consequence, at structuralism itself. In 1962, the same author had famously published *Opera aperta* [open work] (Eco [1962] 1976), in which he had dwelled, in particular, on the aesthetics of artworks and, more generally, of those texts whose interpretative structure authors programmatically leave open to several interpretations, thus invoking the crucial hermeneutic intervention of readers as key agents in meaning-making. Eco's *Opera aperta* already had a proto-poststructuralist flavour, which curiously but not surprisingly became a poststructuralist one in the English reception of this aesthetic proposal, for, again, it was translated into English by Harvard University Press as *The Open Work* only years later, in 1989, when poststructuralism was already rampant in the United States (although the publishing of the original Italian work found ample space in Anglophone intellectual debates through multiple reviews and the publication, already in 1962, of an article on 'The Analysis of Structure' by Umberto Eco himself for the *Times Literary Supplement*). Chronologically, Umberto Eco had reformulated with original consequences the aesthetic 'theory of formativity' of his mentor at the University of Turin, the aesthetician Luigi Pareyson,

stressing the problematic character of the form in the aesthetic creations of twentieth-century European avantgardes; the stress of *Opera aperta*, then, fell more on the dissolution – or at least on the openness – of aesthetic structures, as the title pointed out. Such attitude, concentrating on the multidimensionality of the structure more than on its linearity, was predominant also in the already-mentioned *Struttura assente*, which enlarged the focus to signification as a whole.

Since the very first lines of crucial section 'D' of the book – a section which bears the same title as the entire volume (but also bears the subtitle 'Epistemology of Structural Models') – Umberto Eco seems to follow Roman Jakobson in his cautionary definition of the structure in relation to time and history; the first sentence of such section indeed reads: 'Una ricerca sui modelli della comunicazione ci porta a usare *griglie strutturali* per definire sia la forma dei messaggi che la natura sistematica dei codici' ['research on the models of communication leads us to use *structural grids* to define both the shape of messages and the systematic nature of codes'] (italics in the original); that sounds like a traditional structuralist statement, for the idea and heuristic concept of structure are posited as the one that intrinsically best captures the nature of both the signifier and the signified of a message; it should be noted, however, that the expression 'structural grids' is carefully used instead of 'structures'; as it will be clearer infra, Eco's intention is to affirm a semiological understanding of structuralism, not an ontological one: structures are found in texts so that meaning might emerge from them, but the former are not ontologically present in the latter (Eco will then partially change this view through his approach to and interaction with cognitive sciences and, in particular, in the book *Kant and the Platypus*, which appeared thirty years later). But then Eco in the same paragraph feels obliged to add, within parentheses:

> senza che l'assunzione sincronica, utile per 'mettere in forma' il codice considerato e rapportarlo ad altri codici opposti o complementari, escluda una successiva indagine diacronica, capace di render conto della evoluzione dei codici sotto l'influenza dei messaggi e dei processi di decodifica che se ne danno nel corso della storia. ['the synchronic assumption, however, useful to "put into shape" the considered code and to refer it to other opposed and complementary codes, does not rule out an ensuing diachronic investigation, capable of accounting for the evolution of the codes under the influence of messages and of the processes of decoding that interpret them throughout history.']
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> (Eco 1968)

From this and following statements, it appears that, already in 1968, Eco had adopted a nuanced conception of structuralism, in which the synchronic reading was considered 'an assumption', and not a necessity; where 'structural grids' (and not 'structures' *tout court*) were 'useful' but, again, not cogent; and where, moreover, a more traditional historical reading of codes and messages was not ruled out; although temporal priority was given to the synchronic reading, indeed, that would not exclude that history might come back into the picture so as to explain the evolution of codes, whose nature Eco somewhat tautologically referred to the interaction between codes and messages, and between systems of decoding and acts of decoding, with an epistemological stance that seemed to echo Ferdinand de Saussure's dialectics between *langue* and *parole*. Indeed, in these as in other instances of 'proto-poststructuralism' (in Émile Benveniste, for instance), the rigidity of the idea of structure was nuanced through rebalancing the distribution of

emphasis on the two poles of Saussure's original dialectics between *langue* and *parole*: whereas initial structuralism had enthusiastically focused on the former, neglecting the latter, other scholars, some of which were mentioned above, reintroduced a temporal dimension in the structural understanding of meaning exactly through a consideration of the '*parole*' dimension, a consideration that ultimately consisted in paying attention to the ways in which a system of language is modified by its own productions.

Chronologically, Eco first 'opened' his mentor Pareyson's theory of formativity, then 'opened' with an analogous move the structuralism of Saussure's vulgate to a more relativistic approach (semiology rather than ontology of structures, synchrony *before*, not *without* diachrony), but afterwards somehow returned in both fields (aesthetics; communication studies) to more rigid positions exactly in order to dialectically react to the extremes of deconstructionism and poststructuralism[7]; such reaction took place, on the one hand, through the series of works on the 'limits of interpretation'; on the other hand, through the works inspired by either ontological (cognitive sciences) or historical conceptions of meaning. As it was pointed out earlier, however, in the US reception of Eco, the translation of his *Opera aperta* arrived when the US academe had already fully embraced not only and not as much Jacques Derrida's deconstructionism but the US poststructuralist reception of it.

The same 'academic lag' between diffusion of proto-poststructuralist ideas (that were in many cases closer to the original conception of structuralism in Ferdinand de Saussure than to that of his early epigones) and diffusion of poststructuralist trends affected also the diffusion of Greimas's structuralist semiotics in the Anglophone world, and especially in the United States. The reception of post-Greimassian works in English was, as a consequence, even more complicated. By the time some of the most brilliant disciples of Greimas were refashioning his theory in a sort of poststructuralist way (soon to be specified in this chapter), Greimas had just been translated and published in the United States, although often only in specialistic academic circles.

POSTSTRUCTURALISMS FROM WITHIN STRUCTURALISM

Re-reading and re-assessing the bibliography of Greimas, from *Structural Semantics* on, a sort of 'structural parable' can be detected, going from the initial idea of approaching semantics in the framework of structuralism to the full development of a structural variety of semiotics until the application of this variety to different objects and as many fields of investigation. For most of this parable, Greimas's adhesion to a tetragon understanding of structure seems unflinching. Greimas and his school characteristically fled from any ontological perspective on meaning, missing no occasion to stress that meaning actually emerges from the analyst's decision to cast a structural framework on a portion of reality, thus turning it into a text; from this point of view, structural semiotics seems to join Eco's caution in talking about 'structural grids' more than about 'structures' *tout court*. Greimas and his initial followers, however, did not share with Eco the prudential albeit only hypothetical opening to a diachronic understanding of meaning; in Greimas, time is mostly understood as temporality, history as historical discourse, and no attention seems to be paid to how the dialectics between *langue* and *parole* might affect the decoding of a text, which in structural semiotics is thought of, instead, in purely immanent terms. That constitutes at the same time the rhetorical strength of this method (its promised ability to decipher any text, independently from its conditions of enunciation) and its

epistemological weakness: if structures are not in the ontology of meaning but only in the apperception of it, how can they not be affected by the diachronic evolution of cultures?

Yet, poststructuralist trends, if they might be called so, entered the structural palace of Greimas's semiotics not as much in order to satisfy the theoretical needs of the cultural and historical relativization of structural grids as in order to improve their ability at decoding meaning within the same immanent framework that structural semiotics had championed in relation to its privileged objects, that is, texts. In particular, as Greimas had posited narrativity – that is, a very abstract conception of storytelling – at the core of its philosophy of meaning (a meaning which, in this view, basically arises from the anthropological need to turn structural oppositions of values into narrative tensions), it soon emerged that a rigidly structural reading of textual features, mainly projecting rigorously binary grids on them, was unable to satisfactorily cope with those of such features that, instead, seemed to escape a purely dichotomic nature; these problematic features would essentially fall into two categories: on the one hand, passions; on the other hand, sensations. With characteristic systematicity, however, methodological adjustments introduced so as to deal with these two textual and narrative dimensions soon give rise to a rethinking of the entire theoretical and even epistemological framework of structural semiotics, with results that might well be classified as 'poststructuralist'.

Indeed, if passions were not aptly captured by Greimas's traditional structural semiotics that was the case because, as it was founded out, the theoretical and ideological conception at the basis of structural semiotics itself was not conducive to such efficacy. In a nutshell, Greimas's traditional structural semiotics would understand meaning as an outcome of narrativity, and this as a result of oppositions and tensions among values. Such oppositions, however, and even more the tensions that they would generate, were impossible to account for in Greimas's original terms, those that were essentially in line with the structural idea as formulated by Ferdinand de Saussure and then adopted by his followers. In order to understand passions in texts, one should understand passions in values, but that required to move away from a narrowly ~~discreet~~ discrete and binary understanding of meaning. This analytical necessity gave rise to two complementary poststructuralist trends: on the one hand, the structural semiotics of passions as initiated by Greimas himself together with his disciple Jacques Fontanille, mainly through the publication, in 1991, of the now classic study *Sémiotique des passions: Des états de choses aux états d'âme*, soon translated in English in 1993 as *The Semiotics of Passions: From States of Affairs to States of Feeling*; on the other hand, the genesis of the so-called 'tensive semiotics', in which ~~discreet~~ discrete and binary oppositions of value giving rise to meaning through narrativity were now considered as nothing but a particular case within a much wider and various range of oppositional situations, in many of which value would actually emerge out of a continuous tension more than out of a discontinuous opposition (a trend initiated by Claude Zilberberg's *Essai sur les modalités tensives*, [Essay on Tensive Modalities] 1981). Despite the several attempts at conciliating this tensive understanding of meaning with the structural one inaugurated by Greimas after Saussure, one is nevertheless left with the impression that these two versions of generative semiotics, the structural one by Greimas and the (somehow poststructuralist) tensive one by Zilberberg and others, were as irreconcilable as general relativity and quantum mechanics in theoretical physics. Greimas himself, however, was not at all a passive spectator of this poststructuralist evolution of his own theory but he somehow favoured it, through co-authoring, with Jacques Fontanille, *Semiotics of Passion*, but also through hinting at a poststructuralist

understanding of the sublime and, more generally, of the aesthetic dimension of texts in Greimas's last and most poetic book, *De l'imperfection* (1987) [On Imperfection].

The switching of focus from a conception of meaning based on discontinuity and discreet oppositions among values to one based on continuity and nuanced tensions among valorization poles in the long term did more than simply changing the methodological and analytical framework through which structural and generative semiotics looked at texts and their interpretation; it actually altered the same conception of structure in-depth. The purely discreet and oppositional version of it would still maintain a pristine epistemological status, in line with that which both Umberto Eco and Algirdas J. Greimas had underlined, that is, its functioning as a grid (or, in Greimas, its functioning as the product of an operation, that is, the enunciation of the textual frame by the analyst), as a scheme that would not be found in the ontology of phenomena but, instead, would be superimposed on them in order to find, therein, relations whose observation and description could better explain the emerging of meaning. As the notion and the theoretical instrument of structure became less rigid and more malleable – more permeable to the nuances of the subjacent reality – its epistemological status too, however, became more uncertain, more fluctuating and fuzzier. The conundrum of structuralism seems to consist in the fact that, the more the conception of structure is maintained as arbitrary and, therefore, detached from the actual ontology of its objects, the more it is capable to claim objectiveness and universality, but the less, on the contrary, it is apt to explain the relation between the internal nature of the phenomenon – whose shape is artificially created by the superimposition of the structure itself – and the external agencies that have ultimately given rise to its determination. Vice versa, the more one yields to the temptation of actually motivating structures – so that they might be seen as emerging, within the text, from forces that are actually outside of it – the more the structuralist and semiotic gesture loses its magnificent autonomy and becomes, from a certain point of view, ancillary to other epistemological operations that mainly happen outside of the structuralist focus, beyond the limits of the text. Paraphrasing a famous Christian theological statement by Saint Cyprian of Carthage, 'Extra ecclesiam nulla salus' ['out of the church there is no salvation'], Greimas used to repeat to his disciples that 'hors du texte, point de salut' ['out of the text there is no salvation'], so as to stress the necessity to keep the immanentist approach of generative semiotics in order to preserve its epistemological purity, despite the inevitable restrictions that this could entail in terms of knowledge of the inner secrets of the origin of meaning. With understandable dialectics, nevertheless, all second-generation Greimassian semioticians did exactly the opposite, that is, questioned the intrinsic nature of the structure with reference to its external world. Depending on which dimension of this 'outside of the text' was made reference to in order to motivate the inner nature of the structure, a different version of 'poststructuralist' semiotics was envisaged. The reader should be reminded at this stage that this particular label, 'poststructuralist', is justified in relation to the way it altered and, in certain cases, also unhinged the previous, traditionally structural understanding of meaning; that does not imply, however, that such attempts discarded structuralism or discredited Greimas's attempts at structurally understanding meaning; they were and they still are thought of as intellectual operations in continuity with (albeit in variation with) rather than in rupture with structural and generative orthodoxy. Indeed, as it was stated in the introduction, the author of the present chapter chose to deal not with poststructuralism tout court, but with poststructuralism in relation to semiotics and, mostly, within semiotics. It would not make too much sense, indeed, to consider, in the frame of a companion of semiotics,

intellectual trends whose 'poststructuralism' was actually so extreme as to turn them into 'anti-structuralist', and to deny, thus, the epistemological dignity of semiotics itself. Giving them space in a companion of semiotics would be like expounding on flat earth theories in a treatise of mainstream geography.

Disciples of Greimas, on the opposite, did not destroy the theoretical palace erected by their master but rather restyled it, opening gates and doors and windows where Greimas had left only solid walls (but with the risk, already mentioned above, to fragilize the building). Thus, Jacques Fontanille delved more and more on the prominent role of the body in co-determining the tensions of values that are then apprehended in texts and cultures, recuperating and reinvigorating a dialogue with phenomenology that Greimas had already engaged, mainly with the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty; later on, the same Jacques Fontanille opened the palace of semiotics not only to the internal patterning of the body but also to the external patterning of culture, through an original reinterpretation of Lotman's semiotics in the light of the concept, already championed by Wittgenstein, of 'forms of life'; other members of Greimas's circle, like Éric Landowski, also problematized the relation between the inside and the outside of the structure, between the text and the context, but mostly in dialogue with social and political theory; a new sub-branch of semiotics resulted from it, socio-semiotics, which had several propagations in Europe and Latin America and developed some parallel lines with the social semiotics already autonomously developed by Michael Halliday.

It should be underlined once more, however, that all these attempts considered themselves and were presented to the external intellectual world as in continuity rather than in discontinuity with Greimas's original project; that is witnessed by the numerous inter-theoretical references that such new trends would weave with the previous theory as well as by the fact that many authors of the post-Greimassian era actually worked precisely on refining the internal coherence of the system in relation to the new attempts; thus, Claude Zilberberg worked on bridging the new epistemological model of tensive semiotics with the theoretical framework of structural and generative semiotics; Denis Bertrand focused on the heritage of textual semiotics and its contributions in terms of textual analyses at the same time treasuring the epistemological framework inherited from Greimas and blending some of its aspects with the new theoretical insights of the new school.

The orthodoxy of traditional structuralism was defended along stricter lines in those linguistic and cultural areas where Greimas's semiotics was adopted more than created, for instance in Italy or Latin America, giving rise to a crystallization of the theory that, with the passing of time, tended to acquire vintage undertones. On the contrary, Eco's call for an equilibrium between the opening and the closing of the text, between the adoption of a conventional understanding of the structure as grid and the rethinking of it in relation to external ontologies gave rise to several hybridizations, such as the one between semiotics and cognitive sciences, for instance, explored by Umberto Eco himself in one of his last theoretical contributions, *Kant and the Platypus* ([1997]1999). In all these developments, the alternative ways of understanding the meaningfulness of images were constantly a litmus test of structural semiotics, for determining the relation between the meaning of an image and the ontology that gives rise to it is always an operation that reveals its presuppositions in terms of semiotic ideology: either one stresses the conventional nature of images (like Greimas's orthodoxy did, sometimes with theoretically challenging results) or one admits that, after all, images mean what they mean also because they are in some sort of connection with ontology, either that of 'reality' or that of the biological

and cognitive physiology that apprehends it. The later Umberto Eco, for instance, conceded that patterns in the structure of being could indeed be at the origin of patterns in the structure of meaning, an admission that sounded much less recalcitrant than those appearing in previous, properly structuralist writings. Similarly, whereas Italian followers of Greimas became mostly heralds of his orthodoxy, other schools developed, either in conjunction with Eco's own formulation of semiotics or through opening to other more 'socio-cultural' understandings of the discipline (Lotman, socio-semiotics, ethno-semiotics), which took a more poststructuralist direction.

To a bird's-eye view, Jakobson's already-mentioned urge not to turn Saussure's structuralism into a synchronic cage was at the origin of Eco's lifelong intent to reconciliate structuralism with the common sense of non-structural disciplines, including the philosophy of mind and history (in Eco, historical curiosity developed not only parallel to its semiotic work – through medieval investigations and novel-writing – but also intersected it as a complex meta-discourse, in terms of philology of proto-semiotics but also as metaphorical comment on the unperceived biases of semiotics itself). Jakobson's approach, moreover, was also at the origin of that Chicago school of structural linguistics and semiotics that, mainly through Michael Silverstein's meta-pragmatics, gave rise to an independent attempt at combining structural theory and contextual knowledge, recuperating also the entire tradition of dialogue between semiotics and cultural anthropology in the form of a new, typically US, 'semiotic anthropology'.

It is worthwhile noticing that, whereas post-Greimassian semioticians sought the resources to reformulate the initial project of structural semiotics either within some unexplored areas of the so-called 'generative path' itself (that is, the logically ordered sequence of analytical frames through which structural and generative semiotics diagrammatizes the genesis of meaning in its immanent development) and, secondarily, also in the cautious dialogues with other disciplines (phenomenology, sociology, cognitive sciences, cultural theory), the Chicago school of semiotic anthropology rather opted for using 'Peirce against Saussure', as it could be said with a quick and imprecise, yet effective formula. In hindsight, that was partially the case also in Umberto Eco, whose strategy of dynamizing the understanding of semiosis crucially involved an essentially Jakobson-inspired reformulation of Peirce's thought. In Eco, however, philological awareness of the parallel but fundamentally independent genesis and unfolding of Saussure's thought in Europe on the one hand, and of Peirce's thought on the other, prevented the Italian semiotician to 'play the latter against the former'. On the contrary, Eco's philosophical and semiotic stance against Derrida's deconstructionism precisely stemmed from a philological and, in a certain sense, anti-deconstructionist reading of Peirce's conception of 'unlimited semiosis'. One of the fundamental sources of Derrida's semiotic deconstructionism, Eco contended, exactly consisted in the French philosopher's wrong interpretation of Peirce: unlimited semiosis exists and is actually consubstantial to the human way of processing signs and meanings; yet, Peirce formulated not only this idea, but also the somewhat complementary notion of 'final interpretive habit', which works as a dam to unlimited semiosis, stemming its tide and allowing the constitution of interpretive common sense in a hermeneutic community. Derrida, Eco then claimed, had actually deconstructed Peirce himself in order to construct deconstructionism, yet with a theoretical move that was deeply at odds with the ethics of philology, an ethics whose central relevance Eco constantly stressed not only in his scholarly works but also and perhaps even more in his literary but still deeply philosophical works (for instance, the series of novels on conspiracy theories and esoteric thought, that is, social interpretive discourses that,

ignoring the dialectics between unlimited semiosis and interpretive habits, and espousing, instead, only the former against the latter, often ~~leads~~ to a pernicious disintegration of common sense and the fundaments themselves of a 'community of interpreters').

Less attached to a philological reading of the sources of the history of semiotics, instead, several poststructuralist trends, notably in the United States, actually indulged in championing Peirce as a sort of anti-Saussure. Such trends had historical reasons, which have been partially exposed, that is, the tortuous affirmation of original structuralism in the Anglophone academe, but brought about an approach to Peirce's semiotics that seemed to use him rather than to interpret him (for instance, in the semiotic anthropology of Webb Keane). Is Peirce's semiotics, indeed, intrinsically poststructuralist because it is intrinsically anti-structuralist? At the very origin of the tendency of adopting Peirce as a poststructuralist resource lies the widespread attitude of interpreting his model of the sign, signification and semiosis as an intrinsically dynamic one, but also and above all the complementary attitude of conceiving of this dynamism in temporal terms. In Peirce, as it is well known, semiosis coincides with the process emerging from the interaction among three conceptual elements, that is, an object that, in line with Kant's gnoseology, is never knowable in itself, but nevertheless prompts its own knowability through its yet always unfathomable ontology; an interpretant that captures this prompt but notwithstanding does so always under a specific angle or respect, which is ultimately given by the way in which semiosis has given shape to previous interpretive patterns or habits; and a representamen, which is the most immediately accessible result of this conceptual interaction, that which stands for something else. Peirce's manuscripts and thoughts require keen philological meticulousness in order to be interpreted correctly; yet, it might be argued that this model of semiosis is more logical than chronological, more diagrammatical than diachronic. What matters in it, indeed, is not the temporal order in the sequence of theoretical operations involving the object, the interpretant and the representamen, but the diagrammatical logic according to which Peirce sought to distinguish between an immediately unknowable ontology, language as a deposit of biological and cultural forms through the mediation of which such unknowable ontology is approached, and signs as the material interface of this interaction among reality and minds.

On the one hand, then, the adoption of Peirce's semiotics as a poststructuralist antidote to Saussure is oblivious of the role that time and diachronicity play in the thought of the Swiss linguist and semiologist; in a way, those semiotic anthropologists who, today, quote Peirce as an anti-Saussure thinker reproduce a stereotypical reception of the latter's thought that is in keeping with that which would already circulate in the United States in the 1930s, but without taking into account all the reconsideration and dismantling of such stereotypes that has taken place in Europe and elsewhere in the following decades, and at least from Jakobson on. On the other hand, such interpretations of Peirce *ad usum Delphini* somehow also betray the US philosopher and semiotician's thought itself, for they project on it a temporal and diachronic dimension that was not so primarily essential in his conception of meaning, signification and semiosis. Hence, whereas in Europe Peirce was poststructurally misinterpreted by Derrida so as to establish deconstructionist semiotics as an oppositional and poststructuralist alternative to structural semiotics (whereas Greimas would warn his disciples that 'there is no salvation outside of the text', Derrida would incite his own followers to maintain that 'there is no outside of the text'), in the Anglophone academe, Peirce was also poststructurally misinterpreted as a diachronic, temporal and material alternative to Saussure's supposedly synchronic,

atemporal and formal understanding of language. In both cases, however, only one aspect of Peirce's complex model of signification was emphasized for the rhetorical purposes of begetting an almost caricatural opposition with continental French-speaking semiology.

POSTSTRUCTURALISMS FROM WITHOUT STRUCTURALISM

Whereas post-Greimassian semioticians, Eco, some members of the European schools of semiotics and also the Chicago school of semiotic anthropology developed their poststructuralist approach essentially from within the semiotic tradition (although often 'playing Peirce against Saussure', as it was pointed out supra), other poststructuralist trends clearly unfolded from without the semiotic canon. They will be mentioned here only because they engaged a critical dialogue with semiotics, without nevertheless completely discarding the entire structuralist project (as it was specified earlier, it would be unreasonable to mention, in a companion of semiotics, philosophical trends that overtly misconstrued this discipline; in other words, the adversaries of semiotics will find their place in this chapter, but not its enemies).

The French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, for instance, evidently took many of his concepts from the linguistics and the semiotics that were popular at his time, but then twisted their theoretical shape according to a personal direction of thinking, where the structural methodology tends to fade away and remains as pale grid in the background of a superimposed structure, that is, the personal philosophical pattern devised by Deleuze himself. Such essentially poststructuralist relation with semiotics is already evident in Deleuze's *Proust et les signes* (1964, third edn. 1976; Engl. trans. *Proust and Signs*, 1973, second edn. 2000): on the one hand, *La recherche* is read through a semiotic framework, not only because of the attention to the signs left and found by the characters, but also because of the systematic and methodic way in which Deleuze collects and analyses them; on the other hand, however, this systematic semiotic analysis yields to the idiosyncrasy of philosophical interpretation, and in particular to the hypothesis that Proust's narrator might be a 'universal schizophrenic', whose logic would underpin the webbing of semiotic references throughout the narration. Similarly, in *Différence et répétition* (1968; Engl. trans. *Difference and Repetition*, 1994), the constellation of concepts that Deleuze shapes or reshapes is undoubtedly tributary to the episteme of structural linguistics and semiotics; the very opposition between a philosophical principle of difference and one of repetition seems to stem from an essentially semiotic understanding of both; that is even more evident in the third chapter of the work, dedicated to the 'Image of Thought', which reads as an attempt at semiotically re-establishing the entire demeanour of philosophy, displacing it from a truth-seeking endeavour to the strategy of creating a web of meaning between the subject and reality. Regarding these as well as many other aspects, *Différence et repetition* is a work that constantly dances with structuralism; yet more often than not, it also imposes its own steps, taking semiotics through philosophical and especially political pirouettes which the discipline of signs would not normally engage in (for instance the many hints that, in Deleuze's work, seem to endorse the extolling of difference as a dimension of political, ethical and even anthropological liberation, whereas for pre-poststructuralist semioticians, as well as for the post-poststructuralist ones, it is clear that difference and repetition are just two poles in the dialectics of meaning and cannot be turned into the values of a political manifesto – a semiotic system without repetition would be impossible).

CONCLUSIONS: A CRUCIAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STRUCTURALISMS AND POSTSTRUCTURALISMS

The analysis, *sub specie semioticae*, of the many works by Gilles Deleuze that, although inspired by structuralism, structural linguistics and structural semiotics, actually diverged from their epistemology, using more than adopting it in order to pursue independent philosophical or social goals, could be extended much more: involving, for instance, a systematic analysis of the French philosopher's production, of his immense influence, as well as a survey of all those intellectual productions that, from the end of the 1960s until nowadays, have been characterized by a similar theoretical and writing style, that of a philosophical or socio-political thought that takes some analytical hints from semiotics but then tends to turn them into metaphors, into structural excuses for poststructural discourses.

Given the limits imposed on the present chapter, such an analysis cannot be carried on in an exhaustive way. Yet, Deleuze – who actually objected that his own philosophy might be labelled as 'poststructuralist' (although that is a common trend in the reception of his thought) – might be presented here as an example of what ultimately constitutes a fundamental but often neglected difference between the epistemology of structuralism and that of poststructuralism. Overall, structuralism was born as an attempt at including language – and, therefore, the humanities whose discourse is built through language – in the epistemological sphere of the sciences; focusing on structures – that is, on differences and relations among differences – more than on the elements involved was the genial idea through which Ferdinand de Saussure sought to subtract the study of language and the humanities to the field of subjective impressions. Individual elements are singular and idiosyncratically appraised, whereas differences, relations and structures can give rise to an intersubjective observation, analysis and, hopefully, understanding. Exactly because it is centred on the appraisal of relations, the epistemological framework of structuralism does not exclude time, temporality, agency and causality, but necessarily puts them all into brackets in order to crystallize them and, therefore, analyse the structure of relations that emerges from such freezing; unnatural and arbitrary as it might seem, indeed, such freezing of time is inevitable if the analyst wants to turn the unseizable flowing of reality into a graspable phenomenology, which is enunciated by the epistemological gaze of the analyst and nevertheless shows itself intersubjectively beyond and in contrast with the grid of such structural projection. An unavoidable consequence of this freezing is, however, the exclusion of any deontic horizon from structural investigation. Structuralism does not ask how reality came about, nor does it suggest what it should bring about. This is a stance that preserves the epistemological and, therefore, the methodological purity of structuralism (Greimas's immanentism) but, at the same time, it inevitably hampers its ability to immediately talk to the anxious social demand of knowledge, which is increasingly not about 'what' or 'how' (two questions semiotics is perfectly capable to cope with) but about 'why?' and 'for what?' (two questions that structuralism and semiotics systematically and deliberately avoid). Poststructuralism can therefore be defined as an attempt at reintroducing these two questions within the scope of attention and the field of activity of structuralism. When this attempt is extreme, however, it shakes the very epistemological foundations of structuralism, with the paradoxical result of a poststructuralism without structures, of an anti-structuralism. From the point of view of semiotics, attempts at introducing a greater and fertile tension between epistemological purity and ethical access to the world are certainly welcome, as long as their excessive

deontic approach does not turn them into anti-structuralist ideologies, at odds with the original project of impartial humanities expressed by Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistics.

NOTES

1 In Greimas's approach to semiotics, time is less a philosophical problem than a textual effect; Paul Ricoeur, who maintained an intense, critical and fecund dialogue with Greimas, was the one who most effectively pointed out this shortcoming of his method (a shortcoming that, to a certain extent, affects the whole structuralist project: see Greimas and Ricoeur 2000).

2 A lack of attention to the materiality of the signifier is evident in Saussure, whose definition of sign tends to deprive it of its relation with the referent and its materiality; it is even more evident in Hjelmslev, whose glossematics tends to transform language dynamics into purely formal mechanisms; and it is certainly evident in Greimas, whose semiotic method exclusively deals with the immanence of texts, putting the problem of their material manifestation into brackets. The last works of Greimas and the subsequent trends in his school try to remedy this difficulty by intensifying an already fertile dialogue with Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology (Greimas 1987; Fontanille 2004).

3 This is according to the mathematical meaning of the term 'discrete'.

4 Greimas sought to tackle the problem of meaning as a non-discrete phenomenon in his last works, which gave rise to two of the most interesting trends in contemporary structuralist (or post-structuralist) semiotics: the semiotics of passions and the semiotics of tensions. The semiotics of passions tries to explain the emotional dimension of narratives, which had been neglected in previous works of Greimas and his school, and admits the possibility of conceiving meaning as emerging from a tension between values rather than from an opposition between them (Greimas and Fontanille, 1991; Pezzini 1991, 1998, 2000; see also Volli 2002). The semiotics of tensions pushes this theoretical intuition to the greatest extent, claiming that all semantic phenomena actually stem from a tension between two opposite forces (Zilberberg 1998, 2006).

5 Contemporary semioticians seek to face this challenge by blending the semiotic method with qualitative sociology, ethnology, or anthropology (Landowski 1989; Miceli 2005; Del Ninno 2007; Marsciani 2007).

6 The bibliography on poststructuralism is very abundant; just to quote the most important monographs published in the last ten years (and considering mainly works in English), see Münker, Roesler and Meunker (2012); Braidotti (2013); Dillet, MacKenzie and Porter (2013); Howarth (2013); Williams (2014); Angermuller (2015); Woermann (2016); Ganglbauer (2017); Smith (2017); Moxey (2018); Harari (2019); Poster (2019); Ingala and Rae (2020); for a quick introduction, see Belsey (2002).

7 That distinguishes Umberto Eco's intellectual trajectory from that of Roland Barthes, whose 'proto-post-structuralist' work par excellence, that is, *S/Z*, was never followed by a return on more rigid and structuralist positions.

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