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Preprint

Semiotics of textscapes and cultures

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Introduction

In this article, we present a general outline of a theoretical and methodological framework for analyzing what we call (in analogy to landscapes) *textscapes*. Textscapes are signifying perceptual surfaces that form, so to speak, the interface with the meaning universe framing the *lifeworld* (Husserl 1986; Schütz and Luckmann 2003) of an *actant* (of, for instance, a social actor such as a person, a social group, a community, etc.).

In this sense, textscape descriptions and comparisons are of central importance for a semiotics of cultures understood as a text - or discourse - based approach of the description of meaning systems that possess for an actant (here restricted to *social actors*) a constitutive and normative status. The description of such meaning configurations composing the *doxa* (conceptions, visions, know-hows, values and norms) of a social actor (i.e. his - in the sense of Greimas (1979) - *fundamental semantics*) has to rely on a structured approach for dealing adequately with textscapes as the principal data to be studied: the identification of relevant textscapes, the techniques of collecting and conserving them, the analysis of corpora of textscapes or again the experimentation with textscapes.

In the first chapter, we will discuss the status and the role of textual data in cultural analysis, viz. the description of a cultural meaning ecosystem. In the second chapter, we will introduce with the help of a concrete example the notion of textscape. The example we will discuss, is a small extract of a typical open market textscape as we can find them, for instance, in Europe. In the following chapter (chapter 3), we will discuss textscapes *in a broad sense* as signifying 3D-surfaces of the lifeworld of social actors (persons, social groups, ...). For this discussion, we will use another concrete example, i.e. the multiple textscapes of the kitchen lifeworld. In the fourth chapter, we will discuss - again on the basis of a concrete example - *communicational textscapes*, i.e. textual surfaces conceived especially and principally for diffusing and sharing messages. The example we use is a specimen of modern urban communicational textscapes as we can meet them especially in the East Asian megalopolis.

1. On textual data in cultural analysis

For analyzing cultures, for doing a cultural analysis, we have to start to collect data - to constitute a *corpus of data*. As well known, these data can be of very different nature: oral discourses, written and printed texts, audiovisual material, gestures and concrete behaviors, natural objects and artefacts, people, places, periods, etc.

As Greimas and Courtés (1979) have put it, these data constitute “signifying entities” and “processes” by the means of which we are able to reconstruct or interpret underlying *meaning structures* which form *constitutive and normative patterns* (or *models*) for an actant, i.e. more particularly, for a social actor (a person, a social group, a community, a social organization), for any other anthropomorphic entity and also for

“artificial entities” such as computer programs or robots. These signifying entities and processes (or *behaviors*, as Watzlawick et al (1967) have put it) form, so to speak, the *material side* or *dimension* of a cultural system, i.e. in Julian Huxley’s (1955) terminology, its *artifacts* and *sociofacts*. The underlying meaning structures form the *immaterial side* or *dimension* of the cultural system, i.e. in Julian Huxley’s (1955) terminology, its *mentifacts*.

The relevancy of such collected data is evaluated with respect to their capability to inform us about the culture we want to analyze. When for instance, the historian Hélène d’Almeida-Topor (2006) analyzes the *art of gastronomy in Paris* at the beginning of the 19th century, the relevant data enabling the author to reconstruct this form of culture are, for instance, contemporary lifestyle handbooks, collections of recipes, articles of gossip columnists, thematically relevant art and literary works, and also statistic data or again publications produced by generations of researchers.

All these (supposed) relevant data not only form a simple list, a simple collection or corpus of data to be analyzed but they are first of all *specimen* taken (like in biology or medicine) from the *signifying environment* of a culture to which they belong and which they document. In other words, the chosen data are *situated data* and maintain – also after having been harvested – a *motivated relationship* with the signifying environment from which they have been taken. As specimen belonging to a signifying environment, these collected data form, so to speak, an *excerpt* of this environment. The principal function of this excerpt is to enable the analyst to produce a description and explanation of the meaning – the *meaning universe* and *horizon* (Husserl 1986; Schütz and Luckmann 2003) – of the whole signifying environment, i.e. to produce well-argued generalizations concerning its *cultural value* for an actant (in our case, for *social actors*). In this sense, the different excerpts of a given signifying environment as well as the environment itself “behave” like *texts*.

[...]

No matter the specific support of the data to be analyzed and interpreted, all of them behave in a certain sense like a *text* in a semiotic sense: as an entity of which the *surface* offers the (competent) reader a *perceptible material organization* that he/she compares with *conceptual models* (Watzlawick et al 1967; Holland and Quinn 1987) or *standards* (Stockinger 1992; Hansen 1995) and transforms in a *signifying surface* – in a text or textscape. “Perceptual organization” means 1) that the material surface of these data is “loaded” with signs belonging to one or more perceptual modalities and 2) that these signs form structured, organized configurations, i.e. the (“semiotized”) *multimodal textual surface* of these data. This is true, obviously, for printed textual data such as news articles which are characterized by typical signs (in “traditional” print media, such typical signs are verbal ones and still images) organized in form of linearized, highly typical textual configurations like headlines, paragraphs, figures accompanied by short captions, etc.

But this observation possesses a much more general character and applies to other possible data (of a cultural analysis) such as, for instance, oral discourses, films, the surface of natural objects, artefacts, humans and other living entities or again the spatiotemporal surface of events

punctuating the life, the temporal agenda of a social actor (cf. here, for instance, the interesting collective work edited by Tietmeyer and Hirschberger (2010) on the “language of objects”). All these data constitute the support – the *mediasphere* – of organized textual surfaces, form the *signifying material dimension* of the culture of an actant and function as an *interface* that *regulates* and *constrains* the interactions and communications between a social actor’s culture and his/her relevant environment.

2. The textscape of an open market stall

In analogy to landscapes, textscapes are signifying *spatiotemporal surfaces* that reveal us something about the identity, the cultural specificity of a social actor and his life-world. In a first approximation, textscapes are composed and framed by *signs* which are (perceptual) *traces* (cf. also Ferraris 2013) of a presupposed cultural meaning. Let us take the concrete example of an open market place as shown in figure 1.



(figure 1: Extract of an open market stall at the *Naschmarkt* in Vienna, 2011)

This photography shows us a small extract of an open market stall belonging to the famous *Naschmarkt* in Vienna, Austria. The represented market stall is composed mainly of a great variety of seasonal vegetables (carrots, sweet peppers, green peas, string beans, horseradish ...) arranged in plastic boxes. The name and the price per weight or piece of each variety are communicated by *handwritten boards*. The plastic boxes themselves are organized in meaningful *horizontal lines*: bigger (longer) vegetables are on the back side, smaller vegetables on the front side of the stall. They are also organized in terms of semantically homogenous *surface areas* with respect to related varieties of vegetable: there are, for instance, an “area” of mushrooms, an “area” of sweet peppers, and an “area” of peas. The boxes themselves are “filled” by only *one sort* of vegetable and the *3D-composition* of the filled boxes manifests typical ranges of *affordance* (constrained liberties; Gibson (1979)) for the clients’ interactions with the exposed vegetables: to check and buy red or yellow pepper *piece by piece*; to grasp and buy *predetermined bundles* of onions; to grasp and buy *one or more handfuls* of beans; to choose and buy *one or more* carrots, etc.

What does this mean? We are facing here a signifying surface – a *textscape* – which makes sense for the consumer who shares with the seller a more or less *common food culture*, viz. themes and topics that form for both of them a set of *common standards*, of *common meaning-constitutive* and *normative conceptual models* or again, as A.J. Greimas would have put it, a *common fundamental semantics*. These constitutive and normative conceptual models are not only related to the knowledge and the appraisal of the offered varieties of vegetable but they also include common conceptions and visions concerning relevant social places (here: the open market place Naschmarkt with its stalls), the design of these places, the expected behaviour of the clients and the expectations of the clients, etc.

All these pieces of cultural (i.e. of constitutive and normative) meaning is *expressed* or *embodied* in *meaningful surfaces* or *textscapes*. Textscapes document the *life-world* of a given social actor in a given area (a territory), in a given epoch, in a given domain of activities. The life-world (Schütz and Luckmann 2003; Stockinger 2005) is the world understood as a *global cultural eco-system* shaped and inhabited by an actant. In focussing on the *iconic, morphological, chromatic, physical* and *topographic* characteristics of the photographic extract of figure 1 and in supposing a more complete corpus of related (photographic and other data), the represented open market stall transforms a “material” surface in a more or less meaningful textscape which constitutes the interface to different and diverging constitutive and normative meaning patterns framing *different social lifeworlds*: those of the sellers and the clients; those of the habitants of the 6th district of Vienna where the Naschmarkt is located; those of the tourists discovering and enjoying the very particular atmosphere of this oldest open market place in Vienna; those of eventual financial and economic stakeholders; those of city planners; those of urban historians; etc. All those different categories of collective social actors – inhabitants, economic interest groups, city administration, tourists with different social and cultural backgrounds ... - interact with this “material” surface:

1. in *localizing* and *selecting* those items which are relevant for them (i.e. which possess a specific value for them, viz. a *meaning*),
2. in *organizing* them in meaningful perceptual wholes,
3. and in *using* these perceptual wholes within their specific practical occupations, their daily life and professional activities.

The “same” physical support (here: the market stall) form the media (the *mediasphere*) of meaningful textscapes of which the constitutive signs and sign configurations belong to different *semiospheres*, to the signifying “material dimension” of different cultures, embodying different constitutive and normative meaning patterns or, in other words, cultural standards.

In this sense, our short interpretation of figure 1 is only one of many different, more or less probable, more or less partial ones. Its – potential – interest consists in the hope to be based on *explicit* and *appropriate criteria* for analysing (describing, comparing, classifying, explaining, reproducing ...) such signifying entities and processes and to elaborate a consistent methodology of how to do this.

For us, those criteria are the constituents of what we have called a *semiotic scenario* or again a *semiotic model* of texts broadly speaking, of meaningful surfaces and interfaces. We have developed this approach

mainly for *digital textual data* (Stockinger 1992, 1999, 2005, 2011, 2012): 2D or 3D interfaces, web sites, digital archives, dynamic textual data such as repurposed, remediated ones or again *smart* (“intelligent”, adaptive, replicative ...) *textual data*.

The elaboration and testing of a conceptually consistent and rich theoretical framework as well of operational approaches for using this framework in form of scenarios (Stockinger 1992, 2005) or models of textual structures is, in our opinion one of the central tasks of (structural) semiotics.

3. Analyzing the textscape of kitchens

The textscape of a life world is the support of a *figurative language* in the sense of Greimas (1979) by the means of which a social actor expresses, communicates, shares his culture and interprets the cultures of others.

In other words, the textscape is the intentionally produced and organised surface composed of (paradigmatically) selected and (syntagmatically) integrated signs or systems of signs that figure out the meaning of the life world, of a specific *meaning eco-system* (Bronfenbrenner 1981) framing the lifeworld of an actant.

The *semiotic expertise of culture* consists, in a nutshell, in the collection, classification and description of those signs and configurations of signs that compose the textscape or again the textual sphere of the lifeworld to be analysed. The culture or a specific cultural form constitutes the symbolic or *meaning realm* (the *noosphere*) of the *lifeworld* of an actant: it *qualifies* or again *frames* (defines, describes, explains ...) the specificities and particularities of the social reality of the considered lifeworld.



(figure 2: Two extracts of a typical European upper middle class kitchen textscape, courtesy; copyright Isabelle Lantrain 2015)

Figure 2 represents what we call a textscape in a *broad sense* including any constructed, artificial or natural environment (any sort of “landscape”) as a potential media for producing, communicating, sharing, negotiating, managing exploiting, ... cultural conceptions and visions peculiar to the life world of a social actor. It offers us some visual evidences of the kitchen¹ space understood here roughly as a central element of a typical European middle and upper class family’s lifeworld of the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century.

¹ For more information, cf. the informative and innovative collective research work about the kitchen space, published by the ETH (Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule) Wohnforum in Zurich (Switzerland) under the direction of Klaus Spechtenhauser (2006)

In having a closer look on the examples shown in figure 2, we should try to abstract from the fact that we have to do here with a series of photos. We should better imagine us these examples as a kind of an “augmented” *spatiotemporal and multi-sensory film*. In other words, we have not only to “read” and interpret the acoustic and visual features of this augmented film but also the olfactory, the gustative, the calorific or again the overall *kinaesthetic features* grouped together in *more or less stable textual configurations* and distributed in the temporally evolving three dimensional space.

The examples in figure 2 show us different examples of a global space called *kitchen* composed of functionally specialized places such as: the “cooking space” composed itself of a food preparation and food transformation space; the “preservation space” of aliments; the space for storing” kitchen utensils; the “eating space” composed of the appropriate furniture; the “cleaning space (of dishes)””; etc. Obviously, the embodiment of the functional organization of the kitchen space is constrained and varies in *time* (from one epoch to another), in *space* (from one region to another), with respect to the socio-economic *context* and personal and individual *preferences*.

The examples represented in figure 2 suggest us the fact that the notion of *kitchen* belongs to a *common vision* (a culture) following which the above quoted functional spaces (cooking space, eating space, ...) form together a *common meaning ecosystem* expressed, *embodied* by:

- first, *signifying entities* (hearth, sink, tables, cupboards, chairs, ...), *qualities* (form, colour, technical specificities, ...) and *activities* (cooking, eating, cleaning, preserving, communicating, ...);
- second, *topological* and *temporal arrangements* of these signifying entities in form of more or less stable constellations or, as we call them, *textsapes*.

Let us have a closer look on the series of images represented in figure 2. As an organized life-space corresponding to a more or less *common cultural vision* (typically represented, as already noticed, by the middle class European family house kitchen), the kitchen possesses an intrinsic organisation and it’s up to a more systematic and comparative analysis to explain its characteristic features. This means, that in order to – so to speak – *access* this meaning ecosystem, we have to rely on data taken from the textual sphere of this meaning system and which form (pieces of) the textscape, i.e. the specific perceptual or sensitive material organization of the interface with this meaning system. Each above quoted functionally specialized space is the support of one or more *core activities*:

- the “cooking space” supports typically all activities of preparation and transformation of aliments in meals;
- the “food preservation space” is typically reserved for activities of conditioning, storing, ... food;
- the “cleaning space” is reserved for activities of washing dishes, storing leftovers in garbage cans, etc.

A core activity itself can be qualified by the means of a *script* or a *scenario*: more specific activities, a thread, phases, roles ... which underlie typical more or less stable and routine temporal constellations (i.e.

timescapes, *temporal(ly) arranged textscapes*) and, more particularly, *activityscapes* (cf. also Mickelsson 2009) composed of:

- first, *signifying gestures* through which an activity is performed,
- second *signifying entities* in interaction with each other following the roles they occupy in the performing of a gesture or a series of gestures,
- third once more again *topological* and *temporal constellations* of gestures, entities and qualities ...

For instance, the cooking activity very “naturally” can be broken down in food preparation activities, food transformation activities, activities of surveillance and control, etc. All these activities are realized through concrete *actions* or *acts* (through meaningful series of gestures forming an observable *behaviour*) in a more or less “internalized” (actor-internalized) routine way or, contrarily, with respect to external plans like those, for example, offered by receipts describing and prescribing of how to realize a desired meal. Together these activities and their processing constitute of what Greimas would have called a *narrative intelligence* (obviously not necessarily restricted to the narration or story-telling in a literary sense) – notion we could bring together with that of *practical intelligence* (adapted from Bourdieu’s notion “sens pratique” (1980)). In any case, the description, the analysis of those core activities requires taking into account the above introduced *temporally evolving textscapes* that constitute the interface to their specific *noosphere*, their specific meaning-sphere.

Like any signifying surface, also the kitchen textscape can be studied as a global one. But we have to remember us that it is functionally composed of different parts, of different spatiotemporal *textual regions* or *areas* (analogically to those composing the textscape of the Naschmarkt extract in figure 1) whereas each textual region forms on its turn a “whole” textscape in itself: the textscape peculiar to the cooking space, the textscape peculiar to the eating space, and so on. Each one of these different kinds of textscapes is composed of specific signs which belong to a *figurative language* more or less *common* to all “local” kitchen cultures (and hence composing a *global figurative language*) or, contrarily, more or less specific to the one or the other of local kitchen cultures.

The kitchen life-world as a highly organized meaning eco-system is accessible, can be experienced only by the means of an indeed *complex spatiotemporal and multisensory textscape* which for us is a more less naturally given one (which indeed we do even not notice) as long as we are confronted with our own “kitchen experiences and traditions”, with *kitchen-interfaces* that look like those we have *learned* through socialisation. More the perceptual and sensitive surface of the kitchen lifeworld differ from our experiences with “normal” kitchen-interfaces, more we are puzzled and have to invest cognitive efforts to understand that surface, to appropriate it in form of a more or less appropriate (personal) textscape and to use it with more or less success.

[...]

4. Analysing communicational textscapes

to figures 1 and 2 showing us textscapes *in a broad sense* as signifying surfaces of lifeworlds, figure 3 shows us the photographic extract of a textscape in a narrow sense we call *communicational textscape*.

Figure 3 represents a small part of the busy Mong Kok area in the Yau Tsim Mong district (= western part of the Kowloon peninsula) of Hong Kong. The principal difference with the previously discussed textscapes “in a broad sense” is, that this time, our textscape is full up of communicational devices, i.e. of signifying data (“intentionally”) produced and shared for exchanging messages. We meet and interact, in our personal, every day and professional life, with many different kinds of such *communicational textscapes*. There are textscapes along streets and routes, textscapes composing transportation means (such as tubes and buses), textscapes belonging to specific social places such as commercial centres, railway stations, airports, multiplexes or sport centres, textscapes specific to popular events (sportive competitions, festivals, open air concerts, ...). And there are also personal and private textscapes, scholar textscapes on university campuses, cultural and highly academic ones “enwrapping” scientific manifestations such as congresses.



Figure 3: Mong Kok Area in Hong Kong (P.S 2007)

Let us consider in more detail the structural organisation of the communicational textscape of which figure 3 offers us a small partial extract. It is not our objective to produce an analysis of the photo itself and of the photographer’s strategies of framing and producing a visual representation of an urban reality. We only want to use this photo as a *document*, as a - so to speak - *trace* showing us the organization of urban communicational textscapes. There exist thousands of similar photos available on line on popular digital platforms or more specialized photo-libraries that could be used as *rough data* for studying such urban communicational textscapes. The photo shown in figure 3 belongs to a small series of photos illustrating the urban communicational environment of the

territory of Hong Kong we have realized in 2007 during a short stay in this city.

Maybe the most striking visual evidence in figure 3 is the massive presence of illuminated displays, posters and other advertising columns. It also stresses the massive presence of (consumer) products exhibited behind or in front of storefronts and on sandwich boards on the front sidewalk. In having a closer look on this textscape represented by figure 3, we can identify a series of characteristic features that have to be investigated in a more detailed way:

- 1) the *textual genres* of a communicational textscape;
- 2) the *(multi-)media support* of this kind of textscapes;
- 3) the *multimodal expression* of a communicational textscape;
- 4) the *universe of discourse* of a communicational textscape;
- 5) the *formal organization* of a communicational textscape.

Together, these elements help us to formulate a general *methodological grid* for collecting relevant textual data, comparing textual data and analysing them in order to reconstruct, to interpret specific cultural patterns or standards framing the (communicational) behaviour of people, groups, communities, etc. In the remaining part of this article, we will discuss them quickly and try to show the potential interest to study this kind of objects as “traces”, as “inscribed acts” (Ferraris 2013) of cultural standards framing the lifeworld of a semiotics system (in our case: of social actors).

4.1. Textual genres structuring a communicational textscape

In considering more systematically the photo of figure 3, we can observe the existence of a whole *diversity of textual genres* that are more or less typical constituents of a modern *urban* communicational textscape. Among such genres we find, for instance:

- advertising banners;
- visual ads (posters, ...);
- store, product and brand *names*;
- product, service and price lists;
- menus cards;
- and product displays.

If figure 3 would be a small video instead of a photo, it would further testify the existence of other textual genres such as, for instance:

- small acoustic genres (jingles, hawks, call outs, wired publicities...),
- audiovisual animations,
- and, finally, organised (street) events that are a part of the discussed communicational textscape.

Each one of these textual genres is provided with specific features that characterize them as *structural entities* based on *culturally handed down* or *explicitly produced* and *goal-oriented* (*viz.* with respect to an “efficient communication”) models or scenarios of identifying and localizing, representing and advertising, ... services, products, brands, people or places.

For instance, a typical model or scenario of an *advertising banner* of a commercial establishment represents the name (of the establishment), maybe

a short explanatory phrase and/or a slogan, some practical information (address, opening hours ...) and maybe also a logo and/or small (iconic or metaphorical) illustration. Each one of these elements possesses furthermore typical characteristic plastic features: typographic, graphic, chromatic, physical, etc. All elements (name, slogan, practical information, illustration or logo ...) are positioned in relation to one another within a physically limited two-dimensional space (the space of the banner).

Such a simple model or scenario enables us to *generate* or – better – *stage* a huge quantity of more or less similar *concrete* advertising banners that differentiate from each other with respect to one or more of the above quoted elements and features. The potential (verbal, ionic, chromatic, topographical ...) differences between such concrete versions of the same genre of ad banners produced during the process of staging are motivated by the cultural or cross-cultural context of communication and use.

With respect to a given communicational textscape (like this represented in figure 3), concrete advertising banners form easily recognizable “spots” distributed over the physical 3D-surface of the textscape. Like – metaphorically speaking – groves, meadows, edges of forest, paths, isolated trees ... in a rural landscape, also advertising banners (menu cards, store and brand names, audiovisual animations, street events, jingles, call outs ...) form meaningful *autonomous regions* or *areas* that possess their own specific structural organisation but that contribute to the specific (moving) identity of a concrete (communicational) textscape.

4.2. The (multi-)media support of a communicational textscape

Figure 3 shows us illuminated panels and fluorescent tubes, cardboards, walls and windows, electrical wires, surfaces of public or private transportation means, sidewalks and finally the persons as well as the products themselves which form a substantial part of the physical support of any modern urban communicational textscape.

Some of these multimedia supports presuppose a high technical and technological level which is necessary for the production of this kind of contemporaneous communicational textscape. However, besides high-tech media systems and devices, we also find traditional elements in our textscape, media which are traditionally used for spreading and sharing information (such as persons, public events, etc.). This “mixture” refers to a given technical (media) and social (communication) culture that enables the production of such communicational textscapes.

Through its specific multimedia support, a textscape is part of the *mediasphere* of a social actor. The mediasphere is composed of all media (print, audiovisual, digital but also places, objects, people, periods...) that are the (physical) supports for distributing and sharing of messages which are of relevancy for a social actor (a person, a community, an organisation ...). One privileged media of open air communicational textscapes are physical *display* and *display devices* (which constitutes one of the major media channels of the communication traditionally called *above the line*); another privileged media for textscapes is *design*: the *designed* (physical) space, the *designed* event, the *designed* object and finally the *designed* body.

4.3. The multimodal expression of a communicational textscape

Apart from *verbal* messages, (static) *visual*, *acoustic* and *audio-visual* messages are omnipresent in an open air, urban communicational textscape. An important modality is the *gestural* one that expresses parts of the bellmen's and town criers' verbal messages.

In figure 3, the visual modality includes not only pictures, logos, graphics but also Chinese as well as Latin characters – signs and sign systems that presuppose a high *linguistic competence* necessary for fully interacting with this textscape (or specific elements of it).

However, figure 3 do not show us the existence of those modalities which one only can experience (at least for the moment) *directly*, i.e. *in situ*, and *bodily* (with his/her body): the *smell*, the *temperature* and a kind of global *coenaesthesia* of which one becomes especially aware if immersed in a culturally different communicational textscape (as this is the case, for instance, for European tourists interacting with the in figure 3 represented Mong Kok Area textscape in Hong Kong).

All these modalities, separately or as syncretic (Greimas 1976) signifying entities, constitute specific perceptual (sensitive) signs or *sign systems*. Some of them are more or less typical for specific kinds of communicational textscapes, other are more or less common and shared by many different kinds of textscapes. Logos and slogans identifying a brand are extremely central elements of open air urban communicational textscapes or of communicational textscapes deployed in commercial centres and malls, of communicational textscapes deployed in multiplexes, along major transportation axes, in soccer stades, during popular mass events, and so on.

The Louvre, for instance, is the brand of a two-folded physical space in the centre of Paris: the commercial sector of the *Carrousel du Louvre* and the sector reserved for the *Musée du Louvre*. Product and company branding signs and sign systems (name, slogans, graphics, coloured shapes...) constitute the determining elements of the Carrousel du Louvre communicational textscape whereas they “survive” only marginally in the Musée du Louvre communicational textscape in form of, for instance, information traces of sponsors.

Sign and sign systems compose the *semiosphere* of the culture of a semiotic system such as a social actor. Originally introduced by Juri Lotman (2005 [1984]), we understand the notion of semiosphere as the totality of signs and sign systems at the disposal of a social actor for communicating, for conceiving and interpreting (the world, the other ...) and for exposing and “staging” him/herself (cf. also Torop 2005).

4.4. The universe of discourse of a communicational textscape

The *universe of discourse* of a textscape can be understood as composed of local and recurrent *global themes*, narrative and rhetoric *devices* and specific strategies of *discursive staging* which, together, takes the form of *specific, context-sensitive* and *adjustable messages*.

The universe of discourse of the textscape in figure 3 is provided with *explicit visible* (and *audible*) *topics*. The most common category of topics

here is that enabling us to identify and localize restaurants, shops and stores, products, etc. in the Mong Kok area of the Yau Tsim Mong district of Hong Kong. Another category of topics possesses an axiological function expressed and materialized through verbal and non-verbal signs of appreciating, cautioning ... products and services and trying to seduce the by-passers. Another category of topics relies on *specific contextual knowledge* not necessarily accessible for every public. For instance, in figure 3 the indication “Aberdeen Fish Ball” does not refer to the Scottish city of Aberdeen but 1) to an administrative area and town in the Southern District of Hong Kong, 2) to a culinary speciality of this area and 3) eventually to specific places (restaurants) where to consume this speciality.

Our communicational textscape also hosts implicit propositions and rhetoric devices, based on common sense *narrative utterances* or *statements* (in Greimas’ and also Foucault’s sense) and *maxims* of what is (so to speak, *unquestionably for everybody*) good, beneficial (*and hence has to be cheered and consumed by any normally constituted being ...*). These propositions and devices which are only suggested through the advertising banners, store names and price lists – *suggested propositions* and *rhetoric devices* such as: “It’s good for you to visit me ...”, “I guarantee you that here you will find the best (the most famous, the cheapest, the most recent, the most appropriate ...) X”, and so on.

Finally, a communicational textscape such as that one shown in figure 3 embodies *experiential topics*, topics based on a sort of bodily experienced emotionality which (for the moment at least) presuppose the already quoted *direct interaction* with our textscape. Those experiential topics are difficult to verbalise, to reproduce in form of a verbal record. They are more or less closely related to personal experiences. In any case they form *the personal, psychological basis* for the elaboration of what Greimas has called the *figurative* meaning of signifying textual data.

An elaborated *figurative meaning* possesses a more or less personal, idiolectal dimension and a more or less “public”, sociolectal one. In its idiolectal version, a figurative meaning draws from personal history, personal experiences, tastes and preferences. In this sense the textscape shown by figure 3 can provide the individual by-passer with a lot of more or less idiosyncratic impressions. The second dimension refers to “common sense” meaning (cf. Geertz 1983), to cultural stereotypes and clichés (cf. Amossy and Herschberg 1997) supposed to constitute a common epistemic and axiological reference frame for a social group, a community. Typical examples here are verbalized opinions (affirmations) that the textscape shown in figure 3 is a “typically Chinese one” (in the “eyes”, naturally, of a given public with a specific common cultural background), that it “typically” represents a kind of cultural ambiance peculiar to the busy Hong Kong territory, etc. The figurative meaning constitutes, in this second case, the social (group specific ...) meaning of perceived data (visual, acoustic, kinaesthetic ...) “semiotized” in form of *common*, of shared *figures*.

4.5. The formal organisation of a communicational textscape

This criterion considers the local and the global organization of a textscape in a two or three-dimensional *space* but also in *time* as an evolving signifying surface. Simply speaking, we should distinguish here between at

least three levels of selection and of integration of signs or configurations of signs: a local level, an intermediate one and a global one.

The *local level* of organization determines the *composition, appearance* and *shape* of the *concrete textual configurations* belonging to a specific textual genre. In other words, on this level are determined the selection of relevant signs and configuration of signs composing, for instance, the *ad banner* of “Aberdeen Fishballs”, the *product display* of the electronic speciality store, etc.

The *intermediate level* of organization is composed of *territories* of selected *concrete versions* (of *local* textual configurations) of textual genres and the *topographical disposition* locating each concrete version of a textual genre within a given territory. In the case of our communicational textscape, we have mainly *territories* which are *spatially connected* or *next to the main location* in the *lifeworld* of the *social actor* who *communicates through* our textscape. In figure 3, we can see such *proprietary territories* for a pharmacy, for a book stall, for a local restaurant, for a retail store and for an electronics store. These territories only select textual genres belonging to the communication of the social actor who is the “owner” of the territory: the pharmacy, the book stall, the retail store, etc. They are located along the façade, on the walkway in front of the shop or the restaurant, in the air next to the shop and the restaurant, etc. Other territories can be found especially “on the air”, “above the heads of the passers-by”. These territories are typically reserved for the communication of products and brands, of personalities, of popular events, etc.

The *global level* of organization, finally, deals with the integration and location of the above mentioned territories on a kind of a global *spatial communication map*. It also deals on the one hand with the global shape and the *outer frontiers* of a textscape and, on the other hand, with the *global appearance*, with its global visual and multisensory identity. There exists, indeed, highly regulated textscapes (for which we have a sort of “textscape policy”) aiming at the maintenance and preservation of global visual and multisensory identity. Our example of a communicational textscapes seems to belong much more to those of which such a global “textscape policy” doesn’t exist and which evolves more or less following the principle “every man for himself and devil takes the hindmost” ...

Only a comparative study of a representative corpus of such textscapes could show us if this kind of “every man for himself” policy – represented by a sort of *free juxtaposition* of “communication territories” as those we have identified in figure 3 – corresponds indeed to cultural patterns or standards and hence is motivated with respect to a cultural tradition of communicating.

Conclusive remarks

We will stop here our discussion of textscapes in a *broad sense* (i.e. as signifying surfaces of a lifeworld of an actant) or in a *narrow sense* as a communicational device in insisting on the fact that in this article, we have concentrated our attention to the *structural organisation* of textscapes.

The study of the structural organisation of textscapes is, in our opinion, an indispensable task in the elaboration of an *explicit theoretical framework* which is needed for the concrete work with such signifying entities.

However, this investigation on the structural organization has to be completed with another one considering a textscape in a *pragmatic context*, i.e. in a specific context of action and interaction. In doing this, we have to consider not only *processes* of “reading”, interpreting, interacting with and using a textscape, but also *processes* of conceiving, (co-)producing and managing textscapes, of adapting and personalising textscapes, of collecting, indexing and archiving textscape data or again of transforming textscapes with the help of cutting-edge digital technologies - in *smart signifying surfaces*.

Together with a more systematic and in-depth study of the structural organisation of corpora of textscapes we hope to be able to discuss these questions in a future publication.

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