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Reading is doing: Enunciation in the Discourse of the Print Media

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► **To cite this version:**

Eliseo Veron. Reading is doing: Enunciation in the Discourse of the Print Media. *Marketing Signs*, 1992, 14-15, pp.1-12. halshs-01487096

HAL Id: halshs-01487096

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-01487096>

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MARKETING SIGNS

*A Newsletter at the Crossroads of Marketing, Semiotics,
and Consumer Research*

Nos. 14-15

Marketing Signs Research Institute — Indiana University

1992

Reading is Doing: Enunciation in the Discourse of the Print Media*

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I shall outline here what appears to me to be a new territory of semiotics: that of meaning in reception or, if you prefer, "meaning effects". The "first generation of semiotics" (that of the 1960s) may be characterized as "immanentistic" as it involved taking a corpus of texts and describing the connotative functioning of meaning within it. Faced with existing psychological and sociological approaches to meaning, it was necessary at that time to demonstrate the value of the analysis of the message itself.¹ The "second generation of semiotics" (in the 1970s), attempting to go beyond the earlier static and taxonomic points of view, set about discussing the production of meaning, under the (diffuse) influence of "generative grammars". Here it was a question of reconstituting the processes of the generation of texts.² I am going to suggest that the semiotics of the 80s will have to integrate "meaning effects" into its theory. For it is only then that it will

embrace the totality of its domain: the process which goes from the production of meaning to its "consumption," with the message being the point of passage which supports the social circulation of significations.

Cont. p. 2, col. 1

Just Junior, Dizzy, and Me on the Way to Our Gig

Morris B. Holbrook

Introduction

When he celebrated his 75th birthday on October 21, 1992, John Birks "Dizzy" Gillespie ranked, unarguably, as the World's Greatest Living Jazz Musician and, arguably, as one of the most important artistic geniuses that America has ever produced. For a consumer of jazz or a marketer of music, a key question is: "What does the sign that we call 'Dizzy Gillespie' actually mean?" Or—to put the issue concerning esthetic consump-

Cont. p. 15, col. 1

Tapping the Mythic Unconscious: The "Female as Huntress" Myth in a Watch Ad

Marcel Danesi
University of Toronto

Introduction

As Bruce Bendinger (1988: 14) remarks, the contemporary advertising industry originated as a psychologically-designed marketing strategy at the threshold of the present century. Indeed, throughout this century the premise which seems to have undergirded a large sector of this

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The problem is not a simple one, for a message never automatically produces one effect. Rather, all discourse designs a field of meaning effects and not one effect and one alone. The relation between production and reception (I prefer to call the latter **recognition** [*reconnaissance*])³ is complex. **There is no linear causality in the universe of meaning.** At the same time, a given discourse does not produce just any effect. For the semiotics of the "third generation", the problematic of the function of **enunciation** will be essential.⁴

Enunciation

One should not separate the concept of "enunciation" from the pair of terms of which it is a member: **the enunciated/enunciation** [*énoncé/énonciation*]. The enunciated is that which is said (in an approximate fashion, we could say that the enunciated is the "content").⁵ Enunciation concerns not what is said but **the saying of it** and its modalities, the ways of saying something. If we compare the two sentences "Peter is sick" and "I believe Peter is sick", we can say that what is enunciated is identical in both examples—namely, the ill health of Peter. If these two sentences are different, it is with respect to the level of enunciation rather than that of the enunciated. In the first example, the speaker affirms that Peter is sick (we can say that the enunciator⁶ presents the sickness of Peter as objective evidence); in the second, the speaker qualifies what he says as a belief, and attributes this belief to himself.

What varies from one sentence to the other is not what is said but the relationship of the speaker to what is said, the ways of his saying it. Personal pronouns are, typically, linguistic elements which are situated on the level

of enunciation and not on that of the enunciated. Thus "I" is an "empty" expression, one might say, which is only "filled" when utilized, for it designates nothing more than he who uses it at a given moment. This is why linguists are accustomed to associating elements of enunciation with the context of speech. Like "I", "you", "here", "now", "yesterday", etc., the elements which concern enunciation will be closely linked to what is called the "context of enunciation". However, what is inconvenient about giving a situational definition of enunciation is that such a definition remains too attached to the function of speech, i.e., to the oral. In the case of the print media, for example, there is, strictly speaking, no "context of enunciation" embracing both a speaker and an interlocutor. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the distinction between the enunciated and enunciation is funda-

mental to an understanding of how the print media function. We will limit ourselves here, therefore, to interpret the opposition enunciated/enunciation as including the distinction between **what is said and the ways of saying it.**

In no matter what kind of discourse, the ways of expressing something construct, or give form to, what we will call the **enunciative device**. This device includes:

1. The image of the sender, which we will call the **enunciator**. Here, the term image is metaphorical. It is a question of the place (or places) which the sender attributes to himself. This image thus includes the relationship between the sender and what he says.
2. The image of the receiver, which we will call the **addressee**. The producer of the discourse not only

Marketing Signs

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Marketing Signs is published three times each year by Indiana University's **Marketing Signs Research Institute**, a unit of the Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies. Send all materials and correspondence to the Editor-in-Chief, *Marketing Signs*, Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, Indiana University, P.O. Box 10, Bloomington, IN 47402-0010, USA • Tel. 812-855-1274; Bitnet: Umikerse@INDIANA; Fax 812-855-1273.

constructs his own place or places in what is said, but, in so doing, also defines his addressee.

3. The relation between the enunciator and the addressee which is proposed in and by the discourse.

It is therefore necessary to distinguish at the very beginning the "real" sender from the enunciator and the "real" receiver from the destination. The enunciator and the addressee are **discursive entities**. This double distinction is crucial: the same sender will be able, in different discourses, to construct different enunciators according to, for example, the chosen target. At the same time, in each case he will construct differently his addressee.

Every media has its device of enunciation. This may be coherent or incoherent, stable or unstable, adapted to its readership or more or less mal adapted. In the case of the print media, we will call this enunciative device the **reading contract**.

Enunciation and "Content"

Does the study of the device of enunciation, i.e., the reading contract, require ignoring "content", being uninterested in the level of the enunciated? Certainly not. If the distinction between enunciation and the enunciated is important, it is because an identical content (as indicated above with regard to the sentence about Peter) may be framed by very different modalities of enunciation.⁷ What the enunciator says, the things he is charged with talking about, constitute an important dimension of the reading contract. But it is clear that when we turn our attention to the device of enunciation, we are no longer looking at the enunciated in the same way as one would, for example, in content analysis.

The fact that an identical content—an identical thematic domain—can be taken up by very different devices of enunciation brings up a point of particular interest in the case which occupies us here—the print media. We are very often concerned with extremely narrow arenas of competition, where several magazines, very similar to one another from the point of view of content, share a readership which is relatively homogeneous as to its socio-demographic profile. The case of the so-called "high end" women's monthlies is a good example. In this case, the magazines cover approximately the same subjects, that is they are difficult to distinguish between in terms of their content, but may be quite different on the level of the reading contract. It is thus by studying the latter that we can grasp precisely the uniqueness of a publication and judge the value of this uniqueness in relation to its competitors.

Another example is that of new, more or less specialized domains. Thus we see a multitude of new publications which try to constitute their readership on the basis of a special interest (personal computers, electronic games, video, etc.). It is clear that among these magazines only those which succeed in constructing a reading contract adapted to the domain in question will survive. Success (or failure) is not determined by what is said (the content) but by the ways of **expressing the content**.

Stagnation or decline in readership often occurs as a result of a progressive and unconscious alteration of the reading contract, or the introduction of editorial modifications which introduce incoherence into the contract. It is the reading contract which creates the **link** between the publication and its readership.

We see clearly that the semiotics of enunciation, applied to the identification and detailed analysis of the reading contract of print media, furnishes unique types of information which cannot be obtained by any other existing methods. The manipulation of socio-demographic facts reaches an impasse when dealing with publications with almost identical readerships. Methods such as the "lifestyle" approach propose categories of analysis which have no **distinctiveness** with respect to the press media: there is no precise connection between such and such a lifestyle category and a recommendation of editorial strategy or argumentation for the sake of advertisers; this link is always intuitive in nature.

As for classical content analysis, its descriptive capacity captures only one aspect of the reading contract: the thematic variations in the content. These variations are not unimportant, but they are usually far from being the most important dimension. By contrast, whatever pertains to enunciation by definition escapes content analysis, since enunciation is not of the order of content.

Semiotics thus has an important contribution to make in this domain, and one which is exclusive to it.

Enunciative Variations

On the cover of a magazine, the enunciator can do many things (Fig. 1) or very few (Fig. 2). He can call to the addressee by the angle of the model's look (Fig. 1) or, on the contrary, keep the addressee at a distance by proposing for him the role of a simple spectator looking at someone who does not look back (Fig. 2). The modalities of enunciation on the cover are always a crucial factor in the construction of a contract. The cover can show the

nature of the contract in a way that is both condensed and precise, or it can be more or less incoherent with regard to the contract.

Consider a cover of *Marie France* (Fig. 3). On this cover, a certain enunciator is put in place. First, it classifies: "Fashion", "Medicine", "The Arts". Second, it ranks the subjects: by the typography and color, it chooses one theme as more important than others: "Special knit". Thirdly, it quantifies: "10 pants", "10 boots", "20 models explained". Fourth, it asks questions: "Childbirth—which is the best method?" "Can one live on one's talent?" Fifth, these questions have an impersonal form, reinforced by the

use of "one" in the title "Can one live on one's talent?" Sixth, an image is presented which concerns fashion, and one of the titles also refers to fashion; **the text and the image are thus linked**, and one finds within the magazine, in the articles announced on the cover, fashion themes represented by the model on the cover. The configuration of all these elements announces a **pedagogical enunciator**, which preordains the universe of discourse vis-à-vis the reader, which is going to guide her, respond to questions, explain things, and inform, all in keeping an objective distance between the two.

Compare this cover with another, this time from *Marie Claire* (Fig. 4).

Here, there is no classification: all titles are presented as having the same importance, in a tight list and in much smaller letters. The titles include citations between quotation marks, what linguists call "reported discourse": "There are no more men"; when a prostitute wants "to become honest". These words between quotation marks are neither uttered by *Marie Claire* nor attributed to the addressee. These are testimonies which belong to the genre of reporting. Women are objectivized, are designated: "There are no more men. Why so many women say so." As in the preceding case, the model has to do with fashion, but there is no text linked to it. The image takes up the question



Figure 1



Figure 2

of fashion silently, one might say, and the enunciator *Marie Claire* talks about something completely different: prostitution, viral hepatitis, problems in the relations between men and women. We are dealing with two disjointed and parallel discourses and with an enunciator who leaves it up to the reader to decide the relative importance of the subjects treated in the magazine. As in the preceding case, there is distance (no summons, no "we" or "you" is there to help forge a link with the addressee), but distance **without pedagogy**.

With the cover of *Cosmopolitan* (Fig. 5) we enter a completely different universe. Here, first of all, one has the impression of a confused mess: a lot of

text, scattered in complex units each having two levels and two type sizes. We could even say that the enunciator promotes a certain amount of disorder, for it is not in terms of a pedagogy of classification that the link with the reader is established. Within the jumble, the enunciator takes up a dialogue with the addressee. On the one hand, he addresses her directly: "You work, he doesn't"; on the other hand, the enunciator makes the addressee speak, bringing his or her speech into the scene. Thus, in response to the addressee's exclamation "No, the answer is no!" the enunciator replies "So why do you say yes?" To the addressee's avowal "I love him but I cheat on him", the enunciator re-

sponds "How you can get rid of this rotten habit." Thus, a language game is begun which establishes complicity between the addresser and the addressee. It is in the framework of this complicity (at the opposite end of the spectrum from didactic distance) that *Cosmopolitan* transmits implicit values, dispenses advice, and promotes a certain liberalization of customs. Here, the image on the cover is constructed in a manner very different from that of *Marie France* or *Marie Claire*. It is not a fashion publication. What the model wears is, in effect, hardly seen at all, and is, moreover, of no importance. As the months go by, it is the same type of woman who keeps returning to the cover (Figs. 6, 7, 8) with the status of a



Figure 3

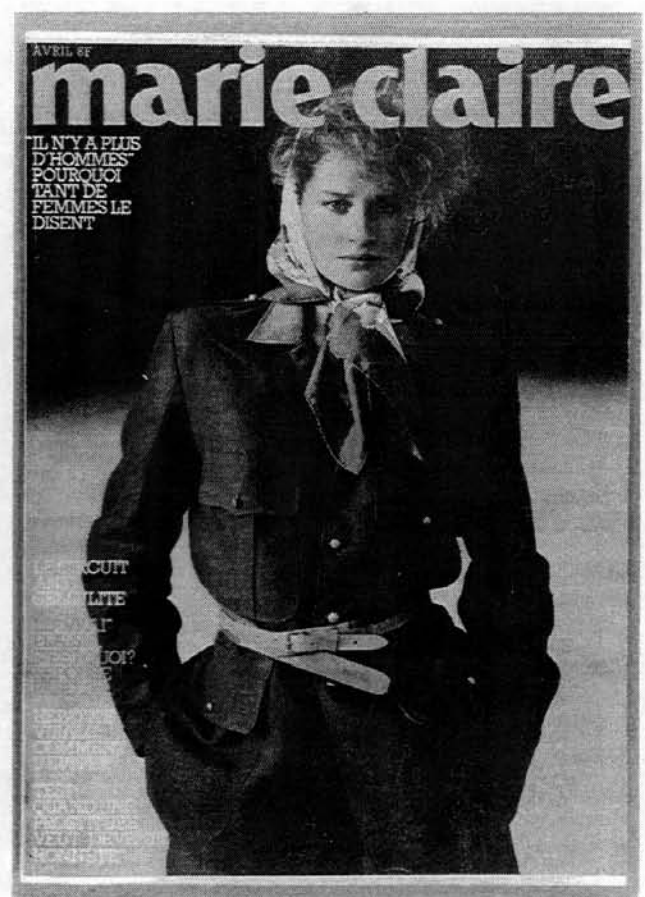


Figure 4

sort of abstract "logotype". The visual image thus functions here as the visualization of a way of life, the "Cosmo lifestyle", which is actualized in the complicity effected by the titles.

So we have here three women's magazines and three different modalities for announcing the reading contract: order, strong links between elements, and pedagogical stance in *Marie France*; the "objective" distance of testimony and reporting, on the one hand, and, on the other, sophisticated, silent fashion of *Marie Claire*; *Cosmopolitan's* complicity concerning lifestyle, of which the magazine is, in a sense, the "trademark".

The presence or absence of a pedagogical stance, of course, is not just a matter of language; it is also expressed by the manner in which images are treated. Compare two images of interior decorating magazines (Figs. 9 and 10). In the first case, all of the elements of the photographic treatment—color, homogenous neatness of all the objects, uniformity of lighting, indications of the places being occupied (e.g., lighted fire in the fireplace)—are there in order to signify that the enunciator has a willingness to inform. In the second case, the image hides as much as it shows a decor. The first image thus defines the addressee as motivated by practical and acquisitive intentions, for which the evaluation

of each element by the addressee, with an eye to its possible utilization, remains the essential question. In the second case, the manner of showing the decor is as important, if not more so, than what is shown. The image invites the addressee to adopt the distance of a spectator, to adopt an aesthetic point of view, and thus to suppress any acquisitive motivation.

This difference is an important one which has many consequences at all levels of the discourse of the print media. For the pedagogical position of enunciation defines the enunciator and the addressee as unequal: the former shows, explains, advises; the second looks, understands, benefits.



Figure 5

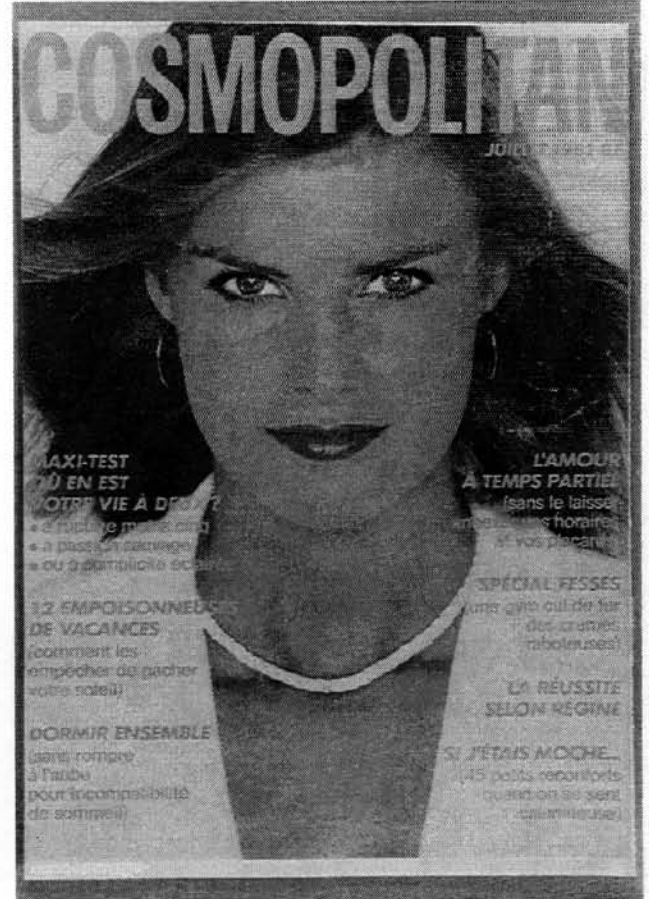


Figure 6

The "distanced" and non-pedagogical position of enunciation invites a certain **symmetry** between the enunciator and addressee: the former, in displaying a **way of seeing things** (Fig. 11), invites the receiver to adopt the same point of view, or at least to appreciate the manner of showing as much as what is shown. This is why this "distanced" enunciation amounts to proposing a **game** to the addressee, a game in which the enunciator and the addressee find themselves in a relationship of complicity created by the sharing of certain cultural values. It is thus clear that these variations in the enunciation are associated with the socioeconomic level of the readership of such publications.

The enunciator's desire to be "transparent" (or, on the contrary, relatively opaque) is translated, in the universe of the press, by very different styles of writing. One of the most fundamental problems which the weekly magazines must resolve is to decide where to draw the line between what is going to be presented as already known by the reader and what is going to be presented as new information (i.e., what is going to be presented to the reader as **unknown** by the addressee). This dividing line is not always easy to determine, and weeklies can be classified according to the manner in which they "apportion" informative and non-informative elements.

Consider these two headlines:

- 1) Lebanon: negotiations have failed
- 2) The Lebanese failure

The first is informative, the second is not. Headline 1 presents the breakdown of negotiations as a piece of information furnished to the addressee. In other words, this title assumes that the addressee knows that negotiations are under way in Lebanon but does not know that they have just broken down. None of the second title's elements are informative in relation to the event. What it announces is not that negotiations in Lebanon have failed but that the enunciator is going to talk about



Figure 7

Figure 8

that failure, the existence of which is presented as already known by the addressee.

A publication like *Paris-Match*, for example, is informative at all levels of the organization of its text—the titles on the cover, headlines within the issue, secondary headings, photo captions, the text of articles). At each of these levels, the addressee is apprised of information he was judged not to have. In going from headline to article, the reader encounters a progression of information, but there is information at each stage. If the reader stops before the end of the story, he nevertheless has understood something about the event. *Paris-Match* thus permits several levels of reading.

In French weekly news magazines, on the other hand, all the elements which frame the text of articles (titles and headings) are opaque and uninformative. Their only function is to induce the reader to read the article. If the reader limits himself to glancing over the titles, he will not obtain information about events. What he will find is a language game which serves to construct a complicitous relation between the enunciator and the addressee by means of the constant reference to cultural objects which both are judged to understand. Each title is a “key”, the decipherment of which acts as “proof” of membership in a shared cultural universe:

- Troyat: “Destroy, he says”
- Vacations of the French: chance and necessity
- Waste and whispers
- Macchiochi and the men of marble

This fundamental enunciative maneuver, consisting of **attributing a certain knowledge to the addressee**—in “constructing” him as more or less “informed”, more or less cultivated, more or less able to catch allusions, etc.—determines the relative “transparency” or “opacity” of the discourse. If a discourse is comparatively opaque, it means that it favors the enunciation over the enunciated; it promotes its ways of speaking more than what it says.

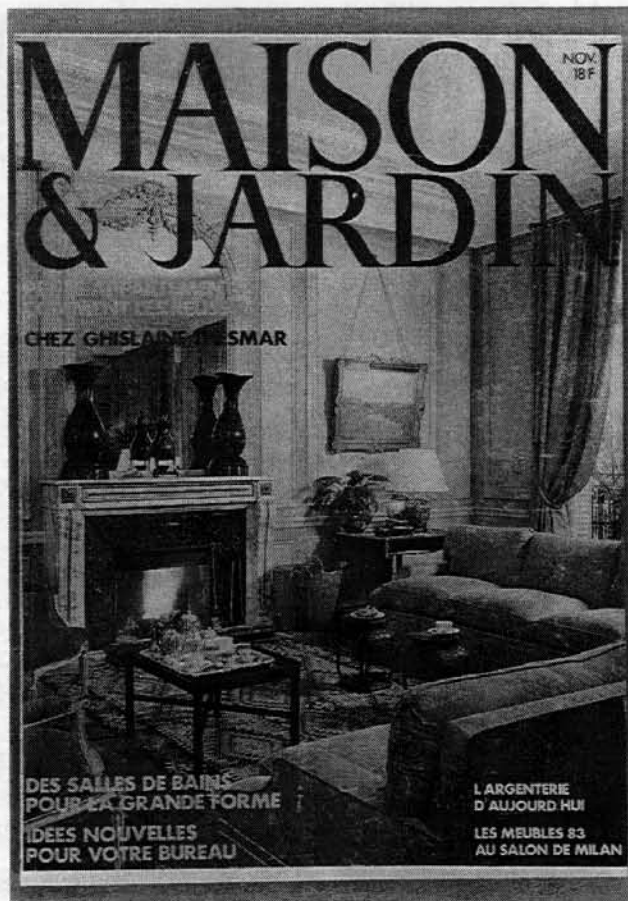


Figure 9

From Production to Recognition

It is through the choices made—taking a didactic position or not, transparency or opacity, distance or dialogue, objectivity or complicity, sharing of values on the level of what is said or of the ways of saying it, strong linkage between levels or “parallel” discourses, degree and type of knowledge attributed to the reader—that the reading contract is constructed. An enunciator emerges who proposes a place for the addressee.

Semiotic analysis has as a goal the discovery and description of all the operations which, in the discourse of a publication, determine the position of the enunciator and consequently that of the addressee. Three things need to be said about this.

First, the analysis is never performed on only one publication, but rather is applied to the universe of competition in question, within which one must identify **what constitutes the difference between different publica-**

tions, what, within the universe chosen for analysis, contributes to the definition of the distinctiveness of each publication. In other words, the analysis must always be comparative.

Second, the operations retained as distinctive must be recurring, i.e., constitute **invariants**, styles of discourse which are repeated and which consequently lend a certain stability to the relationship between the publication and the reader.

Third, if, in the beginning, the analysis consists of identifying and describing in a precise manner each discursive operation, it must subsequently try to understand the relations between these operations. An isolated discursive characteristic never determines a reading contract, which is the result of a **configuration** of elements. In other words, the analysis must discern the **overall logic** of each publication with, of course, its possible

incoherencies and contradictions.

An analysis of the enunciative device is what I call an analysis of **production**, but the contract is achieved, more or less well, by the reader, through **recognition**.⁸ We must thus look at how the readers in the universe of competition in question react to the contracts proposed by competing publications. What is the relative efficacy of each contract, and what are its strong and weak points? This is the goal of the "fieldwork" which always completes a semiotic analysis. We work with the readers and nonreaders of each of the publications studied, either in semi-directed interviews or in focus groups. Semiotic analysis has made it possible to discover the fundamental dimensions of each contract, and it is now necessary to test them. A complete series of projective exercises is prepared, using materials extracted from the publications being studied. The discourse of

readers and nonreaders is thus elicited concerning elements which illustrate each aspect of the reading contract: covers, fragments of articles, examples of page layout, variations in the image/text relationship, variations in the organization of the elements of framing (headlines, subtitles, headings), and so forth.

I shall not dwell on this aspect of the question, which involves well known methods of research. I will merely underline the fact that, from my point of view, the test of the reading contract "in the field" is a part of the overall strategy of an approach which claims to be semiotic. In a complete semiotic approach, the analysis of the corpus itself is caught between the problematic of production and the problematic of reception. However, in the stage of the investigation devoted to determining the way a contract works with readers and nonreaders, it is not a question of undertaking a more or less

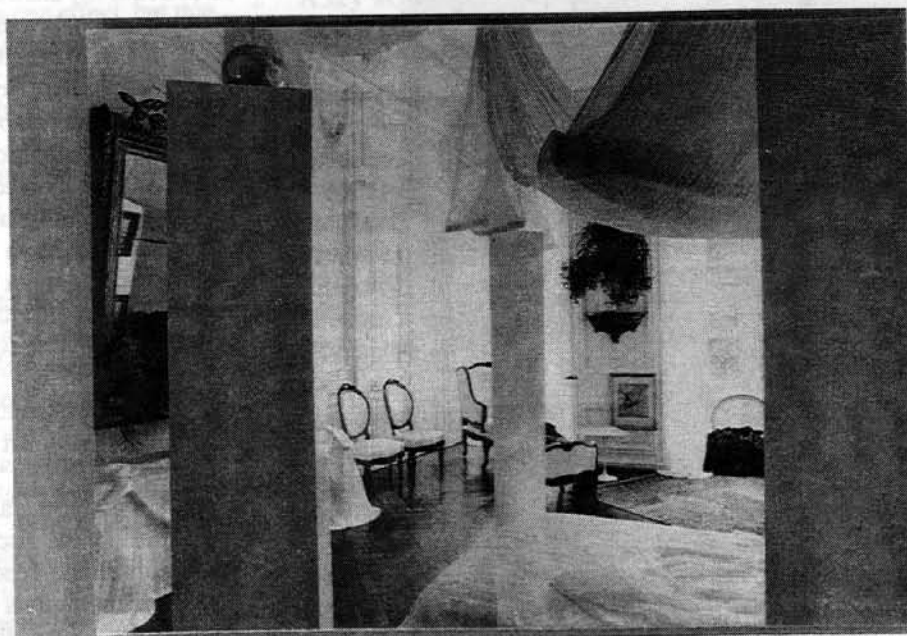


Figure 10

standardized analysis of the projective material obtained through interviews and focus groups. The interpretation of the facts collected in the field is guided entirely by the results of the semiotic analysis. It is in the light of the latter that the material concerning expectations, interests, rejections, and elements of imagination verbalized by individuals acquires its true signification.

Without the semiotic analysis of the reading contract, an empirical investigation designed to collect information about a readership will have difficulty escaping banalities. In a given sector of the population, consumers of print media do not have interests, expectations, motivations, or needs "in

general". All these elements are structured, organized, "worked" constantly by the media discourses to which they are more or less faithful. As in other domains, semiotic analysis serves here to do justice to the **distinctiveness** of the object studied. A print media publication is an imaginary space where multiple paths are proposed to the reader, a sort of landscape where the reader can more or less freely choose his own route, where there are zones in which he risks becoming lost or, on the contrary, which are clearly marked. Along the length of this route, the reader encounters diverse characters who propose different activities, and with whom he feels more or less inclined to establish a

relationship, depending on the image that they provide him, the manner in which they treat him, the distance or intimacy they offer. A discourse is an inhabited space, full of actors, decors and objects, and to read "is to set this universe in motion" by accepting or rejecting, by going to the right or to the left, by investing more or less effort, by listening with one ear or two. **To read is to do:** we must therefore abandon the traditional approach which limits itself to characterizing the reader "objectively", i.e., **passively** in terms of CSP or lifestyle, without ever asking what he does (or does not do) when he reads. If we manage to answer that question, we will better understand the reasons why we read what we read.⁹

The Semiotic Challenge

From this problematic there emerges, I believe, a certain point of view concerning a question posed by Eric Fouquier:¹⁰ Is the study of meaning effects a part of the domain of semiotics? The reader will not be surprised if my answer to this question, contrary to his, is a firm yes. If doubt about this were possible within the framework of the "first generation" of semiotics, there can be none within that of the "third generation". For the latter, in fact, the "true object" is not the message itself (no matter how it is conceptualized, as an ensemble of signs or as a discourse) but the **production/recognition** of meaning, where the message is only the point of transition.

When one is concerned with recognition, one must deal with two discursive wholes: a "corpus" whose properties I analyze, and an ensemble constituted by the discourse of receivers (in this article, readers and nonreaders of various print media publications). I will thus define the question of effects as that of the systematic relation between these two

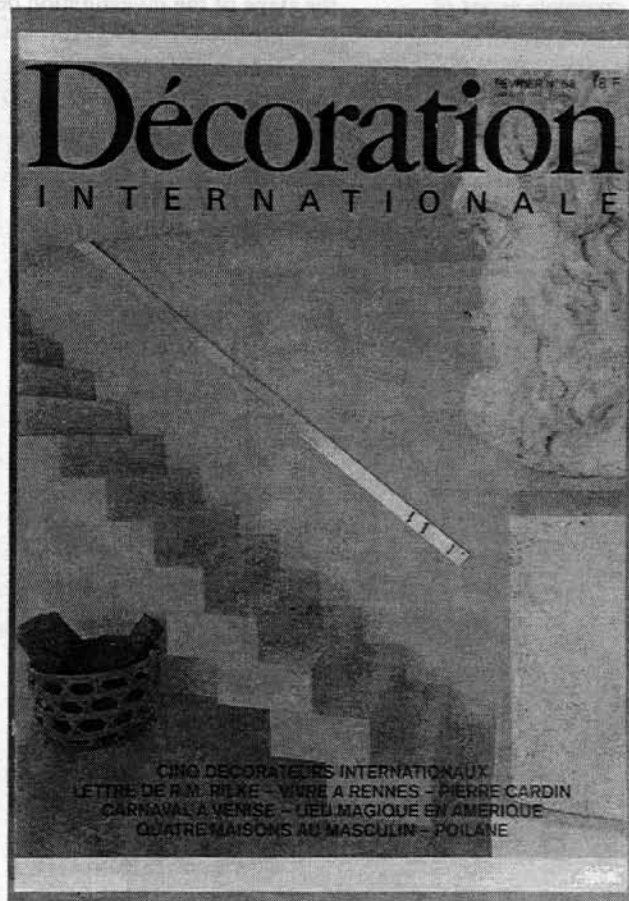


Figure 11

entities. I remain within semiotics because I work only on interdiscursive relations. It is difficult for me to see, in fact, what a "meaning effect" of a discourse might be, from a semiotic point of view, if not another discourse in which the effect of the first discourse is manifested, reflected, and inscribed. In the case of the study of the reading contract reading, I have thus on the one hand a corpus of press publications which permits me to work "on production" in order to discover the **grammar of production** of each of the publications. On the other hand, I try to discover, on the basis of the discourse of receivers, the **grammars of recognition**, which are always numerous, for it is certain that a given device of enunciation never produces a single effect, but always several, depending on the receivers in question.

I am not therefore inclined to leave the question of effects to others (psychologists, sociologists, psychoanalysts, etc.). It is true that from this point of view, the semiotician finds himself in a difficult position. On the one hand, he affirms that a message never produces only one effect, but that several effects are always possible. He claims, on the other hand, that a message never produces just any effect. I believe that if you assert these two things at the same time you are in a very uncomfortable situation vis-à-vis causality.

It is necessary to preserve this ambiguity and to maintain the position that no meaning effect is automatic, that no meaning effect is a linear cause/effect type of phenomenon, but, at the same time, there is a meaning effect and this effect is related to the properties of the message. Why is it necessary to remain in this uncomfortable position? Because if the semiotician leaves meaning effects to others, the result is a bizarre split in reality. You

would have a specialist of causes (the semiotician) who would not be able to investigate effects, and, on the other hand, specialists of effects (others) who would know nothing about causes. This situation, this strange distribution of competencies, would lead to a situation which Roland Barthes long decried: those who occupy themselves with message effects without examining the nature of causes are inevitably led to naturalize the sign.

Notes

- * The original version of this article appeared in *Sémiotique II*. Paris: IREP, 1983, pp. 33-56; translated from the French by Jean Umiker-Sebeok.
- 1 As Barthes did, for example, in "A propos de deux ouvrages de Claude Lévi-Strauss: Sociologie et socio-logique", *Information sur les sciences sociales I* (4), 1962; "L'imagination du signe", *Arguments* 27-8, 1963, a text reprinted in his *Essais critiques*.
 - 2 A key work in the passage to the second generation of semiotics is the book by Julia Kristeva, *Recherches pour une sémanalyse*, Paris: Seuil, 1965.
 - 3 Translator's note: The author's French term, *reconnaissance*, is translated as recognition in *Semiotics and Language. An Analytical Dictionary*, by A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982). In that book, recognition is defined as follows:
 "In the most general sense, recognition is a cognitive operation by which a subject establishes a relation of identity between two elements, one of which is present and the other absent (elsewhere or past), an operation which involves identification procedures enabling

the subject to discern identities and alterities. An example of this is when identification is accomplished by memory." (pp. 256-7)

- 4 Translator's note: The French term *énonciation* is translated as enunciation in *Semiotics and Language. An Analytical Dictionary*, where it is defined as:
 "...a linguistic domain which is logically presupposed by the very existence of the utterance (which contains traces or markers of the enunciation)...enunciation must be conceived of as an autonomous component of language theory, i.e., as a domain which governs the passage from (linguistic) competence to (linguistic) performance, from virtual semiotic structures (to be actualized by the enunciations) to structures that are realized in the form of discourse." (p. 103)
- 5 In an approximate fashion, for the pair of terms enunciation/enunciated does not coincide with the pair form/content.
- 6 Translator's note: The French terms *énonciateur/énonciataire* are defined in *Semiotics and Language. An Analytical Dictionary* in the following way:
 "We shall call enunciator the implicit sender of the enunciation (or "communication"), distinguishing it thereby from the narrator—for example the I—which is an actant obtained through the process of disengagement and is inserted explicitly within the discourse. Similarly, the enunciatee corresponds to the implicit receiver of the enunciation, though distinct from the narratee which is recognizable as such inside the utterance (for example, "The reader will understand that..."). So understood, the enunciatee is not only the receiver of the communication but also the discourse-producing

- subject..." (p. 105)
- 7 The opposite case, of course, could also be interesting.
- 8 On the distinction between production and recognition, see my article "Sémiosis de l'idéologie et du pouvoir," *Communications* 28, pp. 7-20, 1978.
- 9 My formula, "lire, c'est faire" (reading is doing) recalls, of course, the one used to translate into French the title of the work of J.-L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (*Quand dire, c'est faire*) (Paris: Seuil, 1970). Beyond that parallel, the question remains of knowing how to define the "doing" which is implied in linguistic activity, a point which I cannot develop here. I will limit myself to underlining the fact that, in the work of Austin and in those he inspired, the concept of "doing" raises serious theoretical problems.
- 10 Eric Fouquier, "Les effets du sémiologue. Notions opératoires pour une sémiotique des effets dus aux mass-medias," *Sémiotique II*. Paris: IREP, 1983, pp. 5-31.

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industry is that an ad's consumption-inducing effectiveness is proportional to its capacity to tap some "hidden" desire or need in the consumer. A corollary to this premise has been that an ad's efficacy increases significantly when the design technique employed taps some area of the unconscious mind. This is, after the all, the reason

behind the use of so-called "subliminal" techniques in advertising (e.g., Barthel 1988; Ewen 1988; Key 1989). Whether or not the psychological effectiveness of such methods has ever been established statistically is beside the point. The fact is that ad creators continue to employ them in a variety of ways for a wide array of products.

The study of subliminal, or more generally, "unconscious" suasion techniques is of obvious relevance to semioticians as well as to psychologists. The purpose of this brief note is, in fact, to examine a recent ad for an Airoidi watch from a semiotic standpoint, given that it provides a salient example of how advertisers attempt to tap specific "mythic" or "narrative" structures of the unconscious mind. The analysis of the ad will be preceded by a definition of the "mythic unconscious."

The Mythic Unconscious

It was probably Roland Barthes (1957) who first drew the attention of semioticians in the fifties to the value of studying marketing strategies. As Wang (1991: 1) notes, Barthes was certainly the one who inspired the first semiotic works analyzing "concrete advertising signs rather than the signification which arises from the relational organization of signs." Today there is considerable interest in the semiotics of marketing (e.g., Umiker-Sebeok 1985, 1987; Cleveland 1986, Holbrook 1987; Mick 1988; and see Umiker-Sebeok, Cossette, and Bachand 1988 for a selected bibliography). If there is one theme in this new line of inquiry that is of specific relevance to the present discussion, it is that many ads are interpretable at two levels—a "surface" and an "underlying" one. The surface level contains the iconic and verbal components of the ad. These are both the "reflexes" of,

and the "traces" to, the underlying level: i.e., the surface elements cohere into a signifier that has an underlying signified. More often than not, the signified inheres in a mythic, or archetypal, structure (Jung 1956) that works psychologically at a subthreshold level.

As Key (1989: 149) has recently put it: "Humans label consciously, but symbolic significance remains at an unconscious level." Cosmetic ads, for instance, "create archetypal genital symbolism, powerfully attractive both to men and to other women" (Key 1989: 149). The effectiveness of such symbolism, according to Key and other media psychologists, lies precisely in the fact that it works at an unconscious level. Indeed, when the underlying meaning structure is consciously recognized, subjects tend to become alarmed and even repulsed by the ad in question (Key 1949: 151-63).

Particularly relevant to the present discussion is the notion that archetypes unfold as stories or narratives in dreams and in our conceptualizations. The great contemporary psychologist Jerome Bruner (e.g., 1986, 1990) has been suggesting recently that the essence of mind is narrativity. For Bruner, literature and myth put on display our conceptions of ourselves and of the world which we inhabit. They reveal a form of thinking that gives pattern and continuity to human experience. Some recent work in developmental psychology has been showing that children develop concepts primarily through story formats. As Wells (1986: 194) has written, "constructing stories in the mind is one of the most fundamental means of making meaning; as such it is an activity that pervades all aspects of learning." Children seem to grasp new concepts only if these are presented to them in the form of narratives. Stories provide the intelligible formats that mobilize