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Greimassian Semantics and the Encyclopedia

Umberto Eco and Patrizia Magli

SEMANTICS, as the discipline that studies the articulation of content, has been examining the opposition between *dictionary* and *encyclopedia* for some years. The opposition had already been demonstrated, in different forms, in the framework of logic and the philosophy of language; the classical opposition between analytic and synthetic properties, or the opposition between elements of semantic knowledge and world knowledge, can be reduced to this opposition. It is found again in the same form in the *Rhétorique générale* of Groupe μ as the difference between Sigma mode (concepts) and Pi mode (referents) decomposition.¹ Other authors identify analytic properties with necessary properties (which, accordingly, remain intact in all possible worlds) and synthetic properties with factual and contingent properties. In this sense, to go back to Kant's celebrated example, a body will necessarily be extensive in all possible worlds, while it is able to not be heavy in fact (it would be able to not be so in cosmic space for example).

This distinction has formed the subject of numerous discussions.² At the outset it is generally considered that an analytic property relates to the organization of content, while a synthetic property concerns reference to the experience of the world; consequently, one is often led to believe that a horse is an "animal" by virtue of definition (which is true), but it is inferred that it is a quadruped in actual fact, as if the very characteristic of being quadruped did not depend upon an organization of culture, as if the classification "animal" did not imply perceptible properties.

Hjelmslev undoubtedly was the first to propose a dictionary semantics when he posed the problem of analyzing lexical units (which form unrestricted inventories) as "entities that enter restricted inventories."³ Hjelmslev thus inaugurated analysis of content in terms of semantic components or semes; the operation that he carried out in reducing a list of twenty lexical units to a combination of six "generic" components and two sexual semes (masculine and feminine), according to which, for example, /sheep/ is analyzed as "male ovine," is very well known. Hjelmslev is not very clear about the nature of these components and how he can guarantee the "restriction" of their in-

ventory. Anyhow, the principle has been set up. What is still in abeyance in Hjelmslev is the fact (which, moreover, constitutes a problem for any dictionary semiotics) that "male ovine" makes no distinction between a sheep and a mouflon. In fact, subdividing these "genres" into "differences" would test a naturalist's ingenuity; but after a brief check of the methods according to which the naturalist determines the differences, we shall see that even if he usually attributes a Latin name, and hence a very abstract semblance, to them, these differences are bundles of expressed "factual" properties definable on the basis of an experiencing of the object. Also set aside the fact that in itself "ovine" signifies nothing unless it is analyzed in turn by other semes, and these semes will seem very close to those Greimas calls figurative semes, derived from a world knowledge.

No matter how the theory of the dictionary is discussed in applicable theoretical terms, we notice that a semiotic thus constituted presents two fundamental difficulties: (a) It does not furnish definitions sufficient to show the functioning of a determined text (how it is produced and how it is interpreted). (b) There is no theoretical principle that allows defining if, how, and why the inventory of dictionary semes ought to be accomplished.

Josette Rey-Debove, in her analysis of definitions from dictionaries, demonstrated that the terms that appear to be the most basic (the verb "do" for example) are much more difficult to define (which implies recourse to other semes, to infinity) than terms that appear to be less simple, such as "infarctus."⁴ The attempt to define dictionary primitives as "object words," as Russell proposed,⁵ leads to the paradox of a system of dictionary semes that are all of the world-knowledge elements. Attempts to identify ideas of the Platonic type in the primitives result in the same difficulty as all the other research on primitives, Plato himself not having specified the number of his ideas or whether they ought to be determined at the entity level like "the Good," or even "mathematical entities."

Encyclopedia semantics is opposed to dictionary semantics. If in its simplest version it implies the introduction of "factual" properties alongside "semantic" properties,⁶ in its more sophisticated version it denies all difference between semantic, analytic, and conceptual properties on the one hand, and factual, synthetic, and referring properties on the other. Each property that componential analysis attributes to the content of a given linguistic term is a cultural product, and the dictionary or analytic properties that we are considering are none other than the recapitulative formulas that go back to synthetic properties.⁷

As we shall see further on, encyclopedia semantics takes into con-

sideration not only the properties—the components or the semes—but also the contextual schemas, or frames, or scripts. But the problem in such a semantics is that it cannot succeed in (on the contrary, it explicitly gives up) establishing the number of the components once and for all. As Eco recalls,⁸ in encyclopedia semantics the global semantic system continues to be a semiotic postulate that is analyzed, progressively, as a “local” or partial system at the time a given text is analyzed.⁹ All of the preceding is at the root of an interesting problem with regard to semantics that Greimas developed thirty years ago. Does Greimas’s semantics privilege dictionary representation or encyclopedia representation?

1. *The First Theory of the Sememe*

According to an examination of *Sémantique structurale*, it is evident that Greimas’s ideal is the dictionary in Hjelmslev’s sense. It seems that the celebrated example of the system of spatiality corresponds to a “strong” notion of dictionary: each component of the inferior node is the “species” whose “genus” is the component of the superior node, according to the classical model of the Porphyrian Tree.¹⁰ When the content of “head” is analyzed, one notices that it is decomposable into nuclear semes such as “extremity + superiority + verticality.” Nevertheless, a head has properties of extremity, superiority, and verticality in some contexts, while in others it has the semes extremity, anteriority, horizontality, and continuity.

Furthermore, although the analysis of “head” can be made starting from the “extremity” nucleus, it can just as well be made by starting from the “spheroidity” node. Are we still in a simple dictionary semantics? One of the ambitions of dictionary semantics is to furnish analyses of content that are antecedent to any context. In Greimas’s analysis, on the contrary, the possibility of different contexts is foreseen and described by the dictionary itself. In our opinion, when a dictionary is opened to the plurality of contexts (even if this plurality is “reduced” according to a very precise typology), it approximates the structure of the encyclopedia. In *Sémantique structurale*, the lexical signified already appears as a series of *instructions*, for use in different contexts. The semantic examination of the lexeme *head* has shown it to us provided with a relatively stable nucleus, that is, as a nuclear figure from which develop certain virtualities, certain sememic paths dependent upon its insertion in a context, upon its partial realization in the discourse.

The lexeme, therefore, is a virtual organization of semes, a set of possible discursive paths that can be constituted of sememes owing

only to the conjuncture with contextual semes, or classemes. In selecting a unique sense path, each realization leaves in abeyance a set of unexplored sememic virtualities, often vast but ready to be actualized. It is the presence of these underlying virtualities that produces, as the meaning-effect, the *density* or the *expansion* of the words. Though pure virtuality, the lexeme is presented as the product of history or usage rather than of structure. Therefore it undergoes the destiny of human vicissitudes, the linguistic habits of a society—in a word, encyclopedic transformations.

2. *Perception and Categorization: Semic Typology*

The sememe is not a simple collection of semes, the product of a pure combinatory of absences and presences: it is a syntactic organization of semes that are determined by interactive relations, articulated in hierarchies, and instituted in typologies. In finding classification criteria for categories that articulate the semantic universe coextensive with a culture or with an individual, Greimas appeals to a psychology of perception that makes the distinction between exteroceptive properties, insofar as they are dependent on the external world, and the interoceptive data that have no correspondence with it, because they are abstract, and he finishes among the proprioceptive elements, insofar as they are perceptions of the body itself perceived as reactive to the environment into which it is plunged. This typology will be extremely important, for it will constitute the fundamental basis of a typology of possible discourses, figurative or thematic, for example. The problem of the organization of content seems, therefore, to depend on the perceptive and phenomenological signified of figures of the world.

Greimas begins *Sémantique structurale* by affirming: "We . . . can only ask ourselves about the meaning of human activities and history."¹¹ It is, as a matter of fact, perceived differences that constitute articulations of the nuclear figures, as he tries to demonstrate with reference to the "proto-semanticism" of Guiraud, even risking introducing impurities of an extralinguistic nature into the purity of the theory: "Situated within the perception process, the semiological categories represent an external side, so to speak, the contribution of the outside world to the birth of meaning" (SS 65). This type of perception brings about a discrimination between the nuclear semes and the classemes, that is, between the nuclear semes that belong to the semiological level and the classemes that belong to the semantic level of language. And yet Greimas gives the impression of being a partisan of the dictionary when he defines the nuclear figure. "Somehow," he tells us, "one has

to abstract the nuclear figure from its organic milieu and consider it as a *pure percept*" (SS 64). The perception Greimas is talking about seems, therefore, to be constituted as a metahistorical fact and, in this sense, to give rise to interpretations of a phylogenetic order. Actually, for Greimas the semic categories and systems of the semiologic order are grasped at a level of perception comparable to the schematic visual perception of birds that makes it possible for them to recognize their friends or their enemies—for example, with regard to the oppositions: /long neck// short tail/, /short neck// long tail/.

You get the feeling that Greimas is wavering between the pole of the dictionary and the pole of the encyclopedia, without finding good reasons for making a definitive decision. The nuclear figures appear for extralinguistic reasons; still, they have to constitute an abstract articulation. They come from experience, from a primary experience of space, and not of the individual; and yet (perhaps even because of their primitive nature), he is trying to find a limited number of them.

3. *The Macrosemiotics of the Natural World*

It is interesting, nevertheless, to see how much Greimas insists, later on, on the source of these figures in a semiotics of the natural world. We shall try to demonstrate how this affirmation necessarily leads him to take an "encyclopedic" position and obliges him to think the representation of the competence of the encyclopedia in the "local" sense. The contribution of the exterior world to the birth of meaning then constitutes a veritable macrosemiotics alongside that of the natural languages. The nuclear figures of the lexematic unit seem to be drawn into the natural world. As a matter of fact, Greimas proposes to reserve the term *figurative* "only for those figures of the content that correspond to the figures of the expression plane of natural semiotics (or of the natural world)."¹² The nuclear figure that covers the figurative part of the sememe is a figure of the content, antecedent to any discursive manifestation; it depends on the "common semiotic stem" that can manifest itself in particular substances of the expression, as well as in somatico-gestural behavior, filmic or verbal discourse. Nevertheless, the figures manifest themselves through this perceptive residue that Greimas has introduced into the language in conformance with the phenomenological perspective of Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard: "Such a conception of the figure approaches it from *Gestalt*, from the Bachelardian theory of form and figure" (D 149).

The natural world is chiefly a figurative language whose figures, which constitute the *plane* of the content of the natural languages, are

made of sensible qualities of the world and act directly on man without the mediation of words: in fact, the correlation between the categorization of the natural languages and the natural world is not to be looked for in the direction of words and things, but at the deep level of signification. For Greimas, the world is already a biplanar language, a natural semiotics, like the natural languages to which it is differently connected.

Even if it is a set of sensible qualities, the natural world is in fact a discursive structure. Nature is not a neutral place; it is strongly relativized and culturalized within the relations between the subject and the object: "it is the utterance construed by the human subject and decodable by him" (*D* 233). Nevertheless, the natural world does not seem to cover the notion of encyclopedia, as global competence of a speaking subject, or of a community. As a matter of fact, it appears only as a manifestation of the percept modalized by the encyclopedia. The natural or commonsense world takes the form of the figurative horizon from which men draw what they need to build up their own inventories of forms and mobile figurations through an abstractive and simplifying operation, suitable for finding the *invariant* figure.

And we see the specters of the dictionary appearing again in an explicit reference to the universals of language, which are not very different from analytic properties—the constitutives of the nuclear figure, opposed to the synthetic properties represented by continual contextual readjustments of the classemes. And yet the substantial universals are explicitly rejected by this theory.¹³ Like the generativists who postulate the existence of formal universals, Greimas maintains, "The question of universals is presented then as a problem of *metalanguage*" (*D* 140).

Therefore, as the formal metalanguage, semiotic theory tries chiefly to formulate an axiomatics that is presented essentially as a typology of relations and a stock of formal definitions: the universals are none other than the typology of these formal relations, and of these logical operations, such as assertion and negation. Besides the universals that are proper to the semiotic theory, Greimas postulates ad hoc universals. Just as Jakobson introduced phonological universals, Greimas proposes to stimulate the operativity of the semantic component, considering the *life/death* and *culture/nature* categories as ad hoc universals, judging that they are fit to serve as the starting point for semantic universe analysis. In other words, together with the *life/death* category that characterizes the individual universe, Greimas adopts Lévi-Strauss's dichotomy in considering a priori the *nature/culture* opposition as the first elementary investment of the social semantic universe. So it is in this sense alone that this category is

capable of functioning as a universal: a universal that may be postulated only when one undertakes the analysis of a microuniverse.

4. *Semantic Microuniverses as "Local" Encyclopedias*

The semantic universe relating to a given socio-semiotic community is not really describable in its exhaustiveness, according to Greimas. The claim of the sixties to be able to describe—on the basis of some twenty binary semic categories (susceptible of producing infinite semic combinations)—the entire semantic universe coextensive with a natural language is no longer current today, declares Greimas in the *Dictionnaire* (D 327); but already, in *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*, he maintains: "It soon became necessary to yield to the evidence that the semantic universe covered by a natural language is coextensive with the culture of the speaking community and that if semantics is rigorously capable of giving an almost-satisfactory representation of modes of existence, articulation, and production of the forms of the signified, it can in no case lay claim to an exhaustive description of these forms organized into systems and constellations."

Consequently, given that the semantic universe is not describable in its totality, Greimas introduced the analysis of semantic microuniverses into semiotic practice, giving an indication of the modalities of partial encyclopedic representation that is not global but "local." It is actually a question of *idiolectal* universes insofar as they are the semantic organization of a determined dialogue and can be presented either as an abstract semantic structure or in the form of semiological *imagery* of the figurative order. It is a question of partial encyclopedias, even when you are dealing with specific sociolectal universes.

But Greimas goes farther. He subsequently limits the analysis of these "local" encyclopedias within the analysis of the texts in which several figurative values can be taken by virtue of their *recurrence in a closed text or owing to the recurrence of oppositions established by the subject of the enunciation*.¹⁴ Thus, in *Maupassant* Greimas attempts to furnish a model of description, as much of the author's idiolectal universe as of the sociolectal universe of his time and of their possible interactions. In the correlation of these models, through superpositions, compatibility, and incompatibility, Greimas identifies a figurative axiological structure that can be constituted either as the collective representation of individual values, in the case of a sociolectal universe, or as the personal organization of his system of individual values, in the case of an individual universe. The axiologization of this universe was enriched, later on, by the introduction of the thymic category. On the basis of the description of these modes of existence of the sociolectal

figurative structures, Greimas attempts to identify the working model of Maupassant's idiolectal universe. This universe accounts as well for his comprehensive articulation as it does for the rules of conversion that permit producing it from the sociolectal model. Greimas seems, then, to suggest a possible approach from the very definition of the concept of *semantic originality*, supposing an encyclopedic competence that can also account for these rhetorico-stylistic behaviors, capable of transforming an innocent promenade into a patriotic adventure.

5. *The Lexeme as Virtual Text*

Greimas seems to supply an extremely articulated description of the morphology and syntactic functioning of the encyclopedia. He takes this phenomenon to the "pure" state; he reconstructs a simulacrum of it at the level of semio-narrative syntax. This simulacrum seems to be capable of accounting for the form of organization of the cognitive universe. Greimas reconstructs the simulacrum of this encyclopedia within narrativity. Remember that narrativity for Greimas is the projection of the elementary articulations of the human imaginary.

An example of it is constituted by the actantial structures that could account for the organizations of collective universes and individual universes. The functions and the relations of the actants seem, in fact, general enough to produce the bases of a first articulation of the imaginary: these are the formal positions that could account for the instance and the generative paths of meaning. The actantial model seems, moreover, to introduce instances of the pragmatic order as well: they have to be considered as *forecasting models*, hypotheses presented under the form of logical articulations which, once projected into the text, augment its legibility.

But the actantial structures seem to animate the very heart of numerous local units such as the predicates */give/* and */receive/*, whose playing of actantial roles is not only very similar to Fillmore's case grammars but, in introducing a narrative instance within lexematic figures, reverses the traditional description of taxonomic and paradigmatic order into a syntagmatic and narrative description. This new mode of interpreting lexical analysis depends on Greimas's passage from semantics to semiotics. In this new perspective, Greimas declares in the *Dictionnaire* that semantics, besides being a *general theory of signification*, must be *generative and syntagmatic*, because it has to account not only for particular lexical units but for the production of discourse. Consequently, the passage from a paradigmatic theory to a syntagmatic instance has been determined by the fact that Greimas's theory is transformed progressively into a theory of discourse.

Within this vision the lexeme appears as a *virtual text*, as a sort of discursive condensation, while in its turn the text would be nothing other than the expansion of a lexeme: "It is notorious that lexemes, if they are made clear at all, are often presented as covering highly complex narrative and discursive structures. The existence within the utterance-discourse of expansions that reproduce the same structure in a more or less spread out and diffuse manner should not bother us . . . it is only a question of a difference in dimensions, and not in nature; the lexematic descriptions can constitute, in an economical way, models for forecasting further discursive analyses."¹⁵ The lexeme /fisherman/, for example, is an extremely condensed surface construction. It designates someone who has a competence for a particular doing that is open to expansion, and, if the narrative schema that concerns his competence as well as his doing—including the eventual narrative-use programs that make this doing actualizable—is made clear, extremely complex narrative sequences can be obtained. The /fisherman/ carries within himself all the possibilities of his doing, all that one can expect of him in regard to behavior. If the lexeme is a textual unit, its sense develops according to a conversion-oriented process, from the deepest levels to the surface narrative structure. Each sememic actualization is the evidence, the memory of its generative and transformative history.

This is the case with anger, for example. We know that anger is a passion, an anxious state, but it is chiefly a lexical unit. Greimas begins this lexical analysis with the definition given in the dictionary, in order to decompose it afterwards, to break it into other definitions given by the dictionary, which in their turn, in a dizzying, but lucid and controlled, play of mirrors, refer to other entries. In this analysis Greimas proceeds chiefly by the elaboration of an inventory of elements constitutive of anger, that is, lexical definitions taken from the dictionary; then he decomposes the inventoried elements and analyzes them in their narrative programs.

But Greimas's main concern in this lexical analysis is to show the parallelism between the unfolding of the passional sequence and the fundamental articulations of the narrative schema. Anger is therefore a vast discursive configuration that condenses an articulated text into three basic narrative programs. If the study of anger seems to get lost in the investigation of different syntagmatic forms of passional states that appear to have a certain family resemblance with anger, it is because of a double objective: to be able to inscribe anger in a paradigm of analogous forms and to be able, besides, to develop the discourse on anger even to its extreme consequences, to follow it into the labyrinth of a figurative path that goes from "contained anger" to

furious anger, which is constituted in turn as the inchoative moment of the narrative program of *vengeance*. In this sense, Greimas says, to develop the discourse on anger "could then serve as the backdrop for a better understanding of the disturbing phenomenon of anger" (*DS* 245).

But what is interesting to observe is how Greimas utilizes the dictionary in his lexical analyses. Let us take "the challenge" as an example. "Intuitively and spontaneously," he defines the challenge as "moral constraint."¹⁶ This definition is not confirmed by the dictionaries, for which the challenge is a "provocative declaration by which one signifies to someone that one considers him to be incapable of doing a thing."¹⁷ The dictionary regards the challenge as a *simple statement*, without considering the modal nature of the two subjects concerned or that of the specific bond that this declaration establishes between them: in a word, without distinguishing between the aspects of "doing" and "saying." Greimas goes on to the explication of the "provocative" concept of the declaration, and on this basis the challenge appears chiefly as "the act of inciting someone to do something," in which the predicate */incite/*, with all its figurative parasyonyms, appears as the discursive lexicalization of the same activity.

With the play of reference from one dictionary definition to another, Greimas seems to "challenge" the dictionary itself. And just as he has demonstrated that */anger/* is not a simple "violent discontent accompanied by aggressiveness," as the dictionary would have it, but a discursive configuration—better, a discourse—he demonstrates analogously how */challenge/*, an apparently dated term, put to the test by all of the abrasions of the meaning, is, on the contrary, more alive than ever in the stadiums where national honor is at stake, in the daily interactions in which "losing face" is risked to the point of making Cornelian heroes and Charlemagne's peers appear quite commonplace.

6. *An Encyclopedialike Dictionary: Greimassian Frames*

In addition to the description of lexical units, not only in the form of instructions for contextual insertion but also as virtual texts, Greimas's encyclopedia semantics, with the notion of *discursive configuration* and *motif*, seems to introduce notions very similar to those of the "frames" in use in artificial intelligence research. Research in lexical fields, according to Greimas, has revealed the potential burden of lexematic figures that are objects closed in on themselves but that continually spin out their sememic paths, meeting and crossing other similar figures, and constituting figurative constellations equipped

with appropriate organizations. The lexematic figures, therefore, being arranged along entire sequences, being formed into *discursive configurations*, transcend the utterances in which they manifest themselves and constitute a relational network.

In *Maupassant* Greimas defined *discursive configuration* as a "cohabitation" of two lexemes—for example, /sewer/ and /rats/. This is a "cohabitation that relies on *usage* and not on linguistic—and thereby probabilistic—structure constitutive of stereotypes."¹⁸ Discursive configurations are not dependent on usage alone (and not on structure) but are constituted as "narrative" stereotypes in circulation in the sociolectal encyclopedias. They appear, in fact, as *mininarratives* [*micro-récits*] of a sort, possessing an autonomous syntactic and semantic organization. For Greimas the problematic of these configurations is bound to that of *motifs*, theorized even by folklore and by art history, which are presented as trans-sentential [*transphrastique*] figurative units made up of fixed blocks, a kind of invariant able to migrate either from one *récit* to another or from one cultural area to another without undergoing variation in spite of contexts. Greimas is just wishing for a kind of encyclopedic representation integrated by elements of overcoding over the register of motifs.¹⁹ This representation is so similar to the concept of *frame* that Greimas claims the discursive configurations (that is, the motifs) could be inventoried as stereotypes representing canonical structures whose typology could be tested and so constitute a sort of *Discursive Dictionary*.

Greimas envisages two types of dictionary, both of which seem to respond point by point to questions posed by an encyclopedia semantics:

Sentential [*Phrastique*] *dictionary*: This concerns a list of lexematic figures, each comprising the enumeration of sememic possibilities of contextualization. (The encyclopedia must in fact provide for lexical significations in the form of instruction for contextual insertion.)

Discursive dictionary: By analogy, Greimas says, it is legitimate to postulate a discursive dictionary as a stock of themes and motifs, constructed by and for the *use* of the participants of a given cultural universe. (The encyclopedia must in fact register these uses in the form of frames.)

The integration proposed by the Entrevernes group should be mentioned in connection with this encyclopedialike dictionary. Each text, they say, draws lexematic figures from the language and tests figurative paths already realized in other texts. It can, however, explore others, yet unknown, that come to enrich the discursive configuration; in this way, registering the new path of possible intertextual frames of a lexematic figure as well, the encyclopedia is enriched with

new possibilities. The text follows certain paths and refers others to the discursive dictionary, which then plays the role of an immense repository of *cultural memory*.²⁰

7. *The Encyclopedia and Conjecture*

If semantic competence is structured as an encyclopedia, then the encyclopedia is not a code in the sense that it is not an algorithm that allows the quasi-automatic disambiguation of contexts. The encyclopedia is a space open to interpretive decisions and therefore the place in which a conjectural activity is articulated. In other theoretical contexts we thought we saw a logic of hypothesis or of abduction, in Peirce's sense, as consubstantial with each encyclopedia semantics. We think that this conjectural moment is present in Greimas's own thought and that it has even become more and more evident in the course of the same process of thought that led Greimas from *Sémantique structurale* to *Du sens II*.

We should like to put into evidence a very revealing passage taken from *Du sens II*: "Recognizing, on the occasion of the analysis of a short story by Maupassant, the considerable difficulties that the interpretation of figurative discourse encounters when it does not happen to satisfy the semantic data contained in the manifested discourse itself, we have been led to propose a complementary procedure of reading, consisting in confronting the received message with the addressee's *referential universe of knowing*. Whether this procedure is called reading, decoding, or deciphering matters little: it is always a question of the same phenomenon of integration of the unknown into the known, of the authentication of the first by the second. This universe of knowing was designated by some, rather quickly, as an encyclopedia" (DS 124).

It is true that Greimas critiques the notion of encyclopedia as vague immediately after that, because the encyclopedia is characterized "by the absence of any intrinsic order." We do not agree with that assertion, at least in the sense that in semiotics it has also been given a definition of "structured encyclopedia." But clearly the fact that there was structure does not imply that there was univocal order. Just as a railway system is structured in a rigid manner while authorizing different routes, an encyclopedic knowledge can be structured and nonetheless oblige the one who consults it to elaborate conjectures about the best route. Consequently, it seems to us that what we shall call the Greimassian encyclopedia does not present itself only as a universe of images of the world, or as the set of possible destinies of a lexical unit, or even as a repository of a collective memory, but also

as a *dynamic system* of syntactic and formal relations that articulates the cognitive competence of the subjects in a communication situation.

As a matter of fact, these subjects are not neutral instances but, on the contrary, competent and differently modalized subjects. The polemic and contractual confrontation, considered by Greimas as one of the fundamental structures of one narrative schema, is transferred and installed at the very heart of the intersubjective relation, where it seems to be able to account for the uncanny character of communication. The problem of the effectiveness of communication is much more important for Greimas than "well-formed" sentences. Communication supposes a doing-to-know and a doing of interpretation. It follows that in interpretation procedures the portion of the referential universe of the knowing that allows him to recognize the truth of the proposed utterance is brought into action by the receiver. "Interpretation," Greimas claims, "is *recognition* and identification" (DS 119).

This is an operation of comparison between what is produced and what one believed or already knew. It is a question of a cognitive anaphora that preserves a whole discursive past as internal referent. The epistemic act, then, is presented as the control of these adequation procedures from the new and unknown to the old and known.

To return to *Du sens II*: "This universe is not some sort of encyclopedia filled with images of the world, but a system of formal semiotic relations among which the epistemic subject chooses the equivalences he needs in order to receive veridictory discourse" (DS 133). It is in the convalidation activity of these relations that the subject's epistemic activity is defined, still more so if its conception occurs metaphorically as "intimate and total adhesion." The cognitive universe, considered as a repository of approved and confirmed forms of organization, is relativized not only with collective universes characterized by different types of mentality, thought, and belief, but also with individual universes considered from the same standpoint as the preceding, while being assumed by each individual and submitted to more or less aberrant deformations.

It is not the particular substance of the content that designates the cognitive relation, it is the form of this content. Only examination of the *forms* or organization of the cognitive universe can teach us about the nature of the epistemic act. The forms of organization of the cognitive universe prove to correspond to distinct types of rationality, such as paradigmatic, causal rationality, or even mythic rationality. Within these formal loci, Greimas identifies articulations belonging to logic and fiduciary relations. It is on account of the latter that Greimas resolutely introduces into his theory an instance peculiar to the prag-

matics of communication. The interpretive activity of a subject is not, indeed, a cognitive activity conditioned solely by restrictions due to his encyclopedic competence. The one who interprets is an *unquiet subject*, plunged into the intersubjective relation.

His cognitive and pragmatic competence must not be considered only as a *taxonomic type morphology* of all significant articulations, but also as the *use* an individual can make of these articulations. Encyclopedic competence must be considered.²¹ For Greimas, cognitive *adequation* has a process that seems to reflect the very course of communication. Far from proceeding by categorical disjunctions, alternative hypotheses, it manifests, on the contrary, a character of gradualness. Thus, just as communication is often the locus of two sometimes contradictory *doings*, and therefore the locus of conflict where victories, challenges, and compromises alternate in an analogous manner, cognitive adequation is realized (occurs) through passages, mediations that go from refusal to acceptance, from affirmation to doubt.

It seems to us nonetheless that this interpretive doing remains limited to the epistemic activity of the subject, in the sense in which it seems to be carried on essentially in the renewal of an utterance proposed to a cognitive universe of reference, thus re-cognizing [*re-connaissant*] it as veracious. It is a question of a passage, not from a not-knowing to a form of knowing but from an erroneous knowing to a true knowing. In this case, the epiphany of a new cognition [*connaissance*] does not seem to be verified at all; it is a question rather of a re-cognition. But we know well that the encyclopedia is presented as a vast backdrop both for these conjectural movements and for the cognitive activity that is carried on not only in re-cognition but also in abduction, that is, in the abstraction of new cognitions in solitary confinement.

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(Translated by Alice Otis)

NOTES

1 See Group μ [Jacques Dubois et al.], *Rhetorique générale* (Paris, 1970); in English as *A General Rhetoric*, tr. Paul B. Burrell and Edgar M. Slotkin (Baltimore, 1981).—Tr.

2 See, e.g., Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader* (Bloomington, Ind., 1979); and "Dictionary vs. Encyclopedia," ch. 2 of *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Bloomington, Ind., 1984), pp. 46–86.

3 Louis Hjelmslev, *Omkring sprogteoriens grundlæggelse* (Copenhagen, 1943); in English as *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, tr. Francis J. Whitfield (Madison, Wisc., 1961).

4 Josette Rey-Debove, *Étude linguistique et sémiotique des dictionnaires français contemporains* (Paris, 1971).

- 5 Bertrand Russell, "The Object-Language," in *An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth* (London, 1950), pp. 62-77.
- 6 See, e.g., Hilary Putnam, *Mind, Language and Reality* (London, 1975).
- 7 See W. V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *Philosophical Review*, 60 (1951), 20-43. See also, F. Neubauer and János S. Petöfi, "Word Semantics, Lexicon Systems, and Text Interpretation," in *Words, Worlds, and Contexts*, ed. Hans-Jürgen Eikmeyer and Hannes Rieser (Berlin, 1981), pp. 133-50.
- 8 Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, Ind., 1976).
- 9 For an analysis of the local/global opposition, see Jean Petitot, "Locale: globale," *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin, 1979).
- 10 Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 46-86.
- 11 Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Sémantique structurale: Recherche de méthode* (Paris, 1966), p. 5; hereafter cited in text as SS. Here and elsewhere, unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.—Tr.
- 12 Algirdas Julien Greimas and Joseph Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* (Paris, 1979), p. 149; hereafter cited in text as D.
- 13 See the entry "Universals" in Greimas and Courtés, *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*.
- 14 See Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Maupassant: la sémiotique du texte* (Paris, 1976), p. 140.
- 15 Algirdas Julien Greimas, *Du sens II: Essais sémiotiques* (Paris, 1983), p. 225; hereafter cited in text as DS.
- 16 Cf. DS, p. 213 ff.
- 17 See "défi," *Le Petit Robert* (Paris, 1979).
- 18 Cf. *Maupassant*, p. 33.
- 19 For a discussion of overcoding, see Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics*.
- 20 See Groupe d'Entrevernes, *Analyse sémiotique des textes: Introduction, théorie, pratique* (Lyon, 1979), pp. 96-97.
- 21 See Greimas, *Sémiotique et sciences sociales*, p. 74.