

Relationalism: From Greimas to hyperstructuralism

Franciscu Sedda

Department of Philology, Literature and Linguistics, University of Cagliari
via San Giorgio 12, Cagliari 09124, Sardinia, Italy
e-mail: fsedda@unica.it

Abstract. The emergence of New Realism in philosophy and the Ontological Turn in anthropology testify to the increasing attention paid in the human sciences to the topic of ‘reality’. The aim of this essay is to reread and translate Greimas’ proposal of a *semiotic of the natural world*, so as to suggest how his concepts might contribute to the contemporary intellectual debate. From a discussion of Greimas’ attempt to solve the problem of the relation between ‘language’ and ‘world’ in *nonreferentialist* terms, the essay will then move to identify the four forms of correlation that constitute natures and worlds, objects and subjects. In bringing his argument to the extreme consequences, I will call for a reevaluation of structuralism, and propose to distinguish ‘reality’ from ‘the real’. Both hypotheses rest on the idea that *relations* are the matter we are made of.

Keywords: semiotics; language; correlations; ontologies; realism; relations

1. Introduction

Over the past few years new attention has been devoted in the human sciences to the theme of “reality”. The emergence of *New Realism* in philosophy and the *Ontological Turn* in anthropology are among the best examples of this trend. And yet, setting aside their overlappings and internal nuances, philosophy and anthropology appear to have been moving in opposite directions. Philosophical realism points more radically toward a unified nature and an unamendable reality.¹ In contrast, the ontological turn in anthropology tends to fragment the idea of a unified reality and nature, to the extent that it maintains the existence of multiple ontologies, worlds, and natures.² The two positions thus also engender different ideas concerning the foundations of truth.

¹ See Ferraris 2012; De Caro, Ferraris 2012. Umberto Eco’s (1997, 2012) “negative realism” also plays an important role in this current. I have offered a reading of the many forms of realism in the semiotics of Eco in Sedda 2013.

² For a short introduction to the debate on the ontological turn, see Viveiros de Castro 1998, 2009, 2015; Sedda, Padoan in print, as well as Holbraad, Martin; Pedersen, Morten A.;

According to us, this intellectual turmoil underscores the timeliness of the work and thought of Algirdas J. Greimas. Specifically, his 1968 essay entitled “Toward a semiotics of the natural world” is an attempt to solve the problem of the relation between ‘language’ and ‘world’ in *non-referentialist* terms.³ At the core of the attempt was indeed the idea of a ‘natural world’, intended as the macrosemiotic that exists in a *translational correlation* with the macrosemiotic of ‘natural language’. It is no coincidence, then, that in developing his theory Greimas rested on the nascent semiotics of culture of Juri Lotman, who in the same years was repositioning semiotics as a *science of correlations* in its own right (see Ivanov *et al.* 1973).

Greimas was thus laying down the foundations of thinking of ‘reality’ in a semiotic key. Building on these foundations, the present essay suggests the possibility to grasp in a more profound way the *forms* of that *texture of translational correlations* that constitute natures, worlds, and subjects. In bringing this hypothesis to its extreme consequences, it will also become clear how such texture unites, as well as distinguishes between, ‘reality’ and the ‘real’.

What can be recalled in way of caution when putting forth these working hypotheses, is Greimas’ assertion that the study *of meaning* cannot but take the form of the object it studies, that is a constant activity of translation based in turn on an *unavoidable series of misunderstandings* (Greimas 1987).

Lastly, a return to Greimas’ work on *the semiotics of the natural world* is perhaps the best way to celebrate the centennial of his birth. In showing the width and depth of his semiotic outlook that could foresee the future by offering tools for understanding and analysing the present, such a return is perhaps also a good way to *translate* semiotics again and bring it to bear on some trenchant debates of today. In this sense, my imperfect translation of Greimas’ thought is aimed at correlating philosophical, anthropological, linguistic, and scientific points of view so as to define a semiotic position: a form of *hyperstructuralism* that I will call *relationalism*⁴.

Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo 2014. The politics of ontology: Anthropological positions. Cultural Anthropology website, <http://culanth.org/fieldsights/462-the-politics-of-ontology-anthropological-positions>. See also Jensen, Casper B. 2016. New ontologies? Reflections on some recent “turns” in STS, anthropology and philosophy. (Manuscript, available at <https://www.academia.edu/25710614/>.)

³ The essay “*Conditions d’une sémiotique du monde naturel*” was originally published in Volume 10 of *Langage* (June 1968) entitled “*Pratiques et langages gestuelle*”. It has been published in translation in Greimas 1987[1970].

⁴ The term ‘relationalism’ appears in Latour 1991, and is often associated with him. However, it does not appear in his latest works: see Latour 2013, 2015.

2. Translating the natural world

2.1. Semiotics, languages, and worlds

In his 1968 essay entitled “Towards a semiotics of the natural world”, as he engaged the nascent *structural* and *cultural semiotics* in a mutual dialogue, Greimas faced the question of the foundation of the real – and of the reference to reality – by coining the concept of the ‘natural world’.

Now, in reclaiming and updating the concept one must begin from the way in which it runs parallel with its mother idea, that of ‘natural language’. The concept of ‘natural world’ is in fact a double of and kindred to the concept of ‘natural language’. The parallel, at once expressive and semantic, enables one to make certain fruitful deductions right at the outset, without immediately engaging with the semiotic subtleties of Greimas’ reasoning:

(1) As it also occurs with ‘natural language’, when referring to the ‘natural world’ the adjective ‘natural’ should not be trusted immediately. As *language* is a human, historical, and cultural product, so *the world* to which we refer when speaking should also be understood thus. In this sense, it may be said that there is nothing natural either in the *natural language* or in the *natural world* except the constant process of naturalization – embodiment and objectification – realized in the domain of each individual language and each individual world.

(2) As there are many natural languages, it is also safe to assume that there are many natural worlds, although one must not necessarily posit the idea that to each single natural language there is a corresponding single natural world and vice versa.

(3) Like languages, these worlds are (and function like) semiotic forms.

(4) As in case with languages, the communication between these worlds depends on their *partial and imperfect (un)translatability*.

(5) Just like a language, which is constituted by a plane of expression and a plane of content, a natural world also has a plane of expression and a plane of content.

(6) Like each language, that generates the effect of its own *internal reference* – the plane of expression that refers to its own articulation in content – each natural world generates its own reference, its own *effect of (instauration of) the real*.

(7) Similarly to languages, which (i) *overlap* within a given cultural space; (ii) *become modified* in mutual contact; (iii) *cohabit* and *share* multiple roles and circumstances; (iv) *become mutually stratified* in hierarchies; and (v) enter in *conflict* with or *interfere* in the practice of a single speaker, it can be assumed that the same holds true for natural worlds.

(8) Last, similarly to a language, which constitutes the world from its own internal point of view, while simultaneously being only one of its parts, from the point of view of the world, the natural world should be understood in its own basic *doubling*. If the

world, glimpsed *from within* a collectively given, is posited as ‘the real’, that is, a level of signifying reality that is so fundamental as to appear as given, external, or even extrasemiotic when seen *from an external point of view* – which becomes realized in the point of view of a certain alterity (another culture, the anthropological-semiotic gaze) – ‘the real’ comes down to being the network of correlations between the two macrosemiotics of the natural language and of the natural world, or, more in general, the correlation of (at least) two “realities”,⁵ which take up the function of a macro-semiotics in explicit position and of a macro-semiotics in implicit position.

2.2. Multiplying worlds

In consciously departing from the simple equivalence that Greimas puts forth when he creates the concept of ‘natural world’ using the pattern of the term ‘natural language’, the foregoing assertions already carry along interesting consequences. The most obvious consequence is that the assertions enable one to make explicit the *plurality of worlds* that is embryonic, as it were, in Greimas. True, Greimas had a general theoretical line that talks about the correlation between the “natural language” and the “natural world” in the singular, and true, his essay appears to confine itself to neutralizing the philosophical question concerning the unity or multiplicity of nature. Nevertheless, the parallel he proposes, that the present essay has attempted to put to work, conveys a position that thrusts open the door into the idea of a plurality of worlds and natures.

Yet there is more to come. On a closer reading of Greimas’ essay on the natural world it emerges that he offers a glimpse into the same insight when he says that

The interpretation of this type of civilization, which thinks of the natural world as the only level of reality but organized according to the syntactic laws of discourse, is opposed by other interpretations of natural signs that, in positing a second level of natural reality, a deeper level so to speak, interpret the sign as a reference to this second-order reality, and at the same time attribute a variable structure of metaphor, metonymy, or antiphrasis (i.e., a paradigmatic or systematic order) to this relation. (Greimas 1987[1970]: 21)

It becomes clear that, without necessarily shifting onto a philosophical terrain, a single reference to the typologies of cultures and to the work of Lotman (Greimas 1987[1970]: 21) is sufficient for Greimas to begin the multiplication of realities, and to catch in the midst of the multiplicity both the trend toward *dualism* that would be critiqued by

⁵ On the doubling of reality, but with differences that cannot be analysed here, see Lotman 1993: 37–38.

Latour (1991) and Descola (2005), as well as other forms of structuring reality such as *monism*.⁶

It is true, however, that in Greimas such a multiplicity of realities seems to offer itself in strata, leaving the impression that it is still only a matter of increasingly deeper layers within a single nature.

To understand such a complex mechanism, one could take into consideration the very definition of ‘natural world’ provided by Greimas and Courtés in their *Dictionary of Semiotics*. In fact, ‘the world’ emerges in the *Dictionary* as a plane of the content of language. At the same time, it is in itself a plane of expression correlated with a structure of content “of an order that is physical, chemical, biological, etc.” (Greimas, Courtés 1979: 205). The plane of content of the world thus presents itself as stratified (or stratifiable) on more levels, which can be thought of as *semiotic isotopies*, namely homogeneous *reality fields*.

However, these homogeneous reality fields are not only constituted from certain points of view, but also intersect, and, even more importantly, leave room to peculiar forms of indeterminacy that are condensed, marvellously and unconsciously, in the expression “etc.”. Thus, the *et ceteras of the universe*, as they were named elsewhere (Sedda 2012b) represent the reality that escapes from our grasp and that constantly reproduces itself in its absence; at the same time, it is the real that produces itself in excess, by the contradictory superimposition and correlation of various reality fields.

If the foregoing hypotheses are well founded, the natural world must be grasped in mutual relation with its *internal and external plurality*. And it must be grasped with the *contradictory nature* that inhabits it and runs through it.

3. Lost and found (natural) worlds

3.1. Common sense, sensible world, substance: perspectival equivalents

What, then, is the ‘natural world’? Again, prior to descending into semiotic details, it is necessary to grasp sense as it emerges from Greimas’ text. In fact, the ‘natural world’ takes its meaning from its equivalents: ‘common sense’, ‘sensible world’, and ‘substance’.

It is clearly a matter of imperfect equivalences. And yet, such equivalences are permeated by interesting possibilities. First, in their mutual translatability they allow the perception of a common ground between semiotics, linguistics, anthropology, and philosophy. Second, the plane of commonality that runs through the different terms cannot avoid highlighting their partial lack of translatability. Or, put another way, they cannot avoid highlighting the excess of sense that they produce together. Section 6

⁶ For an in-depth study of these themes see Sedda, Padoan in print.

below will show how this line of thought is germane to the argument that this essay intends to put forth.

The second point that can be noticed immediately is that while Greimas' other examples move from natural language towards the natural world, in accordance with his linguistic approach, a general epistemological approach must necessarily "reverse the point of view" (Greimas 1987[1970]: 49). From the viewpoint of the world it is unavoidable to ascertain that the natural world is already permeated with signification; and that signification manifests itself through *the substance* that "envelops man", and which, for him, becomes *common sense*.

It could be said that what is at work here is a perspectivism entirely internal to the reflective relation of the human, who is immersed in the world, with his or her own world: what is the sensible world to an objectifying gaze is common sense from a subjectivizing point of view. In paraphrasing the example that Viveiros de Castro offers concerning the multinaturalism intrinsic to Amerindian thinking, one could say that *where the naturalist-scientist sees the sensible world, the culturalist-anthropologist sees common sense*.

If one deprived such perspectives from any reflexive aspect, any doubting posture, or any critical distance – as is true for any of us in most moments of that chain of actions and passions we call 'life' – what remains would be the fact of being face to face with nature or reality. Or, put more clearly, before *a nature* or *a reality*.

What remains for the semiologist to accomplish, then, is to begin to disentangle from such a positive givenness of substance, from a substance which is either sensible world or common sense, *the forms* that constitute that substance, making it meaningful, and which make matter saturated with a *sense* that tends to *self-evidence*, a sense that contains its own profundities as well as its own plurality.

It is in this context that Greimas, with an axiomatic gesture, chooses the two main forms through which it is possible to make substance speak: natural language and natural world, intended as two *macrosemiotics*, that is, two signifying realities in mutual correlation. Others in semiotics, for example Lotman (1992), will speak of two primary modelling systems, 'language' and 'space'. Yet even earlier, Lotman and Uspenskij (1978[1973]), following Lévi-Strauss (1958), employed the classic dyad 'language' and 'culture' that would later resurface for instance in linguistic anthropologists such as Michael Silverstein (2004). In philosophy, Merleau-Ponty (1964) would speak of 'visible' and 'invisible', or the chiasm between 'sensible' and 'intelligible', while Deleuze (1986), in rereading Foucault, would elect the fundamental correlation as that between the 'enunciable' and the 'visible'.

The fascination with primacy – the element that deserves to be viewed as equal to language (is it culture, natural world, space, the sensible, the visible?) – leads one to lose sight of the true point of the question: the *primacy of the relation*, and of the placement

in correlation, between (at least) two semiotics as the foundation of signification. But the fascination with primacy also conceals the fact that duality is already a plural opened onto the potential explosion and exploration of the texture of correlations among semiotics that inhabit and produce the substances of the world.

3.2. Necessary forgetfulness

A demonstration of such a forgetfulness of the relation can be recovered in the very essay by Greimas. At the beginning of his work the author in fact invites the reader

[...] to postulate the existence and the possibility of a *semiotics of the natural world* and to think of the relation between (“natural”) signs and linguistic systems, on the one hand, and signs and systems of signification of the natural world, on the other, not as reference stemming from the symbolic to the natural, from the variable to the invariable, but as a *network of correlations between two levels of signifying reality*. (Greimas 1987[1970]: 19)

In this sense, Greimas demands that his reader step into the space of the correlation. In the example that follows this passage, however, he reinstates the primacy of the natural language over the natural world.

Beyond any logical justification, methodological prudence, expositional requirement, and epistemological humility, it is possible to see here the effects of that “necessary illusion” that would soon constitute one of the centres of Roy Wagner’s *The Invention of Culture* (1975), a work in anthropological epistemology that, despite Peirce’s semiotics being its point of departure, would reach nonreferentialist positions.

According to Wagner, in the constant work of the invention of culture man cannot but posit two worlds, two levels of reality, acting against each other and in mutual control. These two dimensions generally assume the semblance, and the sense, of the ‘innate’ and of the ‘conventional’. Both dimensions are actually products of semiotic operations (understood here as operations that are more general than those exemplified, for convenience, by natural language), which can function only thanks to a necessary illusion: a partial blindness that, by limiting the vision of the inventor concerning his very own invention, allows that which is prompted as a symbol (that is to say, a ‘conventional sign’ in the Peircean sense) to refer to reality, where, on the contrary, “our symbols do not relate to an external ‘reality’ at all; at most they refer to other symbolizations, which we perceive as reality” (Wagner 1975: 42).

In other words, Wagner’s reasoning, which cannot be followed here in its most interesting details, makes it possible to notice a consonance, if not a true homology, between structuralist semiotic thought and anthropological thought in the United States in the 1960–70s. In fact, it is Greimas who offers themes and triggers to reformulate

the correlation between natural language and natural world as an opposition between *explicit semioticity* (perceived as conventional reality) and *implicit semioticity* (not perceived and therefore reduced to the rank of innate reality).

Put another way, the immanent correlations between natural language and world could be said to convert into oppositions between the explicit and the implicit on the level of manifest perception, just like the innate and the conventional that we perceive on the surface of our worlds are nothing but the effect of a correlation that is as profound as it is fundamental. It is a correlation that unfolds in Greimas *between languages*, which are ‘macrosemiotics’, just like it unfolds in Wagner *between contexts*, which are ‘relational structures’.

For this reason, even in the works that postulate such a mechanism in an explicit manner, it is difficult not to crush one of the two semiotics into the position of the implicit, in this way risking to charge it with a sense of naturalness that eventually conceals not only its semioticity but also the more general mechanism of correlation (with the other semiotics), which is at the foundation of the very constitution of the real. For this reason, both Greimas, who in a more abstract way refers to typologies of cultures, as well as Wagner, who in a more concrete way notices the inversion of polarities between the innate and the conventional in the culture of the United States and in that of the Daribi, will resort to cultural comparison so as not to remain victims of the mechanism whose workings they are struggling to unravel.

4. Correlations

4.1. Forms of the correlation

Having observed the elusive depth of the mechanism discussed above, it is now possible to notice that Greimas offers at least *four modes of correlation* between natural language and natural world.

The first is that which leads the object-phenomenon-occurrence – *that specific table* – to its transformation into a “figure of the world” through a double reduction that, by identifying certain traits and intertwining equivalences with “other figures obtained in the same way”, transforms it into the “invariant table”, as Greimas says.

A level of *figures* of the world, part of a finite inventory and giving a first idea of what the signifying world considered as a form and not substance could be, therefore will have been substituted for the evenemential and accidental world of *objects*. (Greimas 1987[1970]: 21–22)

This reasoning is very similar to that which Lotman and Uspenskij would conduct some years later when they would define language as a “diecasting mechanism”: a stereotyping

device that allows the passage from the “open” world of *realia* to the “closed” world of names (Lotman, Uspenskij 1978[1973]: 213).

On this level, Greimas offers a way to think about a mechanism that translates phenomenical multiplicity into a closed universe, one in which, however, correlation occurs between *isolated phenomena-occurrences* that shape *type-figures as much isolated*.

The second mode of correlation occurs in the form of category correlation: *objects are to nouns what processes are to verbs*. The objective world, that is, common sense, “made up of mobile and immobile objects” (Greimas 1987[1970]: 20), can become correlated and therefore assume semiotic form by being structurally associated with the noun-verb linguistic category. Wherever one wishes to posit the principle that engenders the movement of correlation – in the world that motivates language or in the language through which categories articulate the world – that which remains, Greimas says at last as he engages with Foucault’s *The Order of Things*, is the possibility “to establish equivalences between words and things, between processes and functions” (Greimas 1987[1970]: 20).

The third type of correlation is that which, having seen in the natural language and in the natural world languages constituted by a plane of expression and by a plane of content, postulates correlation in the *superimposition between the plane of the content of language and the plane of the expression of the world*. In other words, categories such as ‘tall’ vs ‘short’, ‘straight’ vs ‘curved’, ‘convex’ vs ‘concave’, which we are accustomed to recognize as categories proper to the *form of expression* of the natural world, “are obviously found as such when one describes the *form of the content* of natural languages” (Greimas 1987[1970]: 22). The implication here is that there is a level of correlation that goes far beyond the relation between words and things and, more important, which verifies the fact that “the sensible world is immediately present even in linguistic form and partakes in its constitution” (Greimas 1987[1970]: 22; see also Fabbri 1990).

The fourth and last type of correlation, from the point of view of the present essay, is implicated in the definition that is central to Greimas’ essay as a whole

To do so all we have to do is to consider the extralinguistic world as no longer being the absolute referent, but as the place where what is manifested through the senses can become the *manifestation* of human meaning, that is to say, of signification. In short, all we have to do is consider the referent as a set of more or less implicit semiotic systems. (Greimas 1987[1970]: 19)

It can be seen that the correlation is not simply between natural language and the natural world, but in a more abstract manner between an *explicit semiotics* and a *plurality of implicit semiotics*, which offer themselves to the former as the ‘referent’, as that to which the explicit semiotics *makes reference*. It is thus not a relation between single objects and single figures, or between single categories, nor one between two forms (of

expression and content) that mutually overlap: it is a correlation between *a form (that is apparently) singular* and *another form that is in reality a multiplicity of forms*. Hence, the way is open to a reformulation.

4.2. Overturning the point of view

If, having reached this point, one could engage the complex task of overturning the point of view, just as Greimas himself set out to do in his essay, and thus begin to unravel forms beginning from substance, one would be able to see how the world, in its *movement of self-constitution*, assimilates the natural language. One would also be able to see how semiotics in the explicit position can be assimilated by any semiotics (Sedda 2010). In more general terms, one could see how substance vibrates thanks to the presence of *series of relations in correlation* (Sedda 2003, 2012a, 2015). Such series of relations in correlation constitute substance to the extent that they made its signs appear as objects existing in direct correlation with words: to a similar extent as when it seems that “the object table has [the word] ‘table’ as content” (Greimas 1987 [1970]: 20) or when two sign-objects such as ‘cloud’ and ‘rain’ seem to refer to each other by power of a purely exterior causality, to the degree that sign-objects can be regarded as ‘natural-signs’ (Greimas 1987[1970]: 20).

In summary, if one can state imperiously and realistically “the table is the table!”, it is only because the complex and heterogeneous play of the forms of correlation has already produced its effect – the institution of the real beginning from a reality that cannot cease to exceed it – to such an extent as to bring about a *tautological correlation* or a *symbol that only stands for itself*. It is a paradox magnifically condensed by the imperative statement “Facts are facts!”, which, from being viewed as the manifesto of a naive realism, can be overturned and become an emblem of the semiolinguistic subtleties that preside over the institution of the real and its factuality.⁷

Regrettably, it is not possible to engage here in a conversation with the several studies in Semiotics of Culture or in Cultural Anthropology that might account for such a dynamic, offering at the same time basic theoretical and methodological reflection. What will be raised here is a well-known example. The statement “a metre is a metre” shows the correlation between natural language and natural world at work. In order to know how long *actually* is a metre, one needs in fact to refer to a correlation between *two* metres. This is because a metre is truly a metre only if it corresponds to the distance between the two notches cut on a platinum bar that is preserved inside a vault in Paris. In sum, the referent one refers to when one says “a metre is a metre” is an artificial object

⁷ For an analysis of the radical constructivism implicit in the statement that (apparently) marks the triumph of realism, refer to Sedda 2016.

that belongs to our metrical-decimal natural world. And the subtleties of the correlation do not stop here. For, even if one does not take into account ethnomatematics or the alarms stirred up by the variations of the bar, which, although minuscule, can throw into disarray the measure of everything, the fact remains that the attempt to hook the metre to “natural” measures (or better, to proportions and *therefore* to relations of relations), comes down to an all too human challenge, made of a *clash of definitions and correlations*. A trace of this history can be found in the grand deposit of *glocal common sense* that is Wikipedia: from the definition of metre as the 1/10,000,000 of the fourth terrestrial meridian (comprised between the North Pole and the Equator) which passes through Paris to the idea that its length equals to 1,650,763.73 of the wave length in the void of radiation corresponding to the transition between the $2p^{10}$ and $5d^5$ levels of the krypton-86 atom, to the idea that it is the distance covered by light in space in an interval of time equal to a 1/299,792,458 of a second (providing that the speed of light in space is by definition 299,792,458 m/s). In other words, it is a matter of correlations of correlations, entirely hypothetical and imperfect. While in the meantime in the natural world “A metre is a metre!”. Just like *facts are facts*.

5. A conflict of realisms

The argument put forward so far aims at translating the thought of Greimas in view of a conversation between anthropology, philosophy, and semiotics. It is impossible to carry out an in-depth study here. It seems useful instead to highlight the importance of the concepts of ‘plurality’, ‘alterity’, and ‘indeterminacy’ in the economy of the present discourse. From the point of view of the present essay, the plurality of worlds, realities, and natures must be made to explode in many directions. It should be brought within each single semiosphere and at the same time it should be regarded as capable of cutting through them, and, in so doing, to articulate them again and constitute them in new planes and levels.

To become aware of this and to bring the question of natural worlds to its extreme consequences it is necessary at this point to tackle the often debated modern and Western ontology and its (apparently monolithic) mononaturalism. We say “apparently monolithic” because, at a closer look, the realism that inhabits “our” Western ontology is at the very least twofold: alongside a *realism of common sense* – according to which “perception puts us into touch with the external world as it truly is” (De Caro 2012: 27; my translation, F. S.) – there is, in fact, a *scientific realism*, according to which “in the name of scientific ontology one tends to deny that ordinary objects are truly as they appear to common sense” (De Caro 2012: 30), but which in turn responds to *other*, more profound, laws and dynamics, which are the *true* reality. It so happens, for instance,

that the concept of ‘matter’, which is so dear to common sense, becomes completely *other* in the reality of physics, and that colours, so objective for a realist attitude, even disappear from the scientific point of view, since “according to physicists the external world is without colours” (De Caro 2012: 37).

To put it simply: is my body here, in front of the computer, stationary, or is it moving? According to the realism of common sense, it is stationary. According to scientific realism, it is moving, and it is moving in many ways: on a microscopic level the molecules I am made of are in a constant state of agitation, while on a macroscopic level I am on a planet that rotates around itself, as it revolves around the Sun, as it takes part in the movement of the solar system around the centre of the Milky Way, our Galaxy which in turn is moving through the universe at large. This means that the speed of my body in relation to the universe (or the most common hypotheses about the size of the universe) is at the all but disagreeable speed value of about 3,600,000 km/h. In sum, the point is not perhaps whether my body is stationary or moving, rather *in relation to what (or which realities) I establish the real at hand*. Thus the question is within which world I situate myself and my body to establish its sense.

Ultimately, to return to the conflict between realisms internal to the field which one should not have trouble in recognizing and defining as modern and Western, in distinguishing a realism of common sense from a scientific realism there appear

two radically alternative conceptions of realistic sign, in the sense that (taken in their purest form) each of the two is non-realistic with respect to the domain in which the other, in contrast, assumes a firmly realistic attitude. (De Caro 2012: 27)

If that was not enough to crush our ontological naturalizations, the field of theoretical physics can be considered. Theoretical physics may be regarded as a more restricted field, one that is strictly “scientific”, and, for this reason, more adequate to verify the hold of the recognition of that which is *effectively real*. Confining the discussion to a superficial (yet for this very reason shared) level of physical knowledge, it is well known that the two main scientific theories, that is, *quantum mechanics* and *general relativity*, operate quite well each in its own respective field, that is, the infinitely small and the infinitely great. Regrettably (or luckily)

the two theories that are responsible for the extraordinary progress of Physics in the past century, the theories that explain the expansion of the heavens and the structure of matter, are mutually incompatible. (Greene 1999: 5)⁸

⁸ A similar position is expressed by Rovelli 2014, who occupies a position opposed to Greene’s on the solution of this disagreement.

In brief, they gather sets of relations – real insofar as they are coherent and/or effective – that are not mutually translatable, however, for they *lack a language of correlation*. Such an untranslatability, which would bring common sense to ascertain that the two laws *cannot possibly be both correct*, brings the physicist instead to quest for some “Theory of Everything”: it could be the result of the addition of a deeper (and until now, invisible) layer of relations that would link and give rise to the two apparently incompatible domains (Greene 1999) or the rethinking of the given relations that would make them readable and understandable in a new and uniform way, that is as part of a unitary mechanism (Rovelli 2014). The future promises of scientists should not make us forget that contemporary physics operates very well with mutually incompatible realities, although its own field is indeed populated by imagined, invisible, obscure realities.

In other words, in giving credence to physics, in beginning from the hard core of mononaturalism, the semiotic attitude brings one to think that even if a “theory of everything” were found, that which remains beyond it and in it would be an *unthought remainder* and an *untranslated or only partially translatable alterity*; for a new plurality of relations, levels, and phenomena would explode inside and outside of it.

If this is true for physics, it seems even more obvious that it should be valid for cultures and for all forms of alterity and indeterminacy with which cultures enter into relations and through which they constitute themselves.

In other words, it seems necessary to set out again, now more than ever, from the ascertainment of *a structuring of the real*, at once, *permanently incomplete* and *excessively overabundant*.

6. Relationalism, or hyperstructuralism

From the perspective of the above, it might seem fitting to champion *multirealism* as recently elaborated by Latour and Stengers based on their rereading of the French philosopher Etienne Sourieau (see Stengers, Latour 2007; Latour 2015). Without addressing the core of a discussion that should be looked at from the semiotic viewpoint, such a multirealism should in any event be thought of and stratified in more ways, which could in turn be in mutual tension or contradiction: the forms of correlation, the modes of semiotic existence, and the construction of isotopies as fields of reality are all tools for the production/identification of realities by means of the more general mechanism of *translation*. If we return to the example of the body sitting in front of a computer, the issue here is how many realities are shared by one’s body. When one says “How many realities?”, “*How many sets of relations*” is what is necessarily implied. These are relations that are already there, but also relations yet to be established, which will eventually be established precisely when an attempt is made to figure out the relations that are already there, in a continuous creation – through translation – of meanings,

values, realities: “[...] *new relations that will join* a situation already produced by a multiplicity of relations” (Stengers 1996–1997: 44).

Thus, it is necessary to identify at which and at how many *intersections of relations* one is situated, as well as to identify in turn how one articulates them, in order to draw from the *multirelationalism of reality that effect of the real, of the instauration of the real*, which offers syntheses and stabilizations, more or less conjunctural or enduring, more or less shared or contested, to one’s lived experiences.

Are we then obliged to shift from multirelationalism to multirealism? However one may conceive or think of it, the fact remains that the idea of a plurality of natural worlds – within which both mononaturalism and multinaturalism can obviously coexist – cannot but have, at its core, a *relationalist* soul.

The implication is that the subjects/objects of the relation are constituted by the relation. Therefore worlds, natures, realities, and truths are always *in relation*.

As Greimas stated as early as 1956, Saussure taught us to understand that “the world can be understood as a vast net of relations, as an architecture of forms loaded with sense and having in themselves their own meaning” (Greimas 1956: 90).

Naturally, one tends to forget about this, for we are used (and perhaps even condemned) to live through the things and processes that relations produce, rather than through the relations of which things and processes are the product.

However, if we were to satisfy our desire to understand ourselves, and the substance we are made of, better, we need relationalism. Or, put in a better way, we need hyperstructuralism, and this hyperstructuralism, in constituting itself, cannot but create as its own predecessors (the imperfect translations if not the very misunderstandings of) Greimas and, along with him, Saussure and Hjelmslev to begin with, and many others to follow, including the Deleuze of “How do we recognize structuralism”:

For structuralism [...] there is always too much sense, an overproduction, an overdetermination of sense, always produced in excess from the combination of places in the structure. (Deleuze 2004: 175)

Yet it may also occur that, along this path, one finds oneself before quantum theories postulating that “reality is the relation”:

Speed [as Galileo realized] was not the property of an object alone: it is the property of the motion of an object in relation to another object. [...]

Quantum mechanics extends such a relativity in an exceptionally radical way: *all* characteristics of an object exist only in relation to other objects. It is only in relations that the facts of nature are designed.

There is no reality, in the world described by quantum mechanics, with no *relation* among physical systems. It is not things that can enter into relation, but relations that generate the notion of “thing”. (Rovelli 2014: 118)

Does one run the risk of falling back into ontologism, then, in looking for the proof of one's semiotic positions in physics? It is certainly so. And, perhaps, one cannot avoid the risk, for what was shown here was exactly the way in which one always attempts to make a singular *effect of the real* from a *plural reality*. Still, it is also possible, if the work has been carried out properly, that one's effect of the real is never (or not too often) able to forget which and how many sets of relations deposited on reality one has had to exclude from one's actions, and how many one has had to put into motion and correlation in order to be able to contingently build *something*. And it would also be good to remember that a fair amount of this play of correlations made and unmade, excluded or activated, occurs blindly: on this end therefore unaware of one's intentions and beyond (and perhaps even against) one's aims.

If the hard sciences can lead one to think that, "what we refer to when we talk about reality" is a "net of relations"; if they can point out, as a task, "mastering the correlations" between us and the world; if they even reach the point of saying that "We are structures" (Rovelli 2014: 220–223), then it is perhaps worthwhile running the risk and saying that, indeed, semiotics – precisely because it is relationalist, and because it is hyperstructuralist – has something important to offer to contemporary thought.

And so, anyone who thinks that there are no structures, and that if they exist, they are bound to enslave us, should be given the answer that if it seems that there is chaos and no meaning, it is because there is an excess of structures – of sets of relations. It is thanks to such a contradictory excess that there will always be room for freedom, time for invention, and the possibility of positioning oneself otherwise, of exploring, inhabiting, creating different realities.⁹

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¹⁰ Italian version of this article is available at <http://www.ec-aiss.it>: Sedda, Franciscu 2016. L'essere e l'enciclopedia: Forme del realismo e della cultura nell'opera semiotica di Umberto Eco. In: *E/C Rivista on-line dell'Associazione Italiana di Semiotica*.

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Реляционализм: от Греймаса до гиперструктурализма

Появление нового реализма в философии и «онтологического поворота» в антропологии свидетельствует о росте внимания к теме «реальности» в гуманитарных науках. Цель статьи – перечитывание и интерпретация греймасовского определения «семиотики естественного мира» (*semiotics of the natural world*), чтобы понять, каким образом его концепции могли бы способствовать решению вопросов в интеллектуальных дебатах современности. Автор статьи исследует попытку Греймаса решить проблему взаимосвязи между «языком» и «миром» в неререференциальных терминах, затем переходит к определению четырех возможных форм корреляции, которые создают природы и миры, объекты и предметы. Доводя аргументы Греймаса до крайних выводов, автор призывает к переоценке структурализма и предлагает отличать «реальность» от «реального». Обе гипотезы опираются на идею, что именно *отношения* создают нашу основу.

Relatsionalism: Greimasest hüperstruktuurialismini

Uusrealismi esiletõus filosoofias ja 'ontoloogiline pööre' antropoloogias annavad tunnistust üha kasvavast tähelepanust, mida humanitaarias pööratakse 'tegelikkuse' teemale. Käesoleva kirjutise eesmärgiks on üle lugeda ja tõlgendada Greimase esitatud "loomuliku maailma semiootikat", et näidata, kuidas tema mõisted võiksid kaasa aidata praegusele intellektuaalsele debatile. Greimase katsest lahendada 'keele' ja 'maailma' vahelise suhte probleemi mittereferentsiaalsetes terminites liigutakse edasi määratlema nelja korrelatsioonivõimalust, mille moodustavad loomused ja maailmad, objektid ja subjektid. Greimase väidete äärmuslike järeldusteni jõudes kutsun üles strukturalismi ümber hindama ning teen ettepaneku eristada 'reaalsust' 'reaalsest'. Mõlemad hüpoteesid lähtuvad ideest, et *suhted* moodustavadki ainese, millest me koosneme.