

INTRODUCTION

1. ANALYTICAL TOOLS: WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW THEY ARE USED

The intent of this book is not to present one or more systems of theoretical semiotics, but to extract a few *tools for text and image analysis* from these systems, explain and refine them, and illustrate their use.

The term "tool" refers here to a pre-established analytical device developed from a relatively simple concept network, which, despite its simplicity, can provide a rigorous, accurate analysis (although an admittedly segmented one).

Semiotics, which is concerned with the study of signs, is obviously more than just an inventory of these tools. While the basic functions of this field of study¹ are descriptive (the empirical approach, as in linguistics), formal (the logical approach), interpretive (the hermeneutic approach) and explanatory (the speculative approach, as in philosophy), we should point out that with analytical tools, the emphasis is on formalization.

Analytical tools appear to be underrated. Along with the postmodern decline of formalism – if not of rationalism – they have become suspect, partly because they arose in an environment of theoretical hegemony and dogmatism. This is easily addressed by isolating them from their original context and revising as needed. In an age of complexity, as we call it, analytical tools are seen as reductive. However, they are quite adequate for what they are and what they can do. It is essential to separate the analytical tool from the person using it, who may do so in a careless, mechanical manner. In other words, the way to construct an actantial model of a text is not by "filling in the slot" with the first sender on the scene and calling it done. Furthermore, analytical tools are worth using if for no other reason than they can often provide a rational and methodological initial approach to a text or an image.

2. INTRODUCTION TO THE TOOLS

Our choice of analytical tools is somewhat arbitrary, defined by our reading, inclinations and analytical experiments. The tools we have selected belong to two theoretical families: the school of semiotics established under A.J. Greimas' influence, and semio-semantic, which has developed under François Rastier's leadership. Some of our tools are very general (e.g., homologation), and others are more specific (e.g., ontological and veridictory dialogics); some apply mainly to texts (e.g., the veridictory square), and others apply to images as well (e.g., semic analysis).

Each tool is the subject of a chapter, structured in the following way: (1) theory, (2) application(s), (3) summary diagram. As the name indicates, the summary diagram is a visual representation of the main elements of the concept network for each tool, and the main relations between these elements (primarily decomposition and classification).

Although our text is indeed addressed to students of semiotics, and more broadly, to those who want to know more about methods of text and image analysis, we believe there is also something of value in it for the specialist. Perhaps this would simply be the fact that we have often found it necessary to break with the status quo approach used in the theoretical systems where these tools originated in order to increase their functionality, either by eliminating traditionally-used constraints that we have deemed unnecessary, or by adding substantial enhancements. The indented notes and the parallel use of technical and classroom terminology provide a way to use the text at different levels with varying degrees of difficulty. Within the limits of practicality, the presentation of each analytical tool is an autonomous entity, reducing the number of references to other chapters; as a result, a certain amount of repetition (whose educational value is well known) is inevitable. The index can be used for a more specialized reading of the text, to learn more about a concept or a term; the glossary defines the most widely used terms ("sign", "signifier", "signified", etc.).

¹ As summarized by Pierre Ouellet in a paper presented at the colloquium *Théories et objets métissés*, Montreal, Société de sémiotique du Québec, May 2000.

Louis Hébert, *Tools for Text and Image Analysis: An Introduction to Applied Semiotics*

The texts we analyze are short, and they come from various genres, eras and literary traditions (Québec and France); in some cases, we have constructed "laboratory texts" for illustrative purposes. We have included a variety of objects for image analysis: concrete poetry, paintings and images from advertisements. Lastly, editorial policies have led us to cut some sections that were included in the French version of this text.

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I would like to express my gratitude to François Rastier, Jacques Fontanille, the Dean of Undergraduate Studies at the University of Québec in Rimouski, Julie Tabler, and my students, who have taught me much.