ICoN2014 - 1st International Congress of Humanities.

The role of Humanities in Contemporary Society.
Semiotics, Culture, Technologies.

The semiotic expertise in cross-cultural communication and digital archives

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Two issues:

1) (Public) awareness of the centrality of *meaning* in contemporaneous society.

2) The fact that this awareness looks for a specific know-how we call the *semiotic expertise* - a know-how which is of central relevancy for a global meaning economy and market.
Topics of this lecture:

1) Some general remarks on the **centrality of meaning** in the to-days communication society and knowledge economy.

2) A first concrete example from **cross-cultural communication (advertising)**.

3) A second concrete example (for topic 2) from the field of **digital media and digital (audiovisual) archives**

=> This conference presentation can be downloaded on the [Research Gate web site of Peter Stockinger](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Peter_Stockinger).
About the progressive (public) awareness of the central importance of meaning
Since the last 25 or 30 years - **two** major processes:

1. the first one is the process of *omnipresent globalization* and hence ...
   - ... a more and more commonly shared awareness of *cultural diversity*, of *diverse and diverging* cultural traditions, life styles and trends;

2. the second one is the process of the *progressive pervasiveness of digital technology and media* ...
   - in our life
   - and in our physical environment
Both of these processes put forward ...

... the **progressive public** (political, economical, ...) **awareness** of the central (critical) status of **meaning** in **all** of our personal and professional activities ...:
= (Public) awareness of meaning – what does this mean ??

1. Importance of the (regulative, normative) **status of** collectively shared **topics or themes** in the life and activities of a social actor

   => “Representations”, visions, “ideas”, doctrines, groupthinks, know-hows, ...

2. Importance of the **axiological status** of (collectively shared) **topics** or themes

   ⇒ “value” discussion: epistemic, pragmatic, emotional, esthetic, ...

3. Importance of the **use**, the **exploitation** of (collectively shared) **topics**, ...

   1. ... in form of actor-specific **discourses**
   2. and by the means of **signs**, sign systems, **signifying multimedia codes**

   ⇒ *In a nutshell: the program of a semiotics of culture(s)*
Meaning is ....

... not only an « academic » problem ....

... but is, to-day, present in all major social discourses:

- Political discourse
- Public administration discourse
- Urban discourse
- Economic and commercial discourse
Short case studies for illustrating this process of (public) awareness rising of meaning
Two short show cases:

1) **cross-cultural (global) communication** (cross-cultural advertising);

2) **digital media and (audiovisual) archives**
First show case: cross-cultural advertising
In cross-cultural marketing, an obvious issue for a social organization (company, institution, NGO ...) is ...

- ... to deal “correctly” with the (supposed) specificities of the cultural codes and expectations of a target public.

Three short examples:

1. The **Givenchy** campaign for the perfume Indécence diffused in Europe and in the Arabic world (specially Arabic peninsula) (2001);

2. The **Mademoiselle Coco** campaign of Chanel with Keira Knightley as the muse diffused in France and in the USA (in 2008);

3. Two versions of the **IKEA catalogue** of 2007 – one for the European market and one for the the Arabic peninsula.
1st Example: The Givenchy ad for the perfume *Indécence* – the left one diffused in France and Europe, the second one in Saudia Arabia and the Arabic peninsula (in 2001);

| Iconic code          | Covered/uncovered breast/arms  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sleeveless cloth vs cloth with sleeves (+ slogan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plastic codes</td>
<td>Gestural (postural) code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chromatic code (bleaching of the cloth, ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Framing; (camera) angle; for/back-grounding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>The (cultural) status of the woman with respect to sexuality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Benjamin Pelletier; [Gestion des risques interculturels](#)
2nd) The Mademoiselle Coco campaign in France (upper picture) and in USA/Canada with Keira Knightely (2008)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Iconic code</th>
<th>Breast and transparent blouse (+ packshot)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Plastic codes</td>
<td>Topography of the female body (breast)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Chromatic code (bleaching of K.K. and contrasting)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topics</td>
<td>1) Decency/indecency;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Desirability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Truth and advertising</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: André Gunthert (EHESS), Totem – Bloc-notes visuel (2009)
3rd example) The IKEA catalogue of 2007 for the European market and for a destine from the Arabic peninsula.

Source: Benjamin Pelletier; Gestion des risques interculturels
Some (practical) consequences
Some (theoretical and practical) consequences

These examples illustrate very approximately, very generally a possible ...

... (semiotic) expertise in cross-cultural communication ...

- composed of corpus analyses, field work, desk – information watch activities, ...

What is needed for building a “semiotic expertise” ... ?

1) a theory of the structural organization of the textual object (here visual 2D objets).

2) An appropriate work environment for “producing” a semiotic expertise in the field of cross-cultural/intercultural communication.
1) **Theory of the structural organization** of the textual object

1.1) **Why? - Issues:**
- Controlling of the **criteria** we are using in our corpus **descriptions**;
- The specification ("design") of the "**field work"**;
- Controlling of "**desk research**" (information watch; benchmarking, ...)
- Controlling of the **experimentations** with possible variants of an ad, ...

1.2) **Aspects:**

1. **Compositional nature** of the textual object (part/whole; functional composition; collections; "textscapes", ...);

2. **Layers of meaning** of a textual object (topical/thematic; narrative; rhetorical; expression modalities; ...)

3. **Functional role of a text in a social practice** (campaign, ...)

4. **Mediatizing of a textual object** (media support, media environment, ...)
2) An **appropriate work environment** for semiotic expertise recovers many things – more particularly:

1. **Work methodology** ("workflow" of a semiotic expertise: phases, tasks, ...);

2. **Technical tools** (analysis, information watch, experimentation with textual objects, ...);

3. Intended **results** and **outcomes**.

4. **Digital archiving** of all the objects of the expertise and of the expertise itself (capitalizing on previous results, fostering innovation, new services for clients, ...).
Second show case: digital media and digital archives
Since the last ten to fifteen years: massive production and circulation on the web of any kind of digital media objects: texts, images, audiovisual records, sound records, etc.

To-day: platforms govern, organize the "digital life and culture" of the world

- Platform, basically, are repositories + services for the users

Examples of platforms:

- "world platforms": YouTube, Instagram, Flickr, Facebook, Google+, Yahoo, One Drive (Microsoft), ...

- Institutional, national and transnational repositories and service platforms: Europeana, European Film Gateway, ..., HAL (France), ...

- CMS (Content Management Systems) platforms: Word Press, Joomla, Umbraco, ...
Example: The official statistics of You Tube ...

- augmentation of almost 100 hours of online video per minute;
- about 1 billion of regular users of the platform;
- every month people regard videos on the platform during 6 billion of hours (= one hour per month for the whole world population ...);

Similar statistics for other “digital platforms”: Facebook, Instagram, Flickr, Twitter, ....
Principal activities on/with platforms ...

1. **Storage** of digital data

2. **Classification, description/indexing, commenting** of those data

3. **Publishing** of those data: **web sites** and **portals**, digital documents, **remediatiioned editorial projects**, ...

4. **Communication, sharing**, ... (social media)
To-day: tremendous number diverse digital archives or libraries....

1. Personal archives

2. Archives produced by informal social groups of friends or colleagues

3. Archives of virtual communities of practice sharing a common interest in a behavior, a style of life, artefacts, practices ...

4. Archives of “ethnic” communities, diasporas, descendants of ancient communities...

5. Archives from institutional actors:
   - ... companies, political parties, territorial collectivities, transnational entities (UNESCO, EU, ...)
   - ... and finally educational and research institutions ....
What is a digital archive, basically speaking?

3 central dimensions:

1. **Repositories** of selected, pre-processed and recorded **data**

   => Selected data = **documents** of a (cultural, historical, ...) **heritage** of a social actor

2. **Repositories** of the **metadata**, i.e. information identifying and describing the data

   a) Metadata identify the “profile” (the provenience) of a data.

   b) Metadata describe **form**, **content** and, eventually, **uses** of a data.

   c) Metadata describe **legal rules** and the **archival history** of a data

3. **Publications** in form of web portals, catalogues, ... and **repurposed (re-mediatized, ...) data** ...
Impact of digital archives on (digital) humanities?

Digital archives = to-day one of the major challenges in (digital) humanities in general and digital communication in particular ...

Central topics and issues:

1. (cultural, scientific, professional, ...) heritage preservation & exploitation;

2. digital resource centers for ...
   - ... vocational learning, informal learning, community learning, ...;
   - ... digital cultural industry and mediation;
   - ... professional communication; ...

3. open data, access to open data and use of open data for research and education;

4. use of linked data (connection between different data) in hisortical, cultural and social research ...
An example of a digital (audiovisual) archive: the ARA (Audiovisual Research Archive) program

- Since 2002 - 3 main missions

1. **Digital scientific and cultural heritage** in the humanities: production (collection) of data (videos), processing, description/indexing, publication, translation, enrichment, long term preservation, valorization, ....

   => audiovisual (video) library (6500 hours) + **ARA web portals** and online publications

2. **Work environment**: workflow (methodology + procedures); software tools + metalinguistic resources (ontologies, processing models, ...)  

   => **Studio ASA** (Audiovisual Semiotic Workshop)

3. **Community platform**: offer the whole work environment to especially “academic” stakeholders

   => French ANR project **Campus AAR** (Semioscape platform)

- Multilingual version of ARA portal: English, German, Spanish, Chinese, ...
2nd example of republishing/repurposing a sub-part of the video archive fonds of ARA in form of ...

Specialized web portals

Example: SCC – *Semiotica, Cultura, Communicazione* (cooperation between university La Sapienza of Rom and FMSH)
3rd example of republishing/repurposing a sub-part of the video archive fonds of ARA in form of ...

**Dynamic subjects corpora** (example – the “encomienda” in Argentina during the 18th century portal: AMSUR)
The working environment for building archives, analyzing and publishing video corpora – The **Studio ASA** (Atelier de Sémiotique Audiovisuelle)

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**Studio ASA**

- **Modeling Workshop**
  - OntoEditeur
- **Segmentation Workshop**
  - Interview
- **Description Workshop**
  - Interview
- **Publishing Workshop**
  - Semiosphere

**Dynamic user interfaces**

- **Generic ontology of ARA program**
- **Domain specific ontologies**

**Library of description and publishing models**
Le **Studio ASA** – a set of software tools which can be downloaded on a PC ...
Some (practical) consequences
Some consequences:

• Semiotic expertise is – potentially – central here but requires however, a **good technical culture**, a very good knowledge of this extremely dynamic sector ... 

• It also requires the **capacity to cooperate with technical teams** (developers, knowledge engineers, librarians, archivists, ...)

Semiotic expertise is concerned with (roughly speaking):

1) The specification – design – of the workflow of an archival project and the procedures (instructions) to follow.

2) The production of the conceptual environment for analyzing (describing, indexing, classifying, commenting, ...) digital data:

   descriptive meta-language for analyzing the universe of discourse of a digital archive –

   ontologies, and models of description, thesaurus, ...

3) The definition of the conceptual environment of the publishing/republishing of described and indexed corpora of digital data

=> Publishing models (scenarios)