

Symposium E3S and SFAS – 10th May 2017

**Challenges for Sensory and Consumer Science in a
Changing Society**

Senses and meaning

(Du sens des sens) :

Semiotic analysis of sensory properties

Denis BERTRAND
Université Paris 8

Senses and meaning

Semiotic analysis of sensory properties

1. Semiotic analysis
2. The principle of immanence
3. The sensory world as a language
4. Semiotics and Phenomenology : importing Two concepts
5. The three moments of sensory performance
6. The sensory process is narrative !

1. Semiotic analysis

- The object of semiotics is **the meaning**, grasped through the languages. Its purpose is **a better understanding of the way we understand** when we read, we speak, we look at, we make gestures, etc.
- This means that “languages” involve verbal, visual, gestural activities : words, images, sounds of music or not music, objects, landscapes, smells, etc. Every experience, because it is signifying, is in the semiotic field.
- This is why, in addition to texts and images, semiotics has studied the **sensory world** : our sensations and our perceptions are signifiers. They can be considered as language !

2. The principle of immanence : guaranty of efficiency

▪ **The principle of immanence is the basis of semiotics.** It says :

1. There is meaning only *in* and *through* **differences**.

2. The analysis must, in order to grasp its objects, identify and describe the **networks of internal relations** (of hierarchy, dependence, and all other kinds) which construct meaning and enable it to be described objectively.

« The text (or the picture) is a whole of meaning »

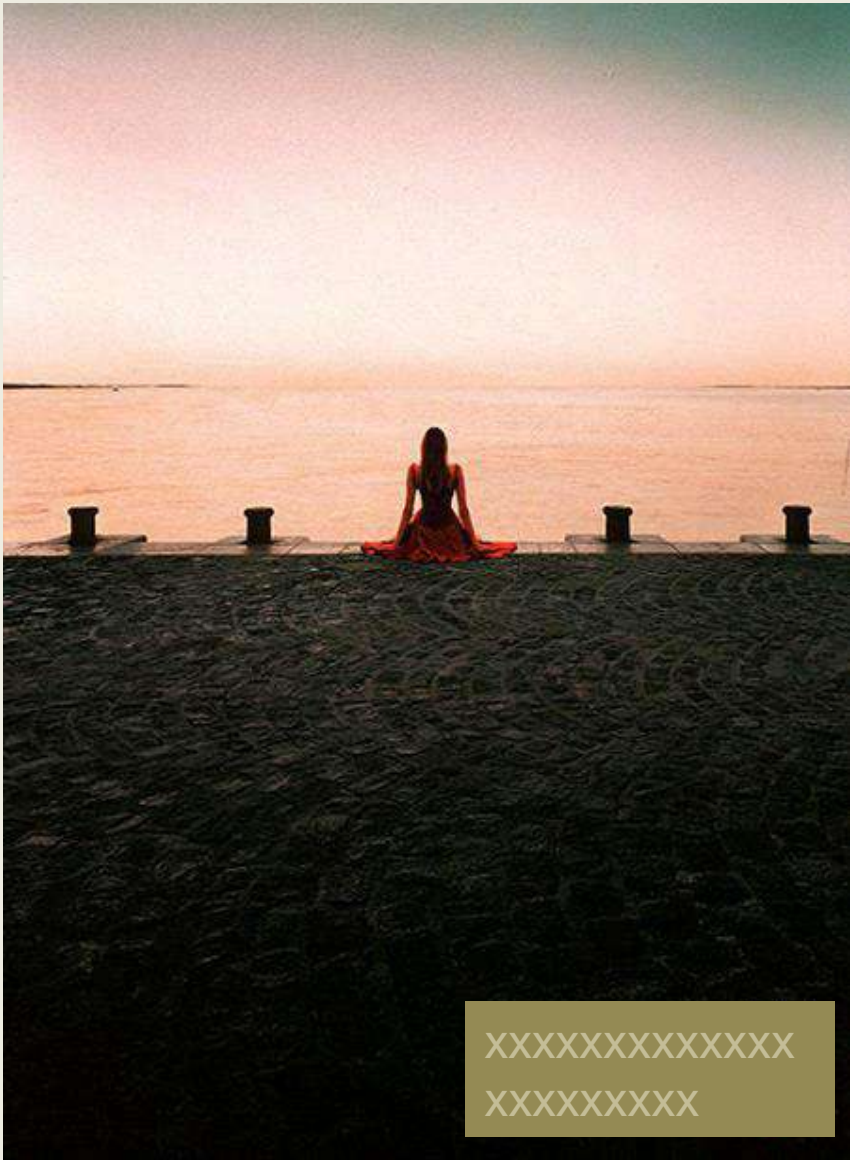
« Out of the text (or picture), no salvation ! » (Greimas).

2. Immanence principle : guaranty of efficiency

- The principle of immanence implies that **the extra-language universe** (i.e. visual, verbal, situational language, etc.) **is not included in the analysis.**
- **Semiotic analysis is thus called "in-room"**: the analyst studies the **corpus** of his images and texts on a given universe with his conceptual, logical and narrative tools.
- This protects against impressionist judgment, evaluation, subjectivity. This guarantees objectivity, but... limits the field of investigation.

➤ **EXAMPLE!**

Application of the principle of immanence



This is an advertisement

Claim and Brand have been hidden...

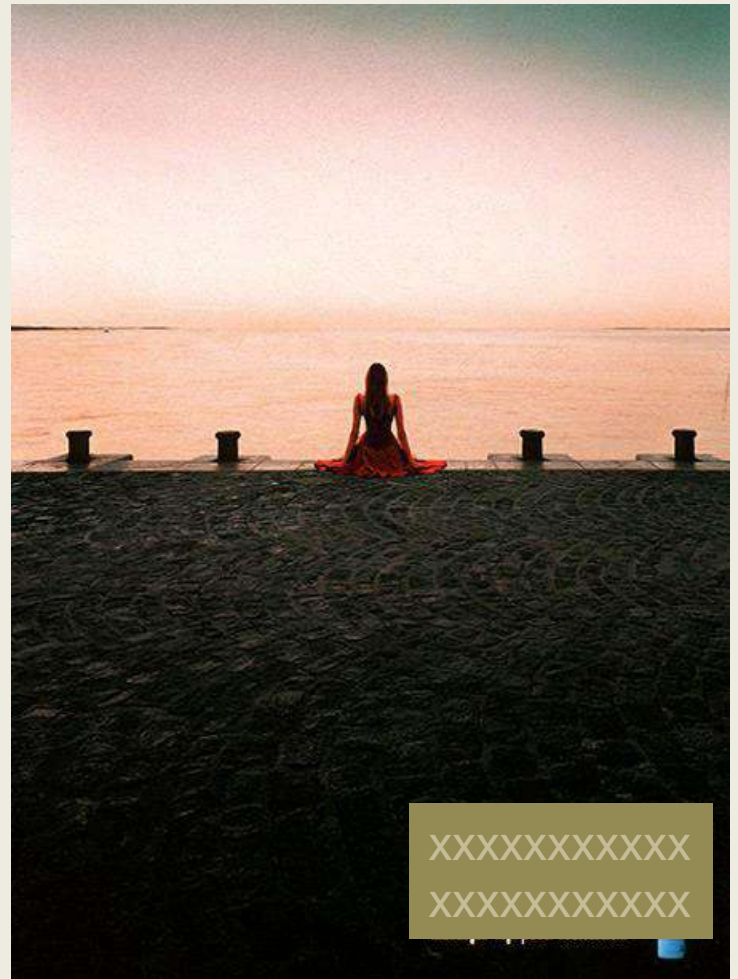


XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

Application of the principle of immanence

THE IMAGE IN ITSELF

- **Plastic Analysis:** horizontal symmetry /vertical symmetry, chromatic contrast (light / dark). Cf. Rothko paintings...
- **Figurative Analysis :** empty space, elementary figures (aquatic / mineral) and encroachments (stone waves), mooring bitts two by two, etc.
- **Narrative analysis:** the female character on the platform, the emotion of the light (the back turned to the dark). A contemplative narrative, the expectation of going on a journey.

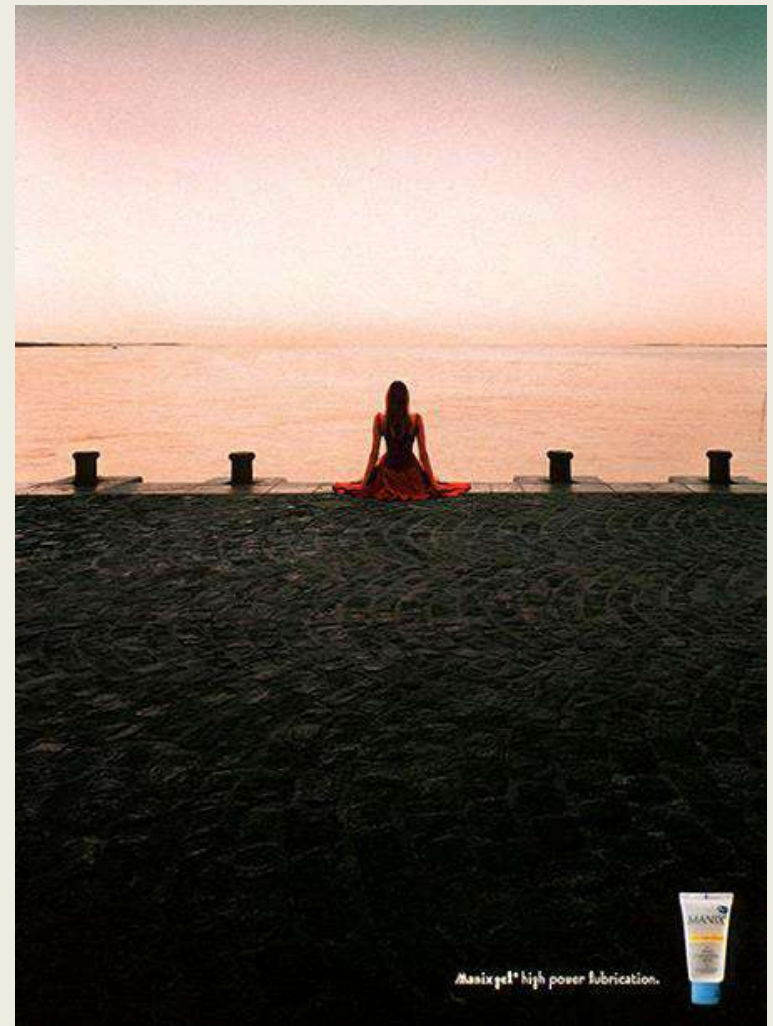


And suddenly...

MANIX. LUBRICATING GEL

- **Out of the text-image.** The **context** appears > **another semiotic universe.**
- Breaking point : **new sensory, figurative and narrative meaning**, with :
 - Rupture of the symmetry
 - Provocation and humor
 - A non contemplative story...
 - Moral transgression
- **Extension of the principle of immanence ?**

The principle of immanence is challenged !



> Extension of the principle of immanence

- In order to grasp the meaning of objects, one must take into account the situation, the setting, the space between the participants, lights, gestures, mimics, looks, smells, in short, **sensory interactions**. That is to say, all the elements which are external to the discourse itself and participate strongly in its meaning.
- Is the principle of immanence abandoned? No, it is extended to the "text" that surrounds the text (the support of a poster for example), and to the "text" that surrounds the text surrounding the text (behaviors, atmospheres, strategies, forms of life).
- This global situation, sensory and passionate, can be analyzed as such, as a "semiotic practice".

➤ **One must analyze the sensory properties.**

3. The sensory world as a language

- Semiotics distinguishes between **natural languages** and the **natural world**. The natural world is constituted by everything that is given to us in perception and which we consider spontaneously as meaning.
- A noise is perceived and immediately interpreted: it is an airplane taking off or landing; it's a truck rushing at me... **Perception is narrativised**: narrative of desire, narrative of threat, narrative of attraction or repulsion.
- The natural world can be perceived either by ***isolated senses*** (sight, hearing, smell, taste, etc.), or by the ***sensori-motricity*** which animates them (that is, the inherent movement of perception), or by ***synaesthesia***, that is to say by simultaneous multi-sensory grasping : see Baudelaire's *Correspondances*, or John Cage's *4'33''* ; see the ordinary life : sensory mixture !

The natural world, a semiotics

- **Expression Plan (the signifier):** A material (texture, colors, etc.), lines, connexions, shape, arrangement in space.
- **Plan of contents (the signified):** something "to sit", a minimum narrative, cultural connotations.
- **What do we see?** The object itself (Expression Plan), or a "to sit" in the kitchen, in a church... (plan of the Contents)?



4. Semiotics and Phenomenology : importing Two concepts

- **1. Phenomenological « Suspension » (Husserl : « epokhe »)**
 - How to **better understand the meaning of the sensitive world?** We must reject what prevents us from perceiving things in themselves, in favor of the cultural habits which make them recognize spontaneously and familiarly.
 - To do this, we must "**suspend**" **our beliefs and our knowledge, which form a screen before things**, which filter their meaning.
 - It is a question of seeing them with an absolutely new, absolutely naive, astonished gaze, to go back step by step from this first seizure to the meanings that determine their use.
- **More generally, it is the condition of creativity and invention.**

■ 2. Sketches (« esquisses » in French)

- One always perceives things from a certain point of view, from a particular angle.
- Things are only partially perceived: to a certain extent, according to a certain scale (see zoom, scale variations, slow motion).
- Phenomenology names “*Sketches*” those fragments of the world (which lead us from the part to the whole: the general "metonymy" of the sensible).

Ex. Olfactory sensations: the “course of life” in the world of perfume

Incipient Sketches	Mature Sketches	Declining Sketches
Fresh fragrances Morning Spring Adolescence	"rich and triumphant » perfumes sensuousness Musk, leather, incense	Perfumes of the decomposition of the living (dusty, ...) Nostalgia, vintage

Giacometti's studio

Training phenomenological suspension (the body-forms)



5. The three moments of Sensory Performance

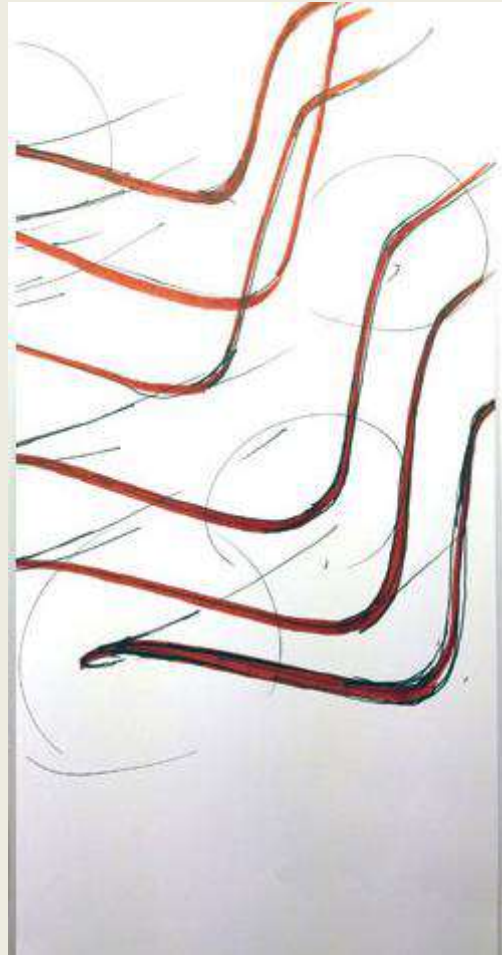
The sensory event, i.e. the progressive formation of meaning in perception, is realized in three moments.

- **The Index moment.** The first sensation is the *index*. "There is something," there is a potentiality of meaning.
- **The Iconic moment.** The thing arouses a resemblance. It is the *icon*, which inscribes the object among others that resemble it. Recognition by comparison.
- **The Symbolic moment.** Recognition is subject to rules. It is the *symbol*, which codifies the object and makes it possible to identify it within a certain usage.

Example: the painter Magritte paints a door in the middle of the desert. It de-symbolizes the icon.

Other exemple : ...

Index moment



Iconic moment



Symbolic moment



The three moments in *Blow up*



6. The sensory process is narrative !

- **Perception** therefore consists not only in seeing objects but in **grasping the processes of signification** of which they are signs.
- By perceiving, we reason upon, we make **inductions** and **deductions**. Moreover, we experience **desires** and appetites, **anxieties** and apprehensions, we **anticipate** the future of things in relation to ourselves, we fear the dangers and we rush to our curiosities. That is to say that **we narrativise**.
- This changing world of sensoriality is transformed into actors with whom we act as partners, we develop our programs, we aim for goals, we hope for results. This leads to the **semiotics of sensory interactions**.
- **Advertising campaigns promote the narrativisation of sensations, through promises of new perceptions.**



**Today, this sensorial narrative is at the heart of our values.
We can speak of an "ideology of the sensory »**

**Last example to conclude : the sensory modulation of
driving in the Multisense, the new Espace de Renault. The
driver is the hero of his sensory history.**



The images of the modes :
Sensory translation from one experiment to another

1. The *Sport* mode

- **A phenomenological perception**
 - View from the outside, 3/4 before: the coming of the vehicle
 - The feeling of displacement: the lines of speed
- **An sensory world**
 - Speed and stop (the wheels still)
 - Moving backwards: reversing the visual code of the speed lines
 - The mirror floor



2. The *Eco* mode

- **An air perception**

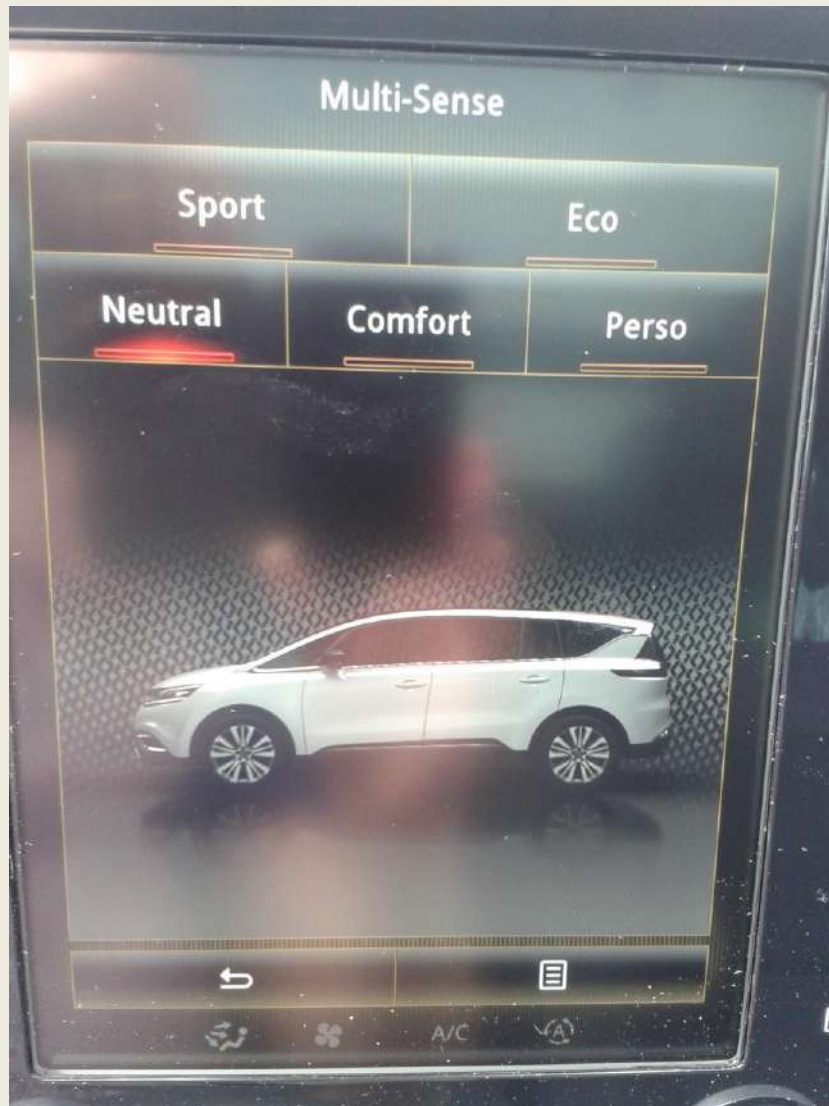
- View from above, 3/4 AR, and from a distance: the vehicle moves away from you

- At the lines of speed here are opposed the luminous points, images of stars?

- **A weakly specifying universe**

- The markers of eco (-logy) or eco (-nomie) are absent

- Only the green color indicates conventionally the ecological code



3. The *Neutral* mode

- **A descriptive perception**

- Profile view, at the angle of a vertical plane and a horizontal plane.
- No depth effect, no movement.
- The bottom has a diamond pattern (Renault stylized logo).

- **A Neutral World**

- Conformity of the visual presentation and mode designation.
- But absence of human presence: effect of technical objectivation.



4. The *Comfort* mode

- **An aesthetic perception**

- View from above, 3/4 Fore, between shadow and light (baroque contrast).
- Immobility and fluidity, marked both by the lines and by the ground-support.

- **A symbolic universe**

- The floor, with concentric circles, presents the symbol of fluidity and softness.
- Reflections and their brilliance, however, set a cold symbolism.
- The relationship with the displayed notion of "comfort" remains low.



5. The *Perso* mode : you, the hero !

- **A technical perception**

- View from above and from inside by transparency, showing the technical components of the vehicle.
- Focus on modular elements.

- **A functional universe**

- The view of the elements is an invitation to manipulate them.
- The elements, however, do not relate, they designate: one remains in the pure descriptive.
- The image of customization is conventional: it is that of the « technician » (Renault's job).

Thank you

R. M. Rilke, *The notebooks of Malta Laurids Brigge*

Say I can not help but sleep the window open! The trams roll by ringing through my room. Cars pass over me. A door slams. Somewhere a window falls clicking. I hear the laughter of the great flashes, the light chuckling of the glitter. Then, suddenly, a muffled noise, on the other side, inside the house. Someone goes up the stairs. Approach, non-stop approach. Is there, is long there, passes. And again the street. A woman shouts: "Ah! Shut up, I do not want anymore. " The electric tramway rushes through everything, over and over. Someone calls. People are running, catching up. A dog barks. What a relief ! A dog. Towards morning there is even a cock that sings, and it is an infinite delight. Then suddenly I fall asleep.