

# A Semiotics of Multimodality and Signification in the *Divine Comedy*

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## Chapter 1

### A Semiotic Theory of Multimodality for the *Divine Comedy*

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# 1 A Semiotic Theory of Multimodality for the *Divine Comedy*

## 1.1 Preamble

In this work I propose a new critical method for the *Divine Comedy* (DC) which focuses not only on *mode-as-writing* but also and equally on other discursive modes, specifically on multimodal forms of expression and signification. It is motivated by the need to understand, in depth, the content value of the DC, which is not only a digital text (*mode-as-writing*), but it additionally anticipates a multimodal orientation that comprises *mode-as-speaking*, *mode-as-image*, *mode-as-moving picture*, and *mode-as-hearing*.

What is the purpose of multimodality as an approach to study the DC? Multimodality is an inter-disciplinary method which studies different forms of signification and, in the specific examination of Dante's poem, it focuses on the written, spoken, aural, and visual interactions and environments to better comprehend forms of representation and/or learning experiences. In our contemporary times, the availability and dissemination of the DC, in addition to the traditional forms, is focused on and further heightened by a multimodal combination of such forms of expression through the employment of sophisticated technology. One fundamental postulation of multimodality is that communication is intrinsically multimodal. To be able to observe how several forms of communication combine and transform into significant units in order to reach new frontiers and, eventually, fashion new ontologies is not only a useful tool to aid our critical endeavor to better analyze the text, but also a felicitous prospect to bring to the fore the inexhaustible content value of Dante's text. The existence of multiple means of dissemination of the DC, namely illustrations, comic strips, public readings, TV and other audio-visual productions, motion pictures, music recordings, video games, and online written, visual, audio resources, in addition to the traditional written form, are examples of unaware needs that the consumers utilize without comprehending their deep implication. They simply take them as settings and forms of expression of their choice. They connect with and respond well to one or several of those forms and, eventually, find them to be quite entertaining.

A theoretical study of a semiotics of multimodality and signification in the DC, with a focus on modal effectiveness, which is the aim of this study, will

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shed light on several reasons why one mode is more effective than another in guiding the user's choice(s) toward the text. By introducing an in-depth study of mode(s) that best address the interpretive needs of Dante scholars, graduate Dante students, and students of critical theory is a way of combining a richer experience of Dante's text with a deeper engagement and competence of the role of the critic. An elementary, yet valuable idea that exemplifies what we said above is that:

With writing alone, the message would, quite simply, be too complex. Using three modes in ... one sign—*writing* and *image* and *colour* as well—has real benefits. Each mode does a specific thing: image *shows* what takes too long to *read*, and writing *names* what would be difficult to *show*. Colour is used to *highlight* specific aspects of the overall message.

(Kress 2010, 1)

The three modes that Kress addressed above perform different semiotic roles, each of which has distinctive potentials and may contribute to the creation of meaning. They provide material for the semiotic analysis of multimodality and allow us to explain why we should engage with multimodality in Dante's complex work. Moreover, we “do not yet have a theory which allows us to understand and account for the world of communication as it is now” (Kress 2010, 7), nor do we have a theoretical study which addresses the same issue specifically for the *DC*, and how a particular modality can become the basis for the creation of new ontologies.

Semiotics deals with the material production of signs through any medium and, therefore, it is the discipline that studies signification by means of signs. Thus, writing is not the only form of signification that takes place by means of signs but visual and sound significations as well. A focused endeavor on the semiotics of multimodality concerning the reception of the *DC* is undoubtedly a literary commitment that sheds light on the interpretive process,<sup>1</sup> studies the text as a generative machine vehicled by the medium, and the medium empowers the interpreter as well with its broad resourcefulness. The ekphrastic expression “*visibile parlare*” (“speech made visible”) of *Purgatorio* 10.95 is Dante's manifesto regarding the use and amplification of his multimodal and meta-poetic awareness. As we shall see, “*visibile parlare*”, and also other examples scattered throughout his entire work, are indications that Dante himself seems to orient the reader toward the use of multimodality to interpret his work and toward the interpretive benefits connected with it.

Moreover, this research project aims at clarifying the strength and limitation set forth by the metaphorical, allegorical, symbolic, iconic, and sonorous signs regarding the semiotic process of signification of those outstanding multimodal occurrences in the *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso*.<sup>2</sup> In other words, all the multimodal occurrences and episodes that we will analyze from the *Inf.*, *Pur.*,

and *Par.* will also explain the semiotic degree of efficacy and weakness each type of modal sign has in its specific context.

In the theoretical framework of this chapter, I did not include the olfactory mode (*mode-as-smell*). I just mentioned it in passing in Chapter 3 to state that it increases the effectiveness of multimodality, especially in the *Inf.* However, it does not claim to have a primary status in the signifying process of the multimodal configuration of the *DC*. The comprehensive picture and purpose of this study is to offer critical insights to the reader to expand the textual analysis of Dante's work that stretches beyond its digital textuality of *mode-as-writing* and, indeed, to show and validate through a detailed analysis the importance of the other modalities as well. Also, the focus for studying such modalities is essentially aimed at exploring and testing paths of signification that respond well to each modality and how such modalities are legitimized by Dante's text, which is primarily a written text. Dante, out of necessity, strategically uses multimodal forms of expression to codify (in several parts of the *DC*, mostly in the *Paradiso*) a new, non-existing content stuff. Said necessity originates from his pristine, uncoded experience, something to which he is exposed for the first time as a result of his journey and for which neither he nor do we possess a suitable medium to adequately deal with. It is the attempt to draw attention to what we may call the unknown issues of the *Divine Comedy* related to planes of signification, in addition to the already established ones carried out by the allegory. Thus, multimodality, under the governance of semiotics is the tool the reader may use advantageously to address such issues and to shed light on new ontologies that Dante strategically stages to narrate his experience effectively.

As a preliminary overview of multimodality in the *DC* and, beginning with *mode-as-writing*, the reader will be introduced to a clear orientation describing such a mode as a digital type. *Mode-as-writing* belongs to the digital type because the language in which Dante wrote is an alphabetic language. Alphabetic signs contribute to form meaning, they stand in for something else and, thus, they are not, themselves, the referent, the actual object of reference. For this very reason alphabetic signs are considered digital signs. Semiotically, we are in the presence of an expression level and a content level. In semiotic terms and, specifically referring to *mode-as-writing*, the *expression level* is the actual word, sentence, paragraph, it is, in other words, the text we use to communicate/signify.<sup>3</sup> The *content level* is the potential meaning vehicled by the expression level. The referent of the codified correlation, which takes place between the two levels, is not an actual object, as we are normally used to refer to animate and inanimate things or what we illusively see through a photograph, but only the idea of an object or its cultural unit. Such a difference is essential in terms of comparison with *mode-as-image* because *mode-as-writing* lacks the transparency<sup>4</sup> function. It lacks the reproductive quality of the object that a photograph provides. For *mode-as-writing* there is always an *a priori* awareness of a bi-planar effort of articulation,<sup>5</sup> both in terms of codification and decodification<sup>6</sup>, which eliminates any intentional and methodical possibility of transparency.

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In *mode-as-writing* there is a rigid positional and oppositional rule of elements of articulation. Graphemes<sup>7</sup> must occupy a certain position and must be opposed to one another in order to form meaningful contents. For it consists of a sophisticated, well-structured system of articulation relying on highly prescriptive rules, which makes *mode-as-writing* a form of communication made up primarily of *strong codes*. (Eco 1968, 121–22) This is a mode governed by rules of horizontal-directional-sequential-placement, oppositional values, and grammatical rules of the system's elements. As it is, *mode-as-writing* requires a much greater effort and longer time to grasp its content. Nonetheless, when we require to express complex ideas and details that require variation and distinction in terms of subtlety, *mode-as-writing* is the most effective one apt to produce the smallest shade of meaning, especially when dealing with abstract ideas. With writing we may adequately achieve such a depth insofar as it is a system of rigid differences whereby positional and oppositional elements of articulation produce strong codes that work toward the disambiguation of content values.<sup>8</sup> For example, if we attempt to draw on paper images that require depth of distinction and precise subtleties, we soon realize that it is impossible because *mode-as-image* is not equipped with the necessary expressive characteristics to signify adequately, an advantage that we instead may find in *mode-as-writing*.<sup>9</sup> Being aware of this difference is crucial because one has the ability to choose the most useful mode of signification and steer meaning toward effectiveness and accuracy.

In the domain of *mode-as-writing*, and specifically the way in which Dante employed it in the *DC*, we need to add its sub-modalities, which consist of signifying by means of *explanatio per argumenta exemplorum* (signifying by means of examples), as well as by the metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolic modes. It is important to comprehend that, although Dante himself did not make a clear distinction among them and only talked extensively on the subject of allegory, the textual quality of the *DC* prompts the reader to make such an explanatory distinction. Therefore, we endeavor to address important characteristics and useful examples related to said sub-modalities in order to fulfil the required wide-ranging, interpretive sphere of *mode-as-writing* vis-à-vis the textual complexity of the *DC*.

The strategy of *explanatio per argumenta exemplorum* was frequently used in the Middle Ages by the scholastics and by Dante himself. He took advantage of it to be able to convey meaning, particularly in the third *cantica* dedicated to the *Par*. Such a strategy consisted of signifying *per aliud*, that is, based on that which calls to mind on the basis of something else. At the beginning of the *Par*., Dante the wayfarer is introduced to a realm of transcendental order for which no human language can produce meaning. To overcome such an obstacle, he took advantage of the strategy of *explanatio per argumenta exemplorum* and referenced Ovid's tale of the fisherman Glaucus who by ingesting an unknown herb, was suddenly transformed into a sea god. Dante mentions Glaucus' example to basically tell the reader that he is now in a dimension beyond human comprehension but, since he cites such an example, he can nonetheless

relate what his experience is without actually narrating it. In Chapter 5 we will provide a semiotic explanation regarding what an *explanatio per argumenta exemplorum* entails and how meaning is formed and conveyed through such a sub-mode.

Dante's central idea of metaphor and the way in which he employed it in the *DC* is a matter of signs/language and not a matter of cognition. Saying that metaphor is a matter of signs/language does not mean that cognition is left out from the metaphorical process. On the contrary, it is what guides perception, formulation, and legitimization of the analogy. Cognition is the dominant resource humans use to look for and discover the content of an unnamed content to which, the named part of the metaphor, alludes to. "Aristotle provides the most luminous confirmation of the metaphor's cognitive function when he associates it with *mimesis*." (Eco 1984, 102) Yet, in the Aristotelean sense and in Dante's view, cognition is not a metaphorical relation itself as some contemporary scholars suggested in the 80s and still continue to maintain. For example, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, in *Metaphors We Live By* 1980, claimed that "our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature" (4), and that the "concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured." (5) On the contrary, we should say that "[t]hinking...obeys linguistic laws before any logical laws may exist. In particular, it obeys the semantic laws governing the play of determination between the poles of lexical meaning and textual meaning." (Weinrich 39–40) Likewise, we can indeed claim (without hesitation) that language is metaphorical while we cannot say the same for cognition.

In the *DC* metaphors are primarily language signs, they are semiotically driven and stand in for uncoded terms. They form cognition for terms that do not exist and establish new semantic relations inhabited by analogies. In this sense, metaphors are a matter of necessity; they are indispensable for the purpose of signification and verbalization of unknown knowledge. For that which is unknown and in the domain of unutterability which, the latter, is particularly underscored in the *Par.*, Dante must rely on *necessary metaphors* to avert the language signifying inadequacy. Also, *necessary metaphors* become the main linguistic feature to find a way, the only way, to speak about God, which can happen only metaphorically, by means of analogies.

Within reach of the metaphorical domain, we find allegory. Dante made special attempts, particularly in the *Convivio* (*Conv.*) and in the *Epistle to Cangrande*, (*Ep.* 13) to show the reader how to comprehend the function of allegory in *DC*. Also, from his instructions we are able to identify the distinctive trait by which we can tell the difference between allegory and metaphor. The distinctive aspect of allegory is that it preserves structurally active (and according to context and textual circumstances) meaning transference from a coded literal sense to a deeper sense in order to address an uncoded and ineffable language. Also, while we have a rather clear definition of

allegory, we completely lack a definition of metaphor in Dante. The need to define and show distinction between the two is not only for definition's sake, but more importantly, to comprehend what the difference is between the two and how they are uniquely utilized by Dante in a signifying process whose object of signification is transcendental. At first sight, we are tempted to say that allegory is a good, lengthened metaphor and that there is no difference between the two. Instead, in our analysis we endeavor to show that there is indeed a difference, a subtle one, which is mainly centered on the mode of signification.

The mode of signification of allegory is based on the ever-present, inferred suggestion to the reader to look for a deeper sense in the text which is directly anchored to and contextually authorized by the codified literal sense. The content value of the letter does not disappear with the pursuit of the allegorical meaning. The literal retains its status as literal meaning and, furthermore, it becomes the verbal embodiment, the *umbra* (shadow) of the allegorical. In a wide-ranging manner, the literal sense in the *DC* is the initial, the fundamental point of orientation for the reader to determine whether some language signs have metaphorical or allegorical value within the text's context. The literal sense is the logical groundwork upon which we construct allegorical connotations and not the other way around. The literal level of the metaphor disappears when the metaphorical pursuit of meaning is established because the literal meaning would become literally absurd. We can literally say that a leopard, a lion, and a she-wolf blocked Dante's journey and, eventually, be enticed to look for a deeper allegorical significance attributable to the three beasts. Yet, if we say that Dante is a leopard, or a lion, or a she-wolf, literally, we would be lying and, indeed, saying an absurdity.

Also, poets may often use the allegorical mode, not necessarily in a strict allegorical sense but in a more general metaphorical way whereby the transference of meaning from the metaphorical word cannot, in a meaningful way, be linked to and be traceable to the literal sense. In fact, if we take the example Aristotle uses in *Rhetoric* 1405a, where he says that "pirates...call themselves 'purveyors'" of commercial goods, the analogy with "merchants" is witty but difficult to spot and it has nothing to do with the literal sense. The difference between a rigorous allegory and metaphor can be spotted in the literal level which prompts us to use the elementary rule and say that allegory reveals by uncovering while metaphor reveals by concealing.

In *mode-as-speaking* the verbal sign is uttered and not written and, as such, it is a momentary auditory production lacking a lasting material quality of sign. The divergence of the material traits employed in this mode is what makes it different from *mode-as-writing*. The oral transmission of Dante's *DC* became a customary practise and, already around 1319–25, "the poem had won a following among the urban population at large, including the illiterate." (Ahern 2003, 9) Through the oral transmission and with

speaking in general, *sound* and *emotion* become fundamental characteristics that point directly to human speech. Human speech consists of a complex system that is not only physical production but calls into play knowledge, intellectual, sensual, and emotional involvement. For its complexity, human speech relies on specific efforts of production and decodification that may be fully experienced and achieved in terms of meaning-formation through an active involvement between production and decodification and enhanced by the combination of the sound and emotion of aesthetic quality.

Also, in mode-as-speaking, our attention is directed to a “multi-dimensional resonance” of language (McLuhan 1969, 36); that is, to the “audile-tactile” world insofar as “speech is an outering (utterance) of all of our senses at once” (McLuhan 1969, 57). The oral dimension of language does not take place as a form of well-defined space, nor is it bound to a rigid, directional linearity that writing imposes, but occurs in an “acoustic space” which, according to Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, is “boundless, directionless, horizonless”, it takes place “in the world of emotion” (1967, 48). The ear, with the presence of sound, is a world of simultaneous relations of our *senses* and of our *surroundings* whose role is not only to receive sound but works also as an exceptional and indispensable tool in the formation of discourse and the fulfilment of our aesthetic experience in language. In Chapter 2 we shall explicitly examine the importance of speaking connected to discourse as a phenomenal model that generates meaning through the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic factors whereby the “universe of signification” is seen and pondered as “*praxis* rather than as a stable set of fixed forms.” (Fontanille 2006, xx; see also Kristeva 1980, 36)

A central aspect that governs *mode-as-image* is perception which influences representation directly. What this means is that perceptually one does not recognize the image as sign or is not spontaneously aware of perceiving the image as sign, but rather as the object of representation itself. It is comparable to a *trompe-l'oeil*, an artistic technique whereby the painted object is intended to deceive the viewer by creating the optical illusion that the painted object is a true object. For this reason Roland Barthes (1977, 17) defines the photographic image as “*a message without a code*” insofar as it is a “perfect *analogon*”, and Umberto Eco (1997, 336 and note 35, p. 422), compares Barthes’ “*message without a code*” to his “alpha mode”. Both, Barthes’ “*message without a code*” and Eco’s “alpha mode” correspond to *primary iconicity* which, in essence, is a type of iconicity without sign. As for the treachery of images, the Belgian artist René Magritte painted his most famous and controversial painting of a pipe and below the image he wrote: “Ceci n’est pas une pipe” (This is not a pipe), to basically make the viewer aware of the fact that the pipe he painted is not the object itself (a true pipe) but only an image of it. And, in fact, perception, at the stage of *primary iconicity*, generally fools the viewer in seeing a true object when, in reality, it is only a depiction of the object.



To be able to recognize Magritte's painting as an image and not as an object itself, we as viewers must position ourselves on the level of *secondary iconicity*; that is, on the second-order of iconicity, that is, when a sign-function<sup>10</sup> really comes into play and, to use Magritte's example, when the pipe is no longer perceived as a pipe, but as a sign (depiction) of the pipe. Such a contrast shows that *primary iconicity* and *secondary iconicity* must be analyzed according to different formal structures to clearly grasp their functional roles within the cognitive experience. Also, when iconicity is taken as *mental image*, the rule of correlation is detected and recognized by the perceiver; that is, we are aware of the presence of a rule that governs the sign's constitutive/correlative elements. This happens only at the level of *secondary iconicity*. At this level, we are allowed to speak of a sign standing in for something else, namely standing in for the object of representation and for which, the sign, only claims "to stand in for" and not to be the object itself.

The greatest challenge posed by iconicity is the impossibility to set accurate perceptive boundaries between real and *surrogate stimuli*<sup>11</sup> and, thus, difficult to distinguish when the perceptor (the individual who perceives) is dealing with an object of representation or with a real object. In the realm of iconic modality, such a challenge is not limited to visual representation but also includes sound, smell, and taste, even if our attention is mostly focused on visual and sound representations. A further difficulty of iconicity is posited when perception is related to real objects, and such objects are not taken or perceived at face value but charged with a metaphorical function.

The iconic mode, especially in the range of visual images, can be more effective than the verbal mode when the content of an image is a concrete referent or a referent that may be materially simulated. This means that the object of representation must contain the physico-sensorial characteristics of an actual object (even if illusory), in order to be unambiguously replicable. It is a powerful mode because it relies on *surrogate stimuli*, which are stimuli of illusory nature insofar as they are able to substitute effective stimuli. They act together with *cognitive types*.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, we must acknowledge the limits of images as visual signs because they are not endowed with distinctive and highly conventional elements of articulation. As such, visual signs are neither well-established systemically nor are they conventionally recognized as having strict positional and oppositional values. Such is the reason for which Eco speaks of weak codes in relation to images. (1968, 124)

Furthermore, in visual representation, space is a complex, implicit characteristic of the image and the way it works in the formation of the image contributes to the efficiency/inefficiency and felicitous/infelicitous outcome of the iconic mode over other modes. This is the case when the representation's content is a concrete and/or a conventional referent which can be materially simulated. In terms of simulation capability, space always contains within itself the totality of the image(s), or at least a complete idea of that which one intends to represent. The message potentially available in the image is

instantaneous and wholly contained within the same spatial boundaries. Unlike writing and speaking, whose main role is to tell, the image's role is to show and, therefore, "there is no need to know how to spell according to a conventional system because the image *immediately* unfolds itself before our eyes." (Spinicci 2008, 19) Therefore, the way we read a painting is different than the way we read a book, and Füssli's depiction of Count Ugolino and the analysis I provide in section 1.8 may suffice to make such a difference stand out.

For moving picture and its mode of delivery, we must point out those distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other modes. As a composite, dynamic system, the language of the moving picture cannot be compared to a written, spoken language and not even, in its entirety, to *mode-as-image* (simple image) because film has its distinctive filmic language and thus differs from the other ones in terms of articulation and insofar as it cannot, for example, be divided into "active and passive" as it is the case for verbal modalities. (Metz 1974, 53) The cinematic image must always be viewed as a performative entity of speech; it can never be taken as a unit of language because, in its performative presence, it is "*always actualized.*" (Metz 1974, 67) As for specific characteristics, we can say that the cinematic language: 1) is not endowed with non-significant units (phonemes), but all units are carriers of meaning; 2) the smallest identifiable unit of the cinematic language is a significant unit, but not as small as the smallest significant unit of the verbal language (morphemes/monemes, or *words*, to use Metz's term); 3) the smallest significant units of the cinematic language are the *shots*, which are whole statements comparable to syntagmas, and "which are actualized with their total meaning in the discourse." (Metz 1974, 115)

According to Pasolini, the cinematic language does not have already-codified-signs, as it is the case for verbal languages. The filmmaker must draw "from chaos" what could become a potential sign and consider it in a classifiable "dictionary of im-signs (gestures, environment, dreams, memory)" (Pasolini 1976, 545). Then s/he must "accomplish the very work of the writer, that is, enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression." (Pasolini 1976, 545) At the point of actualization, even for Pasolini, the cinematic language is always a performative entity of speech insofar as it does not have a true dictionary and/or a proper normative grammar.

One last important aspect of *mode-as-moving picture* is Eco's novelty regarding the third articulation of the cinematic code, which addresses the combination of cinematic signs in a sort of "hypersignificance" and brings into the picture the motion factor of the cinematic code, or what we may also call kinesic factor; that is, the non-verbal behavior of communication related to the gestures of the body language. Eco explains the motion factor that contributes to the making of a cinematic code as the "passing from the photogram to the frame, the characters [present in the photogram] accomplish certain gestures: the *icons* generate *kines* via a diachronic movement,

and the *kines* are further arranged to compose *kinemorphs*.” (Eco 1976b, 602) He also adds that *kines* (meaningful units) can decompose into kinesic figures (meaningless units). This is something that “kinesics has difficulty in identifying”, namely, difficulty in identifying as “discrete units of time in the gestural continuum.” To explain such a limitation, he uses the example of the movie camera which is able to decompose “kines precisely into a number of discrete units which still on their own mean nothing, but which have differential value with respect to other discrete units.” (Eco 1976b, 603) A good example of what Eco argues about here can be found in Chapter 3, section 3.7 that analyzes Peter Greenway’s strategy to depict the well-known episode of Paolo Malatesta and Francesca da Rimini in *Inf.* 5 exploiting the ingenuity of kinesic details applied to the same image with the purpose to convey a change of meaning. Yet, if the same kinesic details would be taken by themselves, detached from the image(s) of Francesca, decomposed into what Eco calls “discrete units”, they would be meaningless. As a central feature of multimodality, *mode-as-moving picture* is also a central feature in the *DC*. Dante’s journey in the afterlife is primarily an experience of what he sees, and before he converts his experience into the written text, or into the written mode, that is, into the mode by which it is offered to us, we must recognize the poet’s foregoing and latent phase of sight that reveals itself as an unfolding spectacle before his eyes. From the beginning of the *Inf.* to the very last cantos of the *Par.*, Dante’s experience is first and foremost an experience of sight. His narration is driven by what he actually sees. His ability to move forward depends on the visual event and not on the semantic content.

## 1.2 Mode

All the resources and environments offered by multimodality are called *modes* and multimodality is the inter-disciplinary approach which is employed to study communication and attempts to engage visual, aural, written, and spatial forms of interactions and environments in order to better facilitate forms of representation and/or learning experiences in the age of information technology. One fundamental postulation of multimodality is that communication is intrinsically multimodal and, thus, always draws on several modes in order to aid representation/learning and meaning formation. Also, *modes* are socially shaped and subject to change over time. They behave in such a way that the more they are used in the social life of a community the more articulated and efficient they become. For this reason and for the extensive employment of information technology, we may say that multimodality has become predominant in contemporary time, including the ways in which it is used to study the *DC*.

Mode, as Kress defines it, “is a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning. *Images, writing, music, gesture, speech, moving image, soundtrack, and 3D objects* are examples of modes

used in representation and communication.” (2010, 79) He also distinguishes certain phenomena and objects that though they are socially shaped and culturally identified as carriers of meaning in their respective environments, “their primary function is not that of representation and communication”. Therefore, it would be questionable and somewhat problematic as to whether or not they should be considered modes, “even though we know that they can be used to make meaning and to communicate.” (Kress 2010, 79) Kress’ notion of mode is wide-ranging and clearly extends beyond the scope of this work. As for the specific modes employed here, we will limit our discussion to those environments which use modes as means of representation and communication primarily.

As socially shaped and culturally driven semiotic resource, mode is able to function as mode only insofar as it is made up of underlying values and organized in a structured manner. Such an organized and structural manner is the *value system of mode*. This means that not only verbal modes, such as *language-as-writing* and *language-as-speaking*, are ruled by *value systems* but so are nonverbal modes, though their value systems are different and conceived according to their respective world of communication/signification, and which, the latter, emphasize “the affordances of the material ‘stuff’ of the mode” (Kress 2010, 80). The material stuff of other modes depends on sound, visual representations, gesturing, movement, etc. In other words, even if the actual manifestation of modes relies on different material stuff or resources, the modes’ ability to carry out their specific tasks as modes is contingent upon the good functionality of their world of communication/signification or their structured *value systems*. For example, if we compare *mode-as-image* to *mode-as-writing*, the former utilizes material stuff and resources that are different from the latter, or even if the same material stuff and resources may be employed by both, the actual effecting of the material and resources would be different from one another and, accordingly, produce different results. One relevant difference between the two is that *mode-as-image* is mostly governed by an iconic sign system<sup>13</sup> whereas *mode-as-writing* by a symbolic one.<sup>14</sup> In the following pages we will mainly focus on those modes that are relevant and will serve the reader in the capacity of interpretive and critical tools for a semiotics of multimodality and signification in the DC.

### 1.3 Mode-as-writing

*Mode-as-writing* is similar to other socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resources that are made of underlying values organized in a structured manner and which we, as we already pointed out, call the *value systems of mode*. However, when it comes to *mode-as-writing*, we need to draw a distinction. However, before we do so, I would like to state from the beginning that what we are going to discuss are only those aspects that we deem relevant for the specific aim of this study. Hence, our discussion is far

from being a wide-ranging study of *mode-as-writing*. Accordingly, we may begin by saying that the distinctive characteristic *mode-as-writing* presents, especially if compared to the visual mode and, in the specificity of photograph and its *trompe-l'oeil* effect, is the immediate recognition of being in the presence of signs that refer to meaning and not to concrete things. Semiotically, we are in the presence of an expression level and a content level. The referent of the codified correlation, which takes place between the two levels, is not an actual object, as we are normally used to referring to animate and inanimate things or what we illusively see through a photograph, but only the idea of an object or its cultural unit. Such a difference is vital in terms of comparison with *mode-as-image* because *mode-as-writing* lacks the transparency function. That is, in *mode-as-image* transparency is viewed as the relation that links the object to its photographic reproduction which is neither filtered through the beliefs of the photographer, nor is there an intentional attitude manipulating such a reproduction, because one may only photograph what is in front of the lens and not what one believes there is. Thus, the material-stuff (graphemes) employed in writing may show (“*děloŭsi*”), convey only what is the outcome of a symbolic<sup>15</sup> sign function operating in a sign system. For *mode-as-writing* there is always an *a priori* awareness of a bi-planar effort of articulation, both in terms of codification and decodification, which eliminates any intentional and methodical possibility of transparency. Before we used the term “meaning” to refer to the content value of an expression in its general sense even if, for the sake of clarity, we should perhaps employ the term “signification”, which may address the semiotic implication more directly. And so it does because etymologically “signification” is the conflation of two Latin words *signum* (sign) and *facere* (to do, to make) which points out the process by which meaning is formed: through the correlation of words (expression level) and what they signify (content level or signification). Moreover, in *mode-as-writing* all the elements of articulation are utilized and acknowledged according to grammatical and syntactical rules. This means that the mode operates by means of discrete traits or by means of distinctive elements. They are assembled within the continuum of combinations, oppositions, and permutations of a limited number of graphemes that a particular language recognizes. Also, in terms of complexity, as M.A.K. Halliday argues, there is a difference between the written and the oral mode in that the “written language becomes complex by being typically dense: it packs a large number of lexical items into each clause; whereas spoken language becomes complex by being grammatically intricate: it builds up elaborate clause complexes out of parataxis and hypotaxis.” (1994, 350)

In *mode-as-writing* there is a rigid positional and oppositional rule of elements of articulation. Graphemes must occupy a certain position and be opposed to one another in order to form meaningful contents. For it consists of a sophisticated, well-structured system of articulation relying on highly prescriptive rules, which makes *mode-as-writing* a form of communication made

up primarily of *strong codes*. (Eco 1968, 121–22)<sup>16</sup> This is the reason why a person must learn all the rules of a verbal language in order to communicate. With verbal languages communication is satisfactory only if learned correctly. Any other way, writing and speaking would be meaningless signs and meaningless sounds. Contrary to writing or speaking, in visual representations, only limited yet pertinent traits are needed to communicate. If we take the dot Eco used as an example for drawing a human profile, we clearly understand that such a dot refers to the eye because of its contextual specificity and its particular spatial arrangement within the line that encompasses the shape of the human profile. In visual representation, drawing is not governed by rules of horizontal-directional-sequential-placement, oppositional values, and grammatical rules of the system's elements. In *mode-as-image*, communication is the result of contextuality with detailed spatial arrangement made available within the totality of its representation. In such a mode, when we deal with signification, only some pertinent traits are used to signify while others are narcotized or pushed in the background. Let us envision the drawing of a three-year-old child attempting to draw the human body. In the drawing we are perhaps able to recognize the face because it is rendered visible through the closed line in the shape of a circle, as well as the mouth through a small horizontal line enclosed within the circle. The same thing may happen for the rest of the body where straight and oblique lines allow us to identify the arms, legs, and trunk. Now, even if the child's drawing is undoubtedly a sort of rudimentary drawing, which presents no more than a few hesitant traits, they are nonetheless good enough to allow recognition. These traits, although considered hesitant, are very powerful because they stand in as pertinent traits and, as such, perform their recognition role felicitously as a result of the peculiar assemblage of visual projection and spatial distribution bounded within the margins of the white sheet of paper. A similar strength of recognition and signification is impossible to achieve with *mode-as-writing*. Yet we need to keep in mind that though *mode-as-image* has the distinctive ability and advantage of recognizing things in the blink of an eye, which is a practical strength that comes from the mode's figurativeness, it nevertheless hosts weak codes. It hosts weak codes because, as Eco argued, the "optional variants exceed by far the pertinent traits" and, thus, contribute in making the mode ambiguous and ineffective in terms of depth of representation if compared to *mode-as-writing*. In fact, when we require complex and strong codes for an adequate representation, we need to turn to *mode-as-writing* insofar as it has the ability to effectively produce the smallest shades of meaning (where necessary) as in the case of abstract ideas. With writing we may effectively achieve such a depth since it is a system of rigid differences whereby positional and oppositional elements of articulation produce strong codes. Strong codes, in turn, contribute to the disambiguation of the content value of an expression. If, for example, we attempt to draw on paper images that require strong, complex codes, we soon realize that it is a waste of time and effort because *mode-as-image* is not equipped with the necessary expressive

features that one requires in order to signify effectively. Instead, such features are offered by *mode-as-writing*.<sup>17</sup> Being aware of this difference is crucial because one has the ability to choose the most able mode of signification to steer meaning toward effectiveness and accuracy.<sup>18</sup>

### 1.4 Mode-as-speaking

In *mode-as-speaking* the verbal sign behaves in a way that is not only different from *mode-as-image*, given the clear variance of the material stuff therein employed, but also different from *mode-as-writing*. By comparing *mode-as-speaking* to the other two modes, we may intuitively grasp that the difference dwells in the material production. Speaking is dominated by sound and, therefore, one does not produce graphic signs, except in the case of some computer programs that they allegedly transcribe when one speaks. I used *allegedly* because what they do is not necessarily what they are designed to do in terms of recognition and accuracy. And here, in a brief digression, I would like to share my experience with the reader. A few years ago (but even now though improved), speech recognition programs lack accuracy and misinterpretation is still a common problem. Out of curiosity, I tested *Dragon*, the speech recognition software. I followed all the rules of voice adjustment provided by the software and then proceeded to read two short texts: one from Aristotle's *Rhetoric* and the other from Dante's *DC*. This is what came out of my reading of the two texts:

#### *Actual text from Aristotle's Rhetoric*

We may lay it down that Pleasure is a movement, a movement by which the soul as a whole is consciously brought into its normal state of being; and that Pain is the opposite. If this is what pleasure is, it is clear that the pleasant is what tends to produce this condition, while that which tends to destroy it, or to cause the soul to be brought into the opposite state, is painful. It must therefore be pleasant as a rule to move towards a natural state of being, particularly when a natural process has achieved the complete recovery of that natural state. Habits also are pleasant; for as soon as a thing has become habitual, it is virtually natural; habit is a thing not unlike nature; what happens often is akin to what happens always, natural events happening always, habitual events often. Again, that is pleasant which is not forced on us; for force is unnatural, and that is why what is compulsory, painful, and it has been rightly said. All that is done on compulsion is bitterness unto the soul.

(1.11)

#### *Speech recognition text generated by Dragon*

Lien may its endowment, of that play German is some lament a more amended by which was sold as a whole ease consciously brought into its

normal state of being; and that pain is in the opposite. To if this is what Glacier Bay is, it is clear that the players and is what tends to abuse this commission, while that which tends to be stored it, or two calls, and so to be brought into the opposite state, is painful. It must therefore be pleasant bizarre ruled to move towards a natural state of being, particularly when a natural process is achieved to the complete recovery of that natural state. Habits also are pleasant; voice shall it as pain has become a bitch role it is virtually natural; habit is the vein and not unlike nature; what happens often is a team through what happens always, natural events happening always, a beach with events often. I gained, debt is players in which is not to forestall ass; course is natural, and that is why what is compulsory use painful, and it has been right to descend all that is bound on compulsion ease bitterness on two of the sole.

When I first looked at what the speech recognition software was transcribing, I was reluctant to believe that it would transcribe nonsense and decided to have a native speaker of American English to read the same passage. The result was worse than the one provided above. After that, I thought of reading a text in another language to see how the program would behave. From *canto 5* of Dante's *Inf.*, I read the following *terzine*:

*“Siede la terra dove nata fui  
su la marina dove ‘l Po discende  
per aver pace co’ seguaci sui.  
Amor, ch’al cor gentil ratto s’apprende  
prese costui de la bella persona  
che mi fu tolta; e ‘l modo ancor m’offende.  
Amor condusse noi ad una morte:  
Caina attende chi a vita ci spense.”* (97-107)

**Correct English translation by Allen Bandelbaum<sup>19</sup>**

[“The land where I was born lies on that shore  
to which the Po together with the waters  
that follow it descends to final rest.

Love, that can quickly seize the gentle heart,  
took hold of him because of the fair body  
taken from me-how that was done still wounds me.

Love, that releases no beloved from loving,  
took hold of me so strongly through his beauty  
that, as you see, it has not left me yet.

Love led the two of us unto one death.  
Caina waits for him who took our life.”]



**Speech recognition text transcribed into English by Dragon:**

*See what they are below in that if we shall let me lien on gold and in all the shame that innovative by sharing quotes statewide Jewish what he a. Motor, to of glory James Dean Close-up, of a adding that place equal shall we been unveil a persona Amy Foote told to a mall bill on or more famed. A more, the gun normal on not allow my own, a meet place a daily host, we, a pitch share see, a for the gained Oliver D. Uncle Ramon bundle. A more own boost in the week of mall. They pay even at aimed. The key of the pitch spins set to.*

As I was speaking into the microphone with much more incredulity than before, I realized that not only was *Dragon* completely inaccurate for transcribing nonsense, but that it was also pretentious by attempting to recognize and translate a language it did not understand!

As hilarious as this case might appear, on a serious note, it should make us reflect on the issue of *sound* and *emotion*, which are the main characteristics of speaking that point directly to the human speech system and to the fact that it cannot be properly simulated by means of a computer program. No matter how complex and sophisticated a software may be, it is, nonetheless, a limited tool of pre-programmed sound patters that will not be able to properly recognize contextual relation of words and sentences, voice patterns, foreign accents, surrounding noises, homonyms, homophones, emotional peculiarities that one would instead spot through facial expressions, and so on. Human speech consists of a complex system that is not only physical production. It requires knowledge and intellectual, sensual, and emotional involvement of the speaker. Sound in human speech involves unpredictable elements of production and decodification. Said elements may be fully grasped and experienced in the complexity of the system only through an actual human involvement enhanced by the combination of sound, emotion, and gesturing in a sort of mixed modality. For example, it would be very difficult in a written statement to convey “good morning!” with a nuanced smile without the aid of a written caption. One could perhaps remark and say that such a thing is possible by using an emoticon that electronic devices have available in text messaging. Indeed, this is possible when conveying an obvious smile. Yet, it would be difficult to express a smile connoting an ironic overtone. In ordinary and formal writing, it is not acceptable to adopt written captions (except for comic books, theatrical scripts, advertisement, and other informal texts), thus one may merely rely on what the sole text says and nothing else. Another distinctive characteristic of the oral mode is that of directing our attention to the “multi-dimensional resonance” of language (McLuhan 1969, 36); that is, to the “audile-tactile” world insofar as “speech is an outering (utterance) of all of our senses at once” (McLuhan 1969, 57). The oral performance of language does not take place in the form of a well-defined space, nor is it bound to a rigid, directional linearity that writing

imposes, but occurs in an “acoustic space” which, according to Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, is “boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition, by terror.” (1967, 48) Furthermore:

[the] ear favours no particular ‘point of view’. We are *enveloped* by sound. It forms a seamless web around us. We say, ‘Music shall fill the air.’ We never say, ‘Music shall fill a *particular* segment of the air.’

We hear sounds from everywhere, without ever having to focus. Sounds come from ‘above,’ from ‘below,’ from in ‘front’ of us, from ‘behind’ us, from our ‘right,’ from our ‘left.’ We can’t shut out sound automatically. We simply are not equipped with earlids. Where a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships.

(McLuhan-Fiore 1967, 111)

Here we could add that the ear is also a world of simultaneous relations of our *senses* and of our *surroundings* whose role is not only communicative, but more so it works as an exceptional and indispensable tool in the formation of discourse and fulfilment of our aesthetic experience in language. The written mode of language, as it physically displays writing on the sheet of paper or on an electronic screen is only one dimension of a linguistic system that fundamentally makes available those prescriptive rules that correspond to the Saussurrean level of *langue* (the language-system shared by a community of speakers) (De Saussure 1959, 16) which, by itself, is not sufficient to allow discourse to develop. In addition to the written word, we need a human presence with a voice and an ear to perform acts of *parole* (the actual speech production of an individual) (De Saussure 1959, 14) to allow discourse to take place. Thus, in its structural complexity, discourse is “a dynamic mechanism of speech acts<sup>20</sup> that generates a [distinctive] message based on a situational interplay between constitutive elements of language” (De Benedictis 2012, 7), and their specific performative roles enacted by the speaker and/or the reader. Strictly referring to writing, in the *Phaedrus* Plato makes Socrates express the following view:

For this invention will produce forgetfulness in the minds of those who learn to use it, because they will not practice their memory. Their trust in writing, produced by external characters which are no part of themselves, will discourage the use of their own memory within them. You have invented an elixir not of memory, but of reminding; and you offer your pupils the appearance of wisdom, not true wisdom, for they will read many things without instruction and will therefore seem to know many things, when they are for the most part ignorant and hard to get along with, since they are not wise, but only appear wise.

(275a, 275b.)

One aspect worth mentioning from the above passage is that Socrates criticizes writing and points out its shortcomings to provide an implied exaltation of the oral mode. For Socrates the oral mode is endowed with a much more valuable linguistic function. Even though he does not explain why writing is not “an elixir... of memory” or “not true wisdom”. Nevertheless, we may infer that he too is conceivably thinking of those distinctive characteristics we discussed above and that only the oral mode may produce.

Orality is remarkably meaningful because the *DC* is a work in which Dante makes the reader an active part of his work. He directly calls upon the reader not once but twenty-one times,<sup>21</sup> which is a clear indication of the significance of such a role and the emphasis he puts on reading and, in particular, on reading aloud. In order for the *DC* to come alive, it is important to not only read the text but also *how* to read it. In other words, reading is not only a practise whereby the reader, secluded in a quiet and remote place, would visually follow the directional linearity of the cursive or printed verse (or as we would call it reading with one’s eyes) but it is a true utterance, a physical manifestation of articulated sounds. In Dante’s time, reading was carried out differently than it is commonly done today. Though we must admit that, for reasons of rhetorical effectiveness, we, in part (luckily), tend to be influenced by and preserve such a valuable lesson from the past. An influential author and certainly an authority on the issue of reading in the Middle Ages remains Dom Jean Leclercq. He argues that:

...in the Middle Ages, as in antiquity, [people] read usually, not as today, principally with the eyes, but with the lips, pronouncing what they saw, and with the ear, listening to the words pronounced, hearing what is called the “voices of the pages.” It is a real acoustic reading; *legere* means at the same time *audire*; ...[n]o doubt, silent reading, or reading in a low voice, was not unknown; in that case it is designated by expressions like those of St. Benedict: *tacite legere* or *legere sibi*; and according to St. Augustine: *legere in silentio*, as opposed to *clara lectio*. But most frequently, when *legere* and *lectio* are used without further explanation, they mean an activity which...requires the participation of the whole body and the whole mind... This results in more than a visual memory of the written words. What results is a muscular memory of the words pronounced and an aural memory of the words heard. The *meditatio* consists in applying oneself with attention to this exercise in total memorization; it is, therefore, inseparable from the *lectio*. It is what inscribes, so to speak, the sacred text in the body and in the soul.

(24,78)

To Leclercq’s account of reading aloud, we can add Ezio Raimondi’s classical rhetorical recollection and key idea of “*ritmo*” (rhythm) insofar as the rhythm of a sentence is that which turns the sentence into the reader’s breathing.<sup>22</sup>

The customary practise of reading aloud in the Middle Ages also involved Dante. The earliest and most common form of dissemination of the *DC* took place through public readings and recitation of scattered *cantos*. Evidence that the *DC* was read aloud and performed in public is irrefutable, as various sources attest to such a practise: “Indeed the already noted oral performances of the poem in Bologna around 1319–25, which so displeased Petrarch and Giovanni Del Virgilio, indicate that the poem had won a following among the urban population at large, including the illiterate.” (Ahern 2003, 9) Also, that the *DC* reached even the non-literate via the oral mode is further confirmed in one of Petrarch’s letters:

“Petrarch writing to Boccaccio (1359) claimed that the ‘ignorant [*idiotae*]... in shops and the market place’ knew Dante. He spoke of Dante’s ‘long-standing popularity...acclaimed in the theatres and cross-roads of the city’ (*Familiars* 21.5) and noted how the ‘unskilled tongues of his admirers defiled the poem in performance [*pronuntiando*].”

(Ahern 1997, 215)

As we look at contemporary multimodality, I am not sure if we are allowed to speak of a New Middle Ages insofar as orality is concerned, but that in Dante’s time multimodal efforts of dissemination and attempts to popularize his poem constitute irrefutable evidence.

### 1.5 Mode-as-image

A central aspect that governs *mode-as-image* is visual perception which influences representation directly. As we consider *mode-as-image*, we want to begin by focusing on the *terminus a quo*(point of origin) of representation instead of on the *terminus ad quem*(end point). At the level of perception, Peirce states that “images” partake of “simple qualities” and can be considered “First Firstness”.<sup>23</sup> This means that in the state of “Firstness”, perceptually, one does not recognize the image as sign, or is not spontaneously aware of perceiving the image as sign. At this stage, the sign is not available yet.<sup>24</sup> To shed light on this point, let us use Giorgio Vasari’s tale of Giotto’s fly. Vasari recounts that one day Cimabue (Giotto’s master) left his workshop for a while to handle business in Florence. During his absence, Giotto painted an authentic, life-like fly on the face of the painting Cimabue was working on. Upon his return and seeing that there was a fly on the face of the painting, the master scolded Giotto for his carelessness and, with his hand, tried several times to get rid of the fly. It took him a few seconds to realize that it was a fake fly. This is a case of *trompe-l’oeil* (an artistic technique whereby the painted object is intended to deceive the viewer by creating the optical illusion that the painted object is a true object). If we compare this episode with Peirce’s definition, we may understand that what he calls “simple qualities” or “First Firstness” of *images*, is that precise state in which Cimabue tried to get rid of the fly from the

painting without realizing that it was a fake fly. With the reaction that followed, that is, when Cimabue realized that the fly was fake, the fly is not perceived as “simple” quality or as “First Firstness” anymore because the “simple” quality of the image has slipped away and conspicuously turned into an iconic *sign*, into what Peirce specifically referred to as the third type of *hypoicon* (“*metaphors*”) presenting a complex quality of *relation* and *representation* (CP 2.277). Thus, only after Cimabue’s realization of Giotto’s trick, does the fly stand in for something else and becomes a sign-vehicle<sup>25</sup> having the sign-function<sup>26</sup> of correlating an expression to a content. A similar example can be found in Eco regarding his discussion on iconicity with Maldonado. Just briefly, the discussion was on the “image of the Moon that Galileo saw in his telescope” which, for Maldonado, “was an icon and as such possessed an innate likeness with the Moon itself.” (Eco 2000, 358) On the other hand, Eco objected, and his view instead was that

the image in the eyepiece of the telescope was not an icon—at least not in the sense of an iconic sign. The iconic sign, or hypoicon of the Moon (Peirce’s third type of hypoicon), emerged when, after having looked in the telescope, Galileo drew the Moon.

(2000, 358)

Such an example is indicative of the critical point in which the transformation occurs from *primary* to *secondary iconicity*, which constitutes the actual formation of a sign.<sup>27</sup>

## 1.6 Primary iconicity of mode-as-image

The material-stuff which makes up the *iconic mode-as-image* complies with the rules of iconicity and thus, in terms of sign production, it leads the mode into a form of representation whereby the image, and in the specificity of Barthes’ photographic image, is “absolutely analogical, which is to say *continuous*, outside of any recourse to a code, there is no need to look for the signifying units of the first-order message”.<sup>28</sup> Further, the first-order message “is not one of ‘transformation’ but of ‘recording’” and thus standing-in as a “mechanical analogue of reality”. (Barthes 1977, 44) This aspect seems to relate to the notion of “transparency” of the photographic image whereby the relation that connects the object to the photographic reproduction is not filtered through the beliefs of the photographer. The transparency of a photographic image is as such because it does not add any intentional quality to the object of which it speaks. A person only photographs the real thing that is in front of the lens and not what s/he believes there is.<sup>29</sup>

Only with the “second-order message”, or with “connotation”, signifying units emerge and the “code of connotation” of the photograph, is “in all likelihood neither ‘natural’ nor ‘artificial’ but historical, or if it be preferred, ‘cultural’ ”.<sup>30</sup> With these guidelines in mind, let us shed light specifically on

what Barthes meant by “first-order message” by not being one of ‘transformation’ but of ‘recording’ and standing-in as a “mechanical analogue of reality”. What this means is that at the literal level (first-order message), the photographic image does not require an actual correlation between an expression level and a content level. It does not require a rule-governed “*transformation*” or the condition for which, given the expression A, a corresponding content B follows because it is the result of a rule-governed correlation between the two and, therefore, involving a process of transformation. Instead, the relationship between signifier (expression) and signified (content) of the first-order message is established and carried out by means of *surrogate stimuli*,<sup>31</sup> in the manner of what Barthes calls “recording”, or reproduction of an illusory nature of the object. Up to this point, everything seems to be flowing smoothly. However, Barthes’ position begins to show some complications when he endorses the view “suggested by certain hypotheses of Bruner and Piaget” that “there is no perception without *immediate* categorization”,<sup>32</sup> especially knowing that Barthes, in the premise of his essay, clearly states that the photographic image “*is a message without a code*” (Barthes 1977, 17). Such a view makes perception and categorization a simultaneous occurrence of the same phenomenon leading to a contradictory conclusion. In fact, how is it possible that the photographic image presents the characteristic of being “*a message without a code*” and that “there is no perception without *immediate* categorization” (meaning that the implication of a code is required)? Or put differently, how is it possible that the photographic image is at the same time and in the same manner a message *without* a code and a message *with* a code? How can something be and not be at the same time and in the same manner? Barthes’ view here seems to violate the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction whereby it “is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect” (*Metaphysics* 4. 3. 1005b). According to this logical principle, to hold such a view is impossible especially in the phase of *primary iconicity*.<sup>33</sup> Yet, the Aristotelian principle of non-contradiction may be challenged and easily eluded when we are dealing with signs which are recognized as such; that is, when they have entered their triadic mode (*Thirddness*).<sup>34</sup> This is possible due to the general nature of signs which have an expression level correlated to a content level and the two function as one. When we look at the content level of a sign, we soon realize that we are faced with an illusory antinomy insofar as the meaning is concerned. If it is taken as a referent of the expression level it presents an *is/is not* provision. For it *is* referent insofar as it stands for something (meaning) and, thus, it means something; it is not a bare nothingness. Subsequently, having established that meaning *is* because it is endowed with the ability to have a content value, it nevertheless remains incomplete and challengeable because it is not a true self, it relies on an expression level and for such a condition it lacks its own individuality; it lacks self-autonomy and self-sufficiency. Thus, for its condition of incompleteness we must say that it *is not*. Again, this is the case only when the sign has

acquired its sign value through the triadic mode, but here we are still at the state of *primary iconicity*.

In trying to solve this impasse, I find more convincing to keep *perception* and *categorization* separate and clearly distinct from one another in the iconic process, as Eco does, and who makes perception coincide with *primary iconicity*. Also, *primary iconicity*, as we have already pointed out, is comparable to Peirce's "Firstness" and, conceivably, to the crossing of the threshold between "Firstness: and Secondness".<sup>35</sup> In other words, perception is a phenomenon that takes place *before* and must be viewed as the *antecedent* of categorization, and not as a simultaneous occurrence with categorization. The material-stuff of the photographic sign, at the level of first-order message produces only a perception of *likeness*<sup>36</sup> (not of *similarity*<sup>37</sup>) by means of *surrogate stimuli* interacting with existing CTs which are present in the individual as a result of cultural and life experiences.

Also, we need to keep in mind that any cognitive phenomenon is not an isolated phenomenon. Even the most primitive one engages all three categories. Perhaps, Barthes was thinking of the same thing when he endorsed Brunner's and Piaget's views suggesting that "there is no perception without *immediate* categorization", even if he never said it explicitly. Eco, instead, makes a point of it when he argues that:

*Ci sono certi momenti in cui Primità o Secondità appaiano preminenti, ma esse non sono mai le componenti esclusive del processo perché qualsiasi tipo di esperienza ha sempre bisogno di essere costituita da tutte e tre le categorie fenomenologiche. ...*

*Non solo, ma per Peirce le tre categorie non sono cognizioni bensì strutture formali che fondano la possibilità di ogni cognizione (in questo senso Peirce era kantiano), ovvero non sono tipi di esperienza bensì forme pure che costituiscono l'esperienza.*

[There are certain moments in which Firstness and Secondness appear to be dominant, yet they are never the exclusive components of the process because any type of experience must comprise the three phenomenological categories. ...

Moreover, for Peirce the three categories are not cognitions but formal structures which establish the possibility of every cognition (in this sense Peirce was Kantian), that is, they are not types of experience but pure forms which make up the experience.]

(Eco 2007, 469. My English translation) `

This means that for Peirce (as well as for Eco and the way in which he interprets Peirce) the three categories are discussed separately and each containing well defined boundaries for theoretical reasons. More specifically, they are kept distinctively separate to define their comprehensive and in-depth functions peculiar to each step of the cognitive phenomenon. Where

Eco states that “the three categories are pure forms...” he is, in my view, clearly referring to this idea.

Now, for what concerns the actual cognitive phenomenon, *Firstness*, *Secondness*, and *Thirdness* interact with each other even when the object of perception is something completely new and isolatable into a pure form of *Firstness*.

...[I]n Peirce le Primità non scaturiscono isolate, perché se lo facessero nulla potrebbe unirle. Esse scaturiscono in relazione l'una con l'altra, e così in una specie di esistenza (CP 6.199). L'emergere delle Primità attraverso l'opporci le une alle altre (Secondità) a partire dalla regolarità dell'abito (Terzità) per Peirce è un evento (CP 6.200), e cioè una singolarità, un punto in cui succede qualcosa. (...) In questo modo la spontaneità della Primità, di cui Peirce sottolinea la natura irregolare e singolare (CP 6.54), non si dimostra essere altro che uno scostamento infinitesimale dalla legge e dalla regolarità a partire dalla quale si produce (CP 6.59). Peirce chiama abito, o Terzità, questa stessa regolarità a partire dalla quale è possibile generare la spontaneità singolare della Primità nel loro opporsi le une alle altre (Secondità). (...) Cioè in qualche modo la spontaneità stessa dell'evento, dell'emergere di qualcosa di nuovo (Primità) non è altro che l'abito di una serie regolare (Terzità) a differenziarsene in determinati punti: il singolare emerge sempre dal regolare da cui si distacca in funzione di un effetto di instabilità.

[...Peirce's Firstnesses do not develop independently because, if they did, nothing would be able to unite them. They develop in relation to one another, and thus in a sort of existence (CP 6.199). The emerging of Firstnesses through the opposition to one another (Secondness), beginning from the regularity of habit (Thirdness), for Peirce is an *event* (CP 6.200); that is, a singularity, a point in which something happens. In this manner, the spontaneity of Firstness, of which Peirce underscores its irregular and singular nature (CP 6.54), is nothing more than an infinitesimal digression from the law of regularity from which it is produced (CP 6.59). Peirce calls habit, or Thirdness, this same regularity from which it is possible to generate the singular spontaneity of Firstnesses in their opposition to one another (Secondness). This means that the event's spontaneity itself, the emerging of something new (Firstness), is nothing more than the habit of a regular series (Thirdness) differentiating itself ([from Thirdness]) in certain points: the singular always emerges from the regular and from which it detaches itself due to an effect of instability.]

(Eco 2007, 469, note 4. My English translation)

What is stated above also coincides with Peirce's general premises of “four incapacities” regarding certain human limitations. The second and the third are particularly insightful as they pinpoint cognition and thought



formation. That is: “We have no power of intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions”; also, “[w]e have no power of thinking without signs.” (CP 5.265) This means that there is the need and the indispensable provision of a “habit”, the requirement of an established rule or of an established sign in order to generate new cognition and new thought formation. Thus, Eco’s claim that a singular Firstness always emerges from a regular Thirdness and detaches itself from Thirdness due to an effect of instability finds clear convergence in Peirce’s second and third incapacities.

### 1.7 Secondary iconicity of mode-as-image

*Secondary iconicity*, in this study, is consistent with Peirce’s notion of “Thirdness” and follows *primary iconicity*. It is the second-order phase of iconicity by which a sign-function really comes into play. In this phase the object of perception (the percept) and an actual sign with its sign-function are established and recognized as such. The material-stuff that makes up *secondary iconicity* provides a clearly defined status for iconicity and, itself, considered within the boundaries of such a status. It cannot be taken or used as a *quid pro quo* case as in *primary iconicity*. Nor can primary and secondary iconicities be inscribed in the same phase and analyzed according to the same modalities because, as formal structures, they must be kept distinct to clearly grasp their functional roles within the cognitive experience. Iconicity may be viewed as *mental image* only when a rule of correlation is in place and recognized by the perceiver; that is, when we are aware of the presence of a rule that governs the sign’s constitutive/correlative elements. This happens only at the level of *secondary iconicity*, and only at this level are we allowed to speak of sign standing in for something else and corresponding to “Thirdness”, or to the triadic relation “between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought, itself a sign, considered as constituting the mode of being of a sign.” (CP 8.332). On the other hand, Sonesson argues:

...we should distinguish primary and secondary iconic signs, since we are really involved with the way iconicity is assigned to signs. A primary iconic sign is a sign in the case of which *the perception of a similarity* between an expression E and a content C is *at least a partial reason* for E being taken to be the expression of a sign the content of which is C. That is, iconicity is really the motivation (the ground), or rather, one of the motivations, for positing the sign function. A secondary iconic sign, on the other hand, is a sign in the case of which *our knowledge that E is the expression of a sign* the content of which is C, in some particular system of interpretation, is *at least a partial reason* for perceiving the similarity of E and C. Here, then, is the sign relation that partially motivates the relationship of iconicity.

(2010, 39)

Moreover, and immediately after the above definition, Sonesson admits that: "In a sense, what I here call secondary iconic signs are not very good examples of iconicity." (2010, 39) The problem I find with Sonesson's argument is not only terminological but also gnoseological. Instead of improving the debate on iconicity and attempting to make it more comprehensible, he, unwillingly (I am sure), contributes to make it even more unfathomable.

Sonesson's definition of primary iconic signs puts emphasis on "the perception of similarity" and takes the expression level of the iconic sign as the object itself perceptively. The first objection is that there is no sign standing in for the object in *primary iconicity*. This concurs with Peirce's level of "Firstness", Barthes' "analogue of reality", and Eco's "alpha mode". The example Sonesson uses as primary iconic signs are pictures. A chief characteristic of pictures is their dual modality in terms of function. This means that based on the type of perception an individual establishes with a picture, namely if s/he takes the content of a picture as the object itself or as a sign standing in for the object, determines the type of iconicity the picture will engage. In other words, perception is the determinant that will engage either a case of *primary* or *secondary iconicity*.

With his approach, Sonesson attempts to transfer the role of iconicity (primary and secondary) on to the iconic sign, as if iconicity and iconic signs are the same thing. This is the first problem I find in his approach and, as I mentioned above, it is terminological. When the picture is perceived according to *primary iconicity*, there is no presence of a sign and of a sign function: the picture is perceived as the object itself by means of *surrogate stimuli* and in its "alpha mode". *Primary iconicity* is a perceptive phenomenon, a mere analogue occurring at the level of "Firstness" for which no signifying vehicle is formed at this level of iconicity. It is a percept *sub specie surrogate stimuli* without signified. By calling such a phenomenon "primary iconic sign", the expression itself is contradictory for the very reason that *primary iconicity* is signless. Also, in his definition of primary iconic signs, Sonesson uses the expression "*perception of similarity* between an expression E and a content C." (2010, 39) Here, too, I find the terminology to be awkward and I concur with Eco's view that at the level of *primary iconicity*, insofar as perception is concerned, we must speak of "likeness" and not of "similarity". One "cannot predicate anything of a Likeness but can only recognize" it. (Eco 2000, 347) *Primary iconicity* is not a rule-governed likeness because the perception is only a percept without signified. On the other hand, we may speak of similarity at the level of *secondary iconicity*, that is, when perception has reached *Thirdness*, or when, as Eco claims, the "alpha mode" has turned into a "beta mode". At this stage, we are in the presence of signs, which means that the perception is not only recognized but also explained. In the specificity of the picture, what is perceived at the level of *secondary iconicity* does not stop at the point in which the sensation recognizes a presence of the picture-object itself, but acquires the function of predicating something about it, it becomes a means of representation, a true signifier. In this case we are allowed to speak of sign and of sign function.

The second problem with Sonesson's approach is gnoseological, and particularly for that which concerns "secondary iconic signs". He defines the secondary iconic sign as "the sign relation that motivates the relationship of iconicity". Put in these terms, such a statement implies the process by which one supposedly uses the already-established sign to predicate about iconicity. At best one is authorized to say that signs may trigger the iconic phenomenon by which the production of other signs is possible but certainly not that they motivate "the relationship of iconicity." The problem concerning the above statement is that Sonesson chooses the *terminus ad quem* as his point of departure instead of the *terminus a quo*. It is not the sign relation that motivates the relationship of iconicity. As a matter of fact, the contrary is true: it is iconicity itself through its primary and secondary steps that motivates the production of sign relation. At best, we are authorized to say that established signs may concur with the whole sphere of iconicity in the process of cognition and insofar as the production of new signs is concerned, but they may not, under any circumstances, motivate the relationship of iconicity through their sign relation. For such an incompatibility, I find Eco's approach to be more convincing and useful in support of our claim, as well as instrumental regarding the latest debate on iconicity and iconic signs.

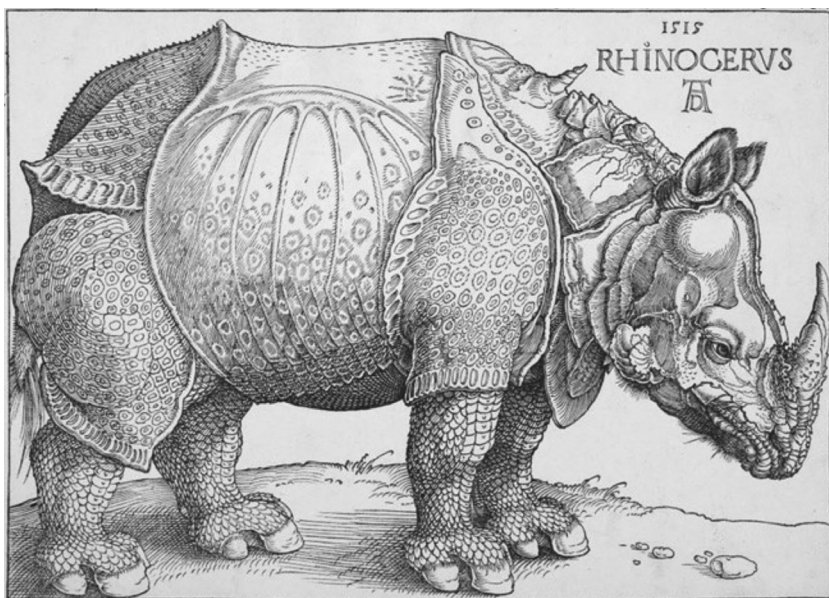
### 1.8 The iconic mode

There is a high degree of difficulty when dealing with the iconic mode because it is governed by *primary* and *secondary iconicities*. Iconicity is made up of these two distinctive parts but, as we have seen above, the way in which they manifest themselves is not as distinctive as we succeed in singling them out for theoretical reasons. The challenge lies in the process insofar as they are both and simultaneously engaged in the iconic occurrence. For this reason, it is particularly difficult to clearly set them apart. Iconicity is utterly problematic, especially when attempting to analyze and understand its functional features in the actual mode of representation. Moreover, the greatest challenge posited by such a mode is the impossibility to set accurate perceptive boundaries between real and *surrogate stimuli* and, thus, difficult to distinguish when the perceptor (the individual who perceives) is dealing with an object of representation or with a real object. In the realm of iconic modality, such a challenge is not limited to visual representation but includes also sound, smell, and taste modalities, though our interest is mostly concentrated on visual and sound representations. A further difficulty of the icon mode is posited when perception is related to real objects, and such objects are not to be taken or perceived as they are but charged with metaphorical function.

### 1.9 Strengths and limits of the iconic mode

In the field of representation, particularly when the iconic mode is compared to other modes (to the verbal mode for example), we may distinguish, for practical reasons, mostly its strengths and not so much its limits that, instead, we often

find in the verbal mode. However, before we begin our discussion on the strengths and limits of the icon mode, it is imperative to stake our position and clearly state that the iconic mode is governed, as much as the verbal mode, by conventionality. It is governed by conventionality even though it appears not to be so as it provides the illusory impression of the actual object of representation; or, perhaps, even when it is the reproduction of an illusory nature of the real, in the form of a true analogon. Dürer's Rhinoceros is a clear example of such an illusory nature of iconic signs because the woodcut of the German painter is not a true representation of a rhinoceros due to certain inaccuracies. Dürer depicts the animal with hard, metal-like plates that cover its body, a gorget wrapping its neck, a breastplate showing rivets along the seams, a small spiral horn on its back, crusty legs, and a saw-toothed-like pattern at the top-rear section. Anyone who is familiar with the most common anatomical characteristics of a rhinoceros would immediately recognize that none of such features described in the illustration are present in the real animal. One might argue that the lack of realism of Dürer's rhinoceros is due to the fact that his representation was based not on a real rhinoceros but on the written description and/or a sketch previously made by an unknown artist. Regardless of its anatomical inaccuracies, Dürer's artwork was regarded in the West as a true representation of a rhinoceros up to the late 18th century. But even with modern photographic technology that can reproduce real objects as accurately as possible (presumably according to pertinent, recognizable traits), and provided that one is familiar with rhinoceros, Dürer's woodcut is still recognized as a representation of a rhinoceros.



*Figure 1.1* Albrecht Dürer: *Dürer's Rhinoceros*. Woodcut print (1515). London, British Museum.

This means that in an act of perception, we select only “the fundamental aspects of the percept on the basis of ‘recognition codes’; if at the zoo we see a zebra in the distance, the elements which we recognize immediately (and remember) are its stripes, and not its profile, which vaguely resembles that of an ass or mule.” (Eco 1976a, 206) Not only do we recognize a rhinoceros through Dürer’s woodcut and take it as an iconic sign, since it works very well insofar as the semantic level is clearly correlated with its expression level, but we may further argue that such a representation, from the point of view of detailing some pertinent characteristics, is even more realistic than that of a digital photograph:

In Gombrich’s book Dürer’s drawing certainly appears ridiculous in comparison with the photo of an actual rhinoceros, which seems to have an almost smooth and uniform skin; but if we were to examine the skin of a rhinoceros close to, we would notice such roughness that, from a certain point of view, (in the case, for example, of a parallel between human skin and that of the rhinoceros), Dürer’s graphic exaggeration, which pays excessive and stylized attention to that roughness, would be rather more realistic than the image in the photograph which by convention portrays only the great masses of color and makes the opaque surfaces uniform, distinguishing them by differences of tone.

(Eco 1976a, 205)

The skin roughness of the rhinoceros is factual, especially if compared to human skin. Nonetheless, Eco calls Dürer’s drawing a “graphic exaggeration” which “certainly appears ridiculous”. Such a representation is considered to be so because an average Westerner would not think, for example, of accentuating the skin roughness of a rhinoceros as a distinctive trait. S/he would rather accentuate the horn on the nose and/or its entire anatomical shape. Yet, we know that the distinctive, pertinent traits of a rhinoceros in Dürer’s drawing are also present, which means that although an iconic sign lacks some or several realistic attributes, it is nonetheless recognizable by a receiver and able to convey its content value through effective pertinent traits. This is the point in which the iconic sign has entirely completed its process of *secondary iconicity*, and becomes a felicitous sign with codified, meaningful content.

Moreover, worth mentioning here is the illusory nature of the iconic mode and the moment when we are aware that it is illusory. We mostly recognize it as illusory when we purposefully use it for reasons of useful simplifications; that is, when we need to quickly identify and grasp the content of a representation and use drawings, photographs, moving pictures, etc. However, when it comes to explaining why the iconic mode is more effective than other modes, it is not an easy task. What is, basically, that which makes an image more effective than a verbal text? We may begin by saying that a visual message is not always more effective than a written/oral message. It is more effective only when certain conditions are in place and provided that the content of the message fits well the iconic mode.

The effectiveness of the visual message is as such when the content of an image is a concrete referent or a referent that may be materially simulated. This means that the object of the image must refer to the physico-sensorial characteristics of an actual object (even if illusory), to be unambiguously replicable. It would be challenging and ineffective to attempt to replicate an abstract idea or a complex philosophical concept by means of visual images when one's sole purpose is that of choosing the most useful mode of representation. In the realm of cinematography, Gianfranco Bettetini made a point of it by stating that the "cinematographic author, faced with the necessity of expressing an abstract idea, often lets himself be persuaded by the simplified solution of a dialogue or a voice off-screen." (111) The visual simulation of a concrete referent is particularly effective with the visual mode because, as we discussed earlier, perceptually we are able to recognize likeness as an "innate experience" by means of *surrogate stimuli* and *CTs* acting together. For example, if we take the familiar signs displayed on the doors of men's and women's public washrooms, we immediately recognize that they are far from conveying a realistic idea of masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, they work very well in signifying exactly what they stand for because they emphasize those relevant cultural traits of male and female; that is, they call attention to a stylized rendition of trousers for men (not even depicted but visually implied) and skirt for women by engaging *surrogate stimuli* leading to the verification of the presence or absence of *CTs* corresponding to such stimuli. This, of course, happens regardless of a realistic or non-realistic representation shared by such signs. The necessary provision is that representation must be able to engage *surrogate stimuli* in order to allow recognition to take place. In turn, *surrogate stimuli* influence the photoreceptors of the eye and create the illusion of reality. What we perceive by means of *surrogate stimuli* are not pertinent traits conforming to a simulation of an authentic reality, but only a filtered representation of it. Regardless of the inauthenticity of such traits, the important aspect is that they work well and allow one to manage recognition felicitously.

Our sense of sight perceives and recognizes the contingency of reality and never its true self, even when the experience is not filtered through *surrogate stimuli* and representation. At this point though we would be crossing the threshold of semiotic competence and entering that of cognitive psychology, insofar as the semiotician is not interested in perception as a total, human, cognitive system, but only in those pertinent traits of perception that acquire the function of sign. Thus, by remaining within the semiotic competence, we can add that the iconic code institutes a relation of likeness between its own form of expression and what the object can potentially express. In terms of physical production, the form of expression of the iconic code is not the transcription of the entire expressive faculty of the object, but only that of those parts that are pertinent for the purpose of a successful representation. Moreover, the form of expression of the iconic code contains a set of abstract characteristics that are different from the material-stuff of the

object. (Polidoro 2012, 35) Hence, in terms of representation, “a photograph, a drawing, or a television image could have the same form of expression, though different from the point of view of the expression’s substance.”<sup>38</sup>

Let us now look at the limits of the iconic mode. A fundamental aspect of this mode is that one proceeds by means of a chromatic continuum without solution of continuity.<sup>39</sup> Additionally,

[i]n the iconic continuum it is not possible to cut out discreet, pertinent traits and cataloguing them once and for all, because pertinent characteristics change: at times they are vast configurations recognizable by means of convention, others can be even small segments of a line, dots, white spaces, as it happens in a drawing of a human profile in which a dot represents the eye, the semicircle the eyelid. And we know that in a different context the same dot and the same semicircle represent instead a banana and a grape berry. Therefore, the signs of a drawing are not elements of articulation comparable to alphabetic phonemes because they do not have a positional and oppositional value. They do not signify because they either appear or do not appear. They may acquire contextual meanings (dot = eye—when it is drawn in an amygdaloid shape) without having their own meaning. They do not represent a system of rigid differences by which a dot signifies insofar as it is opposed to the straight line or to the circle. Their positional value changes according to the conventionality the drawing’s type establishes, and may change under the hand of a different artist, or even when the same artist uses a different style. *Thus, one is confronted with a swirl of idiolects*, some of which are recognizable by many, others are very private, where the optional variants exceed by far the pertinent traits, or better yet where the optional variants become the pertinent traits and vice versa according to the code acquired by the artist (who puts in a state of crisis a pre-existing code and creates a new code with the remains of the previous one or previous ones). *This is the sense in which iconic codes, if they exist, are weak codes.* (My English translation)<sup>40</sup>

What this means is that images utilize extensive chromatic continua but do not display distinctive and highly conventional elements of articulation. Thus, visual signs are neither well-established systemically nor are they conventionally recognizable in terms of having strict positional and oppositional values. Such is the reason for which Eco speaks of weak codes in relation to images. Finally, in those cases in which we require to communicate the smallest shade of meaning, complex signification, and disambiguation of content values (generally occurring with abstract ideas), the iconic mode falls short of its expectations and, in such circumstances, it is a mode that one should avoid or, at best (when possible), used with other modes to fill the gap of its deficiencies while contributing to the efficacy of the dominating modality.

## 1.10 Space and visual representation

In the visual representation, space is a complex, implicit characteristic of the image and the way it works in the formation of the image contributes to the efficiency and felicitous outcome of the iconic mode over other modes. This is the case when the representation's content is a concrete and/or a conventional referent which can be materially simulated. In terms of simulation capability, space always contains within itself the totality of the image(s), or at least a complete idea of that which one intends to represent. This is the case even for partial representations of the whole through sections of pictures, moving pictures, illustrations, diagrams, and so on. Even though the section of a visual representation is indeed a partial depiction of the whole, it nonetheless conveys a complete idea of the section to which it refers, as long as it contains all the pertinent features to allow one to recognize it. Thus, whether we speak of sections of visual representations or of entire image(s), the message potentially available is instantaneous and wholly present within the same spatial boundaries. Unlike writing and speaking, whose main role is to tell, the image's role is to show. For the image

*...non vi è bisogno di saper compitare i segni secondo un sistema di convenzioni poiché l'immagine si dispiega immediatamente allo sguardo. Nell'unità di uno sguardo: la scena dipinta non sembra vincolata alla regola della costruzione sintattica e alla linearità del linguaggio che ci costringe a costruire passo dopo passo ciò che si vuole significare. Nel dipinto il messaggio è già tutto presente, anche se nulla è scandito nella forma di un'asserzione, una tesi che si comprende non appena riflettiamo su quante e diverse sono le descrizioni verbali possibili per una stessa scena. (Spinicci 2008, 19)*

[...there is no need to know how to spell according to a conventional system because the image *immediately* unfolds itself before our eyes. Within the unity of a glance, the depicted scene does not appear to be bound by the rule of a syntactical construction and by the linearity of language which forces us to construct, step by step, that which we want to signify. In a painting the message is *already wholly* present, even if nothing is clearly pronounced in the form of a statement, yet graspable as soon as one realizes that there are several verbal descriptions possible for the same scene.]<sup>41</sup>

Therefore, the way we read a painting is different to the way we read a book. When in *Inf.* 33. 40–41, Ugolino addresses both Dante and the reader and says: “*Ben se’ crudel, se tu già non ti duoll/pensado ciò che il mio cor s’annunziava*” (You would be cruel indeed if, thinking what/my heart foresaw, you don’t already grieve), his words carry a deictic charge as if he were present, and the “You” that Ugolino uses in this context makes us realize



that Dante the pilgrim and/or the reader arrived too late. In a certain way, Ugolino blames Dante and the reader for not having done anything to avoid the tragic ending therein narrated. Now, even though Ugolino comes very much alive through the reading of Dante's text, one cannot say (can only infer) that he addresses Dante and the reader from the exact page and the exact lines (40–41). On the page of the book there are only printed characters that allow us to imagine the terrible event. The place to which the deictic pointer signals is spread through the text, it is nowhere in terms of unitary transparency. As a textual image, it is somewhere else. It is deployed throughout the text and culminates, without a true, visual transparency, at the bottom of the infernal pit, in the Antenora. This is the state of things when we deal with a textual deixis, and, in addition, the pages of the text are not the space in which the narrative event unfolds as an actual visual representation, but simply the means by which it becomes readable.

Now, let us imagine for a moment that on the wall there is a painting which depicts almost the same scene, or perhaps one that mostly emphasizes the way Ugolino looks at Dante and/or the reader, as in Füssli's engraving below. The impression we get from the face of Ugolino is that of being actually observed from the exact point in which his penetrating eyes are visually present. (Spinicci 2008, 84) The same thing happens also in other paintings where the presence of a gesture, a gaze, a smile, all put together in an ensemble, address the observer from the exact point in which the canvas reveals its spectacle. Therefore, a visual representation in general, in terms of space and figurativeness, does not work as a sign that stands for something else in its primary iconic function, but as a presence in a space that comes to the fore in its figurativeness. In Figure 1.2 below, before our eyes, we have Ugolino who is looking at us. It does not matter where the painting is placed, or whether it is just a painting and not the real Ugolino. What matters is that the totality of the visual spectacle is contained within the same space and the same comprehensive figurativeness. Also, we may add that sight is preferred in humans because it "makes us know and brings to light many differences between things."<sup>42</sup> Whereas, considerably less relevant is what we see in the space that contains the alphabetical signs. The signs that allow us to read Ugolino's episode (Spinicci 2008, 85).

The image is perceived instantaneously because it unfolds entirely within the space in which it is enclosed. The pertinent traits of an image are all available to the observer at once, and what is displayed before one's eyes is first and foremost the image as a unified whole. Moreover, an image always shows more than what it willingly chooses to show for the simple reason that in order to display itself, it requires a depicted setting. An image needs a space that accepts it. It cannot be placed in a non-space. It requires a physically present space and, in order to be taken as representation, it needs to be filled with a setting containing itself as-embodied-space, plus its visual features which all take part in filling such a space. Therefore images, in their intrinsic figurativeness, tend to show always more than what they intend to



Figure 1.2 Moses Haughton Jr., after Johann Heinrich Füssli: *Count Ugolino and his Sons Starving to Death in the Tower* (1809) British Museum.

show, and the deep characterization of their nature is their figurativeness. Spinicci argues that “images are objects which possess their own immediate, perceptive givenness”<sup>43</sup> and, in their self-showing, the viewer is provided with a plethora of epistemic givenness. With writing instead, in addition to the spatial restriction imposed by normative linearity, that is, from left to right (English and many other common, modern languages), from right to left (Arabic, Hebrew, as well as extinguished languages: Umbrian, Etruscan, and several others), from top to bottom and ordered from right to left (traditionally Chinese, Japanese, Korean)<sup>44</sup>, the reader requires, first of all, the knowledge of the language s/he is attempting to decode. This rule applies to both the denotative and connotative levels. On the other hand, for most images one does not require a rigid knowledge of the iconic language in order

to decode a message denotatively because both intension and extension are brought into play in a *strong* sense.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, the visual representation, though requiring an interpretive code, is more expandable than the verbal one because, for certain aspects, its figurativeness extends beyond the rigid verbal limits of a culture and renders its denotatum (what is figuratively represented) more universalizing and, thus, maintaining its communicative effectiveness even across cultures.

### 1.11 Denotation's intensional and extensional functions in images

Intension is the act by which the image as a form of expression is related to a content that is always understood as meaning. It can never be taken or understood as an actual thing to which the image refers. On the other hand, extension is the act by which the image, as a form of expression is related to a content that refers to actual things or to the state of things. Now, as Eco argues in appendix 1 (1997, 353), from classical to contemporary times and without making distinctions between verbal and visual communication/signification, denotation has been used in those ways that are described in endnote 45. However, in the case of visual representation, I believe that intension and extension are used somewhat differently, and in light of their different use, we are able to explain also why the content of an image is easier to grasp than that of a verbal description.

In visual representation, on the one hand communication/signification is achieved by means of a bold interaction of the image with its signified content, and according to its performance with the intensional function of denotation; on the other hand and concomitant with the former function, the image is also correlated to the actual object it represents or to the state of such an object, which can be described as the extensional function of denotation. This aspect requires further elaboration. That an image does not refer to real things or to the state of real things but rather to meaning (strong intensionality) is undoubtedly clear for a semiotician. However, it is not necessarily clear for anyone else because s/he would instead better understand how an image may substitute the object it represents. Even though this is bad semiotics and images do not quite do what we just said, there is, nonetheless, a cogent aspect that needs to be addressed. One must acknowledge the deep nature of images, which is their figurativeness, the faculty of intrinsically showing what they depict. As such, figurativeness provides a strong illusion of the presence of things or state of things by means of *surrogate stimuli*<sup>46</sup> when the phenomenal process of perception (strong extensionality) takes place. As a matter of fact, no one would attempt to substitute a word or an expression with the actual thing the word or the expression describes, but it is a common practice to substitute an image with the object it represents, even if the visual representation lacks, perceptively, a sense of realism. On the plane of denotation, the extensive function is particularly strong because the figurativeness of images closely relies on the *likeness*<sup>47</sup> that an

image entertains with the depicted object. And we can speak of figurativeness only insofar as there is likeness on the denotative plane. This means that denotatively, likeness is an essential requisite of figurativeness. Likeness may exist only with the presence of figurativeness.

Also, likeness does not require a high degree of fidelity with the object it reproduces. It can freely move from the center to the periphery with minimal resemblance in terms of reproductive gradation and precision, and still maintain its quality of likeness provided, though, that sufficient pertinent traits are present therein. This means that even rudimentary lines that a child scribbles on a piece of paper, barely depicting a house, do, indeed, produce a display of likeness efficiently. Visual likeness is achieved due to the way in which lines connect with each other and succeed in forming the outline<sup>48</sup> of some pertinent traits of a house and, thereupon, allowing one to recognize the depicted object as a house and not as a horse. One might argue that what a child scribbles on a sheet of paper pretending to be house is not really a house because it completely lacks realism. Indeed, but realism is not a “matter ...of any constant or absolute relationship between a picture and its object but of a relationship between the system of representation employed in the picture and the standard system.” (Goodman 1976, 38) Thus, the effect of likeness is nonetheless conveyed and perceived adequately with or without that which we superficially and naively call realism. One is able to recognize that the child’s drawing is a house and not a horse because of the dominating influence of its pertinent traits, namely the shape and some key details attributable to a house.

Also, pertinent traits are not just random features of visual representation, as they may appear from the drawing of a child or even from the drawing of an adult (to convey a quick idea or even in the case in which the adult does not know how to actually draw), but reflect and abide by established rules of visual convention and conform with what Goodman calls “standard system”, even if perceived as clumsy and hesitant. In fact, the perceiver is able to identify the house and not something else because of existing rules which tell the viewer that certain lines closing up together at a certain point and in a certain way depict a house. This is so because such rules reflect conventional models of representation which Eco calls *cognitive types*.

## 1.12 Cognitive Types (CTs)

CTs, as we also briefly mentioned in section 1.1 of this chapter, are phenomena of the human cognitive process which serve to establish comparisons in order to recognize occurrences in the world that surrounds us and with which we interact. We said above that we are able to recognize pertinent traits of a house because there is a convention that tells us that certain lines drawn in a certain way and presenting certain characteristics stand for a house. Eco also argues that CTs are private in the sense that they correspond to a “phenomenon of perceptual semiosis” and, as such, they “cannot be seen

and cannot be touched” but they “may be postulated only on the basis of the phenomena of recognition, identification, and felicitous reference” (Eco 2000, 138). In order for *CTs* to become conventional, they must coincide with what Eco calls “*nuclear content*” (*NC*),<sup>49</sup> which is “a phenomenon of communicative consensus” that allows *CTs* to be expressed in a conventional form. That is, *NC* becomes the convention or “represents the way in which we try intersubjectively to make clear which features go to make up a *CT*. A *NC*, which we recognize in the form of interpretant,<sup>50</sup> *can be seen and touched*”, while a *CT*, once again, can neither be seen nor touched, and this is the reason why it must coincide with or overlap with the *NC* (Eco 2000, 138).

Such a thing is possible provided that when we perceive an object we may rely on already-existing *CTs*. What if *CTs* do not exist and we happen to be in the presence of something that we have never seen before and need to describe or draw it without a pre-established model? The simple and obvious answer is that we need to create a new *CT*. Yes, that is so, but *how* we are going to do and explain it is not an easy task. Before we move on to discuss how to create new *CTs*, I want to make the reader aware of the importance Dante placed precisely on *CTs* in the *DC*. Although he never spoke of *CTs* literally, he clearly alluded to them in the creative process of his poetry when he speaks of things that were not previously known. For example, when Dante, through an auto-exegetical strategy (critical interpretation of his own work) informs the reader that what he saw had never been recorded by anyone, he is implicitly alluding to the creation of adequate *CTs* that would allow him to give an account of his unprecedented experience:

*E quel che mi convien ritrar testeso,  
non portò voce mai, né scrisse incostro,  
né fu per fantasia già mai compreso. (Par. 19.7-9)*<sup>51</sup>

[And what now I must tell has never been  
reported by a voice, inscribed by ink,  
never conceived by the imagination.]<sup>52</sup>

Dante speaks these words in the *Par.* which is the most prolific place where he, for the most part, endeavors to produce new *CTs*. In this kingdom though *CTs* are typically produced in an abstract sense and, consequently, much more difficult to grasp. To avoid such an obstacle, I chose to focus on Purgatory as a physical, topographic entity to discuss the creation of a new *CT*. Before and up to Dante’s time, a structured and detailed idea of Purgatory did not exist. Only some scarce and unclear ideas circulated.<sup>53</sup> If this is the case, and knowing what we know about the *Pur.*, how does Dante construct such a structured, detailed, and vivid image of it? He begins with what he and the culture of his time knew already. Among other things, he knew that it could be expressed in the shape of a mountain. By grounding his view in the idea of mountain and the same idea serving as a sort of

archetype, he is able to formulate new semantic nodes which serve as an elaboration or widening of the content value of “mountain” by means of “unlimited semiosis”.<sup>54</sup> It is useful at this point to recall the Peircean way to knowledge through his four incapacities:

- 1 We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
- 2 We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognitions.
- 3 We have no power of thinking without signs.
- 4 We have no conception of the absolute incognizable. (*CP* 5.265)

In these anti-Cartesian statements Peirce is basically saying, that: 1. *Cogito* (“I think”) is not an original point of departure to acquire knowledge about the world. This does not mean that we do not possess self-knowledge, but such a knowledge is neither direct nor indispensable. We acquire knowledge by imitating external things through the engagement of will and emotions. Self-knowledge is consequential to our knowledge of the external world, and neither the former nor the latter are certain. 2. Our intuition of something does not occur as a pure intuition but it is the outcome of a cognition (knowledge) based on previous cognitions. This means that we are not endowed with primordial premises of knowledge and, which, such premises become known through intuition as Descartes’ postulates. With such a statement, Peirce does not deny the existence of said premises, he is just saying that we do not have access to them as they are (primordial premises) nor do we need them in order to gain knowledge of the world. 3. For Peirce, any thought must be expressed as a sign because a thought is significant. A thought that is not expressed as a sign is not a thought, and no one may produce evidence against it (*CP* 5.251). Also, a sign is interpretable (*CP* 5.283) and its interpretability depends on other signs. We may explain the meaning of a sign only by using and/or producing other signs. In this respect, no thought can escape its embeddedness in sign. (*CP* 5.284). 4. We have no ability to conceptualize anything that is absolutely incognizable. Here the absolutely incognizable refers to Kant’s idea of the “thing-in-itself” which, according to Peirce, cannot be known and is self-contradictory. It cannot be known since our conception of anything is always relative and not absolute. It is self-contradictory because we “have the concept ‘not’ and the concept ‘cognizable’ and that we can form the concept ‘incognizable’ simply by joining together the two concepts.” As such, the concept: “not” is “synonymous with ‘what is other than’; hence it gives a partial characterization of its object, whereby that object is partially known. It is known, at least, as being other than something else.” (Skagestad 1981, 25) Therefore, that which is “not-cognizable” is “self-contradictory” (*CP* 5.257).

By keeping in mind Peirce's way to knowledge, we should mention some useful associations Dante establishes to enrich his idea of the Purgatory and, for reasons of semantic contiguity to the idea of mountain that was already foreseen by the encyclopedia of his cultural age. We may find, among other things, some ideas that converge with physical place, nature, water, animals, vegetal world, mineral world, climbing, air, and so on. These associations would in turn serve Dante as the source for the formation of new nodes of semantic pertinence with his lived experience (a real journey in the afterlife) to create *CTs* for which a content value did not yet exist as codified knowledge. Because Dante already possessed a codified type (idea) of the "mountain", he was also in the position to describe and/or draw it. Moreover, the creation of new *CTs* is motivated by the innate human ability to establish likenesses among things. According to Eco, such primeval likenesses are "semiosic primitives"<sup>55</sup> from which develop *CTs*, and the latter, in turn, produce *NCs*.

Also, the reader should be mindful of the fact that the things listed above, which Dante possibly connected with "mountain", can be singled out instinctively due to their presence *in* and immediacy *with* the environment in which we live. That is, in order for Dante to formulate them as he did, he does not require a major inventive effort, as for example would require associations being inspired by more complex categories. He does not begin from the idea of "purgation" (too abstract) to construct his layout of the Purgatory, even though he could have done so, but chooses instead the idea of an actual place because he wanted to convey an image of a real journey and of a true, lived experience in a real place. On this aspect, Spinicci also adds that:

*...la nostra esperienza è innanzi tutto esperienza di oggetti reali e di forme concrete, ed è solo dopo aver acquisito una familiarità con il mondo che ci rivolgiamo alle immagini, che ci ripropongono forme e oggetti che nella norma abbiamo già visto e che sappiamo ormai cogliere senza fatica e senza bisogno di immergerci in una vera e propria esplorazione percettiva. Nelle immagini vediamo qualcosa che conosciamo da tempo—e ciò è quanto dire che le immagini sono sotto l'egida della ripetizione e sono in qualche modo parassitarie rispetto al mondo reale, poiché è su questo terreno che si gioca la nostra esperienza e si determina quella confidenza con gli oggetti che ci consente di scorgerli anche quando li vediamo di sfuggita o quando sono parzialmente nascosti da altre cose.*

(98, my emphasis in bold)

[...our experience is first of all an experience of real objects and concrete forms. It is only *after* we acquire *familiarity* with the world through which we address images that the latter re-propose forms and objects that we conventionally have already seen and are able to recognize without effort and without immersing us in a true and proper perceptive exploration. In images we see something we know

from long time—this is to say that images are under the *patronage of repetition* and are somehow parasitic in relation to the real world, because it is on this ground that our experience unfolds and our confidence with objects is determined, which allows us to see them in passing or even when they are partially hidden.]

(My English translation with my emphasis in italics)

From the beginning of the *Inf.* to the very last cantos of the *Par.*, Dante's experience is first and foremost an experience of sight. His narration is driven by what he actually sees. His ability to move forward depends on the visual event and not on the semantic content. In fact, numerous examples call attention to the role of sight and authorize thematic relevance of it. Some of which are expressed *ad litteram*. On this aspect, I spontaneously looked at *Inf.* 4 and from the beginning I knew I would find something in support of our claim, but surprisingly not to the extent it turned out to be. I searched for verbs and nouns that involve the sense of sight, and I realized that Dante used them copiously, and certainly more than I anticipated. In *Inf.* 4 alone, the reader comes across 26 occurrences referencing the sense of sight.<sup>56</sup> This is not only a large but an overwhelming number of occurrences, considering that, with a good concordance, we could add all the others in the remaining 99 *canti*. But this would prove to be a waste of time and effort because Dante's experience of sight, which he then transforms into semantic content, is textually self-evident. Therefore, even when he needs to present something new or incomprehensible, he uses the resourceful support of repetition. A repetition Dante performs by means of images in order to produce yet new images by anchoring them to the existing ones. Dante's vision depends on a very natural choice: as infants are able to see images before they learn how to speak (Spinicci 2008, 102), so does he utilize that very innate human ability to present his lived experience to the reader in a real and effective manner.

### 1.13 Transparency of photographic images

One last point worth discussing here is the transparency of photographic images. We may begin by stating that the major theorist to whom we ascribe the transparency theory applied to photographs is Kendall Walton. According to the American philosopher, when we look at photographs, we see the objects they show, we “see the world *through* them” (Walton 1984, 251). The relation that links the object to its photographic reproduction is not filtered through the beliefs of the photographer, there is no presence of an intentional attitude and thus one may only photograph what is in front of the lens and not what one believes there is. What one sees through a photograph depends on what is in front of the lens. For Walton this means that perception is produced by the relation of a causal dependency which originates from the photographed object, and the photograph is the means



that extends the causal link between us and the object without adding intentional mediations. The photograph is like a prosthesis, and with regard to such a function Walton states:

Telescopes and microscopes extend our visual powers in other ways, enabling us to see things that are too far away or too small to be seen with the naked eye. Photography is an aid to vision also, and an especially versatile one. With the assistance of the camera, we can see not only around corners and what is distant and small, we can also see into the past. We see long deceased ancestors when we look at dusty snapshots of them.

(251)

What we gather from the above citation is convincing; at the same time though the reader might be prompted to argue against it for reasons concerning portraits, sketches, and paintings and, basically, say that they could very much do the same thing. To this Walton replies that there is a difference between photographs and other visual representations made by artists because photographs are “transparent”, the others are not: “We do not see Henry VIII when we look at his portrait; we see a representation of him.” (Walton 1984, 253) Very well said, but a photograph may be technically arranged and manipulated by the photographer, and in this respect, it is an outcome of one’s intentional effort. Apparently true but not quite as it looks because even if the photographer may arrange a particular technical setting and foresees an intentional outcome from the photograph, it does not mean that the photographed object is a substitute of what the camera actually sees. (Walton 1984, 261–62). At the same time, let it be said, Walton does not deny that photographs have also a level of intentionality and that they perform an aesthetic function, but that does not matter because such a function does not interfere with the one feature which is unique and belongs merely to photographs, transparency. No one can deny that what we see through the photograph was not there when it was photographed, though we must recognize that the existential conditions are different: one thing is to have an actual thing in front of us another is to see it through a photograph. Yet, not even this difference will compromise the photograph’s transparency. Another example Walton uses to draw the difference between photographs and paintings is that while an artist may be hallucinating about something, s/he is nevertheless able to depict on the canvas the object of her/his hallucination. On the contrary, a photographer who is also hallucinating about something is not able to do the same because the object of her/his hallucination is not present, it is not in front of the camera and, consequently, will not be able to photograph what is not there (Walton 1984, 264). This means that photographs

are counterfactually dependent on the photographed scene even if the beliefs (and other intentional attitudes) of the photographers are held fixed. Paintings which have a counterfactual dependence on the scene

portrayed lose it when the beliefs (and other intentional attitudes) of the painter are held fixed.

(Walton 1984, 264)

Walton's transparency theory is, in a way, consistent with Barthes' photographic theory.

For Barthes "a photograph cannot be transformed (spoken) philosophically, it is weightless, transparent envelope." (Barthes 1984, 5) He further argues that

the Photograph mechanically repeats what could never be repeated existentially. In the Photograph, the event is never transcended for the sake of something else: the Photograph always leads the corpus I need back to the body I see; it is the absolute Particular, the sovereign Contingency.

(Barthes 1984, 4)

As for the photographic referent, Barthes draws a clear distinction by saying that it is "not the *optionally* real thing which an image or a sign refers but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph." (Barthes 1984, 76)

It is as if the Photograph always carries its referent with itself, both affected by the same amorous or funereal immobility, at the very heart of the moving world: they are glued together, limb by limb, like the condemned man and the corpse in certain tortures; or even like those pairs of fish (sharks, I think, according to Michelet) which navigate in convoy, as though united by an eternal coitus.

(Barthes 1984, 5–6)

Nevertheless, such a transparency theory requires further elaboration in the sense that we want to know the primal cause that makes photographs uniquely transparent. To this and against the transparency's skeptics, Jonathan Friday argues that it is a matter of attitude:

To say a photograph is transparent is to characterize the attitude we have to the causally produced picture we see. ...[T]he attitude to the photograph may often be one in which we treat it as evidence of what is depicted on the basis of our pre-theoretical grasp of photography's causal relation to its subject.

(40)

This means that we cannot exclude the fact that people may take the content of a photograph as the true referent of photographed objects (something that happens spontaneously) as a result of the photograph's transparency. On the contrary, if our attitude toward photographed objects does not view them as true objects but as forms of signification, the transparency of the

photograph is somewhat narcotized, and the object-as-sign prevails. Yet, the most relevant part of Friday's citation is, in my view, "what is depicted on the basis of our pre-theoretical grasp", which takes us back to Peirce's level of *Firstness* or to "the mode of being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else" (*CP* 8.328). In addition, there is the level of *Secondness*, which is "[t]he relation between the previous [firstness] and the subsequent [secondness]" that "consists in the previous being determinate and fixed for the subsequent". In other words, it "is the experience of effort, prescinded from the idea of purpose" (*CP* 8.330). It also converges with Barthes' photographic image which he defines as "a message without a code" and as "a perfect *analogon*" (Barthes 1977, 17), as well as with Eco's "alpha mode", that refers to the "mode in which, even before deciding we are confronted with the expression of a sign function, we perceive through surrogate stimuli a given object or scene which we then elect as the expression plane of a sign function." (Eco 2000, 383) In relation to the photographic image, the specific stages of Peirce's *Firstness* and *Secondness*, Barthes' "message without a code", and Eco's "alpha mode" are all concerned with the issue according to which perception is captured at the critical point of "primary iconism" that has not become a sign yet and, consequently, it does not entail a sign function at that very critical point.

The photograph's "transparency" that Barthes calls "message without a code" can be compared to mirror reflections. The only difference is that photographic images are captured in specific contingent manners and remain unchanged in time while mirror reflections do not and neither do they endure in time when the object of reflection is taken away. If we attempt a semiotic analysis of mirror reflections compared to the transparency of photographic images, we can say that Barthes was right for calling them "message without a code". A Mirror reflection is specular reflection and, as such, it can neither "be taken as a sign" nor can it "properly be called an image" (Eco 1976a, 202). Let us use for a moment (incorrectly) the term "image" instead of mirror reflection. We soon realize that

it does not stand *for* something else; on the contrary it stands *in front of* something else, it exists not instead of but because of the presence of that something; when that something disappears the pseudo image in the mirror disappears too.

(Eco 1976a, 202)

This means that a mirror reflection or a "pseudo image" could never be taken as a sign/code because if we try to apply to it

[t]he schema of communicational process many puzzling conclusions arise: source and addressee coincide (at least in cases where a human being looks at him or herself in the mirror); receiver and transmitter

coincide; expression and content coincide since the content of the reflected image is just the image of the body, not the body itself; as a matter of fact the referent of a mirror is pure visual matter. (Eco 1976a, 202)

Also, the same specular reflection takes place in the *camera obscura*, though here we need to be careful in making the comparison because the reflection becomes an imprinted image, it “remains traced somewhere”. As such, the photograph goes a step further and sets itself apart from specular reflections produced by mirrors. Moreover, since the image remains traced somewhere, the photograph may move beyond its figurativeness and, by doing so, it turns into sign; it becomes the outcome of an intentional process endowed with signifying and aesthetic functions.

We may conclude and say that having established and reiterated these guiding principles, we should be able to also reassure the transparency’s skeptics that photographs do not devoid images of their signifying and aesthetic functions. It is just to clarify that at the level of *primary iconicity* we see transparent images. Yet only if and provided that *primary iconicity* becomes *secondary iconicity*, we are authorized to speak of signifying and aesthetic functions in photographs.

#### 1.14 Mode-as-moving picture

For moving picture and its mode of delivery, we must bring to the reader’s attention those distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other modes. As a composite, dynamic system, the language of the moving picture cannot be compared to a written, spoken language and not even, in its entirety, to *mode-as-image* (simple image). Moving picture has its distinctive filmic language and sets itself apart from the aforementioned in terms of articulation and insofar as it cannot be divided into “active and passive” modes. (Metz 1974, 53) When we think of articulation, we think of the French Linguist André Martinet and his notion according to which we are able to single out two distinctive structural levels of the verbal language.<sup>57</sup> Martinet differentiates structural levels of first articulation and second articulation. First articulation is made up of the smallest units of meaning or the smallest units of sense which are called *morphemes*, or *monemes* (Martinet 1960). When they combine with other units of meaning according to grammatical and syntactical rules, form a larger unit that we commonly call message. Second articulation is made up of those distinctive units of sound that are called *phonemes*.<sup>58</sup> As distinctive units and taken independently from one another, *phonemes* are sounds without meaning. Even though *phonemes* do not communicate anything when taken by themselves, they become meaningful when joined together according to lexical rules of first articulation.<sup>59</sup> In the cinematic language, first articulation, which consists of *signs*<sup>60</sup> and *semes*<sup>61</sup> (generally signs appear as non-discrete or non-distinctive units and are recognizable only within the context of a *seme*), may be approximately equated to verbal language’s first articulation.

More problematic for the cinematic language are the units of second articulation. In fact, from the 60s onwards, three different views have been put forward. According to Metz the cinematic language lacks completely second articulation: "There is nothing in the cinema that corresponds, even metaphorically, to the second articulation."<sup>62</sup> He draws such a conclusion based on the fact that the cinematic language is not a language in the sense of the verbal language, (*langue*, a clearly structured system of distinctive units such as phonemes, morphemes/monemes, syntagmas), but it must, instead, be "considered as a *langage*, to the extent that it orders signifying elements within ordered arrangements different from those of spoken idioms" (Metz 1974, 105). In other words the cinematic language: 1) is not endowed with non-significant units (phonemes), but all units are carriers of meaning; 2) the smallest identifiable unit of the cinematic language is a significant unit, but not as small as the smallest significant unit of the verbal language (morphemes/monemes, or *words*, to use Metz's term); 3) the smallest significant units of the cinematic language are the *shots*, which are whole statements comparable to syntagmas, and "which are actualized with their total meaning in the discourse." (Metz 1974, 115) Also, the cinematic image must always be viewed as a performative entity of speech; it can never be taken as a unit of language because, in its performative presence, it is "*always actualized*." (Metz 1974, 67)

For Pier Paolo Pasolini the cinematic language is first of all a "language of poetry", an artistic language that will never "attain a true grammatical normativity" (Pasolini 1976, 545–46) because its elements are "pre-human", "pre-grammatical", "irrational" and, the latter (the irrational), also "explains the profoundly oneiric nature of cinema" (Pasolini 1976, 545). Nonetheless, Pasolini also considers "cinema as an enormous deposit of 'written language'... composed primarily of texts of narrative, poetry and documentary essays."<sup>63</sup> For him the cinematic language is not only *parole* but also *langue* in the Saussurean sense in that it has its double articulation though different from the double articulation of verbal language. As for the double articulation of the cinematic language, he initially introduced the term *imsegni* (im-signs or image-signs) which depict various objects of reality and identifiable as images. (Pasolini 1976, 544) In 1966 he realized that it "is not true that the smallest unit in cinema is the image, when by image we mean 'view' that is the shot, or in other words, what one sees looking through the lens." (Pasolini 1988, 200) According to Pasolini the *shot* is composed of multiple objects insofar as

there is no object in nature composed only of itself, and which cannot be further subdivided or broken down, or which, at the least, does not present different "manifestations" of itself. No matter how detailed the shot, it is always composed of various objects or forms or acts of reality.

(Pasolini 1988, 200)

In light of this concern, Pasolini replaced *imsegni* (a term which was rather ambiguous and that could be easily confused with *images* and *shots*) with

*cinemes*, analogically modelled on *phonemes*. Now, because Pasolini equated *cinemes* with *phonemes*, we assume that, if taken independently, they are meaningless as *phonemes* are. Yet, the example Pasolini used for *cinemes* (“the face of the teacher, the blackboard, the books, the piece of map”) (Pasolini 1988, 201), which together form the *shot* of the teacher, are meaningful units if taken independently and, thus, not entirely comparable to *phonemes*. In my view, this mismatch is the point that arguably emphasizes the difference between the cinematic language and the verbal language according to Pasolini. As a matter of fact, 1) on the one hand and at the primordial state *cinemes* (taken individually or combined together in a *shot*) are not significant units because they are not codified yet, they are drawn “from chaos, where an automatic or oneiric communication is only found in the state of possibility, of shadow” of potential meaning (Pasolini 1976, 545); 2) on the other hand *cinemes* are significant *images* insofar as they are meaningful by nature, they “constitute a common heritage”, in the sense that they have been rendered conventional, they have been culturalized (Pasolini 1976, 546).

Also, given that the cinematic language for Pasolini does not have already-codified-signs, unlike the verbal language, the filmmaker must, first of all, ‘draw the im-sign from chaos, make it possible’<sup>64</sup> (1976, 546). Pasolini speaks of a “hypothetical dictionary” in the sense that *im-signs* are not classifiable in a regular dictionary like words, nor are they ordered by a grammar with “true grammatical normativity”, nevertheless they “constitute a common heritage.” (1976, 545–46) and consider it as classified in a dictionary of “im-signs (gestures, environment, dreams, memory)” (Pasolini 1976, 545). After which, one must “accomplish the very work of the writer, that is, enrich this purely morphological im-sign with his personal expression.” (Pasolini 1976, 545) As we can see, for both steps the filmmaker is engaged in a performative task of language creation. On this point, we may argue that Pasolini’s view converges with Metz’s, but only for that which concerns the actualization of the cinematic language, since it is always a performative entity of speech and because it does not have a true dictionary and/or a proper normative grammar. Nonetheless, and, unlike Metz, even the cinematic language according to Pasolini is endowed with units of language, which, the latter, are not ready-made for use, but made with the making of the cinematic language.

For reasons of clarity, an interpretive amplification is required for Pasolini’s double articulation and specifically about the function of *cinemes*, as he does not clearly articulate them within the semiotic system. It is in the occasion of the Pesaro Film Festival (1967) that Eco presented a critique of Pasolini’s view of the cinematic language. In his article (1976b), Eco aimed at achieving two fundamental objectives: 1) correcting Pasolini’s view of the cinematic language from a semiotic standpoint; and 2) proposing his

innovative view of the cinematic language as a system of triple articulation. The critique Eco wrote on Pasolini's double articulation is that if the "smallest units of the cinematic language are the various *real objects*" (my emphasis on "real objects"), Pasolini confused real objects/referents with signifiers. According to Eco, real objects as they are in themselves are meaningless; they become meaningful only when they are codified, conventionalized; that is, when the function and the value of signifiers are added to them.

In giving a real object the function of signifier, Pasolini does not distinguish clearly (as Vittorio Sereni commented last year) between sign, signifier, signified, and referent. And if there is one thing semiology can't put up with it's replacing the referent with the signified.

(Eco 1976b, 600).

Also, minimal units of the cinematic language (*cinemes*) cannot be equated with *phonemes* (that which instead Pasolini does) because

phonemes are elements into which the moneme is decomposed (the moneme being a meaningful unit)—*they do not constitute fractions of the decomposed meaning*. Whereas the cinemes of Pasolini (images of various recognizable objects) still retain their own unit meaning.

(Eco 1976b, 601).

Therefore, as "fractions of the decomposed meaning" *cinemes* (if individually taken) should be meaningless, instead based on Pasolini's account they are meaningful.

Moreover, the "*inquadratura*"<sup>65</sup> (which is the greater unit) "does not correspond to the moneme, but rather to an utterance" (Eco 1976b, 601) or to a unit of "narrative autonomy in which elements interact semantically" (Stam et. al. 1992, 37) and commonly called syntagma. Eco's need to criticize and amend at the same time Pasolini's nomenclature serves him as a support to submit the cinematic code "to an analysis of articulations" (1976b, 601), since he finds Pasolini's endeavour to make sense and, thus, allowing him to bring it a step further by proposing his personal and innovative view of the cinematic language as a system of triple articulation, with the specific purpose of introducing into the cinematic code "the maximum number of combinable elements." (Eco 1976b, 604)

In his account of the cinematic language as a system of triple articulation, Eco calls the smallest units *figures*. They are elements of second articulation and "conditions of perception", namely " 'angles', 'light contrasts', 'curves', 'subject-background relationships' " (1976b, 602). They are not "always discrete" and for this reason they appear "as a continuum of possibilities from which many individual messages emerge" and, consequently, difficult to reduce them to a "precise code". (Eco 1976b, 596–97) They are

meaningless elements on their own and terminologically understood in the Hjelmslevian sense if compared to the verbal language. *Figures* combine with each other in *signs*, but even in their combined state, they alone cannot form *signs*. *Signs* are elements of first articulation because they are meaningful units. Eco calls them “semes of recognition”, which correspond to *partial signs* of the *frame* such as “nose, eye, sky, cloud”<sup>66</sup> and denote them “by conventional graphic means”. They may also be “‘abstract models’, symbols, conceptual diagrams of the object (the sun as circle with radiating lines)”. Often, they are “difficult to analyze within a seme, since they show up as nondiscrete, as part of a graphic continuum. They are recognizable only in the context of the seme.” (Eco 1976b, 597) *Semes* are greater elements of the first articulation. They “are more commonly known as ‘images’ or ‘iconic signs’ (a man, horse, etc.)” They are therefore meaningful and, in their state of conventional figurativeness, “formulate a complex iconic phrase” (Eco 1976b, 597) capable of wielding predicative functions about the subject they represent, such as “the man in front of the window is standing up, holds a pair of eyeglasses in his right hand, and is saying something”. Generally, signs “can be recognized” within the context of *semes*, and since the latter permit such recognitions “they stand as the key factors in communication of these signs, juxtaposing them one against the other. Semes should therefore be considered—with respect to the signs permitting identification—as an *idiolect*.” (Eco 1976b, 597)

Now, having illustrated all the elements that belong to the first and second articulation, it is time to discuss what constitutes Eco’s novelty of a third articulation of the cinematic code. In a rather dense line, Stam et. al. define Eco’s third articulation as that which has “to do with conditions of perception” (33). Put in these terms, the definition risks entertaining an ambiguous status situated on the threshold of elucidation and evasion of its very defining purpose. While it is correct to say that Eco’s third articulation is a matter of “conditions of perception”, we nonetheless need to provide a more detailed explanation to substantiate it. Eco’s third articulation addresses the combination of cinematic signs in a sort of “hypersignificance”, which brings into the picture the motion factor of the cinematic code, or what can be also called the kinesic element. That is, the non-verbal behavior of communication related to the gestures of the body language. How does Eco explain the element of motion contributing to the making of a cinematic code? He basically argues that the “passing from the photogram to the frame, the characters [appearing in the photogram] accomplish certain gestures: the *icons* generate *kines* via a diachronic movement, and the *kines* are further arranged to compose *kine-morphs*.” (Eco 1976b, 602) He also adds that *kines* (as meaningful units) can decompose into kinesic figures (meaningless units). This is something that “kinesics has difficulty in identifying”, namely, difficulty in identifying as “discrete units of time in the gestural continuum.” For such a downside, he uses the example of the movie camera which is able to decompose “*kines* precisely into a number of discrete units which still on their own mean



nothing, but which have differential value with respect to other discrete units.” (Eco 1976b, 603)<sup>67</sup> This means that:

If I subdivide two typical head gestures into a number of photograms [or digital units] (eg. the signs “yes” and “no”), I find various positions which I can’t identify as kines “yes” or “no”. In fact, if my head is turned to the right, this could either be the *figure* of a *kine* “yes” combined with the *kine* “nodding to the person on the right” (and in which case the *kinemorph* would be: I am saying “yes” to the person on the right), or the figure of a *kine* “no” combined with the *kine* “shaking the head” (which could have various connotations and in this case constitutes the *kinemorph* “I am saying no by shaking my head”).

Thus the camera supplies us with meaningless kinesic figures which can be isolated within the synchronic field of the photogram [or digital unit], and can be combined with each other into kines (or kinesic signs) which in their turn generate kinemorphs (or kinesic semes, all-encompassing syntagms which can be added one to another without limit).

(Eco 1976b, 603)

With the classical studies of Metz, Pasolini, and Eco, we attempted to shed light on the elemental parts of the cinematic language because *mode-as-moving picture* is a central feature of multimodality and, in particular, a central feature when applied to the *DC*. Dante’s journey in the afterlife is primarily an experience of what he sees, and before he converts his experience into the written text, or into the written mode by which it is offered to us, we must recognize the poet’s foregoing and latent phase of sight that reveals itself as an unfolding spectacle before his eyes.

### 1.15 Mode-as-hearing

When working with orality and specifically with an oral text, we use the term “text” for reason of clarity but inadequately. The oral performance is generative and does not claim to have or to foresee an *a priori* real text unless it is recorded and made physically available through a sound devise. It is a phenomenal engagement of *signifying wholes* in the production of meaning. *Signifying wholes* refer to “facts of language” and encompass “text, discourse, and narrative.” (Fontanille 2006, 46) Here too we bump into the ambiguous term “text”. But such a term, under the semiotic lens, means “the specialist in languages—the semiotician—that which is given to apprehend, the set of facts of phenomena that the semiotician prepares to analyze.” (Fontanille 2006, 46) In a Greimassian sense, *signifying wholes* must be considered in their dynamic function, as being “in a state of construction and becoming.” (Fontanille 2006, x-xxi) Therefore, the reader is required to know that the text lacks physical status in terms of continuity and permanence in time and space. For it becomes real, indeed a material

manifestation only in its short life and consists of living in the moment in which it actually unfolds, as an acoustic propagation, and simultaneously evaporates within its own span. The generative pattern of the auditory text dwells more on the phenomenal engagement of *signifying wholes* insofar as the production of meaning is concerned. In the auditory text, the listener relies fully on the sound manifestation/performance produced in an “acoustic space” and specifically on the impression the unrepeatable auditory occurrence is potentially capable of producing.

In the process of becoming true acoustic manifestation, the auditory text presents a significant challenge for semiotics and will, inescapably, be much more difficult to comprehend because it always entails a process of signification in action which strives for self-realization. The auditory text is not a concrete, linguistic display. It only becomes concrete in the instant of its utterance, at the moment of its auditory occurrence. Moreover, even at the time of utterance, the utterer does not know how it will unfold in order to make it achieve self-actualization. The auditory text can be actualized but not fixed or preserved in time and space with a clear pattern of directionality which, instead, happens to be the case for the written text. The auditory text has no controlled directionality even if recorded because it occurs in an “acoustic space” which is “boundless, directionless, horizonless”. (McLuhan-Fiore 1967, 48) By comparison we can say that “a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, [while] the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships.” (McLuhan-Fiore 1967, 111) Additionally, when an occurrence becomes true manifestation in the “acoustic space” and knowing that the “ear world” is a “world of simultaneous relationships”, the auditory text is by nature multi-sensory. As a result of its multi-sensorial characteristic, it heightens associations and smooths the progress of a multimodal bond.

Beginning with *Inf.* 1, after the scene in which Dante the wayfarer is lost in the dark wood, Beatrice sends Virgil to rescue him. The Latin poet tells Dante that in order to get back on the right path of life, he must go *to* and *through* hell. As Virgil explains to Dante what he must do and who and why sent him to his rescue, we come across a passage that draws attention to the sense of hearing: “*ove udirai le disperate strida*” (“where you shall hear the howls of desperation”, 115). The auditory mode takes precedence over all other modes and sets the narrative tone of the entire *cantica*. Such a narrative tone is further strengthened by what Virgil tells Dante upon entering the actual gate of hell. He says that they will first and foremost hear: “*sospiri, pianti e alti guai*” (“sighs and lamentations and loud cries”, *Inf.* 3.22). Through the unfolding of events, we find many terms and expressions that are ear driven. Overall, they contribute to the formation of the auditory mode. One major characteristic dominating the sense of hearing in the *Inf.* is cacophony. There is an overwhelming presence of harsh, discordant sounds that correspond to its chaotic landscape.

Also, even if the “ear favours no particular ‘point of view’”, what remains seminal is that the ear perceives acoustic occurrences and discriminates

between sounds that produce pleasing sensations and sounds that produce displeasing sensations. Elementary and as obvious as it may sound, what is not easy to comprehend is the here-and-now of the acoustic manifestation, or that which concerns the swiftness of the acoustic occurrence and the ear's response to it. Responses can be classified as acoustic sensations and significations.

Responses to acoustic phenomena without signifying mediation consist primarily of two semiotic categories that Peirce calls *Firstness* and *Secondness*. *Firstness* is the category in which sound is in "the mode of being of that which is [as] such...and without reference to anything else." (CP 8.328) Put differently, *Firstness* is sound in itself or the idea of sound that does not refer to anything at that very state and neither can it be described in words. With *Secondness*, one experiences the sound-feeling because it implies the existence of a dyadic relation. Sound actually affects the ear and generates a felt experience of sound. The experience is the central part of *Secondness* and requires an effort. It "is the experience of the effort, prescinded from the idea of purpose." (CP 8.330) Peirce points out also that an "experience of effort cannot exist without the experience of resistance. Effort only is effort by virtue of its being opposed" (CP 8.330) In other words, *Secondness* is an actual occurrence (sound's occurrence) that produces some kind of reaction in the form of experience without having reached the point of mediation (*Thirdness*), without having become a thought, an intellectual experience, a verbalizable knowledge, a sign.

The auditory mode dwells extensively on the Peircean categories of *Firstness* and *Secondness* because what we consider experienced sounds and noises are primarily sources of emotions. In addition, the ear may very likely favor and limit a sound or a noise to an experience of emotions (especially with noises one would instinctually plug one's ears signaling a sensation of displeasure) and, therefore, not encouraging to push the auditory occurrence to the level of mind-dependent, significant experience, to the level of correlation of the Peircean first and second by means of a third that develops into intellectual knowledge and containing an actual sign function. We also know that there are sounds and noises that are recognizable immediately because already codified as this or that sound, as this or that noise. A thunder is not only an acoustic manifestation that stops at the level of sensation. It is a true auditory sign that stands in for a meteorological condition.

A distinctive characteristic of the auditory mode is that when it handles codified acoustic signs, such as the whinny of a horse, the cry of a baby, the sound of a violin, and all those acoustic sounds and noises that are immediately recognizable, the auditory mode may generate a semiotic retroactivity. What this means is that the auditory mode is endowed with a flexible disposition to spontaneously invert the experience of hearing from a temporary mind-dependent state (*Thirdness*) to an auditory climax that is sense-dependent (*Secondness*). For example, the ear perceives the codified

sound of a violin as a thought, as an experience of the mind that can be verbalized as “sound of a violin” playing a recognizable musical solo (*Thirdness*). The thought “sound of a violin” is only a temporary state which instead of moving forward and unidirectionally producing further codifiable correlations, it instead allows the semiotic process to revert to a state of emotions (*Secondness*) because acoustic occurrences, mostly musical sounds are direct objectifications of our emotional world. In regard to music and certainly as a case in point for our analysis, Arthur Schopenhauer stressed that

music is by no means like the other arts, namely a *copy* of the Ideas, but a *copy of the will itself*... For this reason, the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence.

(vol. 1, 257)

With sounds, and specifically with music, there is an important role that repetition engenders. It impacts our response based on what we hear. What we hear is in part oriented by how we hear sonorous manifestations. To this Arthur Schopenhauer adds:

How full of meaning and significance the language of music is we see from the repetition signs, as well as from the *Da capo* which would be intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words. In music, however, they are very appropriate and beneficial.

(vol.1, 264)

In this citation, Schopenhauer points out not only the fullness of the musical experience through repetition, but encourages us to uncover an important semiotic process. By means of a “*Da capo*” movement (a revertible spontaneity to a state of emotions), repetition provides the necessary condition for sounds to fully engage the emotional nature of the will and to become what Schopenhauer calls “*a copy of the will itself*”; that is, the skipped *Secondness*, our sense-dependent experience for those codified sounds that people can easily recognize and to which they can link meanings as a result of recognition. Recognition of codified sounds is a mental experience that, in the swiftness of its occurrence, bypasses, momentarily skips the emotional part. After the short-lived mental recognition, the sound’s occurrence operates on the human senses because it is a physical event, sensible *per se* (*kath’ hauta*, Aristotle 1907, 2.6, 418a,8–9); it is the object of reality itself; it is an event that the ear takes in without discrimination. Sounds prompt a flexible relation with the will in the form of *ratione sensibilis*, sensitive knowledge, sense-cognition (*Secondness*).

In their natural state, as they are in themselves (sensible *per se*), sounds are not signs because they are primarily that which produces a sense-dependent experience. Nonetheless they may become signs in virtue of a mental

recognition of the sound-sign (carrying a meaning). Yet, the sound that initially was used as a sound-sign reverts to what it really is, to its natural state (*Secondness*). This is so because the-in-itself of a sound, for its very nature, does not stand for something else in the capacity of sign, it is not

a copy of the phenomenon, or, more exactly, of the will's adequate objectivity, but it is directly the copy of the will itself, and therefore expresses the metaphysical to everything physical in the world, the thing-in-itself to every phenomenon.

(Schopenhauer vol. 1, 262)

This is a noteworthy aspect to explain also why repetition is permissible and vital for sounds, while “intolerable in the case of works composed in the language of words.”

The poetic, ear-dependent words of the *Inf.*, particularly those that denote noises, are distinctive signs because they revert to their natural state; they become physical events, sensible *per se*. As such, they are the language of feelings and emotions in their quintessential way of being. They make the auditory mode a vehicle of virtual reality and expose the *musica diaboli*, the music that consists of noises, disharmonious and disquieting sounds that are never “resolved into new consonances”. (Schopenhauer vol. 2, 456) The ability to perceive and distinguish noises from sounds is an intrinsic human competence. Human beings are musical beings (*musica humana*).<sup>68</sup> They are capable of recognizing dissonances that are never resolved into new consonances. In the *Inf.* sounds become true noises, they produce unsettling sensations, they turn into a real performance staged by the act of reading. In the Middle Ages, reading was itself a true, physical, auditory event, and Dante intended it in a similar way. It was a true “voice of the pages”, a sort of “muscular memory of the words,... an aural memory of the words heard...inscribe[d]... in the body and in the soul.” (Leclercq 1962, 24, 78) Thus, reading aloud would be inscribed “in the body and in the soul” of the reader in a way that most of the codified words, such as “sighs”, “lamentations”, “loud cries” “accents of anger”, “words of suffering”, “voices shrill and faint”, “beating hands” (*Inf.* 3. 22–27), from their state of mind-dependence (*Thirdness*), would produce a real experience of the body and soul transforming reading into the language of feelings and emotions (*Secondness*) and, therein, dwelling as *ratio sensibilis*, sense-cognition of *musica diaboli*. In the *Inf.* the ear is exposed to sounds without order, audible noises that can be viewed under the domain of the Boethian *musica instrumentalis*.<sup>69</sup> The audible chaos of *musica diaboli*, a perverted *musica instrumentalis*, is also an indication of a perverted *musica humana*, a perverted microcosm that finds concrete representation in the physical deformation of the infernal souls, the disharmonious relation of the bodily parts, and the disharmonious relation of the souls' rational and irrational faculties. For a detailed analysis of music, which fulfils a structural role in the *DC*, and how the *Pur.* accomplishes the mission of a re-gained *musica*

*humana* in preparation for Dante the wayfarer to access the *musica mundana* of the *Par.*, I encourage the reader to see my *Ordine e struttura musicale nella Divina commedia*, 2000.

The last relevant point worthy of mention is Dante's tendency of combining, quite often, the auditory mode with the visual mode for reasons of signifying effectiveness. He does so by means of ekphrasis, which is a rhetorical trope whose purpose is to utilize the written mode to act on visual and auditory representations. The use of ekphrasis influences the content value of poetry and the signifying outcomes it produces when it involves the change of mode. Also, the ekphrastic domain vehicles not only the change of mode but also prompts the remaking of meaning as it "involves a change in the ontological orientation." (Kress 2010, 124) Ekphrasis, together with metaphor, allegory, and symbol, explains Dante's purpose for the use of multimodality. Likewise, these rhetorical tropes all put together (as we are going to see in Chapter 4 and in Chapter 5) will aid signification and concurrently provide the reader with intelligible material that Dante uses to put into words a reality of the transcendental kind.

## Notes

- 1 For a view of the interpretive process as "sign-based hermeneutics" in Dante, see Barański 1995, 156.
- 2 Henceforth *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, and *Paradiso* will be abbreviated as *Inf.*, *Pur.*, and *Par.*
- 3 Here I would like to draw to the reader's attention that *communication* and *signification*, in this book, are not used synonymously. "It is very important to make this distinction clear... to avoid dangerous misunderstandings...or a sort of compulsory choice imposed by some contemporary semioticians: it is absolutely true that there are some important differences between a semiotics of communication and a semiotics of signification; this distinction does not, however, set two mutually exclusive approaches in opposition. So let us define a communicative process as the passage of a signal (not necessarily a sign) from a source (through a transmitter, along a channel) to a destination. In a machine-to-machine process the signal has no power to signify insofar as it may determine the destination *sub specie stimuli*. In this case we have no signification, but we do have the passage of some information. When the destination is a human being, or 'addressee' (it is not necessary that the source or transmitter be human, provided that they emit the signal following a system of rules known by the human addressee), we are on the contrary witnessing a process of signification—provided that the signal is not merely a stimulus but arouses an interpretive response in the addressee." (Eco 1976a, 8) Based on Eco's distinction, we can understand that communication is in essence the transmission of information without an interpretive effort; on the other hand, signification does not exclude the communicative process, but it further requires an interpretive response "following a system of rules known by the human addressee". In this capacity, "a semiotics of signification entails a *theory of codes*, while a semiotics of communication entails a *theory of sign production*." (Eco, 1976a, 4; my emphasis in italics) The dialectic disposition between signification and communication, a theory of codes and a theory of sign production will constantly foreground Dante's strategy of naming.
- 4 Transparency is the illusion of seeing the actual object through *mode-as-image*.

- 5 Bi-planar effort of articulation is the labor involved in correlating the expression level and the content level. Such a correlation is indispensable for the codification and decodification of a message.
- 6 In semiotics, codification and decodification consist in the endeavor of organizing signs in a meaningful system which correlates expression levels (signifiers) and content levels (signifieds) both used by producers and interpreters of texts.
- 7 Graphemes are letters of the alphabet.
- 8 Content values are the potential meanings allowed by a text.
- 9 With regard to limitation of *mode-as-image* Eco argues: "It is indeed possible to express a given content both by the expression /the sun rises/ and by another visual expression composed of a horizontal line, a semicircle and a series of diagonal lines radiating from the imaginary center of the semicircle. But it would seem more difficult to assert that /the sun *also* rises/ by means of the same visual device and it would be quite impossible to assert that /Walter Scott is the author of *Waverley*/ by visual means." (Eco 1976a, 172)
- 10 It is the functive (cohesive) role that a sign has between an expression plane and a content plane.
- 11 They are stimuli endowed with an illusory nature insofar as they "stand in for effective stimuli". For example, at times we perceive an image not as an image but as the real thing. When this happens, we are dealing with *surrogate stimuli* "in which the same receptors react as they would in the presence of the real stimulus, just as birds respond to decoy whistles or as a sound-effects expert in the radio or the cinema supplies us (through the use of strange instruments) with the same acoustic sensations we would experience on hearing the gallop of a horse or the roar of a racing car." (Eco 2000, 354). The reproduction of an illusory nature by means of *surrogate stimuli* insofar as iconicity is concerned is extended to the formation of *sound-as-message* as well, though one must consider some distinctions between the two in terms of sign-production and sign-function.
- 12 *Cognitive Type (CT)* is a phenomenon of the human cognitive process which engages comparisons and ultimately recognizes occurrences. It unifies the multiplicity of intuition and the recognized occurrence. According to Eco, "*CT is private*" in the sense that it is a "phenomenon of perceptual semiosis". It "cannot be seen and cannot be touched" but it "may be postulated only on the basis of the phenomena of recognition, identification, and felicitous reference" (Eco 2000, 138).
- 13 In terms of sign-function and though not only iconic signs "are *circumstantially sensitive*", Umberto Eco in 1976a, 216–17, argues that they "cannot be classified as a unique category since...some of the procedures that rule so-called iconic signs can circumscribe other kinds of signs, while many of the procedures that govern other kinds of signs enter into the definition of the so-called iconic ones." Also, the view I endeavour to convey here about the iconic mode is consistent with Peirce's definition of *icon*. In Peircean terms, "A possibility alone is an Icon purely by virtue of its quality; and its object can only be a Firstness. But a sign may be *iconic*, that is, may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being. If a substantive be wanted, an iconic representamen may be termed *hypoicon*. Any material image, as painting, is largely conventional in its mode of representation; but in itself, without legend or label it may be called *hypoicon*. Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or First Firstness, are *images*, those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts are *diagrams*; those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*." (*Collected Papers* 1931–58, vol. 2. 276–77). From now on, Peirce's works will be cited as *CP*.

- 14 The symbolic sign corresponds to the Aristotelian convention (*kata synthēkēn*) as well as to the Peircean *legisign* (or a sign that contains the rule of convention and the function of a *type*, a true sign).
- 15 Once more, *symbolic* here must be understood both in the Aristotelian sense, that is, as convention (*kata synthēkēn*) as well as in the Peircean sense of a *legisign* (a sign which contains the rule of convention and the function of a *type*, a true sign).
- 16 According to Eco, *strong codes* are the ones produced by alphabetic languages. He also mentions *very strong codes* that are produced by the Morse Code Alphabet. (Eco 1968, 121–22)
- 17 Regarding the limitation of *mode-as-image*, Eco argues: “It is indeed possible to express a given content both by the expression /the sun rises/ and by another visual expression composed of a horizontal line, a semicircle and a series of diagonal lines radiating from the imaginary center of the semicircle. But it would seem more difficult to assert that /the sun *also* rises/ by means of the same visual device and it would be quite impossible to assert that /Walter Scott is the author of *Waverley*/ by visual means.” (Eco 1976a, 172)
- 18 Here the reader must keep in mind that although we recognize a high degree of accuracy and effectiveness in *mode-as-writing*, not every content of non-verbal nature may be expressed verbally “other than by means of weak approximation”. (Eco 1976a, 173) A good example is the Neapolitan gesture that Professor Piero Sraffa made to stumble Ludwig Wittgenstein. The German philosopher was insisting that in propositional logic, a proposition and what it describes must have the same “logical form”. To which Sraffa replied with the mimicked gesture by brushing under the chin the topside of four fingers of the hand with an outward sweep, and asked Wittgenstein: “What does it mean?” The meaning of such a gesture varies from perplexity to gradients of indifference which, according to Eco, “it is not only impossible to translate verbally but also impossible to describe verbally in a satisfactory manner” (Eco 1975, 233, note 10). Sraffa contradicted Wittgenstein because if a proposition *p* must be either *true* or *false* and not both at the same time, we cannot say that the same logical form applies to the Neapolitan gesture. In fact, if we take the gesture as proposition *p*, it follows that in the same gestural context *p* can be *true* and *false* at the same time because it semantically foresees *perplexity* and *indifference*. Here I used the Italian edition of Eco’s 1976a (Eco 1975) because in the English translation note 10 has been omitted.
- 19 Allen Mandelbaum’s translation is available in *Digital Dante* of Columbia University, online posting 6 January 2022 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210731035016/https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/inferno/inferno-1/>
- 20 For a clear understanding of “speech acts” see Austin 1975, 6–7.
- 21 For a detailed idea regarding Dante’s twenty-one addresses to the reader consisting of seven occurrences for each of the three *cantiche* (7:7:7) see Herman Gmelin 1951, 130–40; Auerbach 1954, 268; Spitzer 158. Unlike Gmelin, Auerbach acknowledges twenty occurrences in the entire *DC* (7:7:6), while Spitzer only nineteen (7:7:5). For a detailed address to the reader in the *DC*, see Ledda 2002, 117–126.
- 22 “*Il ritmo di una frase è ciò che questa diventa nel respiro del lettore, come dicevano i vecchi studi di retorica.*” (2004, 36)
- 23 We may also add that Pierce’s “First Firstness”, as a “simple quality” (*CP*. 2.277), is a sort of feeling, emotion, “an instance of that kind of consciousness which involves no analysis, comparison or any process whatsoever,...[it] has its own positive quality which consists in nothing else, and which is of itself all that it is” (*CP*. 1.306).
- 24 Roland Barthes (1977, 17) defines the photographic image as “a message without a code” because a photograph is a “perfect analogon”. See also (Eco, 1997, 336 and note 35, p. 422), where Eco compares Barthes’ “message without a code” to his “alpha mode”. The “alpha mode”, in Eco’s words, is “that mode in which,



- even before deciding we are confronted with the expression of a sign function, we perceive through surrogate stimuli a given object or scene which we then elect as the expression plane of a sign function.” For the English citation I have used Eco 2000, 383, and note 35, p.431. Thus, in relation to images, the state of Peirce’s “Firstness”, Barthes’ “*message without a code*”, and Eco’s “alpha mode” are all concerned with the critical point in which perception is captured. It refers to the pivotal instant of “primary iconism”, or to the state in which the image has not become sign yet, and consequently it does not entail a sign function.
- 25 A sign-vehicle is anything that can be used as a sign.
- 26 A sign-function is the correlation of an expression (sign-vehicle) to a content. Both “elements”, that is to say, expression and content are “the functives of such a correlation”. (Eco 1976a, 48)
- 27 My use of “primary” and “secondary iconicity” is different from Gören Sonesson’s use which he expounded in (2010, 39). In my view, something that has the potential of a sign and will eventually develop into a sign, at the state of *primary iconicity*, cannot be called sign just yet because it is a perception taking place by means of *surrogate stimuli*. At best, *primary iconicity* reaches a state of “Secondness” that, in Peirce’s words, “is the mode of being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third.” (CP 8.328). This means that the “mode of being” illustrated by Peirce goes as far as the experience goes, without correlating such an experience to something standing in for something else, or that which has the actual function of a sign, or the state of “Thirdness” that Peirce defines as “the mode of being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and a third into relation to each other.” (CP. 8.329)
- 28 Barthes 1977, 20. By “first-order message” Barthes refers to the denoted message of photographs “which is the analogon itself” (17), or what gives the impression of depicting the reality of the object represented for what it is.
- 29 Spinicci 2008, 61. See also Walton 1984, 251; Quine 1953, 175; Grice 1989, 377–79.
- 30 Barthes 1977, 27. More specifically, the “second-order message”, or the “connoted message”, is the way in which “society to a certain extent communicates what it thinks of it.” (17)
- 31 They are stimuli endowed with an illusory nature insofar as they “stand in for effective stimuli”. For example, at times we perceive an image not as an image but as the real thing. When this happens, we are dealing with *surrogate stimuli* “in which the same receptors react as they would in the presence of the real stimulus, just as birds respond to decoy whistles or as a sound-effects expert in the radio or the cinema supplies us (through the use of strange instruments) with the same acoustic sensations we would experience on hearing the gallop of a horse or the roar of a racing car.” (Eco 2000, 354). The reproduction of an illusory nature by means of *surrogate stimuli* insofar as iconicity is concerned is extended to the formation of *sound-as-message* as well, though one must consider some distinctions between the two in terms of sign-production and sign-function.
- 32 Barthes 1977, 28 (my italics).
- 33 *Primary iconicity* or “Primary iconism” (as Eco calls it) must be understood as perception at the juncture in which an icon is not yet a mental image. Eco believes that Peirce’s *primary iconicity* “lies in the correspondence whereby the stimulus is *adequately* ‘represented’ by that sensation and not by another. This correspondence is not to be explained but only recognized.” (Eco 2000, 106)
- 34 In Peirce’s words, “Thirdness” is also defined as the triadic relation “between a sign, its object, and the interpreting thought, itself a sign, considered as constituting the mode of being of a sign.” (CP 8.332)
- 35 This is particularly true in relation to the level of “*pertinentizzazione molare*” (molar pertinentization) of perception, which constitutes the point of departure of an inferential activity. On this point see Eco 2007, 471–475.

- 36 According to Eco, *likeness* (in the Peircean sense) is an element of *primary iconicity*. “On a perceptual level you cannot predicate anything of a Likeness other than the recognition that it is that Likeness”. It is an “innate experience” which “cannot be used to judge similarities, and rules of similarities cannot be used to define primary iconic likeness.” (Eco 2000, 347–48)
- 37 Though some authors use *similarity* and *likeness* interchangeably, in this study we draw a clear distinction between the two. *Likeness* is an element of “primary iconism” and “cannot predicate anything of a Likeness”; it can only recognize it (Eco 2000, 347). Instead, *similarity* is governed by rules and cannot be considered an element of “primary iconism”. As a rule-governed likeness, *similarity* belongs to an already-categorized level of the iconic process while *likeness* does not.
- 38 “Una fotografia, un disegno o un’immagine televisiva potrebbero avere la stessa forma dell’espressione, pur essendo differenti dal punto di vista della sostanza dell’espressione” (Polidoro 2012, 35). My English translation in the main text.
- 39 “[N]ei fenomeni di iconismo si procede spesso per utilizzazione di un continuum cromatico senza soluzione di continuità.” (Eco 1968, 123)
- 40 The Italian text reads as follows: “Nel continuum iconico non si ritagliano tratti pertinenti discreti e catalogabili una volta per tutte, ma gli aspetti pertinenti variano: talora sono grandi configurazioni riconoscibili per convenzione, talora anche piccoli segmenti di linea, punti, spazi bianchi, come accade per un disegno di profilo umano, dove un punto rappresenta l’occhio, il semicerchio la palpebra; e sappiamo che in un altro contesto lo stesso tipo di punto e lo stesso semicerchio rappresentano invece, poniamo, una banana e un acino d’uva. Dunque i segni del disegno non sono elementi di articolazione corrispettivi ai fonemi della lingua perché non hanno un valore posizionale e opposizionale, non significano per il fatto di apparire o non apparire; possono assumere significati contestuali (punto = occhio – quando è iscritto in una forma amigdaloide) senza avere significato in proprio, ma non si costituiscono in un sistema di rigide differenze per cui un punto significhi in quanto si oppone alla linea retta o al cerchio. Il loro valore posizionale varia a seconda della convenzione che il tipo di disegno istituisce e che può variare sotto la mano di un altro disegnatore, o nel momento in cui lo stesso disegnatore assume un altro stile. **Ci si trova dunque di fronte a una ridda di idioletti, alcuni dei quali riconoscibili da molti, alcuni dei quali privatissimi, dove le varianti facoltative superano di gran lunga i tratti pertinenti, o meglio dove le varianti facoltative diventano tratti pertinenti e vice versa a seconda del codice assunto dal disegnatore (il quale mette in crisi con estrema libertà un codice preesistente e ne costruisce uno nuovo coi detriti dell’altro o di altri).** Ecco in che senso i codici iconici, se esistono, sono codici deboli.” (Eco 1968, 123–24)
- 41 I have emphasized “immediately” and “already wholly” in my translation. I chose to emphasize such terms to make the reader aware of the spatial and temporal convergence regarding the perception of an image which occurs within a wholly present space and in a matter of a heartbeat. Also, regarding the distinction between images and verbal representation, Spinicci notes that according to Goodman 1976, it must be considered within the sphere of symbolism. And the distinction between the two is that “images are *dense* and *relatively saturated* systems, whereas a verbal language is a system of signs finitely articulated and *relatively unsaturated*.” (Spinicci 2008, 73) For a clear understanding of Goodman’s view see Lopez 1996, 55–68.
- 42 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1. 1, online posting 14 April 2020 <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.1.1.html>
- 43 “Le immagini sono oggetti che hanno una loro immediata datità percettiva” (24). The term “givenness” is used in its phenomenal sense and addresses what is actually shown in a visual representation, that is, what constitutes the ground of the epistemic process.

- 44 From the 20<sup>th</sup> century on, these languages also use the horizontal system from left to right. “The Structure of the Chinese Script,” *Omniglot: The Online Encyclopedia of Writing Systems and Languages*, online posting 4 January 2014 <http://www.omniglot.com/chinese/structure.htm>.
- 45 In appendix 1, 1997, 353, Eco gives a historical account of denotation from Aristotle to contemporary philosophers of language and explains that, in all cases, it has been used in a *strong* intensional sense, in a *strong* extensional sense, and in a *weak* sense. As per the *strong* intensional sense, denotation is in relation to meaning; in the *strong* extensional sense, denotation is in relation to things or to the state of things; in the *weak* sense, denotation remains suspended between intension and extension with good reasons to propend toward intension. The Italian text reads: “(i) *senso intensionale forte* (la denotazione è in relazione con il significato); (ii) *senso estensionale forte* (la denotazione è in relazione alle cose o allo stato di cose); (iii) *senso debole* (la denotazione rimane sospesa tra intensione ed estensione, con buone ragioni per propendere verso l’intensione).”
- 46 As argued in this chapter, *surrogate stimuli* have illusory effect insofar as they “stand in for effective stimuli”. For example, at times we perceive an image not as an image but as a real thing. When this happens, we are dealing with *surrogate stimuli* “in which the same receptors react as they would in the presence of the real stimulus”. Although we know what *surrogate stimuli* are and that they replace real stimuli in producing the effect of *likeness*, their “mechanics...remain obscure, also because these ‘surrogations’ range from the highest fidelity...to a simple invitation to behave as if we were receiving a nonexistent stimulus.” (Eco 2000, 354–55)
- 47 Here the term *likeness* is used as an element of “primary iconism” and considered different from *similarity* because, as we already discussed, it “cannot predicate anything of a Likeness but can only recognize” it (Eco 2000, 347). Instead, *similarity* is governed by rules and cannot be considered an element of “primary iconism”. As a rule-governed likeness, *similarity* belongs to an already-categorized level of the iconic process while *likeness* does not.
- 48 Eco makes outlines coincide with *surrogate stimuli* and argues that they are “a perceptual surrogate and serve as indicators of discontinuity...[They] serve as an anticipation of the parallax effect of movement, because the objects within our reach will always detach themselves from the background but maintain an intrinsic coherence even if we move our head slightly.” (2000, 348)
- 49 NC must not be confused with *molar content* (MC). The difference between NC and the MC is that the former addresses a conventional knowledge of the object by means of words or images that convey a *basic* understanding of it based on words and expressions with *indispensible* notions and/or *indispensible* traits of visual representation. The latter instead, although it addresses a conventional knowledge of the object and, while conveying an understanding of it based on words and expressions with *indispensible* notions and *indispensible* traits of visual representation, it must be understood as a “complex *knowledge*” which corresponds to a “broadened knowledge” of something, but not quite to an encyclopaedic knowledge (complete knowledge) of the same. As a broadened knowledge, it may also “include notions that are not indispensable for perceptual recognition (e.g., that horses are reared in such and such a way or that they are mammals).” (Eco 2000, 141) As a complex knowledge, a MC often corresponds to a “scientific definition”, description, and/or to a scientific visual representation “of the object” (Eco 2000, 142).
- 50 With the Peircean term “interpretant” we refer to a signified or to the object of signification, the meaning, the cultural unit of a codified sign, which, in turn, itself has the ability to become sign to describe a further interpretant (signified).
- 51 All the Italian citations from the *Divine Comedy* are from Dante Alighieri, *La commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*, 4 vols., ed. Giorgio Petrocchi (Milano: Mondadori, 1966–67).

- 52 All the English translations are from Allen Mandelbaum, *Digital Dante at Columbia*, unless otherwise specified. Online posting 12 November 2022 <https://web.archive.org/web/20210731022057/https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/paradiso/paradiso-19/>
- 53 Before Dante, only a negligible notion of the purgatory existed. For example, as “an annex to hell” with the “distinction that its punishments were temporal and consequently they would cease either when a soul was purified, or at the end of time. In a fundamental study, Jacques Le Goff 1984, 337 disagrees with the traditional view that Dante’s location of purgatory on a mountain was entirely original. The earliest account of purgatory in popular tradition, *St. Patrick’s Purgatory* (c.1180), placed it on a mountain in Connaught. Other instances show that there certainly existed purgatorial mountains before the *Comedy*.” (Scott 2004, 218) But also, “with respect to *Purgatorio* more than with respect to *Inferno* and *Paradiso*, Dante is truly inventing everything as he goes along” (Barolini 2006, 129).
- 54 “Unlimited semiosis” is an expression coined by Eco which refers to the type of relation that takes place in the semiotic system between the sign (signifier) and its “interpretant” (signified). Based on Peirce’s model, the interpretant is endlessly commutable because itself capable of referring to something else and, therefore, the interpretant can itself become a signifier for further signifieds and so on *ad infinitum*. In this work the reader is reminded that unlimited semiosis is viewed and allowed as a system. As a process instead, it is not unlimited because in “the course of a semiotic process we want to know only what is relevant according to a given *universe of discourse*.” (Eco 1990, 28)
- 55 “Semiotic primitives” are “disposition[s] toward meaning of a prelinguistic character; in other words, there are ‘certain classes of meanings about which human beings are in innate agreement.’” Also, they may be viewed as “the pre-classificatory perception[s] of something as either living and animated or devoid of life... [They are] primary recognition[s], preconceptual (in any case pre-scientific), having to do with perception and not with categorial knowledge (if anything, [they] orient categorial knowledge, [they] offer [themselves] as a basis for interpretation at higher cognitive levels).” (Eco 2000, 144–45)
- 56 In *Inf.* 4, I was able to find the following occurrences: “*e l’occhio riposato intorno mossi*”, (and turned my rested eyes) 4; “*oscura e profonda ...io non vi discernere alcuna cosa*”, (“dark and deep... I was unable to discern a thing”), 10–12; “*del color mi fui accorto*”, (“[I ha]d seen the change in his complexion”), 16; “*l’angoscia de le genti che sono qua giù, nel viso mi dipigne*”, (“The anguish of the people whose place is here below, has touched my face”), 19–20; “*Tu non dimandi che spiriti son questi che tu vedi?*”, (“Do you not ask who are these spirits whom you see before you?”), 31–32; “*quando ci vidi venire un possente*”, (“when I beheld a Great Lord enter here”), 53; “*quand’io vidi un fuoco*”, (“when I beheld a fire”), 68; “*si ch’io non discernessi in parte*”, (“so far I could not see in part”), 71; “*vidi quattro grand’ombre a noi venire: sembianza avevan né trista né lieta*”, (“I saw four giant shades approaching us; in aspect, they were neither sad nor joyous”), 83–84; “*Mira colui con quella spade in mano*”, (“Look well at him who holds that sword in hand”), 86; “*Così vid’ I’ adunar la bella scola*”, (“And so I saw that splendid school assembled”), 94; “*volsersi a me con salutevol cenno*”, (“they turned to me, saluting cordially”), 98; “*si che veder si potien tutti quanti*”, (“and we could see all those who were assembled”), 117; “*mi fuor mostrati li spiriti magni, che del vedere in me stesso m’essalto*”, (“great-hearted souls were shown to me and I still glory in my having witnessed them”), 119–20; “*I’ vidi Elettra con molti compagni, tra quali conobbi Ettòr ed Enea... Cesare... vidi Camilla e la Pantasilea; da l’altra parte vidi l’ re Latino...con Lavinia sua figlia...Vidi quel Bruto che cacciò Tarquinio... e solo in parte vidi l’ Saladino...*”

*vidi il maestro di color che sanno...quivi vid'io Socrate e Platone...e vidi il buon accoglitore... e vidi Orfeo...*”, (“I saw Electra with her many comrades, among whom I knew Hector and Aeneas,...Caesar...I saw Camilla and Penthesilea and, on the other side, saw King Latinus, who sat beside Lavinia, his daughter... I saw that Brutus who drove Tarquin out... and, solitary, set apart, [I saw] Saladin... I saw the master of the men who know... there I beheld both Socrates and Plato... I saw the good collector... and I saw Orpheus...”), 121–40.

57 As a form of combinable elements, double articulation is applicable to other languages also, for example, to computer language.

58 *Morphemes* and *phonemes* are not interchangeable.

59 *Phonemes* and *morphemes* are essential elements of the verbal language insofar as they address the economy and strength of language. In English we have approximately 40/50 *phonemes* that have generated hundreds of thousands of words. It is important to keep in mind that a *phoneme* is not the same thing as a letter of the alphabet, although some *phonemes* correspond to a letter, others use multiple letters, as well as some letters are used for different *phonemes* depending on their context. Also, words (which do not always refer to a single *morpheme* because many words may contain more than one *morpheme*, *mean-ing-less* for example, which has three) are a large but limited number in many alphabetical languages. Nonetheless, they are able to generate infinite syntactically valid sentences.

60 *Signs*, not to be confused with *iconic signs*, are the smallest units of the iconic code and endowed with meaning. According to Eco, *signs* “denote (i) semes of recognition (nose, eye, sky, cloud) by conventional graphic means; or (ii) ‘abstract models’, symbols, conceptual diagrams of objects (the sun as a circle with radiating lines). Often difficult to analyze with a seme, since they show up as nondiscrete, as part of a graphic continuum. They are recognizable only in the context of the same.” (1976b, 597)

61 *Semes* “are more commonly known as ‘images’ or ‘iconic signs’ (a man, horse, etc.). In fact, they formulate a complex iconic phrase (of the kind ‘this is a horse standing in profile’ or at least ‘this is a horse’). They are the most simply catalogued, and an iconic code often works at their level only. Since it is within their context that iconic signs can be recognized, they stand as the key factors in communication of these signs, juxtaposing them one against the other. Semes should therefore be considered—with respect to the signs permitting recognition—as an *idiolect*.” (Eco 1976b, 597)

62 Metz 1974, 61. In the footnote of the same page he also argues that not only “cinema *as such* has no second articulation” but (“...no first articulation either).” And the reason for stating that is because cinema “proceeds by ‘sentence’, like sign boards, but, like verbal language, its sentences are unlimited in number. The difference is that sentences of verbal language eventually break down into words, whereas, in the cinema they do not: A film may be segmented into large units (‘shots’), but these shots are not *reducible* (in Jakobson’s sense) into small, basic, and specific units.” (Metz 1974, 88)

63 Pasolini 1988, 199. Pasolini also claims that up to the 60s “films have made ‘cinema’ and united indistinctly by their prevalently ‘prose narrative’ nature: henceforth this will no longer be the case. Cinema is beginning to articulate itself, to separate itself into different special jargons.” (197–98).

64 According to Pasolini, the filmmaker is able to make possible (significant) *im-signs* drawn from chaos by correlating them “to the hypothetical dictionary of a community which communicates by means of images.”

65 In Pasolini’s translation (1988) “*inquadratura*” is translated as *shot*; in Eco’s translation (1976b) “*inquadratura*” is translated as *frame*.

66 Here we should point out the transformation factor of *signs* connected with movement, something Eco does not mention in his article. *Signs* can transform themselves into *semes* when there is a change of *shot*. This happens when a wide or a mid-*shot* is dissolved into a close-up *shot*. Through such a transformation,

what could not be revealed before as meaningful (*sign* of a human eye seen from afar without details), with the dissolution into a close-up *shot*, the meaningless *sign* of the eye has become a meaningful *seme* as a result of a *shot* change that displays details that were not visible before and, thus, gaining complex communicative function, as in the case of: “the eye is dissimulating the true feeling of that woman’s sadness”.

- 67 In the old movie cameras, light is recorded on a 35mm film, and the moving image is formed by a sequence of photograms. With the new digital movie cameras, light is converted “into streams of binary numbers. Digital recording employs a charge-coupled device (CCD) to first convert light levels to voltages and then convert them to the number streams, which are stored in bitmaps, i.e. grids of pixels. The bitmap is a mathematical representation and thus has no physical relation to the image, which is manufactured by the interpretation of numbers.” (McGregor 2013, 266) Also, digital cinema is “the medium of moving images generated by bitmaps” (Gaut 2010, 14), and “[o]nce live action material is digitized, the existing relation to reality is lost as the digital images become raw material (grids of pixels) for manipulation.” (McGregor 2013, 271) One further difference, as Gaut notes, digital film “possesses the possibility, in its non-photographic modes, of creating expressive content that does not require the recording of any reality at all” (50). Now, even by recognizing the technological difference between the two systems, either we speak of kinesic figures or bitmaps, what remains the same is that both are meaningless, discrete units, with differential value in relation to other discrete units, and the motion image in both cases decomposes into kinesic figures and bitmaps.
- 68 Boetii 1867, 1.2, 188–89: “*Humanam vero musicam quisquis in sese ipsum descendit intellegit. Quid est enim quod illam incorpoream rationis vivacitatem corpori misceat, nisi quaedam coaptatio et veluti gravium leviumque vocum quasi unam contionansiam efficiens temperatio? Quid est aliud quad ipsius inter se partes animae coniugant, quae, ut Aristoteli placet, ex rationabili irrationabilisque coniuncta est? Quid vero, quod corporis elementa permiscet, aut partes sibimet rata coaptatione contineat?* [“Now one comes to understand the music of the human being by examining his own being. For what unites the incorporeal existence of the reason with the body except a certain harmony (coaptatio) and, as it were, a careful tuning of low and high pitches in such a way that they produce one consonance? What unites the parts of a man’s soul which, according to Aristotle, is composed of a rational and irrational part? In what way are the elements of a man’s body related to each other or what holds together the various parts of the body in an established order?”] (Bower’s English trans. 46–7).
- 69 “*Tertia est musica, quae in quibusdam consistere dicitur instrumentalis. Haec vero administratur aut intentione ut nervis, aut spiritu aut tibus, vel his, quae ad aquam moventur, aut percussione quadam, ut in his, quae in concavam quaedam aerea feriuntur, atque inde diversi efficiuntur soni.*” (Boetii 1867, 1.1, 189) [“Now the third type of music is that which is said to be found in various instruments. The governing element in this music is either tension, as in strings, or breath, as in the tibia or those instruments which are activated by water, or a certain percussion, as in those instruments consisting of concave brass which one beats and thus produces various pitches.”] (Bower 47)

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