

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

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Chapter 2

The Semiotics of Multimodality in Discourse

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2 The Semiotics of Multimodality in Discourse

2.1 General overview of a semiotics of discourse

The term “discourse” has been employed in different ways by scholars and characterized by the specificity of the discipline in which it is used. In this study, I intend to define and utilize discourse as the single, individual act of communication that attempts to explain its internal dynamic process, which mediates between the intention of the author embedded in the text¹, the intention of the text, and the several ways in which the receiver may orient a textual discourse. Based on this definition, discourse aims at discovering possible interpretive paths that the receiver wishes to find and validate in the text. By means of discourse, the receiver is able to generate such paths through the direct and unrepeatable personal engagement with the text. Thus, the receiver’s responsibility is to consider the intention of the author authorized by the text and, more importantly, to pay close attention to the intention of the text and how it behaves as a host of further intentions in order to guarantee ontological and epistemological dependability of the interpretive process.

Here I propose a phenomenological model because meaning is generated by the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic influences. In this instance, discursive semiotics can prove its efficacy as it steers the reader primarily toward “a general syntax of discursive operations” in that the “universe of signification” is seen as a “*praxis* rather than as a stable set of fixed forms.” (Fontanille 2006, xx; see also Kristeva 1980, 36) Based on this expectation, the semiotics of discourse takes into account the two Saussurian levels of language, namely *langue* (the language-system shared by a community of speakers) and *parole* (the individual speech act made possible by the language)² that contribute to form an active interplay working toward the production of meaning. In such a way, the text comes alive and fulfils its principal signifying function which consists principally of examining the text as a type of process, as a dynamic mechanism that can be adequately analyzed in its manifold epistemic manifestations. As such, discourse is not what it would appear to be, that is, any type of reaction/intuition a receiver may get from the text, but it is rather the exercise of one’s competence vis-à-vis a peculiar text (in our case Dante’s text) and

guided by the cultural, and encyclopedic competence that Dante's oeuvre requires as a product of the Middle Ages.³ Through interpretation, the semiotician focuses on the signifying faculty of the text and on the arrangement of potential discursive paths which will eventually manifest themselves as possible new content levels. In the *DC*, the semiotics of multimodal discourse is primarily an endeavor to anatomize such a polyvocal process emerging from the employment of multiple interpretive tools in the dissemination of Dante's poetry. In light of the complexity of the subject matter, the interpreter must, first of all, become familiar with *how* meaning is formed on the basis of a view that recognizes the language of the *DC* as phenomenal manifestations of multimodal signification and not simply as pre-assembled "textual facts" (Fontanille 2006, 46). And only afterwards one may decide *what* to do with them in order to form a textual coherence.

We already pointed out that the term "discourse" has been employed in different ways by scholars and characterized by the specificity of the discipline in which it is used. For this reason, we must consider the fact that discourse foresees an array of meanings, and the latter are systematically dealt with in such a way as to produce desirable objectives consistent with the interests and needs of a given research field. Nevertheless, as different as purposes and conclusions are in the various fields of human endeavor, one aspect that makes them all converge is the situational inimitability of discourse. This means that discourse is structurally a dynamic mechanism of speech acts⁴ that generates an individual message based on a situational interplay between constitutive elements of language, properly documented as the Saussurian dimension of *langue*, and an actual utterance as a dimension, *parole*. The dichotomy between *langue* and *parole*, as argued by Paul Ricoeur 1976, 3 provides a distinction of task and purpose between the two in that the "message is individual" (*parole*) while "its code is collective" (*langue*). Nonetheless, the Saussurian dichotomy between *langue* and *parole* of which Ricoeur speaks, in my view, is dichotomous only insofar as it aims at selecting, for reasons of clarity, the distinctive presence between the two when dealing with theory analysis. For what they aim to achieve (communication, signification) and for what the process is (synchronized and dynamically bi-directional), I concur with Michael Halliday's view of sameness in regard to "culture" (*system*) and "situation" (*instance*), which may analogically be compared to the Saussurian levels of *langue* and *parole*. For Halliday, culture and situation "are the same thing seen from different points of view". (1999, 8; Martin 2012, 251) To explain this concept Halliday uses "climate" and "weather" as the two elements of comparison. He argues that:

Climate and weather are not two different things: they are the same thing, which we call *weather* when we are looking at it close up, and *climate* when we are looking at it from a distance. The weather goes on around us all the time; it is the actual instances of temperature and precipitation and air movement that you can see and hear and feel. The

climate is the *potential* that lies behind all these things; it is the weather seen from a distance, by an observer standing some way off in time. So of course there is a continuum from one to another; there is no way of deciding when a “long term weather pattern” becomes a “temporary condition of climate”, or when “climate variation” becomes merely “changes in weather.”

(1999, 9)

This means that when we speak of *culture* or *langue*, we use such terms to simply identify the theoretical aspect of the system, while with *instance* or *parole* we recognize the theoretical occurrence of the linguistic system. Further, *instance* and/or *parole*, being the “context of a situation”⁵, allow to formulate the “theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located” (Halliday 1999, 10). Yet in terms of purpose and function, they are the same because synchronized and bi-directionally implicated as oneness in the contextual process of communication/signification. This view is not only useful for the verbal text but also for the visual, aural, and gestural texts to adequately approach modal discursivity, though one must proceed with caution and look carefully at the modal system that one employs and its specific forms of materialization according to which contextual instantiations occur.

In analyzing the constitutive elements of discourse, those that are primarily centered on the areas of communication and representation, I will emphasize the importance of presence, as the concrete manifestation of utterance connected with the “body proper, a sensing body that is the first form that the actant of enunciation takes.”⁶ Hence, presence plays a central role in the formation of discourse because it entails the engagement of any possible response structured according to a schema of performativity. Presence triggers phenomenal responses and inferences, or what we may call creative responses to the immediate circumstances and perceptive judgment of the complex act of interpretation. It is from this preliminary step of presence that conditions develop for a generative trajectory of discourse which is able to produce signs and, by means of signs, discourse is actualized. The actualization of discourse is made possible because from a content-based beginning, discourse must move in the direction of a new grammar of expression which is fundamentally a semiotic production but not yet-made-available in a concrete manner.

Also, an outstanding characteristic of discourse formation is that of challenging and distorting other existing discourses; that is, it distorts discourses that have already been recognized by convention. In the generative trajectory, there are semiotic aspects of correlation that impact discourse as it is being formed. At the state in which it is-not-yet discourse, interacting correlations may arise from simple correlation (*ratio facilis*) to difficult correlation (*ratio difficilis*).⁷ Nevertheless, in order to make discourse intelligible, we need to look at discursive schemas, which are maps of

discursive concepts and their relationships. They clarify and provide “the link between what we understand of the discourse and our sensible apprehension of its presence.”⁸ The study of discourse taken at the point of becoming intelligible or of being semiotized is immersed in the semiosphere, the “the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages” (Lotman 1990, 123) and upon which all possible schemas can be assembled, but with clearly defined semic boundaries,⁹ especially in the case of Dante’s *DC* and its multimodal forms of representation.

Discourse, as Fontanille defines it,

... is the unit of analysis of semiotics. It permits us to apprehend not only the fixed or conventional products of semiotic activity (signs, for example), but also and above all semiotic acts themselves. Discourse is an enunciation in action, and this action is first of all an act of presence: the instance of discourse is not an automaton that exercises a capacity of language, but a human presence, a sensing body that expresses itself. (45)

The text constitutes the initial point from which discourse emerges. At the state of physical presence, both the poetic text and the body proper (reader/interpreter) may bring into play countless fictive orientations (as far as the system is concerned), but a choice among such orientations is required, one that can reasonably validate itself. This means that not all orientations are recognizable as pertinent. It is through a close look at the semiotics of discourse that we are in the position to determine the pertinence of this or that orientation. In fact, when Dante addresses the reader and says,

*O voi ch'avete li "ntelletti sani,
mirate la dottrina che s'asconde
sotto "l velame de li versi strani, (Inf. 9.61-63)*

[O you possessed of sturdy intellects,
observe the teaching that is hidden here
beneath the veil of verses so obscure,]¹⁰

he is inviting the reader to proceed with caution, to consider the allegorical design of his work so that s/he would make an adequate interpretive choice capable of orienting discourse toward a circumspect semantic pertinence of the text. Orientation and pertinence are directional suggestions contained in the textual signs, and signs, in turn, are determined by what Peirce called the “Object”.

Peirce is not all clear when he speaks of the “Object” and what he exactly means by it. What we get from his explanation is that he divides it into two different categories. He calls the first category “*Immediate Object*”, which is

a sort of sensation “represented in the sign”; (CP 8.314) but the Object is not the sign itself. It is instead “the vehicle” of a particular “information” (CP 2.231), or of a particular “notion” that the sign contains (CP 8.314). Since the Object is not a sign, it is neither articulable nor is it critical. This means that although there is “information” or “notion” of something, which is “common” and accepted by many (CP 8.315), the Object is, nevertheless, recognized within the limits of a mental state, and according to him a sign “can only represent the Object and tell about it” (CP 2. 231). To explain the *Immediate Object*, Peirce uses the following example: “ ‘It is a stormy day’. Here is another sign. Its *Immediate Object* is the notion of the present weather so far as this is common” to two or more people, “not the *character* of it, but the *identity* of it” (CP 8.314). Now, a problematic element contained in Peirce’s definition is the term “identity”, and exactly what it stands for since he does not explain what it is. In fact, the reader may easily confuse it with the term “*identity*” he uses in the context of the “*Dynamical Object*” that he also discusses in CP 8. 314, when he states that the “*Dynamical Object* is the *identity* of the actual or Real meteorological conditions” of the weather at a particular moment. Notwithstanding, if we bring together all those significant passages of his CP in which he speaks of the *Immediate Object*, we may reasonably assume that by the term “identity” he refers to the identity of a specific “information” or “notion” of the sign. The second category is the “*Dynamical Objects*”, and he defines it as the “*identity* of...actual or Real...conditions” (CP 8.314) of concrete and/or abstract phenomena capable of producing countless reactions. To explain this intricate concept of the *Dynamical Object*, Peirce uses the following meteorological example:

I awake in the morning before my wife, and that afterwards she wakes up and inquires, “What sort of a day is it?” *This* is a sign, whose Object, as expressed, is the weather at that time, but whose Dynamical Object is the *impression which I have presumably derived from peeping between the window-curtains.*

(CP 8.314)

It is also that which “from the nature of things, the Sign cannot express, ...it can only indicate and leave the interpreter to find out by *collateral experience.*” (CP 8.314) In other words, what Peirce is perhaps saying here is that it is impossible to know the exact/authentic “*identity*” of what he calls “the actual or Real meteorological conditions” through our knowledge and by means of signs. Nonetheless, by the *Dynamical Object* we may achieve sensations from the collateral experience that the sign (“What sort of a day is it?”) triggers. Thus, the “collateral experience” must be understood as the idea by which “no description in itself suffices to indicate the object” (Bergman 2010, 152), because any description is delimitative, and lacks the omni-comprehensiveness that the *Dynamical Object* itself requires. The moment in which we attempt to verbalize the collateral experience that belongs to the *Dynamical Object*, such an

experience becomes the object of an actual expression and, thus, the *Dynamical Object* is transformed into an *Immediate Object*.

In terms of discourse, the *Dynamical Object* constitutes the universe of related possibilities, and the combination of such related possibilities orients the text, and the interpreter with it, toward the formation of pertinent meanings. The *Dynamical Object* is comparable to what Lotman calls the “semiosphere” or

the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages, not the sum total of different languages; in a sense the semiosphere has a prior existence and is in constant interaction with languages. In this respect a language is a function, a cluster of semiotic spaces and their boundaries, which however clearly defined these, are in the language’s grammatical self-description, in the reality of semiosis are eroded and full of transitional forms.

(Lotman 1990, 123–24)

It is in the semiotic space of which Lotman speaks that an actual correlation of the *Immediate/Partial Object* takes place and produces a meaningful value of correlation among the many possible ones that in fact may be potentially called to interact with one another in the complex semiotic provision of pure possibilities.

Before we briefly mentioned that any correlation must happen according to *ratio facilis* or *ratio difficilis*. In addition to *ratio facilis* and *ratio difficilis*, on the basis of correlation in sign production, Eco distinguishes also a third type, which he calls *ratio difficillima*. He describes *ratio facilis* and *ratio difficilis* as follows:

There is a case of *ratio facilis* when an expression-token is accorded to an expression-type,¹¹ duly recorded by an expression system and, as such, foreseen by a given code. There is a case of *ratio difficilis* when an expression-token is directly accorded to its content, whether because the expression-type does not exist as yet or because the expression-type is identical with the content-type. In other words, there is *ratio difficilis* when *the expression-type coincides with the sememe* conveyed by the expression-token.

(1976a, 183)

Put differently, we can say that the expression-token is the actual occurrence of an expression directly accorded to its content because on the one hand perhaps it does not have a codified expression-model (expression-type) to serve as a modeling expression; on the other hand, the expression-model (expression-type) is lacking the content of the actual occurrence (content-token) and it is therefore identical with the content-model (content-type). Thus, “all expressions are produced according to a type; i.e. they are tokens of

a type. The relationship between an expression-type and an expression-token is the sign's function of the type/token *ratio*." (Nimis 1987, 149) On the basis of semiotic correlation, we may analogically extend such a model to Halliday's notion of *system* and *instance*. It observes the same correlational pattern, which we may express as *type/system* and *token/instance*, insofar as 1) an instance may only be recognized and comprehended in relation to a codified system that foresees such an instance (*ratio facilis*); 2) an instance that does not belong to a system (because it does not exist) and, therefore, considered an unfamiliar instance that could be eventually recognized and accepted by the system, but finding itself at a state that it is not confirmed by the system yet (*ratio difficilis*); 3) an instance that is not only absent in the system but that for its very nature problematizes and challenges the semiotic attempt of codification (*ratio difficillima*). This latter type of correlation is very likely to occur in highly ambiguous poetic texts for which undefined contents must be adapted to the need of poetic expressions by means of abductive¹² efforts. An instance dominated by *ratio difficillima* subverts the stability of a signifying system and makes instability the interpretive rule of poetry. This is so because

in the poetic creation, content must primarily conform to the expression and not the expression to content.... [T]he principle of poetry is *verba tene, res sequuntur*. This of course, does not mean that the poet's work is simply a game played on the expression plane and one that fulfills the function of auto-referentiality, with no focus on the content whatsoever, but it is rather the attempt to create expressive obstacles which problematize the expression level, leading the content to undergo revision through its process of adaptation to the new problematized state of the expression. This is the only avenue possible ... to say something new, and in the case of the *Commedia*, to speak... of the ineffable.

(De Benedictis 2012, 143; see also Eco 1985, 249–51;
Mazzotta 2001, 11)

2.2 Discourse in the verbal text

From a general consideration of discourse, we shall now move on to analyze details and peculiarities of discourse that stem from the verbal text. Although the text, once formalized, is that which makes discourse disappear (we are going to see how this happens in the following pages), it is nevertheless the true starting point of discourse when it becomes performative and, thus, when it interacts with the properties of human impressions and sensations. In this respect, discourse lacks an actual formalization insofar as it is a process whose flux cannot be arrested but only discussed and understood as a "schematization of signification" in action. (Fontanille 2006, xix) Nonetheless, if we want to talk about it,

if we want to understand the manner in which it works, we must be able to compare, confront, generalize, and thus escape the irreducible singularity of the current presence. We must pass, in sum, from *discourse in action* to *uttered discourse*, in which values form a “system” and in which the figures take on the stable contours of “icons”.

(65)

In fact, what Fontanille calls “first action” and an “original taking of position”, namely the utterance of an emerging discourse understood as the occurrence of a singular presence, is simply a descriptive choice in order to grasp discourse as signification in action. But in reality:

... no one ever pronounces the “first” discourse: discursive activity is always taken up in a chain, or even a thickness of other discourses to which ceaselessly makes reference. Each occurrence of discourse is itself the occasion of a multitude of speech acts, interlinked and superimposed upon one another. We must in some sense pass from the *act of enunciation* to *enunciative praxis*: praxis is precisely that open set of interlinked and superimposed enunciations, within which each singular enunciation slips. That being the case, through repetition, reformulation, even innovation, all acts of enunciative praxis are underlying the exercise of a singular act. It is in this sense that discourses are capable of *schematizing* that to which they refer and of projecting onto them intelligible forms that permit us to construct their signification.

(2006, 65)

Therefore, it is the schema¹³ of signification mediating with enunciative praxis that allows us to acquire an understanding of discourse, as well as “our sensible apprehension of its presence.” (65)

In the case of the verbal mode (written and oral), discourse begins its process of actualization from the reader’s/listener’s choice who selects a preferential textual entrance based on a pursuable interpretive path and anchors it to the text. The same modal form can be used for the instantiation of discourse in the DC. If the common elements of a general syntax of discourse are equally present in the verbal, aural, visual, and cinematic modes, the semiotic process that develops and actualizes discourse is different from mode to mode. We must therefore look at the distinctive characteristics of each process and try to understand how such modes produce different discursive outcomes and in what capacity they influence the various areas of human sensibility. One thing to keep in mind at this point is that discourse and text are not the same thing. In fact, Fontanille (2006) states that: “[they] are two different points of view on the same signifying process” (45), with the specific characteristics that the point of view of discourse,

in the strict sense, [is] *generative*, because it starts from the most general structures of content and progressively encounters the diversity and particularities of expression; in sum, it is the point of view that endeavors to provide us with a representation of *semiotic production*. (51)

On the other hand, the point of view of the text,

could be called *hermeneutic*, because it is guided by the search for an explanation and an intentionality that would underlie textual facts properly speaking; the point of view would then be what gives us a representation of the *semiotic interpretation*. (51)

It is the point of view of discourse that allows us to differentiate the type of semiotic production each mode may embody as a process. In the case of the verbal mode, especially if we compare it with the visual (not the cinematic) one, the formation of the “generative trajectory” of discourse or the “path that links expression and content” (50) entails a rather delayed formation of the taking of a position by the receiver of the information before finding a legitimate situatedness (consistency) of possible discursive paths. The formation’s delay is caused by the strict sequential path of word order and articulation (for alphabetic languages) which requires a prolonged timespan between the enunciation of the utterance (written/oral) and the receiver’s response. Dante’s text is exposed to both modes, namely oral and written. The view of an extensive use of orality in medieval literature has now been accepted and recognized as “part of [literature’s] “alterity”.” (Jauss 1979, 367–83, cited in Ahern 1997, 216). Also, in addition to the fact that orality in general was a widespread phenomenon during the Middle Ages, in Dante’s case, without an intended purpose on behalf of Dante himself, the oral transmission of the *DC* reached a wide audience, including *illiterati* and *vulgares*, due to the fact that Dante wrote it in the language of the common people, the Florentine vernacular. He further used the *terza rima* (an interlocking three-line rhyme scheme) which was particularly suitable to be declaimed aloud and to be set to music.

The *DC* contains Casella’s episode, which is a clear example of orality and of poetry set to music. Casella, the Florentine musician and friend of the poet, whom Dante (the pilgrim) meets in Purgatory while in the company of Virgil and other purgatorial souls, upon Dante’s request, he begins to intone *Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*, the poet’s own *canzone* that he composed after Beatrice’s death and which he glosses in the third book of the *Convivio*.¹⁴ Dante’s request is as follows:

*“Se nuova legge non ti toglie
memoria o uso a l’amoroso canto*

*che mi solea quietar tutte mie doglie,
 di ciò ti piaccia consolare alquanto
 l'anima mia, che, con la sua persona
 venendo qui, è affannata tanto!"*
 'Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona'
*cominciò elli allor sì dolcemente,
 che la dolcezza ancor dentro mi suona.
 Lo mio maestro e io e quelle gente
 ch'eran con lui parevan sì contenti,
 come a nessun toccasse altro la mente. (Pur. 2.106-117)*

[...“If there’s no new law that denies
 you memory or practice of the songs
 of love that used to quiet all my longings,
 then may it please you with those songs to solace
 my soul somewhat; for-having journeyed here
 together with my body-it is weary.”
 he then began to sing-and sang so sweetly
 that I still hear that sweetness sound in me.]
 My master, I, and all that company
 around the singer seemed so satisfied,
 as if no other thing might touch our minds.]¹⁵

Since we are dealing with an alphabetic language, the oral mode of the above text (not as reading but as speaking), and assuming that the speaker is recalling it from memory, presents important differences from the written mode that will certainly affect discourse and meaning formation. The first difference is that the oral mode is not controlled by the strict spatial-linear directionality of the written text. Space in the oral mode is not visual and directional but “acoustic”, “boundless, directionless, horizonless”; it originates “in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition”. (McLuhan-Fiore 1967, 48) For it is all-encompassing with “multi-dimensional resonance” (McLuhan 1969, 111). Moreover:

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)

Also, if compared to the reader, the listener's experience is placeless because the acoustic space within which the oral occurrence takes place does not contain a defined, fixed, situated entry point. For example, from top-left of the page moving horizontally to the right in a descending linear pattern, a trajectory that the reader of most alphabetic languages would follow. The same thing we can say of those languages that use different directional patterns, Arabic and Hebrew for example, which follow a right-to-left pattern; Chinese, Japanese, and Korean that may orient scripts horizontally from left-to-right or from right-to-left, and traditionally employ the vertical pattern from right-to-left.

When working with an oral text, the generative pattern of discourse dwells more on the phenomenal engagement of *signifying wholes*¹⁶ in the production of meaning. In the oral text, the listener relies fully on auditory performance, which shapes discourse primarily according to textual and enunciative linguistics. Nonetheless, the listener relies at the same time more broadly on the type of characterization and rhetorical-aesthetic impression the unrepeatable auditory performance is potentially capable of producing. For example, if we take Casella's episode that we mentioned above, and assume that the written text is not available or does not exist because wholly attributable to an oral tradition and, therefore, we may only rely on what we hear from someone performing it orally, our experience, whose point of departure originates from the content value of the verbal performance, is clearly influenced by the mode in which the text is actually performed: utterer's appearance, voice quality, modulation, articulation, projection, rhythm, and pauses.¹⁷ What does all this mean from the point of view of discourse and of *signifying wholes*? If we take signification in its basic semiotic sense, that is, as a correlation of an expression plane and a content plane and consider it from the point of view of discourse, Fontanille argues that we are required to follow the path Content → Expression. (50) This is so because when we speak of oral performances or speech acts and keeping in mind that discourse is "the product of speech acts" (Fontanille 2006, 49), the "*generative trajectory*"¹⁸ produces paths which originate from an abstract construction (paths that are proper to spoken words) to then move toward a concrete production of acoustic delivery. This means that the

point of view of discourse, would then be, in the strict sense, *generative*, because it starts from the most general structures of content and progressively encounters the diversity and the particularities of the expression; in sum, it is the point of view that endeavors to provide us with a representation of *semiotic production*.

(51)

On the other hand, if we consider the point of view of the text, the path is Expression → Content, and

could be called *hermeneutic*, because it is guided by the search for an explanation and an intentionality that would underlie textual facts properly speaking; the point of view would then be what gives us a representation of the *semiotic interpretation*.

(51)

2.3 Discourse, a mode of sign production

Since the point of view of discourse is a *semiotic production*, it requires comprehending the way in which the initial, abstract, general structure of content is transformed into an actual semiotic fact. For it is necessary to turn our attention to the mode of sign production (*modus faciendi signa*), especially for what concerns the oral mode. A discourse-oriented utterance lacks the level of expression.¹⁹ For example, before a speaker begins to speak, there is no presence, no trace of expression which indicates how something is going to be said. What the speaker may instead rely upon as a point of departure is a general content that still does not know how s/he will articulate and make it available into a physical, acoustic delivery. The utterance produces the expression, and the latter acquires physical status (for both the speaker and the listener) only and together with the unfolding of the utterance. On this point the reader could disagree and say that even if the expression is produced concomitantly with the unfolding of the utterance, the speaker is in any case using coded words to say what in effect s/he is going to say. For it is indeed a valid point, but even though words are coded semiotic units in the general system (*langue*) which accepts them conventionally, there are some inescapable facts that must be taken into account: 1) words in this case have no *a priori* presence in relation to the utterance; 2) they are not yet expressed according to a particular synonymic spectrum and definite semantic category; 3) they are not yet organized according to a syntactic structure; 4) the expression they are going to form is not mapped out yet as the continuum²⁰ of the performance and, thus, it becomes the host of unforeseeable aesthetic and emotional variability. In other words, the utterer has a general idea of what s/he is going to say, but what specifically and how in effect s/he is going to say it does not know until the actual utterance takes place. At the pre-utterance stage, the content-type is imprecise and vague and lacks a suitable expression-type. According to Eco, “the lack of a definite content-type makes it impossible to find an expression-type while the lack of an appropriate expression device makes the content vague and inarticulable.” (1976a, 188) Therefore, one is left with only one choice, that of introducing a new sign-function, “and since every sign function is based on a code, he has to propose a new way of coding.” (Eco 1976a, 188) This means that a discourse-oriented utterance links Content (C) and Expression (E) by departing from C and following the pattern C→E, whereby C becomes the source of E and puts into motion the generative trajectory of sign-production. In this manner and specifically referring to orality, the

utterance is always generative and implies a sort of “*moderate invention*” (Eco 1976a, 252). In Eco’s words, a moderate invention occurs “when one projects directly from a perceptual representation into an expression-continuum, thereby realizing an expression-form which dictates the rules producing the equivalent content-unit.” (1976a, 252) Thus, from

the *sender’s* point of view, a perceptual structure is considered as a coded semantic model (even though nobody else would yet view it in this way), and its perceptual markers are mapped into an as yet unshaped continuum according to the more commonly accepted rules of similitude. The sender therefore proposes rules of correlation even though the functive-content does not as yet exist.

(Eco 1976a, 252)

In other words, if we take a concrete example, the well-known passage in which Beatrice appeals to Virgil to rescue Dante from the dark wood:

*‘O anima cortese mantovana,
di cui la fama ancor nel mondo dura,
e durerà quanto “l mondo lontana,
l’amico mio, e non de la ventura,
nella diserta piaggia è impedito
sì nel cammin, che vòlt” è per paura; (Inf. 2. 58-63)*

[“O spirit of the courteous Mantuan,
whose fame is still a presence in the world
and shall endure as long as the world lasts,
My friend, who has not been the friend of fortune,
is hindered in his path along that lonely
hillside; he has been turned aside by terror.]

and just barely manipulating the word-order of some hendecasyllables while recollecting from memory and uttering the same passage aloud, as in the following manner:

*‘O cortese anima mantovana,
di cui nel mondo la fama ancor dura,
e durerà quanto “l mondo lontana,
l’amico mio, e non de la ventura,
nella piaggia diserta è impedito
sì che nel cammin, vòlt” è per paura;*

the outcome of the above manipulation causes a change in the perceptual structure, or in the way in which the utterer recollects and utters the passage. The structure, even though a manipulated structure, constitutes a

coded semantic model, yet it is an unshaped syntactic continuum because the expression plane (in its physical sense) does not exist yet in the above word-order, neither for the utterer nor for the listener. By doing so, the utterer proposes a new rule of correlation since the syntactical arrangement of the text in bold is altered. Now, let us assume that the utterer not only alters the word-order but also substitutes some words with others because of an ill-recollection of the passage. A substitution that could perhaps look like this:

‘O cortese anima mantovana,
di cui nel mondo la fama ancor dura,
e **rimarrà** quanto “l mondo lontana,
l’amico mio, e non de la sciagura,
nella spiaggia diserta è **atterrito**
sì che **ne l’ andar, vòlt**” è per paura;

The context of the passage in question is a text that produces further transformations that indeed resembles a “moderate invention”. For the utterer has produced 1) a new organization and shape of the pertinent elements of the two *terzine*; 2) the utterer has introduced new material by means of a “choice made on the basis of a common mechanism of abstraction... [which is] representative of the class to which it belongs” (Eco 1976a, 245), and it is approximately consistent with the original text but nuanced differently. As an example of moderate invention, we can say that the passage above maintains the model of the original text and its textual rules which will serve the utterer to help the addressee comprehend the new modified text. At the same time, the textual model and the textual rules will map out the uncoded material in the content-continuum as it is hypothetically suggested by the expressed changes.

Moreover, as we have seen above, the linking of Content and Expression following the pattern C→E is “a *generative trajectory* which crosses a series of strata, in a theoretical space organized vertically” and which additionally it follows an abstract pattern working toward the concretization of meaning. Fontanille calls this pattern “*semasiological (or ascending)*” pattern (50).²¹ The “strata” of which Fontanille speaks are “levels of signification” that he singles out as: “(1) elementary semantic structure, (2) actantial structure, (3) narrative and thematic structures, and (4) figurative structures. Each level is rearticulated in a more complex manner...from the most abstract to the most concrete.” (2006, 50) For example, the “dark wood” which Dante mentions in the first *terzina* of *Inf.* 1 proposes the category of light/darkness that is an elementary semantic structure. Such an elementary structure, and given the dynamic, generative characteristics of discourse, will be re-articulated in a particular manner which exploits any potential actantial option conforming to conjunction/disjunction of the light/darkness category. This means that the actual labor of re-articulation motivates and sets into relationship, within the

first category, the specific functions of the subject-actant and the object-actant and, thus, producing the actantial structures of discourse. As re-articulation takes place in its singular manner, the singularity of its re-articulating occurrence will give rise to narrative choices causing to preserve, lose, and repair the light/darkness category which will result in the production of narrative and thematic structures. Finally, the latter structures of light/darkness category will form figurative structures insofar as Dante's "dark wood", in order to respond to a felicitous semiotics, must seek "perceptive, spatial, and actorial determinations" (Fontanille 50) which they, altogether, will form said figurative structures. For example, light/darkness at this level requires a salvation/damnation, good/evil, day/night, and summer/winter temporalization. This "illustration describes the "ascending" generative process, that of the construction of signification, because it is that of concrete analysis, which starts from directly observable figures and ends with basic underlying abstract categories." (Fontanille 2006, 50) At this stage, the generative trajectory reaches the endpoint of the semasiological path which allows the verbal signs to become physically present.

2.4 Discourse and modeling systems

As a process of meaning creation, discourse draws from existing modeling systems in order to become concrete and to produce signification. The notion of "modeling systems" was developed in the 1960s at the Tartu-Moscow School of semiotics²². In Juri Lotman's words:

Modelling activity is human's activity in creating models. In order for the results of this activity to be received as the analogies of an object, they have to comply with certain (intuitively or consciously defined) rules of analogy and, consequently, correlate to one or another modelling system. *Modelling system* is a structure of elements and rules of their combination, existing in a state of fixed analogy in relation to the whole domain of the object of cognition, recognition or organisation. For this reason, a modelling system may be regarded as a language.²³

In a general sense, we can say that verbal language can be classified as "an extensional modeling system, permitting human beings to encompass increasingly larger and more abstract domains of reference with a finite number of forms." (Sebeok-Danesi 2000, 83) This means that "language is the system that extends the finite domain of sensory knowing into the infinite domain of reflective knowing." (Sebeok-Danesi 2000, 83) By accepting the view of verbal language as an extensional modeling system it would be like saying that a verbal language is a medium of meaning production classifiable as secondary and tertiary modeling system. It is called secondary modeling system because it connects and extends models²⁴ of the *primary*

modeling system. “Tertiary modeling implies, above all else, the ability to extend forms to stand for abstract referents freely, without any apparent sensory connection between the form and the referent.” (Sebeok-Danesi 2000, 121–22) For *primary modeling system* one should intend the iconic correlation that a verbal/nonverbal system has with its referent. By the term *iconic* we must not limit our understanding of it to that which has only a *visual* correlation with its referent but include as well all possible correlations belonging to other spheres of human senses. Thus, the sound of a crowing rooster that is simulated either verbally or by means of an artificial device is as iconic as a photograph. Moreover, Sebeok-Danesi divide modeling systems into “three groups according to the Peircian three types of sign relations: firstness, secondness, thirdness—primary modeling systems are iconic, secondary indexical, and tertiary symbolical (Sebeok-Danesi 2000, 10).” (Raudla 2008, 152)

In the sphere of human modeling, we are allowed to speak of primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, even in the specific, narrow sense of verbal semiosis. Nonetheless, we must keep in mind that primary, secondary, and tertiary are not rigid levels but rather, as Winfried Nöth suggests, “relational oppositions” in that what “is primary at a higher level may be secondary from the perspective of a lower level and even twice secondary [(meaning tertiary)] from the point of view of a still lower level.” (259) In the case of the DC, the modeling emphasis is on the verbal (written/oral) which means that it is essentially phonocentric in nature and, thus, it would not apparently take into account the opposition put forward by Sebeok-Danesi (2000, 60, 95) between “natural” (“to indicate modeling systems proper to all species”) and “artificial” (“to indicate phenomena belonging exclusively to human semiosis” (Raudla 2008, 152). In Dante, to use the author’s own words, even if focusing on phonocentrism alone, the distinctive characteristics natural/artificial must be analyzed carefully. For Dante, natural is the vernacular because it is intrinsic to humans (“*naturalis est nobis*”) (DVE 1.1.4). Also,

... vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infants assuefunt ab assistentibus, cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipimus. Est et inde alia locutio secundaria nobis, quam Romani gramaticam vocaverunt. Hanc quidem secundariam Greci habent et alii, sed non omnes: ad habitum vero huius pauci perveniunt quia non nisi per spatium temporis et studii assiduitatem regulamur et doctrinamur in illa.

Harum quoque duarum nobilior est vulgaris: tum quia prima fuit humano generi usitata; tum quia totus orbis ipsa perfruitur, licet in diversas prolationes et vocabula sit divisa; tum quia naturalis est nobis, cum illa potius artificialis existat.

(DVE 1.1.2–4)

[... [we] define the vernacular as the language which the children gather from those around them when they first begin to articulate words; or more briefly, that which we learn without any rules at all by imitating our nurses. From this we have another, secondary language which the Romans called grammar. This secondary language is also possessed by the Greeks and others, but not by all; and indeed few attain it because it is only in the course of time and by assiduous study that we become schooled in its rules and art.

Now of the two the nobler is the vernacular: first because it is the first language ever spoken by mankind; second because the whole world uses it though in diverse pronunciations and forms; finally because it is natural to us while the other is more the product of art.]²⁵

Moreover, a clear indication that the vernacular must be considered as *primary modeling system* is further validated by Dante's philosophical view by which:

... lo volgare è più prossimo quanto è più unito, che uno e solo è prima nella mente che alcuno altro, e che non solamente per sé è unito, ma per accidente, in quanto è congiunto con le più prossime persone, si come con li parenti e con li propri cittadini e con la propria gente. E questo è lo volgare proprio; lo quale è non prossimo, ma massimamente prossimo a ciascuno.

(Dante 1988, *Conv.* 1.12.5–6)

[... a man's vernacular is nearest to the extent that it is most closely related to him, for it is in his mind first and alone before any other; and not only is it related to him intrinsically but accidentally, since it is connected to those persons who are nearest to him, that is, his kin, his fellow citizens, and his own people. Such is one's own vernacular, which is not simply near but supremely near to everyone.]²⁶

From the first passage above we may establish the difference Dante draws between the vernacular and the grammatical language, as well as the specific difference he points out. By clearly stating that the vernacular is natural because learned without applying or observing any rules, whereas the grammatical language is artificial insofar as “only in the course of time and by assiduous study that we become schooled in its rules and art”, Dante invites us to pay attention to something that is less conspicuous, yet essential to comprehend his view of *primary modeling system* that he attributes to the vernacular. By accepting the vernacular as a *primary modeling system*, the reader is immediately faced with an interpretive impasse due to the inevitable opposition between orality and writtenness of the vernacular. From the *DVE*'s opening statement cited above we may clearly understand that he is referring to the vernacular-as-orality. Nonetheless, we also know that Dante

was the very first writer responsible to give full status to the Florentine vernacular in its written form. And since we are trying to determine whether the text of the *DC* is an example of *primary modeling system*, we must, first of all, remove the inconvenience that surfaces between orality and writing in the vernacular.

The *DVE* is Dante's treatise on the theory of language and more specifically on the eminent vernacular (*volgare illustre*). It is Dante's search for a prototypical linguistic model which he elevates to the highest dignity that no other vernacular or grammatical language had equaled before. What Dante is after is a sort of pristine language having the characteristics of being illustrious, cardinal, courtly, and curial. Such characteristics seem to appertain to every city yet belong to none ("dicimus illustre, cardinale, aulicum et curiale vulgare in latio, quod onmis latie civilitatis est et nullius esse videtur." *DVE* 1.16.6) It is an ideal, prelapsarian model that looks at the innate, immutable, linguistic ability with which God endowed humans when he created the first man together with the human soul ("dicimus certam formam locutionis a deo cum anima prima concreatam fuisse", *DVE* 1.6.4). Although Dante endeavors to search for the eminent vernacular among the fourteen Italian dialects, we learn that his endeavor is meant to fail because Dante's true, ideal model of the eminent vernacular is one that is not a model. In other words, it is the poetic language, the language that carries within itself the residual traces of the prelapsarian language and which, the latter, may only unpredictably surface from the poetic medium in an exceptional state that is simultaneously a sort of presence and evanescence. For Dante, the eminent vernacular is the faint approximation of the prelapsarian language which is grounded in the co-participation of the *signa* as the residual, physical traces of the Edenic *logos*, and the ever-vanishing condition of its *res*. The actual enactment of said co-participation may only take place at the crucial point in which the *signa* are put to work, they become dynamic and bond to the singularity of discourse such that, in this dynamic bond, discourse is understood as the moment of enunciation in action in which discourse itself is situationally and provisionally carried out. Therefore, the concern expressed above between orality and writing related to the eminent vernacular is, in effect, not a concern insofar as both modes are necessary and indispensable in the making of the *primary modeling system* of Dante's poetic language. The eminent vernacular may come to life only through a physical presence, an actual manifestation of the poetic *signa* and that the latter, in their functional tasks, carry with themselves traces of the "primordial language" ("*primiloquium*"). At the same time, the poetic *signa* perform their linguistic tasks in speech acts, real performative utterances in order to allow us to momentarily experience a remote, faint approximation of Adam's "*primiloquium*". Dante's aim is to draw a "daring analogy between the vernacular's essence and God's nature, a comparison punctually resumed in the pages of the *De vulgari eloquentia*."²⁷ In fact the eminent vernacular cannot be identified with any Italian dialect, and since it seems to appertain to every city and yet belong to none, Dante's conception of the same is a sort of God's attribute, partaking in God's divine character:

... inter que nunc potest illud discerni vulgare quod superius venebamur, quod in qualibet redolet civitate nec cubat in ulla. Potest tamen magis in una quam in alia redolere, sicut simplicissima substantiarum, quae Deus est.

(DVE 1.16. 5–6)

[... among these can be discerned that vernacular we have been hunting, which disperses its sent in every Italian city but resides in none. Indeed, it may be more fragrant in one city than in another just as the simplest of substances, which is God.]

The comparison Dante draws between the eminent vernacular and God not only points out the divine attribute of the former and how it partakes of God's nature, but also, as he prolongs the comparison, he points out its simplest linguistic essence ("*simplicissima substantiarum*") that is boundless, omnipresent, and eminent in the ontological sense of the term. Thus, the unprecedented normative value of the eminent vernacular, when compared to other linguistic realities, is that it is at once everywhere and nowhere.

2.5 The poetic language as primary modeling system

Dante's conceptual model of eminent vernacular can be best described as a poetic model that is able to create new connections among sign-vehicles, with potential ground-breaking content values that may envision and create new possible worlds in terms of meaning and knowledge. Near the end of book one in his philosophical work, Dante remarks:

Questo sarà quello pane orzato del quale si satolleranno migliaia, e a me ne soperchieranno le sporte piene. Questo sarà luce nuova, sole nuovo, lo quale surgerà là dove l'usato tramonerà, e darà lume a coloro che sono in tenebre e in oscuritate per lo usato sole che a loro non luce.

(*Conv.* 1.13.12)

[This commentary shall be that bread made with barley by which thousands shall be satiated, and my baskets shall be full to overflowing with it. This shall be a new light, a new sun which shall rise where the old sun shall set and which shall give light to those who lie in shadows and in darkness because the old sun no longer sheds its light upon them.]

The new light that this commentary will give to readers is that of linking philosophically the essence of the vernacular with God, and how the vernacular's simple essence becomes divinatory, prescient, sublime, through the poetic form. According to Dante, a fundamental characteristic of the vernacular's poetic form is that of being a "language which the children gather from those around them when they first begin to articulate words; or more

briefly, that which we learn without any rules at all by imitating our nurses.” (*vulgarem locutionem appellamus eam qua infans assuefuit ab assistentibus, cum primitus distinguere voces incipiunt; vel, quod brevius dici potest, vulgarem locutionem asserimus quam sine omni regula nutricem imitantes accipiunt.*” DVE 1.1.2) This primeval characteristic of the vernacular provides the ground for a poetic thought, which must be understood in the Vichian sense. That is, poetic thought is not merely the simplification of a conceptual thought fashioned into a conventional system, but rather an independent form of meaning creation and a neoteric way of organizing the world. The true poetic thought is the thought of the primitive mind because it is mythical and, according to Vico, myth is that which gives impulse to the codification of archetypal words insofar as it is governed by human “*fantasia*” (imagination) and, which, the latter, generates inspiration and creativity:

Qui si truova i primi essere stati parlari muti delle prime nazioni, che dovettero significare gli antichissimi greci per la voce μύθος, che loro significa «favola», che a’ latini sarebbe mutus; e fibula agl’italiani restò a significare «favella»; e le favole furono il primo fas gentium, un parlar immutabile: onde Varrone da for disse formulam naturae il «fato», il parlar eterno di Dio. ... Finalmente il niuno o poco uso del raziocinio porta robustezza de’ sensi. La robustezza de’ sensi porta vivezza di fantasia. La vivida fantasia è l’ottima dipintrice delle immagini, che imprimono gli oggetti ne’ sensi.

(Vico 1971, 257–58)

[Thus we find that the first words of the earliest nations were mute, which the earliest Greeks must have signified by the word μύθος [*mythos*], their “fable”, which would be *mutus* [“mute”] in Latin; that the [Latin] *fabula* [“fable”] survived in Italian as *favella*, meaning language; and that fables constituted the first *Fas gentium* [“The divine law of the gentes”], which was an immutable expression. Hence from *for* [“to speak”] came both Varro’s *formulam naturae*, meaning “fate”, i.e. the eternal word of God. ... Finally, when there is either little or no use of reasoning, the senses are robust; when the senses are robust the imagination is vivid; and a vivid imagination is the best painter of the images that objects imprint on the senses.]

(Vico 2002, 150)

Dante’s eminent vernacular as *primary modeling system*, in a way, is comparable to “the first words of the earliest nations” that Vico mentions in his *Principi*, and the analogy is plausibly legitimate insofar as he attempted and actually managed to codify the vernacular in a written form which, prior to his effort, could not claim to have a written status. Therefore, he instituted the “*vero parlare*” (true speech) that in the vulgar sense signifies

“*origine*” (origin) or “*istoria di voci*” (history of words) (Vico 1971, 257). Moreover, his codifying effort addressed a poetic language and not merely an ordinary one. By fashioning a written system poetically, Dante’s creative effort converges with the Vichian state of “primordial imagination”. “Vico sees imagination as the nexus of the beginning of human semiosis” (Raudla 2008, 138), and the principle of “divine poetry”:

Così nacque la prima favola, primo principio della poesia divina de’ gentili o sia de’ poeti teologi. E nacque, quale l’ottima favola dee essere tutta ideale, che dall’idea del poeta dà tutto l’essere alle cose che non lo hanno. Che è quello che dicono i maestri di cotal arte: che ella sia tutta fantastica, come di pittori d’idea, non icastica, quale di pittore di ritratti; onde i poeti, [com’i pittori], per tal simiglianza di Dio creatore, sono detti “divini”.

(Vico 1971, 259)

[Thus the first fable, the first principle of the divine poetry of the gentiles, i.e. of the theological poets, was born. And it was born, as the supreme fable must be, wholly ideal, in that the idea of the poet gives things all the being that they lack. Thus it is, as masters of the art of poetry say it should be, entirely imaginary, like the work of a painter of ideas, and not representational, like that of a painter of portraits. Hence, through this resemblance to God the creator, the poets were called “divine”.]

(Vico 2002, 150)

The vernacular is the language that developed from nature and not from art, just as the primordial language of humankind. And since nature is God’s work, the vernacular is consequently closer to God than to Latin. Moreover, as Vico remarked about the first fable and its divine quality, so does Dante’s language, which is not only a language but, more importantly, it is poetic. It is Dante’s poetic language, though ephemeral in its manifestation, that human beings manage to find the path from which language originated. It is the medium that allows humans to re-discover the relation of necessity between Adam’s language and God. Therefore, the poet:

... è chiamato a recuperare l’entelechia della parola come memoria dell’Inizio, per quanto è possibile nel frattempo di questa vita. La nobiltà della lingua non si misura dalla facoltà di rappresentare il visibile in senso mimetico, ma dalla sua capacità di incalzare l’Invisibile e di sporgersi verso quell’Altrove rispetto al quale nessun segno potrà mai essere adeguato. Il poeta è sempre coinvolto in una sorta di paradossale “arte della fuga”: attraverso la sua voce il linguaggio ritrova il luogo della propria Origine solo a patto di trasmodare, eccedendo se stesso e

aprendosi all'Ineffabile. A ben vedere, il volgare illustre così inteso è l'unica lingua degli angeli che Dante sia disposto ad ammettere. Solo in quanto meoria dell'Origine la poesia ci permette di recuperare un barlume della comunione primordiale tra Dio e uomo accogliendoci sicut angeli nel "convivio" che prelude alla mistica festa di Paradiso. Memoria dell'Inizio e profezia dell'Ultimo si richiamano reciprocamente. Tra questi due limiti asintotici si colloca il destino della parola umana, sospesa in uno stato di oscillazione perpetua che solo la poesia sembra essere in grado di esplorare in tutta la sua ampiezza.

(Raffi 2004, 252)

[is asked to recuperate the word's entelechy as memory of the beginning, as much as possible during the time of this life. The nobility of language is not assessed by the faculty of representing that which is visible in a mimetic sense, but rather by the ability to pursue the Invisible and to try to find that Somewhere-else for which no sign would be ever adequate. The poet is always involved in a sort of paradoxical "art of the fugue". Through his voice, language finds again the place of its Origin, though only by exceeding itself and by opening up to the Ineffable. If understood in these terms, the eminent vernacular is merely the language of angels that Dante is prepared to accept. Only as memory of the Origin, poetry allows us to recuperate a glimmer of the primordial communion between God and man and receiving us *sicut angeli* [like angels] in the "banquet" that preludes to the mystical feast of Paradise. The Memory of the Beginning and the prophecy of the Ultimate End recall one another mutually. Between these asymptotic limits is situated the human word, suspended in a state of perpetual oscillation which only poetry appears to be able to explore in its entire dimension.]

(My English translation)

Hence, the reader must realize that Dante uses the eminent vernacular as *primary modeling system* based on the fact that for him it is *natural* and *poetic*. Also, within the scope of discourse, the singular, subjective way in which the utterer brings the text alive through a real physico-sense-mind-dependent act, always contains within itself a distinctive poetic dimension with traits of primary modeling relevance. In the *DC*, the word's journey requires the natural, unprompted quality, the *primary modeling system*, the characteristics that meet Dante's criteria of eminent vernacular, equipped with the strength and depth of poetic distinction, so that he may find and pursue the "Invisible", the "Ineffable", that is, the word's journey apt to deliver Dante's unavoidable needs in order to recount that which "has never been reported by a voice, inscribed by ink, never conceived by imagination" (*Par.* 19.8–9).

2.6 Discourse in the iconic text

In this section we will limit ourselves to discuss images. A central characteristic of discourse in the iconic text is perception. As we argued in section 1.5 of this study, perception influences representation directly. With respect to perception, Peirce states that “images” partake of “simple qualities” and can be considered “First Firstness”. 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 but rather as the actual object of perception. Such a response is quite common because perceptively we also operate under the influence of *surrogate stimuli*, which are illusory in nature and “stand in for effective stimuli”. They are stimuli endowed with an illusory nature because, frequently, we perceive an image not as an image but as the real thing. This is so because with *surrogate stimuli* “the same receptors react as they would in the presence of the real stimulus, just as birds respond to decoy whistles” (Eco 2000, 354), or in a *trompe-l’oeil* the painted object deceives the viewer by creating the optical illusion of appearing real.

Discourse in the iconic text is quite different than discourse in the verbal text, and the variables that come into play influence the signifying structure of the text itself. One such variable is the non-linear articulation of the image. If in the verbal text the reader is conditioned by the directional linearity of the message, in the iconic text the image provides at once the totality of its compositional elements. This is what Barthes calls the “polysemous” characteristic of images insofar as “they imply, underlying their signifiers, a “floating chain” of signifieds,” and “the reader [is] able to choose some and ignore others” (1977, 39), but still sensory conditioned by what is actually displayed in the image. Nonetheless, because the image is provided as a totality of its compositional elements, “the relation between the signified and the signifier is quasi-tautological.” (Barthes 1977, 36) This means that the image involves a certain arrangement that the relationship between the signified and signifier “is not a *transformation* (in the way a coding can be) but rather “*representation*”²⁸ since “we have here a loss of equivalence characteristic of true sign system and a statement of quasi-identity.” (Barthes 1977, 36) Knowing that the articulation between the signified and the signifier of the iconic sign is governed by such a provision, specifically on the plane of denotation, Barthes calls it “a *message without a code.*” (1977, 36)

Now, as far as discourse is concerned, it too must abide by the provisions of the iconic mode. In the iconic text discourse is engaged by visual stimuli and since a picture, a painting, (we will discuss the moving picture later), a sketch, a drawing, etc. are analogical forms of the objects they reproduce, and the compositional elements that they contain are available at once in various “degrees of amalgamation” (Barthes 1977, 26), discourse is more limiting than it would be in the verbal text. For it is limiting because the message, at the level of denotation, is not *semantic* but *sensory*. It is not the mind but the sense of sight that crafts the message and, thus, imposes upon the reproduced visual objects

its sensory control and disregards the abstract semantic function of the message. What one sees is fully displayed in the image, with clear boundaries. The iconic message, at the denotative level, is semantically poor as it remains framed within the borders of the analogical image which, in essence, is a tautological semantic space. It is not like the verbal message in which words are primarily sign-vehicles, carriers of ideas, and considered true “semiotic product” by their very nature, endowed with a richer semantic space, even at their denotative level. (Eco 1976a, 166) In the same manner, discourse is not mainly transformational in the iconic mode but tautological and re-proposes the content of the image as percepts of one’s visual stimuli. This, of course, happens at the level of denotation. When, instead, the image is used aesthetically its function changes radically. Therefore, discourse in this case limits itself in using the compositional elements of the image, a system that, according to Barthes, vehicles messages without codes for the reason that images are mere *analogons*.

Also, in terms of denotative signification between the iconic text and discourse there are no distinctive points of view, as instead it is the case for the verbal text that designates a point of view of the text and a point of view of discourse. In the iconic text, the point of view of discourse coincides with the point of view of the text. It does not follow the Content → Expression path. It follows the Expression → Content path. In other words, the “*point of view of the text* is that which follows the trajectory in the descending direction, from concrete organization to abstract structures” (Fontanille 2006, 50) and is contextually grounded within the boundaries of the image. This point of view, which is also called “*onomasiological*” (50), constitutes a modal relevance of discourse because its directional action from concrete organization (image) to abstract structures (percepts) marks the orientation of discourse itself and, at times, even corrects imperfection that may develop from perception. With images, we must always take into account the possible imperfections that *surrogate stimuli* may produce in representation, since they are the determinants of perception and do influence the way we see and perceive objects. Also, from the singularity of the point of view we may map out the discursive, tensive schema²⁹ that develops from discourse-as-image. It is the tensive schema that allows us to fix into a “stable contour of “icons”” the type of rapport and equilibrium that will be established between the sensible and the intelligible. To clarify this point, I am going to borrow from Fontanille³⁰ the first schema of tension, as in Figure 2.1 below, which consists of “a decrease of intensity combined with the unfolding of extent” bringing “about

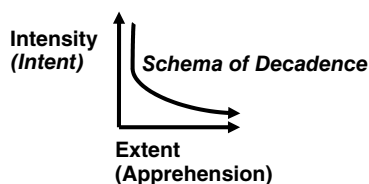


Figure 2.1 Schema of tension in discourse with relaxing pattern (decadence).

a cognitive relaxation” and described as “*descending schema*, or *schema of decadence*” (66). What this means is that the one who perceives the image, that is, the producer of discourse, is put in a state of relaxation. The effort of perception and her/his concrete, generative labor is minimal in the production of meaning. The general notion is that images behave as *analogons* of actual objects of representation at the denotative level. In such a descending schema, the endeavor of intent³¹ is nearly at rest and guided significantly by the extent³² in the manner of an *a priori*, codified apprehension. The intent is guided by the intelligibility of meaning insofar as meaning is already codified, attached to the image, ready to be used, without tensive resistance from the preliminary steps of perception.

In the case in which the image exerts a connotative function (it is used aesthetically), the discourse of the iconic mode is affected as well. At the connotative level, the image is no longer taken as a simple *analogon* but as a true, discrete *sign*, as that which substitutes something else and “stands in for it.” (Eco 1976a, 7) Examples of this sort can be paintings, illustrations, diagrams, symbols, various forms of drawing, and other visual representations that can be used as signs. In the case of photographs, it is not as straightforward as in the examples mentioned above. Years ago, Barthes had a clever insight about photographs and used the expression “photographic paradox”. That is,

[the] photographic paradox can... be seen as the coexistence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the “art”, or treatment, or the “writing”, or the rhetoric, of the photograph); structurally, the paradox is clearly not the collusion of a denoted message and a connoted message (which is—probably inevitable—status of all the forms of mass communication), it is that here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message *without a code*. This structural paradox coincides with the ethical paradox: when one wants to be “neutral”, “objective”, one strives to copy reality meticulously, as though the analogical were a factor of resistance against the investment of values (such at least is the definition of aesthetic “realism”); how then can the photograph be at once “objective” and “invested”, natural and cultural? It is through an understanding of the mode of imbrication of denoted and connoted messages that it may one day be possible to reply to that question. In order to undertake this work, however, it must be remembered that since the denoted message in the photograph 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; the connoted message on the contrary does comprise a plane of expression and a plane of content, thus necessitating a veritable decipherment.

(1977, 19–20)

The analogical “factor of resistance against the investment of values” at the denotative level is warranted by the strong presence of the alpha mode in

photographs. The alpha mode 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.” (Eco 2000, 383) Since *surrogate stimuli* “stand in for effective stimuli” (Eco 2000, 354), in the sense that frequently we perceive an image not as an image but as the real thing; the analogical resistance endures freely until one clearly distinguishes a sign function in the photograph. In other words, the critical point of “the mode of imbrication of denoted and connoted messages” occurs when the alpha mode is suffused with the beta mode, the “mode in which in order to perceive the expression plane of sign functions, it is necessary first to presume that we are in fact dealing with expressions, and the supposition that they are indeed expressions that orient our perception.” (Eco 2000, 383)

For the connotative mode of images, including photographs, the point of view of discourse is different than the point of view of the text. It is different and distinctive insofar as images do not act as *analogons* but become true signs of something else. There is a variation of equilibrium between *intent* and *apprehension*. The first difference entails signification and the path that goes with it. If at the denotative level the path is Expression → Content, at the connotative level it is Content → Expression, which follows an ascending movement or what Fontanille calls “*semasiological*” (50). The pattern can be represented according to Figure 2.2:

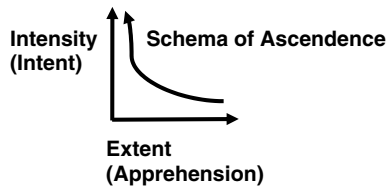


Figure 2.2 Schema of tension in discourse with tensive pattern in ascendence.

In this tensive structure, *Intent* increases through the perceptive and affective experience, and demands the taking of a particular position in order to disambiguate the *Extent*, as the latter entertains a polyvocality of expression. By means of such a schema, the point of view of discourse is “*generative*”. It “starts from the most general structures of content and progressively encounters the diversity and the particularities of expression; in sum it is the point of view that endeavours to provide us with a representation of semiotic production.” (Fontanille 2006, 51) At this point, the reader could justifiably ask: “What are the differences as well as the advantages and disadvantages between discourse in the verbal text and discourse in the iconic text?” One major difference is that in the iconic text there is an absence of true positional and oppositional values among the compositional elements of the visual representation. Something that is clearly present in the

verbal text through the distinctive positions and oppositions of phonemes and words. Moreover, phonemes and words are distinctive signs with distinctive sounds, which can only allow a limited number of variations even when they are used super-segmentally. That is, when they are articulated in the way in which they want to convey a particular nuanced meaning such as fear, delight, hesitation, and so on. Further, Eco argues:

In the iconic continuum there are no pertinent traits that we can categorize conclusively because even those aspects which we consider pertinent traits of the iconic image can vary. At times they are large, recognizable, conventional configurations, while at others they are small segments of lines, dots, white spaces, as it happens in a drawing of a human profile, in which a dot represents the eye, a semicircle an eyelid. We are also aware that in another context, the same dot and semicircle can represent, for example, a banana and a grape berry... Therefore, the drawing's signs are not elements of articulation comparable to alphabetic phonemes because they do not have positional and oppositional values. They are not created in a system of rigid difference in which a dot has the power to signify because it is opposed to a straight line or to a semicircle. Their values change according to the conventionality that a type of drawing imposes upon them and, very likely, may change from sketch artist to sketch artist, or change even when the same sketch artist adopts a new style. Therefore, *one is faced with a swirl of idiolects*, some of which are recognizable by many, others are not because they are very personal. Their arbitrary variants surpass their pertinent traits or, better yet, the arbitrary variants become pertinent traits and vice versa based on the code established by the sketch artist. The sketch artist, with a great deal of freedom, may put in a state of crisis a pre-existing code and create a new one on the remnants of the same or on the remnants of previously existing others. *In this sense iconic codes, if they actually exist, are weak codes...* Anyone who draws is an expert of idiolects because even by using a code that anyone can recognize, s/he demonstrates more originality, arbitrary variants, elements of individual "style" than a speaker in her/his native language. (Eco 1966, 123–24; my English translation)

Some lines and dots are employed in a variety of contexts that may easily cross the boundaries of distinctive cultural/linguistic groups, both denotatively and connotatively. For example, if someone draws two dots in a circle and below the two dots draws a semicircle with a downward-curvature, it would undoubtedly be recognized cross-culturally as a sad face. Such a denotation of dots and lines, as well as others that are not used as distinctively as in the example just mentioned, but rather in a compositional manner forming larger or complete visual representations, are key-factors responsible for making the difference and for allowing images to cross the

linguistic boundaries of various cultures. Something similar may occur at the connotative level but limited to specialized individuals that possess the connotative code. For example, in the case of visual representations of computed tomography (CT scan) of the human body, only individuals trained in medical imaging can read them; or even when we see the symbol used by a meteorologist to signify sandstorm. This sort of fluidity (quite extensive in the denotative sense) is absent in the verbal mode because the latter is regulated by a system of rigid articulation that requires rigid codes of signification.

Under the governance of an overwhelming number of idiolects, on the plane of connotation, in the iconic mode discourse heightens the tension of the semasiological schema because we cannot rely on a true grammar of iconic signs but mostly on a sequence of arbitrary variants. As such, the tension developing in the ascending schema (Figure 2.3) becomes even tenser due to the large number of idiolects generated by intelligible arbitrary variances. If idiolects are mainly elements of sensible intensity, they are moreover forms of intelligible arbitrary variances insofar as they become actualized in a graphic manner. Therefore, the tensive schema viewed in its totality also implies an “affective-cognitive tension” which generates a discursive pattern of amplification as in Figure 2.4:³³

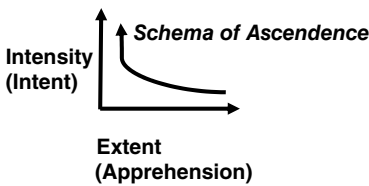


Figure 2.3 Schema of tension in discourse with tensive pattern in ascendence.

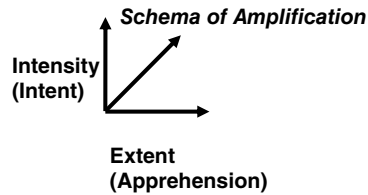


Figure 2.4 Schema of tension in discourse with pattern of amplification.

If on the plane of denotation, especially in the case of photographs, Barthes tells us that we are dealing with messages without codes, on the plane of connotation there are indeed sign functions for both photographs and other forms of visual representation, but sign functions of weak codes due to the presence of elements of individual style and arbitrary variants that impose themselves effectively upon the image. This is also an indication that leads us to grasp the signifying difference between a denotative message of the verbal mode and that of the visual mode. The difference is that while the verbal text contains words that are true codified signs standing in for an absent/differed object, in the case of the visual mode, the image tends to imitate instead of substituting and stands in for the object of representation. This condition may easily influence and limit the content value of the visual



Figure 2.5 *Inferno* 1 Dante in the dark wood dressed as a private detective.

representation framed within the visual boundaries, within what one actually sees and thus may take the image as a true *analogon* instead of as a sign function. A case in point is the graphic novel by Seymour Chwast (11) in which Dante is depicted as a private detective.

If we limit and focus our attention on Dante's character, such a representation is a rigid *analogon* of the graphic character and, for an uninitiated person, Dante the wayfarer in the *DC* is and will continue to be envisioned as a private detective. Hence, while on the one hand an image conveys quite instantaneously its content value because it displays itself in its totality and, in addition, it always tends to imitate and not to substitute the object of representation, on the other hand its content, its signification is markedly limited and image driven.

2.7 Discourse in the auditory text

The title of this section appears to be somewhat contradictory from a semiotic standpoint, especially if we take the auditory manifestation in its natural occurrence and not as a recorded text. The contradiction surfaces from the term "text" when in reality it cannot be taken as such in its traditional sense as it lacks physical status in terms of continuity in time and space. Its material manifestation has a short life and consists of the moment in which it actually unfolds, as an acoustic event, and simultaneously evaporates within its own span.

When working with an auditory text, as we briefly mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the generative pattern of discourse dwells more on

the phenomenal engagement of *signifying wholes* for the production of meaning. In the auditory text, the listener relies fully on the sound manifestation/performance produced in the acoustic space, which shapes discourse primarily according to and within the realm of the acoustic space. The listener relies considerably on the phenomenal impression that the unrepeatable auditory occurrence is potentially capable of producing.

The auditory text presents a significant challenge for semiotics and, most certainly, it is much more difficult to comprehend because it always entails a process of signification in action which strives for self-realization. If meaning in discourse “is not foreseen ‘in language’ and requires a supplementary effort of interpretation” (Fontanille 2006, 5), the same can be said of the auditory text in that it is not language, but it only becomes language in the instant of its utterance, at the moment of its physical manifestation and, even so, the utterer still does not know how it will unfold to achieve self-actualization. Also, the auditory text is vulnerable and heavily influenced by the way in which the actual acoustic occurrence takes place. It can be actualized but not fixed or preserved in time and space with a clear pattern of directionality as, for example, is 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 while “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) Moreover, when an occurrence becomes true manifestation in the “acoustic space” and being the “ear world” a “world of simultaneous relationships”, the auditory text is by nature multisensory and, due to its multi-sensorial characteristic, it heightens associations and smooths the progress of a multimodal bond. A clear example of the auditory text underscoring a multimodal bond is James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake* in which the author attempts to write in a language that does not exist as a functioning medium. Nonetheless, it clearly shows the author’s aim to expand the language beyond its linear directionality and grammatical constraints while conveying a strong presence of pre-literate, onomatopoeic language containing multisensory characteristics that are proper to primitive, barbaric languages. In fact, it is not a coincidence that Joyce, on the very first page of *Finnegans Wake* provides the reader with “different foreign synonyms of the word “thunder”” (Eco 1982, 64) and arranged in a sort of universal onomatopoeia: “bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerr onntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooohoordenenthurnuk”. (Joyce 1970, 3) In this Joycean attempt to immortalize the thunder in a universal onomatopoeia, the reader may recognize the causal origin of the onomatopoeia’s verbalization which, in a Vichian sense, the thunder reveals itself in the “acoustic space” as a frightening divine voice, as a voice of the unknown, and makes its way through the verbal medium as a multisensory, multimodal manifestation. In the onomatopoeia it is the sound that imposes its domain over the word and not the

other way around. Traces of acoustic ascendancy are key-characteristics of all onomatopoeias. Although *Finnegans Wake* is a work that is more than just onomatopoeias (in fact it is an entire language deformation), we may nonetheless say that it is ruled by the same principle, that is, the commitment to revert language to its natural state. Joyce departs from the culturized alphabetization of language to ultimately make it regress to a pristine auditory state, where countless multisensory allusions can be entertained as a result of the regressive process in which the adventure of the word imposes all sorts of allusive connections that escape the reader, as well as “escape the author himself, who has prepared a machinery of suggestions which, like any complex machine, is capable of operating beyond the original intention of the builder.” (Eco 1982, 67) An example with comparable acoustic dominance is Dante’s first hendecasyllable of *Inf.* 7 in which Pluto, the gatekeeper of the fourth circle, utters the following words: “*Papè Satàn, papè Satàn aleppe!*” More than a few commentators of the *DC* have troubled themselves with such a verse with the intent and fervor to demonstrate that it has a specific meaning. This is comprehensible if we consider human desire to look for meaning in everything that can be used as a sign. Nonetheless, it is a daring position to insist (to the point of becoming even obsessed) over the pursuit of an ultimate meaning for said hendecasyllable. Instead, if we regard it as a verse with the highest degree of ambiguity that makes the verbal language regress to its pristine auditory state, where countless multisensory semantic allusions can be entertained, we can adjust our aim and, perhaps, may find the way in which the text truly wants to be read. This Dantean procedure of language deformation, not accidentally, had a strong impact on Joyce, as Ettore Settani reminds us about an episode he experienced while collaborating with Joyce and Nino Frank on the translation of “Anna Livia Plurabelle” (a chapter in *Finnegans Wake*): “Joyce smiled, approached the library, then came toward me and pointed out the Dantean [*pun*] of “Pape Satan Pape satan aleppe”. “I hope father Dante forgives me, but I began from this technique of deformation to achieve a harmony that defeats our intelligence, as music does.”³⁴ The interesting part in this quote, in addition to the pun, is that Joyce mentions music as the art “that defeats our intelligence”. Music is the quintessence of the auditory world as it attempts to structure and to give order to what MacLuhan-Fiore call “acoustic space” which is “boundless, directionless, horizonless” (1967, 48) and comparable to the Vichian thunder, the frightening divine voice, the voice of the unknown.

Since the units of the auditory text are absent because they have no intelligibility prior to their physical manifestation in the utterance, which means that they only develop with the unfolding of the auditory occurrence, we can say that the auditory text claims no *a priori* semantic/semiotic status. It is in fact the act that basically generates signs and sematicizes its content. For this aspect, the auditory text is a text only in a state of becoming. It is the closest form of text comparable to discourse in action because discourse, like the auditory text, has no *a priori* language nor does it hold semanticity. Only the ground is available, which is a sort of guiding domain of pertinence for discourse to take place. Therefore, the possibility of discourse to become

one is *in potentia* and its actualization may occur only through its unfolding process. For this reason, we can say that neither the expression-type nor the content-type of discourse are coded. Only through the act of mentioning and *après coup* one may posit a new correlation between expression and content that could conceivably become a new convention. This is the case, of course, for the auditory text insofar as it may entertain the possibility of being crystallized into a written form or in some sort of recorded manner. What, instead, escapes the possibility to be conventionalized is unavoidably discourse itself. With discourse we are confronted with a textual *impossibilia* because discourse lives only in the instant in which it happens. Yet, upon reaching the limit of full development, it fades away into nothingness and does not even leave traces or references of its expression. Discourse can only leave sensations and emotional states when one experiences its occurrence. For its textual *impossibilia*, we can say that discourse is the latest semiotic frontier, yet the ultimate semiotic challenge that we will endeavor to analyze in Dante's *oeuvre* with reference to multimodality.

Notes

- 1 The term "text" here refers to a multimodal text which, in addition to the verbal text that we divided into written and oral, includes also the aural and visual texts.
- 2 De Saussure 1959, 14–16. In this study, the Saussurrean notions of *langue* and *parole* are applicable also, with all the necessary precautions, to the visual and aural modalities.
- 3 The interesting, yet challenging endeavor for a semiotics of multimodal discourse is that of adequately mapping out the coordinates of comparative adaptation efforts that have been produced in audio-visual modes of the *DC* after it circulated in its complete, final, written form.
- 4 For the notion of "speech acts" see Austin 1975, 6–7 and Searle 16.
- 5 The "context of situation" entails "three significant components: the underlying social activity, the person or "voices" involved in that activity, and the particular functions accorded to the text within it." Therefore, it must be distinguished from the "setting" which "is the immediate material environment." For example, if we take teaching foreign languages, the "context of situation... is the activity of learning a foreign language, involving teacher, learner and fellow students, with the text functioning as instructional material (interspersed with other discourse, such as teacher's classroom management); and in this context, the natural setting is a classroom." (Halliday 1999, 10–11)
- 6 Fontanille 2006, 56. In the making of discourse, the actants of the enunciation are the author and the reader of the poetic text insofar as they are both engaged in the actualization of language. In the *DC* Dante makes a clear point regarding the importance of the reader. Over all, there are about twenty-one instances in which Dante addresses the reader as an active part of his textual journey. Also, the term "actant", based on the Greimasian "actantial model" refers to one of the concurring components that helps to analyze the real or thematized action of a text. In the specific case of our utilization it corresponds to the actual reader and/or interpreter of audio-visual texts.
- 7 Correlation constitutes a central problem concerning the semiotics of discourse in the *DC* due to the fact that the poem's text, in addition to the simple correlation (*ratio facilis*), foresees mostly a *ratio difficilis*, with also instances of further

- complication of the correlation that Eco calls *ratio difficillima*. Regarding *ratio facilis* and *ratio difficilis* see Eco 1976a, 183; for *ratio difficillima* see Eco 1985, 254. Further down and in the proper context we will attempt a detailed discussion of semiotic correlation according to the three ratios mentioned above.
- 8 Fontanille 65. Here the term “schema” must be viewed in the Kantian sense, that is, as that which “designates the mediation between concept and image and, more generally, between categories of understanding and sensible phenomena” (66). According to Ernest Cassirer, cited in Fontanille 66, the role of schema constitutes a central function of language: “Language[...] possesses such a ‘schema’—to which it must refer all intellectual representations before they can be sensuously apprehended and represented—in its terms for spatial contents and relations” (Cassirer 200).
 - 9 Assemblage of meaning(s) must take place within the semic boundaries of medieval polysemy which the text of the *DC* authorizes.
 - 10 Mandelbaum’s translation, *Digital Dante*, Columbia University. Online posting 20 March 2021
<https://web.archive.org/web/20210728041533/https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/>
 - 11 The expression-token is the concrete occurrence of a sign function produced by a code; the expression-type is the conventional, general correlation of an expression plane to a content plane of a code.
 - 12 The adjective “abductive” must be understood in the Peircean sense. It refers to “the process of forming explanatory hypotheses”; thus, it is “the only logical operation which introduces any new idea.” (*CP* 5.171)
 - 13 “Language...possesses such a ‘schema—to which it must refer all intellectual representations before they can be sensuously apprehended and represented” (Cassirer 200; see also Fontanille 2006, 66).
 - 14 Dante also mentions “*Amor che ne la mente mi ragiona*” in *De vulgari eloquentia* 1979a, 2.6.6 as an example of the highest form of eloquence for the eminent vernacular. See also Iannucci 1990, 42. *Convivio* and *De vulgari eloquentia* will henceforth be abbreviated as *Conv.* and *DVE*.
 - 15 We will discuss the notion of *cantio* (singing) as a characteristic of the oral mode in the applied part of this study which examines textual examples of the *DC*, while keeping in mind Dante’s true meaning and view of poetry, which is a sort of “fiction that is composed according to the rules of poetic and musical art (*“fictio rethorica musicaque poita*”, *DVE* 2.4.2-3).
 - 16 *Signifying wholes* refer to “facts of language” and encompass text, discourse, and narrative (Fontanille 2006, 46). They must be considered in their dynamic function, as being “in a state of construction and becoming.”, xx-xxi.
 - 17 In this instance we could have included also the *context* of the verbal performance, but when adopting the point of view of discourse, Fontanille argues that “discourse does not necessitate recourse to context, not because it includes it in the sense of an added part, but because the notion of context is not pertinent from this point of view. In fact, the point of view of discourse neutralizes the difference between text and context; to adopt the point of view of discourse is to admit from the start that all elements that work toward the process of signification belong by right to the *signifying wholes*, that is to say to discourse, no matter what they are.” (52) This, of course, does not mean that the context is absent, it is instead simply not taken into account distinctively, that is, with a developed awareness as context and different from text, but taken rather conjointly as *signifying wholes*.
 - 18 The *generative trajectory* is “the path that links expression and content” (Fontanille 2006, 50).

- 19 For an added view of discourse as improvised performance text, see Domenico Pietropaolo 35.
- 20 The term *continuum* here is used to refer to both expression and content. As an expression-continuum, it must be understood as an entire segmentation of the expression. Therefore, “the expression is the *continuum by which* one speaks, the content is the continuum *of which* one speaks.” See Carvalho 130; Eco 1976a, 217–60 and 264–69; Eco 2000, 52. Moreover, Eco in 1984, 52 adds that although “Hjelmslev leads us to think that there is an expression-continuum and a content-continuum, in reality the model of the sign function should be given a second thought and be viewed in light of a Peircian semiotics, ...whereby the matter, or the continuum of which and by which signs speak, is always the same.” In other words, the continuum “is the Dynamic Object of which Peirce speaks and which motivates the sign, but the sign is unable to immediately account for it because the expression designates an Immediate Object (content).” I used my translation from Eco’s Italian edition because I found that the English translation of the same by The MacMillan Press, 1984 does not adequately convey the content of the original text.
- 21 On the other hand, the point of view of the text follows the opposite pattern; that is, the Expression → Content pattern (E→C). Fontanille calls it *onomasiological* or *descending* pattern (50).
- 22 Sebeok-Danesi 2000, 44; Raudla 2008, 150; Lucid 47–58; Rudy 34–67.
- 23 Lotman 1967, 130–31, cited in Raudla 2008, 150.
- 24 The models of the *primary modeling system* that Sebeok and Danesi refer to are: “singularized, composite, cohesive” (82).
- 25 Here I have used Marianne Shapiro’s English translation of the *DVE* 1990b, 47–8. I will use the same translation when citing the *DVE* in English.
- 26 The English translation of the *Conv.* is from Richard H. Lansing 1990a, 29. The same English translation will be used for further citations from the *Conv.*
- 27 Raffi 2004, 232. The Italian original text reads: “tracciare un’ardita analogia tra l’essenza del volgare e la natura di Dio, un confronto ripreso puntualmente nelle pagine del *De vulgari eloquentia*.”
- 28 Barthes 1977, 32. My added emphasis.
- 29 Discursive “*tensive schemas* are schemas that regulate the interaction of the sensible and the intelligible, the tensions and relaxations that modulate this interaction” (Fontanille 2006, 65).
- 30 From Fontanille 66–67 are also the schemas in figures 2.2, 2.3, 2.4.
- 31 Intent is associated “with a sensible experience of presence, a perceptive and affective experience” of the actor of enunciation. It implies “the taking of position”. Also, “intent operates according to the mode of *intensity*: the body proper ...turns toward what arouses in it a sensible (perceptive, affective) intensity.” (57)
- 32 Extent is an apprehension by which the “body proper perceives positions, distances, dimensions, and quantities.” (Fontanille 57)
- 33 For a detailed discussion of discursive schemas see Fontanille 65–70.
- 34 Boldrini 92. From Boldrini’s translation I just substituted “play” with “pun”.

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