Book and article reviews

PDF erstellt am: **28.06.2024**

BOOK AND ARTICLE REVIEWS

Edward Schiappa. Defining Reality. Definitions and the politics of meaning. Carbondale/Edwardsville, 2003: Southern Illinois University: 207 pp.

Definitions have been treated in the past literature as philosophical or scientific matters, concerned with the essence of things, that is, with "what it is". The main thesis of this monographic study is to propose, in direct opposition to the essentialistic account, a pragmatic account. Such a theory will be shown to understand definitions in terms of social knowledge and language use, as opposed to essences. In other words, instead of being concerned with the essence of defined aspects of reality, a pragmatic theory of definitions is concerned with how words ought to be used in order to refer to objects in the world and how people understand those objects.

Since, in this perspective, the fundamental use of language is to theoretically appraise the world, and not to describe reality itself, definitions are analyzed as being prescriptive and theory bound. Consequently, definitional change always implies a modification in people's perception of the world and vice versa; put in another way, definitions are always political. No form of description is neutral since all accounts inevitably stem from a particular point of view, that is, from a particular valuation of the situation. Since it is the case, when one accepts a definition one also accepts the particular perspective, and the course of action it implies, implicit in the defi-

nition. In this way, definitions are persuasive.

Schiappa himself defines his approach "social constructionist". The core concept this theory is based upon is the definition of category as a set of Similarity/Difference Relationships (SDRs), the set of respects in which we are taught to identify and differentiate our experiences, by means of which we learn to organize reality. From this perspective, the categories, by which the world is understood, do not derive from reality but from learning. Learning, Schiappa states, is the successive occurrences of persuasion. Therefore, definitions are persuasive. The act of defining reality always constitutes an implicit argument put forward to attain certain goals. Definitions, in this theory, are matters of language use and have nothing to do with the essence of things. Since definitions are the means by which we understand the world, they can be, and often are, changed in order to reshape that understanding.

Schiappa conceives definitions as facts of usage, which depend upon the persuasive processes that teaching them presupposes. Persuasion is, in fact, for the author fundamental to learning: children, like adults, must be persuaded in order for them to learn how to use the words through which they understand the world. Consequently, the foundation of definition cannot be found in knowledge of reality, since knowledge always depends on learning. Not the nature of things, but rather the aim of the definer is the basis of categorization. Given this perspective, knowledge is a simple consequence of defining. This position constitutes the premises of

the primary thesis of the pragmatic theory, namely the conception of definition as an argumentative act aimed at altering our valuation of reality.

Starting from Wittgenstein's philosophy, Schiappa founds his argument on a relativistic approach to propositional truth-values. Such approach defines propositional truth-value by a given theory. Observation, and therefore description, is relative to the given theoretical system. Descriptions are prescriptive in this sense, for they impose a whole organization of beliefs and values. The consequence of this is that it is not possible to categorize reality without referring to a given theory. For this reason, defining is always political; it is an implicit argument encouraging the audience to accept a precise valuation of the situation. As such, all definitions establish the truth and implicitly support and influence particular decisions or courses of actions. They are acts of persuasion because they prescribe what is to be considered relevant in view of a particular interest.

This close relation between systems of beliefs, interests, and definition emerges when two theories clash in "definitional ruptures", that is, when an accepted definition is substituted by another, or modified. A clear case of rupture is the redefinition of "death" as "brain death". In this case, the definition of "death" as "cardio-respiratory arrest" has been replaced by the new formula "cessation of brain activities". In this example, the whole conception of human being is at stake; defining what death is means establishing what is essential to human life, that is, embracing a whole philosophical theory. Likewise, defining "rape"

implies inquiring into the role of woman in marriage and society. Considering marital abuse as "rape" means, in fact, challenging the old political conception in which the man had natural power over women. The classification of an event as "rape" is true or false relatively to the conceptual system implied in the definition considered. Defining is giving a framework of interpretation, that is, is implicitly embracing a theory implied by the definition itself. It is the goal of the definer that determines the theory he embraces by defining. What is meant by the words "Art", "Wetland" or "Abort", quoting the examples Schiappa gives, depends what claim the speaker supports.

Schiappa distinguishes between two argumentative patterns of definitions: the argumentation *from* definition (all X are Z; Y is an X; therefore Y is Z) and *by* definition (X is Y). While the first scheme is commonly recognizable, the second scheme is subtler and is based on the persuasive use of naming. This second pattern is founded on classifying an aspect of reality using categories that implicitly advance a set of values. These values constitute the very conclusion the speaker advocates. Naming itself advocates the values the speaker supports, without any need to defend them. The speaker's values are taken for granted and presented as indisputable. Argumentation by definition is the pattern upon which the strategies of loaded terms and "domestication" or "bureaucratization" are grounded. An example of loaded word can be the use of the term "quarantine" to describe the sanctions against Cuba. This classification implicitly defends the prospective of a justified

therapeutic intervention instead of an act of war. The manoeuvres of domestication and bureaucratization are used to shape the meaning of a new phenomenon. By means of domestication, an ordinary term is used to elicit positive or non negative attitudes towards threatening facts. The potentially scaring event is trivialized. For instance, missiles are named "Peacekeeper", or nuclear weapons "nukes". Bureaucratization is, on the other hand, based upon mystification, namely the process of making policies or events inaccessible to the public by means of the use of acronyms or scientific jargon. For instance, when a neutron bomb is named "radiation enhancement weapon", the majority of the audience is prevented from understanding the nature of the referent of the words. The technical language is used to conceal reality and prevent moral evaluation. In both techniques, the public's evaluation of a situation is altered through manipulating their understanding and perception of reality.

The use of names represents a clear case of persuasion obtained by categorizing reality. Persuasion is however at work in every definition or description. Defining, like naming, involves the process of framing, that is, focusing on determinate aspects of reality concealing or ignoring others. Every event, from this prospective, is never neutrally or objectively described. Description is always selective and abstractive; the choice of framing is always determined by the attitudes the speaker wants to encourage in the audience. The same event may be described from several points of view, privileging and neglecting different

aspects. For instance, the cutting of tree can be described as "A tree is being cut down"; "A cylindrical organic object is being rotated from a vertical to a horizontal position"; "A tree is being murdered"; "A mean old man is cutting down that nice shady tree", etc.. The focus of each of these descriptions is only on a single particular aspect of the situation (which can be biological or technical...). Even though the event is the same, the specific way it is described advances a determinate way of understanding the situation, and encourages a particular attitude in the audience.

From this perspective, every means of describing reality, be it names, definitions, or descriptions, are based on framing, that is focusing on determinate aspects of reality concealing or ignoring others. Definitions, such as descriptions, are always selections and the partiality of the account is always determined by the attitudes the speaker wants to cultivate in the audience.

These steps summarize the argumentation used to support a pragmatic approach to definition, whose theoretical basis can be found in neuro-psychological studies, in the theory of prototypes, in philosophy of language, and logic. Schiappa's proposal is extremely interesting, developing in a systematic study a prospective whose roots can be identified in Robinson's anti-essentialistic account of definition. The book provides a thorough insight in the persuasive use of descriptions. The link between the mechanism of framing and persuasive effects can be considered a plausible explanation of many manipulative processes.

What is pivotal to this thesis is the relativistic conceptions of truth and

essence. Since essence is merely the way we think reality may be, and not the way the language frames reality, truth itself depends on the theory we are using to determine the "essence". Reality, not only descriptions of it, given Schiappa's view, appears to be social construction. The critical point, in our view, is the gap he identifies between language and world. Language is presented as the outcome of the previous persuasive processes which impose a particular understanding of the world, and thereby dissociate the object from the prospective on it. Language, in this account, is a means of imposing a determinate theoretical system, that is, a means of "persuading". The doubt we want to point out is whether the imposition of social constructions is really entitled to be defined "persuasion". As a consequence, this kind of anti-essentialistic account seems not to clearly trace the distinction between manipulation and persuasion.

The approach to definition and language presented in "Defining Reality" is undoubtedly extremely interesting and innovative. However, the social constructionist account might be controversial when confronted with the concept of common knowledge and other fundamental aspects of communication, argumentation, and persuasion.

Fabrizio Macagno
fabrizio.macagno@hotmail.com
Università Cattolica, Milano

Bert Esselink. A Practical Guide to Localization. Amsterdam, 2000: John Benjamins: 488 pp.

"La localizzazione è il processo mediante il quale un prodotto ideato e sviluppato in un determinato paese viene adattato alle esigenze linguistiche, culturali ed economiche di altri paesi che ne diventano fruitori, proprio come se tale prodotto fosse stato realizzato in loco. Pertanto, la localizzazione rappresenta il fattore determinante che consente alle aziende di penetrare nei mercati esteri" (Michael Anobile, managing director LISA, 2003). Questa è la definizione di localizzazione contenuta nella prefazione del documento "L'industria della localizzazione", seconda edizione di Arle Lommel (prima edizione curata da Deborah Fry), pubblicato da LISA (Localization Industry Standard Association), l'associazione senza scopo di lucro che offre a tutte le aziende del settore una piattaforma comune per lo scambio di informazioni e di procedure ottimali destinati a sostenere il settore della localizzazione.

"A Practical Guide to Localization" di Bert Esselink è uno dei testi consigliati nella bibliografia del suddetto documento. Al libro, giunto alla seconda edizione, è collegato il sito web www.locguide.com, realizzato dallo stesso autore.

Il manuale è scritto con un linguaggio chiaro, è ben strutturato, con un primo capitolo introduttivo che illustra i contenuti del libro e brevemente la storia del settore, ne indica i principali attori e fornisce le definizioni principali. È interessante notare che la prima edizione del libro s'intitolava "A Practical Guide to Software Localization": per la seconda edizione, l'autore

ha deciso di omettere la parola 'Software', perché il libro ambisce a coprire una grande varietà di argomenti utili per tutte quelle persone che traducono e localizzano materiali appartenenti anche ad altre aree, come i siti web o documenti 'tradizionali'.

Il manuale si rivolge idealmente a tutte le figure professionali che sono normalmente coinvolte nei progetti di localizzazione: dal project manager al traduttore, dal correttore di bozze agli sviluppatori (pp. 13-17). È significativa la mancanza nell'elenco delle figure professionali di qualsiasi riferimento alla figura del grafico (o equivalenti): questo può essere in parte spiegato con la tendenza a non coinvolgere, spesso per motivi di budget, nei team dei progetti di localizzazione queste figure, che possono poi venire coinvolti, a localizzazione avvenuta, come consulenti esterni.

Il manuale è composto da 14 capitoli seguiti da due appendici, che propongono un glossario dei termini tecnici utilizzati e una riflessione sul futuro della localizzazione nel nuovo millennio. Dopo l'introduzione (cap. 1) e un capitolo sull'internazionalizzazione rivolto soprattutto agli sviluppatori di software o di siti web (cap. 2), i capitoli 3, 4 e 5 si soffermano sulla localizzazione del software, affrontando i temi della sua traduzione (cap. 3), dell'ingegneria del software (cap. 4) e del controllo della qualità (cap. 5). I capitoli 6 e 7 trattano degli help online, della loro traduzione, progettazione e valutazione. L'ottavo capitolo offre informazioni sulla traduzione della documentazione, il nono sul desktop publishing, il decimo sulla localizzazione grafica. Il cap. 11 presenta alcuni strumenti per la traduzione as-

sistita dal computer (CAT - Computer Aided Translation tools, e TM – Translation Memory tools). Anche il capitolo successivo è destinato soprattutto a traduttori e linguisti, poiché offre informazioni sulla gestione della terminologia (creazione di glossari, risorse terminologiche utili,ecc.). Gli ultimi due capitoli sono specificamente rivolti ai project manager e affrontano la questione della valutazione dei progetti di localizzazione (cap. 13) e della loro gestione (cap. 14: Project Management).

La valutazione complessiva del libro varia inevitabilmente in funzione del livello di conoscenza del settore e soprattutto del target considerato. Per un project manager, ad esempio, questo manuale può essere molto utile, dal momento che presenta un capitolo interamente dedicato al tema. Viceversa per un grafico la lettura risulta meno utile, dal momento che i contenuti sono "sparsi" in varie sezioni e affrontati prevalentemente in modo molto pragmatico e tecnico, con delle check list. Il capitolo "Graphics localization" è inoltre troppo focalizzato su alcuni aspetti tecnici, e presenta informazioni non sempre utili per un senior graphic designer (es. quale software usare per realizzare le immagini).

Per questo aspetto, e anche per altri contenuti, va comunque tenuto presente che si tratta di un libro pubblicato nel 2000, con un'appendice interessante sul futuro sviluppo del settore, ma con i limiti di un testo scritto sei anni fa in un settore in forte crescita ed evoluzione. In relazione all'evoluzione di Internet, sia per motivi di marketing, sia per specifici programmi che incoraggiano ad esempio il multilinguismo (si veda il documento "Re-

commendation concerning the promotion and use of multilingualism and universal access to cyberspace", conosciuto anche come 'Initiative B@bel de l'UNESCO', http://portal.unesco.org/ci/fr/file_download.php/88e709b543c0854daaa133d2f90872bcRecommendation-Eng.pdf), la localizzazione oggi tende a diventare un track parallelo alla progettazione di siti o di software, o a precedere la fase di progettazione nei progetti dove il multilinguismo viene considerato un requisito fondamentale. Altri limiti del libro sono la mancanza di una specifica sezione sulla localizzazione dei siti web e il fatto che prende in considerazione quasi esclusivamente la progettazione di software in ambiente Windows.

Il manuale di Esselink rimane comunque un utile e importante punto di partenza per chi lavora nel settore della localizzazione; chi volesse poi approfondire le sue conoscenze, può consultare articoli o testi più specifici e più recenti. Ad esempio, nell'ambito della localizzazione dei giochi si segnala "The Game Localization Handbook (Game Development Series)", di Heather Maxwell Chandler (Charles River Media, 2004); nel settore dell'e-Learning il paper "e-Learning Content and Software Localization" di George Bekiaridis (febbraio 2003, http://www.theknownet.com/ict_smes_seminars/default.html); per la localizzazione di siti web, rimandiamo a "Beyond Borders: Web Globalization Strategies", di John Yunker (Indianapolis, IN: New Riders Publishing, 2003; in particolare i capp. 7 "Internationalization and localization" e 11 "World wide design"); per approfondire la parte sulla localizzazione in

Mac, si può consultare un altro testo non recente: "Guide to Macintosh Software Localization (Apple Technical Library)", della Inc. Apple Computers (Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1992).

Nonostante i limiti segnalati, "A Practical Guide to Localization" è al momento ancora uno dei pochi manuali sulla localizzazione, quindi è sicuramente un testo che merita di essere letto da chi opera nel settore; il libro raggiunge l'intento di essere una guida pratica (usa frequentemente check list, immagini, tabelle, fornisce linee guida, elenchi puntati, screenshot commentati, etc.), rivolta prevalentemente a traduttori, project manager e sviluppatori in progetti in cui la localizzazione è un modulo o una fase successiva alla progettazione di software soprattutto in ambiente Windows.

Patrizia Schettino
patrizia.schettino@lu.unisi.ch
Università della Svizzera italiana

Barbara Baerns (ed.). Leitbilder von gestern? Zur Trennung von Werbung und Programm. Eine Problemskizze und Einführung. Wiesbaden, 2004: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften: 281 pp.

This anthology of essays analyzing (effects of) product placement and other forms of "Schleichwerbung" in German mass media was published in 2004, shortly before such issues started to make waves (and headlines) both in Germany and in Switzerland. The most publicized case concerns the soap opera *Marienhof* (of public broadcaster ARD) whose producers

not only allowed storylines featuring some exceptionally cheap travel arrangements while blatantly spelling out the name of the respective travel agency but also hired lawyers in a desperate attempt to silence critics bold enough to shed light on the money transfers involved. Lawsuits addressing illegal practices, some pending, do imply both regional and national newspapers, more or less targeted magazines, public and commercial broadcasters – and do not spare the Swiss Broadcasting Company whose German-speaking SF network has been caught red-handed when publicly advertising a famous luxury hotel and spa during an episode of *Traumjob* (a reality program adapted from Donald Trump's *The Apprentice*).

Has the "thin red line" that – in most European media landscapes – is supposed to separate editorial content from advertising inserts as an (additional) source of income really become a leitbild of the past and thus an obsolete guiding principle, as the title of Baerns' anthology suggests? An American media consumer might wonder about the somewhat eclectic choices made with regards to the essays reunited here: In order to invite for an academic discussion of the increasing amount of implicit advertisement (and supposed illegal payments, one needs to add) the editor of the Freie Universitaet Berlin asked experts from a wide range of media practices and analysis to come up with theoretical concepts, empirical findings and case studies with regards to what in German is commonly called "Schleichwerbung" ("sneaking" or camouflaged advertisement). In a concluding chapter she assembles all the

rules and other more or less binding documents that are currently, in Germany, organizing the relationship between media content offered within the boundaries of editorial responsibility on the one side and media content offered by advertisement companies on the other.

On the one hand this is a most welcome contribution to an ongoing and vexing debate: Is there really significantly more advertisement "sneaking" itself into the texts and programs provided by journalists and entertainers? Where do such practices stem from? How are traditional (service public) contents affected, and how do respective audiences react? And: Do hidden advertising messages actually work in order to generate product awareness and establish new markets? On the other side (... as is usually the case with anthologies based on loosely commissioned essays) these important questions are not systematically worked through in order to find pertinent answers. Only one essay (by Michael Krzeminsky) addresses the challenges of multimedia on a global scale, and just in the very last contribution (by Joachim Westerbarkey) the question of genre and the principles by which respective recognition is negotiated between content providers and content interpreters are raised, and suggestions for a respective generic reconsideration are offered. Throughout the bulk of data and comments offered here (by Volker Nickel, Lutz Tillmanns, Stephan Russ-Mohl, Johannes Schultz, Roland Burkart / Martin Kratky / Lieselotte Stalzer and Jens Woelke) authors largely confirm the notion that "something is wrong" without addressing

the larger issues at stake: ongoing processes of vertical and horizontal media convergence on the one hand, digitalizaton and globalization on the other. It is exactly this implicit concentration on a national, or "German" debate which lends a certain anachronistic touch to this anthology.

While in the European countries and within the European Union the responsibilities for editorial content need to be clearly stated, in order to prevent the introduction of propagandistic messages which might undermine the freedom of expression (... after all, the term "Schleichwerbung" in itself echoes tactics of guerrilla warfare), such protection is unheard of in the more liberal media systems such as the United States. In American broadcast television only the more serious program genres such as news bulletins attempt to convey a certain image of independence from an eventual sponsor's opinion while *all* other programs do overtly, and faithfully, express his or her master's voice. Advertisement in such competitive institutional contexts knows literally no limits (or, as we might sigh, no shame) and comes in an astonishing variety of schemes and disguises: as ad break, as product placement, as a celebrity's testimonial or as strategically positioned sponsor's message (introducing a completely paid-for time slot, usually). Whenever such programs do cross borders and air globally, following the rules of an increasingly integrated marketplace, the resulting visibility – as compensation for a sponsor's his or her considerable investment – is bound not just to cause "collateral effects" but to have a strategic transnational impact. And European contestants do indeed learn fast from their more "liberal" counterparts overseas.

In consequence the legal frameworks once developed (also) to protect an editor from unwanted state intervention and respective censorship, is prone to undergo significant changes, and the obligation to separate editorial from advertising content can take on the traits of a burden just as much as those of a blessing. In a democratic media system one can assume that the introduction of propagandistic messages suggesting to buy a certain soft drink or drive a certain car has been done with editorial consent – which is why such practices can undermine the credibility of the medium at stake, and the credibility of mass media in general. Seen from this angle Barbara Baerns' book provides a valuable first impression and overview with regards to an emerging economic and cultural "war zone" which is already covering new grounds and shifting shape as we speak. More in-depth and comparative analysis is needed to explain what is really going on and at stake here.

Ursula Ganz-Blaettler
ursula.ganz-blaettler@lu.unisi.ch
Università della Svizzera italiana

Giuseppe Granieri. Blog Generation. Roma, 2005: Laterza.

Il blog è un sito web strutturato come diario personale in ordine cronologico inverso, dove il primo brano che si legge è l'ultimo scritto. Gestito attraverso interfacce d'uso semplicissime, è alla portata di tutti. Negli ultimi anni il blog ha esaltato la comunicazione online personale e ha riportato in vita quello spirito di sperimentazione e di

personalizzazione dei primi anni del web.

Il blog ha origine nella pagina *What's new*, presente su moltissimi siti, sebbene la parola blog (contrazione di web log) arrivi solo nel 1997, seguita dalla diffusione del concetto e dei tool. Anche il primo sito web della storia, creato da Tim Berners Lee presso il CERN, aveva la sua pagina *What's new*. Una classificazione dei blog in base al loro contenuto è quasi impossibile, ed è sbagliato tentarla. L'unica possibile categorizzazione è nella persona. L'autore del blog, il blogger, viene fortemente identificato attraverso il blog, che si caratterizza come il suo point of presence individuale nella rete, un luogo che racchiude la sua storia intellettuale, pubblica e consultabile. L'autorevolezza dell'individuo viene costruita con metodo e umiltà ed è il parametro che sancisce il successo (in accessi e riferimenti) del blog e del suo autore. Ma il blogger non esiste, anche questa è una classificazione forzata: il blogger è prima di tutto una persona che ha ruolo sociale che non si esaurisce nel suo essere blogger.

Uno dei migliori punti di partenza per leggere e scoprire l'universo blog è Technorati (www.technorati.com), un motore di ricerca specifico per blog, che indicizza gli articoli di 15 milioni di blog.[1]

Il blog personale, e isolato, si è rapidamente evoluto in reti di persone, collaborative e intrecciate, che costituiscono la *blogosfera*. I blogger producono e commentano contenuti interni o esterni alla blogosfera, che diventa così una grande conversazione basata sul passaparola dove la regola è il confronto. Essa è un enorme filtro auto-

determinante di contenuti, distribuito e collettivo. La blogosfera è un vero e proprio motore di ricerca nella sua accezione più tradizionale (sito per trovare altri siti), pur essendo privo di indice, caotico ma efficace. Come motore di ricerca, la blogosfera risponde all'esigenza primaria dell'utente: trovare l'informazione che cerca (e quella che non cerca) in breve tempo.

Nel caos formato da milioni di voci individuali emerge un ordine dettato dalla "moderazione collaborativa". Blog e reputazione aiutano i lettori a trovare i contenuti più validi, quelli più commentati o anche solo quelli più citati. I blog infatti sono nati per condurre verso contenuti interessanti e funzionano dirottando la lettura su contenuti esterni. Il bene economico della blogosfera è l'informazione, non scarsa e replicabile. L'unica regola è quella di citare fonti e fonti intermedie. Linkando contenuti esterni precedentemente letti, il blogger guadagna in reputazione perché fornisce informazione di qualità; chi viene citato guadagna attenzione perché avrà più porte di accesso all'informazione che fornisce; chi legge riceverà informazione di qualità. La blogosfera aumenta il valore del link e trasforma il web da rete di contenuti a infrastruttura di discussione.

Come produttori di contenuti, i blogger vengono spesso confrontati con i giornalisti. Ed è proprio a partire dal rapporto tra blogosfera e mediasfera, tra giornalismo e blog, che il saggio di Granieri si sviluppa, mettendo in evidenza più che le differenze, i punti di contatto tra questi due mondi. La blogosfera è strutturata a rete, fatta di nodi più o meno connessi. Alcuni nodi sono in forte relazione con la mediasfera e si caratterizzano

[1] stato: agosto 2005

come punti di scambio tra le due realtà. La mediasfera può quindi attingere a una redazione composta da milioni di persone che lavorano come una colonia di formiche, alimentate anche e soprattutto dalla mediasfera stessa. L'assenza di coordinamento di questa redazione distribuita viene sopperita dalla swarm intelligence, che provoca un comportamento collettivo complesso ed efficace, generando un'auto-organizzazione che si nutre dei suoi errori.

La blogosfera, nel suo complesso, rimedia ai difetti più intrinseci della mediasfera. I media tradizionali, infatti, si rivolgono a un fruitore con scarsa conoscenza diretta della realtà e producono una costruzione della realtà eseguita in fretta, con problemi di indipendenza e oggettività. I blogger invece sono spesso persone con una conoscenza diretta della realtà. Sono indipendenti in quanto la loro attività è volontaria e indipendente (se questo costituisce un limite di risorse per un singolo blog, è invece una caratteristica vincente del sistema blog).

In quanto forma di circolazione delle informazioni, il blogging oggi non viene tenuto in considerazione dalle persone che prendono le decisioni per noi. Al contrario, la gente comune ripone nel blog grande fiducia perché li sente vicini e fondamentalmente umani. I media tradizionali e le fonti ufficiali sono percepite come distaccate e lontane.

Blogosfera e mediasfera coesistono già oggi grazie a un patto critico, che esiste anche senza la partecipazione dei media. I giornalisti sono già ora soltanto una delle voci del mondo dell'informazione, il cui ruolo è quello di elaborare e migliorare le informazioni in circolo.

Il blogger non è più un cittadino informato, è diventato un cittadino monitorante, che, grazie a Google e ai blog, diventa protagonista consapevole dell'informazione. Egli ha lasciato l'isolamento degli "unplugged", di chi non è connesso, e ha scelto di essere connesso, di cercare e trovare informazione più ricca, completa di opinioni critiche lontane da quelle prefabbricate dell'informazione di massa. Il blogger non si limita a leggere ma riprende ciò che ha letto, lo linka, lo commenta, lo ripropone in modo arricchito e dà altri punti di vista, spesso arricchisce l'informazione perché è uno specialista dell'argomento. Read it, google it, blog it (leggilo, approfondiscilo e parlane). Lo guida la soddisfazione personale, non l'inserzionista o il politico. Il blogger, "uno che partecipa alla Grande Conversazione", è un protagonista della politica. Oggi la lotta politica non è più tra destra e sinistra, ma tra chi guarda la tv e chi accede alla rete dotata di un'informazione pluralistica più completa, che ognuno può gestire e alimentare.

Per Granieri il blog è l'agorà ateniese, la democrazia diretta per eccellenza, e diventa il mezzo grazie a cui è possibile una nuova democrazia, un nuovo modo di interazione tra politica e cittadini. La partecipazione alla democrazia avviene attraverso molteplici e diverse rappresentazioni parziali della realtà. In questo senso perdono valore, se mai ne hanno avuto, i sondaggi, che non rappresentano l'opinione pubblica in quanto mettono sullo stesso piano l'opinione di persone informate e quella di persone non informate (o male informate).

La blogosfera è uno scorcio su quanto può fare l'intelligenza connettiva, è

il laboratorio per la costruzione del Web Semantico. È piena di svantaggi rispetto a quest'ultimo, ma vi differisce perché esiste e funziona, qui e ora. L'uniformità dei blog, la generazione dei contenuti e dei meta-dati estremamente semplice e sempre simile nonostante i numerosi tool, fanno sì che la blogosfera sia il primo vero caso generalizzato di read/write-web, il web da leggere e da scrivere.

Giuseppe Granieri è un esperto di comunicazione e culture digitali, collabora con "Internet Pro", "Il Sole 24 Ore - @lpha" e altre testate. Soprattutto, Granieri è un blogger. Ci regala un saggio di sociologia usando i blog come pretesto per analizzare la comunicazione online come la si fa oggi. L'analisi è centrata sull'interazione tra le persone, non è una descrizione tecnica del tool: i blog vengono trattati come un semplice strumento di comunicazione.

Marco Faré
marco.fare@lu.unisi.ch
Università della Svizzera italiana

Michele Sorice. I Media. La prospettiva sociologica. Roma, 2005: Carocci.

The book is basically a practical and concise teaching tool addressed to communication sciences students, that introduces, explains and discusses the main theories concerning both media and communication. By having recourse to and taking advantage of different approaches, the author develops a personal point of view (consisting expecially of sociological methods) adequate to the complex problems in question. In this sense, he not only reports outlooks

and conceptions, but also provides the reader with scientifically based judgements and critics, by showing strong and weak points of each theory.

The work is divided in two sections: the first one (including first, second and third chapter) is a discussion of what the author calls "the two sociologies"; these are on the one hand, the american *communication research* (consisting basically of the *transmission theories*), and on the other hand the so-called *"other sociology"*, also known as the *dialogue theories* (gathering several schools and traditions focused on the media studies);

the second one (including fourth and fifth chapter) is focused on the *audience studies* and provides at once a chronologic report of the main theories and a remarkable interpretation of them, by grouping tendencies, schools, methods an so on in two different groups: *empirical approaches* and *interpretative ones*, or – in other terms – *realistic paradigms* and *idealistic ones* (Gili: 1998).

The author begins by introducing the concept of communication (suggesting the idea that each interpretation of the media landscape implies a specific outlook on communication in general), in order to point out the difference between the *every day life communication* and the *mass communication*, a difference which lies above all in the distinct forms of feedback these two ways of communicating involve. Actually, while conversations enable a direct answer/reaction and maybe even a *"pre-feedback"* (a sort of forecast of the addressee's feedback; see Mascilli Migliorini 1974), television or radio programs just suppose an indirect feedback, which is usually

inferred by broadcasters (even though the spectators' role is getting increasingly important nowadays).

Obviously, there are also other differences to underline, concerning for instance the power relations within the communication act: actually, while the *every day life communication* entails an equal relationship between sender and receiver, the *mass communication* puts broadcasters in dominant (and therefore more powerful) positions.

After pointing out that essential difference, in the second chapter the author discusses the *transmission theories*, from the Lasswell's *magic bullet theory* (1927) and the Shannon and Weaver's *mathematical theory of communication* (1948) to the Katz and Lazarsfeld's *two steps flow of communication theory* (1957), which for the first time attaches importance to the personal influences in interpreting the media messages. According to the two American researcher's view, the mass communication information flow is actually filtered by the so-called "opinion leader" (a sort of ideologic point of reference in a group of people), who rework and interpret what they watch, read or listen, before influencing the members of the group they belong to. By the way, Sorice seems to lay emphasis on the *selective influence theories*, by pointing out the advances each paradigm brings along.

In the third chapter, the author goes deeper into those models which consider the receiver's/addressee's role more active (the so-called *dialogue theories*). In particular, he highlights the models by Schramm, Newcomb and Gerbner, that emphasize the role played at once by the encoding/decoding process (and therefore by codes and languages) and

by the social environment, considering communication as a sort of negotiation of meaning. But in order to rethink the concept of communication, Sorice examines also further approaches as the one developed by the Palo Alto School (Watzlawick ; Bavelas & Jackson 1964, that underlines non verbal communication details), the one by McLuhan (1992) and above all the semiotical one. In particular, he focuses on the Eco-Fabbri's (1978) and Bettetini's schemes, that consider messages as texts, in which the conversation sender/receiver is arranged and regulated. In other terms, texts provide a sort of "simulacra", representing the communication exchange between the real sender and the real receiver, in order to lead the communication act. Obviously the theory in question envisages also potential misunderstandings (the *aberrant decoding*), depending for instance on the cultural back-ground, on the reduced command of the code/language used and so on.

Anyway, by looking into views and outlooks, Sorice rethinks the communication act in a way that restores the receiver's/addressee's role.

In the second section (fourth chapter), the author examines the media effects theories, by dividing their chronological development in four phases:

a. in the first one (up to the '30s), media are considered almighty and receivers passive;

b. in the second one, media are regarded as powerful , but their influence is supposed to be filtered by social relationships;

c. in the third one, media are thought once again as almighty, but as regards long-term consequences only;

d. in the last one, media are not supposed to influence directly the audience, in so far as they provide it with messages to interpret.

After getting deeper into the theories mentioned above, Sorice introduces and discusses the two social reasearch methods (quantitative and qualitative), also examining the conceptions of the schools by which they have been employed. He seems to lay more emphasis on those traditions that have recourse to multidisciplinary approaches (the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies [CCCS] or the Hall's *encoding/deconding model* [1980] for instance), in so far as they take into account complexities and diversities implied by society, by developing models that seek to account for all possible variables involved. On the upshot, because of those variables and because of the audience's active role, Sorice concludes that:

- if there are effects on spectators, they will be indirect;

- the media consumption is an active use of the mass communication tools.

Actually, in the last chapter, he examines those theories that focus on the media consumption (the so-called *active audience studies*), seeking to explain how the audience makes use of television, radio, newspapers and so on. By taking advantage of the Alasuutarii's (1999) and Schrøder's (2003) conclusions (and therefore by examinating and going deeper into several conceptions, from the *incorporation/resistence paradigm* (Morley: 1980) to the *spectacle/performance paradigm* (Abercrombie & Longhurst: 1998), the author develops a personal

point of view, by taking up a realistic approach ("*realistimo discorsivo*"), based at once on "multidimensional" methodologies (quantitative and qualitative ones) and on *abductional* criteria: because of the social complexity, of which borders and traits are often unclear, he suggests to have recourse to a paradigm, that enables to look at the problems concerning mass communication from different points of view and therefore that supplies more circumstantial analyses.

Finally, the author concludes by underlining the need of innovating and continuously rethinking methods and approaches, in so far as contemporary society (and therefore media) are "liquid" (Baumann: 2000): if the society is always "in progress" and if a researcher is supposed to explain social phenomena in a suitable way, the social sciences will be requested to be "in progess" as well. By providing the reader with such remarks, Sorice puts a precise angle on his report and gives an idea for further researches. Actually, as he claims: «researching is always reaching finishing lines, that are once again starting points» («la ricerca è sempre il raggiungimento di traguardi che sono nuovi punti di partenza», see Sorice 2005: 199).

In this sense, because of its critical work and because of its remarkable suggestions, the book could be considered not only an ordinary teaching tool, but also a valuable point of arrival within the complex media studies galaxy.

References

ABERCROMBIE, N. & LONGHURST, B. (1998). Audience, London: Sage.

ALASUUTARI, P. (1999). Rethinking the Media Audience, London: Sage.

BAUMAN, Z. (2000), Liquid Modernity, Cambridge: Polity Press.

BETTETINI, G. (1984), La comunicazione audiovisiva, Milano: Bompiani.

ECO, U. & FABBRI, P. (1978). Progetto di ricerca sull'utilizzazione dell'informazione ambientale. *Problemi dell'informazione* 4.

GILI, G. (1998). Il fantasma della realtà: prospettive realiste e idealiste nell'analisi dei mass media, *Studi di sociologia* XXXVI, Milano: Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore: 121-145.

HALL, S. et al. (1980). Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies 1972-79, London : Hutchinson.

KATZ, E. & LAZARSFELD, P. F. (1955). Personal influence, Glencoe: The Free Press.

LASSWELL, H. (1927). Propaganda Technique in the World War, New York: Harper.

MASCILLI MIGLIORINI, E. (1974). La strategia del consenso, Milano: Rizzoli.

MCLUHAN, M. (1992). The laws of the media. The new science. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

MORLEY, D. (1980). The "Nationwide" Audience: Structure and Decoding, London: British Film Institute.

SCHRØDER, K.C. et al. (2003). Researching Audience, London: Arnold.

SHANNON, E. & WEAVER, W. (1949). The Mathematical Theorie of Communication, Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

WATZLAWICK, P. et al. (1964). Pragmatic of Human Communication, Norton: W. W. & Company.

Francesco Marinozzi
francesco.marinozzi@tin.it
Free-Lance Lecturer

Giovanni Bechelloni, Svolta comunicativa. Napoli, 2002: Ipermedium libri.

Il saggio è composto da otto testi sul tema della comunicazione che il sociologo italo-canadese Bechelloni ha letto e discusso in diverse sedi – italiane ed estere - tra il 1998 e il 2002.

Le lezioni sono unite tra loro dall'intento di promuovere le attività formative della Scuola Fiorentina di Comunicazione (SFC), la quale concretamente si prefigge di lavorare alla costruzione di una nuova cultura della comunicazione (da qui il titolo del libro) che meglio legittimi le scienze della comunicazione nonché le professioni del comunicare che in diversi Paesi si vanno istituzionalizzando.

Il paradigma di comunicazione da cui la SFC intende prendere le distanze (e in questo lo si può ricollegare ad un'ampia bibliografia di cui ricordiamo il recente saggio di Mario Perniola, *Contro la comunicazione*, Einaudi, 2004) è quello utilitarista e commerciale della cosiddetta società dell'informazione che nasce dal mondo dell'informatica, della telematica e delle telecomunicazioni, e dal mondo della tecnologia dei segnali che si presenta sulla scena pubblica della pubblicità e dei media, dell'economia e della politica. Tale modello usurperebbe il termine "comunicazione" caricandolo di significati utopici e quindi, in quest'ottica, la comunicazione, parola controversa (e dai molteplici significati) capace di accendere entusiasmi e avversioni acritici, sarebbe divenuta il condensato negativo della superficialità, dell'ignoranza, della manipolazione e dell'imbroglio. Tutto ciò ha fatto sì che nell'odierna società, che è solo illusoriamen-

te trasparente, sia maledettamente difficile comunicàre, ma tale complessità viene oscurata dalla banalità quotidiana dell'attività di comunicare.

La *svolta comunicativa* è in sostanza una forte, decisa e critica reazione scientifica, etica e politica, allo stato delle cose esistenti, alle tecniche della comunicazione che hanno relegato le culture della comunicazione. Contro la tirannia subdola e pervasiva della comunicazione massmediatica bisogna innanzitutto poter ricercare risposte complesse a problemi altrettanto complicati, e fare in modo che le strategie di controllo attivate dalla società dell'informazione possano offrire risposte ai bisogni di comunicazione, fra cui il bisogno di riconoscimento. Dal momento in cui, soprattutto alla fine degli anni '90, l'audience è ritenuta un mero recettore passivo e non ci si prefigura mai abbastanza l'interlocutore al quale ci si rivolge con testi, palinsesti o quant'altro, il riconoscimento dell'altro diviene una priorità per costruire una società condivisa, fondata non sull'uguale sentire, non sulla condivisione di valori imposta con la forza e dall'autorità, bensì fondata sul pluralismo dei valori e dei fini ultimi.

La comunicazione di cui parla il libro è quella che si svolge tra individui e la promessa è di riuscire a comunicare tra persone diverse, ad accettare tale diversità in quanto risorsa e non come pericolo o minaccia. Solo così si riuscirà a meglio capire la complessità sociale odierna e a fare in modo che l'apertura al diverso sia anche un'apertura al nuovo e che tutto ciò solleciti la capacità di imparare (includere e non escludere) degli studenti. Teoricamente la comunicazione diventa allora un problema, ma anche una risorsa, soprattutto quando ad essa ci si rivolge con lo sguardo dell'autore che, oltre a essere ordinario di "Sociologia dei processi culturali e comunicativi" alla facoltà di scienze politiche di Firenze, ha attraversato svariate discipline ed esperienze fra cui quella storica (il libro guarda alla modernità prendendo inizio dall'arrivo degli etruschi in Italia, cita Socrate, passa dalla Magna Grecia del V sec., argomenta con le lezioni di Machiavelli, per poi considerare l'Ottocento e il Novecento) e psicoanalitica (in particolare Freud). Ma per l'autore la svolta comunicativa riguarda soprattutto le scienze sociali (ampio spazio è dato alla trattazione del pensiero di Anthony Giddens), alle quali offre alla loro riflessione e ai loro paradigmi un nuovo punto di vista per osservare e riconsiderare i temi classici come il controllo sociale, i processi di modernizzazione, identità e culture, la ricerca qualitativa, i rapporti tra stato e mercato e le relazioni tra il linguaggio della parola e gli altri linguaggi di comunicazione. Il libro è più che altro una dichiarazione di intenti della SFC e non un'analisi dettagliata delle questioni da considerare e delle azioni da intraprendere. La svolta comunicativa è in definitiva un grido d'allarme per convocare attenzione e risorse scientifiche ai problemi che la crisi della comunicazione fa pervenire in un mondo in cui questo termine sta proliferando in una vasta gamma di accezioni.

Pier Paolo Pedrini
ppedrini@swissonline.ch
University of Applied Sciences of
Southern Switzerland (SUPSI)

Owen Hargie & David Dickson. Skilled Interpersonal Communication: Research, Theory and Practice. London, 2004: Routledge.

The fourth and expanded edition of the textbook *Skilled interpersonal communication* contains the latest research of the authors Hargie and Dickson and includes examples and summaries to help to contextualise the theoretical aspects of skilled interpersonal communication in terms of their practical applications.

Hargie and Dickson offer us a very useful theoretical and practical instrument to master interpersonal communication.

In a context where one of the most dominant facts of our century is the prodigious development of media communication in real time, mediated communication which, as a consequence, has denatured human contact, we rediscover how fundamental, powerful and universal is the human need to interact with others.

So what are and what do we mean by the interpersonal skills in interactive communication? Interpersonal skills are defined as *the process whereby the individual implements a set of goal-directed, inter-related, situationally appropriate social behaviours which are learned and controlled* (p. 5).

In fact, according to the authors, a very important starting point for the study of interpersonal communication is that the purposes people brings into communication have important consequences on communication processes. In other words, skilled behaviour is *goal-directed,* even in a practical realization of a performed behaviour. So skilled behaviour must be *interrelated.* The authors underline also the good

appropriation of the situation in which skills are used. Another feature of the approach is that skills are defined in terms of identifiable units of behaviour. In this way, *skill is reflected in the performance of communicative behaviours* (p. 6). Additionally, the condition that skills should be under the cognitive control it is also part of their definition of skills.

The content of *Skilled Interpersonal Communication* is organized in fifteen chapters.

After an introductive chapter, the *interpersonal communication* chapter presents a skill-based model that emphasizes that all communication is bound to the context. So we refer to notions of person-situation context, goals, mediating processes, responses, feedback and perception.

Nonverbal communication chapter (pp. 43- 81) analyses how we make ourselves known through, for example, a look, gesture, postural shift or trembling voice. It is interesting to follow the analyse through the six types of nonverbal communication:

Haptics – communication through physical touch;

Kinesics – communication through body mouvement;

Proxemics – messages conveyed through the perception and use of personal and social space;

Physical characteristics – information revealed through body shape, size and adornments;

Environmental factors – messages carried by features of the social surroundings such as furniture, décor and lighting;

Vocalics – communication by means of the nonverbal elements of speech. (p. 56).

The chapter on *Rewarding and reinforcing* (pp.81-113) studies reactions that can influence what we do in a certain manner, by making it more likely that we will engage in certain behaviours in preference to others. This is the core concept of reinforcement as an interpersonal skills. *Having the potential to reward is therefore a key dimension on interpersonal interaction that plays a central role in friendship formation and personal attraction* (pp. 81-82). This skill seems to be very useful in education, as reinforcement is seen as a potentially powerful tool to be used by teachers to improve pupils' social behaviour in class and promote academic achievement. *Questioning* (pp. 115- 146) is certainly one of the most natural and widely used interactive skills, and one of the most easiest to identify in general terms. But the authors show us how questioning is complex and their functions multiple (e.g. obtain information, maintain control of an interaction, arouse interest and curiosity concerning a topic, ascertain the attitudes, feelings and opinions of the respondent). After this study, we are able to understand which kind of question suits to our specific goal in the interactive communication. Indeed, the categorisations of questions provide a key template for the analysis of the effects of questions in social interactions. *Reflecting* (pp. 147-168) is an alternative skill of the precedent one. Some of the main functions are *to demonstrate an interest in and involvement with the interviewee, to indicate close attention by the interviewer to what is being communicated, to show that the interviewer is trying to understand fully the interviewee and what the latter is saying, to check*

the interviewer's perceptions and ensure accuracy of understanding (p. 155). In the overview, the authors give guidelines to use correctly a reflective style.

Listening (pp. 169- 196) in social interactions, is of crucial importance. *In order to respond appropriately to others, we must pay attention to the messages they are sending and link our responses to these* (p. 169). Indeed, without listening it is simply impossible to have a dialogue. In communication process, time spent listening is much more important than time spent speaking. *The listening process begins when our senses register incoming stimuli* (p. 173). In this process, all interactive behaviour is important, encompassing both verbal and nonverbal responses. In communication processes, listening is playing a kind of selective perception filter registering a limited amount of information into the conscious level, while a part of information is stored at a subconscious level. While the authors give guidelines to be an efficient listener, they underline that listening *involves focusing on the speaker's verbal and nonverbal messages, while at the same time actively portraying verbal and nonverbal signs of listening* (p. 194).

Explaining (pp. 197-222) is part of *processes involved in giving information in such a way as to maximise comprehension* (p. 197). This chapter presents the nature, functions and techniques of explaining in a variety of professional and social contexts. We find five types of explanation: descriptive, interpretive, reason-giving, causal and functional explanation. After what, the explanation process can be analysed using the 5-Ps model of pre-assessment, planning, preparation,

presentation and "postmortem". With this skill it is important to consider that its success is closely depending on the degree of understanding demonstrated by the listener. So *the activity must be built around the particular needs, capacities and resources of the audience* (p. 221).

Self-disclosure (pp. 223-258) concerns how, what, when and why people disclose information about themselves and is defined as *the process whereby person A verbally and/or non-verbally communicates to person B some item of personal information that was previously unknown to B* (p. 227). So verbal self-disclosures involve the use of the personal pronoun "I", or some other personal self-reference pronoun such as "my" or "mine". Self-disclosures can be about either facts or feelings, and finally it can be about one's own personal experience, or it can be about one's personal reaction to the experiences being related by an another. These are the characteristics of self-disclosures easily identified by the use of a personal pronoun. At function level, this process is conceptually, *the cement that binds the bricks in any relationship edifice. Without it, relational structures are inherently unstable and prone to collapse* (p. 257).

Set induction and closure (pp. 259-290) are the verbal and non-verbal gates to start or to close the interpersonal communication. This skill can be seen as *a key investment toward the effectiveness of relationship* (p. 289).

Assertiveness (pp. 291-324) serves to ensure that one's personal rights are not violated and that the rights of others are not infringed. This chapter considers three response styles: aggressive (talking at others), assertive (talking with others) and submissive (talking little to others). *Research evidence has clearly shown that assertion skills are not innate – they can be learned and improved. Once they are learned, it becomes easier to protect one's personal rights, to say "no" without undue concern, to make reasonable requests, and to regard oneself as equal to others. Our self-confidence and sense of self-worth are improved accordingly.* (p. 324)

Influence and persuasion (pp. 325-368). In this chapter, Hargie and Dickson pay attention to the persuasion process, to steps to successful persuasion, to cognitive routes to persuasion, to persuasion proofs referring to Aristotle's scheme for analysing persuasion in terms of ethos (personal proofs), logos (logical proofs), and pathos (emotional proofs).

Negotiating (pp. 369-399) is one way of overcoming diversity in religion, gender or generation, interests, that leads to people adopting contrasting cultural practices, beliefs, values and ways of doing things. In that sense, negotiating is a challenge of social life, as we have to deal with difference. This chapter examines the nature of negotiating and provides advices to perform this process more effectively. It is important to underline that the authors consider that the objective is not victory for one side, but for both. In this perspective, they propose the so-called "win-win" negotiations pattern.

Groups and group interaction (pp. 401-437) are commonplace in social life which everyday we have to deal with. The authors provide us a definition of what exactly is meant by "group" and a number of basic features associated with the concept. Very

interesting too is the corollary notion of leader and leadership.

The structure of the book is very clear and presents a very academic, rigorous, study, allowing to easily find the information relevant to a particular practical situation. This is strengthened by a very sequential structure of each chapter which contains an introduction, a clear subdivision into sections, boxes that provide synthetic guidelines, and a final overview.

Developing and maintaining relational bonds, so fundamental in our innate predisposition to commune with one another, is possible thanks to a good interpersonal communication that could be attained considering effective interpersonal skills. The concluding comments remind us that this textbook focuses on the importance of the awareness of the skills covered, and on their behavioural determinants to contribute to increase the understanding of the process of interpersonal communication and to react into this process, particularly when problems arise.

The approach behind the central components of interpersonal communication, the so-called skills, *provides a key conceptual framework that has been successfully applied across numerous settings and in a wide of research studies* (p. 439).

Concluding, the authors want to pay attention to communication ethics because, as the information, the skills can be used for good or ill (to manipulate). And in this aim, they present a code for communication professionals, put forward by Montgomery et al. (2001).

Marie-Caroline Beylier
marie-caroline@beylier.com
Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma