

EDITORIAL

Text, discourse

To define *text*¹ and *discourse*² is rather challenging as far as dozens of definitions have been given, each pertinent to different schools and disciplines. And yet, it is not defining such broad concepts³ that we are interested in here but we would like to

¹ According to *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, the etymology of *text* (coming from the Latin *textus*) sends both to the finished product/"the produce of the weaver's art", "that which is woven, web, texture" (while *texture*, from the Latin *textura*, means "a weaving; a woven fabric; any natural structure having an appearance or consistence as if woven; the constitution, structure or substance of anything with regard to its constituents, formative elements or physical character; the representation of the structure and minute moulding of a surface as distinct from its colour") and to the making itself (from the Latin *texere*, which means *to weave*), that is, to "the process or art of weaving" and therefore "to bring into existence; to compose; to work up from raw material, manufacture (material objects). *Text*, then, is both something concrete, material, graspable, a constructed object which is given a price, hence, which may be negotiated, and the process whereby this *woven produce* is brought into being. For a scholarly discussion on *text* see D.C. Greetham's *Theories of the Text* (OUP, 1999).

² The etymology of *discourse*, according to the same *Dictionary* (from the Latin *discursus*, formed on *discurs-*, ppl. stem of *discurrere*), circumscribes the area of "onward course", "reasoning", "communication of thought by speech", "the faculty of conversing", of "running or travelling over a space, region etc.", "speaking or writing at length on a subject", "familiar intercourse"; or, according to Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (apud *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*) it refers to "the act of the understanding, by which it passes from premises to consequences". Thus, *discourse* implies not only the art of holding a conversation or of communicating an idea on a topic but also the act of founding it on arguments, throughout *its length*, with the help of specific persuasive strategies.

³ Besides the tens of thousands of books written on *text* and *discourse*, worth mentioning are just a few titles of journals: *Text and Talk. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Language, Discourse and Communication Studies*; *Textual Practice*; *Text. Journal of Writing and Writing Courses*; *Social Text*; *Pre/Text. A Journal of Rhetorical Theory*; *Text: Transactions of the Society for Textual Scholarship*.

foreground the interrelatedness between text, discourse and culture in this age of post(or trans-)⁴modernity and to leave it on the reader of these articles to follow the diachronic perspective of *discourses* of *texts* belonging to different ages or to debate on metadiscourses.

Having in mind structuralists and semioticians such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, Yuri Lotman, Göran Sonesson, Roland Posner, Umberto Eco, Susan Petrilli, Augusto Ponzio, John Deely (to mention only a few names) it is impossible not to think over issues such as:

- (un) mapping texts, textual dimensions (the manner in which para-, inter-, metatextual elements could *border* texts or whether they are textual strategies leading the reader to the unfolding of discourses);
- textual patterning and levels of intentionality;
- *what* and *who* makes the differentiation of texts;
- *when* and *how* does a text become the object of a specific culture?
- if culture is regarded as *text*, then, how far can we extend the *object* called *text*?; is a coffee house, a pub, a street, an advert etc. a cultural text?
- what is culture's textuality?
- what is a text's spatiality?, is it just material and mental or should we also add a third dimension, the social?
- marginality, centrality and the symbolical search of meaningfulness in texts considered as a cultural phenomenon;
- identity, alterity and 'the other' in 'culture as text'.

As for discourse, we agree to Jürgen Habermas's opinion that it is not just communication (a mere learning of the rules of communication), but it is "an intensified kind of communicative action" and that there is a "creative tension between communication and discourse" (apud Delanty 2000:103), on the one hand, and with Agnes Heller's insistence on the existence of a third domain, the institutionalized sphere (social and economic), which "shapes the other two [communication and discourse] without ever being able to

⁴ Inter-, cross- and trans-disciplinary researches in textual and discourse fields (as a characteristic feature of these decades) reveal the great variety and diversity of concerns regarding the current debates on issues such as communication, literary or non-literary products considered as texts, textual culture, the dynamics of cultural objects, territoriality of text and of discourse etc.

assimilate them.” (apud Delanty 2000:100-104). This interrelatedness between communication, discourse and institutionalization of nowadays’ *everyday life* raises the problems of:

- relations among people (hence, the con(de)struction of discourse);
- the coming into play of a plurality of discourses, which are culturally bound;
- the putting of limits on the objectivation or subjectivation of the *intensified kind of communicative action*;
- the changeable nature of discourse according to cultural codes;
- discourse’s diachronous power; hence its meaningfulness within changes over time;
- interrelatedness of discourse construction rules (linguistic, social, historical, cultural).

The articles in this volume, although “a grain of sand” in an ocean, develop this idea of interrelationship between culture, text and discourse, where both producer and reader have equal power in the making of textual *thirdspacetimes*⁵ cultures.

References

- Delanty, Gerard (2000): *Modernity and Postmodernity. Knowledge, Power and the Self*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi.
- Hetherington, K. (1998): *Expressions of Identity. Space, Performance, Politics*, Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi.
- Soja, E.(1996): *ThirdSpace:Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, Blackwell, Oxford.

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⁵ The term is a coinage on Edward Soja’s *ThirdSpace* (1996), where the author shows that the idea of space has become a central dimension of nowadays’ society. We consider that time should also be added as far as in this age of *deaths* (of *authors, addressees, characters* etc.), of *lies*, of multiple hidden *frustrations* merging to the surface, of *margins in search of never-found centres*, it is time’s speed that changes the social space and makes it unrecognizable.