Special Issue *Versus* – *Quaderni di studi semiotici*

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Call for papers

**The Sensorial Efficiency**

Sensoriality and Presence in Audiovisual Media

For this special issue of *Versus*¹ we will select papers that are clearly semiotic. Transdisciplinary approaches that open up semiotics to other disciplines are welcome. Proposals should focus on themes and arguments that relate to the phenomena discussed above. Of particular interest are proposals dealing with:

(a) how new medial artifacts and languages enhance / complete / hint at / refer to / define / depict perceptual, sensorial, proprio- and interoceptive sensations that stem from senses that are not visual or auditory;
(b) how new medial artifacts and languages redefine and/or model perception of space, sound and text;
(c) how new medial artifacts and languages redefine cultural memory, create new global awareness, contribute to redefining a global memory and inclusion/exclusion paradigms;
(d) How new medial artifacts and languages redefine / enhance / question poetics and aesthetics;
(e) How new medial artifacts and languages redefine “reality” as a semiotic contract.

In particular we will consider favorably proposals that develop the following topics:

- Audiovisual artifacts and the imaginary construction of the present/real world.
- Audiovisual artifacts and representability of the “real world”.
- Audiovisual artifacts and implied senses (taste, odor, proprio- and introception) at productive and receptive level.
- Everyday noises and sounds in audiovisual artifacts and languages.
- Immediacy and passions/emotive response/emotive triggers.
- Effects of “presence” in audiovisual artefacts.
- Audiovisual artifacts and media witnessing.
- Mobile recording and witnessing.
- Orality, gestures, and audiovisual artifacts.
- Production and reception grammars.
- Rethinking of key concepts of audiovisual media.
- Global communication and audiovisual languages and objects.
- Transcultural communication and audiovisual languages and objects.
- Audiovisual memory; audiovisual memory and cultural memory.
- Impact on semiotic theories and practices.

**Schedule**

- Please send an abstract of no more than 500 words (together with a bibliography and a short biography) to both of the editors by

May 17, 2016.

¹ *Versus* (or VS) is one of the first and best-known international journals of Semiotics, Philosophy and Theory of Language. The late Umberto Eco founded *Versus* in 1971. *Versus* aims to publish contributions of the highest possible level, in theoretical and applied semiotics, and to advance the development and progress of the field. Since 1971 over 75 issues and more than 600 articles have been published in *Versus*. The journal has published contributions from over 400 authors, including—to name just a few—Roman Jakobson, Algirdas J. Greimas, Paul Grice, John Searle, Félix Guattari, Jaakko Hintikka, Ray Jackendoff, Philip N. Johnson-Laird, George Lakoff, Luis Prieto. Starting with issue number 106 (January-April 2008) *Versus* has adopted a system of double blind peer review. This signifies that *Versus* is determined to continue its tradition of pursuing quality and scientific rigor.  
(http://versus.dfc.unibo.it/riv1_en.php)
The Sensorial Efficiency: Sensoriality and Presence in Audiovisual Media

We communicate and interact with others and with the world anywhere and at any moment by means of the most disparate media forms and modalities: we blog, we text, we write messages and stories on Facebook, we make video clips, we create live streams, we shoot photos and tag them, we like or dislike or comment on anything on the spot, we record sounds, music and discussions, we read messages, blogs, and stories on our computers, PlayStations or smartphones; we listen to music and messages sent by friends, we watch videos or live streams, even while working, cooking, or walking, we create multimedia objects collaboratively, with colleagues or friends dispersed all over the globe. This phenomenon is so pervasive that we have to question the very idea that media worlds are separated from our “real” world (Eugení, 2015), as they used to be. As a matter of fact, the entire world we live in and experience is a medial and mediated reality, inhabited by medial and mediated bodies (Pezzini and Spaziente, 2014), inter- and trans-connected mostly through digital devices. While for most of the 20th century media were necessarily consumed in dedicated spaces and according to conventional practices (consumers watched TV from the couch in the living room, went to the movies, to a concert hall, or a theater; metaphorically: they consumed medial artifacts mostly in a separate space), media reception and production is currently ubiquitous and scattered in places and processes of consumption hardly definable in space and time and therefore less and less separable from our everyday life and even from our bodies. Smartphones, tablets, iPads (RIP), live pens, notebooks, webcams, drones, surveillance or GoPro cameras are some examples of how the continuing proliferation of audiovisual equipment and media enjoyment is thoroughly integrated into our contemporary way of life, everywhere and anytime, and of how these electronic devices are becoming prostheses that extend our body and enhance its faculties.

One of the basic and most productive formats is still the audiovisual text, often mixed with written texts and still images (video clippings can be organically inserted in a Facebook page, together with texts, remarks, comments, and images). From a technical point of view, contemporary audiovisual texts differ entirely from the first moving pictures with sound, but they still rely on the same basic techniques. These two sensorial universes, image and sound, converge into a diverse, variegated, multifaceted semiotic universe that manages to convey an account or narration (audible, visual and linguistic) of the whole sensorial sphere humans can experience. This sensorial whole consists of multiple perceptual and multisensory dimensions: beside hearing and sight (the main senses triggered by audiovisual texts), the three classical senses—taste, smell, and touch—have to be mentioned, as well as many other senses, referred to as introspection and proprioception (for example, how we feel, how we sense temperature and movement, etc.). How can audiovisual artifacts trigger sensations that do not stem from vision and hearing? Technological progress allows one to redefine the limits of representability of the real and of its complexity, as well as of human feelings and senses, and this through only two expressive spheres. This forces researchers to question what (still) remains unrepresentable, be it metaphorically or directly.

Today’s audiovisual languages are the result of how different media—movies, television, video clips, advertising, videogames, flash videos, or the Internet—have evolved inheriting, transforming and adapting the former modalities related to how we how to render, reconstruct and reinvent reality (opera, theater, concerts, press, feuilletons, etc.). Technological advances now allow us to capture and record the phenomenological world in high quality and with high-tech precision thanks to miniaturized, affordable devices (GoPros, smartphones, drones, live pens, etc.). The results of these virtually ubiquitous logging and recording activities roam from one repository to another: news channels, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, Viber, WhatsApp, or Blogospheres. Everything is instantly available to a potentially global audience: word documents with movies and sound; interactive keynotes; movies from webcams, hidden cameras, surveillance cameras, police or military, as well as simple snapshots taken with a smartphone can instantaneously be online and therefore “present”. There are no longer limits to the availability of audiovisual objects as a form of documentation, be it “historic” or “real time”.

While in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the audience was mainly passive and “received” information in very “defined” situations, now everybody can produce, without any difficulty, complex audiovisual material. And many do this on a daily basis. The transformation of phones into video cameras and audio recorders allows virtually anyone to shoot movies and record what happens around him/her. With advances in software, programming video and audio editing as well as manipulations of the smartphone, it becomes part of the real world.

As a result, the daily media practices do not only have consequences on aesthetics, but transform the way we transfer, share and manipulate information; and therefore alter, define, transmute social, political, ethical issues. Audiovisual objects shape, make perceptible, tangible, palpable, “real” “concrete” and “material” disasters, incidents, events. These objects are today essential to the construction of “reality”, not only at cognitive, but also at aesthetic level (Molino, 1975).

However, this does not imply or guarantee a better communication and dissemination of information and knowledge: immediacy often entails deception and cover-up, often triggered through an excessive emotionalization that prevents an addressee from being critical. Media contents are very efficient because of their capacity to triggering emotions and subjective involvement, making people react uncritically and on the spur of the moment: they make us feeling as if we were there, “real time witnesses” of crucial and unique events.

The notion of media witnessing (Frosh, Pinchevski 2014) refers to this very phenomenon put in place in and through media, even classical ones, that prevalently take advantage of user-generated contents (UGC), such as movies taken with smartphones. This form of production, dissemination and reception is the reason why nobody today can say that “he does not know” (Ellis, 2009).
One of the most iconic events where media witnessing has shown its impact, at least in our Western Societies, are the September 11 attacks in 2001. Media coverage of traumatic events, like the terrorist attacks in July 2005 (Belair-Gagnon, 2015), the Tsunami in 2004, the Haitian earthquake in 2010, the Arab Spring (2011–2012), or the recent events at the Bataclan in Paris (2015) or in Brussels (2016) is increasingly and essentially based on UGC: videos taken by witnesses and victims.

The proliferation of audiovisual recording devices has turned everyone into a potential producer of testimonies (Frosh and Pinchevsky, 2009). We are immersed in a “mobile recording culture” (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014). Its characteristics (e.g. subjective video footage, low-fidelity resolution) generate effects of presence and involvement that differ markedly from the traditional “objectivity” of traditional journalism. UGC induces in their audience a sort of corporeal feeling immanent to the reported events (Andén-Papadopoulos, 2013).

From a semiotic point of view, this raises different problems that go beyond the sensorial/sensitive and aesthetic dimensions and refer to/involves enunciative procedures, figurativity (figurativeness), discursivisation, narrative forms, effects of subjectivity, and so on. The developments of the audiovisual language do not only involve its internal semiotic aspects, but the new sociosemiotic roles it has acquired as well.

For all these reasons—paraphrasing the historic notion of symbolic effectiveness (Lévi-Strauss, 1963)—we could define as sensorial efficiency the effects the consumption of audiovisual artifacts triggers in recipients: the idea of presence, of direct witnessing, thanks to the force and immediacy as well the sensorial rendering typical of the new media. This efficiency has a significant impact on the processes of how we semiotically attribute and build values in our everyday reality. We can see this for example in the cinematic genre of documentaries about memorial sites or traumatic events linked to dictatorships, torture, mass killings, for instance (Demaria, 2012), or in the many attempts to reconstruct memory through audiovisual testimonies (Violi, 2014).

The improved sound recording quality of technological equipment allows the audiovisual language to amplify the rendering of subjectivity both through traditional media (even mimicking new media in films like The Blair Witch Project, USA, 1999) or new media. Immediacy is key to this dimension. Files can be uploaded and sent via WhatsApp, Viber or other messenger apps. Programs like Periscope (“explore the world through the eyes of somebody else”) allow even live transmissions and “stalking”.

New media models contribute thus to globalization and globality. Even more: they are meant to be and are global. Direct, immediate, and global communication and dissemination of content and experiences through photos, texts, sound and video messages are today the most common and preferred idiom (Van Dijck, 2007), and not only for the younger generations. YouTube videos, e.g., are produced worldwide and are accessed from anywhere by anyone. All this has had a profound impact on language and communication as a whole, and therefore not only on syntax and semantics. Pragmatics, gestuality, orality, sonority, and so forth are undergoing global changes. These mutations consent to bypass the traditional difficulties tied to written communication and translation.

The many changes that audiovisual artifacts, audiovisual languages, and their new forms of reception and communication have undergone oblige us to question the traditional concepts and conceptualization of audiovisual media as well as the constituents and characteristics of their languages. A profound and broad reflection that may redefine methodologies and theoretical approaches will have repercussions on general semiotics.

References


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Publishing Style Guide

**Document file format:** All texts must be submitted in .doc, .docx or .rtf format

**Author and Title:** Bold, left aligned. The first footnote must indicate the institutional affiliation of the author and their email address.

**Abstract:** Each article must include an abstract of 150 words max; font-size: 10; left and right indentation: 1.5 cm.

**Keywords:** Five keywords must be provided with the text (font size: 10; left and right indentation: 1.5 cm.)

**Text:** Font: Times New Roman; size: 12. Titles and subtitles must be numbered (1., 1.1., 1.2, 1.3. etc...) and left aligned. First level titles (1., 2., 3. etc..) must be in bold; second level titles (1.1., 1.2, 1.3, 2.1, etc.) must be in italics.

**Quotes:** If less than 3 lines: in-text citations, in inverted commas “…”. If more than 3 lines: separated from the text, without quotation marks, in Times New Roman 10.

**References and footnotes:** All references will be indicated in brackets inside the text, with name of the author, year of publication and number(s) of page(s), forerun by a colon, e.g. (Leblanc 2001: 45). All quotations must be included in the references. Footnotes are intended solely as explanatory notes.

**References:** The references in the main text: Author – Date. For example:

- Eco (1975) suggests that… Eco (1975: 200) suggests that…
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