CALL FOR PAPERS FOR A MONOGRAPHICAL ISSUE

Visual peritext: covers and other visual presentation strategies
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By *peritext*, within his categorization of literary works, Genette means the part of a paratext that is found "inside the text, within the space occupied by the volume itself, such as the title or preface, and sometimes inserted into the spaces between the lines of the text" (Genette, 1989, p. 6). In this special edition, we intend to reflect on a "boundary" peritextual element: the cover, textual synthesis par excellence, as well as a historically determined social practice of immense communicative importance.

The cover has three main functions: to protect, to decorate, and to promote, but it is particularly on this third aspect that the world of publishing has focused its attention. Genette, in fact, labelled the cover and editorial peritext "brand positioning", i.e. an "explicit and well-delimited region", which present readers with particular information, including the author's name, the title of the work or an illustration. The word brand clearly recalls advertising theory and identity creation literature, particularly the theories developed by Jean-Marie Floch who worked a great deal on visuals, seeing the brand as "a matter of trust, a contractual relation between individuals or, in semiotic terms, a fiduciary contract" (Floch, 2006, p. 208).

With the cover (which is emblematic of the peritext and a special kind of "branding") we find ourselves dealing with a production of additional meaning which at the same time is the embodiment the cultural object's meaning, providing a mediation space in which the reader can identify any adherence to (or rejection of) a system of values.

In theory, the cover appears to emerge as an intersemiotic translation of the literary text, as a direct visual interpretation distilled into a single page. In practice, however, it is subject to several statuses and spheres of meaning, as is the case with the predominance of particular iconography and graphics to identify literary genres (e.g. yellow for crime fiction, black for thrillers, etc. used by all Italian publishers), or a book's inclusion in a series, or of a graphic style which makes one particular publisher stand out from the rest.

Broadly speaking therefore, the relationship between text and peritextual elements appears to be an important issue when discussing the effectiveness of the images and iconographic myths which eventually become consolidated through modes of representation, in the alternation of "contraction" based on synthesis, and "extraction" based on synecdoche and subtraction (Baetens, 2005, p. 33 and ff.).

Moreover, covers seem to be exceptional places for meaning to take place and for mediation between the cultures for which they are created: partly due to what they convey, the narrative forms which they exhibit, the myths which they create, and partly due to the modalizing relationships which they produce with the other actants in the editorial system and in communicative systems generally, and

how these relationships are in turn inscribed within the covers themselves. Indeed, they represent a valid case study for the re-examination, in the light of Greimas's actantial theory, the relationships which hold between the subjects and objects of the communication as relationships between the actants in a narrative. In other words, following Latour's indications and attempting to bring them into this discussion (c.f. Latour in Landowski, Marrone, eds, 2002), covers, and peritexts in general, can be viewed as one of the actants to be considered within social interaction, and therefore necessarily analyzable as real social facts.

Additionally, this special issue intends to examine the usefulness of investigating "coverhood" status in other kinds of semiotic manifestations. Can Genette's concept of peritext be applied to other spheres, unrelated to publishing? Can this be done without changing the criterion that the peritext is all the things that exist physically around the text, in its immediate vicinity, and which both present and protect it?

For example, can the packaging of unprinted products be considered as peritext? Or can the "decorative veil" (in Leroi-Gourhan's words) donned by objects of design also play a peritextual function, or is it to be considered purely as part of the text?

As far as the graphic products mentioned here and the status of visual peritext and "coverhood" - which can encompass other types of semiotic manifestation - are concerned, we propose that semiotic theories and their application within an interdisciplinary perspective can help to shed light on the mechanisms which govern meaning and on the illocutionary power of this important form of visual meaning.

In summary, therefore, contributions are sought in three broad areas:

a) Studies regarding the visual/symbolic effectiveness of visual peritext, particularly connected to the social effect of the images;
b) Studies of intersemiotic translation regarding the relationship between text and visual peritext;
c) Possible new applications of the use of "coverhood" status, both within and beyond the sphere of publishing.

We hope that the research directions proposed here will contribute to the theory of "coverhood" status – defining and delimiting the epistemological framework of reference – as well as a philological reflection of the texts considered.

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