

Babeş-Bolyai University
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From novelistic to filmic discourse
***The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa –**
(a linguistic and semiotic approach)

Doctoral thesis

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Summary

Keywords: novelistic discourse, filmic discourse, film making, cinematographic language, textuality, linguistics of the text, “the negotiation” of meaning, intertextuality, intersemiotic translation, referentiality, textual configurations/networks, chronotope, actantial structure, event structure, enunciation, focus, free indirect speech, text features: reticular/pluricode/inferential/synergetic.

The critical reactions triggered by the setting of a novel to the screen, materialized, at best, in pertinent critical analyses, with tendencies towards valorization and axiology may generally be placed in two categories: some state that the film, as a “derived” product is inferior to the book that it transposes, while others consider that the new form of presentation constitutes an original artistic product, that alters the meaning of the initial text to a degree ranging, on a fidelity scale, from a strong reinterpretation to various degrees of content nuancing.

By setting forth a linguistic-semiotic analysis of the novel *The Leopard* by Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa and of the homonymous 1963 film, directed by Luchino Visconti, the approach in our thesis is aimed at defining the relations between the verbal text and the filmic text and, implicitly, between two semiotic systems with different structures and ways of functioning.

Our thesis highlights the common features and the differences between the two texts at the global interpretative level and is based on two main investigation axes: a) the nature of the signs and the specificities of the semiosis and b) the restructuring of certain narrative configurations (actantial, event related, spatial-temporal, enunciative) as part of the intersemiotic transposition process.

In the **first chapter**, that sets the semiotic and linguistic groundwork of the research, we briefly present the status of semiotics in the current cultural paradigm, we define the general notions of semiotics and we explain the role of verbal language within semiotics. Furthermore, we highlight the necessity of including this approach in the field of textual semiotics based on a process of meaning “negotiation”. We chose this perspective because, though we are indeed dealing with an *intersemiotic/intersystem* transposition, because film making actually concerns

texts rather than linguistic systems and the relation established between the source-text (the novel) and the target-text (the film) may be placed in the area of intertextual relations, seen as a “reverberation” of a certain text into another.

Our research is thus concerned on the one hand with the way in which the meaning of the novelistic text is shaped and on the other hand with the semiotic processes typical to the intersemiotic transposition act of the film. Favoring the dynamic side of the creation of textual meaning, the analysis has as a starting point the theoretical model adopted by Carmen Vlad in *Textul aisberg* [The text as an iceberg] in which meaning is defined by highlighting it as *reticular, inferential, pluricodic* and *synergetic*.

The aim of our approach is to *encompass and compare the dynamic of meaning in the novelistic text and of the filmic text in the Leopard* by describing the event-related, actantial, spatial-temporal and enunciative networks/configurations. Aside from certain principles related to structure and argumentative coherence, our choice was based on the degree of relevance of the transformations to which the said networks were submitted within the intersemiotic transposition, due to a recalibration of the message stemming from the alterations of the significant structures. These alterations are dictated by the rules of the new system of local and global connections typical to the cohesion-progression/coherence-pertinence phenomena of the filmic discourse in text form.

Thus, the intersemiotic transposition does not imply a punctual transfer of elements, structures and functions but rather a “mapping” of contents that will take new shapes and significant structures, proper to the new language (cinematographic), taking into account the overall configuration of the textual meaning. Therefore, the making of the film requires a process of meaning “negotiation”, present in all forms of “translation”.

Never thoroughly faithful to the source text, translation always involves a reference (to the translated text) in terms of *similarities/differences*, to which every translation-occurrence must find adequate values. The adapter (in this case, the director, the screenwriter, the producers of the film) becomes “the critical figure” which, taking into account the values of the source-text (the literary work), the context of the production and the end values of the target-text (the film), “negotiates” the textual meaning. The director is the one who “chooses”, “picks” out of the target-text (the film) those elements that may be transposed into the target-text, starting from the superstructural equivalences between systems that lie at the basis of translatability itself.

Seen as an object with a linguistic and a non-linguistic dimension assigned to the interrelation of the various significant configurations, the film appears as text, as a discursive structure that, going beyond a simple means of reproduction, was forced to construct its own specific way of meaning creation, due mainly to the requirement of storytelling.

Chapter 2 of the thesis starts by presenting the opinions of certain theoreticians with respect to the concepts of *language* and *tongue* in cinematography, it explains the relation between cinematographic language and verbal language and it highlights the textual status of the filmic object. In the second part, we describe and define the main significant structures of the cinematographic language.

In what the relationship between cinematographic language and verbal language is concerned, we believe it is important to emphasize the fact that the reference to a “natural language” ought not to target merely the structures of verbal language in general nor the structures of the tongue in question, but rather the identification of methods and procedures typical to the textual-discursive analysis, that is to say to approach the filmic object through the perspective of a text linguistics of meaning. We adhere to the requirement – set forth by recent theoretical studies (Basso, 2003; Bertetto, 2010 etc.) – to go beyond conventional approaches, mostly critical, of cinematography, by adopting a semiotic perspective of film analysis that stresses aspects related to the *effects of meaning* resulting from the plastic-figurative configurations and from the enunciative structures of the text.

Starting from superstructural equivalences pertaining to the field of a narrative, in depth, non-discursive grammar, the intersemiotic transposition of the novel into a film implies, in our opinion, the choice of certain paths of significance that, in trying to convey a great part of the source-text, must adapt or even invent their own significant structures proper to the new language, by the means of a continuous reassessment of the relationship with the overall textual coherence, as a reflection of the new vision about the world.

In the second part of the second chapter, we define the elements and the techniques typical to the cinematographic language, highlighting the relationship between their structural features and the meaning values that they bear, emphasizing notions and aspects such as *shot*, *camera movement*, *filming angle*, *ways of editing*, *shot links* etc., concepts that find their utility in the analysis of certain sequences of the film *The Leopard*.

The filmic text, structured in a visual code (that contains messages proper to various semiotic systems: colors, lighting, gesturing, mimics, proxemics, clothing etc.) and in three sound codes (speech, music, sound effects), is a pluricodic text that takes shape through the simultaneous perception of the various types of languages. As opposed to the novelistic text (words by excellence), in which elements of nonverbal semiotic systems may protrude solely in a verbalized form, the filmic text rejoices in the privilege of conveying messages through the superposition of significant heterogeneous structures that present themselves to the perception of the spectator simultaneously, thus contributing to the creation of the illusion of reality and rendering volume and three-dimensionality to the image.

The third chapter of our thesis explains the components of the pluricode (volume related) dimension of the text, the form acquired by the association of elements typical to various semiotic systems (music, gesturing, proxemics, visual arts) within Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's novel *The Leopard* through punctual references to the way in which some of these significant forms "take shape" within the film.

The hermeneutics of the verbal text, focused on the linguistic aspect, can only render the meaning of the work if associated with other subjects, with semiotics as a common ground, as their interpretation implies certain inferences in the form of continuous alternations from word to image, from text to gesture, from letter to painting etc.

The novelistic discourse is word by excellence but various elements belonging to nonverbal semiotic systems do protrude in the text, with a remarkable (invaluable) contribution to the shaping of the global meaning. Chapter three explains the functioning within the Lampedusian novel of sign syncretism – that, by the means of verbal language, refers to codes belonging to other semiotic systems (music, sign language, proxemic etc.) – and the degree to which their presence influences on the preservation of content equivalences within the intersystem transposition of the film. We also highlight the meaning values of sign language as used by the main character, Prince Salina and the proxemic relations between the various characters, as well as certain sign values of the symbolic spaces (the gardens, the palaces, Sicily).

Due to the impossibility to descriptively encompass all possible forms and functions of the nonverbal semiotic systems that surface in the novel *The Leopard*, a series of phenomena emerging in their convergence area (in the *suturing* space) are emphasized. Similarly, we also attempt to define the ways of verbal transposition of various nonverbal messages that "act" in a

syncretic, synergetic and synesthetic manner. All these phenomena may be captured only through inferential processes, within a pragmatic approach of the novelistic textual-discourse.

Inherent feature of any communicative structure that acquires the status of *text*, *i.e.* significant entity provided with a unitary meaning, the synergetic feature is the result of the collaboration of various networks and codes in the semiotic process of meaning “weaving”. The filmic text appears as a complex artistic way of expression, within which various iconic-plastic and sound codes are at work. Once more, as opposed to the verbal text the filmic text is able to highlight its own strongly synergetic and volume oriented feature due to which the spectator, under the impact of the illusion of reality, tends to convey the level of coherence proper to real life to the perceived content.

Chapter four presents precisely those aspects from which stems the capacity of the cinematographic discourse to create and to maintain the illusion of reality, insisting on the nature of the signs that lie at the basis of the two types of significant entities (the novel and the film) and on the specificities of the referential act. All this is an attempt to define the specific character of the communicative act implied by every individual text and to emphasize the added significance born at their confluence within the intersemiotic transposition process.

After enumerating the main theoretical directions of the cinematographic image, we assess the potential of the image as a system of significance in relation to the verbal language and we describe the referential process relative to two other significant systems, adjacent to the filmic text – photography and painting. The analysis of the said elements also highlights phenomena that are essential to the interpretation of the filmic image and to the presentation of the specificities of this textual entity (the film), in relation to the structures of meaning of the verbal text.

The discussion referring to the relation between the image and the verbal system is nuanced by the two nonlinguistic messages co-present in any image (the iconic uncoded message and the iconic encoded message) and by establishing the relation between the denotative and connotative level of the image. In the subsequent analysis of the various sequences of the filmic text, taking into account the relationship between the figural content of the images and the information appearing in the verbal discourse of the characters, we embrace the semiotic perspective which, by applying the peircean theory, acknowledges the presence within the cinematographic image of all three types of signs: iconic, indicative and symbolic.

Defined as a “simulacrum-image”, a “fiction-image”, the cinematographic image stands out firstly by the distinguishable aspects of its “image-in-movement” specificity. Any movement implies a perpetual transformation and thus belongs to the sphere of temporality. It is in this context of duration and transformation that film met narration and the global success of cinematography can be explained by its uncanny ability to illustrate the narrative configuration with which spectators tend to associate their own life experience.

Based on the premise of an “auroral” identity of narrative structures in the novelistic and the filmic texts, our thesis describes the way in which various forms and narrative functions take shape at a figurative level of the literary and filmic work respectively, following the transformations that occur, in the virtue of the specificities of the two textual objects within the space of the intersemiotic “translation”.

Chapter five of the thesis highlights the way in which the event-related, actantial and spatial-temporal networks/configurations are shaped in the novelistic text on the one hand and in the filmic text on the other hand, underlining the transformations that take place within the movie making process.

As the comparative study of the novelistic and filmic discourse starts from the narrative aspect of the two ways of reproducing the world at a significant level, we presents first of all several meanings of the notion of *narrativity*. Our thesis does not however set forth to produce a structuralist analysis of the two texts, the brief overview of the theories and models of the narration being based on the necessity of highlighting the importance of certain narrative elements and structures (“the cardinal pair” of functions *the lack of something/finding that something*, the actantial protagonist-antagonist relation), essential in shaping the global textual meaning.

Within the process of semiotic transposition, the director’s choices in terms of narrative content are dictated, in our opinion, by the requirements of the new discourse form. The filmic text-discourse must harmonize aspects related to a common denominator – *the narration as a discursive type* (situated at a superior level in terms of embracing various textual forms) – with aspects related to the specificities of cinematographic discourse-making and to the type of reception, in an attempt to offer a product (the filmic object) that has global coherence (which actually grants it a text status).

The analysis of the event network in *The Leopard* stresses the fact that, as opposed to the novel, the film a) chooses to eliminate the scenes with low relevance as concerns the narrative dynamism (that constitute, within the novel, merely the background of the main character's inner "battle", content conveyed by free indirect speech fragments); b) alters the order of certain events on the syntagmatic axis as well as the modality of their narrative insertion; c) alters the causal triggers of various actions; d) alters the quantity of information of certain short episodes from the novel.

All these alterations are required by the impossibility of finding an equivalent pair at the level of expression that is able to convey the same complexity of content. For instance, given the fact that the filmic text-discourse is not able to transpose (except partially by using other forms of discourse-making, such as the direct speech within various dialogues) the numerous fragments of free indirect speech, conveying the thoughts of the character concerning the political and social transformations of the time (the historical period is reflected within the novel as first of all a drama of conscience), an "exteriorization" of the phenomena is preferred, the film allotting an extended space to the battle scenes from during the revolution.

At the level of the spatial-temporal network, the specificities of the two texts, the novel and the film, reside mainly in the following: a) in order to convey the chronotope, the novel *The Leopard* uses representative descriptive fragments, auctorial or actor-related; for the majority of descriptive fragments we are witnessing the passage from an auctorial description to a description by the actors through a transfer of enunciative authority, marked at a textual-discursive level by the main character's opening towards a free indirect speech; b) the novelistic representative description updates three textual functions: the mimetic function, the mathesis function, the semiosis function; c) the mimetic description encompasses mathesic descriptions (usually mythological), that often slide towards an expressive description of ironic nature; d) in the representative description, actions with a semiosis function are included and are aimed at integrating the said descriptive fragment within the narration; e) to these functions we must add a super-function with an indicative role that sends back to an oblique metonymic or metaphoric description; f) the novelistic text illustrates the osmotic connection between characters and their vital space within fragments extended by metonymic representative descriptions; g) the novel updates a series of metaphorical isotopes that follow two different configurative models: the syntactic model (the death of monarchy, the dissolution of the aristocratic world) and the

semantic model (the death of the main character as a metaphor of reaching a celestial space, as pathway to the stars); h) even if, at the level of temporal relations, the film *The Leopard* does not rejoice in the suppleness typical to the alternation of verbal tenses within the written text, it does offer a fluid temporality, manipulating by the means of its own expressive techniques (various types of link shots or a rapid editing), in the various cases of anachronism, the transition from one temporal instance to another; i) the filmic text-discourse, image by excellence, has the privilege of dominating space thanks to certain features typical to the significant cinematographic features: the audio-video flow, the game shot – reverse shot, the depth of the shot, the movements of the camera etc.; j) in order to describe space, the film uses mainly neutral, objective shots, forward or lateral traveling using in very few cases subjective shots, which can indicate the point of view of the character – a phenomenon equivalent to the transfer of enunciative authority in the novel; usually, the camera accompanies the characters who cross various spaces, be they interior (the rooms of palaces) or exterior (the palace garden, Sicily – the way to Donnafugata, going chasing etc.), without allowing the eye of the character to take control; k) built from images-in-movement, the filmic text-discourse describes and simultaneously tells a story, mixing the spatial and temporal dimensions and transforming them into an indivisible conglomerate; l) the film updates most of the functions of description within the novelistic text but, as it rejoices in the privilege of narrating and illustrating at the same time, it does not need the effects of a semiosis function that would normally link the convergence spaces between narration and description; m) given de facto that the film sketches a way of unmediated communication between the characters and their space, the filmic image receives an almost permanent metonymic character; n) if, in what the novel is concerned, we may speak of metaphors as well as of metaphoric isotopes, the film presents a rather “metaphoric effect”, born out of a certain structuring of the content elements, often doubled by the fructification of certain technical values of the cinematographic equipment (primarily, the movements of the camera); the film *The Leopard* grants special importance to the metaphoric isotopes of the dissolution of the aristocratic class (conveying a certain magnitude to the narrative sequence of the ball at the Ponteleone palace in which certain images are stressed – as a symbol of decrepitude and of the passage towards death), that also suggest the demise of the main character.

The differences that appear at the level of components and relationships within the event-related, actantial and spatial-temporal networks of the two textual objects – the novel and the

film *The Leopard* – are also due to the strategies typical to the verbal discourse on the one hand and to the filmic discourse on the other hand as well as to the variety of attitudes of the different enunciative entities and their points of view.

Chapter six of the thesis describes the way in which the enunciative network is updated within the novelistic text and the transformations that take place at the level of this configuration in the intersemiotic transposition.

In order to define the terminological instruments used in our textual analysis, we briefly present the meaning of concepts such as *enunciation* and *narrative perspective* in the linguistics of the verbal text (here we go beyond the structuralist approach as we embrace a pragmatic approach of the enunciative phenomenon, allowing for concepts to be nuanced and for an analysis of various shapes to be performed) and respectively in the linguistics of film.

Starting from the *polyphonic analysis* of enunciations (linguistic support on which the semantic description is engraved; in other words *the polyphonic configuration*), the analysis of certain text samples of the novel *The Leopard* emphasizes the relation between the enunciative instances (mainly the narrator's and the main character's voices), as well as the relation between the enunciative instance and the entities responsible for various points of view updated within specific discursive structures. We highlight the insertion of the interior discourse of the main character, Fabrizio di Salina, (by emphasizing the textual markers of the transfer of perceptive authority) and the role of the free indirect speech (with the main character as enunciative source) in shaping the communicative network and of the polyphonic configuration but also in defining the global meaning of the novelistic text – phenomena subsequently related to the enunciative structure of the movie *The Leopard*.

Due to the different meanings of the concept *enunciation* within the cinematographic text-discourse, certain conceptual clarifications were necessary: as opposed to the enunciation phenomena typical to the verbal text, the film presents a multiplication of enunciative forms and structures the heterogeneity of which renders the definition of the concept even more complicated.

From the perspective of enunciative configurations, the comparison of the novel and of the film *The Leopard* highlights once more the differences between the two textual-discursive types with particular expressive values, the comparison emphasizing the great diversity of shapes

and of the focalizing and enunciative structures of the filmic text, due to its unitary pluricodic discursive character.

In the mean time, in both the case of the novelistic text-discourse and the case of the filmic text-discourse there is a strong connection between the temporal and the enunciative network. The temporal values and the narrative progression (the temporal game) are nonetheless rendered in different manners, according to the characteristics of the elements and of the significant structures typical to the two types of language.

The variety of significant structures typical to the filmic text allows for a multiplication, as opposed to the novel, of the enunciative and narrative focalization mechanisms that, along with the phenomena of enumerating the in-movement-images (the audio-video flow), reinforce the effect of the cinematographic device by the capacity of erasing as much as possible the traces of enunciation and to strengthen the illusion of reality: the film is a story which appears to tell itself and which, just like reality, is unpredictable and surprising.

The analysis applied to the novel of Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, and of the homonymous film, directed by Luchino Visconti, hints to a potential hermeneutical trajectory whose support pillars are the illustration of certain textual configurations/networks (with an increased impact on the shaping of the global meaning).

We emphasize meaning creation as a process by illustrating its reticular, voluminous and syncretic character and by stressing the textual structures and the meaning values of the temporal, event-related, chronotope and enunciative configurations/networks, and thus we illustrate in the movie the relationship between the two textual objects (the novel and the film) that highlight each other's value on the background of a dialogue that we defined as intersystemic, intersemiotic and intertextual.

Beyond this quest for textual meaning (both novelistic and filmic), taking place according to the principles implied by the competence required by the text itself and manifested through a complex system of textual strategies or instructions needed for the production of significant entities, there also are certain inferential aspects that differentiate the reception of the two types of text. We analyzed the latter in an *excursus* which takes the place of conclusions. Starting from a study by Nicole Everaert-Desmedt (1994) on the subject of *resemblance* and *similitude* in the work of Magritte and from the concept of *punctum* illustrated by Roland Barthes (2005), this

excursus launches a potential debate on the specific character of the cinematographic image revealed within the reception of the filmic text.