

## EXTENDED SUMMARY

# GREIMAS' SEMIOTICS IN DESIGN AND FASHION RESEARCH IN BRAZIL: SEPARATION AND MIXING BETWEEN DISCIPLINES

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Design and Fashion are both knowledge fields still under construction that adopt a self-declared “interdisciplinary” approach open to contributions from various disciplines, among which is Semiotics. Semiotics courses are included in the curriculum of several Design and Fashion Design bachelor's degree programs in Brazil, which points to an affinity between theories of meaning and creative activities. Semiotics presents itself as a study of the phenomenon of meaning that unfolds into different approaches. In France, the theorist Algirdas Julien Greimas, together with his collaborators from the *Groupe de recherches semio-linguistiques*, developed over four decades of study a theory of meaning that gradually came to permeate different areas of knowledge.

This article updates a collective research project entitled “Employment of A. J. Greimas' Semiotics in the areas of knowledge in Brazil: developments, conceptual and methodological deployments and appropriations”, which aimed to understand exactly how Semiotics puts itself “at the service” of various disciplines. After a first survey phase regarding the uses of Greimasian semiotics in Design and Fashion areas in Brazil (BOGO et al, 2017), this paper aims not only to complement such research, but also to analyze the problem of interdisciplinarity between Semiotics and other disciplines in Design and Fashion graduate programs.

Our research *corpus* are the doctoral theses and master's dissertations concluded up to 2019 in the 25 graduate programs in Design and Fashion in Brazil, filtered according to the use or mention of authors from the Discursive semiotic theory. We ask ourselves: does Semiotics, in these works, show itself as an ancillary discipline for learning processes? Our problem was to understand if and how Greimas' Semiotics presents itself in interdisciplinarity with the research developed in these graduate programs.

## 2 DEVELOPMENT

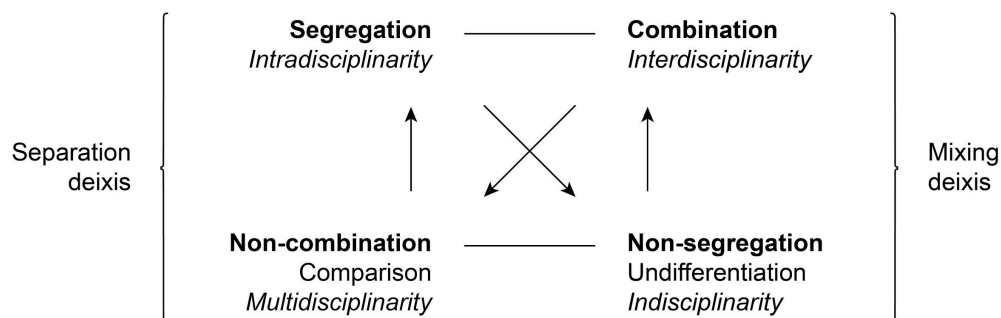
In the different databases in which each graduate program makes its thesis and dissertations available, we searched for the following terms (in Portuguese): “Structural Semiotics”, “French Semiotics”, “Discursive Semiotics”, “Sociosemiotics”, “Ethnosemiotics”, “Plastic Semiotics”, “Narrative Semiotics”, “Tensive Semiotics”, “Passions Semiotics” and simply “Semiotics” (in the last case, mentions referring to

other semiotic theoretical approaches, such as Peirce's Semiotics, for example, were disregarded). We also looked for the following authors, considered fundamental for the studies of this Semiotic approach: "Greimas", "Landowski", "Zilberberg", "Fontanille", "Floch", "Marsciani", "Hammad" and "Oliveira".

Out of a total of 2,854 theses and dissertations from the Design and Fashion areas available in the online databases, we found 90 works that used Greimas' Semiotics, which represents about 3.15% of the amount. Such "use" ranges from one-off quotes of the Lithuanian semiotician (or his collaborators and followers) to works in which the semiotic approach motivates the entire theoretical and methodological perspective of the research.

Based on the opposition between two different modes of scientific making, by sorting or by mixing, elaborated by José Luiz Fiorin (2008), we sought to categorize the ways in which Design and Fashion studies mix or distinguish themselves in relation to Greimas' Semiotics approaches. Thus, through the development of logical articulations, we arrived at two different modes of "separation" and two modes of "mixing" that configured a typology in the form of a semiotic square (figure 1).

Figure 1 - Typology of relations between disciplines



Source : the authors.

Regarding the combination mode (interdisciplinarity), we found some works in which the methodology of Greimasian Semiotics and the research methods of Design and Fashion converge. In these cases, there is a transfer of theoretical concepts and methodologies between research areas, which constitutes an interdisciplinary approach between Semiotics and Design. The studies that we

identified as interdisciplinary sometimes take a semiotic approach to analyze various objects (a production chain, a fashion brand, interaction design, among others), and other times they integrate the semiotic methodology in the design perspective to create new design tools.

Another procedure is that of “non-combination” or comparison (multidisciplinarity), one of the separation methods. This operation takes place when the same object of study is analyzed by several disciplines, putting different theoretical approaches in parallel. The purpose of the comparison is mainly to show the range or limitation of each distinct discipline. Some examples that we found compare the semiotic approach with ergonomic studies, or a semiotic analysis with tests on users, or they even compare a semiotization of “game” with philosophical approaches, in addition to some other works that compare different semiotic theories, especially those of Greimas' and Peirce's Semiotics.

The other mode of separation is segregation (intradisciplinarity), characterized by the closure of each area in itself, in which case other disciplines are called upon only in order to separate one domain from another. In this case, given the very principle of our data survey that already relates Semioticians' citations to the areas of Design and Fashion, we did not find relevant results of intradisciplinarity.

Finally, there is a “non-segregation” mode, i.e., the undifferentiation between disciplines, or “indisciplinarity”. Several studies that we found use certain semiotic concepts or semiotizations of different elements related to the universe of brands and fashion, as well as definitions of language and meaning, without indicating that what is being mentioned is a semiotic approach. Most of the results we found in our survey are characterized by this undifferentiation, which also occurs between different semiotic theories.

### **3 CONCLUSION**

In general, we found in our research a greater number of results making use of mixing procedures instead of separation procedures. Mixing seems to be a characteristic feature of Brazilian culture, reflected in various modes of creation, whether in research or in the practice of Brazilian designers. The predominance of mixing modes also highlights the interdisciplinary nature of the areas of Design, Fashion and Semiotics.

Among the results that we found, some studies appear to take a more interdisciplinary approach, using Greimas' Semiotics to try to build new theoretical models that would assist design practices and research in the areas of Design and Fashion. This seems to be a promising but still little explored path in Brazil. In these cases, what occurs is something commonly referred to in Semiotics as "semiotization". In short, "to semiotize" something is to understand the analyzed phenomena through Greimas' Semiotic perspective, as if the discipline could offer a "worldview" (LANDOWSKI, 2001) that illuminates the various objects of study.

The studies that took a multidisciplinary approach, comparing areas of knowledge, also showed a promising perspective: they could help designers and researchers to choose, among the existing theoretical-methodological tools from various disciplines, those that best serve each type of research or design project. Cases of indisciplinaryity, on the other hand, are often problematic, as they do not indicate precisely which theory they resort to, which is usually seen as a lack of scientific rigor.

Given the quantitatively limited result of doctoral theses and master's dissertations found in our research, we realized that there is still a great field to be explored regarding the use of Greimas' Semiotics in Design and Fashion Brazilian research, which may be due to the lack of this approach in the curriculum of these programs. There is still a long way to go in order for this theoretical "worldview" to have greater reach and to be better understood in the various areas of knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

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