

**(RE) DESIGNING FASHION CONTEXTUAL STUDIES: A
GENERATIVE VIEW OF SOCIO-SEMIOTICS IN CREATIVE HIGHER
EDUCATION**

***(Re)criar Fashion Contextual Studies: uma visão gerativa da Sociossemiótica
no ensino superior de Moda e Design***

***(Re)créer Fashion Contextual Studies: une conception générative de la
Sociosémiotique dans l'éducation de Mode et Design***

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ABSTRACT

The article presents the case for pedagogical approaches in Arts and Design Higher Education that are not informed exclusively by Pedagogy, but growing around Socio-semiotics which ceases to be a theory of critical analysis, to become a tool explored in its generative potential to construct, in reverse, practices that will be put into discourse. From programme design to the delivery of face to face and online sessions with students, the programme constituting the main case of this work was idealised, designed, and delivered utilising the principles of Greimas' semiotics (1986, 1987, 2002; GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993) concerning the analysis of discourses, and the theories of interactions developed by Landowski (2004, 2005, 2009, 2010) and Oliveira (2002, 2013). The bridge created between those theories and Freire's (1970) Critical Pedagogy permitted to explore different modes of presence in the classroom, which transformed the roles of tutor and student, as well as the contents of the course. Seeing Higher Education beyond economic exchanges welcomed the construction of an attitude toward knowledge that surpasses the idea of "skill transfer", cultivating adjustments which aim at the union between different subjects, resulting in the teaching of theory reaching beyond the writing of essays and becoming an integral part in the making of design. Through the transformations of interactions between the tutor, students, and the course contents, the model presented in the article invites a reflection on the importance of semiotic concepts in the process of constructing educational practices that "make sense".

Keywords: Socio-semiotics; Fashion Education; Discursivisation

Resumo

O artigo apresenta uma abordagem pedagógica no Ensino Superior de Artes e Design que não se pauta exclusivamente na Pedagogia, mas se desenvolve em torno da Sociossemiótica que deixa de ser uma teoria de análise crítica para se tornar uma ferramenta explorada em sua visão gerativa, construindo práticas que serão colocadas em discurso. Da concepção do programa à entrega de atividades presenciais e online, o programa que constitui o caso principal deste trabalho foi idealizado, concebido e entregue utilizando os princípios da semiótica de Greimas (1986, 1987, 2002; GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993) no que se refere à análise dos discursos, e as teorias das interações desenvolvidas por Landowski (2004, 2005, 2009, 2010) e Oliveira (2002, 2013). A ponte criada entre essas teorias e a Pedagogia

Crítica de Freire (1970) permitiu explorar diferentes modos de presença em sala de aula, transformando os papéis de professor, aluno, e mesmo dos conteúdos do curso. O olhar do Ensino Superior para além das trocas econômicas acolheu a construção de uma atitude em relação ao conhecimento que ultrapassa a ideia de “transferência de habilidades”, cultivando ajustes que visam a união entre diferentes sujeitos, resultando em um ensino da teoria que supera a escrita de ensaios e se torna um parte integrante na elaboração do design. Por meio das transformações das interações entre tutor, alunos e conteúdos da disciplina, o modelo apresentado no artigo convida a uma reflexão sobre a importância dos conceitos semióticos no processo de construção de práticas educacionais que “fazem sentido”.

Palavras-chaves: Sociossemiótica; Educação em Moda; Discursivização.

Résumé

L'article présente une approche pédagogique dans l'enseignement supérieur des arts et du design qui n'est pas exclusivement éclairée par la pédagogie : cette approche se développe autour de la Socio-sémiotique qui cesse d'être une théorie de l'analyse critique et devient un outil, exploré grâce à son potentiel génératif. De sa conception aux lectures en face à face et en ligne, le programme constituant le cas principal de ce travail a été idéalisé et conçu dans les principes de la sémiotique de Greimas (1986, 1987, 2002; GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993) et les théories des interactions développées par Landowski (2004, 2005, 2009, 2010) et Oliveira (2002, 2013). Le pont créé entre ces théories et la pédagogie critique de Freire (1970) a permis l'exploration des modes variés de présence qui ont bouleversé les rôles de professeur et d'élève, ainsi que le contenu du cours. L'enseignement supérieur, vu au-delà des échanges économiques, a accueilli la construction d'une attitude à l'égard des connaissances, celui qui le fait dépasser l'idée de « transfert de compétences ». D'ailleurs cette nouvelle vision permet de cultiver des ajustements qui visent l'union entre différents sujets et aboutit à un enseignement de la théorie qui dépasse la rédaction d'essais et devient un partie intégrante de l'élaboration du design. À travers les transformations des interactions entre le professeur, les étudiants et le contenu, le modèle présenté est une invitation à réfléchir sur l'importance des concepts sémiotiques dans le processus de construction de pratiques pédagogiques qui « font sens ».

Keywords: Socio Sémiotique; Education en Mode; Discursivisation.

1 INTRODUCTION

In 2016, I joined the University for the Creative Arts (Epsom, UK) as the Contextual and Critical Studies² subject leader with the BA (Hons) Fashion Course. With no degrees in Fashion whatsoever – but carrying my MPhil thesis in Communication and Semiotics which investigated the Corset in the West, as well as over 13 years of experience as a Costume Designer and Maker – I embraced a multilayered challenge: to teach in an extremely internationalised environment, responding to very specific market needs and a competitive setting heavily reliant on satisfaction scores, while responding to the desire of intersecting my multiple experiences and my fragmented, interdisciplinary qualification in the redesign of three course modules.

From all my theoretical and professional baggage, my years working as a Fashion designer and researching the subject, as well as my postgraduate certificate in Education were probably not the most significant attributes I brought into this post: it was my background in Socio-semiotics, a theory I was still relatively new to, which proved to be the cornerstone of my practice, from programme design to student facing activities. In the course of my most active years at the Socio-semiotics Research Centre (CPS) during my MPhil at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, I had studied mainly the body and dress dynamics, as well as the manners in which Semiotics could be used in the understanding of space. That experience taught me to see Semiotics – particularly Landowski's proposition of regimes of interaction – as a “theory of everything”: if an epistemology so multiple can contribute to the understanding of a broad range of objects, the beginning of my journey as a subject leader started with the interrogation about the possibility of using the theories I knew in reverse, to *generate* practice, rather than analysing texts. The following sections will present some key concepts from the theory which formed my address of Creative Pedagogy, focusing mainly on my practice of UK Higher Education in a Fashion programme, designing, planning and teaching the units “Introduction to Fashion

² In the UK, where new Universities offer degree courses that are oriented towards technical skill transfer, the theoretical elements of BA courses are often condensed into one, multidisciplinary module that focuses the development of essay writing, and culminates in the dissertation (which is not the main final major project). In Arts and Design programmes, this module often includes History of Art, History of Fashion (or Design), and other disciplines from the Humanities which are relevant to the degree – such as Philosophy, Feminist theory, Gender theory, Post-structuralism, and so on.

History and Theory,” “Theories of Culture, Identity and Communication,” and “Dissertation.”

The core matrix of my pedagogical practice starts at two seminal works: Paulo Freire’s (1970) *Pedagogia do Oprimido* [*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*], a fundamental piece in awakening my desire to become an educator which preceded the beginning of my academic career; and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1963) *La Pensée Sauvage* [*The Savage Mind*], a work that in one way or another marks the semiotic writings from the authors informing my personal research—such as Algirdas Julien Greimas, Eric Landowski, Jean-Marie Floch, and Ana Claudia de Oliveira. Freire’s Critical Pedagogy and his proposition of dissolving the fixed binary “teacher-student” created a lasting impression on me, particularly because his ideas appeared to be in correspondence with what I had experienced in my Secondary Education in a Socio-constructivist school, and during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Brazil. On the other hand, the inventiveness of Lévi-Strauss *bricoleur*, besides providing an image for a manner of doing research, is also the perfect image of my personal practice, both as an artist and an academic: from my literal collection of fragments in my costume design work to the metaphoric collage of concepts and research corpuses that populated my work as a researcher. Not by chance, the concept of the *bricoleur* is also vivid in writings about Fashion (DIEDERICHSEN, 2006; FLOCH, 1995; GECZY, 2012; HEBDIGE, 1979), marking the union of those two works as the niche in which my practice exists and is made possible.

The pursuit of my pedagogic bricolage led me from the roots of Brazilian Critical Pedagogy to the multiple developments of Freire’s dissemination in the US and UK education, where his idea of the “oppressed” became an emblem for minorities and disadvantaged groups of all sorts. One of the central objectives of those works is to debate the importance of making education *about* students’ lives, cultures and identities, which permits the construction of active engagement emerging from the partaking in the role of making the learning context, elevating students to “co-creators” of knowledge (WAMBA, 2010). His work will equally reappear in writings about creative education, particularly in the blending of Design Thinking with pedagogic practice, both to promote “intuitive learning” and “intuitive insight” which are, little by little, becoming fashionable concepts among educators who seek to utilise these tools as sophisticated forms of processing information (RINGEL, 2004), but likewise in the construction of chained “plateaus”, each one building the foundation to the next: learning, making

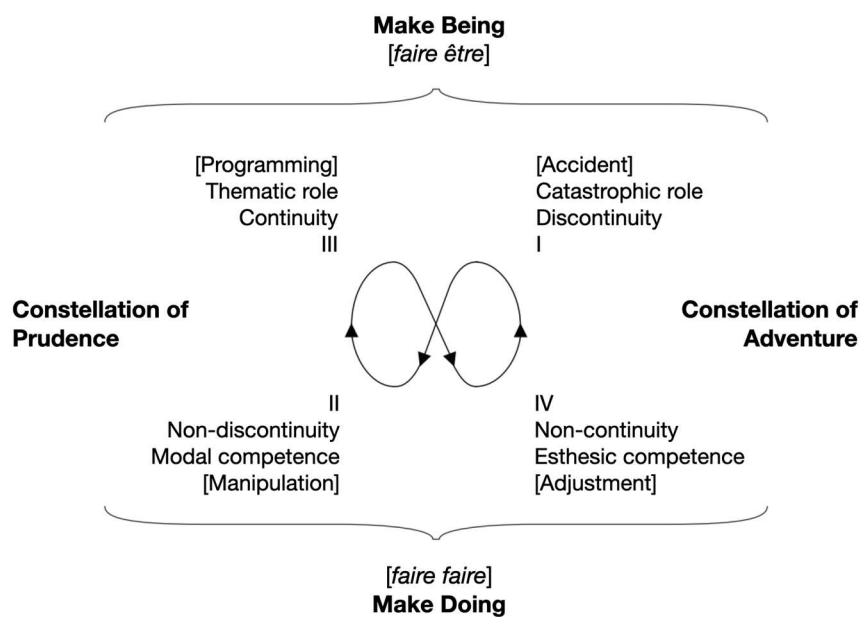
connections and contextualising knowledge, and appraisal; those steps aim, again, at the construction of learning through action and practice, encouraging the collaboration between peers but, equally, between tutors and students (WRIGLEY & STRAKER, 2017), continuing to build on the importance of dissolving hierarchies and suppressing the distance in-between the different agents involved in the act of teaching and learning. Finally, the problem of power imbalances invested in the figures of “student” and “teacher”, particularly in their consequences to evaluations, assessments, and the problem of “ranking” pupils (REYNOLDS & TREHAN, 2000) appear as a “branch” of concepts presented in *Pedagogia do Oprimido [Pedagogy of the Oppressed]* (FREIRE, 1970).

Although the set of pedagogic theories is often portrayed as something existing outside of philosophy and addressing issues that are distinct from other fields and theories, the problems concerning Socio-semiotics – and the texts informing the present article in particular – are not only very close to those matters but, furthermore, capable of presenting solutions which surpass the possibilities of Education theories. More than permitting an analytical approach of Pedagogy – that is, being utilised as a tool to critique pedagogic practice – Semiotics and its multiple concepts can become a tool in itself, no longer a theory of critical analysis, but a guide to constructing praxes in Education.

Landowski’s vast body of work addressing the problem of interactions (LANDOWSKI, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2010, 2013) is one of the key theories informing my “practical practice” as an educator, particularly when it comes to my quest in taking the relations in the classroom from *programme* to *adjustment*. In *Les interactions risquées [The risky interactions]*, the binary “operation/manipulation” from the standard theory is unfolded into four regimes of interaction (figure 1) – programming, manipulation, adjustment, and accident (LANDOWSKI, 2005) – which are anchored in different narrative utterances made possible through the embodying of different roles and competences: besides the thematic roles and modal competences from the standard theory (GREIMAS, 1983; GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993) which appear connected to the regimes of programming and manipulation respectively, Landowski builds on the possibility of catastrophic roles, resulting in accidents and assentiments; and in interactions invested with esthetic competence, resulting in adjustments or unions which unfold into relations that *make feel* (LANDOWSKI, 2005). The regime of adjustment appears, in his work, as a mode of interaction surpassing the strategies

and the exchange of values: the actants are in an interaction whose value is the contact in itself – pure relation, independent from economic exchanges. The possibility of creating a space and relations in the classroom that would be closer to this manner of interaction, contradicting the multiple programmes which seem to govern the majority of relations in Higher Education today, became the ideal I pursued when designing my syllabuses and learning environments.

Figure 1 – Landowski’s schema of the regimes of interaction.

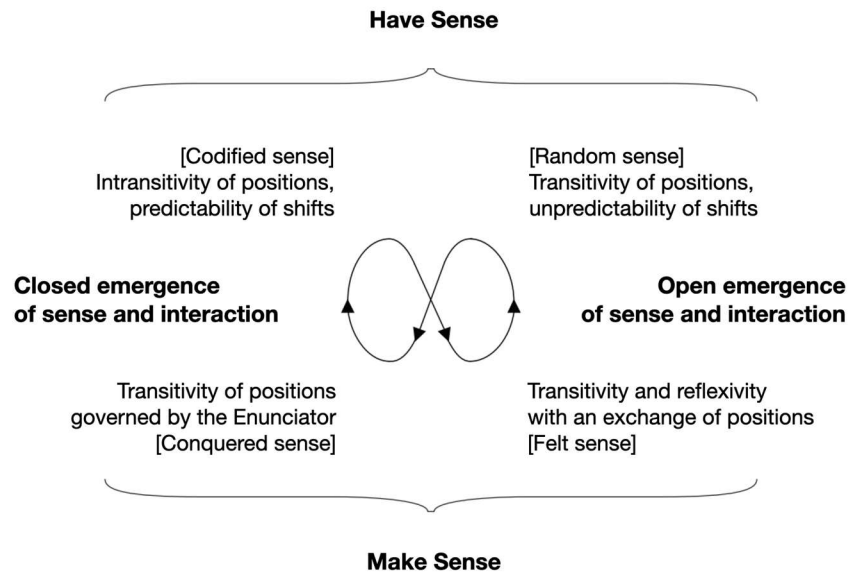


Source: elaborated by the author.

However, beyond (or before?) the designing of relations of presence and interaction, the act of teaching and learning is also a matter of construction of meaning happening in the realm of the discursive interactions and the different modes in which sense can be given and constructed. In “As interações discursivas” [“The discursive interactions”], Oliveira presents a model (figure 2) in which different relations between the Enunciator and the Enunciatee unfold into distinct productions of sense, which can be coded, conquered, random, or felt (OLIVEIRA, 2013, p.45-7). Such modes are necessarily linked to the matter of which roles the subject plays in their interactions producing discourses but, equally, in the problem of whether those roles are fixed – as is the case of the codified sense, which brings the predictability of those positions – or transitive – meaning the roles can be exchanged in manners that are either governed

by the Enunciator (conquered), or through open interactions which can be unpredictable (random) or emerging from a reflexive union of both subjects (felt).

Figure 2 – Oliveira's schema of the discursive interactions.



Source: elaborated by the author.

To reflect on the role of education and the manners in which knowledge can be communicated to an audience is necessarily a reflection on the matter of how things are put into discourse. With that in mind, the article is sectioned utilising the three sub-components of discursivisation: time, space, and person (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993), presenting the manners in which the markers informed the generation of a programme and the praxes leading it into its realisation in lectures, seminars, and assessments. The generation – rather than examination – of those markers will permit a theoretical exposition of the multiple discursive mechanisms the theory utilises for the analysis of communication, such as the various operations through which effects of distance and proximity are constructed, as well as the possibility of interchanging the roles forming the interactions through which contact and exchanges take place.

Our journey through the mechanisms of discursivisation and interactions in the classroom starts at *Sémantique Structurale [Structural Semantics]* (GREIMAS, 1986) as the foundation of programme design, but its destination is Greimas' last individual work (GREIMAS, 1987): to present fractures in the hope of cultivating a taste for the "expectation of the unexpected" which, in my practice, became both the construction of the pleasure of reading and writing, and the construction of an open

attitude that travelled beyond the theory classroom, contaminating the work in the studio. In her preface to *Da Imperfeição* [*On Imperfection*], Oliveira addresses the problem of depth meaning intimacy, which leads to the importance of constructing a semiotics of corporeity (OLIVEIRA, 2002). By utilising this corpus of theories in the construction of a programme, this work aims at taking those statements one step further, by arguing the importance of intimacy and proximity in education, perhaps now more than ever, as we approach the age of distance learning.

2 TIME

Time is a central issue – for both philosophy and Higher Education settings – not only the “continued progress of existence” predicted by the dictionary but, literally, the time of the clock that governs our contracts, the use of rooms, auditoriums and studios, and each moment allocated to individuals. Equally, time goes hand in hand with financial pressures – both the ones imposed on students, which are inversely proportional to the opportunities of funding and incentives; and the institutional ones claiming for satisfied customers, employability, and graduate achievement – and, as a result, universities overflow with Bachelor and Master students in search for the long-dreamed degree carrying the promise of a career, while the courses get shorter, bringing the challenge of how to deliver a thorough exploration of the chosen subjects in modules containing a reduced number of contact hours and sessions.

In Heidegger, we find the affirmation of time as “... the horizon for all the understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it” (HEIDEGGER, 1962, p.39) – a vision which substantiates what Ehrmantraut (2010) presents as a “philosophic pedagogy” unfolding around the concept of *dasein*: literally “being-there”. In our project of constructing pedagogic practice that is informed by semiotic and philosophic writings, side by side with Critical Pedagogy, the concept of temporality from the standard theory carries similar importance: through the production of “effects of temporality”, the temporalisation of discourse transforms a narrative organisation in “history” (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993:388) – a fundamental step in the challenge of delivering programmes which aimed at being comprehensive (some of them History syllabuses) in a reduced number of one-hour sessions. Face those difficult tasks, the question was not “how to do it?” but “how to avoid sacrificing depth?”

History and its study are essentially a temporalised regard of events – the past as a “then” to which we can look back – but also the operation of inscribing events (or objects, artworks, writings) in time, reconstructing narratives that were once acts unfolding in the present. However, the study of History in the time of History is progressively becoming a luxury, as research projects are granted increasingly shorter deadlines and, as mentioned above, the limited contact time to deliver a syllabus often poses constraints to the content. Notwithstanding, such issues were not new to me: they were essentially the same faced during my MPhil in Communication and Semiotics – namely, the task to analyse a 350 years-long corpus in a two-year project – which meant I had already learned the answer: it resided in Greimas’ *Sémantique Structurale* [*Structural Semantics*] (1986), and his proposition for the selection of the corpus, delimiting sections that are representative, exhaustive, and homogeneous. If these three criteria provided a viable solution for dealing with large volumes of samples in a research corpus, the contrary seemed to be plausible: to utilise the same criteria in reverse, working the other way around in the selection of contents attending to the same principles.

On the side of accommodating time restrictions, the curation of a syllabus attending Greimas’ criteria proved to carry pedagogic advantages, encouraging students to continue their pursuit of knowledge independently – a central issue in Higher Education today. The criteria of exhaustivity, for example, stipulates that the analysis must start with a “provisory” corpus, which is representative, to then test the pertinence of the results to the rest of the sample (GREIMAS, 1986). My programme design aimed precisely at that objective: to provide, through my selection of contents and cases, the part 1 of projects, whereas the second part was delegated to the students, through their own research projects: to continue testing the contents and theories I presented by inviting their own contribution to the programme via their independent research, as well as the construction of their own bridges.

Besides assisting the stretching of the course’s clock-time by maximising the contact time and allocating part of the learning to independent research which, in its turn, could be tailor-made to each individual’s interests and personal trajectories in the course, that approach also linked to another problem of time: the sectioning of events and particular moments I would utilise in my reconstruction of the past. As a “History in detail” was ruled out by the delivery hours and course structures in place, the curation of contents necessarily returned to the matter of synchrony and diachrony,

or two criteria of reunion of an ensemble of facts (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993, p. 374). Although the concepts were presented by Saussure having linguistic facts in view, Landowski substantiates their use in the analysis of Society, as criteria for delimiting ruptures or “slices of lived life” (LANDOWSKI, 1992). In the study of History for Creative courses, Landowski’s take becomes the delimitation of significant moments in the past, curated both in their diachrony – the significant ruptures constituting well delimited periods and movements – and synchrony – the simultaneities, or places where different isotopies overlap. Such divisions act as a “provisory” History, incomplete by design: it is up to the student to select which sections deserve to be explored more in-depth, further *practised* in their individual projects, both in theory and in the studio.

The use of Greimas’ criteria side by side with the concepts of synchrony and diachrony revolved around providing students with significant fragments that can be used both in the reconstruction of contents through their own independent practice but, likewise, to reconstruct something else. Our temporality, thus, becomes a sort of “time of the bricoleur” or a “bricolage-time” – a perhaps unorthodox reference to Lévi-Strauss’ concept. As he states, the result of a bricolage is never what the bricoleur initially intended which, he substantiates, is precisely where the poetry and ingenuity of the bricoleur reside (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1963); similarly, for Floch, this “coherent deformation” of the initial project not only adds meaning to the undertaking but acts as a protest against the erosion of significance (FLOCH, 1995, p.7). From the point of view of a module in a creative BA course, that deviation is highly desirable, as it allows for creative practice to interpenetrate the teaching and learning of theory, without compromising the theoretical rigour: some might even call it “innovation”...

Beyond the time of the clock, which occupied this section so far, Semiotics is also concerned with the temporalisation of the discourse, or the description of temporal localisation and the use of the mechanisms of shifting in [*embrayage*] and shifting out [*débrayage*] to organise and establish temporal successions so as to establish temporal frames where the narrative structures can unfold (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993). While such mechanisms, as tools of analysis, aim at grasping the “effects of time” in a given text, their conceptualisation is useful in the efforts of constructing such effects of time: not only the delimitation of different times, “now” and “then”, acting as markers of the History and Theory we study, but the different temporalities of each project, as well as the different times of the subject(s).

One of the outcomes of such reflection – and also the result of a bricolage – was the consideration of the multiple issues linked to time and its management, such as intuitive learning, emotional intelligence and mindfulness, which have slowly penetrated the realm of education, particularly Higher Education, where an epidemic of mental health issues poses an important challenge to tutors and supporting staff. Such concerns brought about another facet of my personal experience, my own struggle with attention deficit, and my own practice of mindfulness meditation which was proved – empirically, but also by scientific studies – to improve problem-solving insight (CAPURSO, 2014). To start each session not with introductions and presenting the content straightway, but in a state of pause, paying attention to the breath: can't we name such an act as discursive engagement [*embrayage*], erasing all markers of discourse to construct a radical effect of presence (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993), one that, perhaps, places the body in a state of “expecting the unexpected”? (GREIMAS, 1987) Following that insight, we incorporated the practice of pausing and breathing together for one minute at the start of each session, with the aim of bringing us all, as a group, back to a mutually agreed *now*, our “now”, preparing our minds (and bodies!) to construct a *here*.

3 SPACE

Particularly in 2020, when an abrupt transition to digital learning environments occurred, the problem of space became even more pivotal to the co-production of knowledge, inside and out of the classroom. In the *Dictionnaire*, spatialisation is defined as the spatial localisation of the discourse and its description, which can be shifting out (through the instalment of those categories in the discourse) or shifting in (by suspending the markers of space); equally the concept is linked to the organisation of a more or less autonomous space, where narrative programmes and their sequences can unravel (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993, p. 358). The two fundamental markers of spatialisation are “here” and “elsewhere”, notions that are not as clearly defined as one might think, when it comes to the space of learning. For example: one can be “materially” present in space, but existing elsewhere – by engaging with their social media accounts, or sleeping, or daydreaming about their other classes and work that needs to be done in the studio, and so forth – and, equally,

to be materially elsewhere – such as when a session takes place on Collaborate, Zoom, or any other distance meeting tool – but to be fully committed to a “here” that is virtual, independent from a shared material space.

Hence, the problem of space relates not only to the classroom (and its materiality or virtuality) but also to the different modes of coming-into-the-space. In that sense, Landowski’s problematisation of the space regimes (LANDOWSKI, 2010) is pivotal, in which it can be used to describe what happens in the space once we are there, and the different modes of interaction which lead us into that particular space. When it comes to teaching theory to cohorts in Arts and Design courses – undiplomatically packaged as “creative courses” in the UK, as if every other field of study existed outside the confines of creativity – the Programming–Adjustment contradiction becomes one of particular interest, being the trajectory leading to the majority of my efforts as a tutor, chiefly because this operation of denial, from perfect continuity to non-continuity (see figure 1) seems to be the space in which the “becoming present” occurs.

On the one hand, the regime of programming (LANDOWSKI, 2005) or, in spatial terms, the *fabric* (LANDOWSKI, 2010), appears as the ideal mode of interaction from an institutional point of view. In the fabric syntax, students apply, get an offer, enrol, pay fees, come to class, learn, produce exciting work that gives universities a good name, happily graduate with high satisfaction scores, and all that allows for the continuity of this cycle: high scores attract more good students who will repeat those steps, and thus forth. The reality, however, is messy and, more often than not, students come into this space with a lot of baggage: language difficulties, learning gaps and, more than anything, one form or another of mental health issues or special learning needs. The ideal student as part of the fabric, then, is confronted with the series of accidents – or the *abyss* – constituting the conflict of their personal, parallel journeys with the heavily regulated space of Higher Education, and the demands and challenges that end up aggravating these obstacles even further.

Beyond those issues, however, another spatial matter posed an obstacle to the construction of a “here” where the complete presence can unfold: that is, the material space, its use and its practice. The UCA campus where I teach, former Epsom & Ewell School of Art founded in 1896, possesses facilities built for a completely different model of education, far from aligned with the 21st-century ideals of “creative education”. The “theory” lectures and seminars I teach, although now delivered online

until further notice (due to COVID-19 Government guidelines), used to be timetabled in a pompous auditorium with two big screens behind the lecturer, a pulpit, and the students all facing the front, arranged in rows and columns – flattering for the tutor’s ego, no doubt, but hardly the best environment for instigating debate and *active* engagement with learning. Not to mention: a space where the (spatial as well as symbolic) distance between student and teacher is stretched – a deepening of the abyss?

After a conversation in the pub (and institutional battles I will spare the reader), I discovered the audience area was equipped with a retracting mechanism that permitted the chairs to be pushed back, creating a void area. A daily event for Contextual Studies, the “retracting of the chairs” became part of the transition from lecture to seminar: we can sit in an “audience” to see the lecture, but at 11 am we gather (me included!) to help the technicians to retract the mechanism, assemble pop-up tables, and arrange chairs in a more debate-friendly structure: a large square or rectangle, depending on the number of students, where we can face one another and be placed in close *proximity*. In due time, students discovered they had complete agency over the shape of the room: I first suggested the rectangle, the format familiar to me from my own university education but, on occasion, the group responsible for introducing the texts that week had rearranged the room to their liking while I was having my break; they understood that, not only space played a role in the ways we interact with one another, but that it is part of their role in the “learning agreement” to take charge of the experience, working around every detail that will facilitate the communication of their ideas.

Likewise, the arranging (and disarranging, with the afternoon group which was responsible for returning the room to its original state) of space became a moment in-between, in which the hierarchies of “tutor” and “student” are completely suspended, promoting an equalitarian area of collaboration, creating “togetherness” – perhaps an intersecting point of Freire’s theory and Landowski’s idea of *adjustment*. That notion of contact without economic exchange becomes fundamental in recovering two forms of empowerment – of the educator and educatee as subjects, as well as of education itself – which seem to be lost in a context where education is managed as a business transaction, dangerously transforming courses in commodities and students in customers. One of the objectives of my practice seems to be precisely the reinvention of a space in which the economic relations are suspended – both literally, as a

temporary forgetting about paid fees, and equally the economic relations from the standard theory, through removing the emphasis on *results* (both the institutional goals and the individual ranking) to reconnect with the idea of *process*: rather than focusing on the acquisition (or loss) of objects of value, this suspension occasions the possibility of a being-together that contains in itself the value of being-there.

The practice of space, thus, also becomes a metaphor for the other practices that can unfold in that space we created: if an auditorium can become a void, that can be filled with chairs and tables that we have the power to arrange in whatever shape we want, isn't that the case with the contents we learn, the theories we debate? In my lecturing, the void room – a zero-degree – became an allegory of the contents themselves or a delicate meeting point of “theory here” and “theory elsewhere”. The books “there” – in the library, often untouched – possessed an aura of inaccessibility, particularly for students coming from a less privileged background, often seeing this type of knowledge as elitist and middle-class, a tool of oppression rather than empowerment. Bringing those texts back to the *here*, shifting in the theory as the present, being uttered in the act (rather than “deciphered” or “decoded” from a finished text) reinstated the idea of the contents as a present entity, part of the same *here* as the students and myself, deconstructing its “aura” and transforming it into something that happens here (and now), not as a finished structure but as a project *in process*.

The possibility of articulating those presences together are at the root of what would permit the emergence of the adjustment or the *volute*: a spatial regime evoking the image of a vortex one cannot approach without being dragged in (LANDOWSKI, 2010). In this presence with theory, even the sceptics couldn't stop themselves from engaging: something said that either inspired or outraged them – for Landowski, the adjustment can be both positive, causing mutual accomplishment, or negative, effecting mutual destruction (LANDOWSKI, 2010) Such adjustments can emerge from the union of what I said in a session with their own experiences or, even, in a personal level, the union of their existence with mine. Rather than teaching “correct theory”, I am more interested in seeing how a text can inspire a student to do something in their design or written work, while also teaching a thing or two about how to look at things, how to appreciate a work of art (or a piece of literature...) and, more importantly, how to carry those skills from input – the receiving of content, aesthetic enjoyment, and so on – to output – to *create* from a critical place. That interpenetration of spaces, then, becomes what I view as critical practice: to allow for the theories to enter us, but also

to enter them (the theories) with our practice. To allow for this bilateral contact – rather than just “receiving information” – is central to what I try to communicate as a tutor, and at the core of what I believe education should be: not to present specific, curated pieces of “useful information”, but to teach how to construct our own paths of learning – a desire undoubtedly acquired through the reading of Freire.

4 PERSON

The third sub-component of discursivisation, the *actorialisation* installs the actors of discourse: the reunion of at least one actantial role and at least one thematic role which are, in essence, a *modus essendi* and a *modus operandi* (GREIMAS & COURTÉS, 1993, p. 9). From a pedagogic point of view, such roles and trajectories are bonded to the concepts of “student” and “teacher”, for example, and to the construction of multiple “Is” and “Others” which concern both the relationships of tutors with students and vice versa, but also of students with their peers and, last but not least, the perceptions of and interactions with the contents from the course which, in our view, are equally invested with subjective roles which are part of the mechanisms of discursivisation. The various theories and theorists emerge, in such discursive practices, as actants and actors partaking in the organisation of pedagogic practice.

Like all the other markers of discursivisation, the analysis of actorialisation is concerned with different modes of presence – whether the proximity of the “I”, uttered in the first person and addressing the presupposed “you”, or the distance of the “he” – as well as different mechanisms of installing or suspending those markers in the utterance, or the mechanisms of shifting out [*débrayage*] or shifting in [*embrayage*] those markers: as mentioned previously, a discursive organisation can choose to install those markers, or to suspend them, creating the illusion of an enunciation that is made in the act (and not an utterance that is finished). When used in reverse, to create rather than analyse, those concepts can serve both the construction of modes of presence for the different actors, while also permitting to imagine what lies beyond the fixed roles of “enunciator” – often understood as “the one who speaks” – and the “enunciatee” – the “receiver”. If that fixed formula can be understood as a programmed utterance of communication, my objective with the programmes and modules discussed in this article has been one of exploring what other modes of interaction,

particularly the denial of the established, programmed situations in the classroom, would look like.

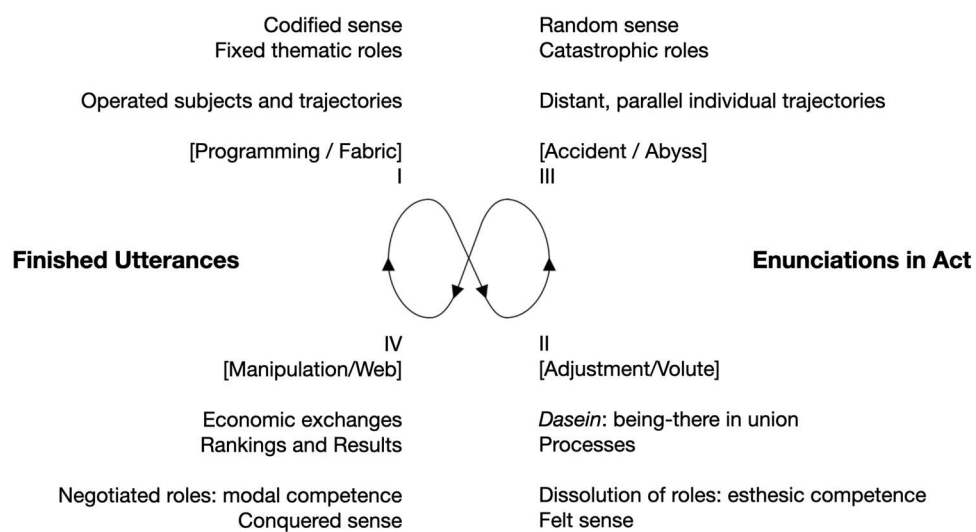
In Landowski's work, the adjustment appears both as a regime of complete union causing both actants to achieve mutual accomplishment – such as in the embrace of two lovers, or the perfect symbiosis of a musician and their instrument – but also as a regime that results in a complete union that annihilates both interacting partners – for example, two opponents in a body-to-body fight, or the relation of complete amalgamation of an addict and their substance. Such images are not distant from the idea of opening up to knowledge: rather than trying to “conquer” a text, or to “operate it”, the relation with the theory I've explored in my own journey and tried to pass on to my students is one of surrender, of giving in so that we can “win” from the inside. That notion is particularly important in consideration of the context of my courses, in heavily international cohorts where students from multiple backgrounds are facing the challenges of living and working together despite gender, sexual orientation, religious difference, and race, while participating in discussion within the modules that address themes that are both part of their experience as contents in their university studies, and a fundamental piece in their own lived experience.

Within that context, it is impossible to think of the contents of the course as separate from the subjects interacting with it – be them the students or the tutors. Indeed, the success of such a model of education, one aiming at the complete equality of all interacting partners (students, tutors, and the content), depends on ensuring equal agency to all subjects, as well as equal vulnerability. On the one hand, the positive union with knowledge can be transformative and, particularly when it comes to Arts and Design students, occasion the mutual accomplishment of theory and subject. To achieve that, however, the negative union is equally important, in which the opening to knowledge is what permits the destruction of limitations and biases which stand in the way of the development of knowledge, as well as the personal development and the advancement of communities.

The investment of “subjectivity” in the students, who can become active participants in their learning journey (rather than *operated* subjects), and in the theories, which move from “canonic” theories which are untouchable to ideas invested with an esthetic competence also marks a passage from education that “has sense” to education that, instead, “makes sense”: the discursive roles of “enunciator” and “enunciatee” no longer fixed, but allowing for transitivity that permits the semiotic act

of construction of meaning, in co-presence and through the discovery of subjects (OLIVEIRA, 2013, p. 246-7, see figure 2). Rather than teaching formulas – or, worse: “showing examples!” – I aim at teaching a state, one in which the student can understand how to “connect” (or unite) with others (human or theory), to then explore those states of adjustment: not looking for results, but cultivating the pleasure of being-there, in a here-now, present to and in the presence of others.

Figure 3 – Ellipsis with the articulation of the regimes of interaction as pedagogic praxis.



Source: elaborated by the author.

That reading of Landowski’s work in reverse, but equally the use of Greimas’ previously explored, seems to align perfectly with Freire’s argument about the dissolution of the binary teacher-student (FREIRE, 1970): through programme design, as well as the delivery of the programmes, the roles of students, myself, and the multiple theoretical actants we invite into our space remove the hierarchies of unilateral communication taking place through fixed roles, to welcome a structure in which all the actants become partners working towards a construction – and not a transfer – of knowledge which causes the interactants to dissolve into one another.

5 CONCLUSION

More than a change of content, the reform in the Fashion Contextual Studies programme discussed in this article responded to a desire to reverse assumptions, presenting the making of essays and research as active, practical work as much as the design work happening in the studio, while also showing that the practice of Fashion within Higher Education – that is, the actual *designing* and *making* of things – can also be theorised. That, on its turn, helped us to start a conversation about the transfer of skills – and I will not pretend this job is concluded – and the manner in which the same theoretical text can inform (at least) two, distinct outcomes: an academic essay, or a piece of design.

In a way, the unsung objective of my programme design emerges as a reversal of Lévi-Strauss' *bricoleur*: from the one who gathers the many fragments to construct one object, to the one fragmenting one idea and transforming it into many possibilities of realisation which full circle in the union of the different skills in the theory module of the Fashion programme. In other words, the analysis of Art and Design can contribute to the development of the making of Art and Design, not only through the deconstruction of the processes, but through the understanding of how we can read manifestations all the way to their fundamental levels, and how abstract concepts surface into gaugeable manifestations. Finally, the modules discussed in this article are, in a way, equally the result of the deconstruction and reconstruction of fragments of a theory that focuses on the analysis of texts, reversing it to its generative potential – no longer a theory of reading manifestations, but one that can lay the foundations to construct, through its principles and concepts, a new manifestation.

Still a unique piece – or, perhaps, the *toile* preceding the finished garment – and far from being a recipe or a method, the model emerging from my experience at UCA is, in the absence of a better word, still too experimental: both when it comes to the education system in the UK, which is highly business-like and grounded in career-oriented courses, and to the Education community in general, which tends to reject perspectives from outside of Pedagogy. Nonetheless, my experience with the cohorts at the University for the Creative Arts has shown me, through both “anecdotal” and statistical data, that the collage of theories and philosophies I used in the construction of the programme has provided an improvement that reaches both an increase in

students grades, and their overall opinion about the course (or about theory, in general)³.

Throughout my experience as a student and researcher within a theory anchored in a study of “the meaning of life”, my present position posed me a challenge of surpassing the teaching of Semiotics, to the teaching of a certain manner of being-there I learned through the key texts in my field. In that journey, my objectives too have been transformed: from aiming at lecturing the “correct use” of texts and concepts, to welcoming a path in which *practice*, in the sense Landowski created for the term, became a central piece of my programme design and delivery: to shift from a transfer of knowledge that can be tested, to the welcoming of the surplus of meaning that comes with creating new uses and pushing the boundaries of the tools and texts we have at hand. Although I cannot vouch for my student’s “absorption” of theory (even if there were some precocious conference acceptances and publications), this experiment certainly has fulfilled a much more valuable goal: to reconnect with students through the study of theory and, in this process, to promote a reimagination of the meaning of “academic work”.

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³ I opted for not including statistical data, as the objective of this piece was to discuss interactional practices and the theories informing them, rather than presenting an enclosed case study. Nonetheless, a breakdown and analysis of satisfaction, library usage, and student final results data is published elsewhere (Cf. AUTHOR, 2018).

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