

# *What Does Thomas F. Broden Think of "the Black Boxes" in Greimasian Semiotics*

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## **Abstract:**

This work is the result of research with twelve “disciples” of Greimas about the possible “black boxes” in his semiotics and seeks to answer the following questions: Did “the black boxes” exist? If they did, what were they? What do Greimas followers have to say? Initiated in 2014, the research project “Black boxes” and the importance of French semiotics in the analysis of verbal, non-verbal and syncretic discourse” lasted seven years and approached the survey through readings of articles and books, the contributions of semioticians such as José Luiz Fiorin, Luís Hébert, Silvio de Santana Jr, Nícia Ribas D'Ávila, Ignácio de Assis Silva, Edward Lopes, Arnaldo Cortina, Edna Fernandes, Ronald Schleifer and Louis Hébert, among others, through interviews regarding the development of Greimas' semiotic theory. In this article, an interview with one of the responsible of spreading the semiotics of Greimas into the United States, the semiotician Thomas F. Broden who is in the phase of a final production of a book on Greimas' life.

## **Keywords:**

Black Boxes; Semiotics; Greimas.

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## INTRODUCTION

My research on “black boxes” was developed using a twelve-question questionnaire to twelve “disciples”, and a series of other telephone and video interviews with Arnaldo Cortina, Diana Barros, Edna Fernandes, Edward Lopes, Ivan Lopes, José Luiz Fiorin, Louis Hébert, Nícia Ribas D'Ávila, Ronald Schleifer and Silvio de Santana Jr. whose transcriptions were conducted having as a methodological assumption the standard form of transcription, according to Luiz Antonio Marcuschi (1986), that is, standard spelling and modified spelling, with greater weight falling on the standard spelling.

In the standard transcription modality, the focus is on the content, being able to eliminate stuttering, language addictions, repetitions, interventions, etc. The standard transcription template is commonly used for the purpose of recording academic papers, interviews, and surveys. This modality allows for a more fluid reading of the content. In this paper, however, we choose to quote the interviewee freely, sometimes delegating his voice as if in a dialogue between interviewer and interviewee, sometimes marking, with quotation marks, their speech within the text. This option is because it is not just a description of an interview, but counterpoints and arguments with other readings that the interviews referred to at the time of speech. Therefore, it is not just an interview, but an article that uses the interview as a source of opinion and counterpoints to didactically develop the hermetic concepts of the theory, as well as its applicability.

The interviews, however, turned into articles, are for a book issue, scheduled, in principle, for the second half of this year, since the first book did a tribute to Greimas (2022) due to the large number of contributors who participated in it, having 12 papers from different Brazilian semioticians and the translation of an article by Thomas Broden from English to Portuguese about Greimas' life, career and convictions. In that book, besides the “Black Boxes”, there were also papers on the popularization of science called semiotics, answering to an old Greimas' desire<sup>1</sup>.

After some electronic correspondence regarding the post-doctorate, I had a first interview with Thomas Broden on October 14, 2017, when he told me about his interest in Greimas semiotics, whose existence as a method, “is above all a state of mind, an ethics that dictates the need for integrity in relation to oneself and to others, and this rectitude is necessary for the effectiveness of its practice and for the transmissibility of knowledge that semiotics allows us acquire” (Greimas, 1977, p. 227).

## THOMAS BRODEN ON THE WAY TO SEMIOTICS OF GREIMAS

My interview with Thomas Broden was during my post-doctorate at Purdue University on July 19th, 2017, and was transcribed by the student of Letras, Ellen Dias. Thomas F. Broden was

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<sup>1</sup> Read “Caixas pretas e a popularização da ciência da significação: o que os discípulos de Greimas têm a dizer 30 anos após a sua morte?” (Santos, 2022).

born on November 19th, 1951 in South Bend, Indiana, United States a “blue-color town”, according to him, where “everyone worked in factories such as Bendix and Studebaker”. He did a bachelor's degree in French at the University of Notre Dame and he spent one year already abroad in Angé, France, learning French, French culture, French literature through a Rotary International Fellowship year in the summer. He did his master's and a PhD at Indiana University in Bloomington and spent two years in Paris studying and teaching English. His career started after he defended his dissertation, when he taught at the University of Notre Dame, Tulane University and University of Nebraska until he gets to Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana, where he has just retired although he keeps on teaching at the seminars in France at summertime and writing his book on Greimas' life, career, and convictions.

- Why are you interested in French? Because you are a professor of French here and you teach introduction to semiotics and literature.
- That's right! Why do I pick French? That was somewhat just by chance.

He explained that the only two languages that his high school taught were Latin and French, and he chose French that “was the only living language. So, it wasn't really much of a choice and I knew I wanted to go abroad and when I was an undergraduate and experienced a foreign culture, use my foreign language and so, by definition it was French that I would have to use”.

As someone who had left the island, although the United States is immense, Broden enjoyed his year in France and Europe, “and the art, architecture and I enjoyed very much the challenge of trying to communicate foreign language”. Another advantage he found in studying French was to do literature, culture, old, new and temporary texts: “as many people do it at that age and I didn't know what exactly I wanted to do”. In Europe you can do lots of learning, while in the United States, things are more specific: “And the advantage of being in French is that you can do all of that”. He says, “in America working in English I have to pick either this or that” and “that's another advantage” of being in France.

- So, that was the way towards Greimas?

- Well, the way I went toward Greimas I got interested in structuralism which arrived late in Indiana but did arrive.

Broden explains that he got interested in structure as Roland Barthes, and “maybe Gérard Genette. And then, my professor Robert Champigny had put a text by François Rastier on our doctoral reading list that we all had to read if we wanted a PhD in French at Indiana University”. The book Broden is talking about is “Idéologie et Théorie des Signes” where Rastier used Greimas' structural semantics: “So, in order to understand what the heck he was talking about I went to the library and got Greimas' book on Structural Semantics out and read those sections and figured out what the heck Rastier was doing and I thought it was very interesting”.

He studied with Rastier who was analyzing an essay from early 19th century as “if it was a narrative, as if were a novel or an epic”. That captivated Broden's interest for “he had this narrative method that he got it from Greimas. So, that was how I got interested in Greimas and when I went to study with this group for a year in 1981, 1982 in Paris”.

- Did you study with Greimas himself?
- Yes, he was still alive then. So, I interviewed him.

Greimas used to give a seminar every week in about four sessions and the other sessions he would invite lecturer, guest lecturer, with summarizing “and comment on the previous week's lecturer and then, afterwards, we would all go to a café and talk and I, you know... like anyone else I've chatted with him a little bit and then I interviewed him twice. So, those were my context with him”.

- And what were the interviews about?
- Well, actually, I think was... two things. One, I asked him a little about his own biography including the Winter War years and he liked to talk about the war years and about his life in

general and secondly, I had specific questions about semiotic square. I asked questions about the semiotic square.

At that time, Broden was still a doctoral student still writing his dissertation at Indiana University and as such, “I had to get a position to the French government. I think I got two things. I think I got in a position to the French government to teach English at a high school in Paris and I got a fellowship to work on my dissertation in Paris”.

- So, how do you compare that semiotics that you first saw with the semiotics today?
- Well, in those days research was mainly focused on... texts in language where's now they're mainly focused on visual limited and on practices, a little bit on music.

## **BRODEN'S VIEW OF SEMIOTIC FROM YESTERDAY TO TODAY.**

Broden explains that in those days the focus was on elementary structure “of signification, like the semiotic square and on narrative” and “they were working on and on a poetry”. To close his thoughts on the comparison from the beginning of Greimas semiotics to what the followers of the Lithuanian semiotician does today he says that “people are... not focused so much on narrative”, they are not focused so much on elementary structural semiotics, “but very much on enunciation and enunciator”, and enunciative structural and the process itself:

And then in those days, there was a fairly tight semiotic group that worked with Greimas and there were workshops associated with the seminar there were introductory courses initiation that initiated students in the semiotics it was all very structural and organized and fairly large. Now, it is smaller, and those workshops don't exist anymore, the introductory courses don't exist anymore and there is less of a group or school and more, just kind of a, a network of people.

Broden says that today in relation to yesterday, there are less people in the seminars and there is more diversity: “you know, from one semiotician to another you find more variation and how people attack problems and what kind of problems they take. And that's a good thing and then in cases that natural evolution”.

- And do you remember Greimas saying something about the black boxes on semiotics in those times?
- That... I'm not sure, I don't think I remember him... me hearing him say something about black boxes that I recall, but I assume he spoke about them.

## **ON THE “BLACK BOXES” IN GREIMAS' THEORY.**

Broden do not remember Greimas saying on the black boxes. Neither does he remember any paper that mentions those probable empty spaces in semiotics. But he says, “that it was his responsibility to define new problematics for semiotics and to propose at least new topics that other semioticians could work on”. Broden explains that “since he presented his approach to a great extent as a theory that had given an architecture” that was “the terms” he would define and he should provide “the different processes that he was describing and were situated and give a point in the generative” path as “a place with the an architecture and that sense if you define in a problematic, you find a place and so, if it's a, a place that I just beginning to and study it's almost by definition a kind of black box, you know”.

As an example of a possible black box, Broden mentions “the semiotic dictionary that was

pretty much finished in 1977, but they published in 1979” where Greimas presents the generative trajectory” of meaning which, in 1981 and 1982, “the topic was putting in the discourse and the instance of annunciation, so... he wanted to study in particular the figurative level”.

Regarding another possible black box, Broden says that “Another black box, I think it would be fair to say” is the fact that Greimas always said that “the structural semantics, the semiological organization of the natural world”, as “the basic categories that we use in perceiving the world around us, that should be an important topic to be studied” and Greimas had “never really did that” and “Barthes did a bit in the system of fashion, *Système de la Mode*”. For Broden, that would “another really black box for Greimas” or his followers to develop, “the semantic side of the deep level in the generative trajectory, so I think there are a number of those slots in the generative trajectory that could be properly seen as black boxes”.

- And do you think that those spaces have been filled now by his disciples?
- Well, certainly not the letter black box that I just mentioned, the basic semantic categories of the semiological world, no one has really worked on that.

He emphasizes that there are “discourse people” who “have worked” on that “more nowadays “and then of course people are working on enunciation now. It has to do with this course as he defined it and people define it now. But there is always more to be done”.

In his paper “A. J. Greimas: Education, Convictions, Career” (2015)<sup>2</sup> Broden states that “much of Greimas world is still terra incognita”. His explanation for that is related to the fact that “we don’t know much about Greimas’ youth, his education, where he grew up, what all that means, what exactly he read”. That was what makes the book on the biography of Greimas Broden is in the process of finishing is about: “We just don’t have a lot of information on that, and we really don’t have a lot of information about 13 years that he spent outside of France and Lithuania, that is when he went to Egypt and Turkey”.

I interacted with Broden by saying that what Greimas had in the very beginning of his semiotics was a project in times of making science, that it was giving us the impression that it was something incomplete. He agrees with me and completes:

he always emphasized that semiotics was a project and not a complete science and I think he did it for two reasons. One, because he recognized that compared to sociology, anthropology, or chemistry or biology, semiotics was extremely recent and new and just hadn’t time to develop many bases and confront hypotheses and so forth. And secondly, I think, you know, probably see pretty much any science has a continuous project and that’s the natural sciences continuous discovering and questions and exploration and not dogma and doctrine.

As e everything in science is dynamic, Greimas knew how to balance his theory by incorporating the new within the old semiotics. As Broden says, “he expanded the architecture but without destroying or cutting out any of what had been established. So that continuously grows”.

## **ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF JEAN MARIE FLOCH**

It was inevitable to ask about Jean Marie Floch and his contribution to Greimas semiotics in the sense of unveiling a black box in the theory.

- Do you think Floch has fulfilled any black box left by Greimas?

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<sup>2</sup> Parte deste artigo foi publicado originariamente em 2011 pelo Lithuanian Quarterly Journal of Arts and Sciences sob o título “Towards a biography of Algirdas Julien Greimas” e traduzido para o Português em 2021 na Revista Acta Semiótica com o título “O Percurso de Algirdas Julien Greimas na visão de Broden” (Santos, 2021) e publicado em inglês pelo The American Journal of Semiotics sob o título “A. J. Greimas: Education, Convictions, Career”, traduzido para o Português e publicado em 2022 pela Revista Casa, Cadernos de Semiótica, sob o título “A.J. Greimas: Educação, Convicções, Carreira” (Broden, 2022).

- Well, certainly, the main thing I would say that Jean-Marie Floch did was to develop visual semiotics.

To speak about Floch, Broden reminds us of Yuri Lotman and some other semioticians who were contemporary to Greimas, that as Floch, “a handful of people” and “somebody who was there a little older” were the “initial pioneers who developed ways of analyzing visual images”, because “nobody knew how to analyze images from the semiotic perspective. Nobody in Greimas’s group.

Barthes were working on images, but they didn’t want to do that. They wanted to do some different for all kinds of reasons. So, that’s I would say is the main thing he did it and in otherwise he, he had... he develops an idea that Greimas must have worked on in the context of poetry about how, what he calls, you know, the Semi Symbolic Systems where you have a category on the plane of expression and a category on the plane of content and mapped those two in a semi symbolic system. Greimas, well, Greimas borrowed that from Jakobson... nodding, you know, shaking your head to say “yes” or “no” and then, Greimas worked on the poetry and then Floch, showed how that could work in the visual figures as well.

Broden admits that “Floch did a lot of analyses where he would look at. The Semi Symbolic System on a plastic dimension of an image and then the... on the figurative level, other contents and how those two would be related but he does not know risk to say that “any of those are black boxes”, but they are contributions made by Floch to semiotics.

- Do you consider what Floch did is a theory because, according to your paper, the same paper, he established the method based on the closest description of particular images.
- Well, as far as the theory goes is pretty much Greimas’ Semiotics, you know, it’s pretty much Greimas’ semiotics applied to visual images.

Broden thinks “Floch was very bright” and that “his intelligence I think was to a great extent, his ability to pick interesting images to study or concrete things to study and then to do a comprehensible and theoretically interesting and methodologically sound analysis”. Nevertheless, he finalizes: “I don’t think one would say that Floch did much developing his own theory”.

In his work “In Memoriam Jean-Marie Floch (1947-2001)<sup>3</sup> Broden puts Floch as one of the “pioneering figures in visual semiotics” who “elaborated an approach that combined an analysis of the basic perceptual qualities and compositional strategies of the image, with a study of the cultural and historical significance of its representational dimension”. At the same time, he sees Floch as “A key collaborator of A. J. Greimas” who situated his project within the theoretical framework of Paris semiotics, which he helped to develop”. For Broden, Floch “positioned his visual studies of familiar cultural objects in proximity to cultural anthropology and the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss” and he cites five of Floch’s published monographs which “explore abstract painting, art photography, Russian icons, magazine advertisements, and comic books”.

According to Broden what Floch does he calls a theoretical perspective, an approach which is unique in terms of exploring the general processes by which artifacts are produced and grasped and the multifarious values and transformations of specific signs prominent in society and throughout history. In other words, in his opinion Floch has created not only a method but a theory if not observed for he says that “His semiotic incorporates a wide range of signifying processes from basic perceptual dynamics to narrative and communication practices including plastic semiotics in which a structure of differential features generates characterized static and semantic effects throughout an image.” I ask myself: Does he really create that theory? In “Memoriam of Jean-Marie Floch (1947-2001)” wrote one year after Floch’s death, Broden does “a review of two of his books that had just come out in English translation” and he explains that when he was talking about Jean-Marie Floch’s theory, “You know... What I had in mind was Greimas’ theory

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<sup>3</sup> Tribute to Jean-Marie Floch published by “The American Journal of Semiotics” by Thomas Broden.

but... Floch was the vehicle for me to present Greimas' theory and I think for Floch his visual semiotics was the vehicle for him to present Greimas' theory".

I do a contraposing to his words on Floch's "theory" by mentioning Nícia Ribas D'Ávila (1987) who studied and had Greimas as her director of research in her dissertation. I say that she also mentions Floch, but she says that Floch's work is based on the verbal aspect. He uses the verbal to explain the verbal, and also the image. D'Ávila criticizes also the fact that he did not come from the figural, he comes from the figurative as well. Then, he established those categories that are very important indeed, but she says that Floch stays in the verbal language to explain the non-verbal language. Broden says he does not know D'Ávila's proposal to the point of comparing Floch and her contribution to Greimas Theory, and, once again, he emphasizes that "Floch's analysis" he thinks "is very important and very striking and clear is that he devotes great attention to the visual, to the visuals. He is very intent on very specifically analyzing the color, the lines, the composition, the textures, points, quadrants on the image". For that reason, Broden does not think Floch "is analyzing images through verbal means". He questions: "What is the role of all kinds of documents that may be related to an image or a set of images? What's the role of those documents, let's say, you know, language... you know natural language to the image"? Those kind of questions related to visual analysis, for him, are open questions because "there are people who seem to say, if you wanna analyze an image all you can do is analyze image". For Broden, if you "Can read any text about, you know, where the art, artist, photographer explained, what she meant to do, how she found the topic or anything if it's any advertisement in a magazine or tv" is also relevant to get to meaning of it. He added:

You can't get interested in a meeting that was held to talk about how to select which advertising or what the purpose of the campaign was and on and on, none of that, just the image. I think is more interesting to use both, if you can find documents that have to do with the image I think is interesting to look at those documents and use them whether it's an image, whether is an artist talking about, what she was doing, what he was doing or a photographer or a company but... and then people can come back and say, well, but they're analyzing texts, you know, verbal and not just the image. But I think it's a rich approach, I think it's a good approach to analyze images. And again, I say that without being a specialist of visual semiotics.

I spoke to Broden about the colors that are difficult to attribute a meaning, because their aspect is cultural, and as the art faces the colors themselves and as D'Ávila used to defend in her classes in Bauru (1997) and Assis (2000) that we should not consider the colors because they are at the helm of meaning effect and not the meaning itself, for they are cultural. She used to say that the non-verbal must have its own language to describe itself. A kind of construct. That's what I call black box in this sense. And that D'Ávila would have developed and it is expressed in her two books "Semiótica Sincrética Aplicada: novas tendências" (D'Ávila, 2007) and "Semiótica Verbal e Sincrética Verbo-Visual e Verbo-Musical, Teorias e Aplicabilidade" (D'Ávila, 2015) and a series of papers published in French and Portuguese along 30 years of research or more.

## **ON GREIMAS VIEW OF AN IMPERFECT WORLD: BETWEEN LINGUISTICS AND LITERATURE**

I spoke about my impression that although Greimas had created a theory translated today in more than 40 countries, he was frustrated with living in an imperfect world and that he might also be frustrated in his career for his interest for the romance tradition, which would become a major frame of reference for him going forward, the symbolism poets he had his first encountered in high school learning verses by heart as we can see in Broden's writing about his career and convictions (Broden, 2022). It looks like, for recalling around this time lovers by standoff in Monroe, by

Dostoevsky and Wagner, the literature itself played the key role in shaping his affective life, his moral compass, and his tastes, as Broden writes. It looks like he was more into literature and arts than specifically within the frame of linguistics. As Broden says, all the international authors made a lasting impact on him, as Edgar Allan Poe, especially “Annabel Lee”, “Ulalume” and “The Raven”.

All these influences as modernist poetry, Mayakovski, etc had an impact on his life. What would Broden say about this? Was Greimas frustrated with his own theory? After all, his last book is called “The Imperfection”<sup>4</sup>. As Greimas states in his post card sent to D’Ávila a little before his death: “I was flattered by your faithful attachment to semiotics, and I realize that you manifest it by your actions”<sup>5</sup>. This statement to D’Ávila reinforces my theory that he was not happy at the end of his journey with the imperfection of the world.

- Was Greimas unsatisfied with the world?
- I think you asked an important question. I’m not sure anyone can answer it but it’s an important question to pose.

Broden associates Greimas’ dysphoric view of the world with what he himself heard from Greimas:

he says that the horrible absurdity of everything that happened the World War II impelled him ways in a lifelong search for meaning and fundamental values and understanding of what makes human beings tick, what makes them act, how to figure out better ways which individuals and societies can move toward strong values that affirm people and build a community.

As far the poetry and science, literature, literary criticism, linguistics, and his semiotics Broden says “That’s hard to say, it’s a kind of “what if... I would say that Greimas had a great ability to be creative in an abstract mode and he was a very important innovative linguist”. Broden cites “essays that he wrote on literature in like, the 1940s in Lithuanian” but he does not think “one could argue that there’s somehow groundbreaking or revolutionary and how they look at literature”. He concludes that he is not certain if “anyone should regret that he became a linguist and not a literary critic” and adds that if you look at “the book on Maupassant”, which it is not a book of literary criticism it “has interesting passages like the analysis of the reflections of the setting sun on the river, an interesting analysis but mainly at system and the semiotic study of semiotic models involved and language”<sup>6</sup>. For Broden, either in literature or linguistics, Greimas ended up being a great contributor to science itself: “who knows what he would have done had stuck with poetry and literature and not going to the root of science, but I think science should be glad that he went through the science and linguists should be glad that he went through the linguistics”.

- How do you compare the work of his “disciples” like Jacques Fontanille, Eric Landowski and the other contemporaneous. How do you compare, nowadays, do you think that they went through what Greimas had left like opening this theory or are they filling any black box?
- Certainly, Fontanille has said that at one point Greimas told him, you can either do two things. Either you can write your own books, just your own ideas or you can work with in

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<sup>4</sup> Do original “De l'imperfection” (Greimas, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> The Citation is translated by the author from French to English and it is published by D’Ávila in the book *Semiótica Verbal e Sincrética Verbo-Visual e Verbo-Musical, Teorias e Aplicabilidade* (D’Ávila, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> For more understanding read “Maupassant: The Semiotics of Text - Practical Exercises” (Semiotic Crossroads) translated from French to English by Paul Peron in (Greimas, 1988) and from French to Portuguese by Carmen Lucia Cruz Lima Gerlach e Terezinha Oening Michels, Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina under the title “Semiótica do Texto. Exercícios Práticos” (Greimas, 1993). The original version in French was published on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976 under the title “Maupassant - La sémiotique du texte: exercices pratiques” (Greimas, 1976).



some kind of a collective project, you know, work with a methodology that is shared by other colleagues.

## **ON FONTANILLE'S CONTRIBUTION TO GREIMAS' SEMIOTICS AND THE BLACK BOXES**

Broden recalls that Fontanille said “you didn’t think twice at the time, what Greimas is talking about what he thought about it and kept thinking about it and realized that what Greimas was telling was what he had written was very interesting”. He explains that Fontanille did not have his “own world but didn’t have a whole lot to do with what else others were doing and it’s that’s how I recall now”. He says that “Fontanille said that I made the decision that I wanted to developed semiotics” and that what Fontanille does is “basically, the Greimas’ seen mode” and his practice is turned to other Greimas semioticians in the sense of doing “collective research and not just my own idiom syncretic, anomalous work”. To finalizes, he says that Fontanille had followed “through on Greimas’ notion that science dynamic is always exposing new questions and new issues”. He defends the idea that develop a science, although you are always attempting “to maintain the bases that Greimas and other semioticians developed”, to “move in new directions” you have to “oppose new questions”. Changing is not bad, when you keep on “thinking and innovating”.

When I spoke about his impression on sociosemiotics, Broden suggested that “something that no one in semiotics succeeded in doing was in developing a vigorous theory and methodology that would take account, would really take account of social structures and whether been in the context of anthropology or sociology”. To reinforces his thesis, he says that “the semiotic model for the most part worked on the notion of... of mind and that was the mind that was creating things and... a kind of content construct” and that there are exceptions, but “the models tend to gravitate around”. According to Broden, “what we didn’t do was say... take a comparative study where you would look at, say emotions in three different cultures”. He adds that Floch did something related as “showing how social organization which then gets incarnated in a layout within a building like in a firm or company” and how this “hierarchy” sets up “the social organization of a given company, how that affects communication within the company and how that... how in a sense, how the company thinks”.

I believe Broden is talking about Floch’s six essays on “Visual Identities” that contribute to the growing field of industrial semiotics where Floch (2001) analyzes signs which are both relevant in industry and precise in the text as the commercial signs, the logos and advertisements of a certain company, trying to go beyond the mass psychology of 'appeal' and audience research, working the textual analysis of commercial signs that have tended to come from limited positions of identity politics and criticism (Marxism, feminism, etc.), managing to find a path between, within and outside these traditions.

Broden closes his cycle of thoughts by saying that “the spatial literally and then, also the hierarchical anthropological organization of the company describes how it thinks” referring to “a kind of a correction of this image of a kind of a universal mind or a complement to this image of universals”, or “How a company thinks in a very specific way based on how it’s organized that space, how it is organized, its groups and hierarchy”. What Broden speaks about Floch’s study of the placement of visual objects in a space is what I understand of proxemics<sup>7</sup>.

I reminded Broden of “Semiotics of Passion” and the study of other feelings as anger, melancholy, other states of mind and he defends that “instead of just working on jealousy in France, look at jealousy in France, in Spain, in China and see how the emotion is expressed or not,

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<sup>7</sup> Read “Intersemiótica e semiótica da figuratividade visual em Morte e vida Severina” by João Cabral de Melo Neto” (Santos, 2017).

modulated in those different cultures and so to get at the cultural specificity”.

## **ON THE SEMIOTICS OF SENSITIVENESS AND SEMIOTICS OF PASSION**

I also told him that the semiotics of sensitiveness has also explored the field of feelings and mentioned the book “Corpo e Sentido: A Escuta do Sensível” (Silva, 1996)<sup>8</sup>. Broden says that the difference from the study of passions or the semiotics of sensitiveness and his suggestion of a cultural emotions study is that...

When Greimas and Fontanille talk about the generative modal for passions, that social factor is one moment in that generative trajectory, but there haven't been any studies that I know of. Comparative studies that actually look at different cultures and how different cultures, within the semiotics, within the semiotics there haven't been any comparative semiotics studies of a given emotion in three different cultures, let's say. And it would be a classic way to really at the culture's specificity.

- What you mean is that when Greimas and Fontanille talk about passion they're specific, they don't do that kind of comparison?
- That's right.

What Broden is saying is that Greimas and Fontanille in Semiotics of Passion study emotions or other feelings and semiotics passions from an etimological point of view instead of a cultural perspective: “ They come from the etimological origin of the word and then, they formed a dictionary and at least Greimas in his articles, specifically says that when he studies nostalgia or when he studies anger, he's studying French anger using the French dictionary”. Broden suggestion would be good if somebody who wants to do it has to be “someone who knows something about these different cultures and can work with different languages”.

## **ON SEMIOTICS OF OBJECT AND SEMIOTICS OF THE SUBJECT: GREIMAS AND COQUET**

Regarding a certain critical point of view of some people on the semiotics of Greimas being a semiotic of object instead of a semiotic of subject as that one developed by Jean Claude Coquet, Broden says that if you look at the origin of semiotic narrative inspired by Vladmir Propp, he thinks “people can exaggerate that also, you know”, because “certainly talk about the subject. The narrative, the Proprian narrative model talks about the subject, the way the subject finds meaning... seeks meaning in life and can find meaning in life”. He also says that “The semi narrative model is the way subjects attempt to construct new values”. To finish his reasons to believe Greimas semiotics is not only objectual, he also mentions the semiotics of passions which “involve the subject”...

In part, I think the subject, object, and argument has some validity, but it is also a way for people who want to try to affirm their own approach, will try to emphasize what they're doing, I mean... I think it's kind of a way of packaging or advertising, you know, give an approach also that may not have... that I might not totally agree with.

Broden has a good impression of the work developed by Coquet as the book he published “around the 1980s” that “were interesting about the modalities” and “the phenomenology of

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<sup>8</sup> Book organized by professor Ignácio Assis Silva that presents Semiotic essays on literature, cinema, music, psychoanalysis, and arts in general through a dialogue between the intelligible and the sensible, in an interdisciplinary perspective.

language. And I think that's very important but that is not the only mode in which to approach the subject". Broden says that he spoke with Coquet: "And he himself, I spoke with him, he himself says that he gets a point, you know... phenomenological philosophy of languages great that there semiologic remains" who are valid" and "if you are going to do semiotics" then you have to think of "concepts and constructs so, it's... parallel to but distinct from philosophizing".

- Okay. To finish, how do you contemplate semiotics nowadays? I know that you are working on Greimas' biography.
- That's Right.
- Can you advance a little bit about that? Can you talk about that?

## **THE REASONS WHY TO WRITE A BOOK ABOUT GREIMAS' LIFE AND CAREER.**

Broden says that reason "number one" is that there are a lot of details "that in specific steps fascinate" him as it is "hard to communicate to an English language public for all kinds of reasons and" that although "people would've tried", including himself" was to try to express what was semiotics in "the 1970s, the 1980s" when "people wanted to do something different", in "different terms, different references". According to Broden, "most people don't understand just the basics of Greimas' method and what it was about", because of the "terminology and maybe the complexity of the method".

As reason number two he says it "is just amazing there hasn't been any, just basic you know, book on Greimas, introducing Greimas". Broden is speaking about Greimas' life itself, his "biography": "and I think, to certainly extent either people have been Greimas' semioticians and have to continue to do very specific specialize work in semiotics or people would've kind of not got... would've kind become disinterested in Greimas and not talking about him at all". He praises Greimas as "a huge intellectual figure both in terms of ways to work and in terms of his impact and his context with other people. So, I figure that one thing that I could do is to try to write a general book on Greimas to present what he is doing to a broader intellectual public". Broden says that Greimas "life" is "fascinating", "interesting", and writing about it is an "attractive way to get people interested in his semiotics through the person Greimas, because he's an amazing figure in the 20th Century".

Broden is right when, especially in the United States, stronghold of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics, many people still do not know Greimas, someone who was "involved in the Anti-Nazi resistance, the Anti-Stalinist resistance", and we can see issues "about East and West, North and South" for he "wrote about all those issues in his journalism and then who, you know, there's a leading figure in structuralism and post structuralism". Greimas, according to Broden, is a "fascinating figure" for he "created this huge group that now some of the students and some of their students, students of students and... on and on. And out there, I think there's a whole dimension that is fascinating about him that can drop people into semiotics".

As a third factor, Broden says that there is "a historical context which theories grow, institutional factors" and "their ability to spread or not. Those are important criteria that I think should be taken into account looking at Greimas' method... so, that's the kinds of things that got me interested in doing this book and that I am working on this book".

His publication on Greimas' life in Lithuanian translation promised to 2018 and the plan for bringing out "half the project in either English or French", or the possibility of bringing "the whole project once in those languages".

Broden made a lot of interviews that involve semioticians from all over the world, including the Brazilian researchers and followers of Greimas who have spread out the theory in Brazil, as José Luiz Fiorin, Diana Luz Pessoa de Barros among others. I suggested Broden to interview D'Ávila, since she had Greimas himself as director of her dissertation and who spent around eight

years studying in France and Silvio de Santana Jr who had also attended Greimas' seminars. He said that he would love to interview her, but he could not find her on the phone and "And someone said that there was a health issue, and I don't like to bother people if there's a health issue". As part of his plan in 2017, there was the publication of two volumes in Lithuanian, a volume in English and the possibility of publishing it also in Portuguese.

Although Greimas is translated in more than forty countries today, he is not as known as Charles Sanders Peirce is in the United States, for the natural reason that Peirce is American. Among the researches who have brought Greimas' semiotics to the United States, Broden mention the semioticians from Vanderbilt University, Larry Crist and Daniel Patte a French man and their students James Lee, Edward McMahon II, Gary Phillips and Michael Rengstorf who was his colleague at Columbia University, Ronald Schleifer from the University of Oklahoma, Norman Campus, who translated "Structural semantics" from French to English and has written articles on Greimas and Schleifer's colleagues at the University of Oklahoma, R.C Davis and Robert Con Davis-Undiano, François Raveau from the University of Richmond, Fredric Jameson, the best known American academic who was interested in semiotic square in 70s and 80s who wrote mainly about Karl Marx.

## **ON GREIMAS AND PEIRCE, THE FORMS OF LIFE AND THE FUTURE OF SEMIOTICS.**

- How do you compare Greimas with Peirce? (both laugh)
- That's a long topic. I think both of them had... both of them constructed very coherent theories with very specifically defined concepts. Peirce was more interested in philosophy and hard science and technology. Greimas more in fields like linguistics anthropology, philosophy of language, maybe... Greimas always thought it was important to take account of both theory and practice or applications, I think... Peirce was more interested just in theory, in theoretical aspects. Those are some ideas.

As coming to the end of the interview, I asked Broden about Greimas' last writings on the forms of life in English. Broden mentioned "The Canadian journal of semiotics" that in its 1993 special issue it contains about four or five articles on forms of life: "The articles themselves are in French but since it's a Canadian journal, they have a nice abstract summary at the journal in English".

I wanted to know his opinion of forms of life and Broden said:

I think forms of life is very interesting that... In a word, forms of life is almost a microcosm of semiotics as it tries to look at, you know, what they call forms of life, which is not that different from life styles include like an aesthetic, they could include a kind of movement, you know, in the sense of literary artistic movement... to analyze each those things, using all the levels as people used to talk about them in generative trajectory and in the case looking at all, using all the tools of the semiotics to analyze that and to look at the interrelationships. So, I think that's the advantage of a form of life... it's very complex both individual and social entity and then, analyzing from a semiotic perspective entail using all the different semiotic instances that one has to developed.

Broden has no specific idea of semiotics in the near future, but he believes that "there are young people doing semiotics today so, I assume there will be semiotics that young... the number of young people is very good, very dynamic. So, I think there will be a future to semiotics. Now, what it will be... I don't know".

- Do you think that will be more to the visuals or...
- Well, so far, it seems like it's involving visuality. Certainly, well... right now, the problematic of the enunciation presumably and hopefully it'll involve new media, things on

internet, blogs, whatever in ten years people are doing. I think that's a good... those are good objects for semiotics to study. I'm not good at them but I know some people are working on them and I think it's a good idea.

Our final topic was enunciation and Broden said "it's an ongoing issue, ongoing problematic but that's good, that's good thing" and that "it's a wide-open field that's there for people to develop.

## CONCLUSION

Thomas Broden is one of the few American semioticians of the School of Paris to publicize the "project of the grammar of content", in times of doing science, as said Greimas in his seminars, on American soil, in which there is a natural predominance of the general science of signs by the American Charles Sanders Peirce. And, from this point of view, his contribution in this paper deserves to be highlighted, since he is dedicated to the publication of his book that presents the stages of methodological evolution of Greimas and his role in the evolution of the human sciences during the second half of the last century, including collaborations, dialogues, and debates with other intellectuals of the era.

Throughout this work we see Broden intrigued in the way of facing the narrative and discursive model of Greimas, showing his interest in objective studies of the text, attracted by the breadth of the Greimasian method development in the United States and around the world in general terms, and specifically about the black box, or some eventual emptiness left in it. He attended the general semantics seminar and workshops given by Algirdas Julien Greimas at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, for one year (1981–82). It has been more than 34 years of involvement and commitment with the semiotics of the Lithuanian "master".

We saw from Broden's view how the legacy left by Greimas relates to trends encompassed in the Human Sciences, including influences and reactions against popular currents. Therefore, this paper brought the transcription of an interview with Thomas F. Broden related to his way to semiotics of Greimas, his view of semiotic from yesterday to today, on the "Black Boxes" in Greimas theory, on the contribution of Jean Marie Floch, on Greimas view of an imperfect world where we live in, on Fontanille's contribution to Greimas' semiotics regarding the development of black boxes, the reasons why to write a book about Greimas life and career, the semiotics of sensitiveness and the semiotics of passion, the semiotics of object and the semiotics of the subject, his comparing Greimas and Peirce, and finally his thoughts on the forms of life and the future of semiotics.

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