

- Schmidt, S.J. "Conventions and Literary Systems." *Rules and Conventions*. Ed. M. Hjort. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1992c. 215-49.
- Schmidt, S.J. "Systems Theory — A Vehicle to Cross Borderlines?" *Concepts of Literary Theory, East and West*. Ed. Han-liang Chang. Taiwan: Bookman Books, 1993. 31-61.
- Schmidt, S.J. *Kognitive Autonomie und soziale Orientierung. Konstruktivistische Bemerkungen zum Zusammenhang von Kognition, Kommunikation, Medien und Kultur*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1994.
- Schmidt, S.J. "Cognition, Communication and the Myth of Autopoiesis." *Paragrana* 4.2 (1995): 315-24.
- Schmidt, S.J. "Trivialization and Empiricity." *Systems Research: The Official Journal of the International Federation for Systems Research* 13.3 (1996): 385-92.
- Schmidt, S.J. *Die Zählung des Blicks. Konstruktivismus — Empirie — Wissenschaft*. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1998. Forthcoming.
- Schmidt, S.J. and D. Meusch. "On the Role of Conventions in Understanding Literary Texts." *Poetics* 15 (1986): 551-74.
- Schmidt, S.J. and P. Vorderer. "Kanonisierung in Mediengesellschaften." *Literaturkanon — Medienereignis — Kultureller Text. Formen interkultureller Kommunikation und Übersetzung*. Ed. A. Poltermann. Heidelberg: Erich Schmidt, 1995. 144-59.
- Stegmüller, W. *Metaphysik Wissenschaft Skepsis*. Frankfurt: Humboldt, 1994.
- Sterbling, A. *Modernisierung und soziologisches Denken. Analysen und Betrachtungen*. Hamburg: Krämer, 1991.
- Welsch, W. *Unsere postmoderne Moderne*. 2nd ed. Weinheim: VCH, 1988.
- Weyer, J. "System und Akteur. Zum Nutzen zweier soziologischer Paradigmen bei der Erklärung erfolgreichen Scheiterns." *KZfSS: Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie* 45.1 (1993): 1-22.

JORIS VLASSELAERS

Discourse: A Challenge for Systems Theory in Cultural Studies?

In response to Siegfried J. Schmidt's paper "A Systems-Oriented Approach to Literary Studies" I would like to make some very brief remarks on the issue of the position and the operative status of discourse-oriented research within the frame of Schmidt's project of an empirical study of literature on a constructivist and systems-theoretical basis.

I do not follow those scholars who proclaim that the empirical approach in literary studies expels "the literary phenomenon" from the scope of investigation and I do take notice of Schmidt's statement that his main purpose is to include literary texts, literary discourse and other literary phenomena in his project. However, I have difficulties in sharing his strong reticence regarding the feasibility "to see texts in contexts" and to specify "which (parts of) contexts matter and which relations between the two can be established." The practice of discourse analysis is not necessarily *reine Textwissenschaft* in which texts ought to be depositories of "true meaning," nor should it be a program of text-hermeneutics revitalized behind a theoretical façade (Schmidt 1991).

A socio-semiotic practice of literary discourse analysis treats textual materials as constituent parts of literary discourse and regards them as cognitive structures and forms of communication (Schmidt 1984), as types of literary phenomena, as facts in the sense of externalized communication, as integrated parts of the literary field, as data/documents that provide and uphold the construction of stability in communication (Schmidt 1994). Socio-semiotic discourse analysis constitutes a type of cultural investigation that matches in a synergetic way the aim and ambitions of the systemic-functional approach of literature as a social system. If one accepts that the formation of different literary discourses is a major factor of the process of internal differentiation in the modern literary system as a self-referential and self-organizing system, it follows that one also has to agree that an in-depth and overall investigation of the discourse system of a society is necessary in order to accurately describe and analyze the specificity of the literary system within that society (Schmidt 1994). A socio-semiotic analysis of literary discourse should provide the researcher with insight into the various conditions of social meaning production and should inform him about the extent and the scale of intersubjective consent in communication, about how the mechanisms of selection have worked and how the self-organizing literary system

generates system-specific conditions and procedures to "inscribe" (i.e., to process) social knowledge and attitudes.

Relying on Gottdiener's outline of socio-semiotics, the basic premises of socio-semiotic research can be summarized as follows: Socio-semiotics analyzes the articulation between the material context of daily life and the signifying practices within a social context. Systems of signification are to be conceived of as multi-leveled, containing denotative signs and the particular codes that credit them with social values. Codes and contexts together form the structuring elements of the semantic fields in which communication is established. Social interaction and lived experience support the value systems (cultural codes) as well as the continuous processing of new signifieds (Gottdiener 25-31). In the practice of the socio-semiotic analysis of literature the concepts of "communication" and "discourse" are of primordial importance to the study of the structural coupling of communication and cognition. Communication is the locus where social meaning is produced and circulates. Discourse, being an articulated and communicative semiotic construct as well as a dynamic practice and process, is not restricted to linguistic material but implies every signifying entity as such. Whereas the notion "text" can be designated as a communicative event answering the interdependent requirements of linguistic *cohesion* and contextual *coherence* and of *intentionality* and *acceptability* on the enunciative and receptive levels (de Beaugrande and Dressler), "discourse" is to be conceived of, following Maingueneau's definition, as a practice to apprehend a discursive formation that is not to be separated from the discursive communities producing it, nor from its modes of emergence, diffusion and distribution: "la formation est alors pensée d'un même mouvement comme contenu, comme mode d'organisation des hommes et comme réseau spécifique de circulation des énoncés" (Maingueneau 15). Socio-semiotic discourse analysis is an operational discourse analysis in which textual specificities are investigated and described as manifestations of the discursive economy, i.e., the social conditions of textproduction, -reception, and -mediation, the positioning of a discourse within the global discursive field, the types and genres of discourse, the categories of producers and consumers, and the linguistic functions. Texts are analyzed within their historical communicative situation, or to put it another way, texts are associated with their contexts.

Parret distinguishes five types of context in order to classify different types of pragmatics: the *co-textual* context, the *existential* context, the *situational* context, the *actional* context and the *psychological* context. Especially the first three categories are relevant for a socio-semiotic analysis as well.¹ Co-text as context refers to the features of coherence and cohesion of a text as a macro-

grammatical system, but also to the notion of "inscription" as we meet it in the praxis of sociocriticism (see the CIADEST project [Montréal, now discontinued]). Robin puts it this way:

Le co-texte est ce qui accompagne le texte, l'ensemble des autres textes, des autres discours auxquels il fait écho, tout ce qui est supposé par le texte et écrit avec lui. Au niveau du texte, il n'y a que du référent intratextuel car chaque élément du texte appartient à un système de références, intra-textuel ... le co-textuel n'est jamais en dehors du texte. Il dessine autour de lui son univers de convivence, de lisibilité. (11-13)

The co-text functions as context of decoding (Parret 94). The existential or referential context consists of the framework that generates the social knowledge of reality using sets of references to the actual or possible worlds. The tissue of institutional or daily life settings constitutes a kind of situational context that may also be reflected in the discursive practice.

The literary system's dynamics manifest themselves in the patterning of the intra- and intersystemic interactions. The comparative method, which is the basic principle of discourse analysis, is very useful at this point. It offers the researcher the appropriate instruments to trace the trajectories of the "discourse migrations" that take place in cultural systems and to show the shifts and transformations brought about during this flow, mainly via mechanisms of discourse recuperation and appropriation of symbols.

Katholieke Universiteit Leuven

Works Cited

- De Beaugrande, R., and W. Dressler. *Introduction to Textlinguistics*. London: Longman, 1981.
- Gottdiener, M. *Postmodern Semiotics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1995.
- Maingueneau, D. *Genèses du discours*. Liège: Mardaga, 1984.
- Parret, H. *Semiotics and Pragmatics: An Evaluative Comparison of Conceptual Frameworks*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1983.
- Robin, R. "Pour une socio-poétique de l'imaginaire social." *Discours social/Social Discourse* 5.1-2 (1993): 7-32.
- Schmidt, S.J. "Literaturwissenschaft als interdisziplinäres Vorhaben." *Vielfalt der kulturellen Systeme und Stile*. Ed. Johannes Janota. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1993. Vol. II. 3-19.
- Schmidt, S.J. "System" and "Observer": *Two Key Concepts in (Future) Literary Studies*. LUMIS-Schriften 39. Siegen: Siegen U, LUMIS, 1994.

1 The last two categories — the actional and psychological contexts — are in scope more limited to pragmatics.