
TWO Semiosis: From Representation to Translation

When a man marches into a room wearing a military uniform and holding a rifle on his shoulder, we have a pretty good idea that this man is either a soldier or he is someone pretending to be a soldier. The man is dressed not only with the cloth, leather, buttons and shiny bits of metal, but with *signs*, entities that tell us something about the man, that signify to us and that allow us to make an interpretation. The combat fatigues, boots and rifle do not only signify the man, they also signify the community to which, not the man, but the signs belong. This said, within a single sign community or across different sign communities there may be not agreement as to the meaning of a sign, but disagreement and struggle. Does the uniform signify liberation or occupation, 'our side' or 'their side', peace or war? Moreover, a gun in the hands of a soldier is surely a sign, but its bullets do more than signify.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the US pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce referred to the process of how signs are produced, interpreted and connected to things and to each other as *semiosis*. Peirce argues that a sign is something that stands for something to somebody in some respect or capacity (cf. Peirce, 1998: 13). For Peirce a sign is something that is interpreted (i.e. it has an interpretant that is attached to the sign) and is related to an object (i.e. that which the interpretant is about):

[A] sign is anything, of whatsoever mode of being, which mediates between an object and interpretant; since it is both determined by the object *relatively to the interpretant*, and determines the interpretant *in reference to the object*, in such wise as to cause the interpretant to be determined by the object through the mediation of this 'sign'. The object and the interpretant are thus the two correlates of the sign; the one being antecedent, the other consequent of the sign. (1998: 410)

Although in many ways an oversimplification of Peirce's philosophy of signs, it can be argued that in some respects he is interested in the degree of motivation between an object, a sign and its interpretant (cf. Eco, 1976). In his science of signs, or semiotics, he makes a distinction between different

kinds of semiotic relations according to, what we might understand as, the degree of motivation (cf. 1992: 5-7, 226-8; 1998: 410). Firstly, at one end, he refers to the *symbol* that has no motivated relation to its object and interpretant over and above its conventional usage. In that sense, the symbolic designates a relation between object, sign and interpretant that is arbitrary. Secondly, Peirce talks of signs that are linked to the object through a sense of likeness. He refers to these signs as *icons*. Thus a photograph is iconic in the sense that the photograph is an exact resemblance of that which is represented; the icon is isomorphic of that which is represented. Finally, Peirce refers to signs that have a high degree of motivation as indices. An *index* is linked to its object through relations of contiguity: namely through closeness, connectedness or causality. The classic example, is that smoke is an index of fire (cf. Peirce, 1998: 4-10). The semiotic nature of the index has interested many from the ancient Stoics to those concerned with the development of medical semiotics (diagnostics) in the nineteenth century onward (cf. Eco, 1984). For example, medical science is able to methodically investigate the translation of signs and objects from symptoms such as sweating, high temperature, aching limbs, sore throat and coughing to the diagnosis of influenza. Or it is able to identify swelling and softness of surface tissue and diagnose internal bleeding. Sometimes the diagnosis names the collection of symptoms; sometimes it names the cause.

But much work on the semiotics of culture has been influenced, not only by Peirce, but by the early twentieth century Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure of whom we will talk much more shortly. The semiotics of culture has focused, by and large, on the question of representation and on the sign as symbolic and, by and large, it has been highly critical of approaches that recognise the relative degree of motivation between signs and objects. Moreover, to a large extent in cultural studies, the world of signs as symbolic has been contrasted to a world of materiality; the former has been seen to be as constructive of and representative of that materiality. Thus, Stuart Hall states:

According to this approach, we must not confuse the *material* world, where things and people exist, and the *symbolic* practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. (1997a: 25)

Furthermore, it is within the symbolic that agency (namely, the capacity to do things) is made visible. Hall continues:

It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others. (1997a: 25)

The advantage of adopting such an approach that looks exclusively at symbolic relations between signs is that we can begin to understand the systematic nature of signification. Different dress codes, for example, are understood with reference to the system of dress codes as a whole. A person dressed as a soldier is differentiated from one dressed as a sailor and one dressed as a airwoman. The different colours of the uniforms (for example, green, white, blue) signify the differences between the different armed forces. It is not that the colour white necessarily signifies a sailor in the navy, but rather that the colour only signifies with reference to what it is not (i.e. to the system as a whole). One of the problems with such an approach though is that it is concerned with symbolic relations to the detriment of other types of semiotic relations. Thus, consider the following example: a young naval recruit is given a pair of heavy black boots that signify 'hard-wearing' and 'durable in all conditions'. But if the boots are slightly too big and are beginning to give the recruit blisters, they will nevertheless signify something very different to that recruit. The sign is not simply symbolic, but also indexical. The material discomfort caused by wearing the boot has a relation to the meaning that the 'boot' has for the recruit. Moreover, if the young recruit finds herself with other young recruits in a dark and dank room with a leaky roof and the recruit removes her boot to catch the raindrops dripping from the roof, then the boot will perhaps signify something different again to those other young sailors in this rain-sodden room. The other recruits might, for example, view the sailor as noble and kindly in offering her boot to catch the rain or they might, alternatively, think her foolish and rather stupid, as it will be her wearing a wet boot come morning. In this latter sense, then, the sign is used (over and above any symbolic or indexical meaning it might have) as a means of social interaction with others.

In the following pages I will look at the most important resources for understanding cultural semiosis. I will initially consider Saussure's ideas about the sign, about the linguistic system, and about how such a system is presumed to be commensurate with an enclosed linguistic community (namely, those who speak a common language). I will then look to the work of two Russians, a linguist, Valerian Voloshinov and a literary theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin, in order to understand semiotics in terms of social interaction or dialogue and to see how such approaches might help us to rethink questions about the ordering of society and language. Finally, I look to the works of a range of writers, including Ian Hunter, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, who have found the notion of representation and the distinction between symbolic and material wanting. It is from this work that we get an understanding of semiosis as

concerned with the possibility of translation across material differences and a more complex sense of the relations across social, semiotic and material spaces.

Language, Social Solidarity and Difference

At the beginning of the twentieth century Saussure was trying to understand language as a systemic whole, not reducible to the particular speech acts that give any language its texture. His major work, *Course in General Linguistics (1915)*, was paradoxically compiled from student notes from a series of lectures he gave from 1906 to 1911. Although linguistics was the focus of his work, Saussure was attempting to formulate a general science of semiology (his term for the study of signs), that is a science not simply of written or oral language, but of gestural, visual and other languages as well. Central to this project was the notion that 'language is a social fact' (1974: 6). But such a simple turn of phrase, borrowed from the late nineteenth century French sociologist Emile Durkheim, masks the complexity of establishing language as a system.

There are clear parallels between the work of Saussure and others, such as Durkheim, in establishing a form of social science in the context of a series of questions about solidarity and structure. Briefly, Durkheim distinguishes between the different forms of solidarity that underpin pre-modern and modern societies. He privileges a notion of society that is comprised of social facts and collective representations. For Durkheim, the collective consciousness of a society – the shared ideas, values and norms of a community – refers to the collective condition of human social experience and not simply to the sum of individual elements (1982). The analysis of Durkheim's is but one in a longer lineage of thought from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries concerning the nature of social solidarity. At that time, after the French and North American revolutions, the growth of the sovereignty and rights of the individual are conjoined with the development of the idea of 'society' as a domain of association and community, such that the latter could be posed as a domain independent of direct government by the state: namely, as a domain whose rules were seen to be immanent to itself (cf. Donzelot, 1991; Wagner, 2001a, b). In a very literal sense, these thinkers were concerned with questions as to how a society could hold together in the absence of direct monarchical and ecclesiastical rule. For these thinkers, human beings were seen to have a sociality or solidarity that is pre-individual, one that is immanent to the very structure of society. The problem for us today is that this way of making social order intelligible seems to make

the structure of society co-extensive with the territorial boundaries of the nation-state.

It is Saussure, in the early twentieth century, who understands this pre-individual solidarity in terms of the notion of a linguistic community, such that what holds the collective together are not people, but the linguistic system. But let us start at the beginning with the sign. For Saussure, verbal language is made up of a series of sounds that are perceived by the ear. A series of acoustical impressions are produced by the vocal organs that are understood as meaningful sounds. These meaningful sounds are known as *phonemes* and are to be distinguished from grunts or other noises that we would not assume to be part of a linguistic system. For example, the phonemes 'c', 'a' and 't' can be placed together to form a larger meaningful unit referred to as a sound-image or *signifier*. Phonemes are not really meaningful on their own, but when combined with other phonemes they can produce units that are meaningful. 'C', as a phoneme, on its own does not have any meaning, but it does in combination. For Saussure, 'auditory impressions exist unconsciously' (1974: 38). Before a sound is uttered, both speaker and hearer have reference to a system of phonemes that when assembled in particular ways are able to produce meaning. But the collection of phonemes, put together to produce a sound-image, are not simply physiological. They are put together in order to produce meaning and hence, for Saussure, are also psychological. The sound-images are articulated with units of meaning or *signifieds*. Thus 'cat' refers to a fluffy animal with four paws, whiskers, who purrs, eats fish and gets chased by dogs. Signifiers are attached to signifieds according to a *code* and together they comprise a *sign* (Barthes, 1968).

Later semiologists, such as Barthes, have looked at how the units of meaning that are coded (or articulated) with signifiers are of two types. The literal meaning attached to a signifier is known as the *denotation*. Thus the denotation of 'cat' includes the definition we might read in a dictionary, such as 'a small domesticated quadruped' (Concise Oxford English Dictionary, 1964: 186). The second type of signified refers to the wider associative or symbolic meaning that might be attached to a signifier; this is known as the *connotation* (Barthes, 1968, 1973). Thus 'cat', in patriarchal contexts, can also be associated with femininity. Cats are seen as feminine creatures, sleek, sexy, wily and independent. Barthes talks about connotative meaning as ideological (1973).

Both signifiers and signifieds have meaning only inasmuch as they are constructed within systems of difference. In this sense, Saussure and his followers argue that signifiers and signifieds are not defined positively, but only negatively in terms of what they are not. Moreover, the relation between signifiers is not motivated by the object or referent itself. The signifier 'cat' does not have a natural relation to the fluffy animal. Rather the relation between

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signifier and signified is arbitrary, although many commentators argue that the relation is actually conventional (cf. Eco, 1976). From this we can gather that signification is purely formal; it is not based on the substantive quality of the world.

For Saussure, individual speech acts, or *parole*, are only possible because of the structure, or system, of language, or *langue*. Thus, the speech act, 'This is my cat', spoken by Mrs Pommefritter at 4.23 in the afternoon on 4 May 1969 in a police station in London, makes sense not because Mrs Pommefritter has a private language known only to herself, but because the signifiers and their grammatical, or syntactical, composition refer to a public system of language. Individual speech acts only make sense in relation to a general system of codification or language. Although the relation between the signifier 'cat' and the signified of 'a fluffy quadruped' is itself arbitrary inasmuch as any signifier could have been used, the signifier that is actually used needs to be one that is used by a whole community of speakers and not Mrs Pommefritter alone. Whereas speech acts are made by individuals in particular circumstances, language as a system is collective. Saussure argues that for language to be social the sign must be arbitrary in nature:

The arbitrary nature of the sign explains... why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up; by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value. (1974: 113)

Language is constituted as a 'sort of contract signed by the members of a community' (1974: 14) and although the mass of individual speech acts are heterogeneous (i.e. many and different), the linguistic system itself is homogenous (i.e. one and the same) and can be understood and analysed separately from those speech acts. Language has a life of its own. It is a system, a social institution and a product of its own history. Saussure refers to language as an 'organism' (1974: 20). Thus, although linguistic systems are related to the ethnography and culture of a nation, to political and social history, to social institutions (such as the church, the school and so on) and to changing geographies (i.e. in terms of migrating populations and so on), language is itself, according to Saussure, a separate and distinct entity. For Saussure, then, language is social inasmuch as '[i]ts social nature is one of its inner characteristics' (1974: 77); it is coextensive with its community of speakers, although not reducible to any one speech act by any one of those speakers.

This said, Saussure's understanding of language is somewhat paradoxical. The articulation of signifier and signified meet in the mind of the speaker or listener: language 'is a system of signs in which the only essential thing is the union of meanings and sound-images, and in which both parts of the sign are

psychological' (1974: 15). Linguistic phenomena 'are realities that have their seat in the brain' (1974: 15). But no one human mind contains within it the structure of language itself. The system of language is only found in the collective mind. Saussure states:

If we could embrace the sum of word-images stored in the minds of all individuals, we could identify the social bond that constitutes language. It is a storehouse filled by the members of a given community through their active use of speaking, a grammatical system that has a potential existence in each brain, or, more specifically, in the brains of a group of individuals. For language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity. (1974: 14)

Thus although signification, the combination of signifier and signified, is made possible in the mind, this psychological fact is itself a consequence of the system of language, not the individual. In this sense, language is, to borrow from Durkheim, the site of a 'collective consciousness'. Individual speech acts are accidental, not necessary aspects of language.

For Saussure, language is a space of social solidarity. But Saussure adds a different dimension. The system of language is commensurate with the community of speakers of that language and the linguistic actions of individuals are secondary to the primacy of the linguistic organism. Moreover, linguistic solidarity is produced through the mechanisms of language. Saussure talks of *associative* and *syntagmatic solidarities*: '[t]he set of phonic and conceptual differences that constitutes language results from two types of comparisons; the relations are sometimes associative, sometimes syntagmatic' (1974: 127). Associative solidarities refer to those groupings according to common meaning. Thus 'cat', 'dog', 'guinea pig' are associated according to the common paradigm of domestic pets. Associative relations are also known (following the work of the linguist Roman Jakobson) as paradigmatic relations. These relations are, according to Saussure dependent on the memory function of the brain: namely, the brain is able to store a series of common terms any one of which may be pulled out and placed in a particular linguistic utterance such as 'The cat is sitting on the mat' or 'The dog is sitting on the mat'. These relations are defined as *in absentia* because as one term is used so all the other terms in the storehouse are not used. In contrast, syntagmatic solidarities are defined as *in praesentia* and refer to groupings of signifiers that are present at the same time. Syntagmatic relations refer to the combination of terms standing next to each other. These are linear relations as in the grammatical combination of words in a well-formed sentence, 'The dog eats biscuits'. 'Dog' and 'eats' have no relation of common meaning. Their only relation is due to their being placed next to each other in the forming of a grammatical sentence.

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Language, for Saussure then, is both a system of differences, but also the site of solidarities:

In language everything boils down to differences but also groupings. The mechanism of language, which consists of the interplay of successive terms, resembles the operation of a machine in which the parts have a reciprocating function even though they are arranged in a single dimension. (1974: 128)

Although the difference machine construes the relation between signifier and signified as arbitrary, the arbitrariness is by degree: '[b]etween the two extremes – a minimum of organization and a minimum of arbitrariness – we find all possible varieties' (1974: 133). Thus the degree of motivation of the signifier and signified (i.e. the degree of stickiness, perhaps, between word and meaning) is explained by the syntagmatic and associative solidarities. Saussure avoids commenting directly on the full sociological implications of his science of semiology and he keeps within the limits of linguistics. Thus the full import of his analysis of linguistic solidarity and differentiation is never discussed in terms of, for example, social and cultural differentiation. These types of analysis would need to be left to later sociological, anthropological and cultural studies researchers.

Nevertheless, Saussure's comments on language, ethnicity and national boundaries are revealing. For Saussure any boundary between two languages is conventional. Moreover, he states that:

[A]brupt transitions from one language to another are common, due to circumstances that have destroyed imperceptible transitions. The most disruptive force is the shifting of populations. Nations have always shuttled back and forth. Their migrations, multiplied throughout the centuries, have wrought confusion everywhere, and at many points all trace of linguistic transition has been wiped out. (1974: 204)

Saussure continues by taking the example of the family of Indo-European languages: Slavic overlaps with Iranian and Germanic languages; German links Slavic and Celtic; Celtic is related to Italic; and Italic is between Celtic and Greek. Peoples migrate and settle; they cross territories; languages travel and change. Here the marks of national difference are not territorial; they are linguistic: '[t]he culture of a nation exerts an influence on its language, and the language, on the other hand, is largely responsible for the nation' (1974: 20). Moreover, if we include rites, customs and everyday practices within the broad spectrum of semiological data, the differentiation of nations becomes more enclosed. Saussure talks about ethnic unity in terms of the 'multiple relations of religion, civilization, common defense, etc., which spring up even among nations of different races and in the absence of any political bond'

(1974: 223). It is this ethnic unity that has a mutual relation with linguistic system:

The social bond tends to create linguistic community and probably imposes certain traits on the common idiom; conversely, linguistic community is to some extent responsible for ethnic unity. In general, ethnic unity always suffices to explain linguistic community. (1974: 223)

The correlation of language and ethnicity is resonant of the cultural relativism of the of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. It is a form of cultural relativism that is immanent to the development of the discipline of anthropology in the late nineteenth century, but also to discussions of culture well into the twentieth century (cf. Kuper, 2000).

In Saussure, then, we see how the systemic nature of language is closely correlated with ethnicity and national culture, on the one hand, and with the community of speakers and their social solidarity, on the other. The boundedness of language is thus the boundedness of society, but also the boundedness of a nation. In this light, the simple ethnographic examples that mark the English word 'cat' from the French 'chat' or the different ways of saying snow in Inuit language or the difference between how the Welsh and the English mark out colour differences between grey, green and blue are more insidious. 'Cat' and 'chat', not only refer to two different ways of pointing to the same fluffy animal with pointy ears, but also reference the difference between two languages, two societies, two peoples, two ethnicities and two nations. For Saussure the differences have no bearing on race. Linguistic systems are not analogues of racial types (1974: 222). Nevertheless, the correspondence between language and ethnicity, on the one hand, and the strict differences (however overlapping) between national languages (as the tracing of communities of speakers), on the other, serves well to deliver the same certainties and the same purification of space that racial difference has historically been so good at delivering. As Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri state, with reference to the equivalence between people, nation and racial dominance: '[t]he identity of the people was constructed on an imaginary plane that hid and/or eliminated differences, and this corresponded on the practical plane to racial subordination and social purification' (2000: 103). But instead of a purification that disavows or represses difference, the solidarity that is constructed within Saussurian linguistics is such that it is a necessary correlative. For Saussure, solidarity is predicated not on a shared set of meanings, beliefs or ideas, but on a community of differences.

The most trenchant critique of Saussurian linguistics, from within cultural theory, has come from the work of the French philosopher, Jacques Derrida. At one level, it might seem that the work of Derrida is appropriate for the undoing of the closure of the bounded space of social solidarity and the

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linguistic system and to some extent this would be true. Derrida has shown how the system of differences that constitute a language are not fixed. A signifier does not simply refer to a signified that sits in the head of the speaker or listener. The idea or concept of a fluffy, four-legged purring animal does not in any way complete the signifier 'cat'. On the contrary, Derrida argues, the meaning of a term is always displaced along the chain of possible meanings. The signified is always deferred. There is no 'transcendental signified', to use a phrase deployed by Derrida, no meaning that halts the flow of meaning, that stops the play of signification. We can think of the example of looking up the word 'cat' in a dictionary. Instead of giving us something substantive, the dictionary passes us on to other words and other meanings, that we then look up and so on and so on. In this sense, language is not only a system of differences in which signs *differ* from each other, but also meanings are constantly *deferred*. Signs are differentiated from each other on a spatial plane, but also meaning is endlessly deferred on a temporal plane. The signifier is never finally stitched to the signified. The term Derrida coins to name such a process is not difference (with an 'e'), but *differance* (with an 'a'). For Derrida the silent 'a' is such that it cannot be heard in the consciousness of individuals, but only in writing (1978a). Derrida talks not of signs (based on the sound-image), but of 'grams' (or written traces) and refers to his philosophy of signification as 'grammatology' (1976). Thus, Derrida's critique – that he calls deconstruction – is posed not only against the notion that meaning is fixed, but also against the notion that any such meaning might find itself in the mind of the speaker or listener. In this sense, Derrida is explicitly deconstructing the residual psychologism of Saussurian semiology and of the science of signs more generally (1976). No meaning ever appears as a presence present to consciousness. Thus, although we might think that a 'cat' in English and a 'chat' in French refer to the same fluffy signified and that translation across the two languages is a possibility, we would, according to Derrida, be very mistaken. Any attempt at translation is a transformation. The meaning of 'cat' cannot simply be transported. It is constituted within a system of differences and the endless play within that system. Any sign does not transparently represent a world outside of itself; rather a language is constitutive of that unsettled reality.

Although Derrida's deconstruction of Saussurian semiology is certainly inviting and takes us some way toward understanding some major problems, it nevertheless has its own problems. First, Derrida's critique is predicated on a prioritisation of the formal qualities of the sign that are foregrounded by Saussure (i.e. that both signifier and signified neither relate directly to physical sound itself nor to any referents in the world). Derrida states that 'by de-substantializing both the signified content and the "expressive

substance" – which therefore is no longer in a privileged or exclusive way phonic – by making linguistics a division of general semiology, Saussure powerfully contributed to turning against the metaphysical tradition the concept of the sign that he borrowed from it' (Derrida, 1987: 18). Thus, in order to make way for a general semiology, and also for a Derridean grammatology, the sign must be de-substantialised. It must be stripped of its materiality and its particularity. In this sense, it is only the form of the phoneme that must be carried from speech to writing to gestural semiotics and so on, not the privilege of speech itself. But the bind in which Derrida is caught is precisely that even though translation at the level of the signified is ruled out of court, it nevertheless slips back in at the level of the formal quality of the sign itself (and whether we call it sign or gram makes no real difference). It is important, as we shall see later in this chapter, not only to substantialise the sign, but also make it thoroughly particular. Speech is different from writing which is different in turn from other semiotic systems, but this does not disavow the possibility of translation, on the contrary it is what makes translation both possible and necessary.

Secondly, although deconstruction displaces the presence of consciousness and any external agency that might serve to anchor meaning, it prioritises difference as *systematic* (1978a, 1978b, 1987). Derrida allows for meaning to be traced throughout the dictionary, as it were, but the world of difference is limited to that dictionary, limited to the sociality of language as the constitutive limits of solidarity. In this sense at least, Derrida stays within the problematic of solidarity and difference. The deconstruction of closure is only skin deep. If solidarity is unbounded, then the reason for difference is taken away. It is not for no reason that deconstruction is a precise form of critique that identifies a binary, identifies the relations of dominance and supplementarity, and reverses the value of the polarity, in such a way as not simply to prioritise the supplement as a new dominant, but to problematise the logic of dominance itself. For example, if we take the binary citizen/soldier, we would ordinarily assume that in times of normalcy 'citizen' is the dominant term and that 'soldier' only identifies those particular citizens who are trained by the military for warfare. In this sense, any meaning of the category 'soldier' is secondary to the meaning of 'citizen', inasmuch as a soldier fights for the population of a given state, namely for the whole society of citizens. Soldiers are citizens first, soldiers second. Soldiers are only seen to fight at exceptional times, such that the normal is seen as a state of peace and the abnormal a state of war. Any deconstruction of this relation between citizen and soldier, of this relation between dominant and supplement, might in the first instance reverse the logic of the discourse and argue that any 'peace' is only made possible through the violence of the state. The state, as that which holds the

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legitimate means of force, constructs a population as citizens only inasmuch as those citizens are made equal under the common rule of law. Moreover, the territory of any particular state is only so because it has been accrued over centuries of warfare. In this sense, peace is only the temporary outcome of a perpetual state of war. In addition, Or to put it more lyrically we constantly fight for peace. Any citizen's allegiance to the nation-state implies their implicit willingness to fight in the defence of that nation; equally though, as if the reverse of that contract, the state is able to call-up, or enforce, that individual to fight. In contrast, those who do not pledge allegiance to the nation-state and who resist the force of that state are, in effect, soldiers in citizen's clothing: terrorists by any other name. Isn't the 'war on terror' an acceptance of this perverse logic, that all social existence is dictated by the logic of war?

If we accept this analysis – if only for the purpose of an example – then we can see how the deconstruction of the difference between soldier and citizen does not simply reverse the polarity of the terms (i.e. soldiers are 'normal' and citizens are 'abnormal'), but leads to an undermining of the logic of the binary construction itself: in Orwellian 'doublethink', peace is war. Deconstruction is an energy efficient critique as it relies on adding nothing except the terms within the system present. But it does *always presuppose the system* and the slippage that occurs as a result of deconstruction is *always within the system*: if the slippage were to slip outside the system it would be spillage or drainage, not destabilisation.

Utterances, Dialogue and Heterogeneity

In contrast to, and in criticism of, the Saussurian model, the work of a group of writers, living under the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, construed the sociality of language in a manner that foregrounded not the homogeneity of the system, but the heterogeneity of the utterances. A series of works written variously under the names of Valerian Nikolaevich Voloshinov, Pavel Nikolaevich Medvedev and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin were written from the 1920s to the early 1970s. These men were a group of intellectuals, friends and writers; the authorship of their various works is disputed; but there is some suggestion that the major works were written by one man, Bakhtin. As with the anecdote concerning Saussure's great text (namely that it was never written by him but from his students' notes), the story of Bakhtin, not being one person but many, has a familiar echo. The story stands as an allegory of the works themselves, a series of works that deal with the heterogeneity of language, not its stifling uniformity; with the vibrancy of language, not the

submission of the written word to the authority of the master's monologic voice. Whatever the truth of authorship, the writings of Voloshinov and Bakhtin in particular allow us to look at lived culture as composed of many voices, speaking together, contesting each other, creative and vibrant. It is because of this understanding of the vibrancy of language, of a sense of speech as social interaction, that these writers have come to the fore in recent discussion about culture and language across a range of the humanities and social science disciplines.

It is with the *utterance*, or the particular speech act, that Voloshinov prefaces his major work titled *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1973, originally published in 1929). Thus, whereas Saussure looks to the structure of language as *langue* or as 'ready-made code', Voloshinov looks to *parole*, not as an individual expression, but as a social act in relation to others, as 'living speech'. Voloshinov typifies the social psychology that is resonant of Saussure as 'metaphysical', 'mythic', concerning the 'collective soul', 'collective inner psyche' and the 'spirit of the people' (1973: 19). Voloshinov instead looks at the performance of *discourse* in specific social situations. His starting point is that the 'word' is defined not in terms of its 'purity', but in terms of its 'social ubiquity' (1973: 19). The sign is everywhere. Social struggle, change and interaction resonate in the sign itself; the sign becomes an index of social change. It is not something that is conjoined – in terms of its formal and meaningful element – in the mind of the speaker or listener; it only has a life inasmuch as it is externalised in a social world and inasmuch as it is an index of the importance attached to certain things, meanings and events: namely, within the 'social purview of the given time period and the given social group' (1973: 21):

Every sign, as we know it, is a construct between socially organized persons in the process of their interaction. Therefore, the forms of signs are conditioned above all by the social organization of the participants involved and also by the immediate conditions of their interaction. When these forms change, so does sign... Only so approached can the problem of the relationship between sign and existence find its concrete expression; only then will the process of the causal shaping of the sign by existence stand out as a process of genuine existence-to-sign transit, of genuine dialectical refraction of existence in the sign. (Voloshinov, 1973: 21)

In Voloshinov's discussion, the sign is spread across a community of speakers and listeners. But, although there are some similarities with Saussure inasmuch as this community is not typified by its sameness but by its difference, for Voloshinov the sign community is one divided by social class. For Saussure the sign community is coextensive with the system and the sign is meaningful only in relation to the system, but for Voloshinov the sign community is a site of struggle and the sign is always divided through that

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struggle. Every sign does not so much reflect social existence; it *refracts* it. The sign is a vital and dynamic entity; it is defined by its '*multiaccentuality*':

Class does not coincide with the sign community, i.e., with the community, which is the totality of users of the same set of signs for ideological communication. Thus various different classes will use one and the same language. As a result, differently oriented accents intersect in every ideological sign. Sign becomes an arena of the class struggle. (1973: 23)

For Voloshinov, the ruling class attempts to close down this multiaccentuality, to close down the class struggle over the sign and to impose a single uniform set of meanings. To a large extent these attempts are foiled by the vibrancy of discourse itself, by its necessary interactivity: '[t]he sign is a creation between individuals, a creation within a social milieu' (1973: 22). Every sign has two faces; it is Janus-faced; it looks from one side of an interaction to the other: from inside one person to outside that person, but also from one person to another.

Expressive theories of language make a distinction between the inner expression and the outer objectification or externalisation of that expression. In this sense, language is the externalisation of intentions and meanings of an individual. For Voloshinov, such a theory of language, disavows the necessity of outward objectification; every expression must, of necessity, be expressed; it must be verbalised or materialised through a shared language; and in order for it to be intelligible to others as well as oneself it must be constructed in a series of signs that are common to oneself and others. Moreover, for Voloshinov, it is the outward expression that organises the experience of the individual, not the other way around. Whereas for Saussure, the sociality of the expression is returned to the systemic nature of language (i.e. language as a system is a social fact), for Voloshinov the sociality of expression is analysed in terms of the necessary *addressivity* of the utterance; '*[t]he word is oriented toward an addressee, toward who that address might be*' (1973: 85). Even on those occasions when we talk to ourselves inside our heads or when we write those secret words in our diaries or we make comments to ourselves on post-it notes, we are talking to others, albeit others imagined, rather than externalised in actual persons standing in front of us or at the other end of a telephone: '[e]ach person's inner world and thought has its stabilized *social audience* that comprises the environment in which reasons, motives, values, and so on are fashioned' (1973: 86). Thus Voloshinov argues:

Orientation of the word toward the addressee has an extremely high significance. In point of fact, *word is a two-sided act*. It is determined equally by *whose* word it is and *for whom* it is meant. As word, it is precisely *the product of the reciprocal relationship between speaker and listener, addresser and addressee*. Each and every word expresses the 'one' in relation to the 'other'. I give myself verbal

shape from another's point of view, ultimately from the point of view of the community to which I belong. A word is a bridge thrown between myself and another. If one end of the bridge depends on me, then the other depends on my addressee. A word is territory shared by both addresser and addressee, by the speaker and his interlocutor. (1973: 86)

Every utterance is always, of necessity, *oriented toward an other*. In this orientation, in this address to another, the sign is intoned in certain kinds of ways; it is valued in particular ways. The sign is always weighted or accented in the moment of address.

Every utterance, then, is constituted as an interaction; it is, of necessity, social; '[t]he immediate social situation and the broader social milieu wholly determine – and determine from within, so to speak – the structure of an utterance' (1973: 86). An utterance is not only addressed to an other, but also within a field of utterances: 'determined by the whole aggregate of conditions under which any given community of speakers operates' (1973: 93). When speaking to another person our language is always infused with the protocols and customs that exist prior to our interaction. Every utterance is always inscribed within a broader *dialogic* or *intertextual* field. When we meet and address a friend, we might reach out our hand or embrace them or kiss them on both cheeks. We might ask how they are and how they have been. We might sit and drink coffee and talk about family and friends. Each utterance draws on a broader field of utterances and thus constructs each interaction within a broader set of *speech genres*, those familiar repeated forms of interaction: the greeting, the social talk, the requests for food and so on: '[t]he outwardly actualized utterance is an island rising from the boundless sea of inner speech; the dimensions and forms of this island are determined by the particular *situation* of the utterance and its *audience*' (1973: 96).

Equally though each interaction is about something. Each interaction has a *theme* or an *object*. But the object of discourse is not something that exists external to that discourse, to that interaction; it is not a 'referent', the object of a proposition; it is more broadly – and here again Voloshinov strikes a chord with Saussure – the meaning or meanings that come to bear on any interaction. In this sense, a discourse does not reflect an external object; it organises it, transforms it and refracts it (cf. Todorov, 1984: 55). In the relay of words, in the borrowings of used utterances, in the orientation of oneself to another, the object is touched; it cannot help but be infused by those movements.

Although it might seem easier for us to tie utterances down to a fixed set of codes, in doing so we only focus on the *given* and ignore the *creative* aspect of any utterance. Whereas the former refers to the reiterative aspect of language, that Saussure identifies in the system or that is articulated in the code, the latter refers to that which is novel in any utterance, the fact that it is not simply a repetition of something already said before:

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The *given* and the *created* in the verbal utterance. The utterance is never the simple reflection or the expression of something that pre-exists it, is given and ready. It always creates something that had not been before, that is absolutely new and is nonreiterative, and that, moreover, always has a relation to value. (Bakhtin quoted in Todorov, 1984: 50)

The particularity or singularity of the utterance, its creativity, is a consequence of its sociality, its embeddedness within a social situation or its field of enunciation. Any utterance is always particular to a situation: to a particular space and time, a particular object of dialogue and a particular relation between interlocutors and the event (cf. Todorov, 1984: 42). Thus the 'utterance as a whole' refers to both the verbal and extraverbal elements of any utterance (Voloshinov, 1973: 96). The event is always original.

To a large extent, when Voloshinov, but also Bakhtin and others, talk about utterances they are referring to speech acts or speech performances. To a large extent dialogue is conceived only as verbal interaction. And yet, they also talk of dialogue to mean other forms of performance or interaction – although they have a tendency to reduce such performances to the model of speech – and other forms of dialogue that are not simply face-to-face. A book written for an audience, printed and read, then criticised in the press, constitutes a form of dialogue between author and her or his readership (cf. Voloshinov, 1973: 95). The discussion of the voices in texts, rather than just verbal utterances, comes to the fore in the work of Bakhtin on the novel, rather than Voloshinov on ideology. For Bakhtin, the novel is made up of many voices and cannot be reduced to the voice of the author. This is discussed most notably in his work on Dostoyevsky (translated as *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1984) and more general writings on the novel (collected in the translation *The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981). In the terms already used above, when a speaker produces an utterance, that utterance is not the property of the speaker; it belongs also to the listener, but equally to the voices of those past utterances that make up the broader dialogic or intertextual field. For example, when I say to my lover 'I love you', although I feel these words and so does my partner, I hardly have a right to their originality. Their meaning is dependent on all the contexts in which these words have been uttered. In this sense, the 'I' of the utterance refers to me, the speaker, but is also constructed within the utterance itself. In the utterance an image of the speaker, the utterer, is thus created, an image that owes as much (if not more) to those prior voices and utterances than to me myself (cf. Barthes, 1990). Bakhtin refers to this interaction as a 'three-role drama' (quoted in Todorov, 1984: 52). The drama of these voices in any utterance is what Bakhtin refers to as dialogic. In utterances that are more cluttered and complex, such as a theatrical play, a television programme or a novel, the number of voices proliferate and we might talk about this in terms of the *polyphony*, not of the utterance, but

of the *text*. In Bakhtin's discussion of the novel, he talks about the direct speech of the author (the authorial voice that might guide us through a story), the represented speech of the characters (characters in a novel that speak independently of, and sometimes in another world to, the author) and the doubly-oriented or double-voiced speech (such that when an author deploys a character that speaks both for her or him, but also for another). As the text becomes more consciously dialogic and more explicitly polyphonic, pulling away from, but also criticising, the centralising power of the author, the text becomes more self-reflexive, more aware of its status as writing. Bakhtin talks about this in terms of the *heteroglossia* of the text:

Along with the internal contradictions of the object itself, the prose writer comes to discover as well the social heteroglossia that *surrounds* the object, the Tower of Babel confusion of languages that goes on around any object. The dialectics of the object are interwoven with the social dialogue surrounding it. For the prose writer, the object is a condensation of heterological voices among which his own voice must also resound; these voices create the background necessary for his own voice, without which his literary nuances would not be perceived, and without which they 'do not sound'. (1981: 91-2)

In such an analysis, we might begin to question whether it is correct to talk about utterances rather than texts. In many ways the dialogism explicit in a novel is less about a particular verbal interaction (as supposed by the notion of utterance) and more a space of such interaction. A text is, in some ways, such a space. Julia Kristeva, the psychoanalytic critic who brought Bakhtin's work over to the West from the Soviet Union in the late 1960s, uses just such a metaphor as the text and it is she who coins the term *intertextuality* to capture the meaning of Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. She says: '[t]he text is... a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another' (Kristeva, 1982: 36). Moreover, every text is a creation precisely because it draws on the resources of other texts. In the making of a text, those other texts are transformed: '[i]n its structures, writing reads another writing, reads itself and constructs itself through a process of destructive genesis' (Kristeva, 1982: 77). Although Kristeva was instrumental in bringing Bakhtin to the attention of Western critics, she provides a reading of his work that synthesises his ideas within a formalist, post-Saussurian and post-Lacanian problematic (which is discussed in chapter five). In many ways the shift from interpersonal interaction to novels leads to an attempt to provide a space for the polyphony of voices, but to frame these voices within the 'text' leads only to these voices being submerged within a system of difference; they become systematised (cf. Billig, 1997; Holquist 1990).

The writings of Voloshinov and Bakhtin are fruitful, not only for the analysis of speech acts and texts, but also for more cultural and sociological questions

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concerning power and democracy and it is in this respect that I want to mark a very deep difference from Saussure and post-Saussurian cultural thought. Bakhtin talks about the diversity of discursive types within any social community. Not only are there a plurality of utterances, but also a plurality (although limited in number) of speech genres (for example, talking as a lecturer, speaking to your mother face-to-face, talking to a lover on the telephone and so on). Bakhtin refers to this diversity as *heterology*. The notion of heterology joins closely with the notion of heteroglossia, which refers to the diversity of languages (in Bakhtin's sense). In sociological and cultural terms, these notions are important as they help to explain how everyday social and cultural life is not simply rich, detailed and diverse, but also counterposed to countervailing forces that attempt to close down this diversity and difference. Bakhtin talks about these forces in terms of the centripetal force of power and authority, centralising culture and the centrifugal force of linguistic and social diversity, the heterology and heteroglossia of the quotidian:

The category of common language is the theoretical expression of historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, the expression of the centripetal forces of the language. The common language is never given but in fact always ordained, and at every moment of the life of the language it is opposed to genuine heterology. But at the same time, it is perfectly real as a force that overcomes this heterology; imposes certain limits upon it; guarantees a maximum of mutual comprehension; and becomes crystallized in the real, though relative, unity of spoken (daily) and literary language, of 'correct language'. (1984: 83-4)

For Bakhtin centripetal forces are monologic. They attempt to speak with one voice, to speak only with the voice of authority and to authorise only those who speak with such a voice. These centralising forces would thus prefer a world of mimics to a world of difference. In this sense, any attempt to speak for 'society', 'community', 'culture' or 'nation' as if with one voice must be viewed with some scepticism. Any such monologism needs to be revealed as but one voice among many: namely, put in its dialogical context. For Bakhtin, then, there is no collapse of the semiological onto the space of social solidarity and national culture. Such a collapse constitutes a form of monological closure, a form of authority that attempts to reduce the heteroglossia of utterances to a single voice:

Verbal and ideological decentring occurs only when a national culture sheds its closure and its self-sufficiency, when it becomes conscious of itself as only *one* among other cultures and languages. This new awareness will then sap the roots of the mythological sense of language, based on the notion of an absolute fusion of ideological meaning with language. (Bakhtin quoted in Todorov, 1984, 66-7)

Any attempt to speak for the nation, for the society, for the culture closes down the polyphony of voices and attempts to disavow the ambivalence and

hybridity within the voice. In this sense, Bakhtin's understanding of dialogism and the necessary hybridity of dialogism (cf. Bhabha, 1996) is more than a notion of a democratic society made up of a diversity of voices or different cultures. For Bakhtin every voice, every 'culture' is not – or contains the possibility of not being – one voice or one culture; every voice, every culture contains within it a drama of voices, both present, past and future. The opening of the social into a heteroglossic space means opening up that space to the potential disruption of social order, to the overturning of hierarchies, to the constant questioning of authority, to what Bakhtin (1968) also refers to as the *carnavalesque* (the topsy-turvy world where the low become high).

Bakhtin provides an account of semiological interaction or dialogue that avoids, and provides a critique of, the collapse that is evident in Saussure and some post-Saussurian semiology: namely, the collapse of linguistic system, social solidarity, national culture and people. Any attempt to talk about 'society', in this sense as a social totality, as a whole system, is a form of monologism; it constitutes the reduction of the social to one particular version of it and it denies the constant creation and invention that is evident in everyday interaction. Moreover, any talk of a system of differences within which meaning is formed, however localised, merely prioritises one voice that speaks for that system, that says what that system is and how the differences are thus formed. This is all well and good, but Bakhtin lets such a monologism in from below. For Bakhtin, society is not a system, but a series of interactions, in the first instance, between two people; it is a notion of society that is based on a primary *intersubjectivity*. This interaction prioritises face-to-face talk as the model of all communication and discourse; all other forms of discourse and interaction are reduced to this interpersonal and intersubjective model and herein lies the problem. Thus, a model that makes visible social and cultural plurality is itself based on a reduction to a single model. This paradox certainly marks a progress on Saussure's understanding of language and society, but it also demonstrates the problem of modelling the social even one that is reflexive.

Rhizomes and Translation Across Material Difference

The move toward understanding language as a series of particulars, rather than as one thing governed by universal rules (whether the grammar of the code or of discursive social interaction), has been made in a number of recent accounts that draw variously on Ludwig Wittgenstein's ordinary language philosophy, Michel Foucault's notion of a discursive formation and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's thinking about multiplicitous organisation.

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Some of these accounts suggest a move beyond the analysis of semiosis as a relation between symbolic and material, or as one that is principally concerned with 'representation', to one that begins to comprehend the translation across material difference. Ian Hunter in his article 'After representation' (1984) takes to task the post-Saussurian critique of language as transparent and of the role of signifying systems in the differentiation of matter and experience. Language does not simply represent a world that is pre-existent. Language does not simply name objects or states of affairs in the world. Language is not a transparent analogue of the world. But, Hunter argues, a post-Saussurian cultural analysis – that sees language as necessarily opaque and as constructive of the meanings of objects and experiences – is equally problematic. In particular, Hunter takes to task the analysis of colour differentiation in Catherine Belsey's *Critical Practice* (1980).

Belsey claims that different linguistic systems produce different ways of organising colour differentiations. Thus the Welsh term 'glas', that is literally translated as 'blue' would include the colours green and grey as identified by an English speaker. Moreover, the English 'grey' might cover both the Welsh 'glas' and 'llwyd' (literally translated as brown) (Belsey, 1980: 39). The undifferentiated continuum of colour experience – from one end of the spectrum to the other – is divided up differently in different languages. There is no natural experience of individual colours. Colour differentiation is a consequence of language. Belsey argues that any particular system of colour differentiation in any particular language is but one way of dividing the continuum among a number of possible ways. In contrast to this form of structural analysis, Hunter draws on the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1958, 1977, 1980) and his understanding of colour description. Wittgenstein does not return to a notion that colour names correspond to individualised pre-existent units of experience, but he does discuss colour naming in terms of very localised sets of practices. If someone refers to a 'reddish yellow', I can point to that colour and I can have an image of that colour in my head. If, however, someone refers to 'bluish yellow', I cannot do the same. Wittgenstein analyses this example in terms of the way that my understanding of a colour is not predicated on a system of cultural differences, but on particular *techniques* of choosing a colour. The apparatuses that we have ready to hand to refer to these colours include, for example, the colour wheel, the graduated palette and the rainbow. In these apparatuses red and yellow stand next to each other, but blue and yellow do not; hence we cannot have a bluish yellow. As Hunter explains:

In Wittgenstein's example, then, the point is not that we cannot 'imagine' or *experience* bluish yellow, not that our *language* occludes some possible part of a colour continuum. Rather, it is that we happen not to possess a *technique* or *apparatus* that would permit us to engage in a particular set of

activities. That we happen not to possess this technique or apparatus does not mean that our (or anyone's) organisation of colours is incomplete, or forms only part of 'all the possible organisations contained in the continuum'. The reason being that capacities for identifying colours and understanding the meaning of colour terms are local accomplishments resulting from the practical deployment of technologies such as that of the colour sample. Differences in colour concepts must not be traced to different divisions of a continuum of experience of 'chain of meaning', but to the differences in available technologies or 'language-games'. (1984: 419)

Different colour concepts are consequences of different *social technologies*. These technologies are built up, according to Hunter, in a piecemeal fashion and they find their conditions of existence not in a universal language, but in very particularised practices, institutions and discourses (such as schools, scientific laboratories, ophthalmic practices, families and so on).

This understanding of discourse and social technology draws not just from Wittgenstein, but also from the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault's work has been used widely within cultural studies, primarily to look at the relations of discourse, power and selfhood, but his analysis of discourse has been widely misinterpreted within the context of a post-Saussurian semiology, of which Foucault was insistently critical. Although for Foucault a central category in his theoretical toolbox is that of discourse as a field of statements, his discussion does not take the route of understanding such a notion in terms of meaning being predicated on a universal system of language. Moreover, Foucault does not reduce the statement to intersubjective social interaction. The statement, for Foucault, is not a bridge between two people. Foucault argues that the statement is: 'a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they "make sense", according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are the sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation (oral or written)' (1972: 86-7). A statement, then, although it involves signs, is a function; it is defined by its use. Moreover, statements are organised not on the basis of their meaning, but according to their dispersion and regularity, namely, their discursive formation:

[t]he fact of its belonging to a discursive formation and the laws that govern it are one and the same thing; this is not paradoxical since the discursive formation is characterized not by principles of construction but by a dispersion of fact, since for statements it is not a condition of possibility but a law of coexistence, and since statements are not interchangeable elements but groups characterized by their modality of existence. (Foucault, 1972: 116).

A discursive formation identifies a series of statements found next to each other, in a particular form of organisation, such that we can talk about things in certain kinds of ways, at certain historical periods and in certain social and

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geographical spaces. A discursive formation does not identify a law that exists outside of time and space; it does not refer to a condition of possibility, but to a condition of existence. It is defined or constituted only by the elements present within itself. It is no more and no less than this. The Foucauldian notion of discourse is set against an understanding of statements, or signs, that refer back to a general code or intersubjective iteration because such conditions frame a discursive organisation outside of particular social and historical occasions. Thus, although Foucault's notion of discursive formation looks like a more historical and socially specific version of Saussure's *langue* (or a signifying practice), it is no such thing. In this sense, language does not have a general grammar nor does it contain certain rules with regard to its capacity to represent and construct an external reality. Discourse is between words and things; it is the term we use to describe the organisation of both words and things. Language itself is thus a much more piecemeal affair.

However, as Wittgenstein says: '[t]o obey a rule, to make a report, to give an order, to play a game of chess, are *customs* (uses, institutions)' (Wittgenstein, 1958: 81). It is not as if there is language on one side and the external material world on the other, as if the latter were a continuous stream of matter or *hyle*, only divided or constructed by the rules and differentiations of language and the symbolic. Such an understanding of the world is one construed through a logic of representation, whereby the sign that stands in for that which is absent is an analogue of that absent thing. In this sense, language is seen to constitute the classificatory system that includes all classifications, the class of all classes: namely, within its definition all of the world exists. Nothing escapes its boundaries; nothing escapes the borders of its territory; it is society, the people, but also the world. It is the measure of all things and within it all things are measured, sized, fitted and organised. As others have noted, this problem of the one class and the many particulars is a problem of epistemology: namely, a problem of how we construct a way of knowing things. Representation names not the only way of knowing things, but just one particular way of doing so and one that has a long and troubled history from the ancient Greek philosopher Plato onwards.

One of the ways of trying to think outside of this problem of representation has come from the work of the philosopher Gilles Deleuze and the radical anti-psychiatrist Felix Guattari. In particular, they present a notion of the *rhizome* as a figure for understanding the complexity of relations that get simplified in the notion of representation (e.g. the analogical relation between a present sign and that which is represented or between the symbolic and the material). A rhizome refers literally (from the ancient Greek *rhizōma*) to the rooting structures of vegetal matter. But in the hands of Deleuze and Guattari

it takes the form of a set of principles for understanding semiosis. First, they talk about the rhizome in terms of its connectedness and heterogeneity: 'any point on a rhizome can be connected to any other, and must be... [S]emiotic chains of every kind are connected in it according to very diverse modes of encoding, chains that are biological, political, economic, etc... [N]o radical separation can be established between the regimes of signs and their objects' (1983a: 11). Thus, unlike the models of Saussure and Bakhtin, language is neither an enclosed system of signifiers and signifieds nor a field of utterances, semiotics is about the connections between what are traditionally thought of as linguistic and non-linguistic, but also across signifying and a-signifying material (i.e. material that does not signify). For example, a series of connections might be made across the letters on the surface of a typewriter keyboard, the hardware in a computer, the word-processing software and the final manuscript that might be produced. The letters on the keyboard would not ordinarily be seen to be signifying material; they do not in and of themselves have meaning. But they do, nevertheless, allow connections to be made. In addition, Deleuze and Guattari multiply what might ordinarily be seen as a division between material and symbolic; they talk instead about specific regimes such as the biological, the economic, the political and so on. In doing so they do not assume that the connections made in any one field or regime are similar in any way to the connections made in another regime. Moreover, connections are made across these regimes.

Secondly they talk about the rhizome as being a multiplicity. A multiplicity is neither the one nor the many, both of which suggest some kind of identity or resemblance between the entities. For example, Bakhtin's understanding of sociality as being made up of utterances, makes the move toward understanding society not as one thing, but as many things, many utterances. Nevertheless, in saying that society is made up of many utterances, Bakhtin has reduced society to the logic of the utterance (i.e. to one thing). The utterance becomes the measure of all things. So in talking about the rhizome as a multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari are trying to talk about the way in which connections across entities are about different things of different kinds being assembled in such a way that those things cannot be reduced to any one thing. For example, at the end of a trip around the aisles of a supermarket my trolley is filled with lots of items, such as wine, bread, cheese, biscuits, vegetables and so on. I could reduce all those items to a single measure (or paradigm) and refer to the objects as 'things in my trolley'. But equally I could try to account for those items in all their diversity and thus try not to reduce a bottle of Chateaufort du Pape to a lump of Cheddar cheese. Both these items are qualitatively and materially very different – wine and cheese – and the point is to take account of all the items while at the same time accounting

for all their differences. There are different units of measure. And hence this understanding of difference is very different from that of Derrida, who accepts a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the sign, but nevertheless reduces the play of difference to the measure of the gram (or the deconstructed sign).

Thirdly, a rhizome can be cut or broken up at any point. Moreover, at each break or rupture the sides of the break do not sit opposite each other, each mapping each other, each mimicking each other. Deleuze and Guattari refer to the example of a colony of ants that we might attempt to disperse by knocking down their ant-hill and divide by putting something in between them. The ants divide up, but constantly attempt to reconstitute themselves over the divide in multiform ways. The lines or breaks between entities are more like stretchings and criss-crossings and Deleuze and Guattari talk about this in terms of 'lines of flight' or 'becomings'. Thus, if we take our example of the signifier 'cat', the idea of a cat we have in our heads (the signified) and the actual fluffy animal that purrs (the referent) then each part is made of different material (phonemes, mental images, and different types of organic matter). The phonemes do not resemble the thoughts in my head nor the fur, skin, bones and flesh of the actual cat. This is an assemblage of different types of materials: '[t]here is neither imitation nor resemblance, but an explosion of two heterogeneous series in a line of flight consisting of a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed nor made subject to any signifier at all' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983a: 20). The passage from signifier to signified to actual cat marks a passage across different materials. Instead of a resemblance or representation, then, Deleuze and Guattari use a geographical analogist talk about the way in which there is a process of territorialisation and deterritorialisation. The movement from one thing to another, the process of becoming, is understood as an expansion or reduction of respective territories. The phonemes, thoughts, and actual cat are linked, but in the passage from signifier to actual cat the phonemes have become deterritorialised and reterritorialised as actual cat. From phonemes to actual cat we see a process of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari say: '[d]ependent on a binary logic, mimicry is a poor concept when applied to phenomena of a totally different order' (1983a: 22). Phonemes, thought and actual cat have 'a-parallel evolution'; they change together differently.

Fourthly, Deleuze and Guattari refer to the rhizome as a map – not in the sense that a map supposedly represents a real territory, an exact simulation of the real – but in the sense that a map enables one to move through territories, to find new architectural sites, to meet new people, to travel to different places. In that sense, it is a way of 'establishing contact with the real experimentally': '[t]he map is open, connectable in all its dimensions, and capable of

being dismantled; it is reversible, and susceptible to constant modification' (1983a: 25, 26). The map is performative and in that sense it has a lot in common with Bakhtin's notion of the utterance as creative. The rhizome is not a code; it is something that produces change through bringing different things together; it is literally inventive (i.e. a coming together as well as a making new).

Finally, a rhizome is made up of lines, such that there are no fixed points or positions: 'the rhizome is made only of lines: lines of segmentation and stratification as dimensions, but also lines of flight or of deterritorialisation as the maximal dimension according to which, by following it, the multiplicity changes its nature and metamorphoses' (1983a: 48). There are no points of advantage or perspective from which one can stand and take account of the rhizome as a whole. Such a total picture can never be taken. It is like a labyrinth from the inside; we can try to imagine the picture, so we can solve the puzzle and get out; but we can never step above the series of routes to see where we are going. It is only known through a series of local connections; we are necessarily short-sighted in the rhizome. Moreover, it is not that there is an outside nor even an inside as such parameters, such boundaries, would establish the shape of the rhizome. If we take the example of a spider's web, does it make sense to talk about that series of weavings as having an inside and an outside. Is that point near the centre of the web, but not on a thread, somewhere between two threads, inside or outside the web? Equally though, just as there are no points of perspective or fixed positions, there is no centre; the rhizome is de-centred. Again, we don't need to assume that this is somehow a complex idea to grasp: does a car have a centre? Is it the engine? Or maybe the front seat? Sometimes such questions that we are so used to in the social and cultural sciences – such as those concerning fixedness, centredness and so on – make no sense outside those disciplines.

The notion of the rhizome, then, helps us to understand the problem of semiosis differently from that of a traditional model of representation. It implies that there is not a space that can be designated as language or the symbolic or the space of meaning and another space called matter, an undifferentiated *hyle*, as if *hyle* were an originary presence; as if one class of things called 'signifiers' represented (either actively constructing or passively naming) another class of material objects and states of affairs in the world. The rhizome is the class which includes itself as a class. Matter is within semiosis every step of the way; not as one thing, but as many things differently; it is constitutive of the organisation of organisation. The rhizome is, according to the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco, a type of encyclopaedia:

If the so-called universals, or metatheoretical constructs, that work as markers within a dictionary-like representation are mere linguistic labels that cover more synthetic properties, an encyclopaedia-like

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representation assumes that the representation of the content takes place only by means of *interpretants*, in a process of unlimited semiosis. These interpretants being in their turn interpretable, there is no bidimensional tree able to represent the global semantic competence of a given culture. Such a global representation is only a semiotic postulate, a regulative idea, and takes the format of a multidimensional network. (1984: 68)

The rhizome is a regulative idea that helps us to think about multiplicity and to think about the materiality of semiosis. It helps us to think beyond two types of space, two types of solidarity that mirror each other in analogical repetition: the symbolic and the material. Part of the problem, then, is that we work with an assumption that we can only mix like with like and that one system of resemblances forms one sphere that collapses onto another system of analogues. The diagram that we use to think about semiosis is thus part of the problem. We think of bounded wholes, spheres, with insides and outsides, rather than series, complex series, not of entities that resemble each other, but series of items that are defined by their singularity: namely their incommensurability. A series of singularities thus poses the question, not of communication (the passage of like with like), but of translation across material difference. As John Rajchman suggests in his discussion of Deleuze's semiotics: '[t]he components of a multiplicity, unlike the members of a set, must be indefinite or vague, matching with the "vagabond" manner in which a multiplicity is constructed; and the problem in Deleuze's logic then becomes how to repeat "free differences" in complex wholes that don't reduce what makes them differences, how to connect "singularities" in a "plan of consistency" that preserves what makes them singular' (Rajchman, 2000: 55).

There is certainly a danger, as Nick Couldry warns, of a faddish version of complexity and connectionism that 'simply repeats what we already know (things are complex and interrelated) without beginning to explain *what sort* of order cultures involve, and where and on what scale we should look for it' (2000: 94). But in many ways the work of Deleuze and others returns us to some of the central questions of semiotics: namely, what is the nature of the sign; how is it related to other signs and things; and how might we sensibly demarcate lines of division between different forms of semiosis. Such work helps us to think not about chaos, but about the ordering of semiosis. In this respect it would be foolish to think that it is possible simply to move on from Saussure's analysis of the symbolic and semiological solidarity or from Bakhtin's understanding of dialogic relations that construe the social as a heterogeneous space. Whatever the difficulties with both these approaches, they do nevertheless present extremely productive models for understanding culture as semiosis and the relation between sign and community. In many ways the Saussurian system, in positing a universal form to language (i.e. in terms of its constituent parts and its mechanisms of

combination and association), makes possible an understanding of different particular languages and cultures. Language as a system, inasmuch as it provides a grid or a table, makes possible the comparison of linguistic, semiological and cultural systems and thus makes possible a form of cultural relativism. Different cultures can be compared, according to their different semiological worlds, because semiology is predicated as a universal system. The one thing that different cultures have in common is the system of semiology. In contrast, Bakhtin's dialogism makes possible an ambivalence and hybridity within the authorial voice and thus questions the positing of such a universal system; it makes possible a form of reflexivity that particularises the account as well as the object under study (i.e. the linguistic system or the culture). Where both of these models come unstuck though is in their understanding of semiological relations as primarily relations between humans within, or across, particular speech communities. The move that is made in more recent work suggests that semiosis is neither enclosed within particular communities nor is it limited to exchanges between humans. Equally though, it is not possible to pose a single model of semiosis as representative of all semiotic activity. It is possible for cultural researchers to investigate translations across material difference, not by reducing the entities under investigation to a single system or model of the utterance, but by acknowledging the singularity of the entities. In such an analysis the rhizome – as the figure of such multiplicity – does not become a wild card, the figure of complexity and chaos, but the initial point of understanding complex cultural ordering. The question becomes one of how bridges are constructed and how translations are made possible across such hybrid series (cf. Latour, 1993).

Chapter Summary

- Cultural studies has traditionally drawn on Saussure's systematic analysis of signs and meaning and understood semiosis in terms of the representation of material relations through the symbolic.
- But Saussure's semiology is problematic because:
 - it conceives of significations within an enclosed system and;
 - the system of signs and differences is seen to be co-extensive with society and nation.
- Derrida's deconstruction of Saussure is still caught within the logic of the symbolic and system.
- Voloshinov and Bakhtin provide a model of sign production that is more reflexive and that questions the relations between language, ethnos and nation. The Voloshinov and Bakhtin model is typified by:

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- its focus on particular utterances, not linguistic systems
 - its dialogic and highly contextual nature
 - semiosis predicated on model of intersubjective social interaction.
- More recent theories have been keen to move away from foundational models (either systemic or intersubjective) and to understand semiosis as particular, complex and heterogeneous. These theories (derived from Wittgenstein, Peirce, Foucault and Deleuze) understand semiosis as particular not universal, indexical not symbolic, and thus not comprehensible through a division between the symbolic and the material.