

# 《符号与言谈：比较诗学的实践》

## 图书基本信息

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## 内容概要

### Preface

This collection of essays produced during a span of nearly forty years has a title, *Sign and Discourse*, which may sound banal to readers familiar with contemporary critical theory. Banal as it may seem, the title can be misleading and therefore needs some clarification. First of all, there is an inherent, necessary and reciprocal relationship between “sign” and “discourse”: Discourse has to be encoded in the linguistic sign before its enunciation, and sign can perform its signifying and communicating functions only through discourse, that is, when language is put in social use. Accordingly, one has to concur with Émile Benveniste’s highly idiosyncratic usage that “semiotics” is embedded in “semantics” — a noble attempt at reinstating the historicity of language users’ interaction (Benveniste 1974: 64). As he puts it, “With the semantic, we enter into the specific mode of meaning which is generated by discourse” (“Avec le sémantique, nous entrons dans le mode spécifique de signification qui est engendré par le DISCOURS.”) (1974: 64; 1981: 19). But at the same time, he points out the two domains’ dialectic relationship. “Semiotics (the sign) must be recognized; semantics (the discourse) must be understood.” (“Le sémiotique [le signe] doit être RECONNU; le sémantique [le discours] doit être COMPRIS.”) (1974: 64 — 65; 1981: 20). However, the two orders of language in-put do not represent two disciplines, but follow temporality and causality. One recognizes sign, in the Saussurian sense of word (moneme) as its elementary form, based on acquired rather than innate language competence, and the signification process of signs (or semiosis) gives rise to sentence and discourse in an infinite generative process. The difference, then, is not that between semiotics and semantics, but between the cognition of individual signs and the cognition of semiosis in discourse. Nevertheless, one could argue that, where social use is concerned, there is little difference between semantics and pragmatics, and for that matter, semiotics. Only in this sense can sign be conceived of as discourse and, in other words, semiosis as a life process. One is reminded of Saussure’s announcement of semiology as the “studies of signs and their life in human societies” (“études des signes et de leur vie dans les sociétés humaines”) (Saussure 1967: 48; Saussure 1993:71 and 71a), or as a conceivable science which deals with “the life of signs at the heart of social life” (“la vie de signes au sein de la vie sociale”) (Saussure 1931: 33.). The minor difference in wording, as one surely remembers, resulted from his students’ note-taking, which was reflective of at least three lives, of the master lecturing and the two pupils listening and recording.

The communication or “autocommunication” (pace Lotman 2001) circuit of lecturing, listening and writing in various institutions of higher learning in Greater China, North America and Europe thus summarizes a life of signs as *apologia pro vita mea*. Therefore, the volume is in every sense autobiographical; it toys with the notion of realizing “self” or “life” through “writing”.

Having said this, I am aware, as chapter 19 suggests, that there cannot be a life (bio) of self (auto) made available through writing (graphein). All the three entities that constitute the genre of autobiography, in name as well as in substance, are ephemeral whilst entering into an intricate semiotic web of relationships. If I may be allowed to stretch a bit farther the figure of corpus as life and book, the division of the book into five “thematic” parts is tantamount to five chapters of a floating life, at once adhering to and defying chronology. Finally, as the essays were delivered and published in different times and places, there cannot be a unity in format. I have chosen to let them stay in their original forms. This explains the inconsistency in spelling (e.g., Americanism and Anglicism), transliteration (e.g., Wade-Giles and Hanyu pinyin), and style sheet (e.g., MLA and APA), amongst other formalistic and rhetorical infelicities.

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