



# Re-reading *Les interactions risquées*. Folds and potentialities of a semiotic classic, twenty years after

**Franciscu Sedda**

University of Cagliari

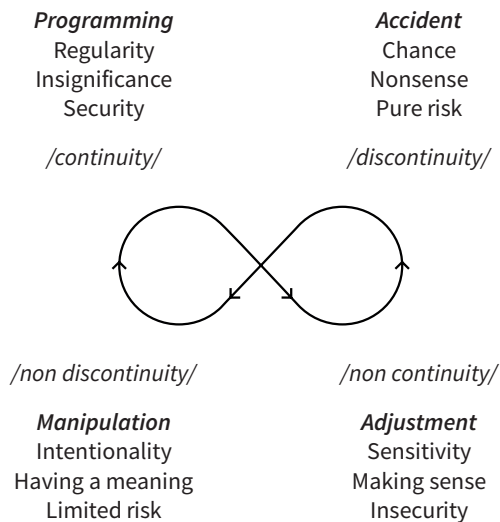
1. Successful books always run the risk of overshadowing themselves—their internal complexity, their nuances, their productive contradictions. This is why, after a few years, it is worth republishing them, so they can be reread with that sense of adventure and discovery capable of reigniting an intense engagement, rich in renewed pleasures and unexpected surprises. *Les Interactions Risquées* is one such book for semiotics. First published in 2005, its republication on *Actes* almost twenty years later serves (also) this purpose : not only to give it broader circulation but also to allow it to be read anew<sup>1</sup>.

A proof to its success are the various translations of the volume<sup>2</sup>. Even more significant, however, is the extensive use of the model at its core by an international community of researchers : “Landowski’s roller coaster”, as students often call his elliptical schema, deliberately or not associating it with other great totemic diagrams—such as “Peirce’s triangle”, “Greimas’s square”, or “Lotman’s sphere”—which serve as both an introduction to and a reduction of the dynamics of semiosis.

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1 *Les interactions risquées* (henceforth *LIR*), *Nouveaux Actes Sémiotiques*, 101-103, 2005, 108 p. Republished online in *Actes Sémiotiques*, 131, 2024. The present article is an English translation (partly updated) of F. Sedda, “Relire *LIR*”, *Actes Sémiotiques*, 131, 2024, which accompanied this republication.

2 *Interacciones arriesgadas*, Lima, Fondo Editorial de la Universidad de Lima, 2009 ; *Rischiare nelle interazioni*, Milan, FrancoAngeli, 2010 ; *Interações arriscadas*, São Paulo, Estação das Letras e Cores, 2014 ; *Prasmé anapus teksto. Sociosemiotiniai esė*, Vilnius, Baltos lankos, 2015.



2. This seemingly playful reference to the way students grasp models has a serious side : in the extensive appropriation of a new idea, a translational mechanism is set in motion that trivialises its content. This simultaneously facilitates the practical dissemination of the model while also increasing the risk of its theoretical dilution<sup>3</sup>. What is gained in breadth risks being lost in depth.

The expansive impact of the “syntactic model of regimes of meaning and interaction”<sup>4</sup>, as Landowski has recently redefined it, is evident in two key aspects : first, its transnational testing—primarily in Europe and South America—which inevitably exposed it to local interpretations and appropriations shaped by the intellectual debates and cultural sensibilities animating the various semiospheres it encountered and permeated. Second, its application by both seasoned scholars and younger researchers far beyond the objects most prominently discussed by Landowski in the volume (such as face-to-face interactions, conversation, dance, war), extending to new or seemingly distant phenomena such as metropolitan experiences, online virality, Covid, tourism practices, political populism, and more.

Our assessment, let us state this upfront, is that this extensive use has not worn out the content of the volume. On the contrary, it has repeatedly tested, revealed, and deepened various zones of intensity within Landowski’s reflections. The content of the volume has thus been subjected to a positive critique, one that has generated reinforcements, integrations, revisions, and developments.

Certainly, extensive use can lead to a certain degree of wear. And a mechanical—programmed !—application of the model can result in artificial outcomes that say little about the reality being investigated and contribute even less to the

<sup>3</sup> A dynamic that can reach forms of perversion : see, in this sense, J.M. Lotman (*Cercare la strada*, Venezia, Marsilio, 1994, p. 76), who, while developing the idea, exemplifies it through the misunderstanding of Nietzsche’s philosophy by Nazism.

<sup>4</sup> A definition in which the idea of a regime, as a dynamic and productive mechanism, must not take a back seat to the ideas of meaning and interaction.

validation or further development of the model itself. However, this extensive application can also foster variation through repetition, a continuous adjustment of and with the model : a reiterative yet sensitive and experimental application capable of generating intellectual satisfaction and significant theoretical advancements.

If the repeatability of an experiment holds such great scientific value, the repeated use of a semiotic tool can enhance its observational power. After all, Landowski himself has taught us about the pleasure and the epistemic value of habit<sup>5</sup>—of becoming accustomed to a practice (including an analytical one) that one cherishes and eventually incorporates into one’s way of thinking and working.

3. The attentive reader will have already guessed that, given these premises, the author of this text finds himself caught in an awkward situation : should he introduce the text for the novice, thereby reinforcing the push toward the simplification of its content ? Or should he attempt to convey its full complexity, running the risk of reenacting Borges’s *Pierre Menard*, who rewrites *Don Quixote* word for word ?

A third possibility would be to point out the developments sparked by *LIR* and how these have fed back into the model itself—a challenging but plausible task, were it not for the fact that this has already been done, with far greater authority and expertise, by Landowski himself !

In several highly valuable essays<sup>6</sup>, Eric has indeed adopted a mode of working that, perhaps romanticising it slightly, seems to me to have been at the core of the Parisian seminar led by Algirdas Greimas : proposing a model to one’s peers, putting this hypothesis on the functioning and analysis of meaning to the test of a community and as wide a range of cases as possible, and then revisiting one’s hypothesis by reading and “taking seriously” what others have done with that model.

A lesson in ‘method’ that we deem crucial to emphasise, because in an era of compulsive and often erratic intellectual productivity, Eric Landowski’s willingness to fully take charge of what others were doing with his model speaks to a potentially outdated yet fruitful approach to research, which involves both a distinctive practice and the definition of a collective identity. An attitude, that of constructing effective semiotic tools in a dialogical and shared way, capable of responding to the question of meaning that comes from the phenomena to be investigated, which seems to us the ‘distinctive feature’, to be preserved and updated, of the semiotic practice, whatever faith in a specific semiotic school is professed.

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5 See “Pour l’habitude”, in E. Landowski, *Passions sans nom. Essais de socio-sémiotique III*, Paris, P.U.F., 2004, pp. 149-158.

6 E. Landowski, “Complexifications interactionnelles”, *Acta Semiotica*, I, 2, 2021 ; id., “Le modèle interactionnel, version 2024”, *Acta Semiotica*, IV, 7, 2024.

4. Returning to *LIR* thus implies, for us, reflecting on the text while reflecting on the reflection that Landowski has been conducting following the many analyses that have been proposed on the basis of his work. At the same time, it involves delving into its folds, perhaps into those parts of *LIR* that have been forgotten or underestimated, whose relative value emerges precisely by observing what has or has not been utilised from the model over the years. In other words, one is driven toward a discussion that is both increasingly *meta-* and increasingly *intra-*: a dialogue that, on the one hand, takes into account other re-discussions of the model—including those carried out by its own author—and, on the other hand, penetrates the fabric of *LIR*, its concepts, and its structure.

A useful starting point for this complex and delicate work, which we will carry out here in an incomplete and partial way, tied to our specific relationship with the work, is the possibility of grasping the philosophy or, if preferred, the underlying ideology of *LIR*. In the introduction to the volume, Eric Landowski clearly underlines that every model carries values, a specific sense of things, which reproduces itself through the analysis itself<sup>7</sup>. He effectively demonstrates this through a brief analysis of Greimas' "narrative schema", showing that it is imbued with a specific sense of life, based on the idea of an "order" to be maintained or restored. *LIR*, like any text, does not escape this dynamic: it has even less chance to do so precisely because it proposes an effective model. *LIR* is a seductive machine that, through both its content and its argumentative style, its writing, pushes us to adopt a point of view, a given orientation regarding meaning. To be precise, this positioning leads the author to bring to the forefront, valorise, if not exalt, the relevance of sensitivity, understood as the general faculty that allows for a genuine and profound dialogue with otherness, with other sensitivities. Sensitivity would thus be this ability to embrace otherness, to translate it and be translated by and through it<sup>8</sup>.

In his revisitations of the model, Landowski, whose aim is to transcend the body / spirit distinction, has strongly stressed that sensitivity should not be reduced to the bodily dimension, to mere physical interaction. Hence his reference to the idea of "intellectual sensitivity", that is, the kind of sensitivity necessary to conduct a productive dialogue (a dialogue that becomes a dance<sup>9</sup>) between strangers trying to truly get to know each other, for instance between an anthropologist and the community he is "studying" (but also between semioticians from different disciplinary traditions — *LIR*, p. 92).

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7 On this point, see also E. Landowski, "Politiques de la sémiotique", *Rivista di Filosofia del linguaggio*, 13, 2, 2019.

8 We find it useful to build a bridge between this idea of sensitivity and the distinction between "understanding" the other, as an appropriative act that moves from self to self through the other, and "translating" the other, as an act of hospitality that moves from alterity to alterity, radically transforming and opening the self to relationality, as proposed in F. Sedda, "Imperfette traduzioni", *Introduzione a J.M. Lotman, Tesi per una semiotica delle culture*, Roma, Meltemi (partial trans. "Semiotic(s) of Culture(s): Basic Questions and Concepts", in P.P. Trifonas (ed.), *International Handbook of Semiotics*, Berlin, Springer, 2006, p. 34.

9 *Les interactions risquées*, pp. 87-88 of the Italian translation. Henceforth, in the text, "*LIR*" and page number of this translation.

*Adjustment*, the process of becoming other together, thus presents itself as a euphoric form of meaning production, capable not only of escaping the insignificance of programmed action and the senselessness of random occurrences but also of evading the dominant paradigm of manipulation. This paradigm refers to a mode of communication centered on intentionality, if not strategic rationality, where there is always a winner and a loser. The utopia of adjustment lies in the possibility of winning together, necessarily together, and in being able to communicate far beyond a predetermined intentionality, one that is transparent to the subject and imposed from above onto reality.

Although Landowski underlines the fact that, from the analyst's perspective, the model of interaction regimes is merely a "reading path", rather than an "initiatory path for a hypothetical subject", this utopian tension remains inscribed in the teleology of the model itself, which emerges from the numbering of its phases (*LIR*, p. 85). Phase I corresponds to the chaotic stage of the *accident*, from which the subject extricates themselves by moving to Phase II, *manipulation*, where the world is brought somewhat under the control of intentionality. This progresses to a stable yet potentially insignificant state in Phase III, *programming*, and ultimately culminates in Phase IV, *adjustment*, where the conflict between necessity and freedom is mythically resolved through the exposure of the sensitive subject to an acceptable—and even enjoyable—risk. This does not negate the fact that from adjustment, one can fall back into *alea*, thereby restarting the entire process, like a perpetual motion of meaning.

Landowski exemplifies this with a literary flair, imagining the journey of a subjectivity—a journey that we are here expanding with our own reflections—that is driven to extricate itself from a world entirely devoid of meaning, dominated by chance and tending toward the absurd, in which its very status as a subject becomes uncertain. This subjectivity first places its trust in a God with whom it communicates through an exchange of signs interpretable within a contractual logic (that of "manipulation"), however asymmetrical and mediated by institutions; then it slips into a rituality or a flat belief, which becomes a refuge that lifts it from the remaining burdens of interpretation, turning it into an automaton of faith (whether indifferent or fanatic) (under the regime of "programming"); all of this until, overcome by boredom or doubt, the subject enters a regime that allows it to rediscover a regulated pleasure in the unexpected, perhaps opening itself to a relationship with faith nurtured by questioning, where it treats the divine as an alterity—whether deposited and manifested in a book, in nature, through a series of rituals, or in other living beings—with which to establish a sensitive and inexhaustible dialogue (that of "adjustment"). This attitude, if taken to the extreme, could lead it toward a radical unpredictability, in which events project a contradictory multiplicity of possible beliefs (or a possible absence of belief) until they outline a senseless (or a-sensical) condition (that of "accident"), thus pushing for the rollercoaster ride to begin again.

In spite of the schematic nature that Landowski himself acknowledges in this example, the fact remains that the rollercoaster seems driven in its evolution



by “relations of implication” (*LIR*, p. 92) that, although projected forward, so to speak, recall the logic of implication (but *à rebours*) of Greimas’s canonical narrative schema.

Now, we believe it is legitimate to ask why this rightful openness to *processuality*, to the treatment of the paradigmatic positions of the semiotic square in terms of a syntagmatic path, should necessarily resolve into *this* specific path. It may certainly be imagined as a privileged or even canonical trajectory, but reducing the field of processuality to this singular development is, indeed, an ideological choice in the sense that it represents only one of the possible realisations of the axiological structure<sup>10</sup>: a realisation that possesses its own inherent (and even beautiful) coherence but stands out against a far more varied, heterogeneous, and contradictory field of processuality. We here appropriate, for the purposes of our discussion, Eco’s idea that cultural space is inherently contradictory, and any statement, unless it makes such contradictions explicit, “ideologically” selects certain properties, certain processes, from this space while ignoring or concealing others<sup>11</sup>.

That adjustment leads to the accident, as in the case highlighted by Landowski, is a possibility but not a necessity. *Reactive sensitivity* can, in fact, be seen not only as an openness toward a *perceptive sensitivity* ready to result in the regime of *alea* but also, conversely, as the prelude to a fully programmed mode of action. Imagine the formation of a behavioral habit or a Pavlovian effect: this process begins with a sensitive interaction born of perception, which over time becomes reactive and eventually ossifies into an algorithmic cause-effect relationship, whether governed by strict causal regularity or a more lenient symbolic regularity.

In other words, if we expanded this example fragment, we could see the rollercoaster moving in reverse. And if we were to revisit the concept of *rection*, or the oblique recursivity, which Landowski introduces a few pages later (*LIR*, p. 96), we would see how movements can be conceived that shift from adjustment to manipulation, or from chance to programming, in some way bypassing stages of the canonical path, or prefiguring other process schemes, such as circular ones. We have shown how, in encountering a work of art like *The Weather Project* by Olafur Eliasson, created at the Tate Modern in London in 2003, the incident

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10 See A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage*, Paris, Hachette, 1979 (Eng. trans. *Semiotics. A Handbook of the Theory of Language*, London, Frank Collins, 1986), “Idéologie”, *ad vocem*.

11 See U. Eco, *Trattato di semiotica generale*, Milano, Bompiani 1975, pp. 359-371 (Eng. trans. *A Theory of Semiotics*, Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1976). Beyond the demystifying tone of Eco’s position, it remains true, in a Lotmanian spirit, that even unintentionally—and if only for reasons of conceptual organisation and expository clarity—we are constantly engaged in producing texts and models that inevitably function as “grammars”. These grammars inevitably push the complexity from which they emerge into the background, even if they aim to provide access to it. Our point, as we will demonstrate in the remainder of this text, is thus to encourage looking beyond the identification of a “canonical” processuality to make visible other processualities that are not only possible but, more importantly, actively present in the phenomena we study. Taken together, these processualities tend to form a space that is, in its way, contradictory, consisting of dynamics that “move” in different—and sometimes opposing—directions. These processualities, when considered individually, would each construct and convey a specific “ideology”.

that destabilises the senses is followed by a perceptual adjustment, an attempt to attune one's sensitivity to that which emanates from the work-environment. This then leads to the recognition of figures in the world that appear on stage as actors capable of initiating a manipulative project, only to discover that one is trapped within a programmed path that, once completed, opens onto a new wonder, both sensorial and cognitive...<sup>12</sup>

These *other* forms of processuality are in fact prefigured within *LIR* itself, as we hinted at when discussing rection : consider the forms of vertical (as opposed to oblique) *recursivity* (chance that produces chance, manipulation that produces manipulation, etc.) or that of *fractality* which seems sketched out in one of the diagrams of the volume, where within each of the regimes, one can glimpse, in an abyss, the presence of the entire model and thus the sub-articulation of a given regime according to “mini-pathways of transformation, also complex” (*LIR*, p. 92).

The discussion could be further developed by exploring its critical implications and differences in value and level. For example, the concept of rection (under its oblique form) tends to take on an *instrumental-practical* character, where one regime is used to activate others. This is an important theme in outlining the concrete practices of meaning generation, which Landowski revisits with great depth and examples in his contemporary rereading of the model<sup>13</sup>. One could thus ask whether there are instrumental processualities and others of an *existential-utopian* nature (and why not also *critical* and *ludic* ?), or if each processuality can assume both of these valorisations<sup>14</sup>.

Or, furthermore, the fact that the different regimes not only concatenate syntagmatically or present themselves paradigmatically as alternatives but also act simultaneously, coexist, and are “always there”, as Landowski recently wrote when discussing chance, should be weighed. In this coexistence, the different regimes can thus reinforce or cancel each other out; dominance can emerge, bending the regimes that are contextually subordinated to the logic and identity of the prevailing one. Alternatively, we could see the emergence of intermediates<sup>15</sup>, confused regimes. Perhaps even *regimes without a name*<sup>16</sup>.

Our point, therefore, is to invite the reader of *LIR* to grasp two aspects within the model. On one hand, the implications of a historical phase in research and, consequently, the reasons for an ideology that seeps into it, even though the author himself reminds us that his work does not aim to identify the laws

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12 See F. Sedda, “Feel yourself sensing. Accidente, aggiustamento, manipolazione, programmazione del senso e della sensibilità dentro un Aleph semiotico”, in A. de Oliveira (ed.), *As interações sensíveis. Ensaios de sociosemiótica a partir da obra de Eric Landowski*, São Paulo, Estação das Letras e Cores, 2013.

13 “Le modèle interactionnel, version 2024”, *art. cit.*

14 We refer here to the different kind of *valorisation* stated by J.-M. Floch, *Sémiotique, marketing et communication. Sous les signes, les stratégies*, Paris, P.U.F., 1988 (Eng. trans. *Semiotics, Marketing, Communication. Beneath the Signs, the Strategies*, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001).

15 In his latest reinterpretations of the model — “Complexifications interactionnelles”, 2021, and “Le modèle interactionnel”, 2024 — Landowski places significant emphasis on this aspect.

16 See “Le modèle interactionnel...”, *art. cit.*, pp. 120-121.

of becoming, nor does it seek to limit the range of possibilities or reduce an “analytic of signification” to a morality or one single philosophy (*LIR*, p. 110). On the other hand, it contributes precisely to relaunching, with the republication of *LIR*, that sensitivity towards exploring the theoretical and analytical potential of the model, still to be looked deeper and tested in the future.

5. As we anticipated, Landowski’s choice to identify a specific processuality as foundational was not, and is not, without motivations and significance. It also has its own theoretical logic and elegance. The emergence of this ideology-philosophy was, in fact, influenced by both internal and external developments within the semiotic field. Certainly, Greimas’s 1987 work *De l’Imperfection*, with its powerful return to aesthetic and the aesthetic, which threw down a challenge (also to beautiful writing) to semioticians, played a role. Furthermore, a more general neo-phenomenological atmosphere was pressing on the study of meaning, one that permeated the transition between the two millennia and left traces in a number of contemporary works<sup>17</sup>. However, it would be wrong to underestimate the contribution of the particular sensitivity of South American semiotics, especially Brazilian, with which Landowski engaged in a fruitful dialogue and continued to engage over time<sup>18</sup>.

In this sense, *LIR* — which effectively synthesised what Landowski had been developing for some time in essays that would later form *Passions sans nom* — can also be seen as a sensor of broader social and academic transformations.

Firstly, as the volume itself attests, with *LIR* Landowski was responding to a widespread contemporary social concern about “security” that, according to his words from 2005, “is desired, demanded, and imposed in all fields” (*LIR*, p. 14). The reevaluation of adjustment and chance is a political response to this security-driven anxiety, which, as in the best tradition, creates what it fears precisely because it cannot understand it. Semiotics as an academic discipline would have reproduced in miniature this spirit of the time, focusing its theoretical attention on the deixis of *prudence*, “a virtue dear to both manipulators and programmers” (*LIR*, p. 116), whereas Landowski asks for equal rights and status for the deixis of *adventure*, whether practiced (socially and, why not, analytically) in the form of adjustment or accident. *LIR* weaves a semiopolitical isotopy from beginning to end, and in doing so, it reminds us that behind our theories there is always a positioning—a position of subjectivity—relative to the time and events we are living through. This positioning is not necessarily in contrast to the quality of our theoretical proposals but, on the contrary, can, under certain conditions, contribute to making them deeper and more effec-

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17 Consider, among others, in the appended bibliography, Landowski 1997, Fabbri 1998, Pezzini 2002 (ed.), Fontanille 2004, Marrone 2001, 2005. We also take the liberty of referring to Sedda 2003 [2019].

18 See Oliveira and Landowski 1995 (eds.); Assis Silva 1996 (ed.); Landowski and Fiorin 1997 (eds.); Landowski, Dorra and Oliveira 1999 (eds.). For a celebration and revival of these South American and transnational dialogues centered on Landowski’s figure and work, see Oliveira 2013 (ed.) and 2014 (ed.). For recent developments in this line of research, refer to the publications in *Acta Semiotica* and the bibliography in Landowski 2019 and 2024.



tive, as well as intellectually more honest. At the same time, it encourages us to perceive the model as a tool for reading historically dominant trends and their transformations, prompting us to question the meaning of the environment in which we are immersed<sup>19</sup>. It is not difficult, following this line of thought, to end up wondering whether today, nearly twenty years later, we have shifted from a security-driven dominant to an aleatory one, which materialises in the concurrent ecological, humanitarian, diplomatic, and economic crises that mark our daily lives. And, continuing this inquiry, we might ask whether we have reached this point due to an excess of programming, a lack of adjustment capacity, manipulations of poor quality (if not in bad faith), or because chance was there and demanded its place. Furthermore, one could hypothesise that our time is destabilising precisely because it is complex, because within it coexist extreme tensions toward programming—automation, algorithms, artificial intelligences, authoritarianisms—and toward aleatoriness—climatic instability, migrations, the multiplication of voices and truths, leadership and individualism, both small and large conflicts. This is not the place to offer answers. But rather to point to the model proposed by Landowski as a lens through which to read, and even more fundamentally to grasp, this problematic field. Yet, we must first observe that the very coexistence of programming and aleatoriness, with the extreme and paradoxical tensions that they entertain, highlights that, in its initial formulation, Landowski's rollercoaster did not pass through the complex terms of the Greimasian square. Might it be time to experiment in this direction as well?

Secondly, starting from a critique of the idea of manipulation, reducing it to the role of “a regime of meaning and interaction among others”<sup>20</sup>, *LIR* anticipated increasingly relevant theoretical and social issues. For instance, by shifting the focus from the centrality of manipulation to that of adjustment, Landowski foresaw a widespread change in the socio-semiotic field, offering new tools for analysis and thought. Consider the political dimension, and its crisis as a place for a technocratic-strategic approach, which gave way to an era dominated by a contagious-phatic consensus based on a form of body-to-body interaction. This evolution would soon find a powerful factor for renewal and reinforcement in the new “disintermediated” forms of online communication. The Landowskian model thus immediately presented itself as a tool for analysing this change, or, if one prefers, this drift. In addition, the revision of the internal dynamics of manipulation paved the way for the inclusion, both within analysis and in the communicative game, of non-human entities, possessing goals without necessarily being endowed with will<sup>21</sup>. By detaching manipulation from a philosophy of the volitional Subject, Landowski opened up a different interpretation of intentionality, one that reintegrates the complex fabric of the living and the

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19 On this topic, see also P. Demuru, “De Greimas a Eric Landowski. A experiência do sentido, o sentido da experiência : semiótica, interação e processos sócio-comunicacionais”, *Galáxia*, 2, 2019.

20 “à un régime de sens et d’interaction parmi d’autres”. “Le modèle...”, *art. cit.*, p. 107.

21 See E. Landowski and G. Marrone (eds.), *La société des objets. Problèmes d’interobjectivité*, *Protée*, 29, 1, 2001.

objectual into the inter-actantial game. To quote Landowski, “Plants may not ‘want’ anything, but like all living beings, they are nonetheless driven toward the equivalent of a goal : to continue living and reproducing”<sup>22</sup>. The challenge is therefore to reintegrate into the game of semiosis the heterogeneity of the actors who participate in it, and whom the different regimes allow us to recognise in their contribution and specificity.

Finally, by engaging in a broader debate on the relationship between texts and practices, Landowski contributed, in his own way, to a rapprochement between semiotics and ethnographic perspectives, which is now being re-evaluated by some who focus on the semiotic study of cultures. This rapprochement is evident from the preface of *Passions sans nom*, where Landowski critiques the process of “methodical cleaning” (*nettoyage méthodique*) —though necessary from the perspective of a discipline in development— that facilitated the construction of an “object-text as detached as possible from the particular circumstances of its generation”<sup>23</sup>, in other words from that dimension necessarily *indexical*, which is now so central in the anthropology of language<sup>24</sup>. Faced with the risk of reifying the difference between the two realms, that of texts and that of practices, *LIR* provided—and still provides—a powerful model for tracing ongoing interactions, for capturing the dynamics of meaning in its situated becoming. Indeed, rather than focusing on dense description and processuality as a singular and unique event each time, Landowski’s proposal reaffirmed the semiotic tendency to grasp more abstract and general structures, or if one prefers, matrices. This identification of structures of processuality and interaction, while bridging an ethnographic and ethnomethodological approach, certainly raises other questions and prompts further differences. However, it has had the merit of bypassing the potential deadlock between “textualists” and “pragmatists”, offering the semiotic community a powerful tool for analysing, for example, both minute lived experiences and forms of media communication. Most importantly, it addresses the relationship between these two dimensions.

6. As can be inferred from these introductory reflections on some of the key aspects of *LIR*, Landowski’s work is more than ever open to dialogue, a body-to-body engagement, full of further ideas, developments, and analyses.

The author himself, returning to the various regimes, has proposed, for instance, to make them more complex. Thus, while on one hand, in our view, the dual nature of each regime remains to be re-evaluated analytically (accident : mythical *vs* mathematical probability ; manipulation : consensual *vs* decision-making motivation ; programming : causal *vs* symbolic regularity ; adjust-

22 “Les plantes ont beau ne rien ‘vouloir’, elles n’en sont pas moins, comme tous les êtres vivants, tendues vers l’équivalent d’un but : continuer à vivre et se reproduire”. This sentence is found in a text currently being developed that Eric Landowski provided us in advance, and we thank him for it.

23 “*objet-texte* aussi détaché que possible des circonstances particulières de son engendrement”. “Le modèle...”, *art. cit.*, p. 3.

24 See M. Silverstein, *Language in Culture. Lectures on the Social Semiotics of Language*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2022.

ment : perceptive vs reactive sensitivity), on the other hand, as Landowski points out today, each single regime can be doubled by recognising both its objectifying and its subjectivising aspects.

This duality is easily inferred from the treatment of manipulation within the standard theory, where the objectifying aspect of *threat* and *promise* has its subjective counterpart in *provocation* and *seduction*. This doubling is not insignificant, as it is true—according to our reading—that this shift transforms manipulation from a mere rational calculation into a matter of identity, as Landowski himself acknowledges. In doing so, a passionate dimension that challenges a merely utilitarian and cautious logic, which should, in theory, dominate manipulation, is reintroduced.

The extent to which these doublings can lead to innovations in the model is demonstrated by the way Landowski proposes to double the regime of chance : to the objectifying dimension materialised in the idea of an *accident*, there would correspond a subjectivising dimension better captured by the idea of *assent*. However, assent itself seems to split : on one hand, it leads to a kind of fatalistic acceptance of fate, while on the other, it becomes the condition for a revolt against the absurd, the absurd that materialises, for example, in the form of arbitrary power.

As can be inferred from these two examples, with each step of increasing complexity the model tends to explode, for better or for worse. While fostering ever more complex theoretical and methodological creations, it simultaneously risks losing its simplicity and elegance ; by embracing the risk of complication, it generates new and more subtle articulations and analytical possibilities. Changing the syntagmatisation of “good” and “bad”, obviously, also changes the dysphoric-euphoric nuance of what we can do with (or must do with) the models at our disposal.

7. In closing *LIR*, Eric Landowski reiterated that the principles outlined by his model were not intended to construct a new semiotics or declare obsolete the “standard” models developed by Greimas and the Paris School, to which he himself had so deeply contributed<sup>25</sup>.

With the passage of time, one can serenely ask whether, how, and to what extent the standard model—such as the so called Generative Trajectory<sup>26</sup>—has been put under stress by the insights from *LIR*. Again, this theoretical shift should not be considered or carried out with iconoclastic fervor, but rather with an openness to the continuous renewal and strengthening of a disciplinary and communal project that Eric Landowski has recently reaffirmed<sup>27</sup>.

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25 For an English introduction to Greimas’s standard theory, see F. Jameson, “Foreword” to A.J. Greimas, *On Meaning. Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory*, Minneapolis, Minnesota University Press, 1987. Our point of view on Jameson’s “Foreword” in P. Demuru, E. Landowski and F. Sedda, “Profession : sémioticiens. I. Options et perspectives en 2022 ; II. Import-Export en 2023”, *Acta Semiotica*, II, 4, 2022 and III, 5, 2023.

26 On the Generative Trajectory and its conceptual architecture, see A.J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire, op. cit.*

27 See P. Demuru et al., “Profession : sémioticiens...”, *art. cit.*

To quickly grasp this, one need only consider the fact that Landowski's model arises from a re-reading of the *semiotic square*, that is to say of the most abstract—and if one may joke, the “most immanent”—part of the Generative Trajectory. Yet, the aim seems to be directed squarely at reconsidering the concreteness of lived experiences, of ongoing interactions, almost to the point of, if one allows a second provocation, veering into full “manifestation.” This extremisation in the form of a short-circuit serves us to highlight how deep, and therefore deserving of careful investigation, the impact of the model of regimes of interactions and meaning can have on the broader standard conceptual apparatus.

Let us highlight just one aspect, which seems to emerge most strongly between the lines of the reflection Eric Landowski has been conducting, based on the applications and re-conceptualisations that have arisen from 20 years of using his model. This concerns the role and status of the Object of Value.

Anyone familiar with the Generative Semiotics developed by Greimas knows what the object of value is and what its place is within the standard theory. Landowski summarises it as follows, referring to the regime of manipulation : “Under this regime, what drives action and interaction is indeed an ‘intention,’ a will or a desire, a plan, a project, an expectation, or a hope directed towards obtaining certain ‘objects of value’”<sup>28</sup>. However, it seems to us that it is Landowski's own reflection, both the one contained in *LIR* and the one that can be made based on his re-reading of *LIR*, that unveils the ambivalence inherent in this key concept of the theory. What remains invisible despite being constantly in plain sight for everyone is that the “object of value” carries within it a dual nature : that of the *object* and that of the *value*. Focusing this distinction allows to notice that when it comes to communication as manipulation, in which a *Addresser* (an entity in the temporary position of authority) operates strategically at a (predominantly) cognitive level to convince an *Addressee* to pursue a value, the objectual dimension takes a secondary position, becoming instrumental, and the value becomes (predominantly) an abstract semantic quality. The actant-Subject established through successful manipulation, through the creation of a *fiduciary contract*, seeks concrete “objects”—money, a car, a house, a political party, a partner, a weapon, a book— only insofar as these are the bearers of “values”—freedom, health, protection, prestige, charm, pleasure, strength, knowledge, etc.—with which it aims to unite.

If we re-read *LIR* and its developments through this lens, it is easy to notice that, conversely, at the level of programming, the value tends to disappear, and what remains is (predominantly) the object. In programming, with the absence of true Subjects, everything becomes objectified, including living beings. When discussing manipulation in the service of programming, Landowski gives the example of a “fish-object” that must be physically caught<sup>29</sup>. But this objectifica-

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28 “Sous ce régime, ce qui fait agir, et interagir, est effectivement une ‘intention’, un vouloir ou un désir, un dessein, un projet, une attente ou un espoir tendu vers l’obtention de certains ‘objets de valeur’”. (“Le modèle...”, *art. cit.*, p. 107).

29 See “Pièges : de la prise de corps à la mise en ligne”, *Carte Semiotiche - Annali*, 4, 2016.



tion can be even more easily perceived when we humans, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, become a “cog” within an assembly program : from the one represented by Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* to the assembly work of putting together an IKEA piece of furniture.

Programming is a regime of objects, or rather, an objectual and objectifying regime. In it, value disappears or, better, it becomes reified : it is reduced to objects (with their constitutive elements, objectively identifiable) and the regularities of their working principles. The logic inherent in this regime is seen no longer as a *junction* (conjunction / disjunction with a semantic value) but as an *agencement*, an assembly work or concatenation between objects that activate or respond to algorithms (behavioral and/or material)<sup>30</sup>. Landowski emphasises this : programming has its own logic, that of the *operation*: “It is indeed a logic centered not on the circulation and appropriation of objects, but on their production, or, of course, their destruction: it is the logic of the *operation*”<sup>31</sup>. This passage is interesting because both cases refer to “objects”, but while in the second case we are talking about things, in all their materiality, in the first case, these objects are only such insofar as they carry and house abstract values.

Now, if all of this is true, it is legitimate to ask what remains of the object of value in the regime of adjustment, dominated by sensitivity, and in that of the incident, dominated by chance.

It seems to us that in the case of adjustment, the place of the object of value is taken by *valence*, understood both as a tension (sensitive and evolving) toward the other and as the exploration and constitution of trust—a “value of values”—that first and foremost expresses itself in an inter-aesthetic, contagious form. In this sense, adjustment refers to a semiotics of passionate subjectivity, a subjectivity that is established and defined through thymico-aesthetic (perceptual-affective, if preferred) dimensions and modulations. This regime of meaning is configured as a transformative path that can go against the grain of the one dictated by the logic of manipulation and its self-interested calculations : a condition often represented in common sense by the idea that “my body was telling me to do one thing, my mind another”. In essence, what takes center stage in adjustment are rhythms—semantic and sensory—that meet and clash, and in doing so, modulate, capture, transform, and may join together. Sometimes their search, the definition of a rhythm perceived as “right” or “appropriate”, is precisely what is at stake in the interaction. Elsewhere, we have demonstrated how the ritual device of Sardinian dance, in one of its central dimensions, is configured as a search for eurythmy that unfolds through a sensory proposal—a proposal of a rhythm of existence, to borrow Merleau-Ponty’s phrasing—incorporated by the music. This music captures the dancers (their feet, in the first place !), who in turn react by “asking” the musicians to follow their bodily and emotional mod-

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30 For more detail, see “Avoir prise, donner prise”, *Nouveaux Actes Sémiotiques*, 112, 2009.

31 “C’est en effet une logique centrée non pas sur la circulation et l’appropriation des objets mais sur leur production, ou, bien entendu, leur destruction : c’est la logique de l’opération”. (“Le modèle...”, *art. cit.*, p. 117).



ulations : an unending play of seeking concordance of rhythms, a play which, while channeled within regularities embedded in customary practices, remains open. Open, above all, to the possibility of failure<sup>32</sup>.

The situation becomes even more complex in the case of the accident, which appears as a regime in which the nonsensical, however it materialises, presents itself as pure presence (“The positive, lived, pathetic encounter, with a full, tangible presence, albeit negative: that of nonsense, of the nonsensical”)<sup>33</sup>. In the face of this presence, the only possibilities would seem to be submission or rebellion. According to Landowski’s recent reinterpretation of this regime, it splits between an objectifying perspective and a subjectivising one. In the first case, we are confronted with an *accident* that simply happens : a series of independent (or seemingly and relatively independent) trajectories intersect. Of course, this accidental nature can unveil unexpected patterns that would have remained latent or virtual without the accident ; alternatively, it can set in motion further unpredictable chains of events.

From a subjectivising perspective, what dominates is no longer the accident itself but the *assent*, that is, the willingness or unwillingness to accept what happens. Those involved in the accident can “assent” to its occurrence. They might do so by saying, “That’s just how the world works ; it was a fatality”, thereby activating a form of fatalism. Alternatively, they might reframe the accident within a regime of manipulation : the accident isn’t truly accidental—it’s a test, a coded message that requires a response. Or they might interpret it through the lens of programming : behind the accident lies a clear, rigorous chain of cause and effect, maybe unpredictable yet entirely explainable<sup>34</sup>.

On the other hand, one might “dissent” and rebel against the absurd. The subject might perceive it as a challenge to find a new meaning for the events of the world, to view existence and its surge of happenings from a different perspectives : like when a “senseless” illness leads us to value life and its small daily struggles more deeply. Some citizens could see it as an invitation to political rebellion, to engagement, interpreting the absurd as a sign of injustices and distortions rooted in the past—issues they were previously unable to “read” as present. Or, still, they might interpret the accident as a “machination”—a term that, tellingly, points back to a programming-objective regime—targeted specifically against them and to which they feel compelled to react.

As can be observed, this type of example spotlights the negativity of accidental occurrences. However, there is also a form of positive incidentality, which manifests not only in strokes of luck or good fortune but, more broadly, in coincidence, serendipity, and chaos as a space of opportunity. For instance, as demonstrated in an ethnographic study by Tatsuma Padoan, those undertaking

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32 See F. Sedda, *Tradurre la tradizione. Sardegna : su ballu, i corpi, la cultura*, Roma, Meltemi, 2003 (nuova ed. Milano, Mimesis, 2019).

33 “La rencontre positive, vécue, pathétique, avec une présence pleine, tangible, bien que négative : celle du non-sens, de l’insensé”. (“Le modèle...”, *art. cit.*, p. 114).

34 See “*Shikata ga nai* ou Encore un pas pour devenir sémioticien !”, *Lexia*, 11-13, 2012.

the Camino de Santiago are inclined to interpret the journey as an opportunity for fortuitous encounters, small moments of unpredictability through which they might glimpse a broader, transcendent, or existential meaning. There are other contexts, such as the logic of *rave parties*, where unpredictability is eagerly anticipated: the more unexpected moments there are, the better the rave experience becomes<sup>35</sup>.

Continuing this final exploration, one might ask what form of assent is at play when coincidence is accepted without being integrated into a broader interpretative framework, as often happens in daily life. In such cases, one could perhaps speak not of “assent” but of pure “sentiment”, a temporary activation of “feeling” as opposed to the almost anesthetised “perception” that typically guides our everyday actions. For instance, when a chance encounter with someone we haven’t seen in years, and didn’t expect to meet in that particular place, “shakes” us—not in a way that we can definitively label as pleasant or unpleasant, but rather with a disquiet full of ambivalences, forcing us to *feel ourselves feeling*.

The extreme tension between accepting events or revolting against them foreshadows a space of struggle—yet one that is not to be understood as the construction-destruction of objects, nor as a strategic-cognitive conflict, nor as a risky exploration of possibilities between sensitivities and rhythms seeking common ground. Instead, phenomenologically, it is a *melee*—a site of encounter / clash between forces and energies that, by entering into relation, can give rise to unprecedented configurations of meaning. If this holds true, then here we no longer have objects, values, or valences, but rather presences (or events, in the most contingent sense of the term)<sup>36</sup>. Think of the uncontrollable fury or the mute resignation that erupts in the face of sudden humiliation; or the unexpected uprisings or mobilisations (whether xenophobic or progressive, it doesn’t matter) based on a “voice” or a video that spreads uncontrollably through the streets and online. In all of these cases, what emerges is a mood-based-aesthetic space in which the encounter / conflict between presence-events generates other presence-events, in a multiplication of chance that, while potentially continuing infinitely, more often stabilises by being captured and put to use by other regimes of meaning.

Art allows us to see in the background this web of forces-presences. It does so by recreating the conditions for the unforeseen: allowing chance to become tangible and making its random logic the protagonist of the work. This is what happens with Robert Rauschenberg’s *White Paintings* and then with John Cage’s *4’33”*, two works in deep translational dialogue<sup>37</sup>. In both cases, the empty-neu-

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35 T. Padoan, “Conchiglia di San Giacomo”, in D. Mangano, F. Sedda (eds.), *Simboli d’oggi. Critica dell’inflazione semiotica*, Milano, Meltemi 2023. For the considerations on unpredictability in raves, I draw upon insights from a presentation given by Michele Dentico at the AISS 2023 conference.

36 It may be interesting to compare this idea of “presence-event” with the “events of semiosis” discussed in linguistic anthropology. See M. Silverstein, *Language in Culture*, *op. cit.*; C.V. Nakassis, *Onscreen / Offscreen*, Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2023.

37 See E. Battistini, “Il silenzio sonoro di John Cage tra arti visive e musicali: nuove possibilità semiotiche al tempo dell’Horror Pleni”, *Roots/Routes. Research on Visual Culture*, <https://www.roots-routes.org/>, 2016.

tral space (the white canvas, the silence performed) is exposed to the intervention of “accidental” forces-presences—the settling of dust, the play of light and shadows, the transformation of sunlight in the room, the passing of silhouettes in front of the canvas, in the case of *White Paintings* ; the sounds of wind or rain on the day of the performance, the sounds of the audience moving, chatting, murmuring, leaving the room, in the case of *4'33*”. In doing so, they create the possibility (often not grasped or misunderstood) for unpredictability to be both captured (in the artwork) and set free (to act).

8. From all this, a question arises : what happens to the Generative Trajectory when the dimension on which its construction was based—the manipulation and the conjunction / disjunction with values—becomes more and more clearly just one dimension among others within a broader model of regimes of meaning production ? Are we sure that the standard theory does not need revisions, reformulations, or rethinking when we fully integrate it with a model of interaction regimes that seems to put it under stress or perhaps even cut across it transversally ?

We will not provide an answer. But we propose two final considerations.

The first is that these different “conceptual objects”—objects, values, rhythms, presences—which we have outlined starting from a reconsideration of the role of value in the Landowskian model (or at least in our reinterpretation of it), do not exist in purity : they are themselves, at the very least, “in interaction”, as if they were the layers and components, with varying weights and modulations, of that “totality” which is meaning as lived experience. Perhaps they are even the same thing seen from different perspectives or caught in specific phases of different processes.

The second is that these considerations of ours have, in fact, mobilised almost all of the regimes of sense and interaction. Many obvious reflections, some strategic proposals, and a few ventures towards the risky limit where confusion and unforeseen creativity become equally possible : the hope is that, in the end, our arguments will appear to the reader as a dance, a sensitive adjustment, with *LIR* and Eric’s thought. But that is not for us to say.

Certainly, they aim not only to contribute to the diffusion and in-depth re-interpretation of *LIR* but also to testify to a deep connection with its contents, its arguments, and its sensitivities. A way to show, to *live*, what it can give. And hopefully, to make something, even if in the form of an accident, for what it has given us.

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**Résumé :** L’essai propose une relecture de *Les Interactions Risquées*, vingt ans après sa première publication. Il le fait en explorant les plis du modèle proposé par Eric Landowski, rapidement devenu un classique de la discipline. L’essai examine le contexte intellectuel et social de son émergence, l’idéologie-philosophie implicite dans la construction et la description du modèle, ainsi que la problématique de la définition d’un processus standard dans la transition d’un régime d’interaction à un autre. Ces réflexions ouvrent sur les potentialités inhérentes au modèle : en particulier, elles visent à encourager une lecture non réductrice et une exploration des relations entre les régimes, permettant de saisir de manière toujours plus nuancée les dynamiques réelles, vécues, de production, destruction et transformation du sens. Enfin, l’essai propose d’associer à chaque régime des entités-concepts spécifiques — objets, valeurs, rythmes, présences — dont la coprésence et l’interaction constantes expliquent la complexité du phénomène que nous appelons « sens ».

**Mots-clefs :** expérience, interaction, Landowski, sémiotique, sens.

**Resumo :** O ensaio oferece uma releitura de *Les Interactions Risquées*, vinte anos após sua primeira publicação. Faz isso mergulhando nas dobras do modelo proposto por Eric Landowski, que rapidamente se tornou um clássico da disciplina. O ensaio explora o contexto intelectual e social de sua emergência, a ideologia-filosofia implícita na construção e descrição do modelo, e a problemática de definir uma processualidade padrão na transição de um regime de interação para outro. Essas reflexões destacam as potencialidades inerentes ao modelo : em particular, buscam promover uma leitura não reducionista e uma exploração das relações entre os regimes que permita captar, de forma cada vez mais detalhada, as dinâmicas reais, vividas, de produção, destruição e transformação do sentido. Por fim, o ensaio propõe associar a cada regime entidades-conceitos específicas — objetos, valores, ritmos, presenças — cuja constante copresença e interação explicam a complexidade do fenômeno que chamamos de “sentido”.

**Abstract :** The essay offers a reinterpretation of *Les Interactions Risquées*, twenty years after its first publication. It does so by delving into the folds of the model proposed by Eric Landowski, which has quickly become a classic in the discipline. The essay explores the intellectual and social context from which the model emerged, the implicit ideology-philosophy underpinning its construction and description, and the challenges of defining a standard processuality in the transition from one regime of interaction to another. These reflections highlight the potential embedded in the model : specifically, they aim to promote a non-reductionist interpretation of it and an exploration of the relationships between regimes that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the actual, lived dynamics of meaning production, destruction, and transformation. Finally, the essay proposes associating specific entity-concepts—objects, values,



rhythms, and presences—with each regime : their constant coexistence and interaction account for the complexity of the phenomenon we call “meaning” or “sense”.

**Riassunto :** Il saggio offre una rilettura di *Les Interactions Risquées*, a distanza di 20 anni dalla sua prima pubblicazione. Lo fa entrando nelle pieghe del modello proposto da Eric Landowski, divenuto velocemente un classico della disciplina. Il saggio ne esplora il contesto intellettuale e sociale di emersione ; l’ideologia-filosofia implicita nella costruzione e descrizione del modello ; la problematica della definizione di una processualità standard nel passaggio da un regime di interazione a un altro. Queste considerazioni aprono sulle potenzialità insite nel modello : in particolare mirano a favorire una sua lettura non-riduzionista ed un’esplorazione delle relazioni fra i regimi che consenta di intercettare in modo sempre più articolato le dinamiche effettive, vissute, di produzione / distruzione / trasformazione del senso. Infine, il saggio propone di associare a ogni regime delle specifiche entità-concetti — oggetti, valori, ritmi, presenze — la cui costante compresenza e interazione spiega la complessità del fenomeno che chiamiamo “senso”.

**Auteurs cités :** Emiliano Battistini, Paolo Demuru, Umberto Eco, Paolo Fabbri, Jean-Marie Floch, Jacques Fontanille, Algirdas J. Greimas, Fredric Jameson, Eric Landowski, Juri M. Lotman, Gianfranco Marrone, Constantine V. Nakassis, Ana C. de Oliveira, Tatsuma Padoan, Isabella Pezzini, Michael Silverstein.

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