



# DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE

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**Raluca SOARE**

Universitatea „Lucian Blaga” din Sibiu, Facultatea de Științe Socio-Umane  
Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences  
Personal e-mail:

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## DIMENSIONS OF DISCOURSE

Discourse, thinking and reality intimately interact in the realm of conscience, their interrelation defining itself as meaning. Factual and symbol, event and structure, object and discourse are not phases or sequences, but compose an inextricable unity. Discourse integrates time and space in a play of intelligibility, while revealing the depths of thinking, the adjustment to circumstances and the confrontation with the object.

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As D. Maingueneau highlights, the discourse must be understood as an articulation of text and context. “In consequence, discourse can neither be defined as a representation of the object, nor as textual organisation, nor as communicational situation, but as a mise en relation of these aspects, by enunciation.”<sup>1</sup> The discourse grounds itself and constructs itself, by taking into possession or assuming what Maingueneau called the archeion<sup>2</sup> of discursive production in a given time and space, that manifests itself in and through discourse. Therefore, according to the distinction applied by E. Benveniste<sup>3</sup> between the historical enunciation system and the discursive enunciation system, discourse represents a kind of text with a deictic character that is in an implicit relationship with the circumstance of enunciation. Discourse delineates and configures the plane of immanence, and content and expression are not and can not be independent from the discursive context towards which they permanently refer their inception and existence. Even more, the term by which Maingueneau names the discursive context is scenography, by which, to the theatrical dimension of stage he adds the graphy, or „legitimate embedding into the stage”, since scenography is „the source of authority for the discourse”. The significance that Maingueneau

attributes to the term is not that of a priori given frame, through which a discourse emerges, since the suffix graphy must be understood in a dialectic sense<sup>4</sup> – as a “process” and “frame.”<sup>5</sup> Thus understood, the concept of scenography brings into light all modulations and transformations a discourse can be submitted to, until it develops a situation of partial exchange, of dynamic correspondence from another plane, while the ultimate conscience being the transposition and modification of the relation between positions. The discourse becomes manifested and legitimate through a situation that does not represent a predefined fixed frame, but rather draws a paradoxical loop by the world it establishes, the discourse must justify the frame it opens; in other words, it presents a world that is nothing else than the very frame it exposes. Therefore, scenography can be defined only by two symmetrical and correspondent axes: the axis of space (topography) and the axis of time (chronography).

Defined as frame and process, discourse can receive other two dimensions: corporeality and linguistic dimensions. Maingueneau associates corporeality to the rhetorical concept of ethos, which serves to indicate the manner of enunciation; the theoretical perspective opened by the discourse analysis broadens

the meaning of ethos, up to its convergence with the concept of scenography. Therefore, even more than signifying the orator, the ethos signifies the exercise of the word, pointing to the discourse, not to the author<sup>6</sup>. The corporeality of discourse presupposes a diffuse set of valued or devalued social representations, that make up stereotypes which circulate in the most diverse registers of semiotic production specific to a community. Far from being a timeless procedure, just like the other dimensions of enunciation, the ethos inserts the discourse into a determining historical circumstance and indicates that ideas are rendered in a manner of expression that points to a manner of being. By corporeality, Maingueneau designates a triple function of ethos: to give a body to the instance or “the custodian of truth”; to determine the assimilation of a set of mental models that compose a certain manner of comparing oneself to the world, mediated by a manner of living inside our own bodies; and finally, by the first two functions, to make possible the “embodiment”, that is the integration inside a community body.

The linguistic code can also be a defining dimension of discourse, says Maingueneau, yet not as much understood by a system of rules and signs allowing communication, but in an overall acception of formal indications that describe the manner of enunciation according to the universe that was incepted by the discourse. .

We can see that, by submitting discourse to a theoretical unfolding, we become witnesses to a constant fragile balance between coherence and openness. If a framework of conceptual discussion could not be created in the absence of coherence, then a possible closing up of meanings would render sterile the very notion of discourse. A revelation of the facets of structural isomorphism between discourse, reality and knowledge can be the source of a certain perceptible instability and ambiguity. Yet it must be emphasized that this isomorphism should neither be understood as a commonplace correspondence, ad nor as an identity of structure between the elements of language, the ontic entities and the cognitive structures. The relevance of this correspondence is given by a double univocalness that does not allow any positions of dominance: the discourse does not exhaust reality and reality does not exhaust discourse, but there is preserved a certain degree of indetermination and incompleteness on both sides. The incompleteness becomes therefore relevant in a double sense: the unity of elements composing the language remains in fact hidden, only emanating towards the exterior, as Heidegger says, through a “breach”, just like a “furrow that enwraps the seedling.”<sup>7</sup> Certain phenomena of the world can not be represented adequately (see the quantum physics), and this not because of faulty representation manners, but as a

consequence of the fact that the incompleteness is, in a sense, an authentic feature of the world itself.

Yet the discourse-thinking-reality isomorphism is manifesting a series of inner tensions and games of power that result in four relevant perspectives. All these perspectives are definable within the horizons of the relation between knowledge and order. In our current accepted understanding, the two notions are undividable, since knowing presupposes establishing an order, while the very process of knowledge has a negentropic character, trying to remove the cognitive indetermination. The authentic acts of knowing must not only achieve an intellectual order, but also legitimize, justify and validate it. As Adrian-Paul Iliescu says, we can speak of two functions of knowledge: one of delivering an epistemic order specific to the state of learning and another of ensuring the intellectual validity of that particular order. A dissociation between the two functions is not implicit, but determined as a consequence of relinquishing the idea that a deduction of knowledge directly from reality simultaneously corresponds to an act of construction and legitimation of epistemic order. Therefore, the process of validation is to be considered as second, but not secondary, applied to a cognitive product that is relatively autonomous from reality.<sup>8</sup>

Specific to the stage anticipating dissociation is the mythical perspective that represents nothing else but an attempt to achieve a model capable of revealing but also installing an order of reality. In other words, the myth represents a sampling theoretical attempt, but also a constructive one. Although authors like Marcel Detienne<sup>9</sup> consider myths as non-definable forms, considering the attempt at defining them to be totally superficial, Luc Brisson reveals that myths must be given today the meanings they owned in Antiquity<sup>10</sup>. Brisson defines myths in opposition with the logos, thus revealing the difference between the narrative discourse whose function is „to render facts as they were claimed to have occurred, without providing any explanation” and the argumentative discourse that represents “a link of ideas made by rules meant to determine in a necessary way, the extraction of a conclusion.”<sup>11</sup> This dichotomy that opposes the certainty of reason against the archaic imaginary, can appear vulnerable, since the mythos requires a logos part as well, by the order it brings into the world and by the logical connection it establishes between the current consequences and the inceptual occurrences. In a similar way, the logos presupposes a content load specific to myth, thanks to reason, that mingles concepts, imagery, affections and relations with substantialistic connotations. Beyond all these, myths remain the discursive construction that best render the sampling-constructive ideal, thanks to its aspirations towards an one-directional rendering



of a primary truth, thus annulling by its very nature the confrontation, the evaluation and the capacity to reduce it to discourse, the latter being absolutely impossible, since for a myth, language has rather an instrumental value. This aspect is also emphasized by Lévi- Strauss, who recognizes the characteristics of archaic thinking in the fact that “myths exist simultaneously in the language and beyond it.”<sup>12</sup>

In one second perspective reflecting the discourse-thinking-reality isomorphism, thinking appears as cause, discourse appears as effect and reality as purpose. In this understanding, discourse becomes the hypostasis of thinking that completes itself by discourse. Discourse is understood in terms of a self-determining objectivity, in a Hegelian sense: an objectivity that is constitutive to the laws of dialectics and laws of nature and that determines a validation of discourse only as “adequatio rei et intellectus.” In a similar sense, discourse must be regarded as a median term situated between thinking and being, through which the spirit reaches self-consciousness, or “phenomenalizes itself.” In other words, discourse is not a reflection of a subsisting something, but rather, in Hegelian terms, is the “phenomenalisation of the spirit,” the spirit being understood as “a synthetic unity of thinking and reality, achieved under a discursive organisation.”<sup>13</sup>

The linguistic turnaround generated by the paradigm of rational knowledge brings along an ideal of intelligibility and accessibility, introducing a new perspective, that institutes an absolute distinction between referent and significance, by an absolutisation of the function of sign. In this way is deduced the general thesis according which the system of significances is conditioning the system of references. The most striking rupture performed by this perspective is the one between discourse and thinking. By a systematisation and formalisation of enunciation, discourse becomes simultaneously the sole accessible reality and the sole admissible reality. Grounded in a semiotic soil, that has become an element of universalism, thinking, just as reality, becomes relativised, and against the ambition of a unique foundation will rise an historicistic-radical argument, based on a “pre-understanding of truth, of language and reason, etc., a pre-understanding

that we can not handle and that can differ from one historical moment to another, thus invalidating a unique foundation of reason.”<sup>14</sup>

By cutting off its connections to the ontic exterior and with any cognitive structure, the discourse unreels a general practice of dissolution, becoming, from a fourth perspective, a diffuse entity, an obsolete agglomeration of signs. The rupture between signified and significant and the domination of the latter receive the character of an exclusive and constraining antithesis. Baudrillard calls this process by which the signified and the referent are now abolished to the exclusive benefit of the play of significances, “the general operationalisation of general.”<sup>15</sup> The discourse is not manifesting itself anymore under the empowerment of a signified that can allow a steady meaning, becoming instead a continuous exposition of a search for a meaning that in fact remains permanently absent. Between discourse and reality, just as between reality and thinking there is an obvious short-circuit produced: we are not dealing with a projection of discourse in reality any more, but solely with a process of immediate transfiguration of reality in discourse, as well as with the absence of any critical separation of thinking from the object. This overdimensional semiotic transformation erases the function of foundation and of knowledge of discourse, placing the language beyond epistemology. Caught in the “foundation-ex/foundation nexus,”<sup>16</sup> thanks to inescapable means of deep necessity, current thinking can only metaphorise the language it deconstructs.

If we apply the field of experience to the world, we are talking about a real world, or, if this term is too blunt, about a world that is to us in a clear, determined way; if we apply it the field of discourse, we can speak about a possible world, that “is not real, or is not real yet, and yet it exists: she is an expressed thing that does only exist in its expression.”<sup>17</sup> If the reality proper to this world stands exactly in its characteristic of being possible, he infers that discourse is not a mirror of reality, but a launching of hypotheses on it, by a delineation of coordinates and routes to the purpose of pinning references, or, as Adrian-Paul Iliescu affirms, discourse only “summons reality; it does not capture it.”<sup>18</sup>

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## Notes:

1. Dominique Maingueneau, “Analysing Self-Constructing Discourses,” *Discourse Studies* 1, no.2 (May 1999): 175-199. Quotation from 178.
2. By extrapolating the polisemantic value of arché (source, principle, order or power) we are entering the significance space of the paradigm, inside which the discourse can be entered, as construction that has a foundation, a development and a paradigmatic finality.
3. By historical enunciation system, Benveniste understands the enunciation-story that functions in the absence of every referent of the utterance. “The events are presented as they happened, as long as they belong to the horizon of history.” Emile

- Benveniste, *Problèmes de linguistique générale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), 241.
4. The verb *currere* (lat.) that is a component of the term discourse indicate both a “process” (race, trip), as well as a “frame” (route, track); therefore, the term indicates both action and the space that allows its unfolding. In the spirit of the same distinction (that is in fact a fusion or coexistence corresponding to the law of included third party) we can inscribe the thought and enunciation, intellect and physical action, process and rule or the spatially dispersed elements and the unity of movement. In consequence, discourse does nothing else than claim a solution (in the sense of annulment) of oppositions, which aspiration can only have its source in an absence.
  5. Maingueneau, “Analysing,” 192.
  6. Dominique Maingueneau, *L'énonciation philosophique comme institution discursive* (Paris: Larousse, 1995), 40-62
  7. Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 408.
  8. Adrian-Paul Iliescu, *Filosofia limbajului și limbajul filosofiei* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989), 140.
  9. Marcel Detienne, *L'invention de la mythologie* (Paris: Gallimard, Detienne, 1981).
  10. The opposition between myth and argumentative discourse is admirably illustrated by Plato through the structure of his dialogues Protagoras and the Political Man. In The Political Man, the stranger from Elea unfolds an argumentative discourse with a dialectic structure, and in Protagoras, the homonymous character develops the same thesis with two different means: narration of a myth and argumentative exposure Platon, *Opere*, vol. I, vol. VI (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1977, 1989).
  11. Luc Brisson, *Introduction à la philosophie du mythe* (Paris: Vrin, 1996), 38.
  12. Claude Lévi- Strauss, *Antropologia structurală* (București: Ed. Politică, 1978), 250.
  13. Joël Biard, Daniel Buvat and Jean-François Kervegan, *L'introduction à la science de la logique de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier, 1981), 12.
  14. Jean-Marc Ferry, *Philosophie de la communication. De l'antinomie de la vérité à la fondation ultime de la raison* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1994), 79.
  15. Jean Baudrillard, *The Mirror of Production* (St. Louis: Telos Press, 1975), 127.
  16. Gianni Vattimo, *Dincolo de subiect* (Constanța: Ed. Pontica, 1994), 121.
  17. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Ce este filosofia* (Târgoviște: Ed. Pandora, 1999), 18.
  18. Adrian-Paul Iliescu, *Filosofia limbajului și limbajul filosofiei* (București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989), 138.

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