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Political Discourse Analysis

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Towards a centrality of culture in social movement research

After having replaced social-psychological and structural theories – such as relative deprivation theory (Davies, 1962; Gurr, 1970), the theory of mass society (Kornhauser, 1959) and collective behaviour (Smelser, 1963) – with a more socially and politically conscious model (consistent with those empirical findings describing movement participants as 'rational' and 'normal' individuals rather than as marginalized and anomic people), the resource mobilization approach (RMA) (McCarthy and Zald, 1973, 1977; Oberschall, 1973; Gamson, 1975; Tilly, 1978) has itself come under widespread criticism. Beginning in the mid-1980s, scholars have increasingly stressed that, in trying to overcome the free rider paradox (Olson, 1968) from a rational point of view, RMA theories have overestimated the role of selective incentives. In fact, within their theoretical framework individuals are seen as participating in collective mobilizations only because they are attracted by (selective) benefits which, by definition, may have nothing to do with a movement's 'cause'. The decision to participate is thus seen as based on an abstract (economic) rationality, while the meaning of the collective goal towards which mobilization activities are directed, and the role of its ideological justification (Ferree and Miller, 1985), are left unanalysed.

RMA proponents, in other words, have been criticized for underestimating 'the significance of grievances and ideology as determinants of participation' (Klandermans, 1984: 584), thus offering no explanation of the mechanisms which bring to the fore specific collective demands. Empirically, this has been highlighted by the rise of the so-called 'new' movements. RMA theories, in fact, could not explain why the most important collective phenomena of the 1980s have all focused, in different countries, on the same topics: peace, environment and women's issues (Klandermans and Tarrow, 1988).

As a consequence, scholars have turned a defined focus on the

cognitive processes by means of which grievances are 'interpreted' and 'consensus' around the collective goals of a movement is constructed and mobilized (Gamson et al., 1982; McAdam, 1982; Klandermans, 1984; Snow et al., 1986). The aim has been to reconsider the role that the specific collective goal and ideology of a movement – its cultural elements – play in arousing people's commitment and interest; thus providing a theoretical bridge between structure (that is, social problems) and action (the motivation to participate).

At the same time, neo-Marxists (Piven and Cloward, 1979) and 'new social movements' theorists (Touraine, 1973, 1978; Melucci, 1980, 1984; Habermas, 1981; Offe, 1985; Pizzorno, 1987) have also called attention to the problem of ideology and political cognition. Among them, adherents of the 'identity paradigm' (particularly Touraine and Melucci) have also tried to overcome the free rider problem by considering the specificity of movement cultures. They have emphasized that the grievances and social problems around which collective actors mobilize are never of an 'objective' kind, and that the individuals involved are not brought together by a common social condition. Rather, the formation of a collective actor requires the construction of a collective self: an 'identity', which is defined on the basis of the available cultural tools and, therefore, appears as a cultural construct through which the specific collective goal is also given meaning.

collective identity

The main currents of social movement studies have thus come to recognize the importance and autonomy of the cultural (or ideological) dimension which lies at the basis of collective action. Concepts such as 'consensus mobilization' and 'collective identity' have brought the focus of research on the 'cultural conduciveness' – as Gamson (1988) says – of social situations, and on the practices through which social movements act as 'signifying agents' (Snow and Benford, 1989). It is within this framework that some scholars have begun to develop a discourse analysis approach and to introduce such concepts as 'political discourse' (Gamson, 1985, 1988), 'frame' and 'frame alignment' (Snow et al., 1986) as specific tools for the analysis of these ideologies and cultures.

The metaphor of discourse: ideology as text and talk

Discourse analysis is by no means a new current of research; although the term covers an extremely wide range of approaches and methods (Maingueneau, 1976), its origins can be found in Z.S. Harris's (1952) studies in distributional linguistics. Nor can its application to what has been called 'political discourse' be

considered new. In fact, the origins of political discourse analysis can be traced back to the end of the 1960s and, particularly in France (Pecheux, 1969; Demonet, 1975), to the idea of approaching the study of ideology through applying linguistic tools to the act of 'production' (that is, discourse, either written or spoken) of this same ideology.

In spite of the existence of different approaches – a thorough discussion of which would make this essay unduly long – my aim here is that of presenting the discourse analysis (DA) perspective as it has been recently developed and applied in the field of social movement studies. In this endeavour, I start from a definition of 'discourse' and of its *raison d'être* as an object (of analysis), and move forward to a discussion of the theoretical, methodological and technical aspects connected to its study. I then try to point out the advantages of such a perspective in the study of movement (as well as other) ideologies and, finally, I outline some of its limits in the analysis of social movement phenomena *per se*. To this end, I try to offer some suggestions for a different and more comprehensive paradigm.

All discourse analysis approaches have their roots in a more or less defined linguistic view and in the idea of discourse as a 'language event'; that is, as the act through which ideative and symbolic constructs are actualized and made real in the human world. The meaning of the term 'discourse', of course, has become metaphorically extended from its original roots in interpersonal conversation to the social dialogue which takes place through and across societal institutions, among individuals as well as groups, organizations and (when political discourse is the object of analysis) political institutions themselves. From this point of view, discourse is seen as a 'talk' in which 'speakers' 'function as agents of groups or institutions that are parties to the . . . controversy' (Rein, 1986: 12).

Different applications assign diverse analytical status to discursive production, from the merely 'superstructural' role of place, where such ideative elements as ideologies, belief systems, opinions, etc. originate and are changed, to the constitutive role of (re)production of a society through actors' communicative interaction. Despite this, in recent social movement studies, the use of the term 'discourse' mainly refers to the first end of the continuum; the role of 'political discourse' is here akin to that of ideologies or belief systems – (the locus of production of) the ideative constructs through which reality is understood.

DA, thus, has been used as a more modern approach to ideological constructs. Compared to more traditional approaches, this

perspective has the uncommon advantage of not treating ideology as a monolithic and fully structured element. In fact, DA's perspective emphasizes the weaknesses rather than the strength of ideologies: their ambiguities and gaps; the 'discussion' upon their real meaning, where legitimating and delegitimating interpretations struggle against each other. As Mehan et al. say, when such 'breaches' in the texture of 'normal' life occur:

> The relations between voices in public political discourse take the form of a conversation . . . The process is essentially dialogic in that the actions of one speaker or voice are oriented to the . . . performances of other voices – reacting, projecting, transforming, anticipating the discourse of other speakers or voices. (Mehan et al., 1990: 135)

Political discourse refers here to:

> . . . the interactions of individuals, interest groups, social movements and institutions through which problematic situations are converted to policy problems, agendas are set, decisions are made and actions are taken. (Rein, 1986: 1)

Political issues, policy problems, and the like, represent the expression of – and the terrain for – contested interpretations of political reality.

From this point of view, the concept of 'discourse' represents an illuminating metaphor; one which can be fruitfully used to refer to the negotiation, or construction, of reality through ideational ('discursive') tools. Ideology and culture may therefore be seen as representing kits of such tools (Swidler, 1986), which people use according to their needs, rather than as finished constructions. DA introduces an intentional focus on their manipulation and use, on the way they confront and change each other, and on how the definition of reality represents the outcome of this (intrinsically cultural) confrontation. Gamson, for example (Gamson, 1985, 1988; Gamson and Modigliani, 1987, 1989), has developed a 'value-added' model of the processes through which people's political culture and opinions are shaped. In it, three elements combine: competing 'discourses' (that is, speeches, press releases, books, etc.) produced by political institutions, organizations and groups ('sponsors', as Gamson calls them), media practices in forwarding and transforming these 'original' inputs, and the cultural tools by means of which people respond to and assimilate them. The aim is to examine:

> . . . the interplay between the commentary that appears about a series of issues in the mass media and the way ordinary people make sense and talk about the same set of issues. (Gamson, 1985: 3)

As this interplay of ideologies, beliefs and opinions determines the rise and decline of political issues and controversies, it is easy to understand why it represents a central concern for students of social movements:

> Sustained collective action involves a symbolic struggle. At the broadest level it is a struggle over the legitimacy of a regime and trust in the incumbent political authorities. Every regime has a legitimating frame that provides the citizenry with a reason to be quiescent . . . .
>
> As theories about ideological hegemony and false consciousness have emphasized, challengers face a formidable task. But the difficulty varies over time for all challengers and, at any single moment, among them. For some, the official meanings with which they must contend are deeply embedded and well-defended; for others, official meanings are in crisis and disarray or perhaps even discredited . . . .
>
> Mobilization potential has, then, a strong cultural component. (Gamson, 1988: 219)

Discourse and frames

The tool which has allowed these approaches to political discourse to introduce quite a new perspective on the analysis of ideology and culture is the 'frame' concept. Its origins (sometimes under the name of 'schema' or 'script') are to be found, between 1970 and 1980, in the field of the cognitive sciences – especially in cognitive psychology (Axelrod, 1973; Neisser, 1976; Fillmore, 1977; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Abelson, 1981; Jackendoff, 1983) and artificial intelligence (Minsky, 1981). Here, a growing number of experimental studies of perception, memory and text comprehension showed that objects or events are never cognized by working from the identification of their component parts to the reconstruction of the whole, but rather by assigning a satisfactory definition to the complex totality, so that the component parts come to acquire an understandable meaning.

According to this point of view, what would be a bundle of scattered perceptions is made to find a structured synthesis in an object or event whose typology is already known and provides the perceiver with a familiar pattern – a 'frame' or 'schema' – with which to make sense of what is in front of her/him, and to make the scattered perception significant. Objects or events are never made sense of by being rationally and consciously reconstructed on a piece-by-piece basis. Rather, perceptive data are 'grouped' together under the heading of one subsuming category, a larger 'frame' which provides them with a recognizable structure and meaning.[1]

One important correlate is that these categories, or frames, by

means of which people 'perceive' the world, are categories which are already present in the perceiver's culture or memory. Cognition is nothing more than re-cognition (or, in the extreme case, restructuration of previous patterns into new and more satisfactory ones), and people make sense of things by 're-cognizing' them as elements of a meaningfully ordered world. The consequence, in a sense, is that nothing can be perceived which is not known already, and that one must look for meaning within culture itself. Culture, then, can be thought of as the 'reservoir' (Rein and Schoen, 1977) of categories or frames. Which frames are actualized among the potentially available ones will depend, besides the physical or discursive characters that objects appear to have, on the perceiver's culture – that is, on the availability of categories in the perceiver's encyclopedia (Eco, 1979).

A second correlate is that once a 'frame' is elicited to define a perceptive input, data or elements which are difficult to fit will be 'adapted' or selectively dropped out, while gaps will be filled by adding the missing elements to complete the 're-cognized' pattern. Since a frame is a known structure, the elements which are constitutive of it are implicitly considered as 'naturally' tied together. The consequence is that mentioning some elements – sometimes even one – is usually enough to 'suggest' or to recall the whole set, as, for example, when a body lying on the ground near a knife immediately suggests a whole homicidal plot, or even better when some elements become the accepted 'symbols' of entire conceptual constructions, such as a red flag.

A third correlate, finally, is that each single bundle of perceptive data can be made to fit a potentially large number of different frames and, according to the selected frame, different characters of the object become visible or relevant. A football game, for example, can be understood either as a battle or as a classical ballet.[2] In either case, the process works by selecting and 'actualizing' a subset of the 'potential' properties of the actual football game, thus 'framing' it along one possible 'semantic' plane, and allowing people to see and expect different things. Once the 'battle' frame is selected, though, the most the idea of 'good play' can refer to is probably a good and smart strategy, but it will hardly get people to think about touch, movement, and style.

A frame, thus, is a general, standardized, predefined structure (in the sense that it already belongs to the receiver's knowledge of the world) which allows re-cognition and guides perception (Minsky, 1981). It is a structure of perception which is selected from memory when a (new) situation is encountered, and which includes related facts, antecedents and consequences, condensing

the perceiver's knowledge of the world (as pertains to that frame or category) and allowing him/her to build defined expectations about what is to happen; that is, to make sense of his/her reality:

> A frame is a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined problematic situation can be made sense of and acted upon. (Rein, 1986: 2)

Frames, however, do not simply pertain to the sheer 'perceptive' activity. Categorization is objectified and given social existence through language and discourse (Berger and Luckmann, 1966), so that the existence and relevance of a social(izable) reality across time and space depends on the manipulation of linguistic categories. Categories, in fact, are abstract classes of objects; objects considered in their full potential, with all their consequents and correlates. By using one category, discourse not only describes an object; it constructs one precise scene which is able to go much further than the object itself, connecting it with other objects and classes of objects. As Greimas (1970) says, the meaning of meaning always lies in this work of 'transformation', of 'carrying objects out of themselves' (which is happily expressed by the word 'sense', especially in Romance languages where the French word 'sens' and the Italian 'senso' also mean 'direction', and, in English, by the term 'mean' and its different meanings). The metaphor is its basic mechanism (Rein and Schoen, 1977; Goodman, 1978; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) rather than abstract logic.

The conception of language, here, changes from that of an instrument for describing reality to that of an instrument for defining reality. Through language, the framing of reality can be socially dealt with, communicated and given relevance. However, since categorization has practical consequences – that is, people decide and behave according to the way they categorize, and therefore make sense of, the relevant facts – we may expect different categorizations of a common reality to arouse conflicts about its definition. Discourse is the place where efforts at defining public reality are made so that it can achieve a collective validity. Frames are the basic tools – or weapons – used in these efforts:

> Every policy issue is contested in a symbolic arena. Advocates of one or another persuasion attempt to give their own meaning to the issue and to events that may affect the outcome. Their weapons are metaphors, catchphrases, and other condensing symbols that frame the issue in a particular fashion. (Gamson and Modigliani, 1987: 143)

Frame analysis

Political discourse analysis is an instrument for studying the ways in which political reality is 'framed' through discourse and, therefore, the way people come to understand it. It does so by tracing the development and change of the ideative constructs which conflict for the definition of the nature of political objects. In fact, political DA has mainly – although not always – focused on those objects whose definition was more or less heavily contested. This may be considered as a consequence of the stance according to which reality is artificially produced and its 'framing' always represents the outcome of contingent human effort, rather than a 'natural' or objective thing.

The research process, thus, centres on the reconstruction of the frames which are used in talking and reasoning about an issue. The core substance of the method concerns this 'reconstructive' work. In pursuit of this aim, DA advances through a number of steps which go from defining the topic to the actual analysis of framing. Nevertheless, the whole process is far from being based on clearly formalized procedures (except for some earlier versions, this is hardly talked about by those researchers who have used it), and my aim here is to give a basic outline of its steps and their most problematic and controversial aspects.

Topic selection and definition

Since conflicting views of some object (e.g. nuclear energy, workers' struggles, poverty, etc.) are what usually constitute social and political issues, discourse produced around these issues has been the focus of much research, the aim being uncovering the frames used by the different 'voices' in the 'discursive interplay'.

The topic of research is thus usually represented by a social or political issue. Once an issue is selected, however, caution is still needed in defining the proper topic of the research. In fact, what is framed is not the issue itself, but rather one object around which the issue revolves, and which comes to be seen from different – more or less conflicting – points of view. The difficulty is represented by the fact that for each issue there may be more than one such object, and selecting the proper one becomes a key decision. For example, in dealing with the ecology issue (Donati, 1989) 'ecology' could not be taken as the topic of research, since its definition already represented one of the outcomes of the framing of 'nature'. Moreover, defining the topic involved a choice between a number of different objects: 'nature', 'natural resources', 'pollution', and so on, so that the final decision became

a matter of heuristic strategy. The point, in other words, is that of finding an object key to the arguments, by means of which the issue was 'discussed', so that the issue itself could be addressed from the most favourable 'position'. Of course, well established argumentative links between the different objects are often made explicit, so that this choice is less dramatic than it might sound. For example, Gemson (1985, 1988) also seems to have taken this choice as less relevant. His suggestion is to see the conflicting views of an issue as 'packages', framing all the relevant objects in a strictly correlated way. The researcher may thus aim at reconstructing the general position on an issue, the 'package', rather than the frames through which one well-defined object or topic has been seen. This could be a workable solution, although it may lead to vagueness in distinguishing different frames, especially because, as we shall see, the relationships between the different objects of a 'package' are not of a logical – and therefore unique and fixed – kind, but rather depend on the specific construction of each discourse.

Texts

Discourse is made up of the interaction of 'voices'. One of the first steps therefore consists of defining what voices will be considered as a relevant part of the discourse. In principle, these do not necessarily come from the same social setting. On the contrary, their social settings may be physically separated from each other – which clearly shows the metaphoric value of the idea of 'discourse', its basic requirement being that the different voices have some relevant, but not necessarily direct, interaction.

Students of political discourse have generally pointed to three different *loci* where discourse is produced and aired: political institutions and organizations (both supporting and challenging governmental policy decisions), the media, and the personal–interpersonal level of primary-group interaction. Among these, more traditional studies focusing on the development of policy issues have centred on the way in which situations come to be defined by political institutions (Rein and Schoen, 1977; Rein, 1986; Mehan et al., 1990). These analyse governmental documents, plans, etc. along with the press releases of institutional and organizational spokespeople, books written by prominent specialists, etc. Studies of collective mobilization phenomena, on the other hand, have emphasized discourse produced by challengers in the polity. Snow's studies (Snow et al., 1986; Snow and Benford, 1988, 1989) have focused on discourse produced by movement organizations and on their efforts at defining reality

both for the general public and for movement converts. Alongside documents and speeches Snow and his associates have used interviews with participants, leaders and activists as a way to 're-create' discourse on an *ad hoc* basis. Gamson (1985, 1988), finally, drawing on recent studies which have stressed the role of media frames in shaping people's political thinking (Edelman, 1971, 1988; Tuchman, 1978; Gitlin, 1980; Merelman, 1984), has focused on the relationship between media discourse (taken from newspapers, magazines, and TV programmes) and the reconstructive processes which take place in interpersonal discourse (re-created through peer group discussions), where media output is manipulated by the public.

The 'voices', however, do not represent the units of analysis. Rather, discourse has been seen as made of what pragmatics calls 'acts of language', made by one actor or 'voice'. What defines them is a pragmatically identifiable beginning and an equally identifiable end. These 'acts', regardless of whether they are written (such as books, articles, leaflets, documents, laws, etc.) or non-written (such as speeches, interview texts, TV and radio commentaries), are considered as DA's units of analysis and are analysed as texts (interviews, as 'artificially' reconstructed texts, might require a partially different approach, considering each single answer or group of answers as one separated textual unit). 'Voices' will differ as to the number of texts produced or aired, but this acquires relevance only in terms of the quantitative analysis of frequencies.

Taking the text as the unit of analysis does not simply reflect an 'empirical' criterion. Because of the fact that it represents a circumscribed 'act', a text can also be considered as the least textual unit to which a fully circumscribed meaning can be attributed, which cannot be said for words or even sentences (Violi and Manetti, 1979).[3] What DA tries to do is reconstruct the argumentative structure which is used to define and make sense of an issue or an object. A text, from this point of view, is usually thought of as defining the object of research according to one frame. Given that frames are used to define objects (making some characteristics relevant rather than others), and given that a change of frame usually amounts to redefining the object, multiple-frame texts are rather unlikely to exist. The coding task, then, will consist of the classification of the relevant texts according to the frame they use in defining what was chosen as the object, or topic, of the research.

Depending on the specific research design, finally, the corpus of texts to be considered may be more or less clearly identifiable (once the corpus is selected, of course, samples may also be drawn). The

problem here is how to define the complete set of texts which are relevant to an issue. When the discourse takes place in a closed setting this can be easy. Basically, text selection ought to take account of the actor who enunciated the text and of whether he is part of the discourse or not.[4] In some instances, however, especially when media discourse is analysed, this approach may be difficult. In such cases, one empirical principle may be represented by a 'key-word list': a list of words naming objects which are relevant to the issue is drawn up (usually including between twenty and thirty words), and texts are selected if they carry at least one (or a predefined but small number) of these words. This technique is consistent with van Dijk's (1977) findings, according to which strategically placed or repeated words work as 'topic markers'. It may be helpful when it is difficult to decide whether a text is or is not related to a given topic.

Frames

As should be clear by now, for the purpose of interpretation a text may be taken as being composed of two parts: a frame, i.e. a general structure of reference; and a topic, i.e. the object to which this structure is applied. When one is confronted by a text, however, the problem becomes one of detecting and deciding what frame is being used or taken for granted in addressing the research topic. Indeed, this is the crucial problem in the analysis, and one about which students of political discourse analysis have never explicitly talked. Such studies have variously referred to semiotic and pragmatic approaches to discourse, but have never dealt with the methodological aspects, with the result that 'frame analysis' has often been seen as something vague and based on subjective intuition.[5]

Instead, the process should be seen as guided by a set of principles, albeit not fully formalized. Basically, each text within a selected corpus is seen as constituted by an argumentative form whose role is to put forth and make recognizable some known structure, or model, with which the object of research is implicitly or explicitly equated. This structure functions as a perceptive/cognitive pattern: a 'frame' whose characters the object of research is implicitly made to borrow.

Two 'rules of thumb' may be useful in checking whether a frame has been correctly individuated: (a) the frame should always be represented by a category of objects, events or actions, both more general and more commonly known than the frame object – the principle is that the frame should work as a guiding model for what is to be understood; (b) the definition of a frame may be deemed correct when the meaning of the text does not change (but rather becomes tautological) after the frame's name or definition has been transposed on to those places of the text where the topic was named.

> (1) Man should use energy only to start a process which, after that, should be able to reach a self-fed functioning and a new equilibrium . . . a fast way of humidifying land . . . consists of irrigation systems. This fast way has different costs and therefore different limits to its applicability. First of all it has a high energetic cost; secondly, it causes different environmental effects depending on the climate. In some hot areas, for example in some areas of Africa, irrigation has caused an increase of molluscs, carriers of highly pathogenic parasites: to get rid of the molluscs chemicals have been employed which in turn have been harmful.[6]

Here nature is framed in terms of finite complexity. A proper name for the frame could be 'No gain without cost', as it reflects common thinking more than 'finite complexity', in the sense that the former represents a model 'script' stating the analogy between the principles which govern nature and those which govern other well-known areas of human behaviour.[7]

Often, the analogy is made in rhetorical form, which makes it more effective and compelling. As Gamson (1985, 1988) says, metaphors play a predominant role here, because of their centrality for human knowledge. Metaphors, in fact, are condensed analogies:

> (2) The world is a carefully crafted watch.

In (2) the metaphor explicitly states the framing, which is similar to that used in (1) but with some important differences. In fact, (2) can be expanded as follows:

> (3) The world is a carefully crafted watch . . . Any random change made in the watch is likely to fall into the very large class of inconsistent or harmful arrangements . . .[8]

In this case, if our topic is represented by 'nature', the metaphor is used to introduce a frame which we might call 'Delicate mechanism', or even 'Carefully crafted watch'. Like (1), this still points to a concept of 'complex interdependence', but now with a different perspective: that of the 'danger of non-well-considered actions or changes'; a perspective from which finiteness is no longer a relevant characteristic. In this case, calling the frame 'Complex interdependence' would not highlight all the aspects of the reasoning.

There are cases, however, in which determining the frame is made more complex by the intrinsic character of the text itself. In

practice, since the procedure of framing (like all knowledge) works by analogy, the continuum of difficulty (for the analyst) goes from the explicit stating of the analogy, to the subtle use of terms and rhetorical forms which work as hints to guide the reconstruction of the complete picture like parts of a *Gestalt*. In the latter case, the task of the analyst will be that of reconstructing the *Gestalt* by starting from the scattered hints which are found at the text's surface and circumstances of enunciation. Take the following text, for example:

(4) Too often . . . one realizes that increased economic well-being does not translate into increased personal well-being, into better relationships with our fellow-men and the environment. We are never satisfied: now that we have a roof under which we can live, that we have filled up our bellies, that we have a salary every month, we begin to look around and realize that there are lots of things we do not like, in this advanced society, and that can produce illness or suffering. And we realize that there is one thing that we should defend – or conquer, something we could define as a desire to feel well 'inside', or to be at peace with ourselves, with our body, with our fellow-men, and with the surrounding environment – which we would like to be more respondent to our needs, while it is often hostile, unfriendly, tough and troublesome . . . . We realize that there is something which could make us feel even better, and that it is something which cannot be reduced to monetary terms, something which cannot be measured by the number of refrigerators sold, which cannot be bought but has to be conquered . . . .[9]

Here, it is hard to find an explicit analogy. What can be seen from the linear surface of the text, is a parallel between terms and syntagms like |a roof|, |bellies|, |a salary|, |economic well-being| on one hand, and terms and syntagms like |something which cannot be reduced to monetary terms|, |cannot be bought|, |one thing that we should defend|, |conquered| on the other. The parallel draws on the opposition between the (individual) action of buying and the (collective) action of struggling to defend or conquer (a better environment). This would define nature as something which is not sold but which everybody has a right to (and a need for). It would frame nature as a social problem or, better, as a 'social right', highlighting the opposition between 'public–political' and 'economic–marketable'. At the same time, however, (4) includes a very well-known syntagm |We are never satisfied| which does not quite fit into the picture drawn above. Rather, it tends to recall stories about the dangers of never being satisfied, of always wanting too much, etc. Very popular stories indeed; in fact, the syntagm represents, as Eco (1979) says, a 'hypercode' introducing a very popular *motive* (Burke, 1969). If this is true, chances are

that this syntagm will be taken by the receiver as a 'marker' by means of which the overall meaning may be discerned. In this case, it is easy to see that the whole text can be re-read from a different perspective: that is, as opposing |filling up our bellies| to |to be at peace with ourselves|, |economic well-being| or |advanced society| to |illness and suffering|, and |responding to our needs| to |hostile, unfriendly, tough and troublesome|. Of course, the framing of nature will vary accordingly. It will highlight the opposition between material ('false' satisfaction) and spiritual ('true' satisfaction): thus, nature would be seen in terms of each single person's attitude toward things and his/her fellow human beings. A proper frame could thus be '(Too many) false needs' (one can infer from this the different impact that the two framings might have on collective mobilization efforts).

These examples shed light on a number of questions. First of all, (4) shows how rhetoric and style play a role in the definition of reality.[10] A frame is not necessarily literally outlined in the text; the discursive elements can tell a reader things that cannot be found on the linear surface of a discourse but that are nonetheless there. This is what the symbolic aspect of language pertains to. These symbolic aspects may be taken as representing a sort of 'framing of frames'. They make frame analysis more difficult, as one needs to 'decode' them to reconstruct the fundamental semantic structure of the text. Van Dijk (1980) has shown that this fundamental structure can be expressed by a sort of 'macro-proposition'.[11] The thing to be noticed, however, is that the fundamental semantic structure of a text is not necessarily more compact than the text itself. Sometimes it 'expands' the text, making explicit some implicit passages. Sometimes, in fact, a text can be represented by a very short sentence, which however carries with itself a cultural 'frame' that is very complex:

(5) The problem is that we are never satisfied.

This is a framing referring to a 'script' according to which people who are never satisfied always create problems because they force objects and other people to do things that they should not do, with unintended but dramatic consequences.

A second question pertains to the relationship between frames and the object of research (or the topic). One can note that the word 'nature' (i.e. the object of research) does not appear in any of the above texts. Rather, |world| in (3) and |environment| in (4) are considered as synonyms of it. This, however, does not mean that words can be easily and superficially substituted for each other. Rather, such substitution involves careful examination of

their reciprocal relationships: even words which are synonyms according to the dictionary might not be used as synonyms by either the text or the receiver of the message. Careful examination is even more in order when a text does not directly address what someone has defined as their topic of research, but a related object (as might be the case in (4)). In such cases, individuating the frame entailed by the text's perspective with respect to the true object of research involves a further passage, consisting first of all of determining the frame used for defining the related object and, secondly, of determining the relationship between this frame and the framing of the object of research. (This also reveals that a text can often, if not always, be taken as framing a multiplicity of objects, according to the reading on which one focuses. A picture of New York City can be used to show both the concept of 'big city' and that of 'skyscraper'. Once more, this depends on the definition of the object of research.)

A related question is whether the relevant elements of framing are always included within the text. This question has an important theoretical aspect, which lies in the assumption that texts cannot be given a refined meaning without considering the context of enunciation. Drawing upon my own research experience (Donati, 1989, 1990), I can say that in most 'commentary'-type texts (typically in books or magazine articles) framing elements are found within the textual structure. In such cases, if frames are well defined, one should even be able to limit 'undefined' texts to those which are objectively contradictory in themselves (which happens anyway). Nevertheless, there are important exceptions. One typical case is represented by news reports like the following:

(6) Government and Unions decide no-stop negotiation until agreement is reached. Rome. As of tomorrow, negotiations against inflation will go on without interruption with the aim of reaching agreement in record time of three–four days. Yesterday, the Prime Minister met union representatives. A meeting with the representatives of the industrial associations is scheduled for today, as well as a Government consultation.[12]

The event here seems to be plainly framed 'in terms of itself'. Nevertheless, I think one should take a different position, taking into consideration that the issue here was represented by the renewal of a contract for automotive workers. From this point of view, negotiation with the government is a subtopic of the whole discourse but, in this case, talking about what the government is doing is a way of framing the issue as a 'limited terrain' issue. It portrays the government as a superior entity mediating between the

two conflicting actors, rather than the issue as a wide social issue in which demands are made upon the government itself. 'Petty quarrels' we might call it. Subtopics, in other words, are the simplest way of framing issues. In such cases, we can say that the argumentative structure is almost lacking, and that the whole object which is presented in the text works as a frame for the general topic. Text (4) forms a similar case, its real title being 'The ecological city', which makes explicit the relationship between the term 'environment' and the topic represented by 'nature'. Another example is represented by those articles which deal with the activities of the unions on the 'economic and finance' page, instead of on the 'politics' page. In all these cases, the framing is determined by the context, or by the space–time of enunciation. In defining frames, therefore, the linear surface of the text is by no means the only element to be taken into account. Subtopicalization and retopicalization are other elements. This also means that there is no event without a frame, and no event can be framed in terms of itself. In this case, the communicative-informative content would be totally absent from all points of view.

A fourth question concerns the naming of frames. Naming the frame is never a secondary matter. A frame can be said to exist only if it frames something. In (1), 'Finite complexity' does not do this (except for engineers or physicists). Instead, both 'No gain without cost' (1) and 'Carefully crafted watch' (2) refer to well-known constructs, which go much further than the words of which they are composed; that is, they really 'make sense'. The same question has a slightly different aspect. In (4) we have two mutually exclusive readings. How do we decide between them? The rule here is very clear: what counts is the receiver's culture. In the example above, 'Social right' draws upon ideas that were 'good currency' in the leftist culture of the 1970s, and considering who the author of the text is, this is probably the intended meaning. Nevertheless, the same opposition between political and marketable is by no means good currency among today's general public. On the contrary, the motive of 'desiring too much' is widely acknowledged, and is therefore more likely to be 're-cognized' as the general structure (frame) of the reasoning. Analysing a text means finding out which frame is being applied to define the relevant object. As we have seen, the process of analysis works by finding out which category or group of known events, facts, etc., the object of interest (say, nature, unions' activity, etc.) is referred to. This category is always a cultural construct used by the receiver to orientate her/his perception. It is not merely a semantic device of a text. It is a cultural construct which is included in the

receiver's cultural tools and knowledge. In the end, this means that discourse analysis which aims at determining how people negotiate the reality they live in should not eliminate all empirical checks, such as interviews or group discussions with the relevant population.

A final question pertains to the types of frames which may be encountered. I think that there are two fundamental types of frames: those which highlight analogies with objects (especially mechanical objects), such as 'Carefully crafted watch'), and those which highlight analogies with event/action sequences (also called 'scripts', such as 'No gain without cost'). Of course, finding one or the other type also depends on how the object of research has been defined. My impression, nevertheless, is that the frames people use in political understanding are mostly of the second type, or at least involve some kind of sequence of events where causes, antecedents and consequences are included. The reason for this is that when thinking about political facts and events, one is likely to think of *scenes* or parts of *scenes*. Paraphrasing Abelson, we might say that political events and facts are mostly described by means of 'structure[s] that when activated organize[s] comprehension of event-based situations . . . . In its strong sense, [they involve] . . . expectations about the order as well as the occurrence of events' (Abelson, 1981: 717).

On frames and content analysis

As an analysis of texts, DA can be considered as a sort of content analysis. Nevertheless, DA has some peculiarities of its own. One lies in the unit of analysis. Content analysis can focus on a variety of units, ranging from single words to a whole text. For the first, standard quantitative techniques are usually found, while the second is the more proper place for techniques similar to DA (which can also be used as a basis for quantitative studies). Even considering this, however, DA does not operate by classifying the units of analysis on the basis of their mere 'manifest content' (Berelson, 1952). Rather, it operates by reconstructing the units of analysis in a particular fashion. In fact, before classifying these units, the elements and above all the argumentative structure of each text are taken into account by 'synthesizing' their content to reconstruct the underlying (latent) frames as categories of meaning.

The same discovery of the importance of textual, rhetorical and argumentative structures within the field of DA itself brought about the abandoning of the earlier approaches which were mainly focused on lexical and syntactical mechanisms (Harris, 1952; Pecheux, 1969) at the sentence level. This step allowed a more defined focusing on the functioning of semantic processes. Discursive structures larger than the sentence were then considered, and also the function of discursive and rhetorical constructs – such as metaphors and metonymies – which mediate between the syntactical level and the semantic content. Rhetorical figures (the metaphor above all, which makes possible the passage from the familiar to the unknown, thus allowing people to expand their knowledge of the world – see Rein and Schoen, 1977; Miller, 1979; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) appeared as the basic elements underlying the structure of discourse and the sort of functioning which, from the perspective of a literal-referential conception of language, had been seen as based on logical 'short-circuits'. In fact, as meaning is produced by drawing analogies which carry the object of analysis out of and across contexts, DA pays special attention not to the parts where plain, rational argumentation is carried out, but rather to the most imaginative parts, the metaphors, the 'strange' constructions, etc., through which these contexts are elicited.

Another peculiarity of DA lies in category construction. DA never translates textual content into sociological or analytic categories. Content analysis uses units taken from the text as indicators for inferring what people think, but this 'thinking' is usually translated into sociological categories. For example, discourses or texts may be coded in order to find out whether an ideology is 'inclusive' or 'exclusive', or whether an opinion is 'for' or 'against', say, ecology. Thus, when one finds |nuclear energy is dangerous| or |nature is endangered by people's will to dominate|, these are coded as 'against nuclear energy' or as 'in favour of ecology'. This, however, cannot grasp how meaning – and which meaning – is built and therefore the full consequence of the construction. Determining whether a text is in favour of or against nuclear energy is here a mere abstraction for rational purposes, but it says nothing about what people understand, or whether they may find the text convincing or not. To understand the latter, one has rather to analyse what people are led to expect from nuclear energy in different situations; that is, how they are led to make sense of it through the discourse or text, its argumentative-discursive structure, and by the analogies through which nuclear energy is described; in other words, the kind of frame the text tends to elicit. As Gamson (1988) notes, the same frame may lead both to favouring and to opposing nuclear energy, according to the meaning a given category turns out to have for those who use it. Political DA, therefore, is not interested in abstract categories like

who is 'for' and who 'against'. Rather, political DA is interested in the reason why one might be 'for' or 'against'; that is, in what people understand of a text or an issue; in how the use of metaphors highlights some aspects of an issue and hides others, thus working as an argumentative and persuasive device; in how framing resonates with people's culture, thus rendering persuasion more or less likely, especially when discourse sounds (as often happens) 'non-rational'.

This sort of understanding, however, can only be obtained by translating a text into the receiver's common-sense categories, instead of analytic categories; that is, 'No gain without cost' or 'Devil's bargain', rather than 'In favour of', 'Inclusive type', etc. DA, in other words, can be said to work as a sort of translation from textual language into people's language. From the point of view of sheer methodological operation, of course, this is an issue of what is 'indicated' by one's indicators. Standard content analysis usually looks for indicators of the author's or utterer's intentions, while DA looks for indicators of the hearer's or receiver's culture. This means looking for a 'translation' into the receiver's categories. In the above example, for any receiver confronted by the text, using a 'pro–con' category is useless if she/he wants to make sense of the issue itself (unless she/he wants to count the occurrences of pros and cons, or unless one has already decided to line up with the utterer no matter what). Rather, the text is more likely to be scanned or read for what it says about a topic. Pro or con is an abstract deduction. Understanding does not work by deduction, but by analogy, and the analyst should try to discover these analogies, working out her/his categories accordingly.

Finally, when the focus is on the decoding operations made by a listener, rather than on the encoding operations of an utterer, one should be aware that a text can be understood according to a number of different meanings and categories. In fact, the meaning which is actualized depends on the culture of the receiver. In other words, if a person knows no zoology, she/he might not actualize the meaning 'mammal' when reading of a whale. If one is a reader of Disney cartoons one might actualize a wide bundle of meanings connecting 'whale' with positive and human-like meanings (such as 'helper', 'gentle', 'knows every place of the sea', 'cannot harm people', etc.) or with narrative programmes (such as 'keeps a man alive in its belly') which that context has associated with the |whale| itself. These associations (or connoted meanings) form the 'cultural competence' of the receiver (a concept which stands at the root of modern semiotics, but which is totally lacking in the classical analyses of belief systems, as they have assumed people to be abstractly rational and capable of all-alike standard logical-denotational reasoning), and the assessment of this competence, as I said before, should also be part of the task of DA.

A constructionist perspective on ideology and movement cultures

A constructivist perspective, as Snow and Benford (1989) point out, allows both a sharper description of how ideational constructs (among them ideologies and belief systems) develop or change, and a more compelling analysis of how they are connected to each other; something which has always been difficult to deal with using the traditional conception of ideology. DA seems to stand out as a particularly qualified approach for studying the development of issues, ideologies and movement cultures. As far as social movements are concerned, moreover, DA is certainly compatible with the existing theoretical approaches, and especially with the consensus mobilization perspective. Here, the rise of a movement has been described as a process of 'cognitive liberation' (Piven and Cloward, 1979; McAdam, 1988), by means of which people shift from one meaningful definition of reality to a new one, thus 'making sense' of the situation, of facts and events, in new terms. The basic idea is that they do so by using a new frame, and a process of 'frame alignment' (Snow et al., 1986). Adopting the concept of frame, therefore, has important consequences. It introduces a constructionist approach, where language is not seen as used passively and denotationally to 'name' things – to give them labels – but rather as manipulated to define and create them.

In studying political cognition, only such an approach can prevent social scientists from considering their subjects as abstractly rational actors or as duped into the trap of ideology (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). In his work on 'consensus mobilization' Klandermans (1988) has proposed approaching the process from the point of view of persuasion. This theoretical and methodological paradigm, however, fails to meet the requirements of cultural analysis. Quantitative analyses of people's attitudes towards political objects like those adopted in persuasion studies and in Klandermans' model[13] can track the spreading of ideas, but are of no use in analysing the way in which these same ideas are generated and accepted as meaningful. They hinder, in fact, the real appreciation of what people understand social and political reality to be.

Rather than analysing how people take account of political

messages and events, how they create meaning through their own cultural tools and interpretive practices, persuasion studies focus on the reception of a given communicational input by matching it with respondent's answers,[14] after having predefined the 'correct' meaning (as the output to be checked) on the basis of its rational–literal content. The consequence of this literal message attitude matching for the conception of human understanding is, however, easily seen. Inferences about 'sense-making' activity are forced in two directions: either it is assumed that attitudes about an issue imply a fully rational and conscious evaluation, carefully worked out on the basis of logical reasoning and extended knowledge of the matter, or it is assumed that the same attitudes are non-rational and determined by (psychological) factors[15] which are considered as exogenous is relation to the content of the issue.

This tends to present a movement analyst with a difficult dilemma. On one side, the first alternative is rather optimistic and difficult to sustain on the basis of empirical data, as people (and especially mass participants, rather than core members of SMOs) can easily be demonstrated to be poorly informed, prone to 'short-circuited' reasoning, and having inconsistent, unstable attitudes.[16] On the other side, the second alternative, formerly adopted by the structural and psychological approaches to collective behaviour and mass society (Kornhauser, 1959; Smelser, 1963),[17] rather simplistically dismisses rationally inconsistent answers and normally unexpected behaviour as non-meaningful. Things have not become easier since the primarily psychological explanations of these 'short-circuits' were replaced – especially as a consequence of the growing importance of visual media – by a more communication-oriented perspective based on the concept of 'symbol'. Here again, the concept of symbol is rather poorly defined, forming a 'catch-all' for what defies rational appreciation.

> Symbols provide a linkage between the individual and the larger social order . . . structuring people's perceptions and allowing them to find meaning in events beyond their own immediate experience . . . [they] serve to constrain people's vision and to make them vulnerable to manipulation. (Elder and Cobb, 1983: 80)

As Geertz (1973) observed 20 years ago, social science has curiously shown strong resistance to the idea of a science of 'symbolic action', taking account of the way in which social cognition operates through language and rhetorical forms. It is this weakness that has forced students to choose between two equally inadequate alternatives: those considering changes in culture and consciousness in terms of either logical demonstration or 'psycho-symbolic' manipulation, and understanding and meaning as either literal or direct and unmediated.

The idea of frame represents a conceptual tool allowing explanation to overcome this alternative and to develop a model and a method capable of taking account of the signifying practices through which people construct their world. A frame is a form of categorization (fundamentally analogic, or metaphorical) whose aim is to transfer meaning from what is known to what is new, but whose extension is rather limited. At the same time, ideologies, or belief systems, which are complex and articulate constructs, may be seen, from this perspective, as composed of interconnected and/or hierarchically articulated frames, embedded at different levels. This articulation, however, does not follow logical but rather rhetorical and symbolic rules.

On one side, the mechanism of framing as categorization allows the researcher to take account of the semantic processes through which meaning is produced. Objects are given structures in order to make them similar to other objects, thus rendering them meaningful. For example, the idea that:

> Any random change made in the watch is likely to fall into the very large class of inconsistent or harmful arrangements

can be applied to a lot of different situations, like a modern factory, a biological environment or modern society as a whole. In these terms it represents a frame. When some object is framed according to such an idea, it takes on the properties common to that class of objects. Traditional perspectives have adopted a positivist stance, considering language as a rational, denotational and neutral instrument; that is, as composed of words with specific and unique meanings. This has tended to make explanation a sort of 'content specific' definition. No fact or object, however, can be cognized and understood as 'specific'. To say that the Gulf War was a specific event with unique characters of its own is a plain lie. All its characters are understood in frames, and the war itself can only be understood as an occurrence of a frame, be it that of economic wars, religious wars or wars where both economics and religion play a role.

On the other side, the concept of frame takes account of the symbolic functions of language and, through them, of the argumentative structure of discourse. Symbolism depends on the ability of words to say more than what they actually denote. For example, as Greimas (1983) says, the term |fisher| will virtually contain, and refer to, all the discursive and narrative possibilities in the receiver's culture, where a fisher may be expected to perform a role (be they

in physical reality or even in well-known narrative situations). Just as when one finds obliterated letters and words in a text and may (up to some point) guess at their content, in the same way when encountering two sentences like 'we are never satisfied' and 'something which cannot be reduced to monetary terms', one might decide that one passage should be amended to say more or less: 'because we have been lured by the false values of materialism'. These missing elements are by no means a strange 'condensation'. They are already present in the receiver's culture, as they mirror what the world is made of in that culture. Assuming a literal-denotative perspective on language does not allow analysis to take account of how meaning is extended, as this seldom happens through a logical structure.

Thus, ideologies may be consistent with different framings of the same issue or event, even if these different framings turn out to have different consequences both for ideas and behaviour. Between 1968 and 1973, in Italy, for example, I found (Donati, 1990) workers' struggles to be understood according to two main frames: as a 'march towards democracy', and as a 'quest for a fair share'.[18] Of course, there is a point of view according to which these two themes come from two different ideologies: a revolutionary one ('march towards democracy') and a more classic 'bourgeois' ideology of a 'social contract between different individuals' ('quest for a fair share'). Does this distinction help? Can one say that people interpret reality according to a structured ideology? I think one should say that holding a given ideology did not make the difference. In fact, the two frames were often articulated by the same people and, if there certainly are points of view from which they contradict each other, there also are points of view from which they can be connected within the same logical construction. And again, it is hard to say that one is more left-oriented than the other, as the former was certainly consistent with some positions held by part of the industrial elites, pushing for modernization. The point is not logics, however. The point is rather: (a) understanding to what category of objects the two frames related events; and (b) understanding the expectations people had, based on each of the two frames. In short, the following hypotheses can be put forward: first of all, 'march towards democracy' did not relate so much to an idea of democracy, but to a rather vague idea of liberation, and it was typical of those workers who had recently moved to industrial areas from the south of Italy, for whom the experience of a 'new condition' was a relevant one. 'Quest for a fair share', on the other side, was typical of skilled blue-collar workers and of their pride in a job that they

felt was 'important'. Secondly, although both frames were used in mobilization efforts, the two had diverse consequences, in that the former was more likely to sustain a 'political' struggle, while the latter was more likely to cause people to see the government as the best 'judge' of the situation.

If ideologies are often contradictory, this is not because they lack logical structure, but rather because structuration and 'tenability' depend on language and not on abstract formal logic (Goodman, 1979).[19] For example, text (3) above can easily be recognized as entailing a plot similar to that of the 'Sorcerer's apprentice'. It is therefore easy to see how a person might pass from (3) to the 'Sorcerer's apprentice' narrative (frame) and from the latter proceed by adding values and ideas to what she/he knows about nature, without the connection being strictly 'logical'. The point, then, is no longer the abstract structure of ideology, or whether it describes reality or not, and why. The point rather is that frames perform semantic and constructive-definitional work: on one hand, by relating experience to culture and, on the other, by making ideative – 'ideological' – connections possible, thus shaping the whole meaning of experience itself (while at the same time experience becomes a sort of 'language in act' which shapes culture through the continuous manipulation, interconnection and conflict of frames). Analysing how actors – among them social movements – construct their frames, change and connect them, means therefore analysing how actors struggle to shape and define reality, and how and why they succeed or fail to mobilize people and public opinion.

From discourse analysis to textual analogy

Discourse analysis has thus mainly been presented and developed, within the field of social movement studies, as an approach to ideative-ideological constructs. What now seems to be lacking is a connection between the level of ideology and the level of (collective) action.

Briefly, the impression one derives from these approaches is twofold. On the one hand, discourse – that is, framing, or ideology – seems to be described (and treated) as the mere 'product' of organizational efforts at controlling people's thought. On the other hand, there seems to be an inherent 'duality' in these approaches, in that discourse – or ideology – appears as a mere production of ideas, counterposed to the existence of a 'hard' reality which it tries to 'mask', conceal, or 'redefine'. In other words, the analysis of discourse tends to be proposed as a method of analysing ideative

constructs, with the implicit assumption that these ideative constructs are important because in the end they 'govern' action, which nevertheless remains on a separate plane. Discourse here stands in the place which was once occupied by the concept of attitude, with which traditional (and more recent) studies of political culture and persuasion (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955; Almond and Powell, 1978; Klandermans, 1984) have been conducted.[20]

One nevertheless cannot deny the fact that action is itself part of discourse, and that any discursive situation is composed of action as well as of words and ideas. If, as Mehan et al. (1990) say, public discourse can be conceptualized as performed by voices in a dialogical situation, then a theory of discourse must include those aspects which pertain to the 'enunciative' action as part of the discourse itself; something which is missing from current interpretations. From this point of view, for example, at the end of the 1970s in Italy, the leftist political movement (born at the end of the 1960s) began to be seen as a different actor, involving a different relationship with its listeners and the population as a whole. Movement activists and organizers did not recognize this change, but they lost credibility as the public began expecting something different from them; that is, that the movement actor, having received what it had been asking for (according to the 'quest for a fair share' frame, which turned out to be accepted as the main framing of these struggles), should start behaving as a member of the community, and no longer as its enemy.

If one takes such a stance, clearly, discourse comes to be seen as the basic form of interaction through which reality itself is produced. From this perspective, analysing the way in which an issue is framed is something which can help the researcher understand who is more likely to win a struggle, or which frame might end up as the more successful. Nevertheless, this cannot answer the one basic question whose importance has been stressed by Melucci (1988): why and from what social movements emerge in a social system. In fact, by considering the mere products of framing activity, one is implicitly forced to take social movements for granted, or to presuppose the actor(s) which produce(s) them. Instead, as Melucci points out, one should explain the presence of the actor 'voicing' a position at the same time as its voiced output – that is, its frame or ideology. This latter perspective assumes the existence of an issue as the first and foremost problem, and should analyse issues as themselves the expression of the ways in which people see and have seen reality. Issues, in fact, should not only be considered as the result of conflicting attempts at constructing reality and as contingent upon the presence of a conflict over the

definition of the situation. Rather, the conflicted object should be itself considered as the 'terrain' upon which discourse takes place, a terrain which is itself an (interactive) construction. As Edelman says:

> Problems come into discourse and therefore into existence as reinforcements of ideologies, not simply because they are there or because they are important for wellbeing. They signify who are virtuous and useful and who are dangerous or inadequate, which actions will be rewarded and which penalized. They constitute people as subjects with particular kinds of aspirations, self-concepts, and fears, and they create beliefs about the relative importance of events and objects. (Edelman, 1988: 12)

The consequence of such a point of view – of viewing discourse as made sense of within its pragmatic context – is that a connection between the level of ideas and that of action is needed in order to interpret the meaning that people incorporate into their world and the way they construct it. Using the concept of frame and framing in a way which includes the pragmatic situation would bring the analysis much closer to Goffman's (1974) formulation than it is now, despite the claims of some social movement students.

Such a 'dramaturgical' perspective on action as game and ritual, nevertheless, is not the only way to look at the process. From a similar point of view, the continuity between action and discourse, as Ricoeur (1971) and Geertz (1983) have shown, could be used as the basis for a 'textual' model of action itself. The key aspect of such a form of hermeneutics (a 'semantics of action', as Geertz calls it) is represented by the way in which action is translated into a text. From a DA point of view, its advantage would lie in the conceptual continuity between the idea of text and the idea of discourse. The aimed-at result, of course, would consist in the possibility of using the same procedures of 'frame analysis', and above all the same frames that are applied in the analysis of discourse, for analysing human 'practices' as action units.[21]

Recent advances in the field of semiotics, and particularly those of narrative semiotics and the theory of enunciation (Greimas and Courtes, 1979), seem to be able to offer instruments for such an analysis. From their perspective, the rise and decline of an issue could be explained as related to a general structural logic of culture. Actions could be seen as the enactment of 'motives' (Burke, 1969) within a social texture composed of wider 'narratives' (Uspenskij, 1977). This would allow focusing on how meaning is fixed from the flow of events within the social world, on how people 'read' the world before talking about it, and on the

symbolic tools which are used to connect the two levels. But this is a story for another essay.

Notes

1. A more general view may well lead to the idea that reality, in its complex structuration, is perceived through a process of re-cognition of hierarchically embedded frames.

2. Of course, people who have never seen things like a classical ballet or a theatrical representation of harmony and style, will be unlikely to see it in a football game, and framing this game in terms of style and harmony will require a different metaphor.

3. Cognitive experiments (Dressler, 1977) have shown that memory processes work by summarizing whole texts, or blocks of text, according to the particular reading which has been actualized by the receiver, which in turn is strictly related to its perceived meaning. This clearly supports the idea that, regardless of their length and complexity, texts can be taken as the basic units of meaning. Of course, a large text may be separated into smaller blocks, or subunits, but this will make sense only in particular cases, depending on which 'units of framing' one is looking for. Moreover, the idea that fully circumscribed meaning can only be attributed to a defined and somewhat 'complete' act (of language) is consistent with the fact that the pragmatic situation, or the context, always overdetermines the meaning of any uttered content.

4. Again, this is consistent with the idea that meaning is determined by the context of communication.

5. I heard perplexed feelings about the method surfacing at the workshop at which the original version of this essay was discussed.

6. From Conti (1983).

7. Notice that, because this portion of text was selected as an example, there is no place here where 'nature' is mentioned, so that it might be difficult to show the use of the 'transposition' rule. On the other hand, however, if we imagine 'nature' to have been the title of this text, it is easy to see that the definition of the frame 'No gain without cost' works perfectly.

8. Freely taken from Commoner (1971).

9. The text is taken from a brochure edited and published by the Municipality of Milan, Italy, in 1989: *La città ecologica*.

10. For the analysis of texts, I refer to current semiotic theories. See Kristeva (1969), Greimas (1970, 1983), Eco (1975, 1979), Petöfi (1975). Textual theories stress how in every text, the co-occurrence of lexematic units (and sentences in wider textual units, as we shall see) form a 'co-text' (Eco, 1979) whose structure confronts the receiver with recognizable patterns; that is, (one or more) 'types of discourse' which he/she can recognize on the basis of his/her cultural 'encyclopedic' competence. This perspective is consistent with the findings of modern linguistics, according to which children (and humans) do not learn the meaning of words through a 'pointing to the object' process, but rather by learning the semantic and pragmatic contexts in which they can be used.

11. The same author has also suggested a set of rules by means of which the 'macro-proposition' can be derived from the actual text. They are the following (van Dijk, 1980):

a. *Suppression*: in a text which is formed by a sequence of propositions, one should take away all those propositions which are not essential for the understanding of the propositions which follow in the sequence.
b. *Generalization*: in a text which is formed by a sequence of propositions, one can substitute the sequence with one new proposition having as its object a concept which summarizes the information of the original sequence of propositions.
c. *Construction*: in a text which is formed by a sequence of propositions, one can substitute the sequence with one new proposition defining as its object a category of facts to which the one being denoted by the original sequence of propositions belongs.

12. From *La Repubblica*, 1 February 1984.

13. The same quantitative approach is also typical of the cross-national studies of political culture in the functionalist tradition initiated by Gabriel Almond (see Almond and Powell, 1978) where culture is reduced to a set of attitudes.

14. Usually in the form of a number of items such as: '(Would you say that) water pollution is presently the main problem affecting the quality of our lives?'

15. Usually rather undefined, like sender's charisma, receiver's personality, source's credibility, etc.

16. In fact, a number of studies (Converse, 1964; Schuman and Presser, 1980; Lodge and Wahlke, 1982) have shown how at least the great mass of people, and particularly the less educated, are unable to 'have meaningful beliefs, even on issues that have formed the basis for intense political controversy' (Converse, 1964: 245).

17. This perspective is still dominant in mainstream political science. Its common conclusion is generally represented by the well-known theme (which may be found in slightly different versions) of the threefold distribution of modes of political thinking (see, for example, Dahl, 1967; Sartori, 1987): a distinction between mass public, characterized by 'unconstrained' and inconsistent attitudes, and the elites that, in turn, can be either 'ideological' or 'pragmatic' (with a defined preference for the latter; see Diani, 1989). This perspective is also usually coupled with the rhetoric of the 'end of ideologies' (once all barriers and resistances – either psychological or positional – are broken down, objective knowledge and full consciousness and freedom will find their way into people's minds, and a scientific approach will be applied to political relationships and decisions). The Marxist perspective also offers a similar perspective – in reverse terms – when it advances its explanations in terms of a 'history of mass manipulation'.

18. There were others as well, but less important in that period. This finding comes from recent research on 'Framing unions' action' funded by FIOM, one of the metallurgic-automotive workers' unions.

19. It is interesting to notice that the conception of explanation and understanding as literal and denotational has been recently rejected even as a model for scientific practice. Scholars have talked about the 'rhetoric turn' (Schoen, 1963; Goodman, 1978; Brown, 1987).

20. For a criticism of their implicit concept of political culture, see Lehman (1972) and Schuman and Presser (1980). On the (problematic) relationship between attitudes and behaviours, see Reynolds and Burgoon (1983), and the essays in Zanna et al. (1982)

21. A number of studies already exist which have tried to advance such a perspective; see for example Bourdieu (1977) and Swidler (1986).

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