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Drawn by Images

Control, Subversion and Contamination in the Visual Discourse of Tokyo Metro

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Please be careful of noise leaking from your headphones in the train.

Manner poster (October 2008)

ITALIAN TITLE: *Drawn by Images. Controllo, sovvertimento e contaminazione nel discorso visivo della Tokyo Metro*

ABSTRACT: This paper intends to investigate the active role of images in shaping contemporary urban life, by exploring the trail of strategies, actions, counteractions and transformations produced by a particular corpus of subway posters. Since September 1974, the Tokyo Metro subway company has been distributing a series of posters which invites, in a humoristic style, to respect the "good manners" inside its stations and trains in service in the Japanese capital. The name assigned to these adverts is Manner Poster. The three editions from 2008 to 2010 are particularly striking for their irony and visual impact. Produced by the graphic designer Yorifuji Bunpei, they depict — in a comic–strip style and using white, black and yellow colours — narrative situations inside the subway stations and trains, where one or more persons perform, under the astonished eyes of the other passengers, actions considered as "ill–mannered". The images present a large variety of such situations, ranging from occupying priority seats for elderly people and pregnant women, to rushing to board as the doors are closing, from throwing waste tissues on the ground, to blocking entrances with suitcases and backpacks. They actually suggest paradoxical narrative sequences, visual hyperboles which exaggerate actions considered as impolite, trying to emphasize the negative effects on the other passengers. And the messages written above the images do not leave any doubts about the target (Enunciatee) of the posters: "Please do it at home", says the one above the instant ramen (noodles soup) devourer, "Please do it at the

office" says the message over the businessman engaged in writing notes while talking on the phone in the train. According to the author Yorifuji, the messages convey "the repressed frustration of the typical commuter" who is emotionally affected by the impolite behaviour. These posters, in other words, construct a form of subjectivity for the metro passengers, posing everyone under the gaze/judgment of the other commuters, and prescribing situations and places which are appropriated to take specific courses of action. They are "regulators of the social life", which charge everyday actions with thymic — i.e. positive or negative — values, according to their spatial–temporal localisation. However, the analysis of this "subway etiquette" discourse and of its development along the three editions, reveals a particular linguistic and visual differentiation of identity, which points to models of behaviour and sociality very different between each other, according to the Japanese or foreign origin of the passengers to which the poster's persuasive action is directed. I will therefore try to demonstrate, on the one hand, how the interactions between poster–actors and human actors try to define distinct regimes of political enunciation (Latour 1999), on the other hand, how parodic translations of the Manner Posters — which immediately proliferated on web–sites and magazines in Japan — also lead to modes of negotiation of the values and social bonds prescribed.

PAROLE CHIAVE: visual discourse; behaviour; enunciation; semiotics; actor–network–theory.

In his admirable work on the rise, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, of a generalized discipline (*surveillance*) concerning the penitential, educational, and medical systems in Western societies, Michel Foucault (1977) pointed out how a certain apparatus of bodily control, the panoptic prison created by Jeremy Bentham, could be actually extended to the whole social body. The relationship between an *observer* spying on the prisoners' movements from a central point of observation, and the *observed* who knows himself to be under virtually constant control, could become a sort of generalized political strategy. Foucault describes this "political technology of the body", as an expanding mechanism of power according to which every member of society is able to control everyone — to occupy the concealed position of the security guard in the central tower — and every individual can be kept in constant observation by the others.

This consideration seems to have been particularly prescient in the field of contemporary media and visual culture, and their intertwining

with political and everyday life. The present paper intends to investigate how images can be effectively used (1) to exert a prescriptive power on everyday behaviours, by activating a diffused mechanism of social control, but also (2) to renegotiate and *subvert* such a power, by creating an arena of conflict which involves the images as active agents in interaction with people. This will be done by exploring the visual discourse — as well as the dynamics of production and reception — of a corpus of posters affixed in the subway of Tokyo from 2008 to 2010. An in depth analysis of this case will help us to shed light on the working and efficacy of images, and the active role of nonhuman actors in the assemblage and reassemblage of contemporary urban life.

1. The corpus of analysis

The case study I wish to introduce concerns *Manner Posters*, a set of images affixed inside the subway trains and stations of Tokyo since September 1974. These images, created by the Tokyo Metro subway company, invite travellers through a humoristic visual style to follow 'good manners' in the subway, practicing a respectful behaviour towards other passengers. Since their inception, Tokyo Metro have re–launched this campaign every year, changing every month images and annexed messages according to an annual format.

Among this wide range of images, spanning almost forty decades, posters included in the three editions of 2008–09, 2009–10 and 2010–11 are particularly striking for their irony and visual impact.[1] These posters, designed under commission by Yorifuji Bunpei, portray specific situations inside the subway trains and stations, where one or more persons perform, under the astonished eyes of the other passengers, actions considered to be 'impolite'. The ill–mannered actions portrayed vary, from occupying priority seats reserved for injured people and pregnant women, to rushing to board as the train doors are closing, from throwing waste tissues on the floor, to blocking entrances with suitcases and backpacks. But the range of impolite behaviours becomes quite wide. Indeed, it also includes eating food on

1. Each campaign started in April and finished the next year in March.

the trains, applying make–up, talking on mobile phones, pouring water on the other passengers while shaking an umbrella, falling down drunk on the ground, doing gym exercises in the metro… These images actually suggest paradoxical narrative sequences, where rude actions are exaggerated, in order to emphasize the negative effects on the other commuters. Above every illustration, a clear message is written in Japanese and in English: "Please do it at home", says the one above the instant *ramen* (noodles soup) devourer, "Please do it at the office", exclaims the message over the businessman engaged in writing notes, while noisily talking on the phone.

Regarding the use of cartoons in subway communication, there are some famous parallels, like the anthropomorphic pink rabbit of the Paris RATP (The Paris Transport Authority) portrayed with his left hand pinched between the sliding doors of a train. The poster, introduced in France since the Eighties, invites the passengers to pay attention to the automated device which closes the train entrance. However, the Japanese *Manner Posters* can be considered quite a different case, both for the abundance of situations they portray, and for their communicative aim. They are not concerned with the passenger's own safety, they do not want to warn him of the danger of dealing inattentively with a technological environment. They focus instead on person–to–person relationships, on the sensitivity of the other travellers, who might be hurt by our inconsiderate and self–centred behaviour. We pass, namely, from a domain of autonomy (Subject–Object relationship) to one of heteronomy (Subject–Object–Third), where besides me and the world, a third role is included, played by the Other. We are entering the domain of ethics.

2. Methodological concerns

Among the many intellectual trends which characterise the contemporary landscape of visual and material studies (Miller 2005; Henare et al. 2007; Morphy 2006), one of the most compelling is maybe the Actor–Network–Theory (ANT).[2] This approach forces us to reconsider the role of material culture, not just in terms of codified inscriptions

2. See Latour (2005) for a general introduction.

of cultural categories (Woodward 2007), but as images, architectural elements, artefacts, things, that do play active roles in our everyday life. According to ANT, these are agents we confront day by day, delegated with specific functions and meanings. They are moved by us but they also move us, for their *design* is supposed to give rise to specific courses of action, and specific passions. They are, in other words, *nonhuman actors* emerging from *networks* of interaction with *human actors*, from common frameworks of participation.

This is the point where Actor–Network–Theory could be considered as conflating with semiotics. Indeed, ANT has been defined as a form of *material semiotics* (Law 2007), one that can fully take into account materiality, being able to integrate together the symbolic and the material, semantics and pragmatics, meaning and efficacy. This would be also the lesson imparted by analytic philosophy: to say something is also to do something, because it involves our active participation in categories of meaning, an act of rearranging the world (Austin 1975). As François Cooren (2010) well explains in his book on speech act theory, language and signs are actions, and they would be better analysed according to what they do and they *cause to do*. Symbolic meaning and material efficacy are thus not to be considered as separate entities. This is not only because materiality itself is shaped in some signifying form. It is actually the way we *meaningfully relate* to the world, that defines both us and the world (Merleau–Ponty 1962), for the relation itself would create the related terms (Hjelmslev 1961). From this perspective, signification is basically a form of action.

According to Bruno Latour (2005, p. 54), ANT is grounded on the specific stream of semiotics known as the Paris School, inaugurated by A. J. Greimas (1988) in the sixties, and further developed by its contemporary exponents (Fontanille 2006; Fabbri 2007; Landowski 2004; Marrone 2009). As pointed out by Jean–Marie Floch (2001), what distinguishes the continental Greimassian school from other semiotic approaches, is that the focus of the former is not on signs. Signs are in fact considered to be only the surface units of underlying processes of signification and communication. They are interconnected by *strategies*, which are located *below* them: "Beneath the signs, the strategies" (*ibid.*, pp. 4–5). With the following paragraphs, I will try to develop this perspective, using the tools of contemporary continental semiotics in order to describe the agency of images in the Tokyo

Metro, and understand the social connection they strategically set and renegotiate.

3. Tracing trails of actions and passions

If we closely examine the *Manner Posters*, we realise that the ill–mannered subjects are visually distinct both from other passengers and portrayed settings, in a very specific way. Let's take a look at the first example (fig. 1).

Figure 1

A short–haired passenger sits on the train bench, with a shopping bag next to him and a bottle between his legs, while firmly holding a cup of instant noodles soup with his left hand. His face is almost inside the cup, and soaking noodles are hanging from his mouth into

the soup, dripping all over the place, while his right hand fiercely brandishes a fork, ready to deal another terrible blow to the cup. The problem is that the situation where this action takes place is anything but appropriate. The person sitting next to him, a middle–age male passenger, is watching with large bulging eyes the intrusive travel companion. He seems to be in a state of bitter discomfort, since the right elbow of the first passenger, suspended in the air in the act of launching another plunge into the soup, is actually pushing into his face. The first passenger does not seem to care at all, and keeps on eating, while the inconvenienced man and a woman standing on the other side, next to the door, stare at him with the same grim, serious face, framing two round, white, glaring eyes.

The impolite subject is here distinguished from the other passengers according to different colours (chromatic traits), positions (topological traits), and lines (eidetic traits). While the other passengers pertain to the same colour of the place — they are in the right tone because their behaviour is attuned, *appropriate* to that particular situation — the noodle–eater is white, different from the rest of the image. In other words, a contrast of colours, positions and lines is here employed to indicate the *improper* character of his behaviour.

Let's now explore the narrative and discursive dimensions of the posters. All these illustrations are always part of a visual narrative or drama, in which a certain actor plays the role of the *offender* — the subject who performs the rude action — and another one plays the *offended* party. The latter covers at least two different positions or *actants* (Greimas and Courtés 1982; Fontanille 2006). The offended character assumes indeed the narrative role of a final Sender, a term which in Greimassian semiotics defines the position of those who judge the actions performed by the subject. Here the inconvenienced man, through his gaze, sanctions in a negative way the intrusive gesture of the subject. The final Sender is always warrantor of a certain universe of *values*, which in this case can be easily identified with *respect* and *social harmony*, and his judgements are dependent on such a system of values.

But there is also a second role he plays in these illustrations, a discursive role, concerning the way the picture itself, as a whole, speaks to us, outside its narrative frame. Here the victim is also an observer. The observer uses his gaze, not just for judging negatively

a subject inside a visual story. Through his gaze, he orients our own vision towards something to see (an impolite action) and indicates how to see it (how to look at that action) (*ibid*., pp. 103–113). Furthermore, in the *Manner Posters* the victim/observer is not an abstract figure. He is installed in the visual text as a full participant who sees something (and knows what is happening: the cognitive dimension), who does something (he is sitting next to the noodles eater and is physically pushed: the pragmatic dimension), and feels something (the passional dimension): "Please do it at home"!

According to an interview released by the author Yorifuji to the *Japan Times* (2009, June 21st), this message intends indeed to "convey the repressed frustration of the typical commuter". As pointed out by Greimas (1987), frustration could be considered as the first step of a transformational process which characterises anger. In continental semiotics, passions are considered as socio–cultural, dynamic phenomena, which always intermingle with actions (Fabbri 2007). If frustration is one of the passional figures at play in these images, it must have been produced by an act which has broken some expectations. In the visual narrative of the *Manner Posters*, this expectation would then be the adhesion to the values of respect and social harmony that we already mentioned above. The iterative betrayal of the expectation of being respected by others, represents an attack to the universe of values of the "typical commuters", which undermines their mutual trust, generating frustration. But, as we said, frustration is also the first step of a complex passional configuration we call anger. The next steps are traced by Greimas (1987) as the following:

frustration → discontent → aggression

Can we thus define the injunction "Please do it at home" as the verbal expression of a sentiment of aggression? As a verbal action generated by the passional configuration of anger? If we listened to the words of the designer Yorifuji, we would reply affirmatively, given that this sentence translates into verbal performance a sentiment of "repressed frustration of the typical commuter" (in the same interview, he also mentions "discomfort"). However, as we will see, this is just half the truth. Things are far more complex.

4. Inside the commuter's gaze

The eyes of the inconvenienced commuter — those large, bulging, white eyes — are the key to understanding these posters. Let's briefly turn to the second image (fig. 2).

Figure 2

This illustration portrays a group of people celebrating a party in a train car, under the gaze of a bewildered commuter. The message on the top says: "Please do it at a pub".

The whole poster is visually arranged along a *mise en abyme* of different frames, one inside the other. These are several frames of *enunciation*, namely frames of reference along which different actors, times and spaces are shifted and translated (Latour 1988). Movements along this chain of frames can be either of projection (shifting out, *débrayage*), distancing from an original instance of enunciation, an

implicit 'I'; or of identification (shifting in, *embrayage*), returning towards this original instance. So, if we look at the poster, and we start analysing it, we will first meet an external frame of reference, i.e. the plane of enunciation which is constructed around our own gaze. This is an open frame, virtually including ourselves as viewers/spectators (Casetti 1998). Here we immediately bump into the institutional figures which authored this visual text, represented at the bottom by the logos of the Tokyo Metro and the Metro Culture Foundation (or Metro Bunka Zaidan, the Tokyo Metro's delegate for cultural activities). These are the figures of enunciators, the producers of the *Manner Poster* discourse. Then we will be "caught" or "punched" (to use other expressions from the *Japan Times*' interview) by what we have defined as the commuter's passional performance, the verbal injunction: "Please do it at a pub".

After, if we shift and project ourselves into the next frame, we will find our Observer/commuter outside the train car, staring at the window in front of the main scene. So, we rapidly shift to the last frame, beyond the window and inside the train car. Here a group of excited people is engaging in drinking and chatting, mixing up public transport with a noisy public house. However, following the path of analysis, an unexpected thing becomes clear: the message "Please do it at a pub" is directed to us. The commuter outside the train car, indeed, does not even watch the group of ill–mannered people anymore. He does not need it. He is watching us. We are the ill–mannered people, but *we see ourselves through his eyes*, reflexively, like in a mirror. We see our wrong behaviours through his point of view, his point of observation. And we feel *ashamed* of ourselves.

Juri Lotman (1975) has well pointed out the role of shame as an internal mechanism of social group regulation. Also, he has widely explored the figure of the mirror, as an enantiomorphic, reflective device of translation between a given semiosphere and texts from other semiotic systems, as a boundary producing new meanings from its constitutive asymmetric character (1990, 2009). We can see in the eyes of our observer/commuter a similar mechanism at work. They produce an identification between the impolite subjects and us, through a mirror–like reflection. But they also mediate between two different semiotic systems: the appropriate one (in yellow), and the improper one (in white). It is not by chance that the *white colour* also characterises

the *external frame of the posters*, the open frame which includes us as viewers/spectators — i.e. the plane of enunciation we partake of — and characterises therefore our own position. The *white commuter's eyes* become channels of communication between the two systems. Through them, one position arrives to include the other, is contaminated by the Other. These round, reflective eyes are therefore the boundary of translation between the two different dimensions of behaviour: the social and the antisocial or, more precisely, the normative and the anti–normative. The *Manner Posters* perhaps try to mediate and solve a contradiction, but more importantly, they also bear in themselves the seed for contamination and change. This can be envisaged also in the poster with the headline: "Please do it at the office" (fig. 3).

Figure 3

Here, a businessman keeps on talking on the phone, organising his work from the train and disturbing the other commuters. The

serial arrangement of the seated persons seems particularly interesting. What calls our attention is the repetition of the same pattern of lines and shapes, i.e. the use of plastic rhymes which creates a strong parallelism between the impolite figure and the commuters. In other words, although I already pointed out how the chromatic differentiation could refer to an opposition of values at the semantic level (yellow: white:: normative: anti–normative), the parallelism between the different characters is in a sense playing against these oppositions. Indeed, it is like pushing them towards the same category, or better, it introduces some principle of reciprocity between good and bad commuters, some disturbing possibility of inversion and identification, as we shall see later. Parallelism (serial repetition), indeed, together with hyperbole (exaggeration), is just one of the visual tropes used by these ironic posters, which introduce a form of strong creative dynamism in these images.

5. The mobile Panopticon

It is interesting to note that in the poster we just analysed (fig. 3), the term 'silent mode' had been translated in Japanese as 'manner mode'. The reason is that in Japan, when you want to turn off the ringtone of your mobile, you have to select an option which is not classified as a technological function of your phone (the silent mode). This option is defined by using some vocabulary based on social norms, on intersubjective relationships and obligations. Manner mode. This introduces us to the next issue.

Michel De Certeau (1988), in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*, talks about the train in terms of an apparatus of control, a Panopticon. He describes seats like cells perfectly numbered, railway cars like pigeonholes, cells of immobility which allow the production of an order, a power of classification and control. Everything is on a grid. And indeed control and food are the only elements moving from one cell to another, through the ticket inspectors and the food trolleys: "Tickets, please…", "Sandwiches? Beer? Coffee?…" (*ibid.*, p. 111). Inside the train, immobility is the order, and you are supposed to stay on your seat. But they are actually mobile prisons, forms of travelling incarceration.

In the metro instead, there are no ticket inspectors and food trolleys, no compartments or cells. Therefore I would suggest that, through the *Manner Posters*, Tokyo Metro intended to introduce in the subway system a mechanism of intersubjective control, based on "good manners". Etiquette is, after all, a minor branch of ethics. Emmanuel Levinas (1979), in his *Totality and Infinity* has repeatedly stressed the intersubjective character of ethics. He describes it as an intertwining of different viewpoints. "Already *of itself*, ethics is an 'optics.'" (*ibid*., p. 29). Ethics as optics. And so, we go straight back to the Panopticon. Whereas the subway is, by its own nature, a place of dynamic transformations (Augé 2002), of cultural contamination and relative freedom, institutions try to reintroduce a form of ordering. The subway etiquette set by the *Manner Posters* becomes therefore a distributed Panopticon, a mechanism of reciprocal control, in which everyone is assumed to control everybody else, and every individual is constantly watched by others.

6. Political enunciations

The political implications of a visual discourse so concerned with the normative aspects of everyday life, are vast and complex. There are also identity issues at stake, summoned by communicative strategies activated by the posters themselves. They concern more specifically the linguistic forms used in these visual texts. If we read and compare the Japanese and the English versions of the headlines, indeed, we will understand that they do not convey exactly the same meaning. The English message "Please do it at home", is indeed used to translate the Japanese sentence "*Ie de yarō*", literally meaning, instead: "Let's do it at home". This brings important consequences to the communicative actions performed by these images. It means that a crucial difference between the English–speaking and Japanese audience is set. While the Japanese sentence tries to embrace the listeners in a cooperative and *inclusive 'we'* ("Let's do it at home"), the English one creates a separation, a *distance* between a 'you' and an *exclusive 'we'*: "Please do it at (your) home, at (your) pub, at (your) office. . . ". It is what Latour (2001, 2003) calls *political enunciation*, an act of 'group–making', to mobilize a collective, and also to separate and draw a boundary between

'us' and 'them' through a performative use of 'we'. In other words, a linguistic differentiation marks two different ways of shaping identity, one *inclusive*, and the other *exclusive*, according to the linguistic competence assumed to be that of the audience, i.e. between Japanese and foreign people. However, a separation between Japanese and foreign forms of identity is only one of the strategies enacted by these posters. As we have partly seen, an analysis of their visual discourse reveals a great multivocality and array of different rhetorical strategies, some of which seem to play against the political enunciation found at the linguistic level.

7. Parody and negotiation of values

Soon after the start of this communication campaign in 2008, a large number of visual parodies of *Manner Posters* began to spread through paper magazines and blog media on the internet. The magazine *Metropolis*, very popular among foreign people living in Japan, started to publish periodically some of these knockoffs, in which the situations portrayed by the original *Posters* were considerably changed and subverted, with comic effects. Also, internet blogs managed by non–Japanese people (such as *3yen.com*, *Politicomix*, or *Harvey James Cartoons*) posted a great number of these counterfeits, to the extent that the same designer Yorifuji Bunpei was asked about this phenomenon of subculture in the interview for the *Japan Times*. Although a small number of these knockoffs also featured Japanese bloggers, the visual parodies of the *Manner Posters* remained essentially a *gaijin* phenomenon, i.e. one concerning foreign people living in Japan.

Some of these parodic counterfeits played with graphic elements, changing the visual setting and the characters of the *Posters*, some others played with written messages and cartoon bubbles. Notwithstanding this diversity, the majority of them rearranged these elements in order to ridicule and make fun of the detailed normative system of behavioural prescriptions proposed by the Tokyo Metro. In doing so, the new images mocked the original ones, both in the style and in the bad manners portrayed. We can try to describe one of these knockoffs (see fig. 4).

This image can be considered as a mocking translation of the poster

Figure 4

in fig. 2 we have analysed before. Here the illustration is exactly the same. What has changed is the verbal message, both in the headline and in the supplementary comment below. The main sentence on the top is: "TERRORISM. If you suspect it, report it". And the explanation below is: "If you're out partying and see a creepy old guy watching you, call the police".

With these simple sentences, the author of this counterfeit completely changed the meaning of this image. More specifically, he generated a syntactic inversion, i.e. an inversion of narrative positions and roles. The person who is staring at the window–glass is not the final Sender anymore. This role is now played by the actors on the train. They are the people in charge of deciding and managing the system of values. The commuter is now the "creepy old guy", he is the subject performing the negative action. So, a *syntactic* inversion of narrative roles (between Sender and performing subject) generates a change

also on the *semantic* level, a complete inversion of meanings. What was charged with positive values before, now is charged with negative ones, and vice versa, so that the antisocial role is now played by the person who was considered before as "a typical commuter".

A syntactic inversion which generates a semantic one: this can probably be considered as one of the most classical mechanisms of the parody as a discursive genre (being visual, written, or theatrically performed). These parodic actions can therefore be understood as powerful counterstrategies, activated by often anonymous bloggers in order to contrast the system of prescriptions and the panoptic strategy of mutual control introduced by Tokyo Metro. The fact that most of the authors are foreigners living in Japan, also testifies some form of reaction to the political enunciation produced by the *Manner Posters* at the linguistic level, where a difference is established between Japanese and non–Japanese impolite people, the former being integrated, and the latter being excluded.[3] Accordingly, the design of these visual parodies is efficacious, for it is able to negotiate and subvert the systems of values, so reconfiguring the collective life by means of semiotic acts.

8. Translation and cultural contamination

The final considerations are dedicated to the images from the third and last campaign of the *Manner Posters* corpus, those produced in 2010–2011. These *Posters* differ considerably from the previous ones. They represent situations where foreigners are explicitly depicted, as performing unexpected positive acts which are rewarded with the headline: "Please do it again". These illustrations often display narrative sequences where the subject is going to take some rude action at first, only to immediately realise how detrimental it would be for the other commuters, and eventually decide to follow proper behaviour. We can consider fig. 5 as a good sample of this kind of narrative.

The big tall guy, apparently corresponding to the Japanese visual

3. Such perspective is also confirmed by field interviews, conducted in Tokyo in 2009, with some of the authors of these parodic posters, who disliked the strongly normative dimension of the *Manner Posters*, and felt they were very often directed to foreigners.

Figure 5

stereotype of the foreigner (usually represented in mass media culture by the American people), stands in the middle of the scene, obstructing completely the train exit door. But in the second sequence, he moves very quickly to the right side of the setting in order to let a couple pass. In the last sequence, he and the couple put their thumbs up, to show each other a reciprocal approval and a happy result of their interaction. While the message on the top, as mentioned before, is "Please do it again", the supplementary comment says: "Please cooperate so that others can get on and off the train smoothly". What a splendid example of cooperation and intercultural understanding! The poster obviously intends to encourage in a positive way active participation in the 'good manners' system. But the way it tries to achieve this communicative aim is not through a separation and distinction between the foreigner and the other passengers. Instead, all

the visual strategy is based on the interpenetration and reciprocal contamination of the marks of distinction we found in the previous *Manner posters*.

The yellow and white shapes are here mixed and mutually combined among the characters. Also, the colours of the train setting and the external frame of enunciation are inverted: the car interior walls are now white, and our spectator position is virtually included in a yellow external frame. If we look at the clothes, we shall note that the foreigner and one of the two passengers — the woman — are dressed in the same way, with a yellow scarf and a black jumper. But the most interesting thing is the sign they exchange each other. Their thumb pointed upwards is a typical foreign (American?) gesture, and is here assumed also by the "typical (Japanese) commuter", like a kind of countergift, as if to say: "You respected my customs, and now I accept yours". It seems like the signs of hybridization, we detected in the previous campaigns — the commuter's eyes, the parallelism, the tropes — now literally exploded, creating situations of cultural mixture. As if the images (the 'figurative level') (Floch 2000), through a form of visual reasoning and rhetoric, created a new discourse on its own, which pushed little by little the boundaries of this communication campaign, suggesting forms of negotiation, parodic inversions, and contaminations.

9. Conclusion

After having followed the development of these three *Manner Posters* editions authored by designer Yorifuji Bunpei, having traced their strategies and the counteractions they provoked, and having witnessed their final transformation, we are left with a sense of uncertainty. For we acknowledge the subjects who produced, diffused and reinterpreted this wide corpus of images — designers, institutions, bloggers, commuters, foreigners, journalists, and finally, myself — but we are not sure that they were the only responsible actors for all the different trails these posters ran through. Of course, there were the work of creative graphic studios, the subway personnel who distributed and affixed the posters, and the irreverent fantasy of active websurfers and blog users — many of whom already worked as freelance designers.

But it is not enough. Following the *Posters*' trails, we realise instead that, as soon as they were created, these images started to come alive. They acquired an existence quite independent from their producers. And soon started to drive the human actors, to make them act in some way. To the extent that, we are not sure if during the successive developments (the parodies and the last campaign), the authors who drew them were the designers, or if such graphic artists were instead *drawn* by the images someway, animated by the efficacy of a visual discourse which rearranged and rhetorically put in tension the different categories of meaning. Ultimately, I wonder if all the flow of strategies, actions, and translations which characterised the history of these posters — from the panoptic strategies of intersubjective control, to the parodic actions of negotiation, until the reciprocal contaminations and translations of different systems of values — was driven indeed by an internal semiotic dynamism, by this sort of creative power which lies beneath the signs.

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