

## Categorical organization in the narrative discourse: A semantic analysis of *Il conformista*<sup>☆</sup>

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### Abstract

We propose a systematic application of psychological findings to film interpretation. We claim that the cinematic discourse whose narrative schema is difficult to retrieve can be viewed as organized along the principles that govern taxonomies. Our case study is *Il Conformista* (*The Conformist*), a film by Bernardo Bertolucci (1970). In our view, this film exemplifies discourses which are best understood as a series of homologous units of signification rather than as a series of causes and effects (i.e., a story).

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Along the lines developed recently by film theorists (Andrew, 1984, 1989; John Carroll, 1980; Noël Carroll, 1988; Bordwell, 1985, 1989; Bordwell and Thompson, 1979, and others), this paper offers a cognitive approach to film analysis. What is proposed is a systematic application of psychological findings to film interpretation. In particular, we suggest that the cinematic discourse whose narrative schema is difficult to retrieve be viewed as organized along the principles that govern taxonomies.

The distinction noted in the literature between schematic and categorical organization (e.g., Mandler, 1984) has been used to distinguish between narrative and non-narrative texts. Since schematic organization centers on spatial-temporal relations, its affinity to narrative or action-structure has been noted by various researchers (e.g., Rumelhart, 1975; Mandler, 1984; Shen, 1985). Categorical organization, on the other hand, centers on similarity relations. It has been used to account for the structure of non-narrative verbal texts (Giora, 1985c, 1988).

We assume here that where schematic organization can apply, readers activate this strategy of organization. However, where it does not, it is contended, readers opt for the alternative categorical organization. This paper puts forth the claim that categorical organization applies either where narrative, action-structure organization is inac-

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cessible, as in the case of non-narrative texts (Giora, 1985c, 1988), or when the narrative structure is lax or deficient or not easy to retrieve. In other words, categorical organization will emerge relative to the narrativity structure of a given discourse (for a similar view see Giora and Shen, 1994). Thus, in a non-narrative text, or in a text whose narrative structure is deficient, it becomes an active mode of organization. This paper shows that this applies both to verbal and cinematic discourses. Our case study is *The Conformist*, a film by Bernardo Bertolucci (1970). In our view, this film is best understood as a series of homologous units of signification rather than as a series of causes and effects (i.e., a story).

## 1. Introduction: Schematic and categorical organizations – Psychological findings

The question this paper addresses itself to concerns the difficulties viewers have in accounting for the reception of so-called ‘problematic’ movies, such as, e.g., Alain Resnais’ (1977) *Provvidence*, Marleen Gorris’ (1983) *A Question of Silence* and Bertolucci’s *Il Conformista* (*The Conformist*). Their discourses do not unfold temporally, and their narrative structure is obscure. It is widely agreed, however, that the most immediate tendency of the perceiver is to try and restructure the narrative by reorganizing the narrative sequentiality. We claim here that this is not the only alternative. To demonstrate this, we review alternative cognitive structurings which govern the organization of knowledge. This is further pursued by the incorporation of notions of narrativity and degrees of narrativity that have been functional in the research of verbal discourses. The notions developed in psychological research and discourse analysis will serve here in what is proposed as a new approach to cinematic analysis.

### 1.1. Schematic organization

Narrative structure is closely related to that form of concept structure where the principle of organization is proximity. Inherent to proximity is the part–whole relation (van Dijk, 1977; Mandler, 1984, inter alia): A hand is a part of a body, paying the bill is a part of a restaurant script. Proximity, that is, co-occurrence in time and space, motivates the type of grouping variously termed ‘schema’, ‘script’, ‘frame’, or ‘thematic category’. Schemas (e.g., a birthday party, a restaurant script) are connected horizontally (to adjacent parts) as well as vertically (to the whole of which they are a part). Furthermore, they are based on experience. They are by and large shaped by our reality.

### 1.2. Categorical organization

Recent findings in psychological research of concept development and concept formation suggest that the structure of conceptual categories is not all of one sort or another. One possible organization is class membership, where the principle of

grouping is similarity. The view, termed 'classical', which prevailed up to the late 1960s, of categories being defined by sets of necessary and sufficient conditions, was shaken by recent empirical findings known as the 'prototype' view. Research by Berlin and Kay (1969), Labov (1973), Rips et al. (1973), Rosch (1973, 1978, 1981), Rosch et al. (1976), Rosch and Mervis (1975), for example, showed that natural categories, or rather, taxonomies, emerge out of probabilistic distributions of features. Within this approach, categories are no longer viewed as having necessary and sufficient conditions but as being organized in terms of similarity to a prototype – to the member sharing the highest number of category features. A prototype approach to categories allows for a hierarchical internal structuring. Membership is not equal but graded. Some members are central or prototypical while others are marginal.

The decision on category inclusion is an assessment of the number of common features against the number of dissimilar features. When a member shares a great number of features with other category members, it is a prototypical member, e.g., 'robin' in the set of birds listed in Table 1. It should be noted, however, that a prototype is a construct. It need not be experienced as a concrete member of the category. The concept is formed independently of the experience of its instance. Constructing a prototype is a process of abstracting the common features of the category members (Reed, 1972). When the number of dissimilar features exceeds the number of common features, this item, however, can be either a borderline member or excluded within the category under discussion, e.g., 'bat' in the category of birds (see Table 1).

Table 1  
Categorical organization (taken from Rosch, 1973: 133)

Fruit	Vegetable	Bird
apple	carrot	robin
plum	asparagus	eagle
pineapple	celery	wren
strawberry	onion	chicken
fig	parsley	ostrich
olive	pickle	bat

In sum, where similarity is a measure, the internal structuring of the category is graded. It begins with the least informative, most common member and ends with the most informative, marginal one.

### 1.3. Schematic vs. categorical organization

While schemas are shaped by our reality, taxonomies (e.g., the set of birds, vehicles) are not. As a category, they have to be formed. They are, therefore, relatively less constrained or rather more flexible than schemas.

As noted above (Section 1.1), schematic organization looms larger than taxonomical organization due to both the connectivity relation (e.g., causal, temporal, spatial

relation) that obtains among schema members, and its experiential nature. A great deal of research has shown that preschool children prefer to group objects thematically (i.e., schematically) rather than taxonomically (e.g., Denny and Moulton, 1976; Worden et al., 1978; Fivush, 1987; Markman, 1981; Markman and Callanan, 1983; Gelman and Baillargeon, 1983; Markman, 1993; Dromi, 1993b). Although such children have a rudimentary ability to organize objects taxonomically, they would do so only under certain conditions (Markman, 1987).<sup>1</sup> Even within taxonomies, the accessed properties are those that correlate with one another rather than those that do not. Where instances contain properties that either co-occur or can be meaningfully related to one another, categorization is more efficient (Hayes-Roth and Hayes-Roth, 1977; Medin and Schaeffer, 1978; Malt and Smith, 1984; Shen, 1993). Cognitive findings suggest, then, that schematic organization has precedence over categorical (taxonomical) organization.

## 2. Categorical organization of the non-narrative discourse

Previous work (Giora, 1985c, 1988) suggests that the principles of informative discourse organization are taxonomical. It was shown that the principles governing categorical organization as delineated, e.g. by Rosch (1973), and Rosch and Mervis (1975) (cf. Section 1), are applicable to non-narrative discourses. On this view, a discourse is well formed if and only if:

(1)

- (a) it begins with the least informative message in the given discourse segment. This least informative message, termed discourse topic, is a generalization that governs the remaining messages in the discourse. Cognitively, it functions as the prototypical category member which represents the redundancy structure of the set (the Relevance Requirement of Giora, 1985c, following Grice, 1975).

and

- (b) it proceeds gradually along the informative axis whereby a given message is more informative or, at least not less informative than the one it follows (the Graded Informativeness Requirement of Giora (1988), following Grice (1975)). Given this Graded Informativeness Requirement, the discourse must evolve informatively and end with the most informative message in the discourse relative to the discourse-topic. Like a marginal set-member, the most informative message in the discourse can be also included within another category. Informa-

<sup>1</sup> Mandler (1984) reports an unpublished experiment by Matthew Lewis which shows that categorical structures are not automatically activated, not even in situations in which they may seem obvious.

tiveness is defined in terms of class membership and in terms of classical information theories (Shannon, 1951; Attneave, 1959, among others).<sup>2</sup>

Discourse well-formedness, then, is a hierarchical notion. It requires that the various discourse constituents be governed by a generalization and develop along an informativeness axis. Reflecting categorical organization, the constraints on discourse coherence account for both the linear and the hierarchical organization of the discourse. While the Relevance Requirement determines proposition inclusion within the discourse, the Graded Informativeness Requirement determines its linear position in that discourse.

### *2.1. Categorical organization of the narrative discourse*

As mentioned above (Section 1.1), psychological findings suggest that schematic ordering is more salient than categorical ordering. When items can be attributed either categorical or schematic structure, the latter obtains. However, special attention can reveal the categorical option as well (Section 1 above). In this section we would like to examine the circumstances under which categorical organization applies to narratives.

### *2.2. Analogies as 'purely-literary linkages'*

One possible answer to the question as to when categorical relations may obtain in a narrative discourse comes from Hrušovský (as quoted by his followers), Perry (1968) and Sternberg (1970). They discussed manifestations of similarity in the literary discourses. They treated them as being 'purely literary'. They claimed that the

<sup>2</sup> For an illustration, consider the passage below discussed in Giora (1988):

"It has often occurred in the history of science that an important discovery was come upon by chance. A scientist looking into one matter unexpectedly came upon another which was far more important than the one he was looking into. Penicillin is a result of such a discovery."

The sequence above obeys categorical constraints. It begins with a generalization which represents the redundancy structure of the text; it presents the set of properties shared by all the propositions in the text: scientific (1) chance (2) discovery (3) of some importance (4). ("It has often occurred in the history of science that an important discovery was come upon by chance"). The second proposition shares this set but adds another property, the relative importance (5) of the scientific chance discovery. ("A scientist looking into one matter, unexpectedly came upon another which was far more important than the one he was looking into"). By sharing the paragraph common properties, the second proposition obeys the Relevance Requirement. By adding another one, it conforms to the Informativeness Requirement. With respect to these two, the proposition concerning the discovery of penicillin (6) ("Penicillin is the result of such a discovery") is both relevant, sharing the set of common properties and more informative. Important chance discovery in the history of science – the set of properties suggested by the first and the second propositions – alludes to a number of possibilities. The mention of the discovery of penicillin, which is a specific instance of the category 'important scientific chance discovery', eliminates the other alternatives that can be included in this category, and adds its unique property. In sum, the sequence above reflects categorical organization whereby all the propositions are linked by a similarity relation to the generalization in the beginning (the Relevance Requirement), while linearly, the more informative message follows the less informative one, in accordance with the Graded Informativeness Requirement.

reader opts for an analogical interpretation when schematic organization fails. Analyzing Mendele's novels for example, Perry (1968) showed that analogy – “a purely literary linkage” – “is enhanced precisely owing to the looseness of the quasi-realistic linkages”. In similar fashion, Sternberg (1970) argued that the compositional principle of the modern novel in general, and Faulkner's *Light in August* in particular, is “purely literary” consisting primarily of analogical patterning rather than of quasi-mimetic links.

We also believe that it is the looseness of quasi-mimetic links, i.e., the absence of an action structure, that triggers alternative patterning. But as will be shown below (Section 3), our requirements for an alternative patterning are much more constrained. Analogical links are just one condition for categorical organization, akin to what has been defined as the Relevance Requirement. This Relevance Condition requires, however, that all discourse segments be similar to each other in that they should all share a set of common properties formulated as a generalization ((1a) above). We also postulate the Requirement for Graded Informativeness (1b) which further constrains the Relevance Requirement and effects segmentation (cf. Section 2).

### 2.3. Categorical organization and degrees of narrativity

Previous research (Giora, 1985c, 1988) showed that categorical organization applies, first of all, to non-narrative (informative) discourses. Such organization was shown to regulate the conditions of discourse coherence on which informative discourses are defined. This suggests that the question should be asked differently: under what circumstances are categorical relations put to use while processing a discourse in general. Along the lines suggested by Giora and Shen (1994), this paper suggests that categorical organization applies where there is no well-formed action-structure available.

Giora and Shen (1994) proposed that narrativity is a scalar notion: Action-structured discourse ranks highest in narrativity, causally connected discourse occupies middle position on the scale, and temporally organized discourse is the poorest example of narrative. Action-structured discourse differs from temporal and causal organizations in terms of the number of connectivity-types it exhibits. Action-structure/goal-oriented schema ranks highest in connectivity as it contains both causal and temporal relations. Moreover, it is a global structure which accounts for the hierarchical connectivity of the discourse. It links the various parts of the narrative (e.g., the Problem the hero/ine has to solve, the Attempt to overcome it, and the Result) to a whole. Causal organization, on the other hand, contains two types of connectivity structure, temporal relations included. Temporal sequencing exhibits only one type of connectivity structure.

Thus, schematic organization admits of degrees when the notion of coherence is at stake. Action-structured discourses count highest on the narrativity scale (e.g., Kemper, 1982; Giora and Shen, 1994). Following Rumelhart (1975), Black and Bower (1980), Graesser et al. (1980), Mandler and Johnson (1977) and others, Shen (1985) showed that narrative coherence is guaranteed when action-structure is applicable. It

is then that the discourse constituents can be viewed as connected to a whole (the final result) of which the various events are parts.

Linear schematic organization (temporal, even causal), on the other hand, counts low on the narrativity scale (e.g., Perry, 1968; Kemper, 1982; Mandler, 1984; Giora and Shen, 1994). This does not come as a surprise, as linear connectedness does not guarantee discourse coherence (e.g., Giora, 1985a,b; Enkvist, 1989).

To show that categorical organization becomes more salient as narrativity recedes, let us, first, check a number of non-literary texts that differ in degree of narrativity and their relation to categorical organization. Consider, first, (2) below whose schematic principle of organization is temporal:

- (2) Anna woke up at seven. Two minutes later a dog barked in her friend's yard. At seven fifteen my father knocked on my son's door. At ten the first man landed on the moon. Then a fly died. I then decided to eat my soup. I looked at the window. The clock did not strike the hour. I went to school. I felt great.

The sequence in (2) has a schematic structure: the events are ordered temporally. Yet it is incoherent. This, however, is not due to low-grade narrativity, but to breakdown of categorical ordering which could compensate for the poor narrativity. The sequence in (2) lacks a generalization, a discourse-topic; it is not clear what it is about, or what category has been formed. To confirm this, one need only note that this discourse can be corrected by attributing the various events a relevant relation, a shared property (Giora, 1985c). It could be organized around, say, the theme of a 'lousy' morning:

- (3) Anna woke up at seven. Two minutes later the dog started to bark. She only got out of bed when her father rang her up. Then the baby started to cry. Then the telephone rang again.

Sequences (2) and (3) are equally low in narrativity. Their events are (only) temporally linked. What makes (3) a better discourse is its compliance with a taxonomical order, or rather, with the Relevance Requirement. It can be assigned a categorical organization. The sequence in (2), on the other hand, cannot: no generalization – i.e. a set of common properties – can be derived from it. It therefore makes no sense, or simply, is incoherent.

Let us consider now a schematic organization that centers on causal connections. To determine whether a chain of events related in terms of cause and effect guarantees coherence, consider the following causal sequences for an answer:

- (4) Dana hit Dan. He therefore cried. His shirt got wet as a result. He went home to wash it. His mother was home so he had to go on errands. He hated his mother. He was unhappy. He cried a lot. His mother hated that. He left her. He met Dina. He fell in love with her. They got married years later. Dina had a baby. She was happy as a result. As a result she had another baby. Then there was too much laundry. Now she was very tired. She dreamt all day. Therefore she wanted to have a career.

- (5) Dana hit Dan. Then Dan cried. As a result Ben hit Dana. Then Dana cried. Then her mother came and she cried too and hit Ben. Then Ben cried. So Dan hit him and stopped crying.

Are the sequences in (4) and (5) more coherent than (2)? Our intuitions don't seem subtle enough to grade them in terms of coherence. The sequences in (4) and (5), however, seem distinguishable. Although they are both somewhat incoherent, the sequence in (5) seems slightly more coherent than the sequence in (4). One should note, however, that the sequence in (5) does not exhibit an improvement in terms of causality but, rather, in terms of similarity. Unlike the chains in (4), the chains in (5) can be subsumed under a unifying discourse-topic (e.g., people hitting and crying), and thus be relevant to a discourse-topic.

What we have seen is that discourses which rank low on the narrative scale, because their mode of organization is of low connectivity, rely heavily on categorical organization for their coherence. On the other hand, action-structure narratives seem less dependent on categorical organization (Giora and Shen, 1994): their Relevance constraint is schematic – their coherence relies on connectedness to the last result (Shen, 1985, 1990).<sup>3</sup> Thus, the answer to the question as to the conditions under which categorical organization prevails can be formulated as follows: categorical organization obtains where discourses have no action structuring, i.e., in non-narrative discourses (Giora, 1985c, 1988), in narratives whose schematic ordering is of low-connectivity (e.g., (3)–(5)), and in distorted action-structured narratives (Section 3.1 below).

### 3. Categorical organization of the cinematic discourse

For a better understanding of the claim that a distorted action-structured narrative triggers a categorical mode of reception, let us turn to the analysis of a discourse that distorts narrativity. An appropriate case study is *The Conformist*. The hypothesis of this paper is that the coherence of *The Conformist* as a meaningful discourse relies mainly on its categorical structure, since its schematic organization is difficult to retrieve. This implies no claim that schematic processing is excluded. It is safe to assume that understanding *The Conformist* involves reorganization of the distorted narrative sequences in terms of schematic ordering as well. What is indicated is that the coherence of the discourse is better accounted for in categorical terms. The discourse lends itself to categorical organization since its linear ordering, rather than reflecting narrativity, reflects categorical structuring.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> As shown by Trabasso and van den Broek (1985) and van den Broek and Trabasso (1986), for example, the number of causal connections increases the likelihood of summarization for both goal and other statements.

<sup>4</sup> What makes *The Conformist* 'literary' is not the reliance on categorical ordering but probably the extent to which it deviates from narrativity. It makes the perceiver put effort in activating two procedures of processing that do not coincide.



### 3.1. *Il Conformista* – A semantic analysis

Our claim that *The Conformist's* organization is rather categorical will be validated if the discourse is found to obey both the Relevance and the Graded Informativeness Requirements (Section 2). Thus, for *The Conformist* to be a categorically coherent discourse, it must be organized around its generalization, i.e., its discourse-topic, preferably presented in the beginning so that the various segments of the discourse will be similar and informative relative to it. This means that it must evolve informatively so that each segment not only shares properties with what is made explicit in the beginning, but adds information to it. Obeying the Graded Informativeness Requirement, the discourse will, thus, end with the most informative message.

Categorical organization applies both at the discourse level and at the segment level. The theory of coherence proposed here predicts that the discourse will be divided into its units at peaks of informativeness (Attneave, 1954; Giora, 1983b, 1986, 1988). The segmentation of the discourse into its sub-units will occur at points of maximal informativeness relative to the discourse-topic of the given unit. Our analysis of *The Conformist* will, thus, suggest an overall interpretation of the discourse as an instance of a categorically structured discourse, and account for its segmentation into its semantic units.

### 3.2. *The rationale for categorical organization in The Conformist*

Given that *The Conformist* is a rather demanding discourse, this paper will show that a satisfactory interpretation of the film can be still achieved by exposing its categorical organization. It is further claimed that the difficult task imposed on the viewer is not arbitrary or purely aesthetic, but has a rationale in the process of the production of meaning. The way the discourse unfolds compels the viewer to look for an alternative structuring, i.e. the categorical organization, albeit the allegedly more accessible schematic organization (Section 1).

This alternative structure, the categorical organization, is the vehicle of the process of signification. By applying this procedure, the viewer is offered a coherent and more comprehensive basis for understanding the film. Certain segments which may look superfluous when the film is read only as a narrative, are better integrated when the film is read on the basis of its categorical organization. Though the two readings are not mutually exclusive, the categorical organization enhances, and in certain cases even enables, a process of signification which directs the reader towards a very specific interpretation of the discourse.

### 3.3. *The order of presentation of the narrative*

The following is a shorthand description of the *sjuzet* – the surface structure – of *The Conformist*:

The time is the mid-1930's. Marcello Clerici, an Italian secret agent, is on a special mission in Paris, where he uses the occasion of a honeymoon vacation as a cover

for his clandestine activity. As he leaves his hotel room, he is picked up by a car driven by his partner, secret agent Manganiello, who, at the moment, is still concealed from the viewer.

On the road, as they are making their way to a rendezvous at which they plan to kill someone, Clerici recalls a series of past events. He first remembers the occasion of his recruitment to the fascist secret service, which coincided with the preparations for his wedding with his fiancée, Giulia.<sup>5</sup> He also reminisces over a crucial event in his childhood in which he was sexually abused, and inadvertently shot and killed his abuser, a handsome homosexual. Scenes from the past are interspersed between short sequences of the two agents on the road, debating certain aspects of their mission: the planned assassination of professor Quadri and his wife Anna, both dissidents, exiles from fascist Italy. Finally, Clerici remembers the time he has just spent with his wife and the Quadris in Paris: – a visit in the Quadris' opulent apartment, a dinner in an oriental restaurant, and an outing to a trendy dancing hall. A few days earlier, when he first saw her, Clerici fell in love with Anna and asked her to leave everything behind and elope with him to Brazil. Anna vacillates between her attraction to Clerici, the man in love with her, and her abhorrence of Clerici, the vile fascist. She finally rejects Clerici's entreaties, and joins her husband on his journey to the countryside.

Manganiello's car now makes a turn on the road and finally catches up with the Quadris' car. A car which arrives from the opposite direction stops abruptly and blocks the narrow road. Professor Quadri gets off to see if help is needed. Several men emerge from the misty wood and assault Quadri with their knives. They stab him many times until he remains lying on the ground, lifeless. They then turn to Anna who stays in the car with her dog. Clerici in his car ignores Anna's pleading to open his door and protect her from the killers. Fleeing for her life into the snow-covered forest, Anna is hunted like an animal. She is finally shot and killed by the merciless fascist agents.

Several years have passed. It is the moment when the fascist regime collapses in the middle of the war. Clerici puts his three year old daughter to bed and goes out to meet an old fascist friend. In a rare coincidence he meets and recognizes there the homosexual who seduced him and whom he believed to have killed in his childhood. He then turns against the now old man and accuses him, in front of the people around them, of having killed the Quadris, yelling to everybody the exact date of the assassination.

### 3.4. A categorical reading of *The Conformist*

The discourse *The Conformist* is best interpreted around the theme already stated in its title: conformism/non-conformism. The question of conformism concerns two central issues: (a) Religious Matrimony as regularization of sexual activity and procreation in society, and (b) State Monopolized Homicide as opposed to criminal

<sup>5</sup> The reference to male characters (except Lino, the homosexual) by their last name and to female characters by their first name is not ours, but the film's.

homicide. Throughout the film, but more explicitly so in the opening segments ((i)+(ii)), the elaboration of these two issues revolves about the notion of Normality. In the film, Normality is constructed as a specific allegiance of the individual to society. This allegiance is twofold: Observance of Matrimony, and the preparedness to act as a Homicidal agent on behalf of the state. The discourse-topic of *The Conformist* is, thus, Normality as conformity to two societal foundations: (a) Matrimony and (b) Homicide in the service of the State.

Given the above discourse-topic, i.e., the generalization with which most of the messages of the film intersect, it can now be shown how the film is structured as a series of progressions revolving about the question of Normality. We will further show that the segmentation of the film is commensurate with categorical constraints: Each segment is relevant to the discourse-topic while at the same time it contains substantial new information in its regard.

Listed here, for convenience, are the series of segments, categorically organized, as they unfold sequentially in the film:

- (i) The titles sequence – sex, violence and persona.
- (ii) The radio station – configurations of political regime and private happiness as aspects of social conformism which secures normality.
- (iii) The fiancée – normality as matrimony.
- (iv) Mother and father – distorted matrimony as abnormality and state-legitimized violence as an etiology of abnormality.
- (v) Murder and matrimony – sexual relations regularized by matrimony. Homicide atoned for by state controlled homicide.
- (vi) Matrimony regresses while the acquisition of normality through state legitimized homicide progresses.
- (vii) A false dilemma en route to normality: Either giving up conformity to the church (matrimony), or giving up conformity to the state (legitimized homicide).
- (viii) A true dilemma: Incompatibility. Either winning the object of desire or earning normality.
- (ix) Brinkmanship – realizability of one of two.
- (x) Murder – normality at any price.
- (xi) Epilogue: Conforming to what? To individual narrative which is the reversal of conformism.

The title of each segment alludes to its specific discourse topic and reflects its relatedness to the governing discourse topic of the film as a whole. We examine the way each segment meets both the Relevance and the Graded Informativeness Requirements. As suggested above (Section 2), obeying the Graded Informativeness Requirement is indicative of segmentation. Specifically, the dividing line between a pair of consecutive segments is determined by the most informative sequence of the head segment.

(i) *The titles sequence – sex, violence and persona.* This sequence shot is superimposed by the head titles of the film. The iconography of this segment is conspicu-

ously that of the thriller genre with more than a tint of a *film noir*. It begins in the hotel room with the blinking neon lights which flash the face of Clerici in red and green. A sudden ringing of the telephone is followed by the mentioning of a mysterious woman. A hand gun is retrieved from a small black toilette case and is shoved into a raincoat pocket. In the convention of genre films, all this clearly points to the imminence of violence. One still missing item of the paraphernalia of the *film noir* hero, his typical hat, is revealed in a rather uncommon location. Following camera movement, it is seen on top of the backside of a naked human body lying on the double bed. Clerici picks it up and puts it on his head. As the last title of the film appears superimposed on this picture, he leaves the room.

Iconologically, the cinematic image and the action create here a linkage between violence, a sex object, and the persona of the hero. This is achieved at the very ending of the shot, when Clerici puts on his hat that has just covered the backside of a naked body. The association here of Clerici's persona with an ambiguous sex object is the most informative message in this shot (relative to the discourse topic) and can therefore be regarded as the ending of the first segment in a categorical ordering of the discourse.

(ii) *The radio station – configurations of political regime and private happiness as aspects of social conformism which secures normality.* The segment starts with a sequence consisting of a series of shots in which Clerici is seen leaving the hotel and then getting in a car driven by someone who remains offscreen for a certain footage. The segment ends with the sequence of Clerici's visit at the office of the minister in charge of the Secret Service.

The central sequence of this segment is Clerici's visit to the radio station studio, where his blind friend, Italo, is delivering a political propaganda broadcast. It is there where Clerici meets the colonel who recruits him to the secret service. Various elements of the sound track, dialogue, radio commentary and a performed song, all deal with two distinct topics: Clerici's forthcoming wedding and Clerici's enrolling in the ranks of the fascist secret service. One line said by the blind Italo to Clerici is certainly enlightening in respect to the discourse-topic: "It's strange. Everyone would like to be different from others, but instead you want to be the same as everyone else". The dialogue here is rich in information about Clerici's present agenda – getting married to a petit bourgeois woman and joining the fascist secret service. In this conversation with Italo, Clerici gives away his motives for taking these steps. "Where d'you think marriage will get you?" asks Italo. "I don't know. The impression of normality", says Clerici. The discourse-topic is spelled out: Through Matrimony and the Secret Service Clerici hopes to attain Normality.

The images in the radio station convey both Clerici's insecure identity and his being subjugated by authority. *Chiaroscuro* lighting, 180 degrees reverse cutting, frequent halving of the cinematic frame and repetitive reflections of Italo's face on that of Clerici point to the centrality of this scene in the process of constructing the discourse-topic. The extravaganza of means of expression alongside with a distracting background action – the Italian 'Andrews Sisters' trio singing "Chi è più felice di me?" ("Who is happier than I am?") is vital in this process. "... composition, camera movement, cutting, all intrude upon our desire for plot; they are unwelcome

and at the same time seductive, for they too provide us with information, ...” (Kolker, 1985: 90).

The closing sequence of the segment, which portrays the minister as a symbol of authority, is informative in relation to the discourse topic. It associates Anna, Clerici's future object of desire who will threaten to destroy his matrimonial bond, on the one hand, with the minister, the supreme authority, who allegedly has the power to bestow Normality on Clerici. For a brief moment, while peeping into the minister's office, Clerici has a glimpse of a woman who looks exactly like Anna sitting in a seductive pose on the minister's desk. She then lies across the desk yielding to the minister's embraces. She and Clerici exchange glances. A different 'replica' of Anna will appear in the film at the secret police headquarters scene. The context there will be similar: the coupling of an object of desire with state monopolized homicide. Having associated violence with abnormal sexuality (cf. Segment (i)), Clerici is now mature for the meeting with the minister in charge of the secret police.

(iii) *The fiancée – normality as matrimony*. In the first sequence of this segment Clerici is seen holding a bunch of flowers on his way to meet Giulia, his fiancée, who lives with her mother. The segment ends in the sequence of the dinner where the three of them, Giulia, her mother and Clerici are discussing an anonymous letter which brings up accusations against Clerici and his father, blaming them for being infected with syphilis.

Here matrimony is depicted as Normality in a very specific manner. In the person of Giulia, Clerici meets his ideal fiancée: A traditional petit bourgeois woman. Moreover, the three women, the fiancée, her mother and the housemaid, who make here their first appearance in the film, help establish the notion of Matrimony. They represent the three traditional functions a married woman should fulfil: sex, motherhood and domestic services. Clerici himself is presented as a puritan lover who resists his fiancée's seductiveness. Yet the introduction of a libelling letter paints this idyllic domestic scene in the colors of ambiguity so characteristic of the *film noir*. This *noir* element is further reinforced by the *chiaroscuro* rendering of the image effected by the combination of decor, costume and lighting. That which, from the safe distance of ideology, looks as the epitome of Normality is soon reframed by bourgeois duplicity. At the moment, it is Clerici who is daunted with Abnormality. As for Giulia, the closing sequence only enhances her Normality. At the very ending of this scene, Clerici makes an ironic comment. He calls Giulia's childhood diseases (mumps, rubella and scarlet fever) moral diseases. But unlike his father's alleged syphilis, they point to her innocence. Giulia thus stands out most immaculate.

(iv) *Mother and father – distorted matrimony as abnormality and state-legitimized violence as an etiology of abnormality*. The fourth segment contrasts Clerici's quest for Normality with his abnormal hereditary burden: His politically subversive father and sexually subversive mother. His quest for Normality is charged with more information: It is destined to make up for his own abnormal background. The first shot of the segment is a Dutch tilt, where the frame of the picture is not horizontal. The reframing to normal horizontality takes place as Clerici and his henchman, Manganiello are, for the first time in the film, included in the same frame. This balancing of the frame marks Clerici's embarking on the route of Normality by entering the

secret police. The segment ends in the sequence at the sanatorium where Clerici's father is interned.

Clerici's mother is portrayed as a lascivious woman addicted to morphine. Her example, as a wife and a mother, casts dark shadows on one of the aspects of Normality as conceived by Clerici, i.e. Matrimony. His father's mental illness is presented as related to his past service in the secret police. At the ending of the segment, in the very last shot, Clerici is interrogating his father about the latter's participation in the torture and murder of prisoners. This is another step up in the Graded Informativeness order in which the discourse-topic develops. As Clerici himself is seeking Normality by means of joining the service, his father's mental condition demonstrates that this may turn out to be an adverse act. By conforming to the ultimate demand of the state, by committing murder on its behalf, instead of attaining the much desired Normality, the end result of such conformity might be a stigma of Abnormality. This segment takes Clerici's quest for normality, by means of both Matrimony and service in the Secret Police, a few steps further. It foregrounds the possible futility of such an effort.

(v) *Murder and matrimony – sexual relations regularized by matrimony. Homicide atoned for by state controlled homicide.* The segment begins with a two-shot sequence of Clerici and Manganiello in the moving car. Manganiello tells Clerici about a mistaken execution in his past. Then he brings up again the issue of the woman whose life they cannot spare. On an impulse, Clerici tells Manganiello to stop the car, and he gets out. From this point on, a series of shots brings up an important event from Clerici's childhood. It is the story of his seduction by a homosexual whom he shot and killed with the latter's pistol. In the film this accidental killing of an object of desire is analogized with the unplanned murder of Anna, his object of desire. In the sequence there is a plethora of tying together of principal elements recurring in the film from its first segment: Abnormal sex in the person of Lino, the homosexual, is connected with violence through his pistol and the shooting. Lino is further associated with the triple incarnation of Anna, twice as a prostitute and once as Quadri's wife, who also has an ambiguous sexuality. Both Lino and Anna represent seductiveness and sexual anomaly which trigger violence.

The last shot of this segment is at the confession booth, when Clerici rejects the priest's absolution for his accidental killing of Lino, the homosexual. For this, Clerici says, he will seek absolution from society. In order to win absolution he will commit yet another manslaughter, only this time it will be in the service of society. "Blood washes away blood", says Clerici. This is the most informative section of the segment, since for the first time Clerici reveals his motives for joining the service. His dual route to Normality consists of: (a) adhering to the church in what is one of its sanctified dicta – catholic matrimony, and (b) conforming to the state in what is known to be its sanctified privilege – the physical elimination of dissidents without trial.

(vi) *Matrimony regresses while the acquisition of normality through State legitimized homicide progresses.* This segment consists of three sequences. The first and the third take place in the train compartment. In between, there is a sequence in which a meeting takes place between Clerici and a commander in the service who

changes the orders for Clerici's mission. In the first sequence, on the train, Giulia, Clerici's newly wed wife, confesses to him a love-affair which she had in her adolescence with an elderly family friend. Giulia, who up to this point was looked upon as the epitome of Normality, is suddenly lit in an abnormal light. The notion of Normality gained through Matrimony is therefore being undermined. Here again we see that, in terms of the coherence theory in question, the film evolves along the informative axis, i.e., in each segment there is a clear-cut new development of the discourse topic. The new information does not necessarily contribute to the construction of the narrative.

The following sequence deals with the other aspect of Clerici's search for Normality. It is in this sequence that Clerici's need to wash away 'Blood by blood' is given a concrete target – professor Quadri – a dissident who operates in Paris against the Italian fascist regime. Instead of spying on him, Clerici is ordered to eliminate him. In the commander's office, a series of scenes occur which are relevant to the discourse topic. Clerici meets a whore, whom he embraces with affection. The whore mutters "I'm crazy, I'm crazy". The linkage to Anna is made again by using the same actress. The allusion to Clerici's previous object of desire, Lino, the homosexual, is made by the scar on the whore's face. Later, Clerici aims his gun at his head only to find out that his hat is missing. What surfaces here again is the association of violence, the love for the abnormal and persona (cf. Segment (i)).

Back at the train, Clerici makes love to Giulia, emulating Giulia's elderly lover. The most informative element in this section is Clerici's acceptance of Giulia's past fornication, which he incorporates into their marriage. Clerici now compromises Normality, which he has hoped to attain with Matrimony. In this way the discourse becomes gradually more informative.

(vii) *A false dilemma en route to normality: Either giving up conformity to the church (matrimony), or giving up conformity to the state (legitimized homicide).* The present segment consists of the following scenes: Clerici and Giulia, at the hotel room in Paris, try to contact Quadri. Clerici and Giulia meet the Quadris at their home. Clerici and Quadri discuss philosophy and politics – Plato's myth of the cave. Anna befriends Giulia, while Clerici surprises Anna in her bedroom. Clerici sends off his wife to visit the Eiffel tower. He meets Anna at the ballet school and proposes an elopement to Brazil. Anna exposes his treacherous plotting against her husband and offers him her body in exchange for their immunity. Clerici eludes her.

In regard to the two aspects of his quest for Normality, Clerici makes some progress towards the execution of his secret mission, as he makes contact with professor Quadri. However, at the same time, since he falls in love with his victim's wife, Anna, he jeopardizes his matrimony. What deters him from realizing his new passion, a realization which might cost him his search for Normality through Matrimony, is Anna's proviso that he should give up his murderous plans. This is where Clerici flinches: "I don't know" is what he says to Anna in response to the deal she offers him.

Another recoil in his quest for Normality by means of political assassination takes place when, in their discussion, Quadri comes forth with the observation that, given the manner in which Clerici analyses the present situation in their homeland Italy, he

cannot be a true fascist. Quadri's assertion which perplexes Clerici, alongside with his new passion for Anna, eventually throws him into a turbulence of hesitation and procrastination. The doubt cast by Quadri on Clerici's devotion to fascism, and his plan to elope with Anna, constitute a virtual reduction in Clerici's zeal for what he pictures as his route to Normality. The shot which signals the ending of the segment is that in which this new development in his quest is concretized. Anna offers him her love in exchange for renouncing his clandestine activity against her husband. This is indeed the very moment when, in the person of Anna, a mixture of violence and desire is added to the long drink of Normality that Clerici is fixing for himself. It is also a pay-off for earlier hints about the nature of the object of desire in Clerici's mind: The mistress on the minister's desk, the womanly look of Lino the homosexual, the whore with the scar at the secret service headquarters in Ventimiglia, all tinged with violence.

(viii) *A true dilemma: Incompatibility. Either winning the object of desire or earning normality.* A series of close-up shots opens the first sequence of this segment. The camera makes a rapid movement from the head of a fox hanging from a neck fur to the head of Anna's black dog, to the face of Manganiello, to Clerici's head, to a two-shot of Giulia and Anna and finally back to Manganiello's face. Next is a long-shot of Clerici in front of a Parisian fashion house. This series of close-ups is a visualized condensation of Clerici's dilemma. He now has to choose between Anna, his newly found love, on the one hand, and his Normality (loyalty to Giulia i.e. Matrimony, and loyalty to Manganiello i.e. the State) on the other. His procrastination reaches its culmination in his attempt to hand his pistol back to Manganiello. This takes place in the last shot of the segment as the two meet in the back room of the oriental restaurant where the Quadris host the Clericis for dinner.

The most informative part of the last shot is at its ending, as Manganiello says to Clerici: "You don't betray the fatherland or impair your honor, you betray yourself". Instinctively, Manganiello strikes a chord in Clerici's mind as he insinuates his motive for joining the service, a question already raised by the Colonel at the radio station. Only then Clerici was silent about his motive. Now his motive has become clear. Clerici's brand of conformism stems from his innermost need to efface his sexual ambivalence and rid himself from the guilt feeling about having killed Lino. As Manganiello says to him: "... you betray yourself", Clerici cannot resist this contention.

(ix) *Brinkmanship – realizability of one of two.* This segment is comprised of one sequence – the dancing hall at Joinville. It begins with a shot of Anna drawing Giulia into the dancing hall, and it ends in the shot where Anna dances with Clerici. The centerpiece of the segment is the moment when Clerici surreptitiously hands Manganiello the note that Anna gave Giulia back at the hotel, pointing out her husband's destination in his trip out of town on the following day. "What about his wife?", asks Manganiello, gripping Clerici's hand. "She is not going", retorts Clerici, ridding himself of Manganiello's handgrip. Clerici's move is twofold. He remains loyal to the State but at the same time he breaks his matrimonial oath to the Church. By acting so, he only fulfills what he said to Manganiello when they first met at his mother's villa: "Fatherland before Family". The next moment Clerici is encircled by



the serpent of the dance headed by Giulia and Anna. Alone at the center he is now being singled out, as if his quest for being like everybody else is frustrated yet again. Clerici's vacillation between conformism and individualism reaches here another ironic peak. At the last dance, Anna tells him that she has changed her mind and that she will join her husband on the coming morning. Clerici is full of horror and tries to dissuade her from doing so. At the point when she accedes to his pleading, the segment comes to an end. This last sequence is indeed highly informative, since Clerici's quest for Normality is now undermined. Having secured Anna's safety, he seems to believe that he will now win her love. That will mean the breach of his Matrimonial oath, a step which will lead him away from his true goal, the acquisition of Normality.

(x) *Murder – normality at any price.* The dramatic climax of the film, the murder scene, is at the same time the farthest that Clerici goes with his conformism on the way to his long aspired for Normality. By colluding with the murder of the woman he loves, Clerici safeguards his matrimonial bond on the one hand, and recognizes the authority of the State over the individual in matters of loyalty, on the other. In this sequence, for once, Clerici fulfills his capacity for conformism. One and the same act, the killing of Anna, serves a dual objective: Defending his matrimony and defending his fatherland by committing murder. Clerici's participation in the assassination of Anna is for himself the ultimate proof of his Normality.

Were *The Conformist* merely an action structure narrative, it should have ended here: Despite a few hurdles, the quest has been accomplished. But *The Conformist* has not ended yet. For a person who seeks Normality, reaching Normality is all too predictable.

(xi) *Epilogue: Conforming to what? To individual narrative which is the reversal of conformism.* In the epilogue, which takes place much later, when the fascist regime in Italy collapses, Clerici performs a full turn on his heels in his personal narrative. He opens up to new possibilities other than blind adherence to the exigencies of Church and State.

The segment starts at Clerici's home, where he puts his three-year-old daughter to bed, and makes her say her prayers. This opening section presents him as an accomplished father and husband. But the segment ends differently. Later on, in the streets, where he meets his old friend Italo, he faces the rejoicing crowds celebrating the downfall of the dictatorship. Visually, Clerici is confronting the people in the street going the opposite direction. For the first time in the film we see him staying put, not conforming.

The conformism that applied before is not valid any longer. His instinctive response, as an accomplished conformist, is to efface all reminders to his past allegiances and express solidarity with the emerging forces which are taking over. But an unexpected encounter with the homosexual he thought he had killed as a young boy tosses his cards. When he realizes that the man is not dead, it must dawn on him that his involvement in the murder of the Quadris resulted from a terrible misconception.

Denouncing both the old homosexual and his blind friend Italo as fascists, he is now left alone facing the crowds marching the opposite direction. He then sits down

on the stone stair at the same spot where, a short moment before, the old homosexual was sitting. By choosing this particular place to sit down, Clerici reverses his vantage-point on his own life. It is precisely here, under the eyes of the homosexual, his seducer in the far away past, that he is going to ponder on the tragic consequences of his misconception of himself. This must be Clerici's first step towards renouncing the brand of conformism that he has adopted up to that point. An uncalled for insight will now reshape his consciousness and lead the way to autonomy. His ordeal of heteronomy is over and done for.

The film thus ends with the most informative message in the discourse. The long and meandering quest for conformity comes to its end with the emergence of a non-conformist individuality. By virtue of its excessive informativeness, the epilogue can be looked upon as almost flouting the Relevance Requirement. The discourse progresses gradually in accordance with the Graded Informativeness Requirement until it reaches its final segment which bears a reversal relation to it: Individualism as opposed to Conformism makes it look as 'Une bande à part' (a group in itself), a marginal member on the category borderline (cf. Section 2).

#### 4. Concluding remarks

Previous research (e.g., Giora, 1985c, 1988; Giora and Shen, 1994) has shown that non-narrative texts and texts low on the narrativity scale exhibit a categorical organization. This paper demonstrates that categorical organization is not verbal discourse specific, but applies to the visual/cinematic discourse as well. Where cinematic narrative/action structure is difficult to access, comprehenders may opt for the alternative categorical organization. Comprehension of both verbal and visual discourses, then, stems from general cognitive principles which account for the organization of verbal and non-verbal information in memory.

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