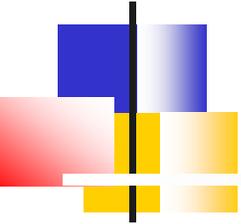


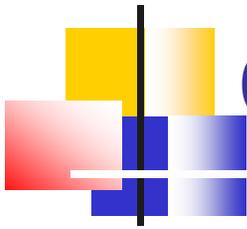
Reclaiming meaning: representations and counter- representations of gender in children's and teenagers literature

PhD marathon
EFSS – Sozopol, 13 september 2009

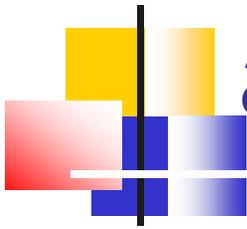
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University of Bologna



Introduction: gender e discourse

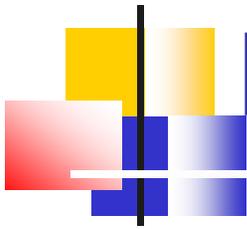


- **Gender** can be conceived as a **semiotic construct**, a way to assign a certain meaning to the feminine and the masculine and to their representations
- In the '80s, within the debate about the engendered subject, the key concept is **discourse**: sexuality is seen as a product of discourse



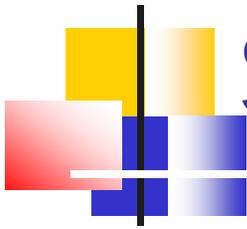
Introduction/2: differences and representation

- As the Italian semiotician Cristina Demaria argues, “**differences** are the product of discursive, material and cultural coercions intertwining along the complex journey that leads up to the formation of a female identity” (Demaria 2003)
- The different **representations** with which women compare themselves are produced by several converging ideological systems



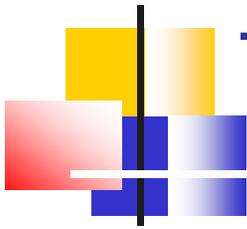
My research project

- **Title:** *Reclaiming meaning: representations and counter-representations of gender in children's and teenagers literature*
- The purpose of my research project is to focus on the modalities of representing gender and marginal subjects in literary text. I intend to analyze the discursive construction of gender identity exploring literature for children and teenagers in the Italian business publishing (inclusive of both Italian and foreign writers)



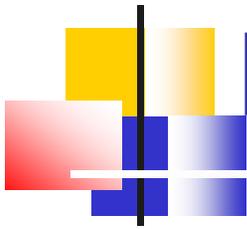
Starting questions

- My research will focus on the contemporary system of gender representations addressed to children and teenagers, asking which feminine and masculine identity models culture proposes and how contemporary writers subvert values and messages of the prevailing social code
- I will analyze the different textual representations and the literary and cultural models departing from which the young readers can accept, deny and negotiate their own identity



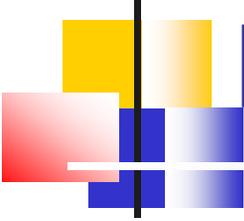
The context

- Literature for children and teenagers has changed a lot in the last decades: extreme conservatism and traditionalism coexist with new trends, innovative literary experimentations and creativity. Although a process of modernization of stories and subjects, narrative gender models and roles are only apparently multifaceted and original. Also the rule-breaking representations suggest frozen identities and old stereotypes



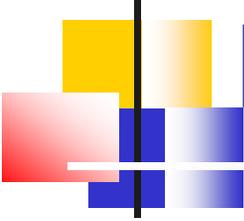
Main issues and study goals/1

- 1) the semiotic construction of femininity and masculinity in children's and teenagers literature
- 2) literary re-telling practices (*rewritings, transpositions*), like some contemporary versions of canonical stories and fairy tales that reveal the representative cages regimenting the feminine gender



Main issues and study goals/2

- 3) analysis of verbal and visual language in children's books in order to single out some sexist semiotic configurations
- 4) focus on the sense effects constituting gender subjectivity and on the body as a semiotic category



Purpose

- The purpose is to show the importance of a *politics of representations*. Every practice of representation proposes, diffuses and interprets an identity role: that involves the political aspect of the discourse and the meaning given to our experience within a system of socially shared representations. This meaning develops through historically, socially and culturally determined power relationships
- My study will attempt to go inside texts revealing the underlying constructions related to gender
- My object will also aim to explore the contribution that semiotics can give to gender studies, particularly through the semiotic methodology of text analysis