Reaching a Semiotic Reality through Signs' Moveability

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Abstract

Either taken from the ontological or epistemological viewpoint, semiotics can exemplify almost all life contexts and "realities". One concludes that more than one "reality" can exist in the "being" of semiotics itself. Such "realities", however, can be "lived" realities or "fictive" ones, i.e., a product of human imaginative capacities. Intriguingly enough, such facts make semiotics omnipotent owing to a straightforward reason: all mentioned realities (or scientific fields, if one wants to use the word metaphorically) are said to convey meaning. Name it semantics generally, or, meaning specifically, it should represent a final empiric result of each semiotics. The critical question is, however, how many "realities" does semiotics have?

Keywords: *Semiotics; Sign; Epistemology; Ontology; Reality*

INTRODUCTION

Apart from providing basic terms and concepts of semiotics, this text aims to treat "semiotic reality" instead of what one may call a "lived reality" through signs' behaviour in various circumstances. It will accordingly aim to focus on determined sub-fields of semiotics, which are, as we suppose, scientifically used to enhance artistic expressions' meaning. Moreover, it will further attempt to elaborate on their difference with a "lived" social reality, which, as we suppose, is likewise semiotically conditioned. For such and similar reasons, the text will endeavour to cover some semiotic approaches, including their practical applicability, to emphasise artistic expressions. Explicitly speaking, we will consider twofold criteria: one that is theoretically based (or originates from various theoretical paradigms) and the second based on a social lived reality (which originates from practical behaviours and their consequences). I will attempt to confirm the mentioned thesis as semiotics is an inter- and trans-disciplinary field. In other words, it supposedly covers more than one life sphere. What I intend to say with the mentioned facts above is the following: either taken from the ontological or epistemological viewpoint, semiotics can exemplify almost all life contexts and "realities". Therefore, one concludes that more than one "reality" can exist in the "being" of semiotics itself. Such "realities", however, can be "lived" realities or "fictive" ones, i.e., a product of human imaginative capacities. Intriguingly enough, such facts make semiotics omnipotent owing to a straightforward reason: all mentioned realities (or scientific fields, if one wants to use the word metaphorically) are said to convey meaning. As may be presupposed, the last assertion makes the matter semiotically relevant. Name it semantics generally, or, meaning specifically, it should represent a final empiric result of each semiotics. The critical question, however (as

I have also noted elsewhere), is how many "realities" does semiotics have [see: (Hoxha 2016)]?

The scientific matters mentioned above have been emphasised purposely. The truth is otherwise that semiotics holds a firm competency to discuss philosophical matters (similarly to its competency for other scientific fields) aimed to convey and interpret meaning [in the sense that Eco emphasises, such as in (Eco 1997; 1984)], among other related matters. Interpreting meaning, however, can be an object to a multifarious viewing of the mentioned realities. What ways are used to make such "interpreted meanings" evident and explicable? How much of them belong to a determined reality, and why? The present text shall attempt to offer responses to the above questions.

Seen from a theoretical viewpoint, however, we can be confident that semiotics' role is either relational or definitional. "Relational", because each sign must be related to another [see, among other related matters:(Deely 2009)], and "definitional" [see: (Saussure 1959; Peirce 1960)], because not only one method of defining the semiotic method is known today.

THE SEMIOTIC REALITY OF THE SIGN

This part of the text aims to treat some basic concepts of semiotics. Alternatively, it concerns determined theoretical matters directly connected to the sign. One then rightly asks: why should one discuss them at all? For a simple reason: to enhance an inevitable "semiotic reality", one must see signs' behaviour, their shapes, transformability, and the chain of procedures to reach meaning.

The term "semiotics", otherwise, its meaning, academic understanding and applicability, is not as novel as it might be presupposed. One can find its roots in the Middle Ages

(for some scholars even before). It has been documented and elaborated on by various scholars [see, for instance (Eco 1997; 1976); (Deely 2009)]. It is worth noting, however, that this text shall not treat historical matters of semiotics, as its object is a discussion of the diverse realities that semiotics might contain. On the other hand, as hopefully will be noticed, the present text shall attempt to define determined matters to clarify such mentioned statuses of semiotics.

I will, therefore, focus on two main streams of semiotics (which are not the only ones) that have widely influenced modern research and its audiences and spectators (if exemplified in terms of artistic expressivities, for instance). These approaches or methods are the "linguistically-based" and "philosophically-based" semiotics. Finally, we shall also refer to other semiotic approaches that have significantly revolutionised the method.

The term "semiotics", as otherwise known, has developed through Peirce's teaching [see: (Peirce 1960)], who also gave definitions of the term, as well as named as "another name for formal logic" [my paraphrasing; see: (Peirce, 1960)] (stemming from the field of logic and philosophy). The other turn that made semiotics exposable to the academic audience is the so-called "linguistic turn", also philosophically originated by the Paris, Prague, and Vienna schools. It used to be called "semiology" [such as can be instanced in: (Saussure 1959)].

The linguistic sign

I will first refer here to the connection, "link", and applicability of semiology and semiotics with linguistics, as such were the definitions which were widely exposed to the academic audience [see, for instance: (Rauch, 1999:49)]. Rauch's introduction (1999), for instance, even sees it as an "intimacy" within the two fields.

Otherwise, the various periods in terms of the development of language history (such as structuralism and post-structuralism, in this instance) and the various scholars' work over the first fifty years of the past century have proved the above phenomenon. Besides, as generally known in academic surroundings, this period lasted longer. This is one of the reasons that makes this issue semiotically discussable. Otherwise, as is known, the definitions of signs have been widely exposed to the academic audience during such periods.

Generally speaking, if one questions its popularity, it is undeniably true that Ferdinand de Saussure [see: (Saussure, 1959)], with his "Course of General Linguistics", was the first one to have exposed the discipline to a broader range of academic audience (especially emphasising the linguists). It is also true, on the other hand, that works of the sort (I have here in mind other linguists as well, such as Sapir, for instance) have marked a revolution in the overall development of the linguistics of science, besides naturally, other previous discoveries in the field. The reason to state facts like the

above is to demonstrate (as hopefully, I shall be able to explain) that semiotics is a multi-disciplinary academic field in the first place and, in the second, that one cannot conceive its provisions one-dimensionally, only. Another reason is the definition of "semiology" in this instance, which Saussure gave us. Therefore, one asks Saussure's importance regarding what a "semiotic reality" might mean. Moreover, why him, in the first place, among other scholars? The following lines of this text shall attempt to explain the issue.

First, a generally known fact is that Saussure was a linguist by vocation. The term "general linguistics" is used in the title of his only book (originally published in Geneva, 1916) because he defined the "sub-branches" of linguistics, its sub-divisions and matters that have comparatively been studied during that time by various scholars. What matters to a semiotician, instead, is the definition of "semiology" (as Saussure names semiotics in his book) and its "placement" into linguistics. Alternatively, both terms "overlapped" somehow, as he "embedded" semiotics into linguistics. The relevance of their mutual exclusiveness or inclusiveness shall be discussed in later sections of this study.

Among the most prominent distinctions of the period was the conceptualisation of matters in dichotomies, which made visible how various linguistic phenomena could be juxtaposed with one another. Explicitly speaking, the difference within, or, in other words, the differentiations among the tiniest scientific entities, was an object of a scientific discussion. This conceiving of scientific realities leads to various conclusions on how various languages would develop regarding their diverse normative surroundings. I will call this a "linguistic reality", as such was Saussure's primary scientific object, without mentioning the term "semiotics" explicitly.

Notwithstanding the above facts, the term "binary oppositions", for many structural scholars, meant nothing less than comparing two phenomena so that differences could be seen, analysed, criticised, and compared among one another. It is to conclude that such matters were utilised above all for etymology, dialectology, and other related linguistic sub-branches. If such theses hold, then one poses the question: Why should such an explanation for discussing "semiotic realities" be included in the present text? One issue we should be sure of, however, semiology in Saussure's time and semiotics today usually need (and indeed, needed in the past) such a "conflictual situation", as we shall attempt to show.

As we hope is clear now, we are interested in "semiology" and its definition, as used by Saussure. He claimed that "there is a science, a field, which is concerned with the signs, the deaf-mute alphabet, colours, army ranks, etc., and I shall call that field semiology. It stems from the Greek word "semeion", meaning a "sign". It is a part of social and general psychology…" [my paraphrase; see: (Saussure, 1959: 16)]. In other words, he defined it as a "science of signs". I will try to exemplify this: if we are in front of the traffic lights, each

colour that appears has a meaning: it signifies something to us. If it is a red one, we should stop, so that let the cars pass by, etc. In other words, even in Saussure's time, two phenomena juxtaposed could entail processing meaning. It meant, and still means, that there is an oppositional status between "the signifier" and the "signified". Saussure developed the concept of the sign precisely utilising this dichotomy. Psychology was essential in this sense of the word, as the sign had to be motivated to create meaning. "Semiology" was not about extracting meaning as much as it was about inducing meaning. In conclusion, Saussure's "semiotic reality" meant uniting form and content (" the understandability" of an object or subject) to create what we call meaning today.

Saussure has also established the dichotomy "langue' ("language") and "parole" ("speech"), which is also a semiotically relevant matter. The explanation is as follows: "language" is an abstract concept, as it contains linguistic normativity (in order to be able to write and speak properly; thus, using standard languages), while "speech" as a phenomenon is a concrete concept, as it depends on our physical and psychological abilities to utter phonemes and morphemes (likewise, words as well). When both mentioned components combine, we reach a word, or, like I said, even a phoneme (in the sense that other scholars have called it an "act of speech").

First, the conceptualisation of terms (or, if one wishes, lexemes in a dictionary, but metaphorically speaking, other life phenomena as well) has been made by precepting them, i.e. observing phenomena (either as ready-given or newly established ones). I wish to say the following: some psychological processes must occur before speaking or writing. In conclusion, after observing a phenomenon, we mark a preparatory stage: a psychological conceiving of a word, a non-verbal act, etc., that we wish to express physically. Secondly, such a phenomenon must be cognised; in other words, its function must be disclosed. One must know what a particular phenomenon (linguistic or non-linguistic) serves. Therefore, as hopefully understood, two psychological processes occur: perception and cognition. Both processes (or "realities" in our instance), according to Saussure, contain what he used to call "language", as they both have an abstract nature (like the language normativity, as I mentioned above).

Third, phenomena, words, and non-verbal acts must become a part of a category. The term is logical (or it stems from the philosophy of language). It would depend on which category they would be a part of. Let us exemplify this. If you conceive of a "table" or "desk", you would conclude that it may be made of wood and iron, and when both combine, they enter into the housing category, for instance. Therefore, the term or concept becomes a "concrete" one. And finally, fourth: the utterance of the word "table" or "desk". Both last stages are a part of the "speech" phenomenon, which aims to enable our speech abilities.

According to Saussure, the concept of "sign" is also to be mentioned here. Unlike many structuralists of the time, Saussure based himself on the "motivation" of the sign [in the sense that I have also emphasised elsewhere; see: (Hoxha 2016)]. It means the following: a plane is passing by if we hear a loud noise. Saussure called that entity an "index". If we see the plane, it is an "icon" on the one hand, and if we say that "the plane" is something else, it is a "symbol". It all depends on the motivation component, which uses terms in a concrete act of speech. These sorts of distinctions resembled Peirce's teaching in their formal status, although it is generally known that Peirce established trichotomies for the sake of the process of signification.

Let us sum up: naturally, one cannot discuss Saussure in a few lines on one hand, but on the other, my aim is introductory and explanatory. I wish to say that Saussure not only marked the "first revolution" (as I wish to call it) in the semiotic method (above all, because of the explicit definition of practical terms) but also implicitly stated that what one seeks in semiotics (or semiology as he called it) is meaning. In Saussure's time, in conclusion, the critical issue was uniting "form" and "meaning" as his "language as a system of signs" based itself on this sort of a "dual" understanding of phenomena; a fact that later, as we hope to be able to show, has developed in other fundamental semiotic entities.

SEMIOTICS AND INTERPRETATION: ANOTHER "SEMIOTIC REALITY"

Semiotics as a discipline (or, as I wish to call it, a "methodological intervention") cannot be covered with one discussed field only. Its basic concepts are widely used within humanities, arts, or even rigorous sciences. It means that, through discoveries, semiotics has widely extended its object of analysis and domain. The following lines of this text shall try to discover such matters. It is worth noting, however, that a chronological order of such "innovations" in semiotics shall not be used in this text. The aim is to reach interpretation, which can be exemplified in artistic expression. I will use such sort of exemplification, as I consider that, in the field of arts, specifically, "signs processing and moveability" is more explicit and vivid, primarily if such arts are acted on the scene.

As I said, I have purposely singled out the two semiotic approaches in this instance, among other related issues, because one paper cannot cover them all. Let us mention but a few methods (approaches) of semiotics because of their uttermost importance regarding their theoretical comprehension in general: "biosemiotics" (the study of the "sign systems and their movement, transformability through our organic systems and biological functionality"), "educational semiotics" (the study of the signs' changeability and processing for various educative purposes), "communicational semiotics" (the study of the signs systems through processes of encoding and decoding the message), etc. The task of semiotics in these instances is obtaining

and processing meaning. Before I continue elaborating on the issue, we ask why there is such an insistence on the "meaning" component. The reason is the following, in my opinion, because of the multiple ways of interpreting it, especially in artistic expressions [see: (Eco 1989; 1962)].

As I shall attempt to explain, it differs significantly from what one calls a "semantic field" or a ready-given meaning of whichever object or subject one can be aware of. We are concerned with processing meaning, its components, and their unification so that a unit that can signify another would be created rather than the "given" one. Therefore, this fact is exclusive to normative linguistics. In other words, here, we are not concerned with what may be named "general lexemes" or "categories" as given in dictionaries but rather with the way and method of obtaining a determined meaning. The last assertion, undoubtedly, confirms a semiotic reality, or better, as hopefully shall be further seen in this text, semioticizing a determined "semiotic object" [among other related issues, see (Greimas 1973)].

If one questions similar scientific matters as mentioned above, it will be evident that semiotics' functions and practical applicability convey an essential significance in the mentioned respect. For such reasons, one has to refer to one of the founders of modern semiotics, C. S. Peirce. Differing from Saussure (we mention him for matters of comparison of what is earlier stated in this text), who conceptualised language as "sign systems", Peirce started from philosophy and logic of science [see: (Peirce 1960)]. One has to remark here that Peirce was one of those scholars who did not focus on one field only; his interest varied among more scientific fields: general philosophy, metaphysics, logic, mathematics, etc. As Peirce conceived, the logical conceptualisation of the sign notion in trichotomies was novel at his time of theoretical creativity. I shall consider here only Peirce's most significant postulates of semiotics, which I retain as necessary for the methodological purposes of the present text.

Peirce defined semiotics as "another name for formal logics" [see: (Peirce 1960)], as we mentioned above, which means juxtaposing phenomena was not the object of analysis in his "theory (like in the age of structuralism), but "something that may be said to represent or replace something else". In Peirce's terms: "a sign is something that stands for something else" [my paraphrasing].

This notion or postulate (although discovered earlier than Saussure's time) marked a shift in semiotics' methodological approach, meaning semiotics is even competent for representational issues. Let me try to exemplify the above theoretical matters.

One of the most prominent semioticians of the twentieth century, Umberto Eco, stated the following: "If I see one flower in a garden, I can imagine all missing flowers…" [my paraphrasing; see: (Eco 1968)]. Thus, something can be represented with something else. In other words, there may be something to which one can only refer. Not only does "the

white" against the "black" represent an opposition, as many of the structural representatives might have presupposed, but also a "third" component comes into existence: something that in Peirce's time was named "interpretant". It is worth noting, therefore, that semiotics' role becomes different from what was conceptualised during "the linguistic turn". It is clear now, as we hope, as also Eco claims, that there is something called "interpretative semiotics" [see: (Eco 2001)].

The reason for the complexity mentioned above (or another viewing of "semiotic objects") is the following: except for the proposed components under discussion, interpretation means "shaping" a meaning. Therefore, the definition changes in the following respect: "Semiotics is a science for the cognitive interpretation of meaning".

The reason for mentioning Peirce's concepts in the present text is simple: the concept of the metaphor, for instance, is seen as a result of deduction or extracting meaning. How would one suggest how to comment upon determined artistic creations if not by referring to an element which might be referential, "hidden", and not immediately visible or noticed (by) to the reader, viewer, or spectator? Naturally, these questions cannot be posed only in terms of humanities and arts but in other life spheres as well.

Let me give just one example here. If Shakespeare's Othello was a Moor, then it is his firstness, as Peirce says. Except for being a general and having a "victorious spirit, he is tricked by Iago (his "secondness", as Peirce says), so disrupting and humiliating his army rank status. He further gains a "thirdness" and becomes jealous because of the false argument, thus psychologically and physically destroying his wife.

Interpretation as a Transformability of Signs into a "Semiotic Reality"

The term "interpretation", as one would rightly suppose, stems from philosophy. It refers to paraphrasing, changeability, and emanating more than one "truth" [such as can be instanced in: (Goldman 1986)]. The term naturally emerged from ancient times, and we do not see a necessity to explain it here. It referred, obviously, to "commenting upon" "re-shaping" of diverse "truths", as not only one "truth" is realistic and observable in philosophy, in general.

For instance, one would think of having an "imagined truth" or a "fictive reality", as Eco claimed. The aim of semiotics in Eco's understanding is to disclose the "enigma" [as I have stated elsewhere, see:(Hoxha 2022)]. To conclude this part of the explication, I will exemplify the following. How would one conceive of the constant "echoing" of the caves in Foster's "A Passage to India"? Was this an ongoing process for the author while narrating the "story" so that relations between the colonisers and the colonised could be better explained to the audience? How would one then conceptualise Eco's "The Name of the Rose" [see: (Eco 1980)] if one did not have a previous context of Middle Ages societies and interactional processes within?

Umberto Eco otherwise "took up" specific Peirce's categories, as generally known, and defined the "sign" by explicating the encoding and decoding processes. In 1976, [see: (Eco 1976; 1975)], he thoroughly described the mentioned processes and demonstrated their "linkage" with rigorous sciences. However, one question can be posed in this context: how should one interconnect this with human emotionality, behaviour, and, after all, inter-human relationships? The last question, as hopefully obvious, drives us to the interpretation process, or better expressed, to the semiotic understanding of various acts of speech, which may exceed a mathematical exactness. Let us attempt to explain this situation.

If in Eco, for instance, there is a comparison between informational processes and human relationships, it means that he wanted to show how such a model has been "hired" to express both sides of the process of signification: the "source" and "destination". Second, all occurrences cannot be "unified" (or be a part of semiosis) within their precision only. Eco's work (1976) anticipated and determined later semiotic understandings of the "transformability and processing of signs" in semiotics.

If one speaks of "emotionality" (as, let us say, a finalised expressivity in the arts), then it should be clear that the ongoing processes (e.g. biological and psychological, regarding human social functionality) occur in our inner organic functionality to create artistic realities. For this reason, I have mentioned the term "transformation" in the title of this text. Greimas, among other related authors, [see:(Greimas 1973)] founded a theory highly applicable in the arts field precisely due to such imprecision in conceiving semiotic phenomena. Then, one asks how we create a "semiotic reality" in such a context.

Let me give some examples. If "love" between Romeo and Juliet is evident to the audience as described by the author, one asks: is exactly such love that cannot become a reality the topic of the tragedy? The truth is the contrary: the story's main topic is hatred and intolerance among the families concerned. Such passions, which gradually become evident in the play, can demonstrate a "transformation" in the frames of the processing of the signs from one to another protagonist of the "story narrated". We further ask: in what way? Since "a wanted love cannot become a reality", which is evident over the developmental stages of the tragedy, one concludes that another "narrated story" is at hand: that of the animosities and intrigues stemming from various protagonists. In conclusion, the signs become movable, transformable: it thus marks another sort of "semiotic reality".

Greimas and Fontanille [see: (Greimas and Fontanille 1993) have founded the "semiotics of passion". They speak of a "semiotics of action". In my opinion, it is the instance when the "subject" becomes movable and transformable in semiotics through the modalities of Being and Doing. Deducible "passions" result from the "action" itself and, thus, become visible and explicit. One cannot, therefore, immediately see or cognise the passions or "passional configurations" (as Greimas and Fontanille would claim), but they come gradually due to the transforming processes of the chains of trajectories of obtaining meaning.

Semiotics' paradigms have gradually developed, primarily from psychology, philosophy, biology, and linguistics as their primary grounds. An article like the present one cannot elaborate on all of them, as their in-depth study necessitates other "scientific objects" which cannot instantly be covered. Otherwise, we hope this paper asserts that the making, producing, and generating of meaning as final results can contribute to a future general paradigm of the semiotic method.

CONCLUSION

This text aimed to demonstrate what a "semiotic reality" means. The truth is, as hopefully noted that there is not only one semiotic reality opposed to the social surroundings of the "stories lived" in comparison to the "stories told" [see: (Griffin 2003)]. There may exist more than one such reality.

Second, a semiotically conceptualised reality cannot be reached at once or just by one positioning of the "semiotic objects" and tools. Stated differently: determined procedures and paradigms have to be followed. Be it "transformation" in Greimas [see: (Greimas 1973)] or "transcendence" in Tarasti [see:(Tarasti 2000)], it entails a change in movement. In other words, a finalised meaning is not a final meaning in semiotics. On the one hand, it confirms the limitlessness of interpretation, but on the other, it confirms the optionality of choice in semiotics. Semioticians' task, in this instance, is the choice, which means "a newly found meaning" or disclosing a brand new "semiotic reality" through signification. The aim is to stop the chain(s) of interpretation for the sake of having semantic results.

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