

QUALITATIVE EXTENSIONS AND LIMITS OF SEMIOTICS

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Abstract

Semiotics is considered a discipline including in its investigation field the language (languages) and the signification/communication practices as social manifestations. Along the time, different definitions have been provided for this discipline, all attempting at discussing its epistemic horizons, its qualitative extensions and limitations. Most of the attempts made at defining the domain of semiotics came from the part of the philosophy of language, of logic and linguistics. In spite of this, semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok asserts that the roots of semiotics are actually in medicine, once Hypocrates (460-377 b.Chr.), considered as the founder of Western medical science, was among the first ones to make use of the science of signs when studying the symptoms of the sick. However, subsequent investigations devoted to this domain will separate the concept of symptom from that of sign, bringing closer to semiotics especially the latter one. It was only during the Renaissance that philosophers such as Rene Descartes, John Locke, G.W. Leibnitz, Immanuel Kant, G.W.F. Hegel will include the concept of sign in their philosophical systems, from logic and epistemology to the theory of knowledge and metaphysics.

Out of the recent researches, the approach of the Italian scientist Umberto Eco appears as especially relevant. In his opinion, general semiotics (the one including in its investigation domain semiology, as well) should accept in its terminology a theory of codes and a theory of the production of signs. In his attempt at establishing the statute of semiotics (in a didactic manner), Umberto Eco reveals the two situations in which it may occur, namely: a) as a discipline and b) as a research field. Further on, the Italian scientist develops his concepts by considering semiotics as a domain (field) which has still to delimitate its authentic structure.

Keywords: *Semiotics, semiology, significance, semiosis, communication, culture, methodology, interpretation, empirical approach.*

In the attempt made at evidencing the characteristics of a semiotic investigation, the observation made, in most of the cases, was that any domain records – as a result of the application of certain investigation methods – its own virtues and limits. In this respect, discussed in the following will be the six fundamental functions of the act of rendering significance, in parallels

with a critical analysis of the limits of the field. This approach will permit a further inquiry on certain models and methods of semiotic exegesis, to be applied in the analysis of postmodern poetic language.

In spite of the attempts made at establishing the horizons of the semiotic domain, the science whose object is to interpret the *signs of life*¹, even if apparently a young one, due to the terminological configurations developed in the last century, in spite of having a more than a 2 thousand year-old *catalogue*, is still viewed as an open science, *which seems not yet well-organized*² or which, on the contrary, registers successful trials of revalidating old theories within a new epistemological milieu.³ It is nevertheless undoubtful that the actual attempts made by Ch. Morris place semiotics in a double relation with the other sciences. Thus, on one side, semiotics appears as a science among the other sciences and, on the other, as a science in itself, perfectly capable of providing instruments of scientific investigation.⁴

The six essential functions of the action of rendering significance are discussed and developed by the Romanian semiotician Traian D. Stănculescu⁵, in his study *La început a fost semnul. O altă introducere în semiotică*, in which he evidences, on one side, the main controversies about the actual conditions of semiotics, and its degree of application upon the *signs of life*, on the other.

1. The function of semantic representation.

Unlike the other species, which only send *signs of life*, the human being, due to its capacity of creating and understanding signs, of communicating by the two separated, yet combined semic registers: the non-verbal language, inherited from his ancestors, the

mammals – especially primates – and the verbal language, known as exclusively human,⁶ as well as a result of his intelligence, possesses creative competencies, by which he can present and define, in a meaningful manner, certain things and events of his life. In this respect, Traian D. Stănculescu suggests that involved here are only “some peculiar significances of *thinking without language, the symbolic or semiotic function* being absolutely necessary for differentiating between *consumable* (food, shelter etc.), and *communicable matters* (tools, gestures, sounds, figures, words)”.⁷

The most precious human virtue, that of thinking, of being rational, situates humans above all animals as, comparatively with them, human beings have acquired the capacity of giving meaning either to the intimate or external world, thus launching various messages in the *cultural-social* space. In this respect, in one of his famous treatises, Henri Wald observes that “man is the first being satisfied not only with the *assimilation* of nature, he even initiates its *change*. Animals cannot transform into *objects* the centers of resistance to which their impulses have to face. For animals, no difference exists between *object* and *subject* as, being devoid of language, they cannot distinguish between space and time. For any animal, a modified object is *another* object. Animals are capable of spacial tours, but not of temporal endurance. Their intelligence does not permit them to grasp the time and to discover what remains constant in the variability of an object”.⁸ Considering all these, one may assert that the occurrence of signs, as a result of understanding the events of the world, represents the moment of shifting from the animalic stage to that of *homo significans*.

This new quality enables humans to develop voluntary (as well as involuntary, in cases of accidents) signs within their community, of generating semiotic situations of communication. John Deely clearly outlined that “our whole experience, from its simplest sensorial origins, up to the loftiest achievements of intelligent understanding appears as a network of relations among signs (...) an interpretative structure mediated by signs and substantiated on it”.⁹ Making use of a largely accessible terminology, we can assert that, once the human being has been capable of generating signs (semioses), *he*

was also capable of using them in an implicit or explicit situation of communication. To conclude with, the assertion may be made that *human performance – in all its forms – is the result of the human ability to generate and efficiently utilize signs, to operate semiotically,¹⁰ to change messages within a situation of communication.* In this respect, worth mentioning is that “the object of semiotics, as frequently asserted, is the change of messages – namely: *communication*. Equally, one should add here that semiotics is prioritarily concerned with the study of *significance*”.¹¹

2. The function of cultural significance of nature. In this context, a comprehensive definition is given by Traian D. Stănculescu, who outlines that man, once having learned to transpose the objects of the world into signs, acquired a cultural meaning of nature. In his attempts at giving meaning to the objects of nature, man made use of *language*. The Romanian specialist evidences that no human achievements related to processes of giving significance could have appeared in the absence of a related process of significance and communication, namely in the absence of language, be it an inner (the implicit language, which he ignores), or an explicit language, externalized by means of distinctly uttered words (verbal language), gestures, plastic or musical representations (the non-verbal language).¹²

3. The function of creative significance. This function is explicitly defined by the *power* of the (verbal) language of generating, due to its (acquired) *creativity*, systems of signs. By means of the (verbal) language, humans give significance to the objects of the world, this process of *name-giving*, i.e. a (verbal) significance-giving process occurring within several forms of discourse, such as the literary-artistic, philosophic or technico-scientific one. Traian D. Stănculescu also asserts that the creative dimension of the (verbal) language may be discovered in the following situations: a) when assuring shifting from image to imaginary, from nature to its significance, from biological to psychic, from the consciousness of representation to the consciousness of (re) significance; b) by the creative dimension of the (verbal) language the human being responds to the creative need of giving a prime name to the

objects (of the world); c) the function of creative significance satisfies the social need of linguistic communication, of storing and transmitting the spiritual (cultural) values created by mankind along the centuries, and d) permits to the humans that, by the versed force of the language, viewed as an essential instrument of culture, to oppose the entropic tendencies (of dis-organization and uniformization) of nature, thus contributing to its and their own *creative* transformation.¹³

4. The cognitive function is the semiotic virtue showing that man has discovered that *the world can (must) be assumed in relation with its signs* by means of a coherent reading of decodification and interpretation. In most cases, in the attempt made at understanding certain expressions of the (natural) world, man was confronted with the unforeseeable and with the transcendental, which explains why he raised this function at the level of *sacred knowledge*. In this respect, we come to understand that it is only the *selected ones* that may interpret the *signs of the transcendental* or the *signs of light*. The effect manifested in the primitives shows that, in the process of knowing the *essence* of the world, they begin from phenomenal aspects. This explains why, for either the theologian or the common Christian, the possibility to know God, the transcendental, involves the encounter with His *signs* (wonders or the signs of light God sends to us). On the other side, by its cognitive function, semiotics offers information to the primitive person, whereas today, due to the development of the systems for understanding the phenomena surrounding him, the modern human has in himself the power to provide information, namely to give meaning to things. Starting from this aspect, Gabriel Liiceanu asserts that "we are not any longer in-formed, instead it is us that in-form the world of objects; we are moving inside our own universe of forms and, by describing things, we are actually describing the form of our own activity. We come to know the world with what we are putting into it; therefore, we come to know it humanly".¹⁴

5. The unifying function is the semiotic virtue permitting a comparison of the main types of discourse, by means of which people attempt at assuming the realities (magic, mitico-ritualic,

religious, philosophic, scientific, aesthetic etc.) of the world. Thus, Traian D. Stănculescu, considering the tendencies of the new millenium, believes that intersection of languages for establishing the methodical horizons of contemporary semiotics is possible. Thus, the new, unifying semiotics (including other specific semiotics, such as linguistics or astral semiology) may participate to *building a new image about the world* (including here either concrete or virtual images). As anyone knows by now, and we should all admit this, the man of the new millenium lives in both dimensions, using the same communication and signification means. In his opinion, reality means to accept the existence as a sum between the virtual and the concrete). That is why, the scientist associates to semiotics some other attributes:¹⁵ a) the quality of being at the same time *study of signs and of interpretative processes*;¹⁶ b) the possibility to operate at the level of *interdisciplinary knowledge*, appearing as a space in which various opinions about the signs of the world meet; c) propensity towards *transdisciplinary analysis*, by retrieving some paradigmatic concepts and their deep meanings.

On the other side, the unifying status of the *new semiotic discipline*, occurring in a relation of complementarity with logics and hermeneutics, apart from being a theory studying *codes* or the *production of signs*,¹⁷ makes semiotics an authentic organon, a *method*¹⁸ of unitary reading of the signs specific to various categories of languages. Such a theory, possessing this type of methodic apparatus, applicable to numerous types of discourse, becomes a general theory. In this respect, Eco shows that "a general semiotic theory should be considered *powerful* to the extent to which it succeeds in offering an adequate formal definition to any type of function-sign, be it coded, codifying or liable to codification".¹⁹

The above considerations evidence the three fundamental elements of the semiotic domain, namely: a) general semiotics, b) specific semiotics and c) applied semiotics.²⁰

In relation with the first element, one should mention its effort of evidencing the relations developed among the various above-mentioned types of languages. By analyzing the conditions of knowledge, similarly with logic or epistemology, general semiotics evidences

systems of values according to which we make classifications and judgements. On the other side, it has been demonstrated that general semiotics is related to the philosophy of language, individual psychology, psychology of perception, social psychology, sociology, linguistics, etc., once it offers and utilizes common investigation tools. However, this does not mean that general semiotics is absorbed by these disciplines, but that it rather attempts at establishing a type of communication among these domains of interest, normally separated, and at offering to them a unifying language.

As to particular semiotics, the first observation to be made is that it is represented by the so-called *specific semiotics*. Each of these show, in their specific manner, the rules which determine functioning of a *language*, viewed as distinct from the others by the autonomy of its description. Particular semiotics may attain a precision level quite close to that of exact sciences, as in the case of linguistics, which provides support for the analysis of the text of the uttered, written or heard language. The two domains of analysis: syntactic and semantic, support this hypothesis. The father of linguistics, F. de Saussure, appreciated that linguistics is a semiotics, among others, outlining that the laws to be discovered by semiology (semiotics) will be applied to linguistics: "the language is a system of signs which expresses ideas and, in this way, is compatible with writing, with the alphabet of the deaf-and-dumb ones, with the symbolic rites, with the politeness formulae, with the military signs, etc. However, it remains the most important among all these systems. Therefore, one may think of the creation of a *science studying the life of signs in the social life*, appearing as a part of social psychology and, consequently, of general psychology; it will be called *semiology*. It would teach us the meaning of signs and the laws of their functioning. (...) Linguistics is but a part of this general science; the laws to be discovered by semiology will be applicable to linguistics, so that this will come to be related to a well-defined domain in the general milieu of the human actions".²¹

As to the latest type of semiotics (applied semiotics), identified in relation with the unifying function of the domain, we believe that it is applied to certain peculiar objects or domains.

Consequently, applied semiotics may have practical objectives, such as familiarization with journalistic writing, establishment of efficient secret codes, of communication systems or automated translation. The relation among these three semiotic levels had in view is a *unifying one*, supporting *deciphering and understanding* of the new ontological horizons.

Starting from the new attributes of semiotics (that of being a *theory of signs*, as well as a *method of reading*), contemporary researchers show that two perspectives define their complementarity: a) *the centripetic perspective*, defined as the unifying aspiration of semiotics, mainly in its theoretical quality; and b) *the centrifugal perspective*, detached from the recent involvement of semiotic methodology for investigating and redefining some specific domains, such as zoosemiotics, phytosemiotics, physicosemiotics, etc. From this perspective, Ch. Peirce – the creator of modern semiotics – offers a pan-semiotic, integrating, unifying approach of the domain studying the *signs of life*. He also observes: "I could never study anything, whichever would it be – mathematics, morals, metaphysics, gravitation, thermodynamics, optics, chemistry, comparative anatomy, astronomy, psychology, phonetics, economy, history of sciences, whist, the man-woman relation, wines, metrology – but as a study of semiotics".²²

6. The instrumental-methodological function shows openly that the representatives of all new types of cognitive discourse about the world operate with the *instrumens of semiotics*.²³ In this respect, the physician interprets the signs (symptoms) for curing the disease of a patient, the theologian makes use of the signs of divine revelation for rendering his religious conception accepted, physicists, chemists and cosmologists interpret with the semiotic apparatus the messages of the universe for establishing the causes-laws on whose basis they operate, the psychoanalyst investigates the symbolic dreams or the irrelevant actions of the human subject for entering his unconscious side, the sociologist analyzes the different categories of indices for revealing one or another tendency of social evolution, the journalist resorts to the inquiry method or asks questions for understanding an event he has to make known, the ethnologist, the hermeneute and the

anthropologist interpret the symbolistics of the myth for understanding the cultural beginnings of humankind, etc. All these types of discourses form the universe of (creative) culture.

Apart from the virtues of semiotics, mention should be also made of its limits, which created disputes related to the *unifying* status of contemporary semiotics. Many of the disputes referring to the motivations of the semiotic domain involve concepts which define semiotics as an independent science. There exist pro and contra opinions, both on the horizon of the theory (the science of semiotics), and on that of methodology (the science of semiotics as a working method for other sciences).

With reference to the status of semiotics, Umberto Eco, the famous Italian semiotician, who laid the foundations of literary semiotics in Italy, evidenced that any investigation on the limits and laws of semiotics should begin with establishing whether semiotics is a *specific discipline*, with a well-established method and object - or whether semiotics is a *domain of research*, whose concerns are not fully unified, at least for now. He also draws the attention that "if semiotics is a domain of preoccupations, in such a case the different semiotic studies performed are justified by their very existence, so that a definition of the semiotic discipline might be possible inductively, by extracting from a series of constant tendencies a unified model of research. If semiotics is a discipline, then the model should be established by deduction, being used as a parameter on which inclusion or exclusion of various types of investigation in or from the domain of semiotics should be based".²⁴ As a matter of fact, what Eco asserts here is that semiotics appears equally as a theoretical discipline and as an applicative domain.

However, even prior to Eco, Ferdinand de Saussure, in his attempts made at analyzing the language, will propose a *semiology* whose scope is to offer valuable arguments, on the basis of some valid theories. To know the specific character of each system of signs we may "create a science for studying the life of signs within the social life (...) which we shall call *semiology*. (...) The linguistic problem is first of all a semiological one".²⁵ Even if "the domain and the limits of semiotics are not known,²⁶ Charles Morris

asserted, much time before, that this discipline serves as an *instrument of scientific investigation*, appearing, on the whole, as a methodological structure. Morris has understood that semiotics, as a science, is a discourse about other sciences, a description situated, due to its generality, above other sciences, and also that, as an instrument of scientific investigation, it will acquire the characteristics of a method. In this way, semiotics may be considered as a metascience.

Another dispute about semiotics refers to its object of study. In the opinion of Solomon Marcus, this starts from the idea that "semiotics is everywhere, which does not mean that all is semiotics".²⁷ According to him, the object is directly capable of referring to objects different from it, especially if it has several lateral meanings, while, indirectly, the object is capable to be coupled to several different objects which it describes as a sign. Starting from this idea of Solomon Marcus, Traian D. Stănculescu will conclude that this double hypostasis of the object, on one side, generator of signs and, on the other, beneficiary of the processes of significance, enriches "the world with virtual meanings, making it a significant or possibly significant world. For the real manifestation of such possibilities, the presence of a conscious, signifying instance seems absolutely necessary. In the absence of such a consciousness, capable of giving to the objects of the world their suitable meaning, no one could speak of either significance or sign".²⁸ Further on, Tr. Stănculescu will analyze the relation between *phenomenon and essence*, showing that any object of the world assumes two structural components, namely: a) a phenomenal, visible side, also defined as *of surface* and b) an essential, invisible one, also known as *of deepness*. Starting from here we may say that the *surface side* "stands for" (*i.e.* it is *sign* of) "something else" (the *deep side*), in the case that "someone" (the human interpreter) wants to interpret it. The conclusion to be reached from here is that "all objects of the world are virtual signs, respectively potentially significant realities".²⁹ The same idea appears with Umberto Eco for whom a sign (object of semiotics - from the theory of codes) is always an element of a *plan of expression*, conventionally correlated with

one (or more) elements of a *plan of content*.³⁰ Starting from this relation, the Italian semiotician establishes definitely the object of study of semiotics, appreciating that "semiotics permits us to catch sight of a sort of molecular passage, in which what we are accustomed to recognize as daily forms is actually the result of some transient chemical combinations, whereas the so-called *things* constitute an apparent subadjacent network of elementary units. Or, if you want, semiotics might be a sort of photomechanical explanation of semiosis, revealing us that, where we believe we see images, there actually exist strategic arrangements of white and black points, as well as alternating filled and void spaces".³¹

Another polemic approach about semiotics hints at its statute. In this respect, researchers ask themselves whether semiotics is a social science or a science of nature. Obviously, the opinions are different, however, in most cases, they discuss the social side of semiotics, putting forward the hypothesis that semiotics is a science about humans. Thus, the linguistic Schools of Prague and Copenhagen, as well as the representatives of the School of Tatu agree that, once it investigates the (verbal – human) language within various systems of signs, semiotics or semiology is a *science about humans*. According to Lotman, a semanticist preoccupied with the analysis of cultural signs (namely of the systemic relations developed among people), semiotics, as a science about man, studies the language as a *primary signifying system of signs*, along with the *secondary signifying systems of signs* which include the semiologic systems of culture (myths, religion, taken as a whole, philosophy and poetry, science).³²

On the other side, other scientists assert that semiotics is a science of nature, as demonstrated by the fact that even animals communicate through different channels and environmental combinations. In this respect, a significant contribution is brought by T. A. Sebeok, for whom any biological form may organize issuing of messages, signals, which appear not only as an object of research for the sciences of nature, such as biology, chemistry, anthropology, but also for semiotics. This also supports the idea that semiotics is first of all a science of nature

which makes use of the human sciences for decodifying *the signs of life*. In my opinion, however, I think that the scientist is more close to an integrating theory of social and natural semiotics, a theory of the "essential units".³³ Thomas A. Sebeok states that the living beings "communicate through different channels or environmental combinations. Any form of energy programming may be practically exploited for transmitting messages (...) Once known that, in human communication, issuing and receiving of sounds are omnipresent, the rare situation of the presence of sound in the more ample scheme of the biological existence might appear as surprising. As a matter of fact, most of the animals are both deaf and dumb. The real utilization and the functional production of sounds are prevailing – yet without being ever universal – only in the two most advanced types (*phyla*): the invertebrate Arthropoda and the vertebrate Cordates (a category to which the humans belong, as well)".³⁴

Another perspective on semiotics viewed as a science of nature is that of Stéphane Lupasco, who considers that, if the human being is the *holographic measure* of both macro- and microcosmos, appearing as a complex synthesis of the *three matters* (physical, biological and psychic), there results that the structure and functionality of an investigative dimension of the human being (the physical one) is also observing the principles of research of the sciences of nature.³⁵ As a matter of fact, the terminology of Basarab Nicolescu permits the observation that the vision of Lupasco is an integrating one, bringing together the two semiotic domains, therefore a transdisciplinary one, in which semiotics appears equally as a social science and as a science of cosmic and human nature. Therefore, the collaboration between the humanistic disciplines is more and more necessary. In this context, Doroszewski recommends to give up *doctrinary* isolation: "all (so-called) *humaniora* branches are intermingling. The doctrine of Saussure, having so largely influenced linguistics, owes its impetus to certain notions elaborated in the fields of sociology, philosophy and psychology. In spite of the diversity of its departments, not only that linguistics remains unitary, but *man himself*

is unitary and all sciences which study the human being converge towards a single scope and are to face the same problems. That is why, giving up isolation becomes more and more necessary".³⁶

In recent years, several researchers discuss about *semiotic imperialism*, asserting that, by its character of metadiscipline and as a general method for the investigation of any reality in which signs may be manifested, semiotics acquires a fundamental role in the development of many secondary disciplines possessing, as well as linguistics, *vocation towards universality*.³⁷ However, the *semiotic imperialism* should not be viewed in nihilistic terms, as semiotics does not take over, in a glaring manner, the methodology of some disciplines but, on the contrary, it provides to them analytical support, a structure for the *interpretation* of life or of the *signals of life*. In the terms of Deely, it may be asserted that semiotics offers open perspectives for any scientific approach, the more so if their object of investigation is the human life and the *signs* which come into contact with the man, being a discipline contributing not only to the *understanding-decoding* of the forms of culture but also supporting people, by means of its methods, to *realize-codify* the possible cultural strategies. Considered as a whole, semiotics is the science about life, concomitantly belonging to humans (science as a science), and to nature, developing its area of investigation within the social field, evidencing a natural behaviour, "offering a large perspective upon the entire experience by means of its own experience. Once this aspect is understood, it becomes the first among the sciences, not simply one out of many, as predicted by traditional metaphysics while, as a *doctrine*, it opposes to *scientia*, and what is primordial in understanding opposes to what is determined by it".³⁸

A comprehensive vision on semiotics is provided by Hjelmslev, who suggests that such a science might contribute not only to a better knowledge of reality, but also of the elements to be possibly encountered. Consequently, semiotics offers opportunities for a scientific approach for the investigators of both human phenomena and poetic character of reality. As a matter of fact, Hjelmslev brings fundamental contributions to literary semiotics, demonstrating the existence of

a certain compatibility between humanistic disciplines and scientific analysis. The maxim that asserts that humanistic disciplines should utilize the epistemological apparatus of metascience is well-known: "It appears as indisputable that, as long as the humanist sciences will not consider such a theory as a working hypothesis, they will disregard the most important aspect of their mission, that of making humanism an object of knowledge. One should realize that, in describing humanistic phenomena, one has to choose between poetics and science; or, on one side, only between the poetic approach and, on the other, between the poetic attitude and the scientific attitude, viewed as two coordinated forms of description; one should also have in view that, at this level, selection depends on the control of the system laying at the basis of the process".³⁹

Describing the background of semiotics as an *organon* among sciences, Charles W. Morris simply demonstrates that semiotics is situated at the highest level, as the object-sciences included in its epistemological field consume their specific modalities of systematization of signs. In this respect, the American philosopher considers that *semiotics is the milieu within which the equivalent elements of the old trivium: logic, grammar and rhetorics meet*. Morris shows that expansion of the semiotic theory towards specific (singular) sciences represents a stage in the process of scientific globalization. The novelty brought about by this *metascience* is that, by its methods, it *reinterprets* in *semiotic terms* the formal sciences and the empirical sciences. In the opinion of Morris, unification is possible, as many of the sciences integrated into the semiotic domain made themselves use of semiotic methodologies and instruments.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, I should end the above dispute around the *organonic* status of semiotics with a reply given by the Italian semiotician Marcelo Paginini to Marin Mincu, in an interview realized in the early 80'ies. Discussing the future of semiotics, the Italian scientist asserts: "we are still running through a stage of profound study and establishment of the vast problems opened by the foundation of semiotics as a science. Its subsequent developments will be determined, as it is usually the case, by the critics made to the

system and by the resulting restructuring actions for theoretical thinking". Further on, the Italian scientist, former teacher of English language and literature at the University of Florence (Magistero) leaves the *skin* of the dreamer and analyzes the actuality of the semiotic domain, outlining the idea that semiotics "deals with cultural, literary and extraliterary *systems*, to which the complexity of the text is ascribed. Obviously, some of these literary systems are constituted of *genders*. Study of an work in relation with genders creates the opportunity for conformity, for innovation (and even for *destruction*: a denied gender still remains present, *in absentia*)".⁴¹

Umberto Eco recognizes that, in its progress towards becoming a comprehensive discipline, semiotics risks to knock against certain borders, meant simply at evidencing the *limits* of semiotics (related to interpretation). According to Eco, these limits can be divided into *political limits*, *natural limits* and *limits of epistemological nature*.⁴²

The *political limits* are of three types: a) *academic*, when other (specific) disciplines have developed or are developing investigations upon topics which semiotics takes upon itself; in this respect, several examples can be provided: formal logic, logic of the natural languages, philosophical semantics analyze – in the opinion of Eco – the truthfulness of propositions and of various types of so-called *acts of speaking*, while other currents from the anthropology of culture perform the same job, yet from a different angle; in this respect, the Milanese semiotician evidences that general semiotics should take upon itself the results of these disciplines in a specific manner, so that each of them will be recognized as a branch of semiotics; at present, what semiotics can perform is to *reinterpret* and *redefine* the results of these disciplines *versus* its own theoretical susyem; b) there exist *cooperation limits* related to the fact that different disciplines have elaborated theories and descriptions which anyone would recognize as typically of semiotic nature. In this context, mention should be made of disciplines like linguistics and the theory of information, which developed the notion of *code*, kinesics and proxemics, etc. Eco indicates that a general semiotics should recognize the semiotic nature of these categories and propose a unified body of categories capable of facilitating a fruitful

cooperation and of eliminating the classical habit of translating categories of linguistic into different systems of reference. In other words, a unified code of concepts and categories is proposed; c) the last subcategory of political limits refers to the *empirical* ones, those putting into evidence the existence of some groups of phenomena whose semiotic relevance is self-evident, which means that they can be *interpreted* by means of the semiotic apparatus, with the only observation, however, that the semiotic approaches attempted up to now gave no relevant results. Eco asserts that these empirical limits are vague and get modified as new investigations are in course.

By *natural limits*, the Italian semiotician understands the limits which semiotic research cannot exceed as, in such a case, it would enter a nonsemiotic space, where phenomena which cannot be grasped as functions-sign occur. In this respect, the semiotic justification loses control upon metaphysics or religions, domains for which the human being feels the need to recognize the presence of some codes – see the case of the smoke which does not function as a sign of fire if/when the fire is perceived together with the smoke, however it may signify a non-visible fire in situations in which a socialized rule has necessarily and usually associated the smoke with the fire.

The third threshold of semiotics, referring to *epistemological limits*,⁴³ does not involve the definition given to semiotics, but the definition given to the theoretical *purity* of the discipline. Umberto Eco states that semiotics should ask questions both upon its object of research and upon the categories with which it operates, making thus known that it is an abstract theory on the competence of a producer of signs or that it can or cannot support, to the highest extent, the study of the social phenomena subjected to mutations and restructuring actions. "According to the theory of codes and of the production of signs (...) it becomes obvious that any semiotic approach is governed by a sort of *indetermination principle*: as to *signify* and *to communicate* are social functions which determine the social organization and evolution, *to speak* about *speaking*, to signify the significance or to communicate about communication can but influence the universe of speaking, of signifying,

of communicating actions. (...) If semiotics is a theory, it goes without saying that, in the actual perspective, it appears as a theory which should permit a continuous critical intervention in phenomena of semiosis".⁴⁴ The author does hope that, by discussing the spaces and limits of semiotics, its paradoxes, as well as the openings it may produce for assuring the continuous development of the domain, have been evidenced.

Endnotes

1. Victoria College, *Introducere: Thomas A. Sebeok și știința semnelor*, preface to T. A. Sebeok, *Semnele: o introducere în semiotică*, ed. cit., p. 14.
2. Roland Barthes, *Systeme de la mode*, Seuil, Paris, 1967, p. 217. Barthes was the first to propose the term of *translinguistics* for defining the semiotics which combines various types of approaches in the study of literature. In the opinion of Barthes, semiotics studies the *discourse whose substance is the natural language*. On the other side, this is also the object of *translinguistics*, from where there results that, for Barthes, the two terms are not situated in different relations, appearing first as synonyms. However, the linguist will re-analyze the terminology and will make a distinction between linguistics and translinguistics, so that, finally, he will introduce the criterion of the investigated object, namely: linguistics explores the text, while translinguistics explores the discourse.
3. Maria Carpov, *op. cit.* p. 12.
4. Ch. Morris, *Foundation of the Theory Signs*, The University of Chicago Press, 1938, p. 2. Morris asserts that, in its quality of science of signs, which offers an instrument of investigation for other sciences, as well, semiotics, actually a *metascience*, assumes studies at three levels, corresponding to the three dimensions of semiosis, namely: syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.
5. Traian D. Stănculescu, *La început a fost semnul. O altă introducere în semiotică*, cit. vol., p. 189-197.
6. Thomas A. Sebeok, *op.cit.*, p. 49.
7. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190, apud Traian D. Stănculescu, *Limbajul verbal de la competență la performanță*, în Vitalie Belous et al., *Performantica – inferențe, sinergii, confluente*, Performantica Publishing House, Iași, 1996, p. 34-38.
8. Henri Wald, *Homo significans*, Romanian Encyclopedic Publishing House, București, 1970, p. 7.
9. John Deely, *Bazele semioticii*, translated into Romanian by Mariana Neț, All Publishing House, București, 1997, p. 5-11.
10. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 191.
11. Thomas A. Sebeok, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
12. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 191-192.
13. *Idem*, p. 193.
14. Gabriel Liiceanu, *Om și simbol*, Humanitas Publishing House, București, 2005, p. 93-94.
15. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 195.
16. *Ibidem*, apud Oswald Ducrot, Jean-Marie Schaeffer, *Noul dicționar enciclopedic al științelor limbajului*, Babel Publishing House, București, 1996.
17. Umberto Eco, *O teorie a semioticii*, ed. cit., pp. 16-19.
18. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op.cit.*, p. 195.
19. Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*, p. 17.
20. A more detailed presentation of these types of semiotics is provided by Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, in his *Inițiere în semiotică generală*, translated into Romanian by Maria Mureșanu Ionescu, Publishing House of the European Institute, Iași, 2004, chapter *Perspective la nivelul studiului*, pp. 22-27.
21. Ferdinand de Saussure, *Curs de lingvistică generală*, ed. cit., p. 41.
22. Charles Peirce, *Écrits sur le signe*, traduits et commentés par Gérard Deladalle, Éditions du Seuil, Paris, 1978.
23. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197.
24. Umberto Eco, *O teorie a semioticii*, ed. cit., p. 21.
25. Ferdinand de Saussure, *op. cit.*, p. 41-42.
26. Gheorghe Ivănescu, *Domeniul și limitele semanticii*, în I. Coteanu, L. Wald (coord.), *Semantică și semiotică*, Ed. Științifică și Enciclopedică, București, 1981, p. 8 5.
27. Solomon Marcus, *Semnificație și comunicare în lumea contemporană*, Ed. Politică, București, 1985, p. 7.
28. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 203.
29. *Idem*, p. 205.
30. Umberto Eco, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
31. *Idem*, p. 78.
32. Juri Lotman, *Studii de tipologie a culturii*, translated into Romanian by Radu Nicolau, Univers Publishing House, București, 1974.
33. Traian D. Stănculescu, *op. cit.*, p. 206.
34. Thomas A. Sebeok, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
35. Ștephan Lupasco, *L'homme et ses trois éthiques*, avec la collaboratuin de Solange de Mailly et Basarab Nicolescu, Le Rocher, Paris, 1986, *apud* Traian D. Stănculescu, *op.cit.*, p. 206.
36. W. Doroszewski, *Quelques remarques sur les rapports de la sociologie et de la linguistique. E. Durkheim et F. de Saussure*, in *Essais sur le langage*, Minuit, Paris, 1969, pp. 108-109.
37. Algirdas-Julien Greimas, *Considerații asupra limbajului*, în *Despre sens*, translated into Romanian by Maria Carpov, Univers Publishing House, București, 1975, p. 33.
38. John Deely, *Bazele semioticii*, ed. cit., p. 58.
39. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolégomènes à une théorie du langage*, Minuit, Pariss, 1963, pp. 16-17.
40. Charles W. Morris, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-59
41. Marin Mincu, *Semiotica literară italiană*, ed. cit., pp. 147-148.
42. Umberto Eco, *Tratat de semiotică generală*, ed. cit., pp. 16-17.
43. Umberto Eco, *O teorie a semioticii*, ed. cit., pp. 52-54.
44. *Idem*, p. 54.