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### A REPORT ON THE STATE OF SEMIOTICS FROM A PSYCHOLOGIST'S POINT OF VIEW

*Незважаючи на вузькість свого предмета, семиотика викликає цікавість багатьох науковців з усього світу. Семиотика виступає посередником у багатьох наукових сферах. Семиотика становить ядро психічного посередництва: знак, символ, значення і сенс; заперечення суб'єктивності. Ці поняття розрізняють психічне посередництво в різноманітті підходів до вивчення явищ репрезентції, культурного представлення об'єкта, емоційне ставлення, культурні, а також історичні цінності, що створюють соціальну ідентичність, додавши до неї вивчення адаптивного посередництва в доісторичній формі існування. Це дає змогу розширити вивчення ментальних репрезентацій через призму їх знакової форми. Вивчення проблематики через феноменологію знаків дозволить використати знання семиотики в методах психології та соціальних наук. Семиотика підкреслює унікальність психічних процесів. Дослідження, проведені на підґрунті семиотики, розрізняють феноменологію знаку у поведінці, діяльності, емоціях та ставленні як репрезентацій індивідуального знання, що включає знання інтерсуб'єктивності культурного середовища.*

**Ключові слова:** семиотика, психічне посередництво, психологія.

*Несмотря на узость своего предмета, семиотика вызывает интерес многих ученых со всего мира. Семиотика выступает посредником во многих научных сферах. Семиотика составляет ядро психического посредничества: знак, символ, значение и смысл; отрицание субъективности. Эти понятия различают психическое посредничество в многообразии подходов к изучению явлений репрезентации, культурного представления объекта, эмоциональное отношение, культурные, а также исторические ценности, создающие социальную идентичность, добавив к ней изучение адаптивного посредничества в доисторической форме существования. Это позволяет расширить изучение ментальных репрезентаций через призму их знаковой формы. Изучение проблематики через феноменологию знаков позволит использовать знания семиотики в методах психологии и социальных наук. Семиотика подчеркивает уникальность психических процессов. Исследования, проведенные на основе семиотики, различают феноменологию знака в поведении, деятельности, эмоциях и отношении как репрезентацию индивидуального знания, которое включает знания интерсубъективности культурной среды.*

**Ключевые слова:** семиотика, психическое посредничество, психология.

*Despite a rather small determinacy of its subject, semiotics has great power of attracting people from all over the world. Semiotics is in general a study of mediation. Semiotics uses what constitutes the core of mental mediation: sign, symbol, meaning and sense; the subjectivity founded on itself is negated. These notions distinguish mental mediation in the variety of approaches in the study of phenomena representation, the cultural construction of an object, the expression of emotional relation, cultural as well as historical values creating social identity, adding to it the study of adaptive mediation in the prehuman forms of existence. This suggests broadening the study of mental representations in their sign form. The view on sign phenomena makes it possible using the semiotic thought in psychology and social sciences. Semiotics accentuates the signity of the studied mental processes. The studies performed on the semiotic foundation distinguish sign effects of human behaviour, activities, emotions, attitudes as representatives of certain individual knowledge included in the knowledge intersubjectively shared in the cultural environment.*

**Keywords:** semiotics, mental mediation, psychology.

I leave every semiotic congress with a nagging question: What is semiotics? Not only for the reason that I am not a professional semiotician. I mention the congresses as a general inspiration to a reflection on semiotics and its relations with psychological and social studies. In this way, I eliminate the mixing of citations concerning congress events and vaguely distinguished quotes from the lectures of congress participants with historical comments and epistemological questions.

The congresses are some meaningful events. It is worth registering once in a few years the activity of the semiotic movement, presently closer than ever to cognitive science, cognitive psychology and biological sciences, in which, likewise, resounds the interpretive approach accentuating the socio-historical genesis and the diversity of mental representations, emotionality, iconicity, narrativeness, identity, personality, spirituality.

Semiotics is still young and expanding. Semiotics expands geographically and thematically. Europe is the birth place of the international semiotic movement. The vivacity of semiotics on the Northern American continent is of no surprise either; from there emanated the thought of several of its renowned representatives. The remarkable development of semiotics is visible in South American countries, its expansion in the Asian direction, the achievements of Chinese, Japanese and Korean semiotics. Despite a rather small determinacy

of its subject, semiotics has great power of attracting people from all over the world, it is studied at many universities, not only in philosophical and philological departments.

The answer to the question «what is semiotics?» usually states that semiotics is an interdisciplinary study of signs. The time has come to realise that this general answer no longer satisfies neither those who are deeply concerned with the semiotic issue, nor those who know very little about the topic. The first illustration of semiotics should be broadened in a way that would correspond to the way of thinking occurring on a deeper level characteristic of the semiotic approach.

Semiotics is concerned with mediating individual and social knowledge by means of a sign or sign function. Semiotics is in general a study of mediation. If one most characteristic word revealing the nature of semiotics had to be chosen, it would be mediation.

To encompass with its range the acquisition of knowledge of the world by people and their initial forms existing in nature, semiotics uses what constitutes the core of mediation: sign, symbol, meaning and sense. In every semiotic triangle there is the concept of correlation between the mind, the sign and the being. Semiotic triangles derive from Aristotelian tradition of the triad: sign – notion – reference, they present the idea of mediation which leads to the knowledge of the world. There is no world of phenomena, accumulation of cultural objects and course of historical events in semiotics without the mind; the subjectivity founded on itself is negated. This suggests broadening the study of mental representations in their sign form.

The representation of knowledge in the human mind has the form of a sign; the modification of knowledge is realised by means of a sign. The fundamental role of semiotics is to study the sign representation of human knowledge in different fields of science, practice, art, social roles and spiritual life. Semiotics seeks sign mediation in gaining information, learning, professional activities, emotional relations, art, religion, anything that brings the particular kind of knowledge. The scope of semiotic pursuit is thus colossal. The sign phenomena in their extensive occurrence should be approached in such a manner as to be able to express more than what is known from research conducted in scientific fields or from life experience.

The core of semiotics consists of the sign, symbol, meaning and sense. These notions distinguish any mental mediation, determine its structures in the variety of approaches in the study of phenomena representation, the cultural construction of an object, the expression of emotional relation and cultural as well as historical value, adding to it the study of adaptive mediation in the prehuman forms of existence (biosemiotics). Concerning the fundamental problem of sign, symbol, meaning and sense, semioticians differ in their views and research traditions, correlated with them ontologies and methodologies.

The notion of mental mediation has been recently extended in its scope. Jacques Lacan has reformulated the intellectual interpretation of de Ferdinand de Saussure and exposed the genetic dependence of sign on the symbol. Despite its controversy, Lacan's viewpoint deserves consideration in view of the rapidly developing visual and image semiotics of today. The semiotics of iconism, visuality, architecture, space, city, fashion, gestures, the art of performance, literature, music, film, television and new media are amply represented at numerous thematic congresses. The lasting for more than twenty years good streak of fortune of psychological and social studies on the identity of I is also worth mentioning. Humanistic and existential trends are characterised by the distinction of the role of speech acts, conversation, narration and dialogues, in which values are depicted; however, humanistic psychological concepts developing in the West were not devoid of somewhat strong biological and evolutionary inclination. The bio-cognitive orientation in the study on the identity of I was tolerated in some of the countries of the Communist Bloc, e.g. in Poland. A considerable part of the semiotic congresses constituted the sessions devoted to semiotics of existence and spirituality, proper names and discursive forms of social representation, i.e. national, political and legal, as well as constructing history. Semiotics of existence distinguishes the subject (subjectivity), dialogue and values. Undoubtedly it is an issue of identity and personality. Semiotic construction of history is basically the sign and symbol in institutional history. In this aspect, social institutions are seen as manufacturers and controllers of symbol systems. From the semiotic perspective, history is not Heglism or Marxism, but mental representations of objects and events in social activities, symbolic diversifications and transformations of institutions.

Semiotics expands thematically, traditional logical subject-matter of semiotics is not sufficient anymore. The paradoxical fact in semiotics is that, after all, it has not widely entered the field of humanities and social as well as psychological sciences, although their representatives should, as it seems, specifically feel the need of meaning and sense of the studied features and processes in their sign effects. Certainly, semiotics is perceived as general methodology of the humanities, though traditional semiotic terminology is logical and, to a considerable degree, naturalistic. Humanists get acquainted with semiotics which core subject is the mind with its natural abilities. It is on a par with the position of modern cognitive psychology; cognitive processes and language, i.e. signification as well as communication are natural abilities. The recent emergence of cognitive semiotics and its correlation with cognitive sciences is a consequence of this position.

The founders and representatives of semiotics were intellectualists of great distinction: Charles Sanders Peirce, Edmund Husserl, Ferdinand de Saussure, Bertrand Russell, Charles Morris, Louis Hjelmslev, Roland

Barthes, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roman Jakobson, Emile Benveniste, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Umberto Eco, Jacques Lacan, Lew Wygotski, Vladimir Propp, Michail Bachtin, Jurij Lotman, Thomas Sobeok, and from Poland: Roman Ingarden, Alfred Tarski, Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz, Tadeusz Kotarbiński, Janina Kotarbińska, Henryk Hiż, Roman Suszko, Jerzy Pelc, Adam Schaff. Many of them have recently passed away, some still live until today. Semiotics continues its traditions. The semiotic congresses could not do without sessions devoted to Peirce, Greimas and Bachtin. During world semiotic congresses homage is paid to prominent figures. New generations of semioticians do not abandon theories of their masters. It is difficult to create a revolutionary theory. Ironically speaking, it is the excellent philosophical, logical and linguistic foundation that results in semiotics being too conservative. The logical and 'semiological' current is evidently strong in modern semiotics, however, it would be an exaggeration to talk of its dominance. The second current is taken by social and cultural semiotics. The observation of the events leaves no doubt about the strength of the cultural stream.

The expansion of semiotics in the direction of culture and history, human emotionality and identity correlates with the tradition of information mediation found in organisms' behaviour in the environment, which assumes a logical form, an autonomous cognitive form in the human mind. The sign representation of factual objects constructed on the basis of natural abilities and its simulations in artificial intelligences and formal logical, mathematical and information models is undeniably visible in semiotics; however, logicians, mathematicians and computer scientists work in their fields with little interest of what semiotics is concerned with. The emotional subject-matter evoked by the growing popularity of the problem of symbolic mediation in psychoanalysis was completely incomprehensible for many logicians and semioticians, it was obscured by bias resulting from leftist manifestations in the 1960s and 70s. In the present, the turn in humanities and social sciences towards human identity, their spiritual existence and social history present an additional difficulty in semiotic studies. Blaming semioticians for their conservatism is pointless; new tendencies in philosophy, social and psychological sciences require long and thorough examination.

The founders of semiotics formulated the intellectual concept of the sign. Just as in formal logic and the so-called before the World War II 'exact philosophy', in the semiotic tradition, the sign is an instrument for objectification of the world of factual objects. Each object is potentially an object of logical action. Even if in his semiotic system Peirce mentions behaviour, it is presented in a form of logical action – the human subject acts through logical signs; it was not behaviourism but pragmatism, an intersection between American activism and European semiotic idea since Plato and Aristotle. Acting is not a thoughtless behaviour and thinking is not detached from the world of action. Peirce was aware that acting cannot be performed without emotionality, therefore, he created the notion of emotional interpretant. He did not enter the field of social identity. De Saussure presented the dynamism of the relation between the signifier and the signified in speech in specific social environment. The sign would become the sign of cultural action, not only logical action in any behavioural environment. It is on communication situations in social life system that the admission or rejection of some signifier and signified compounds (the meanings) depends.

Peirce did not investigate emotional or existential symbol, but logical sign; he believed that only logic guarantees cognitive detachment from individual (emotional) motivation. De Saussure intentionally eliminated symbol as a motivated element in meaningful relation. For Peirce and de Saussure, Barthes and Eco, the ultimate sense of sign phenomenon is the anthropological one: social history is mediated by natural history, looking forward is determined by evolutionary processes.

Semioticians have worked in a particularly intensive manner on the sign representation of the phenomena world in the human minds and its prelogic forms in living organisms. It could have been approached from the formal logic perspective, as in Poland before and after the World War II. Another approach was cognitive behaviourism, and further, cognitive sciences. The semioticians in the Soviet Union and countries of the Communist Bloc were often less interested in logical semiotics and more in the language and communication in the social environment. The authorities consented to forming mathematical logic models of information and language structures or examining cultural systems in the socio-historical framework of Marxism, or in the similar categories of capital system criticism in western authors publications. It was Russia that brought forth Wygotski, Propp, Bachtin, Uspienskij, Lotman, the Moscow formalist school cooperating with Tartu during the Soviet times. Let us leave political complications; however, the cultural-historical path of research still presents considerable problems for the semioticians.

The cognitive semiotics revealed the evolutionary, genetic and brain foundation of culture, an extension of changeable cognitive to the neodarwinistic approach. In this perspective, culture is a revolutionary invention of the species – afforded to persons and communities in social history through artefacts in resemblance to accessing life environment by natural phenomena in evolutionary history of the species; the culture 'creates', enables the exteriorization of natural abilities. The language performs the role of the symbolic foundation of cognitive artefacts; the language itself is not an artefact, but a generic, specifically human, symbolic interpretation skill. In the cognitive semiotics and neuroscience perspective, the language performs the role of constitutive

foundation of cultural niche; the subjectivity of communication, text and discourse remains in the foreground of forming cultural symbolism. From the cognitive perspective, semiotic mediation possesses natural history, genetic and brain determination; however, the question of specific rationale behind the formation of cultural-historical world representation in human minds remains unanswered; the individual and the community are not perceived as autonomous subjects of social history.

Empirical semiotics is developing at a fast rate, different semio-cognitive models have arisen. The problem of differentiating empirical semiotic research from empirical research in other fields, particularly in psychology, has appeared. I assume that in semiotic models the sign character of knowledge represented in the mind, in other words, the signity of the studied mental processes which yields intersubjective knowledge, is accentuated. The experiments performed on the semiotic foundation distinguish sign effects of human behaviour, activities, emotions, attitudes as representatives of certain individual knowledge, which is included in the knowledge intersubjectively shared in the cultural environment. Psychologists are oriented on differentiating the contents of individual (subjective) reactions, meanings, feelings, values etc. determined by numerous factors. Cognitive semiotics treats of representing semiotic phenomena 'on the outside' of the human mind and heart ('what is semiotic is not on the inside').

The dominance of cognitive science, however, is coming to an end. It is possible to practice cognitive semiotics without the psycho-physiological reductionism. The formation and development of phenomenological semiotics (Zahavi, Thompson, Gallagher) proves this fact. According to Husserl's tradition, the principal method of phenomenology lies in careful observation of phenomena which appear in consciousness and generalization of the observation results. Phenomenological research yields knowledge a priori, however, it allows for empirical study of the products of consciousness. Phenomenological semiotics was created as a combination of Husserl's slogan 'to get to things directly', and a priori assumption of Peirce that the thought as a triad, a composition of message medium, denotation and interpretant, is capable of signifying any object in reality; conscious thinking assumes the sign form. The knowledge of the subject in sign mediation is acquired through consciousness, and not in pure consciousness. To broaden this interpretation, phenomenological approach in semiotics lies in studying the sense of semiotic phenomena which appear in the consciousness, that is, at the moment of their existence. The semiotic perspective enables understanding of the fact that cognitive elements constructing the knowledge in the sign form are ingredients in the forming of the conscious thought in its relation to the object.

The connection between semiotics and psychology is still rather weak, not only in Poland. It is even understandable as 'application' of psychology in semiotics, and vice versa, raises a number of fundamental problems. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century semiotics emerged as an opposition to psychologism: signs require analysis on their level. Signs can be reproduced regardless of their understanding by individual people. Science without sign is impossible. If signs were creations of individual people, communication in the scientific community, and, therefore, its existence, would not be possible. I believe that semiotics studies objective effects of logically formalized and cultural meanings; semiotic cognition assumes the absence of reduction of the sign to a psychological factor, although, the bio-psychological process contributes in its way to creating semiotic phenomena and is carried out on the sign representation. Wygotski assumed that the sign, the instrument of social practice, is a social message assimilated by the developing and communicating mind. I mention Wygotski only as an author of the famous thesis about the placement of social history over the species history in the human development. I think that Wygotski did not manage to create a methodology of studies that would correspond with his theoretical postulates. The problem is that the assumptions accepted in present cognitive science reduce the sign phenomena to the brain, genes, biological evolution and behaviour. Since the 1990s, the era of cognitive science as an exact science about the mind considered from the bio-cognitive structures perspective has began. It has happened as foreseen by a well-known intelligence researcher Robert Sternberg – that the further development of cognitive psychology and the whole cognitive science will not be possible without the precise knowledge of the nervous structures and processes.

The idea of semiotics as interdisciplinary science is still emerging. Semiotics intertwines with other sciences, presently, above all, with cognitive science, however semioticians are rarely concerned with semiotic models emerging in other sciences, and vice versa, there is no cooperation between specialist semiotics with general semiotics, an autonomous science concerned with the reflection on the sign, also in relation to discoveries appearing in scientific and non-scientific disciplines.

Semiotics is a living experience. It was difficult to notice the shape which is semiotics in this kaleidoscope with myriads of colours. Poland has got excellent semiotic tradition, however, during study on semiotic phenomena one cannot relate only to the achievements of Lwow-Warsaw school, the national classic of logical semiotics. The world rushes forward. May we not become the peripheries in the field which, until recently, has been a Polish speciality.

I should not have left the question 'What is semiotics?' unanswered. That is why I try to present a more precise definition of mediation as semiotic process, emphasising the informative, cognitive, symbolic and

evaluative aspect of intellectual representation of human knowledge about reality. Human thinking is a semiosis that leads to objective cognition in historical culture. The mind creates the world representation in an activity form that encompasses experience content expressed symbolically, and the sense of experience is revealed in social groups and institutions that adopt certain value systems and give identity to the individual. The notion of mediation through signs, fundamental for semiotics, is enriched by incorporating the psychological, social, cultural, historical and axiological issues to the logical studies. A precise analysis of the aspects of world representation in the mind, i.e. the knowledge representation about reality in behaviour, action, experience and conduct of human being is performed in more thorough studies.

In this moment raises important questions about the empirical approach in semiotics that would function as grounds for cooperation between semioticians and psychologists. My difficulties in answering these questions arise from a conviction that relation between semiotics and psychological subject-matter should not be reduced to the 'use' of formal semiotic system in psychology cognitive methods and, what usually takes place, forming research results. First, it should be acknowledged how the sign is created; what it means that the human cognitive processes function as sign builders bring objectivism to the knowledge; what is the symbolics of emotional experiences expression and how it connects with semiotic form. The transfer of attention of semioticians and psychologists from logical to cultural, historical and axiological issues is connected with the necessity of bringing the problem of signs in their denotative role in relation to the world of phenomena, as well as in symbolic expressions of emotional relations and in the valuations in opinions, convictions and beliefs by people of certain social identity. Such work needs to be performed by semioticians and psychologists as well as sociologists and other researchers in the social field. I find objectionable a psychology in which various problems, even historical or religious, are discussed but only in a way accepted by the cognitive-behavioural approach, where, with the genetic discoveries and progress in neurological diagnosis, the references to neurofunctional processes function as 'the last resort'. It is an option, which, on its part, reveals the creation of sign; however, its strong dominance sets aside the need of cultural and historical interpretation, thinking according to social inheritance of semiotic systems, according to feelings and values. Psychoanalytical theories of relation with the object (Otto Kernberg) are subject to biological and medical approach, and 'humanistic psychology' (Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers) is very often pure naturalism. I try to avoid exaggerated opinions about the 'reductionism' of the cognitive-behavioural approach and extend the information about empirical semiotics. Empirical studies in semiotics are concerned with establishing cognitive mediation in living creatures and humans. In a classical example given by Aleksiej Leontiew insects were getting used to omitting an obstacle that was placed on their way and did not cut short when the obstacle was removed, as if it was still there. Empirical semiotic studies lie in discovering semiotic phenomena mediating action (behaviour) on a specific level of activity (reaction) forming or mediating experience relation resulting from an emotional value, or intentionality of a given sense adopted in a specific conviction or belief in groups and institutions following a certain value system. The speculative (theoretical) method of semiotics connects with empirical methods in, among others, psychology. The future will reveal how the semiotic thought is utilized in the field of qualitative studies in psychology and other sciences concerning people and the society.