

Performing Arts in the Process of Semiosis

[Göstergenin Oluşum Sürecinde Sahne Sanatları]

[Les arts du spectacle dans le processus de formation de l'indicateur]

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Abstract

The present text aims to demonstrate the semiotic functions (essential or complex) in artistic expressivity. This text focuses on the performing arts in various shapes to show the signs of permanent movement and changeability. "Transformation" and "transcendence" are the basic notions through which I attempt to disclose the semiotic function within the mentioned expressivities, which entail either signs' ontological or epistemological understanding.

Keywords: Semiotics, arts, performance, existence, passion

Özet

Mevcut metin, sanatsal ifadedeki göstergebilimsel işlevleri (temel veya karmaşık) göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu metin, kalıcı hareketin ve değişebilirliğin işaretlerini göstermek için çeşitli biçimlerdeki sahne sanatlarına odaklanmaktadır. "Dönüşüm" ve "aşkınlık", göstergelerin ontolojik ya da epistemolojik olarak anlaşılmasını gerektiren söz konusu ifadelerdeki göstergesel işlevi ortaya çıkarmaya çalıştığım temel kavramlardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Göstergebilim, sanat, performans, varoluş, tutku

Résumé

Le présent texte vise à démontrer les fonctions sémiotiques (essentielles ou complexes) dans l'expressivité artistique. Ce texte se concentre sur les arts de la scène sous différentes formes pour montrer les signes du mouvement permanent et de la changeabilité. La "transformation" et la "transcendance" sont les notions de base à travers lesquelles je tente de révéler la fonction sémiotique dans les expressivités mentionnées, qui impliquent la compréhension ontologique ou épistémologique des signes.

Most-clés : Sémiotique, arts, performance, existence, passion

1. Introduction

Comparing or analysing different sorts of artistic creations through recent semiotic paradigms is not an easy task, and it generally requires knowledge emerging from more than one discipline, which is a fact that renders

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the task even more complex. Before I present my hypotheses regarding my choice of an applied research methodology, let me present my views and inspiration points for undertaking this task.

Artworks, in general, which have tragic endings mainly [such as: “Othello”, “Rigoletto”, “Romeo and Juliet”, etc.], contain a set of common elements, like destiny and fate elements (e.g. love, hatred and sacrifice), which belong to a literary or a semiotic way of analysis, in the first place. Secondly, it must be remarked that they also belong to philosophical, musicological, theatrical, and psychological analysis. If these represented and still represent characteristic tools of the periods when different works of art were created, then semiotics as a methodology would provide a contemporary way of their analysis. By the term “contemporary”, I intend recent semiotic paradigms regarding artistic creations, which shall gradually be described in the following lines of this text.

I will focus on some of the points I consider “common” in the above artworks. What I consider semiotically important, however, is the question of the characters or protagonists involved in the specific sense of the word: their behaviour and semiotic status. For this reason, this paper shall primarily focus on the mentioned points in its applicative part (whereby various characters’ positioning in “stories narrated” shall be exemplified).

Specifically speaking, I find typological similarities and differences among various characters of “stories narrated”, which are comparable, semiotically analysable, and practically applicable. I shall prioritise semiotics as a discipline in this instance, with the sole aim of extracting a signification process from the works mentioned. It should be otherwise understandable that the above reasons are not the only ones that would have inspired me to write the present text; other important matters shall also be elaborated on here.

This part of the text, as already evident now, intends to disclose some of the reasons why I encouraged myself to focus on different sorts of artistic creations in the first place, and in the second, it intends to reveal reasons in terms of their connectivity and reliability with what we call semiotics today. My intention, as should be understood, is both scientific and methodological.

2. Semiotics and artistic expressivities

I have purposely generalised the subtitle above instead of giving a detailed account of the applicative part of my analysis, which shall follow in other sections of this text. This part is, therefore, intended to cover some general facts about semiology¹ and semiotics² as research methodologies, which may be utilised to cover chosen forms of artistic expressivity. I emphasise the word “may” here, as not only semiotics can explicate and scientifically elaborate an artwork as should be understandable. On the contrary, many other fields, such as art theory, musicology, and aesthetics in general, hold the eligibility to analyse artworks that concern their performance on the scene.

Notwithstanding the above facts, as should be obvious, one single text cannot cover all related spheres that may be considered scientifically relevant but should instead cover specific theoretical issues to demonstrate the applicability of determined theoretical postulates.

As may be supposed, however, for the above reasons, I have chosen semiotics as a method: as an “intervening” discipline to decompose determined theoretical items in terms of performing arts in general.

The problem under discussion seems naturally complex, as it would not instead cover general definitions of determined concepts (such as the “beautiful” or “aesthetic” elements in the arts) but would cover other matters which definitionally belong to semiotics. These, in the specific sense of the word, cover gestures, movements, and actions (widely applicable otherwise within performing arts), which by now in semiotics hold broad applicability in terms of its determined approaches [such as, for instance, in (Tarasti, 2015)]. The approaches in question, as is hoped, shall be an integral part of the present text.

Theory and methodology, as the main components in my object of analysis, shall hold equal status in the present text: either in the shape of a theoretical explicability of the work method or the shape of practical exemplifying the artworks themselves. As I hope to have clarified, this part of the text shall mainly focus on the methodology used to reach the goals that shall be gradually specified.

¹ By the term “semiology” I intend Saussure’s semiology, above all, and analysis which is principally based on two opposed entities.

² By the term “semiotics”, I intend the contemporary definition of semiotics as a cognitive science on the interpretation of meaning.

Semiotics has become a trans-disciplinary academic field through its historical development, viewed from the aspect of its earlier representatives [I have in mind here Saussure and Peirce; see: (Saussure, 1959);(Peirce, 1960)], or even recent ones, such as Greimas's and Tarasti's contributions [see: (Greimas, 1973);(Tarasti, 2000, 2012, 2015)]. All of these, in my contention, represent revolutionary developmental achievements within the overall growth of sign theory in general. However, out of all of these, not only has one definition of the field been asserted, but more have also advanced. This is definitely due to some other "contextual circumstances" (Eco, 1968) in semiotics itself, some of which shall be a part of this study. Theory in this sense of the word is necessary because of a detailed explication of practical and applicable matters, as it is hoped will constitute this study.

The above "masters" of semiotics shall not be the only ones who shall inform my methodological approach; other authors will also. In creating a "theory", one should not abandon or "overcome" earlier theories, but on the contrary, use parts of them to create a new one [my paraphrasing; see: (Tarasti, 2015)]. Owing to the applicative part of this study, however, my aim is not to create a theory of semiotics: the assertion above is metaphorically used purposely, with the sole aim of the complex task of decomposing artistic complexities. Let me put it in simple terms: "classical semiotics" (Tarasti, 2000) is a necessity in terms of analysing certain formal aspects of "classical" works of art.

As should be obvious, the term "classical" has two meanings. The first one, rightly coined by Tarasti (2000), refers to some of the founders of the "traditional" semiotic models: Saussure's semiology. The second one should naturally concern "traditional" and "classic" works of art, again in the metaphoric sense of the word, necessary, among other issues as well, for systemising the mentioned works of art in their due places (in the frames of the general development of art). It should be evident that this shall not be my only reference to this notion in the present text because it is essential for clarifying matters we aim to discuss. Additionally, it may have other connotational capacities comparable to various discussable semiotic terms.

Semiotics, thus, in the sense of the works that we aim to elaborate further in the text, has the capacity of demonstrating a relation, above all [see for instance: (Deely, 2009)], a sign function [see: (Eco, 1976)] (as an essential part of various levels in terms of semiotic analyses themselves), as well as a signification process, starting from Peirce's semiotics, whose result is a process of semiosis. If I have claimed that the mentioned theories are necessary, it does not mean that recent semiotic theories are unnecessary. For now, I shall mention only one simple reason: the artworks I discuss later in this text include the "action" and "subject" notions. Both mentioned terms remind us either of Greimas's generative semiotics (Greimas 1973; Greimas & Fontanille, 1993) or of Tarasti's existential semiotics (Tarasti, 2000).

Speaking generally, however, the philosophical component in the frames of signs' growth (such as the ones noted by Deely) shall also be included here, for my intention is to show the movability of signs: their shapes of changeability during their action. It shall pertain to the epistemological component in semiotics and its ontological one. This is so because of the complexity of artistic expressivities, about which they may be subject to various levels and stages in frames of their creation by the writer, artist, composer, etc.

The term "transformation", specifically speaking, or "transformability", will be one of my critical theoretical terms since the mentioned sorts of artistic expressivity hold in themselves either the philosophical or the psychological component. What I intend to say is that they were subjectively created (by the author, composer, painter), or, if one wishes to use Eco's terms, by their "empirical authors" [I am referring to: (Eco, 1979, 1984) to try and show matters of "objectified" realities [the term is hired, see: (Bourdieu, 1982)], from their subjective point of view; (this last assertion, reminds us of Tarasti's "ich-tone", for instance, in terms of explicating the manner of composing of various composers (Tarasti, 2000, 2015). Since the matters mentioned need a thorough explanation, I shall initially focus on some instances of the historical development of the semiotic method. The aim is their usability and inclusiveness in the theoretical discussion regarding the works we shall discuss.

2.1. Structural semiotics and its oppositional relations

At the beginning of this theoretical explicability, let me express why semiology is vital for the present text in its specific word sense. Naturally, all hypotheses presented have to be elaborated in the sense of justifying the object of our analysis. One should be confident that this sort of explicability also aims to include an "inter-semiotic translation" from one work of art to another and their interconnectivity with determined semiotic approaches. This is so because of the characters' positioning in various applicable circumstances, which will be our object of analysis. My ultimate goal is to examine the multiplicity of possibilities within the applicability of semiotics. Let me try to state the facts in sequence.

Semiology has been defined as a “science of signs” by Saussure (1959). Saussure spoke of the sign systems as a linguist by vocation and considered “language one of such systems” [my paraphrasing]. However, it is worth noting that Saussure’s semiology did not include only linguistics but also psychology and physiology. It refers above all to the “motivation” of the sign [see, for instance, my reference to these issues elsewhere (Hoxha, 2016b)].

However, in terms of a signification process, it should be emphasised that Saussure, in the semiotic sense of the word, included all processes that might contribute to making a single process complete. What is meant by this is primarily that, before each verbal expressivity, one needs contextually to prepare oneself for the intentional sort of expression. Other processes besides the linguistically minded ones (the standard linguistic norms) are necessary here. Therefore, the logical question is: what does this have to do with various artistic expressivities?

Although the answer seems complex, I aim to focus on some instances which represent a possibility for semiotic modelling of the “performativity” question: the relationship between the works and the audience, as well as the “contextual” pre-expressive ability, similar to Tarasti’s “pre-signs” (Tarasti, 2000), which would include uniting the components concerned. Naturally, considered from the semiotic viewpoint, all of these should represent semiotic processing aimed at a final meaning.

Nevertheless, if the mentioned facts are not convincing, one would rightly pose the following question: why Saussure’s semiology at all? Let us address this question immediately.

First, not only should one speak here of the unification process between form and meaning but also of the influence that semiology (or structural semiotics) has had (even taken from the “classical” or traditional point of view) on literary theory and the narration processes. It does not concern only Saussure on the one hand; on the other, it is essential for the present text. Second, if the structures of our object of analysis are essential (which is a semiotically relevant matter), their interrelation is also. This sort of view applies to “separate” matters for consideration. Let me give some examples: Does the actor not need to prepare himself/herself to express Shakespeare’s words verbally? Does he/she not have to contextualise himself/herself within “actorial relations” [the term is semiotic; see: (Greimas, 1973)] presented by the author of the play? Does not the same apply to an opera? I aim to say that the processes in question (which primarily, in this instance, belong to psychology) gradually develop either in our “inner” organic physiology or within frames of a conscious reaction towards the act of performance. Both relative elements, as is hopefully clear, belong to semiotics.

Third, the two elements mentioned above have to combine. If only two components are juxtaposed, they belong to semiology; if there are more such components, they belong to semiotics. One might ask why. Let us try to elaborate on this assertion.

In Saussure’s comprehension, dichotomies presented entail creating a process. Therefore, the concept of “sign” can be of multiple natures: disregarding its origin means there is no difference in this sense of the word, whether a verbal or a nonverbal expression is in question. If such a thesis holds, then the process itself must provide results if semioticized (within its constituent components), which justifies the structural part of semiotics itself.

Otherwise, as may be presumed, everything that shows and demonstrates something, no matter whether we take it from the aspect of our perceptive capabilities or their other contextual matters, is a sign because it “may be said” to refer to something else. Usually, anything said or expressed in art may refer to something else. Besides, as much as it holds for the “reference” notion, that much, it consequently holds for the “inference” notion as well. That sort of relationship is apparently of interest to a semiotician. As much as it refers to Saussure’s teaching, it also refers to other semioticians and “masters” of semiotics as well. What matters instead is how many more meanings, except the “obvious” one, can one extract. This also holds for Peircean semiotics (Peirce, 1960).

Let us exemplify such “semiotic situations”. Just as Rigoletto might seem a “court fool”, a protagonist who gradually becomes tragic and comic at the same time, so does Othello—being a famous general—become “tricked” and thus becomes a tragic and comic protagonist. Both characters in question, within their respective comparative analysis, regard Peircean “firstness”, “secondness”, and “thirdness”. In what way? If Othello is a general and a Moor, it is his ‘Firstness’, as it is such that the audience conceives him in the exposition stage of the play. However, in terms of getting acquainted with Iago, the audience starts to get another impression. His “secondness”: his being a general and a Moor is represented by something else, specifically Desdemona’s husband and somebody of whom Iago was jealous. However, out of his “honesty” (as Othello defines Iago throughout the play), he gains a “Thirdness”, which means psychologically and physically destroying his wife.

Besides the love between Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare, many other “intrigue-making” factors and characters contribute to the final tragic events in the “story narrated”. I shall initially emphasise here the Nurse and Friar Laurence as much as they seem just, or better expressed, being of “help” to both main protagonists of the story, that much they hold the responsibility for “tricking” them both so that tragic consequences be eligible for finalising the story. Such relationships, finally, bring about “semiotic consequences” as an output or empirical result.

As hopefully clarified above, because of the events occurring in the artworks themselves, the semiotic “result” of the matters regards their multifarious nature, as it cannot be revealed in one and only one sort of semiotic methodology. For instance, such a “result” may also be disclosed through a gradual “movement” and “changeability” of the “semiotic objects” concerned through determined stages of development in close regard to the “stories narrated,” thus referring to semioticians who theoretically generate meaning, such as Greimas.

I use the terms above to exemplify the content of diverse artistic works: I intend to render a work of art narrative (also because of certain theoretical paradigms in semiotics), even when it might represent the opposite. Semiotics needs such a relationship (initially, as two opposed entities) so that it later (or better, in its in-depth analytical comprehension) may be able to represent either multiple meaning(s) or optionality of choice. The matter regards various approaches in semiotics. In conclusion, as it is hoped that is understood, I assert that interpretative semiotics comprises determined postulates of both Saussure’s and Peirce’s semiotics in the works I aim to elaborate on.

In an attempt to justify the above assertions, however, some logical questions arise: why, for instance, in “The Name of the Rose” (Eco, 1980), is the “secret” or “enigma” gradually disclosed to the audience, readers, or viewers of the film? How does the audience gradually understand Iago’s “tricking” of Othello? How is it that we gradually learn of Rigoletto’s “defeat” regarding his fellow court members, on the one hand, and of his affection and love towards his daughter, Gilda, on the other? Or, how come Juliet is not immediately aware of Romeo’s banishment when she hesitates between desperation for her cousin Tybalt and love for Romeo?

These questions are due to some semiotic situations in the artworks we discuss. In the specific sense of the word, I suggest that the artistic works exemplified here overcome semiology: they become an object of semiotics, thus containing the capability of the cognitive interpretation of their determined parts. The ultimate goal at this instance in semiotics is twofold: either disclosing relations among characters (as constituent parts of the “subjects” participating in the communication process) or extracting and deducing meaning units which become an integral part of semiosis (or of a process of signification). This study will further attempt to provide an answer to the following question: is this sort of essential relatedness of ‘semiotic objects’ (thus, attempting to paraphrase Greimas) sufficient in the field of artistic creations, or does it need further elaboration, aiming to call it ‘semiotics of performing arts’?

Naturally, this represents definitionally a “separate”, or a “special” semiotic enhancement of determined parts of artworks. What I am interested in is semiotizing an artistic expression, disregarding its methodology of creation—or, better: formal structure—whether a theatrical play containing a written text and being acted on the stage or an opera containing a written score, being performed in a hall (accompanied with its concrete actualising, if one wishes to use semiotic terms vocal interpretation). Disregarding whether theatrical, acting, musical, or literary communication is in question, semiotics, in this instance, needs to find a “common feature” of matters that, for us, should present the object of discussion. Therefore, one has to conclude that matters of structurally minded semiotics should be utilised here for explicative purposes and other matters. This must include other semiotic tools intended to deduce multiple meanings, such as Greimas’s generative semiotics and Tarasti’s existential semiotics. The ultimate goal, hopefully evident by now, is a semiotics of performing arts.

Let us sum up now: if the methodology is in question, one should be confident of the multiple capacities of semiotics, which represent a fact that necessarily imposes expanding semiotics’ domain. It means compounding form and meaning and hypothesising it as an exchange of information in frames of encoded artistic realities and their interpretation. To my conviction, finally, this covers epistemic matters that are semiotically relevant to our study.

2.2. The “complex” semiotic function and a narration process as an example

The last assertion complicates the situation on the one hand, but on the other, one must admit that it also belongs to the recent semiotic paradigms. Not only does one single “basic” semiotic function have to be accomplished [such as, for instance, explicated in (Piaget, 1969)], but a “complex” one, as well. By a “complex” semiotic function, I mean multi-layered meaning productivity [see: (Eco, 1976; Peirce, 1960;

Tarasti, 2015)] which not only pertains to the existent constituent elements compounding it (or that are a part of its composition), but also on such elements that might not be concretely visible or existing, but rather, that might be imaginative or referential. For this methodological reason, in analysing works of this sort, one should be concerned with other semiotic approaches besides those said to lead the research.

It is here (in the mentioned “complex” semiotic function) that artistic expressivities “emerge”. I have used the term metaphorically, as not only one “artistic situation” may be semiotically considered. In other words, one should first analyse “ready-given” units (in this instance, narrative ones) so that later, such given “units” may be separately reconsidered. These reasons (and I shall mention other ones further in this part of the text) make one extend the theoretical explication, which for us should range from the basic definitions of the sign notion to a multitude of correlational semiotic theories and their final unification for the sake of the process of signification. This is all aimed at meaning extraction and meaning productivity (generating meaning or making or processing it in frames of compounding specific components). After all, this view shall hopefully lead us to a definition of the semiotics of performing arts.

Otherwise, in terms of applying different semiotic approaches within artistic expressivities, defining or explicating a single (as well as a primary) semiotic function is not enough. It would not cover such attitudes as the “modalities” (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993; Greimas, 1973) and meta-modalities (Tarasti, 2015) which for us will be our fundamental theoretical issues. Second, a “basic semiotic function”, well-defined by Eco (1975, 1976), cannot give a “precise” determination (e.g. actions, wishes, reactions, etc.), which are matters that might be found in-between each given semiotic unit. Consider the communicative level of the mentioned discourse: messages transmitted from one side to the other side of the communication channel might be unequivocal [the reference is hired; see: (Eco, 1976)]. I intend to say that not every action, story, plot, etc., as narrated by the author, is usually “read” by the audience in the exact way it was initially given or written by the author. It is precisely because of this reason that semiotics overcomes semiology, as I said above. Interpretation does not always mean overcoming semiotics because, very frequently, it may refer to such “semiotic situations” that may become an integral part of the signification process.

Otherwise, by the term “readability”, I shall also address Barthes’ definitions (Barthes, 1992): it would for us mean that each sort of “reading” may be different. If all mentioned above holds, why not propose another semiotic “reading” of different works of art?

Notwithstanding the facts above, and since each thesis can be opposed by its counter-thesis, one may ask why I raise this question now. The response seems simple at this stage of our discussion: because the relations among the protagonists on the stage pertain to different contexts, or better, they pertain to a “semiotic reality” that has to be sorted out by the methodological tools we aim to utilise. Moreover, second, naturally, because artworks under the present discussion contain different semiotic systems to analyse. After all, artistic creations have to narrate (if one wishes to use the “extreme” expression so that they become analysable) so that, finally, they may be “ready” or prepared for semantic outcomes. As may be concluded, I aim to focus on the “semiotic processes” themselves (either metaphorically or adequately understood) to obtain semantic results.

There are two key issues that I have attempted to discuss in this part of the text. The first issue is that structurally based semiotics (or semiology, in this instance) is a starting point for a semiotic comprehension of different sorts of artistic expressivities, and secondly, that even from the times of Russian Formalism, the arts in general, could have been considered to be an object of discussion for a semiotician. I assert this thesis for at least two reasons. First, because structuralism utilised the oppositional relations, or “binary oppositions” [which are one of the main preoccupations of scholars like Saussure; see: (Saussure, 1959)], and second because within Formalism, artistic expressivities became a widely analysed scholarly object regarding semiotics as a discipline [see, for instance: (Beker, 1991)]. What I mean to say precisely is that scholars like Viktor Shklovsky, Vladimir Propp, and later, Roman Jakobson, etc., not only elaborated one single sort of expressivity (be it an artistic one or not) but even within frames of such sorts of expressivities, enabled and enhanced a semiotic process. This fact is recognisable from terms like “acts of speech”, “communication process”, and “narration”, or the process of their being created. In the following, I shall attempt to elaborate only on the scientific issues that I consider relevant to the works mentioned in this text.

Considering that I prioritise the narration process, its flow, and various components such as the concept of “time”, it should be logical that I have to justify the above assertion. I will give two reasons at this stage: the first is that the author usually narrates artistic content(s), and the second is that within semiotics, they were discovered in the frames of the structural period. After all, Russian Formalism partially covered that period, which is crucial for the correlations and “common features” of various artistic expressivities.

2.3. The narration process as a semiotic tool of artistic expressivities

Let me pose the problem another way now. Each expressivity (be it an artistic one or not) can be narrated. As we perform, say, utilise the term (either adequately or metaphorically) in our everyday lives. What matters instead is the method of its use. If we narrate, tell, or retell an experienced context to somebody else, thus trying to enact a communication process, there is no doubt in saying that the issue belongs to psychology and the interpersonal sort of communication [my paraphrasing; see: (Griffin, 2003)]. Such interactional activity between two persons communicating can undoubtedly have various types of being “interpreted”. Let us note the following: not every “story lived” is a “story told” [the terms are borrowed: see the citation above]. We might tell somebody something that has not been experienced, aimed to hide the truth or maintain balanced relational attitudes with the other(s). If “the other” accepts our “truth”, there is no miscommunication in this instance, but the process finds its end. However, if the contrary is true, then “a noise” in the communicational sense of the word appears. One should then finally approach a solution to the problem.

Let me give another example. If one visits the doctor, as I have mentioned elsewhere (Hoxha, 2018), one should narrate the problems he/she has. The specialist should react based on patients’ complaints; on the one hand and the other, he/she uses the protocols that would assist healing. I mean that the term “narration” has more than one connotational meaning, and we here use the one related to semiotics.

Discussing narration from the semiotic viewpoint is a separate and significant scientific matter. It relates to either the “linguistically based semiotics”, as I wish to call Saussurean semiotics or the formal analysis, the formal content of the work which, if considered in its depth, may consider such complexities as the earlier mentioned modalization processes.

I emphasised the first component above because it focused on oppositional relations, or binary analyses, as scientific objects first, that invited comparison between discussable “semiotic objects” (if one wishes to use Greimassian words) and second, their uniting or distinguishing between “variants and invariants” [the paraphrasing is mine; see: (Ivič, 1970)]. The above assertion does not imply that our analysis shall start from that point, but it means that the method to be used later by scholars like Greimas utilised similar principles. I quote here one such argument, as stated by Jameson’s “Foreword” to Greimas’s book:

A.J. Greimas is the last of the great thinkers and theoreticians of French structuralism and poststructuralism to be translated into English and presented to the American public, and perhaps in many ways the most difficult and forbidding – bristling with scientificity, as these texts are, and breaking out at all points into that graphics of formalisation (equations, schemata, nonverbal symbols of variables and invariables) that always seems to the “humanist” to draw a boundary across which one looks with frustration at the forbidden promised lands of mathematics or symbolic logic, or of music theory (Greimas, 1973, p. VIII-IX).

As can also be seen from the above citation, the features mentioned belong to the structural method in semiology and semiotics. In this sense of the word, the following issues make scientific matters significant and applicable: first, the determining of the protagonists of characters of the “stories narrated” and their “transformation” into “actants” [the term is borrowed; see: (Hoxha, 2016a); (Greimas, 1973)], (which, in other words, means: “transforming” the characters in Greimass’s way of perceiving them); second: the possibilities of the actants in their actualising; and or their “transformation” into semiotic systems; third: the relation between fiction and reality (Hoxha, 2017); finally, the manifestation of the semantic units, or in other words: the “surface structure” as a result. Additionally, the multiple ways of analysing this notion imply semiotic terms and procedures. The asserted procedures, naturally, apply to the detailed applicability of the known Greimassian models, which this paper will not present because of its theoretical approach in general terms.

Besides the relation between fiction and reality, as mentioned earlier, all the facts mentioned represent semiotic procedures towards an act of manifestation. A logical question would be imposed: what do all of these have to do with narrativity? To formulate a “narrative unit” or “structure”, as some structuralists named it (one of whom is Greimas), one needs its constituent elements. Such elements, undoubtedly, represent the semiotic tools needed for the procedures.

3. Existential semiotics in artistic expressivities

Although I have not presented all the other methodological approaches above in this text, one should be confident that such procedures (covered by the theories mentioned) should be utilised for their practical applicability. One asks, however, what happens after Greimass’s theory has been absolved. Or, in other words,

what would happen if the Greimassian models, through their actantial relations and passional configurations, would not suffice in terms of the artworks we discuss?

One of the possibilities to enhance such a semiotic situation is existential semiotics. One may ask why. The following lines of this text shall attempt to disclose some of the reasons that would support existential semiotics' hypothesis in the given works of art. Besides, by establishing various levels of relations and correlations among the components discussed, I would aim to answer the question of the "signs way," as Deely used to say, or even the issue of the signs being moveable, for instance, in Tarasti's sense of transcendental signs.

Existential semiotics, otherwise, focuses on the Being, Subject, and the "transcendence" of signs. It is significant to note that the components mentioned are in a permanent movement, which is a fact that makes things different from a "classical" sort of semiotics. In existential semiotics, moreover, the communication process obtains another shape: the "trip" of the message to the destination might have a "feed-back" (to use the term metaphorically) or, to say so, uses a "returning" effect. The "intermediator" in-between is the Dasein. This interrelation among the components derives from the Hegelian concepts of "Being-in-itself" and "Being-for-itself" as proposed by Tarasti (2000, 2015). Before further explicating the concepts in question, let me give some examples.

Othello's and Rigoletto's naiveté, the seeming "honesty", as well as the initial equivocal transmission of signs to the audience, in both works of art, as the stories continue their sort of narration, undergo a process of a determined changeability, transformation, or change from one state to another. This is due to the "negation" process, initially, and then "affirmation" again (Tarasti, 2000). Not only does Othello not at once accept the false "argument" of the handkerchief shown to him, but he gets furious in negating such a truth (one can compare this to Tarasti's "pre-signs"). Therefore, the signs are again transcendent, or, expressed in an everyday language, go back to the Subject (in this case, Othello's Being) so that later he becomes affirmative to it (comparable again to Tarasti's act-signs). His affirmation, thus considering the transcendence completed, will not suffice, as fury, anger, greed, and jealousy prevail over him due to Iago's permanent "tricking" of him. The "post-sign" in Tarasti's term represents the execution, the crime, which comes from such exposed jealousy. This is exposable and presentable through the Zemic model [see, for instance (Tarasti, 2015)]. In order to support this last assertion, I shall quote Tarasti: "A semiotic act occurs as a production of an act-sign by means of the help of a pre-sign or enunciant/utterant, or the act takes place as the interpretation of the act-sign, by means of the help of the post-sign or the interpretant" (Tarasti, 2000, p. 33).

In "Rigoletto", however, due to his inability to accept his daughter's being hurt and humiliated (though, out of his erroneous behaviour towards her and others), he is filled with depression out of the initially imagined gloriousness: a fictive "victorious spirit" given the audience of the opera and other protagonists of the story. However, this depression is the "negation" of the transcendent signs in permanent movement so that they again, through the Dasein, return to the Subject: Rigoletto's Being. The ongoing process of returning the signs (or, if one wants to use traditional communication models, the message's return to the source of information) would later represent "affirmation". This is documented by the engagement of Sparafucile, who purposely, based on Rigoletto's ignorance of the actual occurrence in the later developmental stages of the opera, stabs Gilda, which causes the story's tragedy of "Rigoletto". Thus, in conclusion, the "pre-signs" (the initial stages of Rigoletto's behaviour) attain a full semiotic status by the "act-signs" and later are interpreted by "post-signs" because of Rigoletto's inability to decode correctly certain content aspects of the story narrated. This existential and universal situation is again representable through Tarasti's Z or Zemic model. Finally, this paper shall not present the mentioned model, as its purpose is theoretical.

What I wish to emphasise in the present text is the following. First, the structural approach to semiotics in the artworks I am analysing is insufficient in disclosing the so-called movable and transformable signs only, for instance, if seen through the modalities of "being" and "doing" as designated by Greimas. The reason is simple: not only may determined unequivocal signs be transmitting and or transmittable, but they may also undergo different modes of changeability, which is only possible by including meta-modalities, as presented by Tarasti. It, for instance, includes the modality of "Will" in Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet", as well as in "Hamlet" (Shakespeare, 2002). The "will of revenge" represented by both families respectively is the initial point to make the conflict visible to the audience in the "story narrated". This component is an integral part of both Greimas's provisions (Greimas & Fontanille, 1993) or of Tarasti's existential semiotics (Tarasti, 2000). The difference between them has hopefully already been clarified earlier: the communication process in Tarasti is not "classical" but is "intermediated" by the Dasein, thus making the Subject transcendent and movable.

Otherwise, as should be obvious, the context deduced out of the text can generate and make meaning (as Greimas and Peirce would say), but also the Being of the protagonists of both works through their Dasein, which in this instance comprises even complexities that pertain to the creation of the artworks mentioned, in my examples theatrical or operatic. This entails two critical issues at least: the “putting on the scene”, the movability of Shakespeare’s text from a conventional text to a “dramatic” and “semiotic” text (or, in other words, its inter-translatability from one sort of expression to another), as well as the transcendence of the signs in Verdi’s opera: from a full score to active “playing of the role”, thus emanating meaning to the audience, which is possible only through the transcendence of the Subject’s Being through the Dasein.

4. Conclusion

Semiotics of performing arts should constitute all “semiotic roles”, which can be enhanced to the artwork if semiotized. It means not only relations visible on the stage but also ones rendered referable and interpretable. In other words, the intentional act of performance intends to create a “semiotic role”, which is changeable due to the permanent movement of signs. They can be “transformable” through chains of trajectories of generating meaning, but can also be “transcendental”, as not only one sort of modality creates meaning. The interpretability, in conclusion, creates an overall understanding of an artwork, as not everyone understands it equivocally, and it thus asserts the uniqueness, aesthetics and beauty of its form and content.

It should also be remarked that this text cannot foresee all “semiotic systems” (to paraphrase the structuralists), which may be an object of elaborating on different sorts of artistic expressivities. Therefore, I assert that the topic under discussion overcomes the limits one paper can foresee.

The ultimate goal of this text is to provide a formula that shall unite both theories mentioned to prove that Tarasti’s existential semiotics has overcome earlier semiotic theories based on their epistemic and philosophical matters, emphasising performing arts in the specific sense of the word. Moreover, its overall semiotic understanding asserts defining the semiotics of performing arts.

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