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**Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz (1932-2007) as a semiotician, textologist, and theoretician
of culture: some remarks on a man of a truly polyphonous sophistication**

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It is only quite by accident that I came across a valuable collection of articles assembled by Janusz Semrau to commemorate Andrzej Kopcewicz (1932-2007), an outstanding intellectual genius and a fascinating teacher of American literature at Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań (Semrau, 2009). Professor Andrzej Kopcewicz was also my teacher in the late 1960's and I owe him my everlasting fascination with literature as the highest intellectual product of the human species as well as of the superb mind-eye-hand connectivities which characterize the *Homo sapiens sapiens* predicament as regards the production of literary works of art (also referred to here as 'literary opuses').

As I was reading through the two articles authored by Kopcewicz which happen to span twenty seven years of his outstanding academic career (i.e. between the years 1968-1995) and which were also fortuitously included in the collection, especially the article written by him in 1995 and entitled "The machine in Henry Adams, Frank R. Stockton, and Thomas Pynchon. A paradigmatic reading", I was struck with the depth of his multi-faceted theoretical stance on literature. I realized that he was not so much interested in literary criticism proper, as he was deeply involved in constructing a lucid semiotic-textological-cultural architecture for all literary opuses, those from the past, the present ones, and the ones as yet to come. Several of my conversations which I was lucky to conduct with him throughout the 1990's invariably converged on the usefulness of semiotics for literary studies. At this time, however, I did not fully realize the width and depth of his concern for the matter, although I intuitively felt that the question of the semiotic background to literary opuses was of primary concern for him.

I decided to look more thoroughly into Kopcewicz's airy and verbally sophisticated account of the literary opus-culture relationship. Subsequently, I fully realized that Andrzej Kopcewicz was first and foremost a refined semiotician, an ardent textologist, and a subtle theoretician of human culture. Thus, in the remainder of the present small contribution to highlight Kopcewicz's integrative vision of literature, I will make an attempt to present my humble account of his truly monumental understanding of literature within the semiotic-textual-cultural paradigm.

In the article mentioned above (see Semrau, 2009: 187-210), Kopcewicz states that literary works of art (in this connection he mentions Henry Adams' *The education of Henry Adams*, Frank. R. Stockton's *The great stone of Sardis*, and Thomas Pynchon's *V*) "can be treated as a compound self-reflexive text, i.e., a text folding upon itself, expanding and supplementing itself" (p. 187). This very brief excerpt from his article presents a very clear articulation of Kopcewicz's understanding of any literary work of art as being equipped with the potential to be linearly assembled with other (more or less selected) works of art, together with the richness of their 'local' teleologies. This property may be schematically represented as follows (Fig. nr 1):

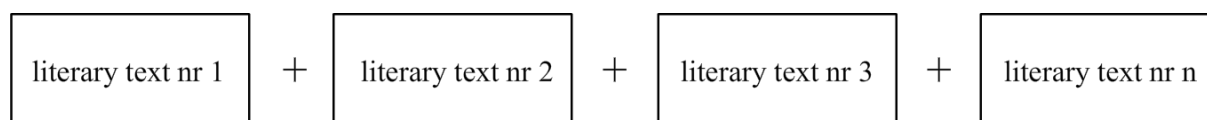


Fig. nr 1

The paradigmatic level of literary opuses with their local teleologies

As can be seen from the diagram, such a linear arrangement (or composition) represents a paradigmatic level of potential juxtapositionality of any literary work of art. Subsequently, a linear arrangement of this kind would result, according to Kopcewicz, in obtaining an expanded and necessarily supplementary compound literary entity which he further called "a compound self-reflexive text" (or a "multiverse"). One can imagine at this point that the semiotic-textological life of such an entity would most obviously represent a

much expanded version of local teleologies otherwise present in the singular works of art. The arrangement which thus embodies the inescapable semiotic-textological-cultural entanglements and fate of any literary work of art may be schematically represented as follows (Fig. nr 2):

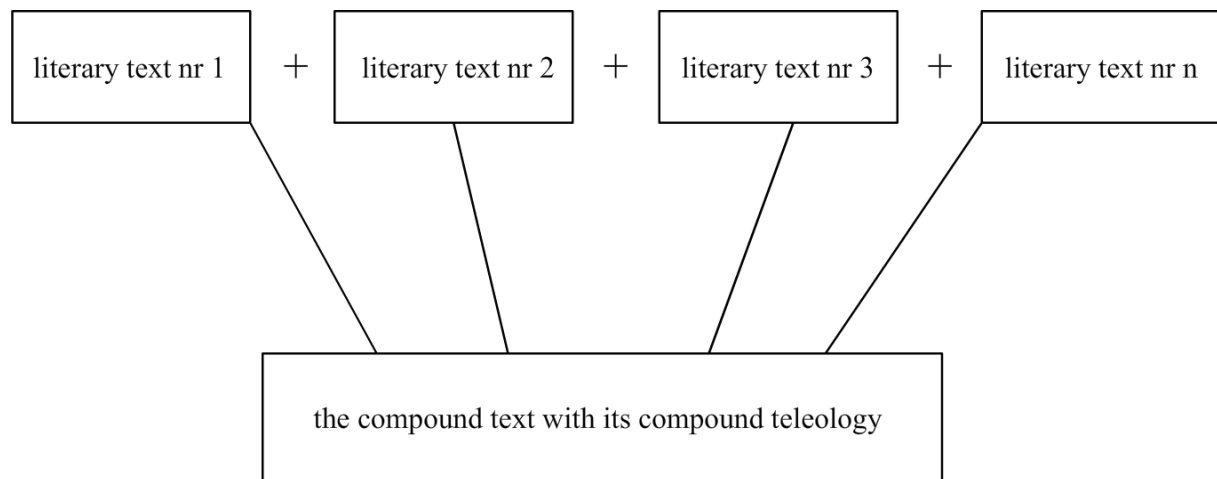


Fig. nr 2

In this way, a clear dichotomous composition of the basic level of paradigmatic juxtapositionality of the respective literary texts is opposed to the derived level of a compound text which has been obtained through such an arrangement. One can imagine that such a two-level design represents the compound/convergence level which appears to be far more powerful in exposing the various semiotic-textual proclivities of the respective singular texts assembled paradigmatically. One can also imagine that such a design can most naturally allow for envisaging a whole array of dynamic interactions between the respective levels, both on the semiotic and textual planes.

Moreover, between the two levels one can find a major area of dynamic interactions (or a 'polyphony of voices', as it were) taking place among and mediating all the tropes, metaphors, metonymies and symbols involved in the assemblage. As some kind of a filter and whirlpool, they jointly contribute to the generation of both individual and collective imagination (or literary consciousness) which is present in the reception of the compound self-reflexive text, with its compound (generic) teleology. In this way, a two-level design which is mediated by the level of continuous interactivity of all tropes, metaphors, metonymies and symbols present in the texts assembled may be delineated. The design may

be schematically represented as follows (Fig. nr 3):

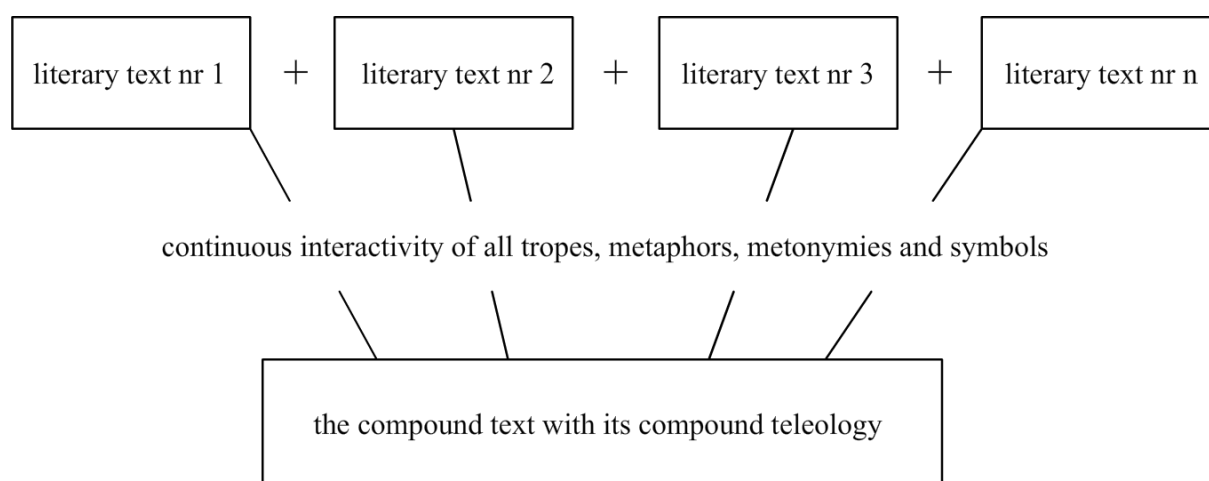


Fig. nr 3

To complete the picture, the design outlined above is immersed in culture as a major frame of reference, with a life filled by elusive, non-definitive, ever-changing semiotic/symbolic and narrative entities (i.e. literary opuses). The latter are involved in endlessly combinatorial and thus maximally open both individual and collective interpretations (or ‘connotative activities’, as this kind of activity could be called in the purely semiotic perspective).

In Kopcewicz’s account, human culture appears to be filled with the eternal life of literary opuses forever immersed in the semiotic-textual sphere, especially in its symbolic content which, in turn, allows for a plethora of connotative activities performed in the reception process. More precisely, culture is defined here as a framework for a creative confrontation of semiotically-based texts and narratives in which the meanings are constantly blurred, mixed and mediated as if placed in a whirlpool, and where they escape, perhaps luckily, a final definition. In this way, the design so outlined acquires a more fundamental and holistic shape which captures and enhances the dynamism and richness of life in general and of the literary works of art in particular. This goal is attainable/attained within culture which appears to serve as a meta-convergent level on which the inescapable compounding of various ‘local’ literary texts takes place and which further defines the very essence of text dynamism. The life of culture - understood as an over-arching frame of reference - is filled with open-ended (and therefore escaping final definition) semiotic-textual and polyphonous entities which fold upon themselves, expand and supplement each other. It really makes sense.

References

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