Hypostatisation in expanded anthropocentric sign systems

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Zusammenfassung. Dieser Beitrag stellt Überlegungen zur Hypostasierung aus der Perspektive der semiotischen Anthropologie vor. Hypostasierung, der Prozess, in dem Abstraktionen als materielle Objekte betrachtet werden, ist von weitreichender Bedeutung für menschliche Kulturen und ihre Entwicklung. Die Argumentation in diesem Beitrag basiert auf der Annahme, dass alle Aspekte des gegenwärtigen sozialen Lebens der Menschen stark in der semiotisch-semantischen Dimension verwurzelt sind, die ganzheitlich verstanden werden sollte. Neue Medien, digitale Medien, Internet, Cyberspace – Techniken der symmetrischen Massenkommunikation – haben einen spezifischen interaktiven Informationsraum geschaffen, in welchem Information die zentrale Rolle spielt und die Form des sozialen Miteinanders beeinflusst. Die in diesem Artikel vorgestellte Theorie beruht grundlegend auf den modifizierten Annahmen der semiotischen Anthropologie (Boroch 2018), die ursprünglich von Milton Singer (Singer 1978, 1984, 1985) vorgeschlagen wurde.

Summary. This contribution presents considerations concerning hypostatisation from the perspective of semiotic anthropology. Hypostatisation, the process in which abstractions are regarded as material objects, is of far-ranging importance for human cultures and their development. The argumentation in this article is based on the assumption that all aspects of contemporary human social life are strongly rooted in the semiotic-semantic dimension, which should be understood holistically. New media, digital media, Internet, cyberspace – techniques of mass symmetrical communication – have created a particular interactive informational space in which information plays the most important role, influencing the shape of social life. The reasoning for the theory presented in this article is based on the modified assumptions of semiotic anthropology (Boroch 2018) originally proposed by Milton Singer (Singer 1978, 1984, 1985).

1.   Introduction

This article presents considerations concerning applications of sign theory to the analysis of human cultures from the perspective of semiotic anthropology. Heretofore, attempts at epistemological (Singer 1978, 1984, 1985; Metz 2007) and empirical (see Parmentier 1994) research produced no breakthroughs. There were several reasons for this, but the main point of difficulty was the analytical integration of the two major sign theories: the logical semiotics of Charles S. Peirce and the semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure (Singer 1978). Analytical or logical integration of these theories was the intention of the founder of anthropological semiotics, Milton Singer (Singer 1978, 1984, 1985). However, Singer's proposal did not meet with general approval on the part of social anthropologists. The main critic of the proposal was the British anthropologist Edmund Leach (Leach 1985), who, as a proponent of the thought of Claude Lévi-Strauss (Leach 1970), rejected the hypothesis of Singer's anthropological semiotics, accusing it of being contradictory (Boroch 2016, 2018). Leach based his criticism on the hypotheses contained in Umberto Eco's *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* (Eco 1984), in which Eco pointed out fundamental ontological and epistemological differences between Peirce's logical semiotics and de Saussure's semiology, which are, in his opinion, impossible to merge, either analytically or logically.

It should be noted, however, that Eco's position was based on general sign theory – the general theory of semiotics – which logically led to theoretical difficulties in the subjective dimension, i.e. a system of linguistic vs systems of non-linguistic signs, as well as in the formal dimension, i.e. the social functioning of sign systems.[1]

The division proposed by Morris is an anthropocentric division, in which the basis of reasoning is the assumption of the existence of a conscious subject – the user, who, thus understood, uses signs, or sign systems, consciously as well as intentionally. The goal here is communication. At this point as well, we arrive at the essence of the dispute within anthropocentric semiotics. Let us reconsider, taking an ontological and epistemological step backwards, the relevance of sign theory in the twenty-first century, accounting for new factors such as cyberspace. In order to do this, it is necessary to consider the following problems:

1. What epistemological possibilities are opened up by questioning Morris's classical division in the context of anthropocentric sign systems?
2. What is the consequence of the holistic approach to anthropocentric sign systems, and what are the ontological and epistemological consequences of this approach?
3. What is the role or function of information in anthropocentric sign systems?

As I have already mentioned, in formulating the above questions, we return to the dispute regarding the adequacy of sign theory, which, in the past, actively engaged researchers in the fields of phenomenology (Roman Ingarden), linguistic structuralism (Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson), structural anthropology (Claude Lévi-Strauss), and poststructuralism (Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Jacques Lacan), etc.; it is impossible to list all of them.

The proposed holistic approach to anthropocentric sign systems within the framework of the academic programme of anthropological semiotics must explain the origin of the specific semantic value associated with the sign bearer. In other words, it investigates the mechanism of semantic coding of the sign bearer. It is imperative to direct our attention to significant factors such as:

1. the ontological-epistemological relationship of the anthropocentric and digital universes;
2. the role of the conscious user of the sign in these universes (e.g. in cyberspace, the conscious entity has been replaced by an algorithmic process that the individual cannot control);
3. the role of information which influences an individual's decision-making processes;
4. the dispersion of the sign bearer in these universes;
5. the role of hypostasis and hypostatisation in so-called ontological leaps.[2]

2. Extended anthropocentric character systems: cyberspace

Empirical observations of anthropocentric sign systems in the age of new media, or the so-called Digital Age, argue that anthropocentric sign systems operate in two universes: (1) the a n t h r o p o c e n t r i c u n i v e r s e, e.g. physical or mental space, as well as (2) the d i g i t a l u n i v e r s e (cyberspace), e.g. Internet space – the global infrastructure of information technology and the data contained in this structure (Wasilewski 2013: 227).

The first proposal is rooted in the Platonic and Popperian construction of the world (Burgin 2011: 17–20), as Mark Burgin explains in the article *Information in the structure of the world* (2011).

The second proposal is relatively new; in it, the term cyberspace is understood differently. Two senses are distinguished here: one narrower, one wider. In the narrower sense, cyberspace is understood as the space of the Internet and the information it contains (Nentwich 2003). In a broader sense, it is a space for the processing and exchange of information generated by ICT systems, for which the Internet may serve as a platform (Wasilewski 2013: 229–231). Alternatively, cyberspace can be described as an interactive space, of which the Internet is a part, consisting of digital networks used to store, modify, and transfer information (Wasilewski 2013: 229). Cla-

rification regarding the exchange of information related to the anthropocentric universe is an important specification of this proposal. In this sense as well, cyberspace cannot be separated from the anthropocentric universe, because these universes – anthropocentric and digital – complement one another, creating a new semiotic-semantic or pragmatic quality in which specific anthropocentric sign systems are generated and disseminated to varying degrees. Taking into account this attempt at a holistic approach, it is possible – and necessary – to speak of an expanded anthropocentric universe.

Let us consider what may result from the above cognitive professions for anthropological semiotics, considering first the holistic view. Some of the arguments supporting this approach are the following:

– The transfer of processes of management, e.g. social – e-offices, elections, election or informational campaigns, etc., or industrial – remote production control, i.e. control systems, etc.
– Expanded information management, e.g. education, etc.

It is impossible to list all supporting evidence in one place. What are the consequences? First of all, the limitation or complete elimination of direct human participation in the expanded anthropocentric universe, which means that the role of conscious user is assumed by a control program, algorithm, or machine. It is they that influence the decision-making processes of the individual and thus shape his or her quality of life, quality of social relationships, values, and aesthetic qualities. The fact is that the data contained in the digital universe, primarily the exchange thereof, shapes an individual's beliefs about true reality, which appears rational even though it is the hypostatisation of a machine. Anthropological semiotics should ask itself an important question about the mechanism of hypostatisation that occurs at the interface of minds – of the real and of the digital human – and undertake an attempt to clarify the relationships of the formation of expanded anthropocentric sign systems residing in part of the intersection of the ranges of the anthropological and digital universes.

The above issues are examples, as there is no way to list all aspects. The issues relevant to the discussion conducted in this article concern ontological and semantic hypostatisation.

The fact that information plays a key role in the expanded anthropocentric universe cannot be ignored. The processes occurring here, such as semiosis or semiotic mediation, are fundamental processes, i.e. indispensable for the construction of sign systems. Entities created in this way may be subject to degradation in both the semantic dimension, e.g. a change in meaning – the loss of meanings through maintenance of the structural integrity of the sign bearer – and the semiotic, e.g. degradation of the sign bearer through maintenance of the semantic integrity of its semantic deposit. Consequently, we arrive at an irreducible structure: (1) of information; (2) its semantic representation; and (3) the logical value of this representation.

Of the distinguished elements (1)–(3), element (3) is essential for the discussion being conducted here regarding semantic hypostatisation. Every propositional entity has a l o g i c a l   v a l u e , to be understood as the truth or falsehood of a judgment. Other researchers expand this spectrum by adding a value, which is called possibility.[3] Let us pose a question here in reference to the semantic deposit of the sign bearer. Why is it that the logical value of a semantic deposit can be either true, partially true, or false? The answer to this question is difficult. Let us note that in the case of a sign bearer, we are actually dealing with a propositional entity with a multidimensional design, whose semiotic-semantic structure is dispersed in an expanded universe. However, something causes such a structure to become fused. The process binding this structure is ontological hypostatisation, as a result of which a hypostatic object is created.

 The present article is of a purely theoretical character. The object of discussion is the mechanism of the hypostatisation of a semantic and ontological aesthetic object as understood by Roman Ingarden (Ingarden 2005). The choice is not accidental. Firstly, the discussion of an aesthetic object refers to aesthetic experience, which is common; secondly, it narrows the area of reflection to metaphysics (Zahavi 2003), phenomenology (Sepp and Embree 2010), and semiotics, particularly anthropological semiotics (Boroch 2018).[4]

3.   An outline of the theory

The development of multimedia technologies is conducive to the consolidation and dissemination of information related to the primary and secondary content of works of art. Primary content is to be understood as content resulting from direct aesthetic experience (primary level), secondary content from indirect (secondary level). Bearing in mind the specific characteristics of the Digital Age, it is necessary to look at the problem of semantisation and semiotisation of works of art from a different perspective. For example, the semiosphere of Yuri Lotman appears to be a promising cognitive proposition; however, this proposal requires appropriate supplementation which takes into account the specific nature of the Digital Age (cf. Renkas 2016). The cognitive results of this supplementation might nevertheless prove unsatisfactory due to changes in the nature of 'cultural data'. Let us note that at present (2020), cultural data is characterised by (1) instability, (2) diversity, and (3) volatility, when linked to (1) the structural, (2) the semantic, and (3) the semiotic dimensions. All elements, i.e. (1)–(3), constitute the *meta* dimension 'constructed' in the process of semiotic mediation, which is based in turn on both primary and secondary content. Therefore, the *meta* level is characterised by a particular ontological-epistemological structure whose semantic dimension is consolidated and disseminated in the collective consciousness of a particular group of users of culture by means of new media. Fig. 1 illustrates the relationship between these levels.
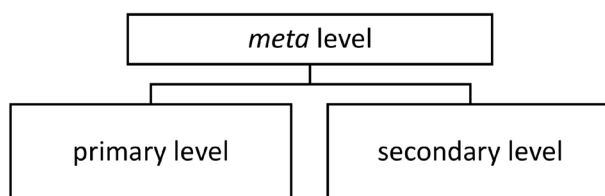
Fig. 1: Structure of the relationship between the primary, secondary, and *meta* levels.

The structure takes into account three levels of creation of thematic content: the primary, at which primary content is created as a result of direct aesthetic experience; the secondary, at which secondary content is created as a result of indirect aesthetic experience; and the *meta* level, at which *meta* content appears. The ontological bond joining these levels is mediation, which results in a hypostatic object to which the viewer assigns specific semiotic-semantic representations of a particular aesthetic value. Aesthetic value is associated not with the hypostatic subject, but with a viewer who is not, at any moment of the aesthetic experience, disconnected in terms of either time or space (universal viewer). Neither is the viewer 'intended' or 'assumed' (ideal viewer) by the entity creating the work, who in this sense becomes himself the viewer-user of specific aesthetic values, which he employs or from which he departs in the creative process. Thus, I propose the introduction herein of the term *generational viewer* or *generation of viewers*.

The direct and indirect aesthetic experience of a generational viewer in a structural and semantic-semiotic dimension is the result of having reached a consensus with regard to a particular aesthetic value, e.g. a work of art that fits into the prevalent aesthetic system accepted by a particular generation of viewers as a model. Let us call this state of affairs a *horizontal aesthetic quality*, that is, one that is (for some reason) recognised as a model (or as typical) for a particular generation of viewers.

A work of art may also be the subject of direct or indirect aesthetic experience for a future generation of viewers, a generation that will perceive different aesthetic value in this work of art. This results in an 'intergenerational' aesthetic quality, transcending the unity of time-space. For more specific terminology, let us call the unity of time-space *horizontal aesthetic quality*, and a rupture of the unity of time-space *vertical aesthetic quality*. Both qualities, i.e. vertical and horizontal, form an aesthetic family which may have areas in common. I present this idea using visualisations in Figs. 2 and 3.

Fig. 2: Visualisation of a spatial horizontal relationship.
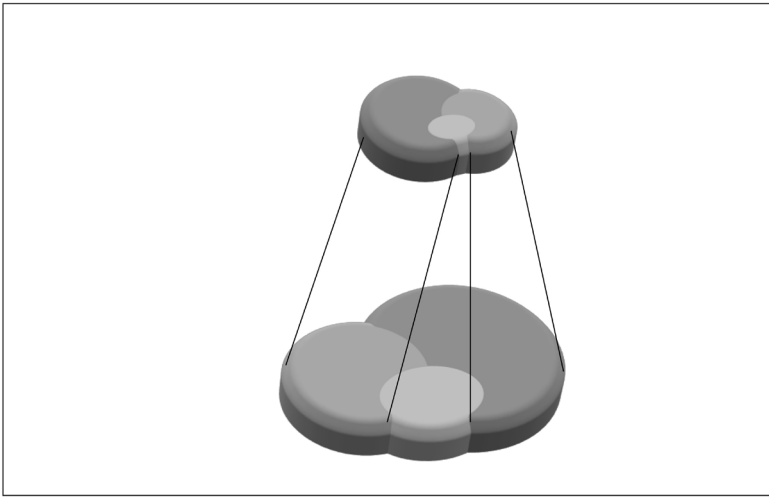
Fig. 3: Relationship of horizontal and vertical aesthetic families.

In the spatial visualisation of a horizontal family (Fig. 2), common or 'inter-generational' areas are visible. A horizontal family does not rule out chronological succession of aesthetic qualities. Chronology, however, does rule out a vertical family, which violates time-space unity. The next visualisation, Fig. 3, reflects the relationship of horizontal and vertical aesthetic families.

Horizontal and vertical families result from the overlapping of aesthetic values prevalent in a particular generation of viewers. However, taking into account the specific nature of the Digital Age, the above considerations need to be supplemented in terms of aesthetic experience, which may be apparently direct or apparently indirect. In other words, this experience is hypostatised based on the semantic-semiotic representation available, e.g. through new media, to the viewer. In such a case, we can speak of an act of aesthetic experience, presented to the subject as real, current, and factual, resulting from the experience of a real work of art. In the first case we are dealing with an imitation of an act of aesthetic experience, in the second with an object hypostatically recognised by the subject as a real work of art. The hypostatic object is the result of the hypostatic abstraction. The hypostatic process must be treated here as a procedure for the transformation of the components of the referent *A* into the hypostatic object.[5] Let us set these considerations in order through the introduction of helpful symbols and ordering terminology.

Hypostatic abstraction, hereafter HA, leads to the emergence of a hypostatic object, hereafter HO; HO is to be understood as *ens rationis*, i.e. an abstract logical unit or a sufficient portion of the information existing in the mind of the subject. Here, the basis of understanding of the object of art comprises the primary and secondary levels, which occupy the initial position in the ontological chain, enabling the emergence of an ontology of a higher order. I have already shown this relationship in Fig. 1; here is another reminder.

$$C$$
$$A \qquad\qquad B$$
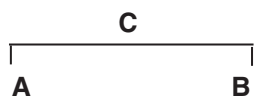
Fig. 4: Relationship between objects in hypostatic abstraction.

Here, A refers to the primary (direct aesthetic experience); B to the secondary (indirect aesthetic experience), and C to the *meta* level. I am assuming that the starting point for our argument is the relationship shown in Fig. 4, created as a result of the completion of the process HA of constructing the hypostatic object HO, here C. This procedure is multi-dimensional, which means that one speaks here not of linearity, but of a spatial grid. A simplified model of the grid, in which basic and higher-order ontologies have been applied, is shown in Fig. 5.

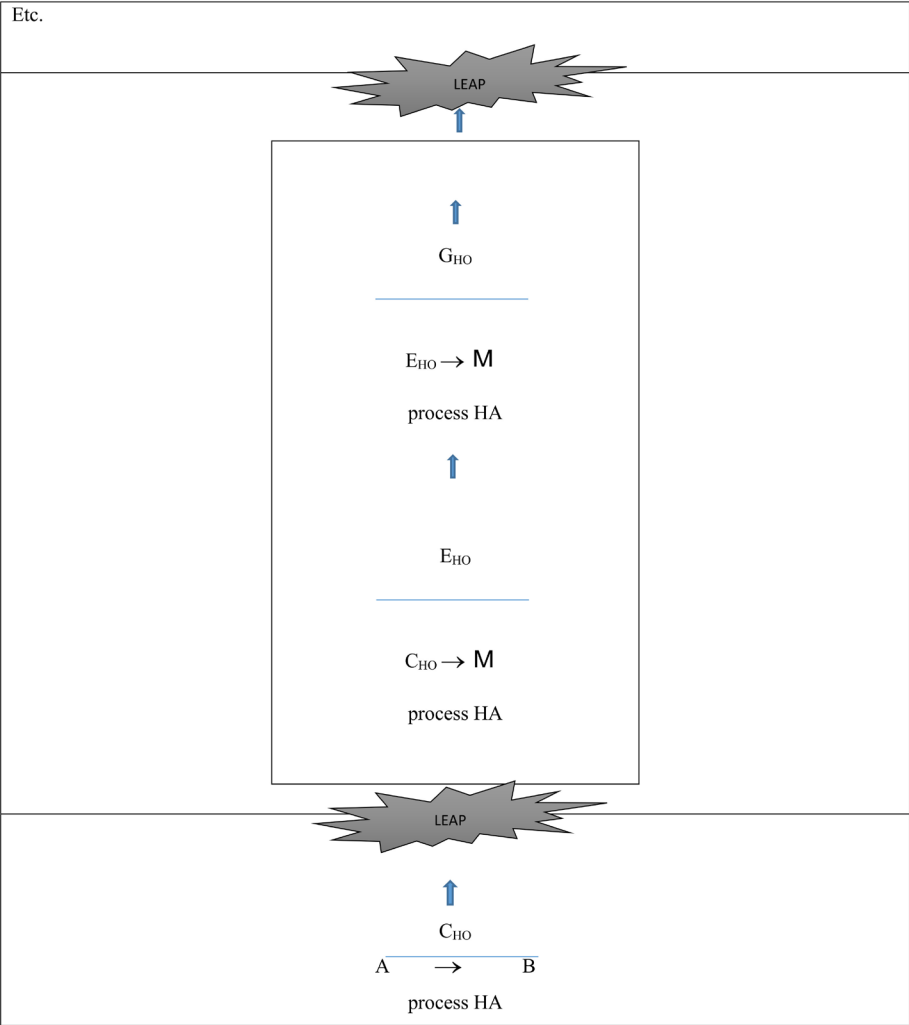| Ontologies		
IV	etc.	
III	$\uparrow$ G_{HO} $E_{HO} \rightarrow M$ process HA	
II	$\uparrow$ E_{HO} $C_{HO} \rightarrow M$ process HA	
I	$\uparrow$ C_{HO} A $\quad\rightarrow\quad$ B process HA	

Legend:
I–IV, etc. – ontologies
I – basic ontology
A, B – objects in a reciprocal relationship **R**
C_{HO}, E_{HO}, G_{HO} – hypostatic objects HO resulting from the process HA
M – unknown object HO
Vertical arrow (large) – direction of vertical changes
Vertical arrow (small) – direction of horizontal changes
Horizontal arrow (small) – direction of hypostatic abstraction

Fig. 5: Two-dimensional abstract model of hypostatic abstraction.

Ontology I is the base ontology for ontology II. At the moment of construction of the object C_{HO} as a result of the process HA, object C_{HO} belongs to both ontology I and to ontology II, with the difference that in ontology I object C_{HO} is the result of the completed process HA, whereas in ontology II object C_{HO} becomes the quasi-basic object of a different process HA, etc. The large vertical arrow represents the hypothetical direction of change viewed from a broad, e.g. historical, perspective; small vertical arrows represent a hypothetical ontological leap. For the process HA to be initiated, the presence of a pair is required (Fig. 4). In basic ontology this pair is represented by A and B. We note that it is only in this ontology, i.e. basic, that such a pair exists. In ontologies of a higher order, an unknown object appears, which I have marked with the symbol *M*; in ontologies of a higher order, the unknown *M* is part of the pair which enables the initiation of the next process HA and the construction of objects HO, e.g. $E_{HO.}$ The unknown *M* exerts no influence on the breakdown of process HA. It must therefore be assumed that there is an additional hidden process enabling the ontological leap. However, this leap still fails to explain either the structure or origin of *M*. In this case one must assume the existence of the object HO *M*, which exerts no influence on the breakdown of HA; however, with respect to the object HO *M* nothing can be determined, except that completion of the process HA transmits to the ontology of a higher order an unknown deposit of a certain value, e.g. semantic-semiotic; this process is called an enigmatic ontological leap, or simply *leap*. A *leap* is, in my view, a reasonable explanation for the presence in higher-order ontologies of an object HO *M*. Should HO *M* perhaps be treated as a meta-object, or as the residue of a 'process within a process'? Let us leave this issue open for further consideration.

Figure 6 presents a visualisation of a hypothetical leap from a base ontology to an ontology of a higher order. Here I leave the unresolved problem of the relationship of HO objects. Let us limit ourselves to the statement that HO objects stand in relationship **R** to each other from a c t u a l or a p p a r e n t   n e c e s s i t y – the former is one in which object A stands in relationship **R** with object B because it is actually true that object A stands in relationship **R** with object B; the latter is one in which object A stands in relationship **R** with object B because it seems to someone that object A stands in relationship **R** with object B. The conclusion is as follows: actual necessity is real necessity, while apparent necessity is hypostasised.

Etc.

$$LEAP$$

$$\uparrow$$

$$G_{HO}$$

_____

$$E_{HO} \to M$$

process HA

$$\Uparrow$$

$$E_{HO}$$

_____

$$C_{HO} \to M$$

process HA

$$LEAP$$

$$\Uparrow$$

$$C_{HO}$$

$$A \quad \to \quad B$$

process HA

Fig. 6: Ontological leap visualization.

In the proposed theory, nine phases of hypostasis are distinguished:

[1] The starting point of process HA is base ontology.
[2] Higher-order ontology becomes the base ontology for another higher-order ontology.
[3] Process HA requires a pair of items (A and B) belonging to the base ontology.
[4] As the result of process HA, object HO is constructed.
[5] In all higher-order ontologies, unknown M is present.
[6] Unknown M is a complement of one element of the pair referred to in point [3].
[7] Unknown M does not influence the collapse of process HA.
[8] Unknown M has the status of the object HO M.
[9] In all higher order ontologies, the presence of HO constitutes an explanation of the
    ontological leap.

4.   Conclusion

The aesthetic object possesses specific characteristics that enable it to be identified with the prototype. However, features that enable identification with the prototype are dispersed in expanded anthropocentric character systems – that is, in the anthropocentric and digital universes. In this aspect, an individual has no access to the entity, only to dispersed elements (Burgin 2011: 24–30), which subjectively appear to him as a whole. Visible here is a special bond of intersecting universes, which can be compared to intentional events (Searle 2008, 2010), which in turn are possible due to the innate intentional stance of the individual (Dennett 1989), explaining the natural presence of ontological and semantic hypostatisation – for different conscious communities, the same aesthetic object then means something different. Here Dennett indicates an intentional semiotic system (Dennett 1989) possessing a social dimension; it constitutes a particular type of hallmark within a particular social structure, a hallmark that specifies intentional expectations towards e.g. 'ways to objectify and make personal, collective power' (Skoggard 2020). Examples of these stances include religious symbols and the various semantics attributed to them. If we proceed further in our considerations, we may become conscious of intentional ontological and semantic hypostatisation. If the possibility of reaching the prototype becomes blocked in some way, a semiotic gap will be created in the reference chains. This problem was pointed out by Yuri Lotman, who employed allegory in the form of a lost cultural key. Is such a cultural key opening the content of the sign bearer (Boroch 2012, 2013) at all necessary?

Notes

1   Let us remember that Eco's position, on which Leach relied, is based in turn on the traditional division of semiotics introduced by Charles W. Morris in 1938, distinguishing between (1) semantics, (2) syntactics, and (3) pragmatics as distinct areas of research. According to the proposed division, semantics took the meaning of the sign as the object of its considerations; syntactics investigates mechanisms for combining characters into systems; and pragmatics, methods of their use. The objective element linking all areas was sign theory, in which the material medium and the semantic deposit associated with it occupy the central place. Morris's division has become a permanent part of the tradition of semiotic research.

2   The problem of hypostasis in the humanities was considered by the eminent Polish philosopher Tadeusz Kotarbiński, the creator of ontological and semantic reism (Woleński 1990).

3   This issue was elaborated splendidly by the Polish logician Jan Łukasiewicz in an article entitled *On Three-valued Logic* (1920).

4   As a reminder, extended anthropocentric sign systems constitute the object of knowledge of anthropological semiotic. The development of a model of hyposta-

tisation in this perspective is key, as it clarifies the relationships between character systems in the expanded universe and their impact on the individual, who, after all, functions in the anthropocentric and digital universe simultaneously.

5   "Hypostatic abstraction is a formal operation that takes an element of information, as expressed in the proposition '*X* is *Y*', and conceives its information to consist of the relationship between that subject and another, as expressed in the proposition '*X* has *Y*-ness'. The existence of the abstract subject *Y*-ness consists solely of the truth of those propositions that contain the concrete predicate *Y*. Hypostatic abstraction is known under many names, for example, *hypostasis*, *objectification*, *reification*, or *subjectal abstraction*. The object of discussion or thought thus introduced is termed a hypostatic object" (Awbrey 2009).

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