Some comments on the relationship between text and reality[1]

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Abstract:
On the basis of a discursive reflection on postmodern approaches, the author of the study discusses the nature of the relationship between (artistic) text and reality, as well as the basic categories related to this issue. He formulates a (hypo)thesis about the homologous relationship between text and reality, which, however, according to the author, has an intertextual essence unlike traditional mimetic solutions.

Defining the problem

The question of how text relates to (non-textual) reality certainly does not have an immanently burdensome nature, although it may seem quite the opposite at first glance. On the contrary, in our opinion, it is most potent in its very conative impact. What we have in mind is the achievements in the field of humanities. This issue is of crucial importance for them precisely to the extent that they include the interpretation of one text or another. And this measure is not negligible. This extensively concerns the interpretation of artistic text (in a broader sense, which will be discussed later, and which includes all other types of art in addition to literature). This is fundamentally conditional to whether the relationship of iconicity is assumed between text and non-textual reality in the sense defined by C.S. Peirce (coherence, form, analogy, etc.) in a way that one concept can be used to refer to another and vice versa, or the relationship of two fundamentally different characteristics, which are incompatible in their otherness and autonomy.

The answer to this question depends on the extent to which we lean towards the notion of artistic text as an autonomous speech game, which is particularly beneficial to the

semiotically "informed" position of our consciousness,[2] and to what extent we approach it as a statement that determines our existence in the life world and, ultimately, the very meaning of our existence (Heidegger's Dasein) in it.[3] The answer to the relationship between text and the life world also depends on the extent to which, and what, we "let out" of our interpretive performance: whether we allow our complex experience to factor in.[4] In other words, it is a question of what meaning we delegate to our interpretive performance: it is to boost our knowledge only, or even transform our personality.

As we know, the imperatives of the postmodern/poststructuralist paradigm (in the sense of Heidegger's "indeterminate *it is*") include the professing of an anti-mimetic relationship between text and the life world, or an anti-representationalist relationship between language and the life world.

We do not dare to assume the position of a sovereign arbiter in this matter. We only admit that some of the arguments used to justify the anti-mimetic relationship between text and the life world do not appear to us to be as obvious as trendily proposed. This directly applies to the references with which the puns about the anti-mimetic relationship of text to the life world are automatically circulated. The compulsory equipment of this trendy pun includes references to Plato's opposition of *diegesis* (narration) and *mimesis* (imitation) in the third book of his *Constitution*,[5] to Kant's concept of *sublimity* (exemplification of incommensurability), but especially to the theses – and it is precisely these theses that we focus on in the upcoming interpretation – with which Ferdinand de Saussure defined the relationship between the *signifier* and signifié, or the relationship between language and reality, in his work *Cours de Linguistique Générale* (2007).

So, let's analyse step by step the validity of these references, as well as the basic conclusions that are drawn from them (usually also as a matter of course). Both are supposed to support the anti-mimetic concept of the relationship between text and reality.

Sign, language and reality

Let's recall how the nature of a linguistic sign is defined in the Swiss course. De Saussure defines the essence of the sign in the first part of the *Course of General Linguistics* (*General Principles*) in the first and second paragraphs of the first chapter (*The Nature of the Linguistic Sign*) as follows: "The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept (*signifié* - Ľ. P.) and a sound-image (*significant* – note by Ľ. P.) /.../. I call the combination of a concept and a sound image a *sign* ..." /.../ The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. /.../ The idea of *"soeur"* (sister) is not linked by any inner relationship to the

2

succession of sounds *s – ö – r* which serves as its signifier in French... /.../ The word arbitrary also calls for comment. The term should not imply that the choice of the signifier is left entirely to the speaker /.../; I mean that it is *unmotivated*, i.e. arbitrary in that it actually has no natural connection with the signified" (Saussure 2007, pp. 96-99).

First of all, it is necessary to emphasize the completely obvious in the above. The Swiss linguist does not deal with the relationship between the linguistic sign and reality, nor is he addressing the relationship of text to reality. In his view of the sign, which diverges from some semiotic triads of Anglo-Saxon provenance (Peirce, Ogden-Richards, Morris, etc.), reality remains simply "outside the scope". De Saussure is concerned exclusively with the relationship between the two internal components of the linguistic sign.[6]

We should emphasize the following: even if, according to de Saussure, the relationship between the significant and signifié is not motivated but arbitrary, this in no way justifies and substantiates an analogical transfer of the qualities of this relationship to the relationship between text and reality. The relationship between the structural units certainly affects the relationship of the structure created by them to other structures, however, it is not automatically transferred to the relationship of the structures themselves. A trivial example: if Marilyn Monroe's forehead does not resemble her nose, this in no way excludes the similarity of her face to Julie London's face.

Let's take a closer look at the impact the de Saussure's anti-representationalist understanding of language has on the relationship between text and reality. It should be emphasized here that precisely thanks to de Saussure's distinction between langue and parole, or paradigms and syntagms, it is obvious that language and text belong to different ontological orders. They can also be defined by opposites such as code–message, dispositional/presuppositional–factual/implementative (Zdeněk Mathhauser) or system–structure (in Miko's unique understanding[7]). Thus, in relation to reality, a statement can be situated in positions other than the language itself.

Two trivial examples of the above:

1. The same language can be used to create a factual report about the real world ("a living person has a head"), fictional world ("a dragon has twelve heads") or nonsense ("a head is conjugated as two to power of three").

2. The paradigm of Arabic numerals has no visual analogy with the human head:

123456789

However, when properly arranged (for example in the verse-poem from the Czech Protectorate "Five, six, seven/Hitler's head/period, comma, exclamation mark/here is the villain"), an image is made in which most of us *recognize* the human head (similarly to what can be observed in some advertisements when a collage of images of faces that do not resemble an image of a *flower* created its mosaic, and vice versa):
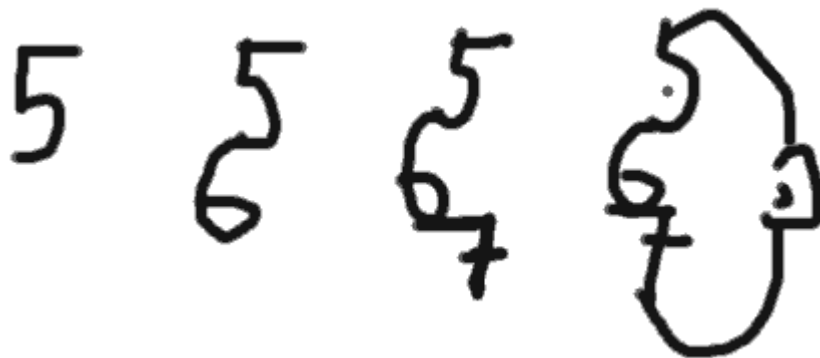
Therefore, the relation of text to reality cannot be confused with the relation of its language level to referential reality. It is simply meaningless to ponder about whether the relationship between linguistic means and referential reality (e.g. the relationship between adjectives or asyndetons used to describe a literary character and a real person) has a mimetic nature or not.

However, it makes every sense to think about the relationship between the topic (the textual model of the world, fictional world), which is articulated through linguistic means, and the non-textual life world and/or referential reality.

And this is where the fatal ambiguity is demonstrated in what is actually meant by the term *referential reality*, *reality* and even *text*. Let's have a closer look at these concepts.

Referential reality

The term *referential reality* is a foreign language synonym of František Miko's expression "*intended reality*" (Miko 1989, p. 41). In common literary parlance, this term is mostly understood extensively (Müller, Šidák, 2012, pp. 137-138, 428-433), i.e. as extratextual reality (for example: the Slovak National Uprising as a historical event is the referential reality in Mináč's novel *The Living and the Dead*). However, the referential or intended reality of the

text is – and it is worth emphasizing it tautologically – the reality that is *referred to, spoken about* in the text (!), and/or which is *meant* in the text (!). What is said in the text is identified by the literary theorists themselves as its theme. And the theme is part of the text (e.g. according to Miko's division into language, theme and style). This means that referential reality does not exist outside the text. The text establishes this reality fictionally or interpretatively. Examples: what is referred to in Cinderella is a fictional world in which a pumpkin is transformed into a carriage; and what is referred to in Hitler's manifesto *Mein Kampf* is a world in which the Aryan race is superior and the Jews are scum.

If someone objects that, for example, *Mein Kampf* is just an interpretation of "referential reality" outside the text, e.g. the reality of the 1920s when this Nazi manifesto was written, we ask: what reality? The Marxist-Leninist reality as interpreted by Stalin? This reality is, after all, an interpretatively constructed world in his texts (in the work *The National Question and Social Democracy*, in his articles in the Moscow Pravda, and in his speeches). Or Freudian reality? This, in turn, is a construct of Freud's texts (e.g. *Die Traumdeutung*). Or religious reality, that is, the created universe? If so, then we ask the following: are we dealing with an extratextual reality in the Buddhist (the world is created by illusion while the ideality aimed at is extra-divine), Gnostic (the demiurge is the source of Evil) or Christian sense? If referential reality is seen extratextually and as the physical or natural world, we ask again: what kind? That of Aristotle, Newton or Hawking? And, if someone objects that by referential reality they mean the reality in itself, we opine that even this "reality in itself" only exists as a referential, hypothetically form(ulat)ed model of the world in certain scientific texts, and only in these texts, which no one has ever had any experience dealing with.

Certainly, in addition to the referential reality of a specific text, there is reality that can be termed the *life world*.[8] However, it is an extratextual reality only in the sense that it exists outside of individual texts, but not outside of texts at all. The life world is an intended reality, a product of referential realities, that is, interpretatively or fictionally established images of the world.[9]

Reality

And what is actually meant by reality when it is claimed that the text does not have a mimetic (or rather, in our understanding, iconic) relationship to it? We are referring to the extratextual, i.e. Doležel's "actual world". This means the "objective" world, as used in positivist objectivism and/or Marxist materialism, i.e. reality as it supposedly exists independently of consciousness, pristinely untouched by language or signs (let's repeat: none

of us actually deals with such a world – it is a model of the world, formed, formulated and existing in the texts on classical logic and the so-called hard natural sciences). Or does it mean the life world as it is actually presented to us, i.e. the world subjectively significant, the world into which language and signs are embodied in a meaning-creative way? If this eventuality holds then the life world has more in common with the text than with the "objective" world: both are the result of semiosis, and both are articulated through signs.

There are indications that the reality, to which the text supposedly has a non-mimetic relationship, does not mean the "life" but the "objective" world independent of consciousness, as constructed by science in its positivist fashion.[10]

Strictly speaking, we are somewhat in agreement with the anti-mimeticism supported by this reasoning. Namely in that we do not dare to class the relationship of the aesthetic narrative to the "objective" (hypothetically assumed) reality as mimetic (in our understanding: iconic). And this is mainly because we simply don't know what this world "unto itself" is like. However, if the *life world* ("for us") is understood as reality, then the relationship between it and the textual world must also be homologous, i.e. iconic. What's more, the *eloquence* of an artistic text in relation to the life world and the feeling of it (that is, the overlapping agreement and similarity with it) is one of the most essential (and currently rather unacknowledged) sources of receptionist fascination with art.

Text

However, the question of what is actually meant when dealing with the term *text* in the declaration of the anti-mimetic relationship between text and reality has an even more fundamental impact on the relationship between text and reality.

From a classical perspective, the concept of text is based on a statement enshrined in writing. However, there is also a broader (and today seen as classical) concept as defined by Jurij Lotman. According to him, text is determined by the following signs: *expressiveness*, *boundedness* and *structure/structural nature* (Lotman 1990, p. 66 – 68).

It is obvious that Lotman's criteria apply not only to the graphically captured statements, but also conversations at the kitchen table, a work of art, theatrical performances, musical compositions, the outfits of subculture members, ceremonies, movement etudes etc.

However, there is an even broader definition of text than Lotman's. It was presented by Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1996) in the idea of a polyphonic novel, and by Jorge L. Borges in his fiction. In this context, we can also mention the concept of ideal textuality by Roland Barthes (2007) or the understanding of text as a network by Michel Foucault (2002). However, in our

view, Theodore H. Nelson's concept of *hypertext* is of particular importance because it refers to textual networks in the computer environment, and an interactive *perplex* (taken from Frederick C. Crews): "By hypertext /.../ I mean nonsequential writing — text that branches and allows choices to the reader. It is best read at an interactive screen. As popularly conceived, this is a series of text chunks connected by links which offer the reader different pathways." (Landow 1998, p. 12). George P. Landow further defines Nelson's term as follows: "...Since hypertext, which links a passage of verbal discourse to images, maps, diagrams, and sound as easily as to another verbal passage, expands the notion of text beyond the solely verbal /.../. Hypertext denotes an information medium that links verbal and nonverbal information." (Landow 1998, p. 12). Hypertext is "multilinear or multisequential". "(o)nce one leaves the shadowy bounds of any text unit, new rules and new experience apply./.../ As this scenario suggests, hypertext blurs the boundaries between reader and writer" (ibid.). "Anyone who uses hypertext makes his or her own interests the de facto organizing principle (or center) for the investigation at the moment. One experiences hypertext as an infinitely de-centerable and re-centerable system /.../ All hypertext systems permit the individual reader to choose his or her own center of investigation and experience. What this principle means in practice is that the reader is not locked into any kind of particular organization or hierarchy." (Landow 1998, pp. 14–15).

As far as the concept of *perplex* is concerned, Nelson defines it as follows: "The true form of most information is what I like to call *perplex,* that is, a mix of various items and relationships, facts, partial facts, statements and opinions, which may contradict each other in many different ways" (Nelson 1998, pp. 5-6)[11].

It can be said that the concepts of *hypertext* and *perplex*, albeit linked to cyber technologies, to a certain extent only highlighted the conditions under which texts had operated "ever since". However, instead of computer networks, the "technological space" in this case was the reception consciousness itself. Historical man lived in a convolution of various codes and texts from the very beginning, and always participated in the final form of some of them through an interactive dialogue.

Existext and textistence

Having realized that Nelson's concept of *hypertext* laxed the criterion of boundedness (at least in the sense that *hypertext* – even in the form of Internet "surfing" – is uncontainable in its vastness within a single human life, and thus it is seemingly infinite), and the concept of *perplex* in turn goes beyond the rigid understanding of text as a coherent piece of

communication, we can conclude that *a meaningfully materialized life world is a case of (hyper)text or perplex.* It is the so-called *existext* with the corresponding *textistence*[12] (existence in the life world as a text).

We are currently only aware of two attributes by which the life world differs from (hyper)text:

1. As a whole, it is not our creation, so its overall form is not subject to our individual will.[13]

2. The function of the bearer of meaning (significant, sign vehicle) is also comprehensively fulfilled here by our bodies (and, as follows from the first attribute, regardless of our will, so we cannot leave *existext/textistence* without losing our life – only death has this privilege).

We argue that all other differences between the text and the so-called real world can be derived from the above two attributes. For example, it can be deduced from the first attribute that, according to some world-views, *existext* is unlimited, has no creator, and therefore no unifying intention or semantic gesture (Mukařovský). Similarly, it can be deduced from the second attribute that in addition to pleasure, *existext* also makes us hurt, sick and grow old, and that we are born into it and die in it. The sense and meaning of classical texts is supported by a parchment or a sheet of paper, and in the case of *hypertext* of the life world, it is fully dependent on the body as well. People say that paper can take anything. But not the body. Young people usually do not realize the dependence of *hypertext* of the life world on the body, but it makes itself known with age, namely with human *decline* (Heidegger).

We deduce from the above that *when a hypertext becomes so technologically developed that it overcomes the two above differences in a "Matrix" way, it will not be possible to distinguish it from the living world.*[14]

The final (hypo)thesis

The relation of text to *existext* (understand: to the life world) is not incommensurable, but primarily *intertextual*. This concerns the relationship between an individual text and complex framework-based *hypertext*, i.e. a part and a whole. If this is the case, then in this particular case it is perfectly possible for all eventualities of intertextual relations, including copying, quoting, imitation, translation, paraphrasing, etc., to come into play, which otherwise are also accepted (at the intertextual level) by the postmodern/poststructural proponents of the radical divide between text and reality. And this relationship is also constitutional: individual texts co-create our life world as *lexia* and in this sense they are part of it.

Endnotes

[1] This study was prepared within the framework of the APVV 17-0026 project "Thematologic interpretation, analysis and systematization of archnarratives as semiotic models of the life world and existential strategies". The Slovak version of the study was published in the Slovak journal Ostium and some parts in the proceedings Poetika textu a poetika udalosti (eds. R. Bílik, P. Zajac, Trnava, Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis, 2018).

[2] "What goes on in a narrative is, from the referential (real) point of view, strictly nothing. What does 'happen' is language per se, the adventure of language, whose advent never ceases to be celebrated." (Barthes, 2008, p. 43)

[3] "What is indeed to be understood — and consequently appropriated — in a text? /.../ What has to be appropriated is nothing other than the power of disclosing a world that constitutes the reference of the text. /.../ This objection may be removed if we keep in mind that what is 'made one's own' is not something mental, not the intention of another subject, presumably hidden behind the text, but the project of a world, the pro-position of a mode of being in the world that the text opens up in front of itself by means of its non-ostensive references. /.../ I say that interpretation is the process by which disclosure of new modes of being — or if you prefer Wittgenstein to Heidegger, of new forms of life — gives to the subject a new capacity for knowing himself. (Ricoeur, 1997, pp. 123, 125; see also: Čechová 2012a, 2012b).

[4] On the concept of "experience", see: Plesník, 1995.

[5] "/.../ poetry and mythology are, in some cases, wholly imitative — instances of this are supplied by tragedy and comedy; there is likewise the opposite style, in which the poet is the only speaker /.../" (Plato 1993, p. 134). At the same time, other categorical oppositions are also used: telling – showing; narration/telling about.../chronicle - showing something/drama (see also: Genette 2002; Chatman 2008; Barthes 2008; Doležel 2003, p. 17-42; Müller, Šidák 2012, p. 93-96, 312-317; Michalovič, Minár 1997; Michalovič 2003.

[6] For the sake of completeness, we should add that the opening paragraph of the fourth chapter (*Linguistics of Language*) of the first part of the *Cours de Linguistique Générale* does not concern the relationship of text to reality. Here, de Saussure addresses the question of the relationship of phonic matter to thinking (ibid., pp. 139-141). Having tapped into the unqualified justification of the anti-mimetic relationship between text and reality, we should add that the declarations of the anti-mimetic relationship between text and reality are not supported by the phenomenon of a naive or veristic recipient. It is as follows: while the discursive (cultured) recipient distinguishes between – in Doležel's terms – the fictional and actual world, the naive or veristic recipient identifies one with the other (classic examples include a reader of Doyle's novels sending letters to Sherlock Holmes at 221B Baker Street in London with a plea to solve his case, or an audience member shooting the "villain" actor during a theatrical performance). A naive or veristic recipient is simply an unqualified participant in artistic communication. His method of reception of the work of art only implies that the themes of some works of art (this is hardly the case of Kandinsky's paintings or Dadaist poems) allow for such a malignant contamination as a result of certain "believable" analogies with reality. However, the superiority of the discursive recipient in relation to the naive one in itself does not indicate the existence of a similar hierarchy between the concept of non-mimetic and mimetic, or of the iconic relationship between text and reality. On the contrary, the elementary assumption of the homologous (and also the mimetic or iconic) concept of this relationship is precisely embodied by the difference between the textual and non-textual worlds (with the exception of *identitas indiscernibililium*).

[7] František Miko (1920 – 2010) was an important Slovak literary scholar, linguist and semiotician. His models of text (style, theme, language) and interpretations of specific texts were programmatically built on an authentic receptional empiricism, acknowledged regardless of what is currently fashionable, trendy, uncritically imitated, etc. in the humanities (academic environment) of today. As Miko's student, the author of this study is affiliated to Miko's scientific legacy.

[8] The term *subject* is reserved for this relationship in classical poetics (Hrabák 1973, p. 78).

[9] From this point of view, a question mark can be placed after Mukařovský's claims and Doležel's concepts of so-called Z-texts and K-texts (Doležel, 2003, p. 37) according to which artistic texts create a model of the world and the topics of scientific texts (which are a part thereof) are based on facts alone.

[10] Indirect evidence for this can be found in the introductory part of the work *Heterocosmica* (*Introduction Terms I*). The *narrative world* is defined here in the following sequence:
1. *S(St): the world of states* ("created by static objects with unchanging physical properties and fixed relationships /.../, a closed, timeless Parmenidean realm of immobility and silence where nothing changes, nothing happens" (ibid., p. 45).
2. *S(PS, St): the natural world* (a "new entity, a natural force appears in it"), which "causes specific changes in the states of the world, called natural events" (ibid.).
3. *S (O, PS, St): a world with one person* ("who, in addition to physical properties, also has a mental life /.../, the changes it causes are conditioned by specific mental events and intentions; such changes are called actions. A person's creative actions enrich the world with a new kind of objects – artifacts"; ibid., p. 46).

4. *S (O, PS, St): a world with two or more persons* (which "brings a new and powerful source of change – interaction. A special case of interaction is communication, the exchange of information using semiotic acts. The interaction takes place between individuals or groups. The groups are organized into institutions in which complex forms of social behavior take place."; ibid.).

Evidently, we are dealing with the reconstruction of the world according to some objectivist concepts. Such a sequence is out of the question in the *life world*: the *life world*, as we are experiencing it, is interwoven with Bakhtinian dialogs and Lévinasian interactions "with others" from the very get-go. There is no primary "I" followed by "others" in it: it is established on the basis of relations between "I/we – you/them". And from the very beginning, it is constitutively (and not additionally) saturated with signs and communication. The events stated at the beginning of the cited scheme only occur much later (phylogenetically and ontogenetically): we begin to think hypothetically or learn how the world around us could have been created and what it is like independently of us, and/or what it was like and what how we were faring before we became aware of it; and only subsequently do we single out an enclave of the world with a quasi-one person (and this only happens in a physical sense) from it. We don't want to resort to cheap paradoxes here, but if the sequence exists, then – as far as our *life world* is concerned – rather in the opposite direction from what is presented in the quoted definition. The world from the quoted model, which developed "objectively" in this way, is therefore not the real *life world*. It is the intended reality, and perhaps the "fictional world" of a certain group of texts (for their definition, see the interpretation above). For the sake of correctness, let's emphasize that in *Heterocosmica* the given sequence is not presented as a given of the *current world*, but as textualized concepts or models of the world (1. classical logic; 2. natural sciences, works of art with natural themes; 3. – 4. humanities and social sciences, narratives; ibid., p. 45, 46). Either way, it doesn't change anything in terms of why the above-cited sequence was chosen here. It is not clearly anchored in the very historical sequence of texts (starting with mythological protostories or religious archnarratives), nor in the synchronous logic of the consensual reconstruction of the world. Rather, the cited sequence preceded the selection of texts that exemplify the individual "levels" of the world in *Heterocosmica*. It can therefore be assumed that it penetrated into the above-mentioned sequence precisely for its epistemological "naturalness" in the concept of the "true nature" of the world as an "objective" reality existing independently of our conscience, which belongs to objectivist (post)positivism.

[11] If the definitions given in this paragraph seem to be empirically unclear, it is enough to substantiate them with the common experience of our contemporaries from "surfing" the Internet.

[12] For the dictionary definition of terminological neologisms *existext* and *textistence*, see: Plesnik 2017.

[13] The question of whether or not it has its author is a matter of discussion on world-views.

[14] We do not rule out that there are counterarguments that can easily disprove our hypotheses. However, the usual objection "If there are no other differences between text and reality, then try and fill your stomach with the printed menu!", is definitely not one of them. The seeming persuasiveness of this counterargument lies in an elementary logical error – in contamination. The point is that only the *signifiant* or *sign vehicle* is taken into account in real food that fills our stomach (which is part of the *existext*), and only the *signifié* is taken into account in the menu. In actuality, we can eat both (the menu and, say, a schnitzel with fries) on the first plane (*signifiant, sign vehicle)*, the only difference being their digestibility and nutrition value (which, however, is not a relevant argument in this context), and neither the menu nor the schnitzel with fries will fill us on the second plane (reading the menu, apperception of the served schnitzel with fries).

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