

Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak and Paula García-Ramírez (eds.), *Hermeneutical Narratives in Art, Literature, and Communication*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2024.

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This review is designed to give an evaluative digest of the collective volume that addresses a number of hermeneutic issues related to arts (painting, music, and cultural heritage), literary narratives (feminist, postcolonial, and dystopian) as well as verbal and visual communication, viewed from noematic (cognitive), cultural, and didactic perspectives. The review highlights the most conspicuous hermeneutic foci of the book chapters, related to self-cognising, presentation and re-presentation, the notion of thirdspace, stance-taking, and the application of edusemiotic strategies in different cultural milieux. The review concludes with establishing the links between the scope of hermeneutic approaches suggested by the volume contributors with the current postparadigmatic episteme.

The volume under review suggests a colourful palette of research findings that demonstrate various dimensions of what can be qualified as heuristics of the interface between Hermeneutics, Semiotics, and Culture Studies. It is a powerful enterprise of international scholars from Poland, Spain, the USA, Morocco, Czech Republic, and Ukraine that bring together hermeneutic issues related to arts (painting, music, cultural heritage), literature (mostly African or Africa-centred oeuvres in their symbolic folklore- and gender-oriented formats, along with postcolonial and dystopian apocalyptic narratives), as well as verbal and visual communication in its cultural, epistemic, didactic, and propaedeutic manifestations.

The above research vectors determined the tripartite design of the volume, with its emphasis on artistic, literary, and multimodal discourses, viewed from spiritual, self-cognising, historical, heuristic, and identity perspectives, all of which are profoundly analysed in the Preface entitled “Hermeneutics as a Pathway to Self-Knowledge.” This title may be considered a pivotal motto of the monographic study, which embraces thirteen chapters that

consistently, step by step, highlight novel and traditional facets of hermeneutics as art, science, philosophy, and a toolkit for adaptation and survival.

The volume presents contemporary Hermeneutics in its multiple approaches and practices not just as a world but rather as a synergetic universe, where both an expert and a lay reader would find a 'planet' to their liking. I, for one, was particularly impressed by the chapters that address Hermeneutics in terms of understanding and revealing the self through art while experiencing the latter as a milieu for catching the invisible (Haładewicz-Grzelak & García-Ramírez 2024, pp. 3-22), going from literary and artistic representations to renewed representations (ibid., pp. 87-108), finding and overcoming apocalyptic parallels between war and disease (ibid., pp. 125-147), creating imaginary thirdspaces and interpreting various discourses to identify their concealed structures and specific thought patterns, which might be used as elements of edusemiotic strategies (ibid., pp. 241-262).

Part One of the volume, "Noematic *Lacunae* in Artistic Discourse," starts with a chapter authored by David Jaeger and Evan Underbrinkin, and plunges the reader into the realm of art per se and fine arts in particular, relying upon the Aristotelian triad of *aesthesis* (experience of knowing oneself and others through art as a saturated phenomenon that implies immediacy of sensation and inexhaustibility of interpretations) :: *poesis* (experience of making a conversation with art) :: *phronesis* (experience of practically living, construing one's individual identity) as the guidelines for cognising the Self as Other through art. Chapters Two and Three, by Sally Stockdale and Andrzej Koział respectively, make the reader travel in time from the vibrational waves of the early 20th century Silver Age painting, associated with the names of Kazimir Malevich, Vasilij Kandinsky, and Nikolai Roerich, where space, pure sensation, and colour find themselves intertwined in spiritual expression, to the painterly motifs of Baroque iconography related to Mary's and St Joseph's kisses as an embodiment of spiritual improvement through mystical experience.

Part One concludes with Chapter Four by Marta Falces Sierra that focuses on Elgar's Cello Concerto in E minor with a special emphasis on narrativity of non-verbal music with its numerous communicative layers, including, among others, that of implied composer and implied audience, which create dramatic tension triggering cognition and re-cognition of music as a semiotic resource that requires interpretation.

Part Two of the volume, "Hermeneutic Diaphaneity in Literary Studies," brings us back to fiction and Literary Hermeneutics, mostly associated with postcolonialism and dystopias as literary trends. For me it was truly intriguing to learn, from Chapter Five authored by Violetta Jojo Verge, about the role of Adinkra pictographic symbols in animistic culture as an old

communication system practiced in Western Africa and their usage as recurring patterns that pervade the narrative of contemporary West African women's literary works. Eight of such symbols referred to in this Chapter illustrate the way such a multilayered ideographic language is employed by African women authors to acquire their voice in literature for the sake of the continent's cultural awakening. Against this background the notion that gets most salient and promising hermeneutically is that of representation as an intermediary between language and concepts, related, respectively, to the experienced and imaginary possible worlds. Given that notion, the author introduces a derivative term, that of re-presentation as a marker of the flexibility of meaning-making, proving the assumption that the meaning is always "in a process of emerging and thus, never fixed" (Haładewicz-Grzelak & García-Ramírez 2024, p. 89), preserving cultural tradition while bringing it closer to modernity.

The African theme is further developed in Chapter Six by Beatriz Valverde, where two novels that deal with European colonisation in Africa are compared in terms of colonial landscapes – Graham Greene's *A Burnt-out Case* and Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Desertion*, as well as elaborated in Chapter Eight by Paula García-Ramírez, which focuses upon Christopher Okigbo's poetry that highlights present-day African conflicts, describing apocalyptic scenery of violence and abuse, along with prophesising war. The issue of apocalypse becomes central in Chapter Seven, authored by Almudena Machado-Jiménez, that addresses the language of war and apocalypse tropes in Meg Elison's dystopian *The Book of the Unnamed Midwife*. This American post-apocalyptic feminist novel (2014) depicts a terrible picture of gender-coloured cultural violence, drawing "a new map of hell" (ibid., p. 125) based on the heuristically powerful disease-war parallelism.

Part Three of the volume, entitled "Epistemic Spaces in the Geopsyche Universe of Visual and Verbal Communication," combines at least three hermeneutic foci – conceptual, communicative, and didactic. The former one is traced in Chapter Nine, contributed by Fatima Ez-zahra Benkhallouq and Wahiba Moubshir, and in Chapter Eleven by Valentina Ushchyna, which mainly deal with specific thought patterns that provide cultural transmission (as Berber proverbs representing a dynamic cultural legacy) or discourse structuring in terms of stance-taking (as in Covid-19 blogs), embracing epistemic modalities of (un)certainly and evidentiality. The communicative angle of the "hermeneutical dialogue through guided interpretation" (ibid., p. 181) is focal in Chapter Ten, coauthored by Joanna Lubos-Kozieł and Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak, under the title "Thirdspace Creation as a Geopsyche Dialogue with Tourists in the Karpacz Holiday Resort, Poland." Here thirdspace is interpreted as a phenomenological concept and a research perspective in studying mediated spaces of

urban and other cultures as dialogically constructed experiential identities, both real-and-imagined, actual-and-virtual, emerging as a stylised space representation within manifestations of visual and verbal textuality.

The two final chapters of the volume, Chapter Twelve contributed by Marta Wrześniewska-Pietrzak, and Chapter Thirteen authored by a group of scholars (Katarzyna Mazur-Włodarczyk, Małgorzata Haładewicz-Grzelak, Elżbieta Karaś, Joanna Kolańska-Płuska and Przemysław Misiurski), have a definite instrumental and pedagogical bias. The former one addresses the state of the art with language and identity of the deaf community in Poland, particularly in what concerns the efficient schooling and education of hearing-impaired children. The latter focuses upon the Chinese concept *wenming* ('civility') as an edusemiotic strategy of *Bildung*, that of creating and spreading culture. Such a strategy, which is also referred to as a socially engineering one, is designed to ecologise Chinese society through explaining and understanding morals, hygienic and pragmatic values grounded mainly in visual textuality, embodied cognition, and educational coercion. Going deeper into the etymology of the *wenming* concept, the scholars succeeded in outlining the heuristic domains related to the concept in question (such as reference to nature / natural habitat, cohesive and centripetal dynamics, cultural significance, historicity, etc.) along with defining its hermeneutic density.

Characterising the book in general, I would rather not try and place it on the hermeneutic map as it has already been done in a very detailed analytical Preface (ibid., pp. xvii-xxxviii) with its numerous mentions of Diltheyan, Gadamarian, and Ricoeurian hermeneutics as well as Greimassian semiotics as another proof of the inseparable link between semiotic and hermeneutical studies through the very idea and methodology of interpretation (Andreichuk, 2021, p. 35-36). To conclude, I would rather use another imaginary map, a paradigmatic one, to locate the chapters of this project there. My assumption is that the present-day hermeneutic panorama represented in the volume fits well in the postparadigmatic syncretic phenomenological episteme, which no longer centres around the system of hypotheses and methodologies, but is oriented towards the phenomenology of the world in its multidimensional existence (Vorobyova, 2021, p. 30). Given that, the monographic study will definitely attract attention of all those interested in the philosophy of language, verbal and cultural semiotics, as well as hermeneutics as a multidisciplinary field.

References

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