

BOOK REVIEW

Pop, I. & Veres, O. (2010). ELEMENTS OF APPLIED SEMIOPHYSICS. Cluj-Napoca: Risoprint.

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The book of Ion Pop and Otniel Veres, *Elements of applied semiophysics* (Risoprint Publishing, 2010), is a fresh and invigorating appearance in an environment that is, unfortunately, abundant in far too rigid and impersonal collages. The approach of both authors has the great gift of being both intellectually stimulating and informative, but without being overly technical or precious. In addition, although it is marked by an obvious religious attitude (honestly admitted by the authors), there are sufficient reasons for the book not to remain silent to the lay public, especially through the first chapter (a strictly theoretical part entitled "Semiophysics Systems"). From a brief and well documented presentation we find out that semiophysics (a relatively new concept for the Romanian intellectual environment) is "the science of synergistic signification in the process knowledge" (p. 12), a transdisciplinary structure within the perimeter created by phenomenological physics (the common meaning of the natural knowledge), semiotics and ethics. The three areas (provinces, pillars), of semiophysical knowledge join together in the "transdisciplinary field of semiophysical knowledge, based on the semiophysical model of synergic synthesis in an attempt to find points of confluence between areas that seem to have nothing in common" (p. 34).

Transdisciplinarity (and semiophysics as a legitimate representative of it) is one of those endeavors that place any honest postmodernist (assuming that this phrase is not an oxymoron) in deep dilemma: do we face a typical expression of the postmodern spirit or, conversely, another attempt to defend against it? Content analysis, but also the analysis of the attitudes of authors lead us to the conclusion (somewhat paradoxical for those less familiar with the field of transdisciplinarity) that the work of Ion Pop and Otniel Veres is an anti-

postmodernist manifesto, though designed as the latter's extension. On the one hand, references aimed at the logic of the included or hidden third, at the role of the quantic observer in knowledge or the intrinsic contextualism present in the view on communication remind us of typical postmodernist stances. On the other hand, conservative attitudes towards moral values, the appeal to authority (see the second part bearing the explicit title "Authority and testimony") and even the solid scientific foundation of the approach are recurring elements of a modern Weltanschauung. Not accidentally, the authors define transdisciplinarity as "the eternal desire of mankind to retrieve the unity from the beginning of knowledge" (p. 8).

The book does not lack abundant bibliographical references and appeals to other areas (they are quite abundant actually – which is something wrong, indeed, to be said about a transdisciplinary work). Instead, what is lacking is self-determination, the correct establishing of its own status. Do the "Elements of Semiophysics" want to be a non-technical introduction to semiophysics? Does it want to be an example of applying a lay exegetical paradigm to the Scripture? Does it want to be a simple support for those with some interest or expertise in this field? The preface, a place that would be suitable for a declaration of intent (even if only a formal one) is relatively cryptic. According to the only two pages included in the introduction, the fundamental status of the "Elements of semiophysics" is that of a "dialogue between religion and science from the perspective of transdisciplinary knowledge" (p. 8). I feel (and hopefully the second edition, already in preparation, will correct this) that there is room for more extensive explanations here.

Returning to transdisciplinarity, *primum movens* of the book, we will legitimately ask ourselves whether claiming transdisciplinarity in terms of neo-contemporary protestant thinking isn't somewhat exclusive and pernicious, in the end. "If Christian thought is essentially transdisciplinary, then its basic book, the Bible, cannot be otherwise, by the very manner of its composition [...] Scripture is not only reading but listening, communion, being also a description of how to enter into this communion" the authors assert (p. 47) which makes at least one question rise: to what extent can these features be applied to a religious thought other than the Christian one or even to philosophy, for example? In other words, doesn't emphasizing so much on the side of the evangelical thought (which breathes through every pore of the book, especially in the second part) mean the risk of losing the interest of readers from other areas than this one?

Despite all the tenacity and exactness in the attempt to map concepts such as "synergistic communication" or "search window", the authors reveal their prejudices and a surprising superficiality in treating a construct like postmodernism. For example, we fear that an extended quote from a newspaper article by Radu Paraschivescu (although picturesque and exciting in its own way) would not be a very suitable source for an accurate description of "the recent human hedonism". Equally, the call to some clichés ("the abolition of boundaries between fantasy, virtual and reality" or "the absolute loss of moral values in our culture" - p. 68) for a summary of the postmodern condition without any kind of references from classic titles in this area seems to be a form of methodological errors. The same paragraph devoted to postmodernism is the venue of some statements definitely hasty and poorly or not at all justified; for example, the outspoken assertion that "the more a person spends more time on the Internet, the more depressed and more stressed one is"(p. 69) is an unwanted contrast to the attitude displayed in the theoretical chapter of the book, a mere subjective observation that could equally well be false or true in the absence of any references to data to certify this conclusion. The frailty of this approach is at its peak in these pages, and as long as they were not essential for achieving the goals of the book, it would have been desirable that the subject was avoided.

Clearly, each of the above criticisms is not a criticism of the “Elements of applied semiophysics” themselves but rather a pretext for discussion and debate. From this perspective the authors’ purpose is fully accomplished. Whether you agree or disagree with the approach of the problem or with the nuances of the theories (incidentally, semiophysics as a theoretical model of communication seems to be a construction solid enough to become a legitimate part of any academic course of communication theories within Romanian or foreign universities – we especially address this to specialists, particularly to those laymen like us who could ignore the approach presented here because of its religious and confessional load), the most important success of the book is precisely to make you ponder, to stimulate and accelerate your neural circuits, something so rare in today’s textbooks.