

The Concept of the Trace within the Semiotic Project:

Umberto Eco as a Model

مفهوم الأثر ضمن المشروع السيميائي - إمبرتو إيكو - أنموذجا

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Abstract:

Contemporary Western philosophy established the concept of difference and succeeded in transcending all systematic thinking based on unity and stability. It founded the concept of multiplicity by moving beyond methodological monism to assert the plurality of methods and the relativity of truth. Perhaps the most important of these methods is the hermeneutic method as an approach to understanding philosophical texts. The meaning of hermeneutics (interpretation) has multiplied, ranging from understanding, explanation, and application to other meanings.

Umberto Eco is considered one of the contemporary philosophers who focused on the interpretation of philosophical texts. What distinguishes Eco's hermeneutics is his reliance on the paradigm of the openness of signification and its infinitude, which is linked to the concept of the "Work" (Opera/Work in progress). On what basis did Eco build his hermeneutics? And what is the relationship between understanding the text, the concept of the Work, and the migration of meaning from one text to another and from one reader to another?

Keywords: The Text; Understanding; The Work (The Open Work); Openness of Signification; The Semiotic Project.

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ملخص:

أسست الفلسفة الغربية المعاصرة لمفهوم الاختلاف واستطاعت أن تتجاوز كل تفكير نسقي قائم على الوحدة والثبات وأسست لمفهوم التعدد انطلاقاً من تجاوز أحادية المنهج والقول بتعدد المناهج ونسبية الحقيقة ولعل أهم هذه المناهج المنهج التأويلي كمنهج لفهم النصوص الفلسفية، ولقد تعدد معنى التأويل من معنى الفهم والتفسير، والتطبيق إلى معاني أخرى، ويعتبر إمبرتو إيكو واحد من الفلاسفة المعاصرين الذين اهتموا بتأويل النصوص الفلسفية وما يميز تأويلية إيكو هو اعتماده براديفم انفتاح الدلالة ولا نهائيتها المرتبطة بمفهوم الأثر فعلى أي أساس بنى إيكو تأويليته وأي علاقة بين فهم النص ومفهوم الأثر، وارتحال المعنى من نص إلى آخر ومن قارئ إلى آخر؟.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النص؛ الفهم؛ الأثر؛ انفتاح الدلالة؛ المشروع السيميائي

Introduction:

Since the advent of contemporary philosophies, the human being has no longer been regarded merely as a rational animal and has used the expressions of the Greek philosopher and pioneer of formal logic, Aristotle. Reason is no longer the sole attribute and essential trait that defines human existence or explains why one is in this world. Instead, language has become the medium between the being and its existence, the human essence worthy of comprehension, since it is the dwelling of being, in the words of the philosopher of existence, Martin Heidegger. Through language, subjects transform into linguistic beings, carrying with them all that language encompasses words, expressions, signs, and symbols, through which meaning journeys across various paths, thereby opening the horizon to multiple interpretations. Thus, the act of interpretation is released, escaping the confines of meaning into the expanse of the sign and the infinitude of understanding. The term hermeneutics cannot be confined solely to the domain of philosophy; for the German philosopher described by Hans-Georg Gadamer in his work, *Hermeneutics and Philosophy*, as the Neoplatonist, namely, Friedrich Schleiermacher, was the first to transfer hermeneutics from its theological domain into the philosophical domain, from the interpretation of sacred texts to the interpretation of human-authored texts. This concept subsequently expanded and was widely applied across philosophical and nonphilosophical fields alike, including literature, the arts, and the social sciences.

Thus, hermeneutics managed to penetrate all modes of thought and enter intellectual fields and projects so rich and abundant that they require reassessment, understanding, and critique, with language entrusted with the task of review. Language is taken as the path through which the hidden meaning is revealed from its apparent form, the spoken and the

unspoken, in every human text or discourse. In this domain, a host of philosophers and literary figures emerged who engaged in exploring this project and became the foremost authorities in hermeneutics. While Schleiermacher and, subsequently, Wilhelm Dilthey laid the philosophical foundations of hermeneutics, the Italian semiotician Umberto Eco elevated this turning point to the literary and artistic domains through his book *Reflections on the Narrative*. Eco demonstrated the role that novels, films, writings, and metaphors play in understanding reality and the world. Through his hermeneutic project, he showed how the open emerges from the closed, how a text can tend towards infinite reading and the openness of meaning in his book *The Open Work*. He also discussed the issue of multiple interpretations and the cooperative nature of interpretation in narrative texts in his book *The Role of the Reader*, relying on Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic approach.

What will be examined within the hermeneutic context of Eco is the concept of the trace within the semiotic project. How did the Italian critic and writer manage to render the process of human understanding practical, endowing it with flexibility and infinitude rather than closure and limitation? What does Eco mean by the open work, and towards whom or what does this openness tend, the reader, the text, or the enabling factors of understanding? What criticisms have been directed at his project, and has he succeeded in convincing his opponents and responding to his critics?

1. The Intellectual Framework of the Concept of the Openness of the Trace within Eco's Hermeneutics:

Before discussing the concept of the open work within Eco's semiotic project, it is essential to trace the intellectual roots and the most significant motives and factors that profoundly influenced the formulation of his intellectual framework regarding this concept, as well as the development of his hermeneutic project. These range across literary, semiotic, and philosophical references.

It is not surprising that these fields intersect in tracking Eco's interpretative trajectory because discourse on semiotics is discourse on the sign, and nothing escapes the dominion of the sign. Discourses about human beings in various dimensions and the experiences and traces they produce cannot be separated from the domain of the sign and the interconnected chain of signs. Since humans are called upon to understand themselves and the world

around them and to trace their effects, the process of understanding and interpretation inevitably falls within the domain of hermeneutics and interpretation. "The semiotic link is established through the aid of conventional elements, among which the following must be highlighted: a sign cannot be considered in isolation, separate from other signs; it comes into being in the moment it is interpreted by other signs, being a qualification for other signs."¹

What justifies the strong presence of semiotics in Eco's thought? Although Ferdinand de Saussure is considered one of the foremost representatives of the semiotic movement, followed by Charles Sanders Peirce, Eco acknowledges that the philosophical tradition involves a semiotic approach. If philosophy is a contemplation of reality, this reflection is inseparable from the system of signs from the Greek era to the contemporary period. Eco demonstrates in his book *The Sign* that Plato's theory is essentially a theory of the sign and that Sophist philosophy was able to exercise a sort of control over minds through signs and, consequently, through speech and the art of rhetoric. Aristotle laid the foundations of an entire policy using signs to regulate human behaviour in three dimensions: legal, pragmatic, and dialectical.

In the medieval period, Eco cites Saint Thomas Aquinas, who formulated hermeneutic rules for sacred scripture, whereby signs belong to a universal linguistic system carrying a specific meaning that expresses what God intends to convey and reveals divine truth. Turning to the influence of semiotics in the modern era, Eco points to John Locke, whom he considers the father of modern semiotics through his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In this book, Locke clarifies that sciences are divided into sections: physics, which concerns corporeal or spiritual things; practical application, which consists of rules guiding our actions; and finally, semiotics, namely, the knowledge of ideas and words, which are tools for the other sciences.²

A careful observer of the historical trajectory of the sign and consequently semiotics or semiology as a system of signs and its relation to philosophy recognises the functional interdependence between the sign and interpretation. Humans are symbolic animals, and symbolism is not confined to language but extends to the cultural sphere. Signs are a human

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Sign: A Conceptual Analysis and Its History*, trans. Said Benkrad (Beirut: Arab Cultural Centre, 1st ed., 2007), 250.

² Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 229.

product, and everything surrounding us in the external world, as well as all that society carries, constitutes an arsenal of signs that form a vital subject for interpretation, encompassing life and continuity.

To clarify the relationship between the sign and interpretation and to show that interpretation is nothing but the understanding, simplification, and clarification of the meaning of the sign, which acquires actual existence through interpretation, Eco begins his book *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* with the story of Mr. Sigma and the doctor. Each speaks a different language: Mr. Sigma is Italian, and the doctor is French. Both must simplify and clarify signs to achieve agreement and understanding of the signs used by each individual, which differ according to the environment and culture. The doctor's understanding and diagnosis of Mr. Sigma's illness are not based on the patient's feelings but instead on a system of vocal and bodily signs. Conversely, Mr. Sigma sought the doctor in an area of Paris through dozens of signs translated from Italian into French, which could be gestures and actions, symbols, or physical traits with multiple meanings. "As will become clear, the sign is a guide to interpretation and a mechanism that, starting from an initial stimulus, leads to all the farthest interpretative conclusions."¹

What we deduce from this story is that the sign is not exclusive to the educated class, the elite group, or the audience of linguistics and semiotics but is used by all segments of society for daily communication and the expression of lived experiences. This has moved the sign beyond the linguistic and language domains into the cultural, social, and even historical realms, highlighting the openness of signs to human life and the external world. Eco attributes this idea to Peirce's semiotics.

Among the contemporary semiotic figures who shaped the core of hermeneutic philosophy and the foundation of Eco's semiotic project was the American philosopher with a pragmatic inclination, Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce's status in Eco's semiotic framework is evidenced by the new concept he proposed for *semiosis*, one of the fundamental concepts within Eco's semiotic space, upon which he built his hermeneutic project. Peirce's distinction,

¹ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, trans. Ahmed Al-Sam'i (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1st ed., 2005), 69.

according to Eco, lies in adding a third dimension to the sign, unlike Ferdinand de Saussure, who confined the sign to the relationship between the signifier and the signified and to linguistic meaning. Peirce transcended the limits of this sign to the referent or object, that is, what the sign realistically represents: "The clearest difference between the Saussurean model and the Peircean model is that the latter, being triadic rather than dyadic, includes a third term that goes beyond the limits of the sign, which I mean as the object (or the referent). As we have seen, for Saussure, the signified is not an external referent but an abstract mental representation. Although Peirce's object not only indicates tangible things, as is also true for Saussure's signified, it can also be abstract concepts or imaginary entities."¹

Peirce distinguishes between three types of signs: the *representamen*, the *object* of representation, and the *interpretant* or interpreter. The Peircean sign consists of three indispensable elements, namely, the *representamen*, *object*, and *interpretant*, which grant continuity to the sign. Signs are generated through the act of interpretation. "On this basis, the semiotic process (the field of semiosis) calls upon the object as the instrument of representation, the clarity as the thing to be represented, and an interpretant that connects the two elements, that is, what allows the object to be fully represented within the communicative event."²

A sign loses its meaning if the relationship between the *representamen* (or *representamen*) that performs the representation and the object of representation is dissolved. The relationship between them is not direct but instead is mediated through the interpretant. This means that the *representamen* refers to the object through the interpretant as the third component of the sign, through which the receiver apprehends the sign. This Peircean triadic model, surpassing Saussure's dyadic model of significance, forms the foundation of Eco's semiotics in linking Peirce's semiosis with semiotic production and the generation of signs. "Accordingly, a sign is produced only if it immediately enters into a triadic relation in which the third term, the interpretant, is automatically generated anew, and this process continues indefinitely."³ Building on the third dimension of the sign and

¹ Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, trans. Talal Wabbah (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1st ed., 2008), 75.

² Said Benkrad, *Semiotics and Interpretation: An Introduction to Semiotics* (Arab Cultural Centre, 1st ed., 2005), 77.

³ Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 39.

meaning, Eco relates the sign to the cultural system from which the meaning emerges, asserting that communication between sender and receiver does not proceed via signs isolated from their context.

In Eco's view, knowledge of signs necessarily entails knowledge of the rules governing and underpinning the sign because humans, as symbolic animals, are themselves the language and speech they use. Since every language is a cultural and social product, knowing the rules of signs means, correspondingly, knowing the society, that is, the cultural and social context that produced the sign, taught it, and administered it to its members. "The word or sign a human uses is the human being itself, and that life is a sequence of ideas affirms that the human is a sign."¹

Peirce distinguishes among three types of interpretants: immediate interpretants, dynamic interpretants, and final interpretants. The primary function of the immediate interpretant "is to provide the significance with a point of departure."² It arises from the direct apprehension of the object, producing an interpretant that signifies it, as in the statement "the sky is clear." The quality of clarity has no intrinsic connection to the immediate interpretant itself and is external to it; the interpretant merely describes it as it is and determines what is given and present, which may appear directly evident. The dynamic interpretant, on the other hand, functions to specify the effect that the sign actually produces in the mind of the interpreter, meaning that it moves beyond the direct data associated with the immediate interpretant to the realm of open interpretation. This requires the use of the speaker's faculties on the basis of the notion that a person is the language they speak and the reliance on a cultural encyclopaedia, by which fixed elements become fluid. The unsaid becomes articulated through an infinite chain of signs and the unlimited circulation of these signs.

The infinite process of semiosis and dynamic interpretation, according to Eco, leads to infinite interpretive labyrinths, prompting him to impose limits on interpretation in his

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 273.

² Said Benkrad, *Semiotics and Interpretation*, 94.

project of *multiplicity of interpretation*, protecting interpretation from excess and deviation towards meaninglessness.

"The observer of the Peircean view of the sign finds that there is no cessation or repose as long as references do not cease or quiet down, so interpretation as a search for truth lacks legitimacy and rigour, making any systematic attempt to define its conditions a failed venture within the semiosis movement. "¹

The role of the final interpretant lies in placing limits on this process within a specific domain and horizon, which is encapsulated by habit and convention. Hence, the final interpretant is what the sign intends to say or what it invokes. "²

The idea of Peircean semiosis has taken a vast course within Eco's semiotic system. On the one hand, it has opened the field for the openness of significance and the infinity of the sign. However, Eco expresses caution regarding this openness to prevent erroneous interpretations. Nonetheless, Eco aligns with Peirce's view, considering the interpretant merely a representation that endows the sign with an appearance of truth. This representation, in turn, opens the way for another interpretant, thus initiating a process and chain of interpretants. Eco utilises Peirce's concept of the final interpretant to set limits on the notions of openness and the hermeneutic labyrinth by determining the sign's fate within its cultural context and under the boundaries and rules of the communicative community. The role of the final interpretant does not imply an absolute end to semiosis because the process of interpretation is infinite but rather the reduction of its scope and the specification of its parameters within the external system in which it exists, guided by the set of signs particular to the linguistic community, including all the rules and linguistic system entailed by the language. This suggests that communication is a semiotic process that proceeds from the immediate interpretant to the dynamic interpretant and ultimately to the final interpretant, thereby forming a logical Peircean interpretive chain governed by the logic of the three categories and defining three modes of existence.

Suppose that Aristotelian categories define the essence of existence and that Kantian categories distinguish between sensible and intelligible judgments as well as between

¹ Saida Khensali, Umberto Eco and the Critique of Multiplicity of Interpretation (Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2015), 188–189.

² Said Benkrad, Semiotics and Interpretation, 101.

analytic and synthetic judgments. In that case, Peirce's categories establish modes of existence. The first, the category of *Firstness*, relates to the general, inherent qualities of a type; its existence is independent of other things or events and represents the immediate mode of being, which corresponds to the immediate interpretant. The second, the category of *secondness*, pertains to facts and actions; it connects the subject to its place, expressing the actual and realisation of the subject. This category translates the sensory content of the category of Firstness into concrete reality, moving from mere potentiality to actuality by relating it to other predicates and embedding it within spatiotemporal facts. This actualisation of things is represented by the dynamic interpretant and articulated with reference to the cultural encyclopaedia. This interpretative process appears infinite, granting semiosis its infinite becoming.

It is essential, however, to impose limits on this openness to prevent it from falling into disorder by adhering to a set of rules and laws. This function is fulfilled by the final interpretant, corresponding to Peirce's third category, the category of *Thirdness*, which governs these facts by means of a linguistic semiotic system regulated by law. This system operates like a filter that selects and confines the infinite interpretations generated by the dynamic interpretant within the boundaries, laws, and rules of the community's language, shaping their collective memory and contributing to successful communicative processes among themselves. Like Firstness, it retains a characteristic of generality, but this is a legal generality rather than a generic or potential generality, unlike Secondness, which has an individual character.

"Within an interpretative process, the interpretive act tends to stabilise this process within a cultural context that can be regarded as a final horizon within the interpretative course, leading from the determination of initial semantic data for an immediate interpretant, to the evocation of a richly diverse series of significations (dynamic interpretant), culminating ultimately in the establishment of a semantic anchoring point represented by the final interpretant."¹

¹ Said Benkrad, *Semiotics and Interpretation*, 152–153.

Eco utilises Peirce's concept of habit as a system of symbolic linguistic codes for the communicative practice of a given community, which he terms the *world of discourse* or the general semantic system. The interpretation of the world is nothing but the interpretation of signs connected to the cultural stock and the political, social, and even ideological context of that community. Relying on communicative systems that reflect culture, the external world is interpreted and given meaning, thus transforming cultural content into objects of linguistic communication. Moreover, the relationship between culture and communication has mutual implications: wherever culture exists, communication exists. "This conception of culture entails a correspondence between thought and language; here, Eco, drawing on Peirce's views, holds that ideas are but signs."¹

Thus, Eco, inspired by Peirce, was able to vitalise the human world through the final interpretation and semiosis, delineating the features of a cultural semiotics concerned with cultural symbols and signs as mediators between humans and their external world and between the self and the other. These symbols serve as values and reinforcers of social communicative relationships. Eco affirms that humans are symbolic animals and that symbolism extends beyond language to include culture and habit, drawing on the philosopher Ernst Cassirer, the originator of the theory of symbolic forms. According to Eco, life becomes a practice of an unceasing symbolic arsenal that transcends linguistic signs to include material and spiritual symbols in the relationship between humans and their creators. In his book *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco explores the meaning of symbolism in various domains. For example, Freud associated symbolism with the system of dream symbols interpreted according to patients' associations. Lacan equates the symbol with semiotics and relates it to the symbolism of mystical life and artistic experience. Hence, life at various levels and fields consists of symbolic expressions and practices. This symbolism contributes to openness toward the world and its depth through the process of interpretation: "The symbolic form does not distinguish a specific type of sign or a particular way of producing the sign, but only a way of textual production and interpretation."²

¹ Anwar Al-Murtaji, "A Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign," *Contemporary Arab Thought Journal*, no. 46 (Summer 1987), Beirut and Paris: National Development Centre, 48.

² Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 378.

The significance of symbolism and the symbol is evident in tracing Eco's hermeneutic philosophy in his book *The Open Work*, where he addresses the openness of the text within the artistic and aesthetic experience. He does so through the study of baroque aesthetics, Romantic aesthetics, and symbolism, highlighting the importance of metaphor in the interpretative process and in embodying and defining the unsaid within the text.

2. The Concept of Open Work within Eco's Semiotic Project:

Eco's concept of openness is linked to the text and the reader, as it relates to the interpretant directed towards a specific artistic or literary effect, discourse, or work. Eco established the foundations of the term "openness" in his work *The Open Work* through his presentation at the 18th International Congress of Philosophy in 1958, which addressed the problem of the open work.¹

In this book, Eco did not limit the concept of open work to the text or to a specific epistemic field; instead, he expanded it to encompass knowledge and artistic fields such as music, painting, and plastic arts, among others. Conversely, in his book *The Role of the Reader*, he focused on the narrative text expressed through language to clarify the meaning of the open work. This finding indicates that the first book concentrated on audiovisual fields, whereas the second focused on the text as a symbolic human production subject to interpretation and serving as a mediator between the author and the reader. "Therefore, this book aims to address the phenomenon of verbal narrative as an object of interpretation by the reader... I will not deal here with the matter of the (open work) in all models of musical, visual, and other types of texts; rather, I exclusively aim to study verbal texts."²

The text constitutes the central focus of the interpretative act in particular and of hermeneutic philosophy in general. It represents a crucial meeting point between the sender and receiver and between the creator and the recipient. It can be considered a space for the convergence and dialogue of selves through a linguistic fabric that fosters interaction

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Abdul Rahman Bouali (Damascus: Dar Al-Hiwar for Publishing and Distribution, 2nd ed., 2001), 7.

² Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, trans. Antoine Abu Zaid (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Centre, 1st ed., 1996), 9.

between the author and readers. Eco distinguishes between two types of texts, closed text and open text, just as he differentiates between the concepts of closure and openness. Structuralism focuses primarily on textual structure at the expense of meaning, thereby obscuring the language of the text and its vitality and activity, which ought to be manifested within the text.

Eco's turn away from closure towards openness is grounded in his adoption of a phenomenological framework with an intentional dimension, wherein the process of phenomenological perception is directed towards the world. Every consciousness is consciousness *of* something, which reinforces the bonds between the self and the object, the ego and the other, and the self and its external world. This relationship holds meaning only within the framework of the intentionality of consciousness, thereby opening the horizons for dialogue between the self and its object. "Openness can flourish only within Husserlian phenomenology and its successors, while structuralism establishes binaries mainly on the basis of the philosophy of communication; phenomenology dismantles this through the mode of consciousness and its direct relation to human awareness."¹

According to Eco, closed text is nothing but an open text whose openness depends on the act of the reader. Closed texts are comprehensible and subject to interpretation; they invite their interpreter and reader to decode their symbols, analyse their codes, and deconstruct their fractures. The openness of the text is conditional upon the reading strategy. To overcome closure, Eco supports both reader and text through the concepts of *encyclopaedia* and *openness*, respectively: "He equipped the reader with the concept of encyclopaedia and the text with the concept of openness so that the reader contributes to opening the text/message on the basis of their encyclopaedic background, while the message/text contributes to modifying, developing, changing, and directing this cultural encyclopaedic system through a complex system of codes."²

In addition to the concept of textual closure, Eco introduces another notion: the *laziness* of the text. The text is regarded as a lazy machine, incomplete in meaning, requiring completion and the uncovering of its meanings to transform it from a state of stasis and

¹ Saida Khensali, Umberto Eco and the Critique of Multiplicity of Interpretation, 45.

² Wahid Bouaziz, Limits of Interpretation: A Reading of Umberto Eco's Critical Project (Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2008), 128–129.

inertia into existence through reading on the basis of a dynamic interpretative process that establishes and consolidates the notion of openness. Accordingly, these gaps or blank spaces, as Eco terms them, are what confers meaning upon the text.

Understanding the text is not achieved solely through reading and interpretation but through cooperation between the author and the reader. The text remains dead and obscure unless it is revealed through interpretation and transitions from potential existence to actual existence, including the extraction of hidden and latent meanings behind it. Eco calls this issue *textual cooperation*: "Even if the text, as we shall demonstrate, is a lazy machine requiring the reader to exert a tremendous cooperative effort to fill the gaps of what is 'unsaid' and what is 'said' that remained blank, this is precisely what truly turns the text into its postulates."¹

This means that, for Eco, the process of interpretation requires an encyclopaedia to complete the textual gaps. The encyclopaedia represents the knowledge base and cognitive resources of the interpreter, activating the self's various abilities and competencies and drawing on prior acquisitions, cultural heritage, and preexisting knowledge to understand the text according to the social and cultural frameworks that produced the text and shaped the reader. The encyclopaedia thus functions as the semiotic culture, which Eco contrasts with Peirce's notion of habit. The encyclopaedia concerns textual concepts, cultural heritage, and the linguistic stock of the text. Consequently, the archaeological method is practised by delving into the signs of the text and their linguistic significations, which are inseparable from the language of the community and its rules. Accordingly, sound understanding of the text, correct interpretation of its contents, and revealing its truth depend on interpretative effectiveness, which itself depends on the reader's effectiveness, knowledge base, and linguistic wealth. Eco refers to this ideal as the *model reader*: "Each game has its own rules, and the model reader is the one who knows how to respect these rules."²

In addition to the model reader, Eco introduces the concept of the actual reader, who is characterised by the absence of adherence to any rule or law. Typically, the actual reader's

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader*, 28.

² Umberto Eco, *Reflections on Narrative Fiction*, trans. Yaeed Benkrad (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Centre, 2nd ed., 2015), 29.

textual reading, influenced by their psychological conditions, draws on sources beyond the text itself. Eco complements the encyclopaedic knowledge of the model reader with the notion of the dictionary, which he deems no less important than the encyclopaedia. While the encyclopaedia reflects the cultural and social stock of the reader as a semiotic given the necessity of granting the text its readability on the basis of the concept of conventions or textual codes, the dictionary organises and arranges this knowledge and its codes. The dictionary's purpose is to reorganise and refine the reader's semiotic competencies and discursive structures, clarifying ambiguous uses of words and meanings. Dictionary meanings are objective and presuppose linguistic competence, including morphological, syntactic, and orthographic skills. This requires the model reader to possess two essential qualities: linguistic competence to address the text's linguistic aspects, which Friedrich Schleiermacher termed technical hermeneutics, and cognitive competence to grasp the text's conceptual contents and semantic aspects. "The dictionary and the encyclopaedia constitute two abstract models for describing the form of our semiotic consciousness; the dictionary's supreme aim is to describe this knowledge based solely on linguistic limits, whereas the encyclopaedia seeks to grasp our knowledge of the world."¹ According to Eco, there is no difference between dictionary knowledge and encyclopaedic knowledge as long as the aim is to understand the world through understanding the text in all its aspects and parts, grounded in knowledge of the verbal contexts and the semantic orientations within the cultural and social heritage of the community, involving the probing and excavation of its memory, authenticity, and value, scientific, and historical heritage.

Eco's emphasis on cultural encyclopaedia as an epistemological premise aligns with the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer's focus on tradition and his emphasis on the role of prejudices as an essential condition in the process of understanding. This constitutes the interpreter's historical consciousness. "Tradition is the historical material, that is, what is rooted in history; it shapes, owing to it, the theoretical frameworks of consciousness, its cognitive representations, and its existential behaviours. Tradition does not imprison consciousness; rather, it supplies it with appropriate energies in the form of prejudices or

¹ Umberto Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 160.

preconceptions, by which the practitioner corrects present practices and is liberated through them in their future expectations of meaning."¹

According to Wolfgang Iser, the text itself is a hybrid intellectual wealth carrying within it a cultural, historical, and social stock. It is, as he expresses, an absorption of previous texts before it; it does not suffice with its own being but rather transcends earlier texts that preceded its existence. In this context, he aligns with Eco's concept of the encyclopaedia, which is manifested in what Iser calls the *répertoire* (the repertory).²

In addition to the model reader and their role in opening the effect on the basis of their encyclopaedic knowledge, Eco emphasises the model author to refute the claims of the death of the author according to Roland Barthes. The model reader cannot conceive of a text as a production without the existence of a producer. The model author considers the reader and the effects that may arise from reading their text, starting from the aesthetics of reception. In other words, the model author anticipates readability before writing the text and expects the reception of the text and the effect on the readers' minds and the context in which they exist. This means that the model author provides the interpreter with effects and activates reception on the basis of intentionality in their text. Given that the text contains gaps or blank spaces, the model reader is tasked with filling them, which are intentionally left by the model author to allow the reader to complete the effects of the text. What we can infer is that the reader precedes the text in existence, and the effects of the text precede its readability and reception by the addressee, who in turn derives another text or what is known as intertextuality. Credit goes to Julia Kristeva for innovating this concept on the basis of the aesthetics of reception, and the effect texts leave the way for multiple interpretations. "Thus, according to Eco, the text returns to that circular movement of reader-text/text-reader, through which the subject of interpretation is constructed through that movement. This

¹ Mohammed Shawki Al-Zein, *Displacement and Possibility: Critical Sheets in Western Philosophy* (Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2008), 76.

² Nadia Wadeer, "The Encyclopaedia and the Interpretation of Metaphor in Umberto Eco," *Al-Khitab Journal* 11, no. 7 (2012): 96.

circle is ancient and well known as the hermeneutic circle. "¹ Alternatively, the interpretive loop is expressed by Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey.

Interpretation, according to Eco, occurs through the interaction between the text and the reader and between the reader and the author, as each creates within social and cultural frameworks. The reader interprets, on the basis of their accumulated knowledge, the meaning of the text. At the same time, the author creates by writing and opening its effects, thereby forming the path through which the reader produces multiple interpretations. The text is a space for the meeting and dialogue of the author and reader, both of whom achieve the pleasure of reading: the author anticipates the reader's time and the effects the text might produce, and the reader engages with the text to pave the way for open interpretations on the basis of the poetics of the open work. "Thus, the literary effect appears as a fertile field for the act of reading, allowing the interpreter to present their unique vision and interpretive model, but, as mentioned earlier, within the limits that enable it to generate and multiply texts and interpretations, granting it greater openness. "²

Openness is further nourished by the author's use of metaphor, which expresses the unsaid aspects of the text and covers the limitations of language. Understanding metaphor does not require equating it with things existing in the real world but rather entails grasping the interpretative possibilities it generates, which are connected to the reader's cultural encyclopaedia. Openness is also linked to poetic metaphor, as poetry employs metaphor as a figurative image that stimulates the reader's reception. In this sense, metaphor becomes a semiotic sign carving a path toward infinitely open interpretations. "Metaphorical interpretation arises from the interaction between the interpreter and the text, yet the outcome of this interpretation is determined by the nature of the text and the general framework of encyclopaedic knowledge of a culture, having no relation to the speaker's

¹ Elyamin Ben Toumi et al., Umberto Eco, the Open Interpretive Project, Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Research, Contemporary Western Philosophy, vol. 2 (Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2013), 1516.

² Abdelghani Bara, Hermeneutics and Philosophy: Towards an Interpretive Rational Project (Ikhtilaf Publications, Algeria, 1st ed., 2008), 171.

intentionality. The interpreter may regard any utterance metaphorically, provided that their encyclopaedia affords them that capacity."¹

However, Eco sets conditions and limits to this openness, emphasising that it does not mean unrestricted interpretation or absolute freedom for the reader to use their cultural encyclopaedia arbitrarily. He calls such an interpretation a *deviant interpretation*. Eco objects to the openness or hermeneutics embraced by deconstruction, particularly its view that interpretation, according to its proponents, is an endless game, a concept Eco terms *multiplicity of interpretation*. Deconstruction places no bounds, as evidenced by Derrida's conception of the text as a machine producing an infinite chain of references.²

In his book *Interpretation and the Multiplicity of Interpretation*, Eco discusses the limits of interpretation to curb excessive interpretations and to outline conditions for engaging with texts. Allowing unlimited interpretations risks inflating or distorting meaning, as interpretation results from an infinite series of texts and readings. This drove Eco to distinguish between interpretation in general and *the multiplicity of interpretation*. In this work, he offers criticisms particularly targeting the American pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty, whom Eco mocks for the instrumental use pragmatists make of texts, interpreting them instrumentally or benefit-oriented. Eco calls for the objective use of texts and an economical reading that nullifies claims of endless multiplicity and meaning dissolution. Instrumental use, according to Eco, divorces texts entirely from their communicative dimension and content.

In contrast, Rorty and other pragmatists use texts as a means to serve their purposes, which Eco sees as depriving texts of their right to be read and understood and obscuring their hidden meanings. This instrumental approach transforms texts into repressive authorities exerted by authors over readers to suit their interests and goals. Rorty responds to Eco's distinction between the interpretation and use of texts by arguing that every pragmatist aims to benefit and profit from using things, including texts, because pragmatism glorifies action

¹ Umberto Eco, *Interpretation between Semiotics and Deconstruction*, trans. Said Benkrad (Casablanca: Arab Cultural Centre, 3rd ed.), 159.

² Umberto Eco, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, 121.

and practice: "This kind of distinction is certainly not one we pragmatists want to make. From our point of view, anyone, whatever they do with anything, is using it. "¹

Regardless, the interpretative project outlined by Eco, defending objective interpretation and setting limits against deviation into multiple interpretations, is itself subject to acceptance or rejection. One criticism came from the American critic Jonathan Culler, who initially defended the multiplicity of interpretation. He argued that provocative texts are those that carry more than one reading and open up to the most significant possible number of readings and interpreters, since the text's openness toward the reader generates infinite interpretations. Consequently, just as, according to Eco, closed texts are considered more open than open texts are, multiplicity of interpretation is also more creative than objective or moderate interpretation. "Thus, following Culler, it can be concluded that the insistence on imposing rules and limits on interpretation is nothing but a hindrance to the effectiveness of reading and a restraint on the language's ability to break boundaries and limits imposed by any methodology. "²

Conclusion

In conclusion, Eco's interpretative project is far richer and more complex than can be captured in a few papers, which reflect only some facets of this vast project. This richness stems from its conceptual diversity and its intersections with philosophical, literary, and semiotic currents. This study merely offers a window into the fundamentals of Eco's hermeneutics. What can be concluded is that Eco delineates a philosophy of interpretation within a semiotic framework, demonstrating that the interpretative process and the openness of the textual effect depend on fundamental principles: the openness of the sign or semiosis in Peircean terms, the text's openness and multiplicity of meaning, which themselves are contingent on the intentionality of the author, and the roles of the model author and model reader alongside the text. Crucially, interpretation is cooperative, involving partnerships and interactions between readers, authors, and texts. To safeguard interpretation from slipping into arbitrariness or excess, Eco ties the interpretative act to the encyclopaedic knowledge of the model reader and the dictionary, paralleling Peirce's

¹ Umberto Eco, *Interpretation and the Multiplicity of Interpretation*, trans. Nasser Al-Halwani (Centre for Civilisational Development, undated edition), 118–119.

² Abdelghani Bara, *Hermeneutics and Philosophy*, 377.

concept of habit. Eco critiques the interpretive labyrinth leading to meaninglessness in deconstructive discourse, as well as the instrumental use of texts by pragmatists. For Eco, interpretation is governed by reading experience. It remains linked to the text as a space where the reader and author meet and as a horizon for questioning, criticism, dialogue, and understanding free from any authority except the freedom that grants reading a passport for journeying through time and space but always within the domain and boundaries of semiotic culture.

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