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A case study of Eco's notion of encyclopedia: the (ethno)racial lexicon and its semantic sphere

Abstract: In the wave of Umberto Eco's oppositional binomial Dictionary-Encyclopedia, the paper aims to apply the rhizomatic system to the practical case of the (ethno)racial lexicon as a broad semantic area of the word *race*, which previously involved both physical predisposition and cultural habits. Given its critical issues, the dictionarial approach is distinguished into two different stages, intra-dictionarial (properly dictionarial) and inter-dictionarial (resulting from the metaphorical chain of meanings). Originally, *race* referred to horses (stud and herds) and property (as ownership and essential attribute), which extended metonymically to other senses – general zoological-botanic, human (lineage, offspring) and typological qualitative ones. Comparing its correspondents in Romance and Germanic languages, reference to many different contexts and a continuous misalignment between lexeme and concept emerge. The liquidity within the semantic sphere of *race* (embracing the three semantic cores racial, ethnic, and typological) can be explained by taking a phenomenological and semiotic perspective. If the ethnic sense (people, nation, etc.) is connected to a socio-cultural Lifeworld in an interplay of identities and differences, the aporia of synonymy emerging from the inter-dictionarial analysis finds its balance in the local encyclopedic approach, which proves to be the real deterrent to Porphyry's tree through the rhizome, conceived not in its entirety, but in the partiality and contingency of its branches.

Keywords: lexical semantics; metaphor; race; rhizome; sociocultural Lifeworld

1 Introduction: the lexicon as fertile ground

The historical study of the lexicon, and particularly the tracing of a semantic history, is generally conceived as a side issue in the field of semiotic theories. However, such an activity under continuous restructuring inevitably has to deal with the long-

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standing issue of agreeing on a definition and its different contexts – that is, between the different meanings and the different senses, which presuppose the inherently interpretive nature of the sign. In outlining what the semiotic concept of a Dictionary involves, Umberto Eco (1986: 47–48) highlighted the problems arising from Louis Hjelmslev's structuralist approach for semantic traits. These problems mainly stemmed from isolating and making autonomous the purely semantic and (intra) linguistic element, worthy of interest, from the pragmatic element, relating to different situations and the surrounding world.

This attempt, which Eco proves to be inevitably futile, shows an imbalance that emerges not only in classical examples (such as *sheep* or *stallion*), but also in more subtle and, as it were, less concrete cases. Analyzing from a historical-semantic point of view keywords of human development such as *classe* 'class', *democrazia* 'democracy' and *arte* 'art', Tullio De Mauro reiterates from the outset that

> *L'uso di un vocabolo o di un sintagma si comprende appieno solo se esso è considerato in una duplice dimensione, cioè nella sua attualità funzionale (in sincronia) e nella sua storicità (in diacronia), ossia in quanto si lega ad altri elementi del sistema linguistico e in quanto è frutto d'un processo storico più o meno lungo e complesso.* ['The use of a word or a syntagma can be fully understood only if it is considered in a double dimension, that is, in its functional actuality (in synchrony) and in its historicity (in diachrony), that is, insofar as it is linked to other elements of the linguistic system and insofar as it is the result of a more or less long and complex historical process.'] (De Mauro 1971: 163, my translation)

Therefore, De Mauro (1971: 164–165) considered the significance of the different contributions made not only by more purely linguistic issues (synonymy, correlation, opposition), but also by inter-linguistic ones (namely, the different meanings assumed by the corresponding words in other languages), which, however, intertwined and irremediably flowed into extra-linguistic ones (such as the use of a given expression having different degrees of synonymy with other words depending on the context in which it is used). Hence, De Mauro's (1971: 166) view of language (*langue*, *lingua*) as a reflection of the different moments of individual and collective life is held together by what Eco (1986: 57) described as the unstoppable and purely semiotic phenomenon of interpretation, which starts from a definition, but cannot close or limit itself to it. The consequent insertion of specific differences will soon prove to be the moment of denial and loss of the intrinsic properties of the Dictionary which launches the transition to the Encyclopedia.

The poignancy of the lexicon, as well as its problematic nature, emerges in the attempt to apply such a theoretical semiotic framework to cases of boundary words such as *razza* 'race', which, previously involving both physical predisposition and cultural habits, constitutes only the outermost component and the tip of the iceberg of a broader (ethno)racial lexicon as its extended (and far from cohesive) semantic

area. In Section 2, this semantic constellation will be revealed through a critical analysis of the dictionary definitions of *race*, considering the associative relations between the main semantic cores involved. For this purpose, a distinction, within the dictionary concept, between two further stages, the intra-dictionarial and the inter-dictionarial one, will prove necessary. The latter stage will be conceived as the true turning point toward the encyclopedic moment. Finally, as discussed in Section 3, a complementarity between the semiotic and the phenomenological approach is the key to better understand the constant movement between the opposite semantic poles of nature and culture, the first reflection of which lies in the oxymoronic quasi-synonymy characteristic of the (ethno)racial lexicon.

2 *Race* and its non-linear semantic history: the problems of a dictionarial approach

Carrying with it a heavy and unfixable inheritance, the word *race* is originally quite far from a human discriminatory meaning, rather showing an inherent, intricate semantic burden. Reconstructing the history of the word means first understanding what exactly *race* means, that is, what its "true definition" is. This approach, which aspires to consider only what lies within the dictionary, gradually collides with the sheer volume of possible competing definitions, that is, of the different ways (but also situations, times, and places) in which *race* might be interpreted.

As De Mauro (1995 [1982]: 98–100) noted, semantic vagueness or indeterminacy, which is different than polysemy (i.e., the intrinsic linguistic condition of having different meanings and senses), is essentially reflected in a distinctive metaphoricity and a necessary semiotic (and not strictly semantic) instability, linked to what he calls the "incalculability of synonyms."

In the specific case of *race*, the acquisition through metaphor of multifarious meanings, senses, and synonyms from an equine origin undoubtedly led to a slippery wobble between the word and the concept, as evident by taking into consideration the historical course of events (the role of slavery, the racial theories of the Modern Age, and political developments of the twentieth century).

2.1 An intra-dictionarial stage: between equine meaning and connotation of property

Following the Italian philologist Gianfranco Contini, the Italian word *razza* derived from the Old French *haras* (a variant form of *haraz*), probably coming from the Latin

haracium, akin to *grex equorum*, namely, 'herd of horses' (OED, s.vv. *haras* and *race*). Accordingly, the primordial meaning of *race* initially denoted a horse breeding farm, and then, by metonymical extension, a stud or herd of horses.

This discovery came only in the late 1950s, after three centuries of convoluted etymological research. According to Contini, all the hypotheses provided up to then consisted of "assembled etymologies," the result of an effort to trace the original sense in a supposedly necessary coincidence between the various forms of the word and its coeval meaning – predominantly human or typological.[1]

Like his predecessors, the philologist was also intent on providing an explanation for the transition from a supposed first masculine attestation (It. *razzo*, around the fourteenth century) to a feminine one (It. *razza*). However, even with respect to a competing and apparently valid hypothesis, such as that of *ratio* 'nature, type, reason, idea', ultimately supported by the Austrian linguist Leo Spitzer, he tried to go beyond mere aprioristic suppositions, valuing the historiographical method as the most appropriate tool for reconstructing a primarily semiotic pathway:

> *ciò che chiarisce quell'apparente storicizzazione come falsa è solo la storicizzazione vera. Il pedigree di quel cavallo* [i.e., l'originario etimo equino]*, per la verità, non era stato affatto esaminato. Questa constatazione di carenza filologica non vuol essere un rimprovero metodologico a priori. Soltanto, quando un'etimologia "trovata" o storica ne annulla in fatto una "cercata" o combinatoria, è lecito indagare, con fittizia pedagogia a posteriori, non dico dove si sia introdotta la mossa sbagliata, ma dove sia mancata la grazia di quella buona.* ['What clarifies that apparent historicization as false is only the true historicization. The pedigree of that horse [i.e., of the original equine etymon], in truth, had not been examined at all. This observation of philological deficiency is not intended as an a priori methodological reproach. Only when a "found" or historical etymology in fact annuls a "researched" or combinatorial one is it permissible to investigate, with fictitious a posteriori pedagogy, not to say where the wrong move was made, but where the grace of the good one was lacking.'] (Contini 1959: 320–321, my translation)

Sorting out, like a detective, the various clues collected through matchings in some manuscripts, Contini found the first original attestation of *race* in a passage from the thirteenth-century prose work *Faits des Romains*, demonstrating that its mid-nineteenth century Italian translation presented the ancient form *raza* as a correspondent of *haras* (Contini 1959: 321–322).

Despite the greater philological evidence, even today, Contini's proposal is not unanimously agreed upon, since some dictionaries of languages other than Italian

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1 From the seventeenth century, proposals came generally from Latin (in addition to *ratio*, the most common ones were *radix* 'root', *radius* 'ray (of sunshine)', *generatio* 'generation, progeny', *raptia* 'the hatching of falcons'), while, later, additional hypotheses were proposed from other languages, such as the Basque *arraca* or *arraza* 'caste, lineage', the Old High German *reiza* '(blood)line', the Arabic *ra's* 'head, chief', and the Slavic *raz* 'character' (see Contini 1959: 319–320, notes 1–2).

still offer some resistance to accepting it. For instance, French and Spanish dictionaries generally support the typological hypothesis of the Latin *ratio*, citing different reasons: it denotes 'sort, species, order of things, category' and, in Middle Latin, 'descent' (LGR, s.v. *race*), but it can be also conceived as a semi-literate form for 'calculation, count' akin to the classic 'nature or character, mode, species' (DCECH, s.v. *raza*). On the other hand, following the nineteenth-century hypothesis of the philologist Friedrich Diez, some German dictionaries support *reiza*, considering as more satisfactory the hypothesis of an original meaning such as *linea sanguinis* 'bloodline' and 'lineage' (KLUGE, s.v. *Rasse*). Lastly, there is no shortage of skeptical attitudes suspending judgement on the origin, laconically pointing out its uncertainty and at most summarizing the long and intense debate (OED, s.v. *race*).

The inevitable persistence of a few grey areas does not prevent the presence of elements that could unravel this Gordian knot. Indeed, in their different perspectives, all etymological theories agree that the word in its most definite form was first used in the Italian language. As the textual repertoires of vocabularies have shown, from the mid-fifteenth century onwards the Italian *razza* gave rise to the corresponding words in modern languages, first in Romance or Neo-Latin languages and only then in Germanic ones.[2] In all these cases, it must be said, the earliest and most important examples between the fifteenth and sixteenth century referred mainly to equines.

Moreover, deserving of attention is the fact that the etymological debate helped reinforce the idea of a disambiguation between two lemmas, one of equine meaning and the other human and typological meaning. Considering its denotation of 'horse breed' (more closely anchored to domestic herds), the *Oxford English Dictionary* disambiguates *race* in a separate headword as it is obsolete and with occurrences dating between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. If, in that case, a close synonymy with the French borrowing *haras* is evident (due to its purely equine meaning), such disambiguation appears ultimately superfluous, as it is traced back to the main headword by the dictionary itself (cf. OED, s.vv. *race* 5–6). Indeed, things get complicated with the metaphorical expressions still in use today in some languages. In Italian and French, for example, expressions such as *cavallo di razza* or *cheval de race* 'racehorse, thoroughbred horse' characterize, in a categorical way, human individuals (e.g., the fact of being a prominent politician) or even inanimate objects

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2 The Spanish *raza* and the Portuguese *raça* appeared from the fifteenth century, respectively, in 1438 and 1473 (cf. DLE, s.v. *raza*; DLP, s.v. *raça*). Later, while the Modern French *race* dates from the beginning of the sixteenth century (LGR, s.v. *race*), the English *race* made its appearance from the mid-sixteenth century (OED, s.v. *race*) and the German *Rasse* from the eighteenth century (BW, s.v. *Rasse*).

(e.g., the new and amazing model of a product line). In this case, *race* constitutes a qualifier, accentuated by predominantly singular and more rarely plural usage.

The coexistence of the two semantic cores – equine and human typological – can also be traced in a 'familiar' word such as *stud*. Similarly to *race*, its original meaning (attested before the fourteenth century and synonym of *haras*) refers to the place where horses are bred (or, metonymically, indicating the horses themselves or the individual animal suitable for breeding), extending in the nineteenth century to other domestic animals (OED, s.v. *stud*). Concerning people, the early references (frequent between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries) can be considered a counterpart of the Italian word *stirpe* 'lineage, family line', and are found, with *race* or as its substitute, mostly in poetic texts (e.g., *mortall studdes*, as in the mid-sixteenth-century translation of the Virgilian *Aeneid*; OED, s.v. *stud*). Indeed, from the early seventeenth century *stud* acquires a figurative use relating to a group of people as the property (i.e., belonging to) or as at the service of another person – namely, being a slave to someone (cf. OED, s.v. *slave*). Besides, "property" (OED, s.v.) appears to be declined in two interrelated ways: on the one hand, as the relationship between the owner and what is possessed, and on the other hand, as the characteristic essential attribute of a particular entity. These two aspects will prove crucial in the context of a semantic and conceptual turn such as that of slavery (see Section 2.3).

Taking care not to fall into the temptation of constructing forced causal links, we can say that the aspect of ownership has contributed, initially quietly and then decisively, to the increase of extensive use (literary and then naturalistic) from the animal to the human sphere. Undoubtedly, this is further evidence of the lack of validity of all the etymological proposals made before Contini's, which, assuming a primarily qualitative or human (and anthropocentric) derivation, do not mention a probable zoological derivation, despite the use of examples referring to definitions that considered an equine semantic factor. Furthermore, the close bond between the equine reference and the qualitative and ownership reference (relative already in the inherent distinction between horses owned and not wild) leads to a metaphorical concatenation, where meanings and senses are articulated on a steep ground that opens to continuous problems.

2.2 Anatomy of a metaphorical chain: the inescapability of an inter-dictionarial approach

The etymological debate had brought numerous issues to light. On the one hand, as Contini (1970: 651) later stated, the idea of reconstructing the word's path by advancing contrived combinations was inserted at some point in the course of history. In fact, etymology became the political tool of certain ideologies (the national-

socialist or fascist ones) or the escape route to somehow restore dignity to the word, giving it a "flattering ascendancy," as in the case of Spitzer (Contini 1970: 651–652). On the other hand, intentionally or unintentionally, the foundational metonymical process leading to the acquisition of the different meanings and senses was questioned: indeed, it inevitably constituted the intrinsic driving force behind the semantic nature of *race*. The question thus shifts from pure etymological conjecture to the more concrete structuring of the semantic plane.

In the meanders of its various ramifications, the metonymic development of *race* can be summarized in a kind of timeline, to be dissected into different moments, which, however, should be viewed following their appearance, not diachronically but synchronically, subject to contingent polarizations. As shown in the image below (cf. Figure 1), at least seven different semantic moments can be schematically identified. Instead of appearing as monolithic, these often include different senses, which can be gradually acquired from corresponding senses in other languages.

The extension and intersection surely started with the equine meaning (a). As noted above, a bifurcation occurred between the twelfth and thirteenth centuries: on the one hand, the reference to horse breeding continued, mostly spread in literary texts or in zootechnical and veterinary treatises, specifically those related to farriery or *mascalcia* (a-1); on the other hand, a more generic extension to horses could be found, namely 'stud' and 'herd' (a-2). From the fourteenth century, a new, ethnic meaning (b) first denoted offspring, lineage, progeny, stock, and then figuratively referred to noble origins or to the population of origin, frequently used at a literary level. Around the same time, a typological-qualitative meaning (c) – i.e., 'kind' – began to coexist with the previous ones: mainly attested in literary texts and referring to things, it later also pertained to animals, plants, and humans, in the latter case often in a derogatory and ironical manner. In the same period, a generic zoological-botanical meaning (d) became as widespread as the equine one (a) and related more to hereditary characteristics than to reproduction or breeding; initially applied to horses, it was, from the sixteenth century, generically used for animals, less frequently for plants, and sometimes for people (especially in English).
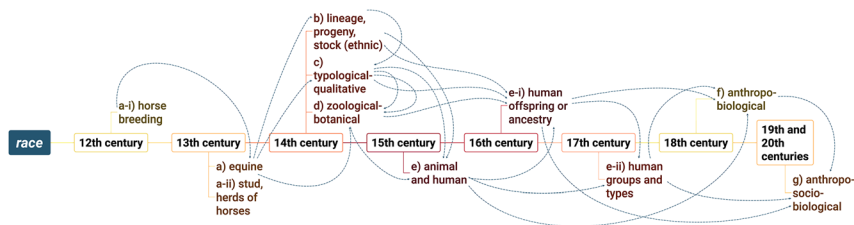

Figure 1: Synoptic graphic representation of the semantic history of the word *race* from its origins to its acme (twelfth to twentieth centuries).

Similarly, starting from the mid-fifteenth century, a generic reference to human individuals (e) and their hereditary characters (mostly in Spanish, Portuguese, French, English and even Dutch, but rarely in Italian) was spreading as widely as the zoological-botanical one (d). Specifically, while from the sixteenth century our word had the sense of hereditary human offspring or ancestry (e-1), used as widely as the ancient meaning of offspring and lineage (b), from the second half of the seventeenth century a proto-anthropological human typification (e-2), which primarily referred to human groups, appeared as a semantically geographical extension of the previous sense. Indeed, as stated by Doron (2016: 431), the conventionally recognized first example of the human typological use of the word *race*, namely, the 1684 attestation in French explorer François Bernier's pamphlet *Nouvelle division de la terre, par les différentes espèces ou races d'hommes qui l'habitent* (anonymously published in the *Journal des Sçavans*) should rather be considered as referring to human groups, and not yet to types according to an anthropometric classification. Indeed, given his focus not on *homme* 'man' but on *terre* 'earth', the absence not only of a genealogical order, but also of a taxonomic order and a natural-historical systematization is attested in Bernier, without, however, entering into the monogenism-polygenism debate (Doron 2016: 432).

Keeping neo-Latin languages aside, the case of the Dutch word *ras* is particularly interesting among the Germanic languages.[3] As has been ascertained, it comes directly from the French word *race*, which mainly referred to people (*personnes*, see LGR, s.v. *race*). However, its appearance is to be dated more than a full century later, in 1665, reaching an important development at the same time as its English and German correspondents. As attested by WNT (s.v. *ras* I), a botanical zoological usage prevails in Dutch at the historical level, incorporating mankind as well, later in the view of biological systematization. In addition, *ras* also has the older sense of 'line-age', with a categorical connotation. Nevertheless, the Dutch case proves interesting because of the presence of a homonymous lemma *ras* (i.e., WNT, s.v. *ras* IV). This is the result of the sum of an extensive use of the preceding one (i.e., WNT, s.v. *ras* I) and the meanings of two other Flemish words, namely *rapalje* and *rap*, the latter indicating a metal of little value or waste of organic material (cf. WNT, s.vv. *rapalje* and *rap* II). Thus, the lemma "*ras* IV" means 'low-quality people', that is, of the lowest social and moral level (the two aspects were generally considered to be closely related). While absent in Germanic languages (or, as in Dutch, constituting a separate

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3 Although worthy of attention in the context of semantic development, I have chosen here to consider Dutch *ras* as a semantic case in isolation and not in comparison with its correspondents in other languages: this is because it differs little from English and German in terms of general meaning, and also because of its conceptual prominence in the context of slavery.

lemma), the typological-qualitative and metaphorical meaning of *race* referring to human morality is frequently found in Romance languages.

Otherwise, starting from the mid-eighteenth century, an anthropological-biological meaning (f), mainly used in French, English, and German, frequently in Spanish and Portuguese, and only later in Italian,[4] finally developed and became as widespread as the human typological-qualitative one (e-2).

The nascent pseudo- and para-scientific disciplines, such as craniology and phrenology, and the structuring of physical anthropological studies played a pivotal role in converting *race* into a technical-scientific term of anthropology, making its original meaning obsolete, even though it was still the most prominent one in some languages (e.g., Italian). In this framework, from the mid-nineteenth century, a further meaning was added, the anthropo-socio-biological one (g), which was in turn an extension of the anthropological-biological sense (f). Developed approximately from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, the anthropo-socio-biological sense implied a close connection between biological and psycho-socio-cultural aspects that were considered scientifically well-founded – a fact that led, lexically, to the consequent formation of derivatives such as *racial* and its variants (cf. OED, s.v. *racial*).

From what has been seen above, the metaphorical and metonymic extensions determined an interrelation and interdependence of the senses, with a different priority according to the varying contexts of use of the word. This necessarily leads to a reconsideration of the role of dictionaries, given the large number of factors that occurred, for example, in the change of semantic-lexical function from word to technical-specialist term.

In the attempt to find a definition for *race*, the intra-dictionarial survey proved to be fundamentally and inherently unsuccessful, since it was within it that the first link in the metaphorical chain was generated in the extension from the condition (i.e., horse breeding) to the individual (i.e., the stallion), and then to the collective (i.e., horse herds). This three-dimensionality, if initially resolved by grouping under the hypernym of the 'equine', leads to a collision due to the strong oscillation between a concrete reference such as that to a horse and a more abstract reference, such as that to (human) lineage, in their often-dangerous ramifications even when unintentional. In a nutshell, the first aspect of the inherent incompleteness of the basic dictionary level emerges in the inevitable shift from an intra-dictionarial to an inter-dictionarial approach that minimally accounts for the intersection of different

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4 The anthropological-biological meaning appeared in its effective use in Italian only from the first half of the nineteenth century, especially in historical-geographic treatises during the Risorgimento period, becoming common in the second half of the same century within anthropological disciplines. On this point, see Barsotti (2021).

epistemologies and languages according to the comparison and the integration between various dictionaries.

2.3 A centuries-old path: multiple contexts, more senses

As becomes clear when we take a brief glance at the periods of its rapid evolution, the prominent theories and taxonomies of race do not always imply the presence of the word *race* and generally advocate different subdivisions of human varieties. If between the end of the fifteenth century and the mid-seventeenth century the word *race* had rarely been used, the concept became closely related to "blood" and skin color, as well as to the "civilized"/"uncivilized" dichotomy, from the period of geographical explorations and territorial conquests before and after the European "discovery" of America.

As is known, *race* has been a flagship concept within the sensitive issue of slavery. Maritime expansion and new territorial discoveries and conquests certainly played a key role in the first major curvature toward discriminatory meanings. A semantic springboard of no small importance was certainly the typological-qualitative and categorical meaning, often used in an ironic or derogatory sense. In the languages of the countries most involved in the slave trade, the original denotation of race as property, relating primarily to horses, or at any rate only to the zoological realm, seemed to have given way exclusively to the objectifying human connotation in the sense of 'slave', that is, a person belonging to and owned by someone else.

Nevertheless, it is very difficult to find these connections at the dictionary level, as some examples show. For English, no locutions such as *race of slaves* appear to be recorded under the lemma *race* (the only two examples can be found in OED, s.vv. *propagate* and *salt-water Negro*). The same is true for French, which, however, also features a use of *haras* in reference to the human species (LGR, s.v. *haras*). In the latter case, if its acme was reached with the reference to Nazi eugenic practices, one or two centuries earlier, extensive human use could have been made with respect to slave trade processes, which provided, as for animals, 'breeding-places' (a term attested in reference to birds in OED, s.v. *breeding*). It was not only a matter of separating those who were slaves from those who were not (or even someone who was a free citizen from a person who was owned by another, or the nation itself), but also of hierarchically classifying the different types of slaves (e.g., those of Creole birth, or the 'salt-water Negroes' mentioned above) according to certain values (including the fundamental one of survival).

After all, the German and Dutch cases account for the ambiguities emerging from the close connection between slavery and race. If the Dutch word *slavenras* is

attested, not with a colonialist meaning, but only in its purely metaphorical use and in the poetic sphere (WNT, s.v. *slaaf*), the German word *Sklavenrasse* was used with purely discriminatory value in opposition to *Herrenrasse* 'master race' and was particularly characteristic of late nineteenth-century colonialism and the National Socialist period according to the dichotomy of 'superior race versus inferior race' (DWDS, s.v. *Herrenrasse*). As Jorati (2024: 265) has noted, compared to the centuries-old, structured Dutch tradition of slavery in the Americas and Africa, German colonialism did not play a preponderant role, although reflections on slavery helped to forage the eighteenth-century theoretical debate on scientific racism. As a result, from the early nineteenth century onward, the anthropo-biological and craniological taxonomization of the concept produced a larger use and an increasing frequency of *race* as an anthropometric technical-scientific term pregnant with political ideologies.

In this framework, a lexical problem arises with an alternation and a coexistence of *race* and other terms such as *variety*, *genus* or *species*. This does not always imply, however, the creation of synonymic relations, especially considering the specialization of the technical-scientific lexicon; on the contrary, various types of semantic relations are established, such as hypernymy and hyponymy. Following Doron (2016: 419), at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there would thus be a conceptual shift (which, in our view, also proves to be lexical) between a "logical-classificatory" method – such as Bernier's geographical-territorial classification and Linnaeus' zoological-botanical classification – and a "genealogical" method – such as that of Georges-Louis Leclerc de Buffon, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, and Immanuel Kant, implying the necessary transmission of hereditary characters. At a conceptual – but not lexical – level, Doron (2012: 79–80) describes an earlier "racial moment" in ancestry, spirituality as transmission of sins, and horse breeding practices (which then became a question of quality and type). Indeed, what is called a "tension between the logical and the genealogical" (Doron 2012: 88), namely, between a mere account of identities and differences and a filiation by succession, family ties or kinships, implies, within the writing of natural history, a gap between disregarding the element of variety and seeing its rootedness as the discriminating pivot of the relationships in question:

> "Varieties" (*variae*) did not count for a naturalist; they did not even define a true and stable collective unit, but rather a mere collection of heterogenic characteristics. Varieties concerned only *practical knowledge*, precisely because of their inconstancy and variability…

> The naturalist had good reasons to despise varieties. Taxonomy needed to rely on *constant*, clearly *defined* and *invariable* characteristics; alterations caused by climates, cultures or lifestyles were mere trivial variations which could not make up part of a well-ordered system. Questions of breeding, alterations of types or transmission of characteristics which varied

across time and space thus had nothing to do with taxonomic knowledge. As Foucault rightly claimed, beyond the species, between the species and individuals, was an "*epistemological threshold*" which relegated everything beyond it to inconstancy and obscurity. The naturalist's gaze, at least in its classificatory enterprise, did not go beyond the species. On the contrary, it took species and genus as its basis, as its starting-block in order to get to orders, classes and so on. Varieties were only "*variae*," that is, mere variants, without any defined logical and taxonomical identity. They were disparate collections of natural beings able to be multiplied indefinitely … it is only through a *genealogical prism* that all of this undifferentiated field of varieties came to be marked out, and that it is through the fundamental criterion of reproduction and *kinship* that varieties became "*races*," relatively stable entities relevant to natural history. (Doron 2012: 84)

The problems increased during the nineteenth century with the countless scientific approaches dictated by the positivistic wave, which pushed to make *race* an inter-contextual technical-scientific term. In fact, the word was used not only in physical anthropology but also in geography and linguistics. This implied, on the one hand, a greater development of the technical-specialist lexicon (with the term and concept as a prerogative of anthropometry and cranial measurements), and, on the other hand, the restructuration of numerous pre-existing nexuses, such as race-language-climate.

In this context, the emerging continuous slippage between word and concept takes place at two main junctures. Firstly, a racial concept could also exist in absence of the word *race* (e.g., Blumenbach: *varietas*, *genus*, *degeneratio*), but only after the appearance of its typological and qualitative use applied to human beings in a technical-taxonomic way (so, after Bernier and Linnaeus), and only if it is connected to the concept of a hereditary transmission of characters (e.g., Kant), and of degeneration and alteration (e.g., Buffon and Blumenbach). Secondly, in this overlapping of contexts and disciplines (i.e., anthropology, linguistics, geography, etc.), the presence of the word itself in some texts does not imply racial thinking, both before human typological use and with the nuanced and non-discriminatory use of the race-language-climate nexus. Just to give a few examples, on a path akin to that of German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt regarding the diversity of languages, the Italian philosopher and poet Giacomo Leopardi, referring to the habit-climate nexus within his habituation theory, meant by *race* peoples with their customs and cultural habits, namely, in an ethnic sense and far from a climatic, physical, and natural deterministic view (Orrù 2020: 27–32).

Further shifts and intersections of contexts and plans occurred in the twentieth century with the emergence of pseudo- and para-scientific approaches: science became an instrument of politics, and *race* turned into a technical-scientific term serving political ideology – in particular, totalitarianism and Nazi-Fascist racial

legislations in the 1930s.[5] Therefore, the instrumental use of the term has clustered the purely racial reference to physical dispositions and the ethnic denotation concerning cultural habits. Needless to say, the latter was seen as a consequence of the former.

This semantic value has been the subject of profound reflection in the post-WWII context, where its scientific role in biology and genetics, as well as in the social sciences, has been widely discussed (e.g., pivotal international documents such as the Unesco *Statements on race* since the 1950s; see Pogliano 2005: 145–210). Moreover, with the promulgation of the post-war European constitutions, the word *race* lost its earlier discriminatory sense by acquiring a remembrance function, semantically denying the term itself in order to ensure the equality of citizens' rights before the law. On this basis, national and international legislative interventions after 1945 tried to restore and clearly separate the physical-moral nexus, distinguishing the phenotypic characteristics from the psychological and behavioral ones. In this way, the nature-culture binomial has achieved a new stability, appearing, in its various and multiple phases and within several different intertwining disciplinary fields, to be much more fluid and complex than a mere opposition or a simple unidirectional development, with boundaries constantly being redefined.

3 From *race* to *(ethno)racial*: the Encyclopedia as the keystone

It is evident from the above that, although it is more appropriate than the purely dictionarial and binary approach, the inter-dictionarial approach does not appear to be a real solution to the problem, but only an indispensable emergency exit to face

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5 The legacy among racisms, a highly disputed issue that is beyond the scope of this paper, has been the subject of attention since the 1990s. Its profound complexity has been exacerbated, as Raspanti (1994) notes, by the presence of multiple lines of thought in Italian "racism" (biological, national, and esoteric); nevertheless, a correlation between the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 and the fascist laws of 1938 is well known. As Israel (2010: 10) notes, seeing Italian racism as a mere derivation of the German one, and consequently considering it of less importance and impact, ends up being a dangerous dismissal of the problem. Following Cassata (2011), it is connected with the development of Italian eugenics in relation to racist theories, which, after reaching a peak during the Fascist period, dragged on until the 1960s. On the political side, the Italian laws of 1938 were also boosted in no small part by the colonial context of Italian Africa (see Orrù 2023). Furthermore, Whitman (2017) has demonstrated a basic correlation of German racism with the racist segregation campaigns implemented in the U.S. (e.g., from the late 1800s with Jim Crow laws in southern states), which in the 1930s constituted a model for the political, scientific, and legislative German debates.

the problem of the polivocity[6] of lexical meanings (that is, their polysemic nature). However, albeit with due caution, it could be considered something of a precursor of an encyclopedic approach inasmuch as it implies an embryonic coexistence between the semantic and pragmatic planes, feeding the ceaseless re-semantization of the word that imposes the shift to the higher level.

In a different form and terminology, the articulation of the two planes of the intra-dictionarial and the inter-dictionarial can be found in Eco's reflections on the dictionary conundrum. Here the starting point is Porphyry's tree,[7] which, on the basis of Aristotelian categorization, was aimed to investigate "whether genera or species exist in themselves or reside in mere concepts alone" (Eco 1986: 58). Continuing to a more abstract level, the tree changes its structure and betrays its original nature by the attribution of numerous differences, which constitute the real building blocks of the tree itself. Thus, "a tree which is not a tree" soon becomes a tree "entirely made up with differentiae" (Eco 1986: 62–65), allowing the unavoidable binary composition of the dictionary and its inherently oppositional functioning to emerge.

As Eco (2014: 13–15) later stated, the continuous and context-depended reorganization of differences reveals an essential flexibility according to the necessity to classify and define, that is, to give a solid but adaptable structure. In this sense,

> It is clear, however, if we follow the inner logic, that the tree of genera and species, however constructed, explodes into a swirl of accidents, into a nonhierarchizable network of *qualia*. The dictionary dissolves of necessity, as a result of internal tensions, into a potential orderless and limitless galaxy of elements of knowledge of the world. *It becomes, in other words, an encyclopedia, and it does so because it was already in fact an encyclopedia without knowing it, an artifice invented to camouflage the inevitability of the encyclopedia.* (Eco 2014: 18, last emphasis mine)

Accordingly, within Eco's semiotic theory, Dictionary and Encyclopedia, as two inseparable aspects that remain theoretical even in their instrumental use, are harbingers of countless developments in the most disparate fields (to name just a few, cognitive semiotics, phenomenology, lexicology and lexical semantics, etc.). The placement of *race* through its chains and connections (that is, through its synonyms) within an (ethno)racial lexicon could thus shape up not only as a theoretical systematization of the two aforementioned notions, but also inherently prove to be a prolific plane for the fine-tuning of a key phenomenological concept such as Lifeworld, which further nurtures the relationship between the individual and what is perceived.

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6 I use the term "polivocity" as the correspondent of the more frequent Italian *polivocità*, which refers to the meanings and senses of words.

7 The logical form of Porphyry's tree saw a long history and various developments, as shown by Eco (1986: ch. 2), and, more importantly, the concept was and is applied in more than one way, as noted by De Mauro (1995 [1982]: 55–56), who employed it to classify semiotic codes from a semantic point of view.

3.1 The aporia of synonymy between nature and culture: encountering and shaping the Lifeworld

The remarkable gap between a theoretical and conceptual level and a more concrete, experiential, and perceptual one certainly brings into play the issue of the proto-typicality of the word, that is, in Violi's (1997: ch. 7) terms, the negotiation of certain properties and characteristic traits as having a status of essentiality (i.e., of being necessary and sufficient conditions) or a status of typicality (i.e., of being erasable and brought into play by different associations according to different contexts).

Taking into account the inter-dictionarial level as a new starting point, the first effort to be made is to draw up a rough list of the main synonymic relations of *race* in the foremost Romance and Germanic languages. This is obtained from an extended comparison of the main dictionaries of usage of the six languages under consideration (cf. Table 1),[8] an approach that is obviously applicable to any other language, considering the constant slippage of contexts and usages and the mismatch between words of different languages translating a similar meaning.

Unavoidably, this attempt to reconstruct a synonymic field immediately proves to be non-exhaustive, and far from complete. As can be seen, in almost all the languages we find shifts from the common language to technical-disciplinary languages such as that of biology, as well as oscillating relationships between terms such as *group*, *(sub)species*, *subdivision*, and the reference to the transmissibility of hereditary characters. Moreover, the development of the meaning of descent, which for a larger number of synonyms is the most widely employed, is closely related to that of the historical meaning, which is to be isolated given the conceptual scope it had at certain key stages. However, this does not emerge clearly from the Dictionary but can at best be sought in its meanderings. Analyzing its components in isolation, without taking into account the different relationships that would emerge, only obscures these facts.

Thus, in the historical-linguistic analysis of *race*, taking into consideration its origin and semantic change, the multifaceted nature-culture binomial remains the crucial point. The word includes at least three basic intrinsic semantic or proto-typical cores, which through metaphorical processes give rise to further senses, distinguishable only on a purely dictionarial level: (1) a racial one (as derived from *haras*), originally equine, then zoological and then human biological, denoting origin or stock (namely, nature); (2) an ethnic one (from the Greek *ethnos*), referring to a people and its place of origin (OED, s.v. *ethnic*), acquired metaphorically, and

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8 For Italian, see GRADIT, s.v. *razza*; for French, see LGR, s.v. *race*; for Spanish, see DLE, s.v. *raza*; for Portuguese, cf. DLP, s.v. *raça* and HOUAISS, s.v. *raça* (the latter inherent to Brazilian Portuguese); for English, see OED, s.v. *race*; for German, see BW, s.v. *Rasse*.

Table 1: List of synonyms for race in the main Romance and Germanic languages. For convenience and economy, the common corresponding variants have been selected and summarily covered in terms of their translation by the column referring to the English language.

Meaning	Italian	French	Spanish	Portuguese	English	German
Descendence	Stirpe, schiatta, generazione, progenie, lignaggio, nascita, origine, discendenza	Extraction, famille, filiation, lignage, lignée, branche, souche, (dé)génération, postérité, origine, ascendance/descendance, naissance, semence	Linaje, generación, dinastía, familia, origen, ascendencia	Família, linhagem, antepassado(s), ancestralidade, origem, geração	Posterity, ancestry, house, family, kindred, descendance, origin, offspring	Familie, Abstammung, Nachkommenschaft, Herkunft
Equine	Razza equina	Parage [equine, obsolete]	Raza equina, raza de caballo, equino(s)	Raça de cavalo	Stud/herd [of horses, obsolete]	Pferderasse
Ethnic	Etnia (lingua), popolo, popolazione, nazione, stato, società, civiltà	Ethnie (langage), peuple	Origen étnico, grupo étnico, población	Origem étnica, grupo étnico, população, povo	(Ethnic) group, tribe, nation, people	Ethnie, Stamm
Type	Qualità, sorta, tipo, varietà, rango, grado, livello, gente [and pejoratives], casta	Sorte, type (physique), engeance [pejorative], gent [literary], famille, classe, noble	Casta [qualitative], clan, gente, plebe [pejorative]	Casta [qualitative], gente, plebe, povo [pejorative]	(Physical) type, kind	(Menschen)typus, Sorte
Biological	Specie, genere	Espèce, genre	(sub)especie, género	(sub)especie, género	Breed, stock, variety, genus, species	(Unter)Art, Gattung, Ordnung
Historical	Sangue, terra, paese, patria	Sang, terre, sol	(Limpieza de) sangre	(Limpieza de) sangue	Blood, land	Blut (und Boden), Heimat(land)

denoting peoples or nations (namely, culture); (3) a typological one (from the Latin *typus*, and even earlier from the Greek *typos*), as a qualitative sense (implemented primarily with reference to property as ownership of something), which derives from the metaphorical concatenation between the first and the second and has repercussions on both in the process of re-semantization of the word.

Whereas the typological semantic element takes on the function of schematizing experience through taxonomies (biological, social, cultural, etc.), the ethnic semantic element, not as immediately perceptible as the other two, brings to light a socio-cultural Lifeworld, namely, the habit assumed in the course of experience and use. In Sonesson's (2018: 25–28) terms, the series of regularities that make up the Lifeworld is the product of a shift from contingencies concerning individual experience that is the result of the perceptual situation to a systematic knowledge, the result of a sedi-mentation of different past experiences. A social-cultural phenomenon implies definitely that (1) the phenomenon in question is located in the context of the human, but without being "biologically grounded" (Sonesson 2018: 48), but most importantly, that (2) in this phenomenon, perceived experiences mean something at a level that is not (only) individual, but shared in order to be communicated, constituting a background already taken for granted, that is, *relevant*, on a social level (Sonesson 2018: 30–32). On the other hand, the interpretative element, which only appears in contextual relevancies, turns out to be decisive in the shift from the system to schemes which become "interpretational relevancies." In this sense, a thing's "per-taining to a certain domain" means relating to a certain situated context, through which one meaning or another is attributed to the thing in question according to the "various possible interpretations" at the subject-relative level of the speaker's feeling (Sonesson 2018: 32).

Borrowing the phenomenological perspective, the ethnic semantic element as part of a socio-cultural Lifeworld should be considered here metaphorically in a more strictly historical-linguistic key, that is, as the continuous flow of senses of the language(s) which the speaker of a given language (and member of a given culture) is confronted with. More specifically, the interrelation and blending of *ethnos*, *typos*, and *racial* would reveal a complex relationship based on the identity/difference dichotomy, or, in Steinbock's (1995) terms taken from Husserl, a particular polariz-ation within the Lifeworld between a 'homeworld', which is "normatively signifi-cant" but also "geo-historically" placed, and an 'alienworld', to be intended as "normatively insignificant or normatively significant" just because it is *other than* the homeworld.[9] As Strassheim (2018: 2–4) noted, within a system of relevancies, we distinguish what is "relevant" from what is "irrelevant" according to the usefulness,

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9 Steinbock's Husserlian idea of an antinomy 'homeworld/alienworld' was recently taken up by Sonesson (2018: 48) as well as by Zlatev and Blomberg (2019: 78–79).

need, or possibility to access information that helps us "select" knowledge (and, consequently, an area of interest) and thus shapes our experiences and actions.

Basically, both homeworld and alienworld identify their respective point of view only in opposition to the other. In this sense, Steinbock (1995: 179–183) speaks of "liminal experience," always turning to the boundary, decentralized and asymmetrical, made up of "appropriation" (being owned by something) and "transgression" (not belonging, exceeding the norm that establishes property), which, however, are never actually so because of their "co-generating" and co-feeding.

Far from being a mere dichotomy, homeworld and alienworld fit, albeit systematically and normatively, into specific and always different contexts, which do not define, but rather delineate from time to time the ever-fading contours of the object in question, where Sonesson's (2018: 27, 29) expression "from contingency to system, from system to scheme" could be rephrased by placing it backwards. If a homeworld is also such because of greater typicality than an alienworld, an alienworld itself becomes a homeworld at the very moment when it acquires traits that make it a type of a certain category.

This being the case, at the semantic-lexical level, *ethnos* and *racial* take on a multiple guise as 'different identities', or, more properly, as specific lifeworlds, where, depending on the point of view taken (i.e., the context of use and the communicative situation), they become *familiar or foreign*, proper or not proper to something. If one speaks today of the cultural aspects of a given people or nation, the use of the word *race* is less appropriate (not to say unseemly) than some other technical term in cultural anthropology such as ethnicity. On the other hand, if one reads texts from two centuries ago, the word *race* was often preferred to others such as *people* or *tribe*, both because these related to more specific contexts and because of a progressive and dangerous general tendency to naturalize and biologize culture and society. Taking those cases of 'biological' synonymy, if (as currently) *race* corresponds to nature and is in some way opposed to culture, the biologization of ethnic and cultural semantic references in some contexts and periods means that sometimes *race* corresponds to nature, *including* culture. Based on this assumption, the same opposition cannot be found in different fields; rather, the resulting blurring between the two planes is the outcome of the different unfolding of the interpretational chain.

After all, if the metaphorical process of re-semantization makes something foreign or familiar, its actual normalization and typicalization occurs when something is experienced and therefore stored in memory. What Sonesson (2021: 117–118) defined as a mnemonic and experiential sedimentation process turns out to be the key to dealing with the seemingly sudden changes in the semantic field of *race*, contemplating the time and place in which the word was used, but above all the different interpretations that have resulted from it.

Returning to the Dictionary problem, further questions may be asked: are there 'true' synonyms, are there 'true' antonyms of the word *race*? Or maybe there are only relatives (near and far) depending on the context(s)? It is not possible to determine in a schematic way the lexical relationships, constantly evolving according to the contexts, uses, and the contingent interpretation of the speakers. Beyond the increasing and thematic polarization of synonymy, there are many conceptual and semantic nexuses that overcome disciplinary connections, also constituting a basis for current discussion at other levels (e.g., that of the constitutions of modern nation states and the implied connection between race, language, culture, identity, etc.). Such a condition leads to a strong mobility and intersection of the relative semantic field(s), involving elastic reciprocal relationships between multifold disciplines and contexts of use, which means an on-going transition between essentiality and typicality. However, as Violi (1997: 237) points out, this "has nothing to do with the traditional distinctions between dictionary and encyclopedia" because "both essential and typical traits are part of our encyclopedia" as "general knowledge of the world of which all language speaks." In a sense, as the exhaustiveness of the concept of Dictionary is lost, so is a supposedly rigid Dictionary-Encyclopedia dichotomy which proves unsuccessful in the face of the attempt to account for what concerns the world.

3.2 The traces of semantic liquidity: exceeding the tree, circumscribing the rhizome

Setting aside a theoretical approach also meant having to abandon the metaphor of the tree, given the established impossibility of controlling and containing its many branches. According to Eco (1985: 357–359), a first "anti-Porphyry" may be the labyrinth, which, however, does not have as its exit a single path among many dead ends, but has the structure of a network.

If this need emerges from semantic-lexical analysis conducted at the (inter) dictionary level, however, the distance between the abstract plane of the model and the metaphorical plane useful for concretely conveying the idea remains uncovered. Accordingly, Eco (1986: 81) proposes the "plant metaphor" of the rhizome, which appears as "a tangle of bulbs and tubers appearing like 'rats squirming one on top of the other'." Its proponents Deleuze and Guattari (1980: 13–20) point out its effectiveness of being neither tree nor root given its characteristics of non-definability: it is heterogeneous and connectable, multiple and breakable at any point, it is not a cast but rather a map.

In the context of semantic-lexical field construction, the transition from a word to its synonymic chains should not be understood as a mere sum of the different

components, nor as an incorporation of the first element into the second or vice versa. Rather, it is a matter of being thrown into the world and *in medias res*, in the midst of what happens.

Also taking into account the basic co-implication of semantic and pragmatic levels, what is explained from a phenomenological point of view as Lifeworld thus turns out to be integrated from a holistic semiotic point of view as Encyclopedia. Following Paolucci (2017: 109), since it is the sum of the signs and the rules governing their production and use, Encyclopedia allows us to understand how semiotics (namely, the 'science of signs') has first and foremost a gnoseological and episte-mological value, that is, through the mediation of knowledge representing the background to our perceptions, it enables us to understand "how we are able to know the world." The interpretive element pushes, as Violi (1997: 211–212) argued, beyond the idea of a binary semantics which tries to refer to a metaphysical reality, to make room for a semantics based on inferences and experiences according to an insepa-rable link between language and our "being and acting in the world," which is basically the main reason for the spotty oscillation between the essentiality and typicality of features.

In affirming its essence as a hard-to-define field, the (ethno)racial lexicon also makes evident its partial character. Its semantic liquidity and plasticity cannot imply a simultaneous and total permanence of all the meanings and semantic nuances involved; instead, they are given from occasion to occasion and on the basis of similarity (i.e., on a path somewhere between the identical and the different). Considering *race* and its supposed synonyms, while tracing its semantic history to its deepest and most hidden ravines, it is not only impossible to identify the "tree" with its branches, but also to trace its true first roots. If the lexicon, through its representation as a rhizome, proves to behave like an organism subject to change according to different internal and external contingencies, the (ethno)racial constellation appears to be an organism that inherently contains its other, which, even when it does not emerge, leaves obvious and inescapable traces. "Racial" thus contains that biological element in the broadest sense, which, given the various developments, inevitably points to a parallel organic life, that is, metaphorically, the cultural and ethnic element, which is constantly being generated and transformed.

In this sense, *race* as an (inter)dictionarial structure should be seen as placed within an (ethno)racial lexicon, which suggests that the word *race* and its synonyms constitute a branch of a labyrinthine rhizome that could be represented as local only. The moment we represent a portion of the Encyclopedia, we are faced with an *in fieri* transition from an inter-dictionarial root to a local encyclopedic rhizome, namely, from a net of points (i.e., the essential meanings interconnected through metaphor) to a continuously extensible and flexible cobweb consisting of the multiple simul-taneous relations always exceeding the boundaries.

What has been said finds its foundation in the traits of the rhizome actualized by Eco (1986: 81–82) on the model of Deleuze and Guattari. On the one hand, the rhizome possesses intrinsic interconnectedness as well as de-centrality and peripherality, while on the other hand the continuous separation and reconnection of branches makes it an "antigenealogical" structure. Besides, it basically constitutes a point of view given that it is *not identical* to other rhizomes and at the same time presents itself as an "open chart" and a "network of trees" (as abstractly general and concretely or deeply particular) due to its being partial, multidimensional, and changeable in time and space. Nevertheless, as stated by Violi (2015: 100–102), locality means a "reconfiguring and reproportioning portion of semantic potential" through textual definition and systematization, where lexical terms constitute only a window that can be closed but that is ultimately always open to the global. This clearly gives a more central role to the subject, who in Eco's view is a "semiotic" and "social" subject as the interpreter and author of a "segmentation" of portions of the world (Violi 2017: 245).

In more strictly semantic terms, we return to the relationship between what is contingent as always outside the system and what is normalized as systematized. Keeping in mind the dictionary definition of *race*, and at the same time understanding the context in which to use that word or, alternatively, its related lexemes according to a (normed) criterion of appropriateness, consists, as Diodato (2022: 116–118) states with a metaphor dear to Eugenio Coseriu, in knowing how to distinguish between when it is appropriate to study a plant abstractly, following the botanist's approach, and when, on the other hand, it is necessary to employ the gardener's approach, taking concrete care of the plant itself. Consequently, the gap between the rhizome as an essential labyrinth and as a delimited portion of the plane of content opens up to indeterminacy as defined by De Mauro – namely, the "third Saussurean principle" in addition to arbitrariness and linearity, conceived of as the true feeder of the "oscillation of the vocabulary":

> *Dal punto di vista fenomenologico e funzionale, conviene assumere la indeterminatezza come la condizione primaria entro la quale è possibile, tra l'altro, estendere i confini di significato d'ogni monema e segno fino ad abbracciare sensi nuovi e imprevedibili senza mutare di codice, ma mutando solo localmente, solo in qualche punto, il codice in funzione di nuove spinte di significazione cui si rendono sensibili gli utenti.* ['From the phenomenological and functional point of view, it is convenient to assume *indeterminacy as the primary condition* within which it is possible, among other things, *to extend the boundaries of the meaning* of each moneme and sign up to *embrace new and unpredictable senses* without changing code, but *changing* the code *only locally*, only at some points, according to renewed pushes of signification which users become sensitive to.'] (De Mauro 1995 [1982]: 102, my translation and emphasis)[10]

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[10] On polysemy between semantics and pragmatics, and the systematicity and synergy of the vocabulary, see Basile 2018: 26–30; on the third Saussurean principle and lexical fields in the context of structural semantics, see Diodato 2018.

On this wavelength, in Eco's perspective, the notions of Dictionary and Encyclopedia should be regarded not simply as opposites, but as gradual and complementary within a mosaic-based and ever-changing system:

> Thus, if the encyclopedia is an unordered set of markers (and of frames, scripts, text-oriented instructions), the dictionary-like arrangements we continuously provide are transitory and pragmatically useful hierarchical reassessments of it. In this sense, one should turn upside down a current distinction between dictionary (strictly 'semantic') and encyclopedia (polluted with 'pragmatic' elements); on the contrary, *the encyclopedia is a semantic concept and the dictionary is a pragmatic device.* (Eco 1986: 85)

Albeit from different points of view (the former more purely semantic, the latter more purely semiotic), both De Mauro and Eco focus on the foundational element of mobility: on the one hand, it is the foundation of the Encyclopedia as a semiotic postulate, and on the other, it is what feeds the life of the Dictionary, which, merely anchored to its stability, would simply be obsolete. If the system is a lifeline in the midst of the indeterminate, usage is what guarantees the applicability and very existence of the norm and the system.

4 Conclusion: following a path in concentric circles

To draw some conclusions, we are faced with a constant going back and forth from the center to the peripheries, from the restricted to the extended and in their different and infinite intersections – that is, metaphorically, in a way of concentric circles of water, from the Dictionar(ies) to the 'local Encyclopedia' and back to its portions, with a continuous and constant narrowing and broadening of semantic fields. Moreover, as we have seen above, reconstructing a semantic history (i.e. analyzing its metaphorical chain, without aiming to contain it, but noting its continuous development) means problematizing the dictionary definition of a word, all the more so if it is hotly debated and pragmatically ambiguous, as *race* is. Theoretically, it has been verified through the case study of *race* that a dictionary moment, although conceived as static, must present at least two stages (intra- and inter-dictionary) in order to form the antipodean pole of the Encyclopedia.

In sum, the semantic history of the word *race* makes it necessary to untangle the branches of the (ethno)racial lexicon conceiving it, in Eco's terms, not as a tree or as a single-exit labyrinth, but as a local rhizome, where those various synonymic relationships identified that expand the relative semantic field are only a part of the whole. Consequently, postulating an (ethno)racial semantic sphere, which

simultaneously contains and exceeds two opposite and interconnected semantic nuclei, constitutes a compass for navigating the open sea of "racial" usages, and it must remain so, without titanic pretensions to embrace and categorize the entire sampler of different semantic faces.

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