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**Kenneth Waltz talks through Mark Rothko: Visual
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Theory**

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Kenneth Waltz talks through Mark Rothko

Visual metaphors in the discipline of International Relations Theory

Abstract: Semiotics constitutes an untapped and interdisciplinary source of enrichment for the discipline of International Relations (IR) theory. We propose two visual metaphors to that effect to interpret the figure depicting the central claim of structural realism (*SR*) offered by late Kenneth Waltz who is one of the most disputed, read, and inspiring IR theorists. The figure is the tenor of both metaphors. The vehicles are two paintings by Mark Rothko, namely, “Green and Tangerine on Red” and the “Number 14.” The metaphors generate innumerable meanings for the tenor and eliminate the criticism that *SR* is a static and an ahistorical theory. Thus, they benefit the Discipline characterised by academic cleavages on the meaning of theory, science, and production of knowledge.

Keywords: metaphor, structural realism (*SR*), semiotics, the discipline of International Relations (IR) Theory (the Discipline) Rothko, Waltz

1. Introduction

Is it possible to use visual metaphors to generate new ideas and revisions of rigid opinions in the academic discipline of International Relations (IR) Theory? We answer the question in the affirmative. The Discipline contains bitter quarrels about its sheer aim, meanings of theories, and methods of study.¹ IR theories constitute a world of meanings such that they are produced, reproduced, and used by opponent theoretical schools as mutual criticism and defence lines. It is not an exaggeration to qualify them metaphorically as constituting a war zone where “philosophical hand grenades and largely untargeted artillery barrage are among the fighting rules” (Wight 2002: 33). In such a brutal context, semiotics emerges as an invaluable (and peaceful) source of knowledge for the IR discipline through visual metaphors we propose.

The metaphors represent an IR theory claim by the help of Mark Rothko’s structural abstract paintings. The claim is due to late Kenneth Waltz, one of the most disputed, read, and inspiring IR theorists.² Waltz offers a figure depicting the main proposition of his theory at system-level coined the names of Structural Realism (abbreviated as *SR* from here on) and Neorealism in the literature. The figure delineates how structures of international systems shape and shove states’ interactions and states’ interactions affect structures back. The metaphors connect the figure with paintings of Mark Rothko so that the artwork helps to discover a deeper meaning and interpretations of Waltz’s claim. The metaphors attest to a need of thorough revisions of conventional *SR* interpretations. They imply that criticisms of the theory as being static, ahistorical, and too simple to be of any analytical value lose ground. Thus, semiotics opens a gate and enters the Discipline with full force through abstract art.

Against the background of fierce theoretical discussions, the metaphors acquire a constructive quality by communicating values, stimulating subjective evaluations and feelings of sensual priority. Metaphors do not function through destruction. Instead, they generate mental imaginations through colours and colours' location in canvases blowing a fresh air in discussions of the theory in the Discipline. They are artfully constructive.

Like the "pictorial turn" taking place in culture and theory noted by Mitchell (1994), the discipline of IR is evolving through an "interpretive turn" (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea 2006). Thus, the metaphors satisfy to an extent the plea of Fyfe, Gordon, Law (1988: 6) "for the visual to be taken seriously in sociologies of subject-matters that are not necessarily at first sight explicitly visual." IR theorists should not be blinded to the visual; we should not delete the eye from IR theory. There exists another reason of why visual metaphors constitute rewarding interpretive tools: language is not paradigmatic for meaning. "Seeing comes before words" (Berger 2008, 7). Words and language are replaced with forms, shapes, lines, areas, and colours producing a visual grammar in art. Fauvists alter colour and cubists alter form; in the IR discipline realists accentuate material power and post-positivists deconstruct dominant theoretical discourses. Some artists explore missing elements and ideas in human life which can be communicated by abstract works. Rothko gave up drawing but concentrated on colour and space. He asserts that "The whole of man's experience becomes his model, and in that sense it can be said that all of art is a portrait of an idea" (Gottlieb and Rothko 1943). Similarly, some IR theorists try to display the missing elements in the international which escape our attention through abstraction: "To define a structure requires ignoring how units relate with one another (how they interact) and concentrating on how they stand in relation to one another (how they are arranged and positioned)" (Waltz 1979: 80).

In fact, his focus on structures of international systems moved Waltz away from classical realism by reducing and radically changing realist axioms.³ His idea in succinct terms is that states' juxtaposition through their distribution of power shape and shove state relations and constitute source of constraints on foreign policies as they are sovereign and coexist. In Waltz, what matters is the structure like Rothko's work where the key is the juxtaposition of colours and areas they occupy in his structural abstract paintings. Juxtapositions of colour and areas versus the juxtapositions of states and their relative capabilities indicate the parallel foci of abstraction helping to form a semiotic constellation displaying Waltz's claim through Rothko's works. The constellation drives perceptual and aesthetic forces to assess the idea and the meaning of systemic forces Waltz refers to. Therefore, art and the Discipline are not distant as abstraction is a tool to communicate an idea in both art and IR theories. The abstract-abstract interpretation axis establishes a topology linking both realms.

The axis includes a political tint. The U.S. intelligence services used American artists' structural abstract paintings to whet the appetite for freedom in populations at the "other side" of the Iron Curtain during the Cold War (Cockcroft, 1985; Sylvester, 1996). These art works were tools to inspire Communist societies to ideational liberty à la American society. In a sense, the U.S. secret activities to impress Communist societies by exposing Western freedom through art somewhat parallel metaphors' use to free *SR* from established discourses of its being static and ahistorical.

Three results follow. First, a dichotomy emerges between what we suppose we know about the claim against a background of new theoretical horizons. Conventional interpretations and criticisms of *SR* lose ground. Second, discursive criticisms of the claim and unending alteration of problematic and incomplete meanings attributed to *SR* take new turns. Third, the

metaphors serve for the selected works by Rothko to enter the Discipline generating an intersection of theoretical knowledge of IR under artistic imagination and feelings.

The rest of the paper proceeds in four sections. First, we present our research problem. The metaphors are proposed in the second section. The third section evaluates the implications of findings. The final section concludes by demonstrating ways to conduct the visual metaphor approach to cover other IR theories.

2. The research problem

Our research task is to enrich interpretations of Waltz's claim by creating meanings, in a sense, "to present the unrepresentable" (Lyotard 1993, 71). We first need a succinct summary of the theory to that purpose. Waltz proposed *SR*, an IR theory at system level, to investigate behavioural constraints structures of international systems generate on states' interactions. States cannot adopt any foreign-policy choice at will; the range and the direction of these choices can vary with changes in the structure. "Structures shape and shove. They do not determine behaviors and outcomes, not only because unit-level and structural causes interact, but also because the shaping and shoving of structures may be successfully resisted" (Waltz 1986, 343).

The structure has two elements according to the theory: the inexistence of an overarching authority above sovereign states, that is, anarchy, and the way states are positioned with respect to each other. Anarchy is the international system's principle of organization. It is a kind of order assumed as a constant until the day of, perhaps, the emergence of a world government such that no sovereign state left in the international system or the replacement of states by multinational and transnational corporations.⁴ The power distribution in turn is a variable indicating states' positional picture, that is, how they are juxtaposed in the system. Any change in the power

distribution across states implies structural changes at system level. Hence, states face alternative behavioural constraints in systems where there exist one or two “superpowers” like the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, or more.

The theory posits that structures shape interactions among states and interactions among states affect structures back. Waltz claims that “The aim of systems theory is to show how the two levels operate and interact, and that requires marking them off from each other. One can ask how A and B affect each other, and proceed to seek an answer, only if A and B can be kept distinct. Any approach or theory, if it is rightly termed “systemic”, must show how the system level, or structure, is distinct from the level of interacting units.” Thus, Waltz’s “fetish for order” (Molloy 2010: 396) clarifies his aim of an IR theory at system level and encourages him to simplify complexity of international politics.

Waltz defines theory as “a picture, mental formed, of a bounded realm or domain of activity. A theory is a depiction of the organization of a domain and of the connections among its parts” (Waltz 1979, 8). Indeed, if the theory is basically a picture of an arrangement, one should expect to see it – depicted. However, Waltz’s text contains strikingly few drawings or diagrams. Waltz offers only one figure visualizing his theoretical proposition (Waltz 1979, 40):

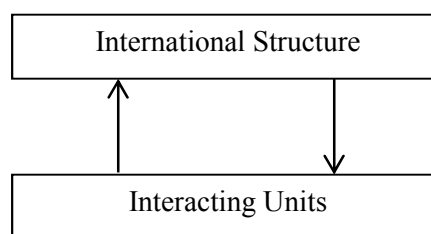


Figure 1. Waltz’s claim: the reciprocal relation between the structure of the international system and international politics

We assume that the figure is the image of an IR theory at systems level in the mind of Waltz.

Therefore, the figure is assumed to transmit Waltz’s idea of such an IR theory and fixes the

meaning of such a theory; otherwise it is impossible to expect that the figure generates any solid signification of Waltz's idea helping to construct visual metaphors.

The scarcity of depictions in Waltz (1979) motivates the need of search for unobserved mechanisms of constraints structures generate upon international relations. The Discipline did not investigate such mechanisms either in post-positivist or in positivist terms. The irony is that far from exploring structural constraints shaping and shoving global politics, IR theorists still discuss the meaning of theory including Waltz's definition of it.⁵ They try to come up close with a concept of theory they all would agree on yet fail to strike a compromise.

IR theorists reach a consensus by criticising *SR*, however. Some hold that it is a static and structuralist approach towards understanding interactions among states. Ashley (1986: 265), for example, holds that: "Change, for the structuralist, is always to be grasped in the context of a model of structure—an elaborate model whose elements are taken to be fixed and immutable in the face of the changes it conditions and limits." While others indicate that *SR* does not consider the role of social elements in IR (Wendt, 1999), and it is ahistorical (Schroeder 1994). Post-modernists and post-structuralists criticize it is a shallow approach concealing fundamental power relations in discursive terms. They evaluate the language *SR* (and the language of other realist theory branches such as classical, offensive, and defensive realism) uses as causing visions and pictures of world politics among war mongers and thereby producing self-fulfilling prophecies of inter-state conflicts (George 1995). These critical dimensions did not put an end to discussions over whether structures really exist or they are phenomenal.

In fact, Waltz searches for mechanisms of a non-observable nature, always present and occasionally materializing. He insists on key elements such as structure as analytical categories, not 'real' ones. Contrary to his being presented as a positivist, Waltz remarks that "I emphasized

that much in the present seems to contradict the predictions I make. But then, I did not write as a positivist or an empiricist" (Pond and Waltz 1994, 194). The Discipline is slow indeed to grasp Waltz's ideas. Three decades after the publication of Waltz's book the *Theory of International Politics*, an IR theorist finally remarks that Waltz makes a strong distinction between what is real and what is not: "In modelling a theory, one looks for suggestive ways of depicting the theory, and not the reality it deals with. The model then presents the theory, with its theoretical notions necessarily omitted, whether through organismic, mechanical, mathematical, or other expressions" (Wæver 2009, 204). Semiotics here becomes the key unlocking a universe of elements in Waltz that are alterable and not fixed. While it is agreeably difficult to appreciate and interpret how Waltz conceptualizes systemic values, we arrive at particular representations of systemic forces through Rothko paintings. The metaphors attribute such meanings to Waltz's claim that it can be interpreted as becoming free of positivism and empiricism castigations.

3. Metaphors

Statements cannot be translated into images directly according to Gombrich (1972, 82). Thus, no painting can straight visualize Waltz's verbal claim of "the aim of systems theory is to show how the two levels operate and interact, and that requires marking them off from each other" in the absence of Waltz' figure. We use the figure as pitted against an artwork to establish a metaphoric relation.

3.1. *Metaphor 1: "Waltz's figure is Green and Tangerine on Red"*

The painting "Green and Tangerine on Red" by Rothko and the claim are similar as both work through two areas in interaction. A visual metaphor is then born by the superposition of the

figure and Rothko's "Green and Tangerine on Red" reproduced below. The metaphor is "Waltz's figure is Green and Tangerine on Red" or "Rothko's Green and Tangerine on Red Exposes Waltz's claim of international structures shape and shove units' interactions" (Kennedy 1982, 589). To accentuate the metaphoric relation, one could also write "the reciprocal relation between the structure of the international system and international politics" underneath the painting erasing the title "Green and Tangerine on Red." The alternative metaphor of "Green and Tangerine is Waltz" is meaningless, because we are interested in the opposite metaphorical construct, not in how Waltz's claim might illuminate Green and Tangerine on Red. Alternatively, we are not using Waltz's claim to enrich sensations we feel by gazing at the artwork. The metaphoric relation is not commutative. The similarity between Waltz' figure and Rothko's



Figure 2. "Green and Tangerine on Red" ⁶

painting constitutes our central point of departure. The subjective exactness of the correspondence between the claim and the painting divulges a connection between them (Arnheim 1997, 116). The relevance of similarity takes its strength from interpretations of the

pictorial depiction of theory's logic. To put it differently, the interpretive faculties of fusion between artistic senses and IR theories drive the metaphor. Had Waltz drawn circles instead of rectangular shapes in his figure, we would have proposed another painting to depict his claim.

The following question remains to be answered: How does the metaphor enter the realm of IR theory? Two answers exist. First, the painting represents and inspires infinitely varied concepts and feelings across individuals as "there is no innocent eye" (Gombrich 1960, 297-298). Thus, the painting might imply no connection with IR theories or might imply a relation which is strictly opposed to or different than structural realism. Second, the constituent parts of metaphors provide an answer. All metaphors have two elements: the tenor and the vehicle (Richards 1932, 96).⁷ What are the tenor and the vehicle of the metaphor "Waltz's figure is Green and Tangerine on Red"? Kennedy (1982, 589) indicates that "the tenor is the thing treated and the vehicle is the treatment." The figure is treated by the painting. The figure is therefore the tenor. The abstract relation between structure and interacting units is to be explored; it is to be interpreted. The painting helps us to reimagine the claim. We understand the claim in terms of Green and Tangerine on Red carrying the weight of the comparison and acting like a generator of subjective interpretations. Thus, the painting works as an engine to produce alternative interpretations of the tenor. It functions as a tool to treat the figure to expose its undiscovered aspects immersing Waltz's system-level IR theory idea into a colourful universe. The vehicle is the painting.

A multitude of other paintings could be selected as vehicles, because subjectivity of visual interpretations varies from one person to another. Therefore, subjective "feels" of similarities between *SR* and art works can generate an infinite variety of visual metaphors. For example, Sylvester (2001: 549) selects "Bacon's tortured men wrestling with their own angst" as

the “favorite image of neorealism,” thus as the vehicle. The claim of Waltz would then gain nothing but a hollow scientific understructure disclosed by a screaming hallucination. The selected vehicle would treat structural realism as a futile attempt to transform realist IR theory into a scientific construct. Yet we can differentiate between aesthetic and semiotic appreciations of images (Kjeldsen 2018: 76). Bacon’s work can be sensed as generating a more aesthetic appreciation, because its similarity with Waltz’s figure is less immediate. Hence, the similarity of the figure with selected Rothko works enables us to decode the idea of system-level IR theories at a relatively lesser level of subjectivity. Any antagonism targeting *SR* is reduced to some extent.

We propose a simile through Rothko-Waltz relation as well, because the painting resembles the graph. There are three implications of this remark. First, the relationship is based upon an aesthetic experience of seeing Waltz’s figure like the painting, that is, a simile formulating a comparison (Aldrich, 1968, 74). The similarity between Waltz’ figure and Rothko’s painting is of degree and derives from the two superposed rectangles. Thus, the similarity derives from a sensual immediacy and a perceptual analogy between the graph and the painting (Goodman 1976, 4). While the central structural realist claim and the structural abstract painting are distinct, they allow direct comparisons being presented as each next to the other. Hence, the simile can take the form of: “Waltz’s figure is like the Green and the Tangerine on Red.” The simile in the form of “Waltz is like Green and the Tangerine on Red” and the one in the form of “Green and the Tangerine on Red is like Waltz” then cover metaphors of “Waltz is Rothko” and “Rothko is Waltz.” Yet the former metaphor is useful for our purpose, not the latter. Second, there is a deep contrast between the simile and the metaphor. The claim and the artwork are independent of each other and have equal positions in the simile. In contrast, they are

integrated in the metaphor so that they cannot be dissected from each other. Separate existence only allows comparisons between the painting and the figurative claim. Unlike a metaphor, a simile formulates an explicit comparison (Aldrich 1968, 74). The equivalence relation posited by the metaphor transcends these comparisons. Third, the difference between the simile of “Rothko is like Waltz” and the metaphor of “Rothko is Waltz” can be stated in terms of the likelihood of similarity between Waltz’s figure and the Green and Tangerine on Red. In the former, the likelihood does not reach certainty; it does in the latter as the metaphor does not formulate an explicit comparison but expresses certitude of similarity fusing the two figures. The fusion in turn functions as a producer of meanings the claim conceals and not discovered before. The painting assimilates the figure; it catches what the figure misses to express. We understand and experience the claim in terms of the painting since “the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 5). Therefore the artwork attracts and responds to IR scholars’ criticism toward *SR*.

3.2 *The Metaphor 2: “Waltz’s figure is Number 14”*

One can now ask, for example, what other colours could be used for the same detail and how would they connect with Waltz’s figure? Alternatively, what colours, areas of colours and colours’ placement in a vehicle correspond to the tenor the best? (Harrison 2003, 46-60). These questions can be answered by other Rothko paintings such as the Number 14 painted in 1960:

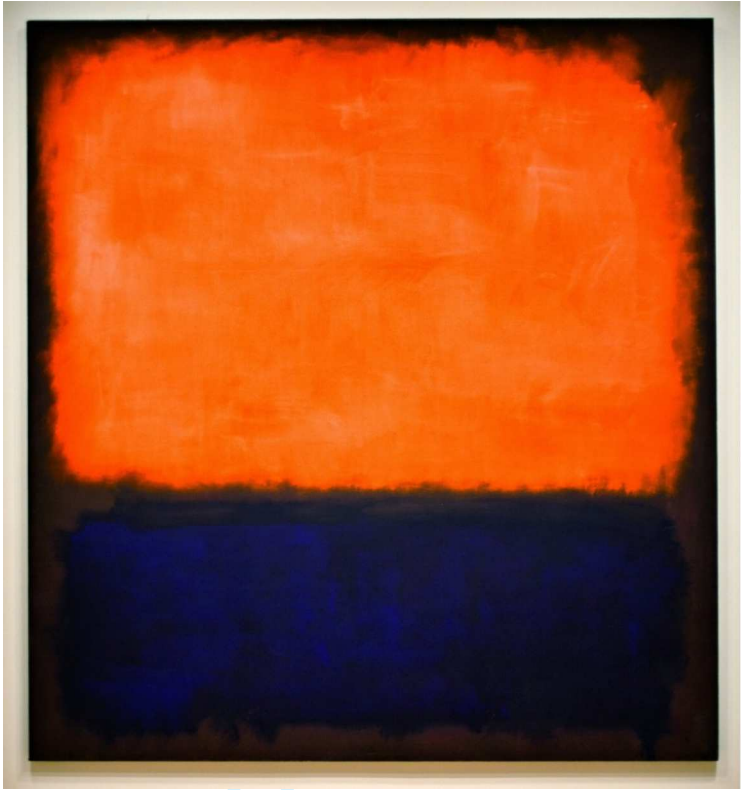


Figure 3. “The Number 14” (1960)⁸

The metaphor is transformed into: “Waltz’ claim is Rothko’s Number 14” or “Rothko’s number 14 exposes Waltz’s claim.” Like in the previous metaphor, the interactions revive in warm and the structure appears in cold colours in the second one. Yet there is a huge difference between the two tenors: colours are differently placed in them. Sticking to Number 14, the figure 1 should now read as the figure below:

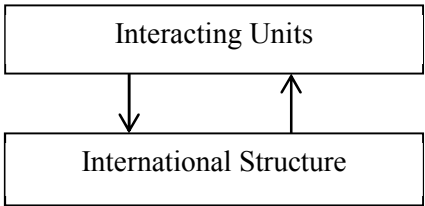


Figure 4. The reversed reciprocal relation between the structure of the international system and international politics

The figure above demonstrates the metaphoric power of Rothko paintings selected as vehicles but differentiated through their dissimilarity in terms of colour placement. Deep blue and blackish green represent forces structures produce over interacting units. Thus, in the first metaphor, the structure is placed on top of interacting units in the claim. Hence, the first metaphor has a one-to-one correspondence with the graph. In contrast, places of the structure and interactions corresponding respectively to blue and orange areas are interchanged in the new tenor. The colour constellation of the Number 14 hints at the fundamental role of the structure in *SR*. Waltz hints at a distinction of structure versus interacting units. An international system can change only if the organization principle of anarchy collapses (Waltz 2000). Structures are the basic and essential elements in systemic theories. Hence, the bottom area should be the place for dark tones. As a result, the Number 14 can be interpreted as treating the tenor better than does the Green and Tangerine on Red. Nonetheless, we can question such an argument.

Schapiro (1972-1973: 12) indicates that: “the qualities of upper and lower are probably connected with our posture and relation to gravity and perhaps reinforced by our visual experience of earth and sky. The difference can be illustrated by the uninvertibility of a whole with superposed elements of unequal size.” The elements “earth” and “sky” give their place to interacting units and structure in the metaphors of *SR*. Does the sky or earth represent structure’s impact upon interacting units? The answer is simple: “it depends.” It depends on how one perceives one element as more central than the other. If one perceives that the sky above earth connotes an overwhelming layer, then the dark area should be on top; otherwise, if earth is perceived as representing the basic element, then it should be at the bottom of the canvas.

According to Schapiro (1972-1973: 12) “though formed of the same parts the rectangle with small A over large B is expressively not the same as the one with the same B over A. The

composition is non-commutative, as architects recognize in designing a façade. The same effect holds for single elements; the cubist painter, Juan Gris, remarked that a patch of yellow has a different visual weight in the upper and lower parts of the same field.” We note that the dark hues occupy relatively smaller areas in both vehicles. Thus, the visual weight of areas does not vary with size in both metaphors. The question is simply whether the importance of structures of international systems makes itself more visible on the top or at the bottom of the paintings. If we select the top area, then the “Green and Tangerine on Red” is better vehicle than the “the Number 14” that in turn expresses the claim better if we interpret that the bottom area functions as transferring the idea of the fundamental systemic value of international structures. We might call these axial changes and effects they produce as “cryptesthesia” both metaphors embody (Schapiro 1972-1973: 12).

Darkness, while covering a smaller area, occupies a centrality in terms SR, because the structure of the international system is constant unless the structure itself changes. Therefore, if we attribute dark colours a quality of evil forces that prevent humanity throughout history to break the war cycles at global level, then we could obtain a sign post-positivism and other critical IR theories would cheerfully endorse. Whether the evil is placed on top or bottom would not make any difference. Consequently, popular culture mixed up with colours opens another myriad of interpretations radiating from the proposed metaphors.⁹

4. A closer look at the metaphors

We see Rothko’s paintings as Waltz’s claim in both metaphors (Aldrich 1968: 75). We see therefore a luminescence emanating from colour interactions that gives life to a claim argued to be a motionless view of IR. The claim gets animated. It acquires a meaning diametrically

opposed to the conventional one the literature discusses. Mark Rothko had his own artistic and personal experiences in producing his artwork, yet metaphors allow interpretations by spectators who did not go through those experiences. Thus, the metaphors constitute universes of meanings produced by individual appreciation of art and IR theory knowledge. Naturally, everyone's background and art appreciation differ, so that there is no guarantee that the same artwork will be selected as vehicles. This is especially true in the discipline of IR, as scholars are divided in terms of the meaning of science and the production of knowledge. The distance between them indicates the severity of academic cleavages. However, looking on the bright side, the discovery of connections between two different and creative fields, namely, art and IR theory, broadens theoretical horizons. As a result, we can agree with Hester (1966: 205) that missing something there to be seen, that is "aspect-blindness" precludes visual metaphors and therefore intersections between IR theories and semiotics. Like having a musical ear, seeing an aspect in an artwork and an ability to connect it with an abstract IR theory necessitates some visual control and restraint identifying a separation between the tenor and the vehicle. The result would become cross-pollination between semiotics and the discipline of IR theories.

4.2. *Colouring SR*

Colours, their interactions and areas of the vehicles enable making meanings. Colour theory and shapes generate a metric to interpret the figure through paintings. The arrows in the figure transform into joint colour effects. The arrows separate rectangles in the figure, the operation of colours replace the arrows in the vehicle. "The interaction of colour, that is, seeing what happens between colours must be our concern; we almost never see a single colour unconnected and unrelated to other colours. Colours represent themselves in continuous flux, constantly related to

changing neighbors and changing conditions” (Albers 1963, 5). The effect communicates meanings and concepts through association (Itten 1961, 21). The interplay of the two-coloured areas in the Green and Tangerine on Red and the Number 14 corresponds to the arrows in the figure and to subliminal dynamics perceived by the eye. It displays how systemic constraints shape and shove states’ interactions and how states’ interactions affect structures back. It demonstrates how the vehicle functions to deepen our interpretations of the tenor. The figure, in its isolation, does not make the systemic features of international politics colourful and clear. The colour interaction crystallises these features. One can imagine alternative colour frames as if their interactions tell different stories about constraints states face in their interactions. These colour frames would allow interpreters to navigate and explore unknown or unexpected features of *SR*. Colour interactions then become products of individual subjectivities ascribing different meanings to them. They would open countless interpretive pathways in the Discipline.

When we focus further on colour effects we note that the meaning of red can vary from evil, hot, anger, and hot to love and passion. Similarly, blue can mean peace, tranquillity, knowledge, serenity, or stasis. While the reddish area can be perceived as coming forward, the dark area retreats in visual terms and becomes the distant basis upon which international interactions take place. Thus, the coloured areas do not project a duality but a continuous flux emanating from their reciprocal relationship. The contrast between dark green, blue, orange and reddish orange implies a multitude of tertiary colour oppositions and dynamics of constraints upon international interactions. The complexity of *IR* muted by the theory resuscitates thanks to the vehicle. The claim suddenly breathes in the painting.

The contrast between areas painted in two complementary colours in both artworks produces a tension. It creates an infinite variety of abstract mental representations through

subjectivities as red and orange are known as warm colours, yet different people can see, for example, different reds looking at the same red tone. Thus, the fusion between innumerable subjective colour schemes generates innumerable meanings for the tenor affecting our theoretical visions of SR (Rothenberg 1980, 17-27). The juxtaposition of the reddish hue of the bottom area and the greenish black area in Green and Tangerine on Red, and, similarly, the juxtaposition of the dark blue and orange areas at bottom and above, respectively, exhibit how structures shape and shove interacting units. The juxtapositions might produce a luminescence sensed through the colour contrast with warm areas meaning wars, crises, and fierce activities, and the greenish cold and serene dark-blue areas representing static principle of anarchy.

Rothko wanted simple expressions of complex thought constituting an entrance to subliminal subjectivity. Waltz on the other hand, represented a theory of IR reducing complexity and achieving parsimony to study a wide variety of systems. The common reduction of complexity steers the similarity of both works easing the metaphorical relation. The tenor reduces the complexity of IR like the vehicle that reduces the number of colours. The metaphor then symbolizes a dual nature of subjectivity versus parsimony for an artist and an IR theorist. It produces a generation of a colourful aesthetic life for the tenor. The tenor's new life substantiates the power of metaphors.

We agree that paintings have different meanings to different people in different contexts. Yet Waltz's claim narrows down the range of paintings to use to assign it meanings. Thus, the claim as reproduced by the figure in Waltz works itself as a selection mechanism to allow specific paintings to enter the Discipline. Selected Rothko paintings carry the figure depicting Waltz's claim by assigning it meanings so that not only *SR* but all other IR theories and ultimately the whole Discipline becomes affected by the metaphors. Although there are no

colours in Waltz figure, it gains colours through the metaphors. As a result, the figure's colour meaning owes its creation to the similarity between the figure and the juxtaposition of colour areas in the paintings. The metaphorical relation is so powerful that it selects a specific artwork among alternative paintings. Signs glow over the referent that can be taken as debates indicating the Discipline's theoretical division (Lapid 1989).

Finally, we cannot deny the role of the interpreter's art appreciation, interest, and knowledge in this process of semiosis. Nevertheless, the meanings created exceed all metaphorical relations as; above all, they free *SR* from criticisms to some extent. The freedom as divulged would bring about theoretical repercussions in the Discipline. Unlike areas' placement, the order of colours does not matter in terms of colour interactions: whether, for example, green is on top and orange is at the bottom, the perceived luminesce remains the same in the first metaphor as well as in the second. No strict temporal asymmetry holds between colours as if in a causal relationship where the cause and the effect are independent so that the cause must precede the effect (Wendt 1998, 105). Thus, the metaphors do not mean causality. They do not mean the interaction between the two entities in the figure in terms of cause-effect relations. We then interpret the claim as escaping from the positivist enclosure and approaching the interpretive side of evaluating IR theories. Both metaphors function in a similar way; they are undifferentiated with respect to interpretive tasks. Paul Klee in *Creative Credo* (1920) maintains that "art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible." In conformity with Klee's vision, we can assert that metaphors do not reproduce Waltz's claim of system-theory of international politics, but they make it visible.

4.2. *Signs versus metaphors*

Visual metaphors we propose are signs because they expose meanings of Waltz's claim in visual aspects helping to re-interpret it discursively. They communicate meanings and generate values and feelings. Accordingly, semiotics of Saussure and Peirce would bring further light on their discussion. The metaphors associate Waltz's figure with Rothko paintings similar to Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between signifier and signified together constituting a sign. Saussure (1916, 98) asserts that a linguistic sign emanates from an association between a concept and an acoustic image, the two elements of a sign: "Le signe linguistique unit non une chose et un nom mais un concept et une image acoustique. Cette dernière n'est pas le son matériel, chose purement physique, mais l'empreinte psychique de ce son, la représentation que nous en donne le témoignage de nos sens; elle est sensorielle, et s'il nous arrive de l'appeler "matérielle", c'est seulement dans ce sens et par l'opposition à l'autre terme de l'association, le concept, généralement plus abstrait." In our case, we do not gaze at the claim, we read it. We do not read the painting but look at it. The signifier becomes the visual image, that is, the selected painting as our IR theory knowledge chooses an artwork representative of an abstract IR theory claim. When we look at the painting which physically exists, a specific assertion comes to life in our mind. Thus, the signified is the concept, that is, the tenor; it refers to the theoretical claim which is an abstract mental representation. We become able to express one in terms of the other. Yet Saussure's approach does not connect the metaphors any further to the larger context of the Discipline; it does not contribute by revealing new features not discussed through the metaphors. It can be stated that the signified-signifier relations can take different interpretive values depending on the philosophy of science espoused by IR theorists who evaluate them. Hence, our discussion picks among infinitely many meanings arising of the signifier-signified relations. We

are more concerned by the following question, however: what are the implications of the metaphors for the Discipline as a third factor, an object?

Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics approach offers the third element. Peirce asserts that "a sign, or representamen, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its object. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the ground of the representamen" (Peirce 1955, 99). Hence, Peirce discusses three elements: the representamen which is perceptible as the signifier, the interpretant which is the mental image the recipient forms of the sign as the signified, and the object which refers to something beyond the sign (Nöth 1992, 42-47). It follows that the paintings are the representamen, as they represent IR claims and IR claims are interpretants. The relation between paintings and claims stands for the object, the Discipline. Both metaphors reveal that Waltz's claim and therefore *SR* does not lack dynamics. The proposed metaphors do not stop producing meaning once the interpretation of a dynamic *SR*. The interaction between the vehicle and the tenor is repeated countlessly. They bring about the theory's complexity, ahistorical nature, and dominance in the Discipline. As a result, these new meanings make an entrance into the object, the Discipline, dislocating the validity and the value of countless critical discussions of *SR*.

Peirce's approach moves beyond the binary sign relationship Saussure proposes. Three relations exist according to Peirce. While the representamen-interpretant relation is more or less obvious, we must now discuss how the representamen and the interpretant are related to the object. The answer comes through the referent question "what is represented?" An example eases

our task. Suppose that you are standing in front of a handicap parking lot. There is a blue rectangular sign depicting in white a person sitting in a wheel-chair. The sign is physical, observed. It therefore becomes the representamen. You interpret the sign as people with no impairment cannot park their cars in that area. This is the interpretant. As to the referent or the object, it is the factual existence of handicapped people. The example informs us that the paintings are the representamen, as they represent Waltz's claim and the claim is the interpretant. The relation between paintings and claims stands for the object, the general idea of the Discipline. Therefore, paintings are the representamen, claims that are the interpretants, and the factual existence of a fragmented Discipline is the referent/object. The referent contains antithetical meanings and subjectivities with respect to *SR*. It represents both feelings of relief and annoyance springing from controversial interpretations of *SR* as the meanings of Waltz's claim alter depending on whether a Realist or a Critical theorist assesses the metaphors.

Peirce's icon, index, and symbol triad reveals sign patterns. The icon signifies a one-one relationship, called the category of firstness (Nöth 1990, 121-127). Icon is a representamen and a sign by itself. It does not depend on an object. Given the arbitrariness of the sign we cannot assert that the paintings are iconic in their representations of *SR*. An icon implies resemblance relation between the representamen and the interpretant. To illustrate better the existence of an iconic relationship you can look at yourself in a mirror, the icon is the image of yourself you see. The selected paintings then become icons if such an objective likeness exists; should they constitute mirror representations of the theoretical claims. They are not such replicas, however. The other sign possibility is that each painting is an index. The index differs from the icon as its connection with the representamen is not based upon an analogy. If each painting is physically connected with the claims, then each becomes an index (Nöth 1990, 113). However no such

physical or existential connection exists between the paintings and Waltz's claim. The remaining possibility is that the paintings are symbols. Symbol relation is based upon arbitrariness. Our subjective selection of the paintings as representing the claim means that they are indeed symbols. Hence, Rothko's paintings become essentially symbols, not duplicates, of the structural realist separation between two levels.

Conclusions

Visual metaphors would not limit the contribution of semiotics to the Discipline with only one IR theory. To illustrate, Realism is a large family of theories. Take, for example, the branch of offensive realism which posits that states' behaviour always hints at activities to obtain better positions in the international system. States interact to increase power regardless systems' structural differences (Rose 1998, 144-172). All states have similar positions and are subject to same constraints according to this realist branch. Hence, constraints structures put on international interactions dissolve and become erased.

What paintings can represent offensive realism? One can immediately think of works like Rothko's Black on Black, Ad Reinhardt's Black Paintings, the Black Square by Kazimir Malevich reproduced below or another artwork. These oeuvres all display nothing but a

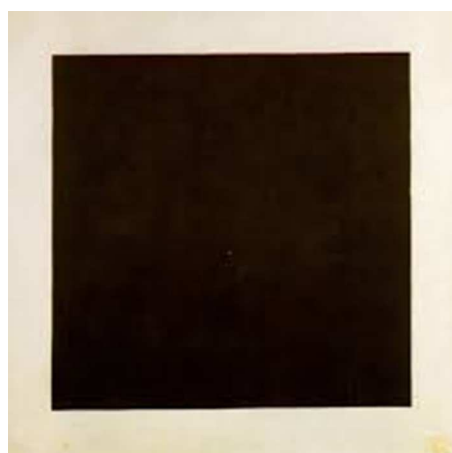


Figure 5. "The Black Square"¹⁰

uniform colour and can be selected as vehicles of the offensive realist tenor. Any other structural abstract work where there is no other colour than, say, white or any other colour could also be selected as vehicles. These paintings would then treat offensive realism in a way that one obtains illuminating interpretations of the theory only through colour. The compactness of colour precludes colour interactions and therefore a meaning of dynamicity aspect of the theory.¹¹

Nevertheless, even in its static interpretation, offensive realism could be attributed different meanings through colour selection. If we select black as we previously did, then we can talk about pessimism about peace in IR. Offensive Realism means nothing but continuous clashes and conflicts among states. The compactness of black or white would mean death depending on the culture of people making sense of these two colours. Hence, the colour scheme can greatly alter the meaning of Offensive Realism. If one picks the colour pink, then what becomes the meaning the theory transmits? A compact pink would again imply constant and unchanging constraints states would face. The static meaning of the theory does not change. However, the question then becomes what the colour pink would imply for the meaning of Offensive Realism? Is it a static but a cheerful, tender, or even a cute IR theory? The question reveals that once there is no configuration of different coloured spaces in a painting, one is bound up only with the "message" the selected hue transmits to interpreters and spectators. The carriage of the theory to an artwork and the carriage of their combined interaction to the Discipline are greatly limited.

To sum up, we find that the metaphors open four channels of communication. First, they make meanings relating to imagination and subjective reasoning instead of direct representations. Second, they reveal several features the naked eye cannot identify. Third, they illustrate "human

making meaning out of the meaning-making of the other humans: translated plainly from the philosophical tongue of ontology and epistemology, this is the heart of what it means to be an interpretivist” (Pachirat 2006, 374). And, fourth, they open numerous artistic/aesthetic channels of interpretive subjectivities supplementing, revising conventional interpretations of *SR*.

Parallels between art and theory can be multiplied across individual subjectivities if there is room in IR theories to employ the senses. Epistemological and ontological controversies underlying theoretical debates give their place to artistic and aesthetic views by thinking about IR theories through paintings. Scholars can detect and appreciate new relations and implications theories do not seem to divulge.

The metaphors do not serve either the purpose of verification or falsification of the claim. They do not mean a structural realist empirical success; they do not demonstrate that the distribution resources across states under anarchy prevents or encourages states to take some actions. This is indeed impossible as Waltz himself noted. Systemic mechanisms are generally of non-observable nature, but they are always present and become occasionally concrete. He insists on key elements such as structure as analytical categories, not ‘real’ ones. It also follows that one cannot either falsify Waltz’s claim, because it is impossible to find an instance where systemic forces are observable and combine this condition with interactions of states facing no constraints at all. As both its verification and falsification are impossible, we give up whether the claim is scientific or not but instead we try to create incentives for interpretive thinking through visual metaphors.

Indeed, the IR discipline does not amply benefit of conducted experiments as physical sciences do. One cannot execute laboratory experiments to observe how differently placed states interact in such alternative systemic structures. Visual metaphors instead produce knowledge

through interpretations needing no laboratory or heroic empirical assumptions positing different system structures. Waltz's claim structured in terms of selected paintings by Mark Rothko generates additional knowledge about *SR* and therefore the whole discipline. Marcuse (1979: 32) remarks that "art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the men and women who could change the world." Rothko's paintings cannot change *SR* but can create a consciousness and interpretive capacities which would give a new breath to the Discipline. In a similar vein, Waltz (1997: 915) states that: "Multipolarity is developing before our eyes, to all but the myopic it can already be seen on the horizon." Semiotics corrects the myopia Waltz refers to. Rothko's paintings talk in Waltz's voice.

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Notes

¹ I capitalize the term *Discipline* as I use it to refer to the academic discipline of International Relations Theory.

² Wæver (2009: 203) states that Waltz's 1979 book *Theory of International Politics* that is the source of *SR* "constitutes the most influential theory in the discipline within the last 65 years."

³ The axioms of Realism are the following: states are unitary and rational, states are after security, states are sovereign and coexist (the condition of anarchy). Slight changes in these axioms generate a new branch of Realism.

⁴ Recall those futuristic movies such as *Blade Runner* (both the old and the new versions), *Outland*, *Alien* and others centering on colossal firms but no states looking for precious minerals and even extraterrestrial life forms in outer space. These science-fiction movies tell stories taking place in different international systems composed by firms rather than states.

⁵ There is nothing to be puzzled about a leading journal in the field consecrating an entire issue to alternative answers to the following question: "The End of International Relations Theory?" *European Journal of International Relations* 19 (3), 2013.

⁶ http://www.phillipscollection.org/research/american_art/artwork/Rothko-Green_and_Tangerine.htm.

⁷ According to Forceville (1994:1), the tenor and the vehicle correspond to the literal A-term that is the primary subject and the figurative B-term that is the secondary subject, respectively.

⁸ <http://redtreetimes.com/tag/mark-rothko/>

⁹ The evil versus the light, the duality of the Dark Side (of the Force) versus the Force, makes up the engine of worldwide popular culture of *Star Wars* movies. The duality does not always remain the realm of fiction and fantasy. It springs from the movie pictures to actual, observed politics of Ukraine as well: See, Zaporozhtseva (2018).

¹⁰ <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/research-publications/the-sublime/philip-shaw-kasimir-malevichs-black-square-r1141459>

¹¹ There is room for visual metaphors to discuss and propose representing other IR theories such as defensive realism, liberalism, constructivism and others.