Polskie Towarzystwo Semiotyczne

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE

Tom XXXVIII • nr 1

PÓŁROCZNIK

SEMIOTICS, ARTS AND REALITY

Warszawa • 2024

Adres redakcji: Krakowskie Przedmieście 3, 00-047 Warszawa
e-mail: studiasemiotyczne@pts.edu.pl
http://studiasemiotyczne.pts.edu.pl/

ISSN 0137-6608; e-ISSN 2544-073X

CONTENT

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 5–9
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.01

MAŁGORZATA GAMRAT *

SEMIOTICS, ARTS AND REALITY

In 2024, in Warsaw, on the centenary of the birth (September 30th) of one of the most important Polish semioticians—Professor Jerzy Pelc—the 16th World Congress of Semiotics / 16th World Congress of the IASS-AIS (WCS) was held under the auspices of IASS-AIS, with the main theme being "Signs and Realities". This topic was related to the research of Jerzy Pelc, and this choice was intended to not only recall this outstanding semiotician, but also to remind us of what has always been the essence of semiotics, and which, in our times, is sometimes blurred in the "craziness" of always searching for something new. At the same time, it is an extremely current topic in an era of realities largely created by mass media, artificial intelligence, algorithms and special effects, often combined with created worlds and experiences that change and sometimes, even, pervert the perception and experience of real life.

The topic of "art and reality" is one of the most widely discussed in the history of the visual arts, but not so much in other arts such as music, cinema, performative or multimedia arts, etc. This topic has been well elaborated upon by many scholars, such as Ernst Gombrich and his colleagues Julian Hochberg and Max Black, who, in their book titled *Art, Perception, and Reality* (1973), discuss the relationships between art, reality, and the human perception of those elements from a triple perspective: that of the history of art, of psychology and of philosophy. Joyce Cary, for his part, in his book titled *Art and Reality: Ways of the Creative Process* (1958) examines, from practical experience, "the relation of the artist with the world as it seems to him, and to see what he does with it" (p. 11) and asks how varying arts present different forms of the "truth". More contempo-

* The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, Faculty of Humanities. E-mail: malgorzata.gamrat@kul.pl. ORCID: 0000-0002-6588-7533.

rary research on this topic includes the book by Dennis J. Sporre titled *Reality Through the Arts* (1991) in which the author offers a wider view, not only of the visual arts, but also of other arts, seeing art as a tool for artistic actions composed of various media.

The topic "art and semiotics" has also been well-elaborated upon. I could here cite Mike Bal and Norman Bryson and their classic essay "Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context and Senders" (1998), or the Prague School and its semiotic approach to the arts (cf. Titunik, Matejka, 1984), or Meyer Schapiro and his famous essay "On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs" (1972–1973).

Many semioticians say that "We inhabit two worlds—the world of matter and the world of meaning" (O'Halloran, 2023; cf. also Halliday, 2005). Could we see the world of matter as an artistic one that refers us to the world of meaning and for which human experience is necessary to put together both worlds? Moreover, regarding the arts we can also ask the question of which kind of reality we are analysing: artistic, semiotic, or other? We can compare artistic and semiotic (scholarly) realities—perhaps both create the same image of reality, but use different tools or have other aims. Perhaps the artistic reality is subjective, and that of semiotics could be objective (cf. the famous dichotomy: objective/subjective—in the sense of Heidegger or Deely)? Additionally, one could ask: what do we understand as reality? Is there one or more? The subjectivity of perception causes us to perceive more than one reality or to see the same reality from various perspectives or, if we believe quantum physics, there is possibly more than one universe—all of which provokes questions on the singularity or plurality of reality, parallel worlds, and even the multiverse…

We can see the arts as a tool of communication composed of signs, codes, and even systems, and semiotics offers various tools to analyse the relationships between art and reality (e.g., Popova, 2003). One can also compare different arts to find common elements in all arts or similar artistic practices and tools that serve for communication, to code and decode messages in the various systems (e.g., Souriau, 1947).

Some scholars propose quite complex theories or methods that allow us to analyse, among others, the arts and their relationships to reality (cf. Barry, 1999; Schechter, 2008; Solomonick 2015; Tarasti, 2000). Others have proposed a common reflection on semiotics and the arts in volumes in which all of the arts are placed together, close to each other, such as *Bloomsbury Semiotics Volume 3: Semiotics in the Arts and Social Sciences* (Pelkey, Petrilli, Ricciardone, 2023), *Open Semiotics. Volume 3: Texts, Images, Arts* (Biglari, 2023), or *Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities in the Post-Truth Era: The Reality Machine* (Günay, Kalelioğlu, Bayram, 2024).

During the Warsaw Congress, several of the nearly 50 panels concerned the arts—including one of the three under the patronage of the Polish Semiotic Society (PTS): "Semiotic and Artistic Realities" (Wąsik, 2024, p. 33–34, 242–257). For Jerzy Pelc, who was one of the founders of the PTS, one important element

of research was the process of using signs and their interpretation in the act of communication, which also can be applied to various arts. Pelc saw semioticians not only as philosophers or linguists, but also as specialists from various research areas, imagining collaboration on the basis of semiotics: psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, theoreticians of literature, theatre, film and music. This collaboration should lead to discussions and "the search for a common language: both in terms of terminology, and in considerations about the rational division of tasks, and—most profoundly—in terms of substantive matters",[1] as he claimed in the Introduction to the first volume of *Studia Semiotyczne* (Pelc, 1970, p. 9). This was also the case during the panel devoted to the relationship between art, reality and semiotics: it brought together philosophers, linguists, art historians, film and theatre scholars, literary scholars and musicologists drawing on various areas of semiotics to search for a common language and to deepen the understanding of the fundamental aspects of perceiving reality through art and its relationships with reality. This enabled a lively discussion resulting from the differences in "theoretical attitudes and habits, born for example from practising different disciplines or from conflicting schools, differences of interests and opinions" (Pelc, 1970, p. 9). Thanks to this, the discussions were extremely fruitful and allowed for the finding of common ground. The next step was to announce a call for papers for *Studia Semiotyczne*, founded by the Professor several decades ago, and which I have titled "Semiotics, Arts, and Reality". I posed several questions to the authors:

1. Which means are used in the different arts to react to, describe, and create reality?
2. Which codes are used by artists to present reality?
3. How do the arts/artists describe reality?
4. How do codes and signs function in artistic reality?
5. Which tools do semiotics offer us for the research into these topics?

Responses came from all over the world. From those articles that addressed these issues, I ultimately selected nine, which I present to the reader today.

The concept of this volume is to begin with the broadest approach to the topic and then explore various arts—from performing arts to… performing arts, yet operating in different mediums and grounded in different theoretical concepts. The selected articles address not only different arts and differently understood realities, but also draw on various semiotic concepts. This provides the reader with a multifaceted mosaic showcasing the diversity of contemporary semiotics, which, despite its diversity, is always the same in its deepest assumptions. This allows us, as Professor Pelc desired, to connect specialists from various disci-

[1] Unless otherwise indicated, translations are those of the author.

plines thanks to semiotics that serves as a kind of meta-tool and, at the same time, a common space.

The first article, *Art as a Language Facing Reality*, by Eduardo Grillo (Italy), is an in-depth reflection on the main themes of this volume—"the complex relationship between language, art, and reality through a semiotic perspective" (p. 11 of the current issue). It also provides the most theoretical introduction and provides a background for reflections on the reality of various arts. Next, Bujar Hoxha, in *An Epistemological Way of Exemplifying Artistic Realities: From a "Transformational" to a "Transcendental" Sign*, discusses the performing arts and their relationship to reality, drawing on the semiotics of passions (Greimas and Fontanille) and existential semiotics (Tarasti).

Irina Melnikova's paper begins a series of texts focused on specific arts, often illustrated by a particular case. In *Semiotic Mapping of Reading and* Lolita*'s Interpretations*, the author discusses Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and its numerous interpretations, drawing on Peirce and adapting his semiotics to literary studies, including the issue of "textual materiality". The next article, Pacarrete*: The Aesthetics of the Screen in Journalistic Texts* (Gilmar Hermes), continues Peirce's contemporary applications, this time to "journalism focused on Brazilian films" (p. 65), which allows for the connection between textual and visual elements. A different perspective on these connections, in the context of Peruvian comics, can be found in the work entitled *Enunciation and Memory: Conservative Representations of the Peruvian Internal Armed Conflict through Comics* (Eduardo Yalán, Jose Miguel Guerra, Gonzalo Jara Townsend), in which the authors analyse comics as a medium for representing historical events.

Vivian Mizrahi's essay *A Naïve Realist Account of Depiction* shifts the focus to visuality and the visual arts, art history, and the perception of visual arts, our way of viewing and interpreting art. Maria Helena Martins Costa Pires's contribution (Garden of Eden*. Art and the Artificiality of the Natural*) examines the spatiality of art, its relationships with nature, reality, and the imagined, as well as "the meaning-making process of our contemporary sensitive experience" (p. 129), drawing on the concept of sociosemiotics. Leonid Tchertov, for his part, in his article *Semiotized Spaces in Pictorial Arts* drawing on the concept of the semiotics of space, analyses the perception of space in and through the fine arts in relation to reality, as well as in the context of "processes of subject-object representation and inter-subject communication" (p. 151). The volume concludes with Paulo C. Chagas and Ivana Petković Lozo's paper, *Sound as Modulating Reality: A Semiotic and Phenomenological Approach to Electroacoustic Music*, which states that music is a medium that organises reality, including space and our perception of art and the world around us.

Hoping that the multifaceted reflection in this volume will enliven the discussion on the relationship between art and semiotics, I wish readers a pleasant and research-inspiring read.

REFERENCES

Bal, M., Bryson, N. (1998). Semiotics and Art History: A Discussion of Context and Senders. In D. Preziosi (Ed.), *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology* (242–256). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Barry, J. (1999). *Art, Culture, And the Semiotics of Meaning: Culture's Changing Signs of Life in Poetry, Drama, Painting, and Sculpture*. Martin's Press.

Biglari, A. (Ed.). (2023). *Open Semiotics. Volume 3: Texts, Images, Arts*. Paris: Harmattann.

Joyce, C. (1958). *Art and Reality: Ways of the Creative Process*. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Gombrich, E., Hochberg, J., Black, M. (1973). *Art, Perception, and Reality*. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press.

Günay, V. D., Kalelioğlu, M., Bayram, S. (Eds.). (2024). *Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities in the Post-Truth Era: The Reality Machine*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Halliday, M. A. K. (2005). On Matter and Meaning: The Two Realms of Human Experience. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, *1*(1), 59–82.

O'Halloran, K. (2023). Matter, Meaning and Semiotics. *Visual Communication*, *22*(1), 174–201.

Pelc, J. (1970). Od wydawcy [From the Publisher]. *Studia Semiotyczne*, *I*, 5–10.

Pelkey, J., Petrilli, S., Ricciardone, S. M. (Eds.) (2023). *Bloomsbury Semiotics Volume 3: Semiotics in the Arts and Social Sciences*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Popova, M. (2003). *Semiotics, Communications, Reality*, Sofia: NBU.

Schapiro, M. (1972–1973). On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs. *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, *6*(1), 9–19.

Schechter, M. (2008). *Semiotics and Art Theory: Between Autonomism and Contextualism*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann.

Solomonick, A. (2015). *A Theory of General Semiotics: The Science of Signs, Sign-Systems, and Semiotic Reality*. Cambridge Scholars.

Sporre, D. J. (1991). *Reality Through the Arts*. London: Pearson.

Souriau, É. (1947). *La correspondance des arts. Éléments d'esthétique compare* [The Correspondence of the Arts. Elements of Comparative Aesthetics]. Flammarion.

Tarasti, E. (2000). *Existential Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Titunik, I. R., Matejka, L. (Eds.). (1984). *Semiotics of Art. Prague School Contributions*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Wąsik, Z. (Ed.). (2024). *Abstracts. 16th World Congress of the IASS-AIS*. Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 11–21
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.02

Article

EDUARDO GRILLO *

ART AS A LANGUAGE FACING REALITY

SUMMARY: The paper examines the complex relationship between language, art, and reality through a semiotic perspective. Drawing on key theorists such as Eco, Greimas, and Barbieri, it argues that art operates as a distinct language that challenges perceptual and cognitive habits by subverting expectations. Aesthetic experiences are viewed as transformative moments that reshape the individual's worldview and interpretive abilities. The analysis highlights how artistic texts, through ambiguity and self-reflexivity, encourage deeper engagement and innovation in meaning-making. The paper also considers the impact of digital technologies, suggesting that while they risk dulling sensory and imaginative faculties in programmed environments, they simultaneously offer new creative opportunities. Ultimately, art remains a crucial site for reflection and transformation, capable of redefining the boundaries of reality and driving cultural and subjective change. The paper advocates for a mindful engagement with media, underscoring the liberating power of artistic manipulation and the necessity of protecting imaginative freedom.

KEYWORDS: reality, language, art, expectations, digital technology.

1. Introduction. Reality: From Languages to Art

There was a time when, in semiotics, the use of the word "reality" was strongly discouraged: there was a risk of being considered incurable idealists. An exception could be made by putting the term in quotation marks. However, doing so left the door open to a wide variety of interpretations, including contradictory

* LUMSA, Department of Law, Economics and Communication. E-mail: e.grillo1@lumsa.it. ORCID: 0009-0008-1970-6333.

ones, between these two extremes: 1) semiotics has nothing to say about the world we live in ("reality"); 2) semiotics continues to be a referential theory (too rigid, empirical, and adhering to "reality").

All misunderstandings revolved (and sometimes still revolve) around a fundamental principle of semiotics: the primary task of languages is not so much to provide an effective means of communication as it is to give form to the world of experience. However, this does not mean that there is not "something out there"; it just indicates that we know nothing more about it than what our semiotic systems allow us to focus on and express. This, in turn, does not imply that the signs these systems organize correspond point by point to what we perceive; each system follows its own rules of organization, incorporating specific perspectives. In summary, even "reality" is a word; that is, an expression linked to a content, but something stimulates us to use this word in some senses and not in others.

Every great semiologist has elaborated on this assumption, emphasizing various aspects of it. Sebeok (1986) credited the addition of the communicative function to the phylogenetic development of syntax, particularly in the context of verbal language. Lotman considered languages to be modeling systems, assigning a privileged role to verbal language. He specifically acknowledged the existence of multiple languages and traced reality back to what is translatable in the transition from one language to another. Furthermore, this realm of untranslatability serves as a reserve of elements contributing to the renewal of languages, with which these languages are in constant contact:

> [T]he world of semiosis is not fatally locked in on itself: it forms a complex structure, which always 'plays' with the space external to it, first drawing it into itself, then throwing into it those elements of its own which have already been used and which have lost their semiotic activity. (Lotman, 2009, p. 24)

The relationship between languages and reality is also a matter of translation for Greimas (1987a), who regards the "natural world" as a semiotic system, much like verbal language. In the translation process between these two semiotics, the plane of expression of the former becomes the plane of content of the latter. The world "out there" thus becomes an immense reservoir of nonlinguistic languages and systems of meaning beyond verbal languages, which are translated into linguistic forms. Adopting this perspective, nature must be understood in terms of habit, specifically what occurs most often; in brief, the world is the realm of common sense, a universe already endowed with meaning. However, both the world and language are real nonetheless: the world because it is the actual reservoir of meaning for language, and language because it is effective (that is, produces real effects) in translating the world.

Ultimately, Umberto Eco's approach, despite going through various phases, has consistently emphasized the relationship between reality and language, recognizing its role in constructing models of the world—always imperfect but 1) adequate enough to allow us to navigate the world without too much drama; 2) nonetheless dependent on cultural (and ideological) constraints. From this

perspective, the fundamental theoretical problem involves navigating between conflicting demands: the reasons for order and the claims of Adventure. For Eco, it has always been a matter of reconciling the dual nature of the world—an open horizon of possibilities and a system of constraints—with inherently dual languages, blending invention and recognition (Pisanty, Traini, 2017).

These last two characteristics highlight the linguistic nature of art. Aesthetic theories and the history of poetics have consistently relied on mimesis, on one hand, and novelty, on the other. According to Lotman (2011), secondary modeling systems; text-laboratories, as proposed by Eco (1976; 1979); and places of perceptual fracture, as explored by Greimas (1987b), artistic languages, artworks, and aesthetic experiences serve consistently as sites of tension in semiotic reflection, where the world is redefined and our expectations are challenged. All of this will be discussed in paragraph 2. Paragraph 3 will focus on brief reflections regarding the impact of digital technologies on the relationship between languages, reality, and artistic works. It seems necessary to devote at least some thought to this subject, considering that we are now attempting to untangle ourselves from the opportunities offered by new technologies and the reality crisis they threaten.

2. Artistic Languages and Aesthetic Experience: Forms and Expectations

The purpose of art is to wash the dust of daily life off our souls
Pablo Picasso
Only he is an artist who can make a riddle out of a solution
Karl Krauss

The quote from Picasso does not define art as an amusing diversion. Instead, the dust he refers to can be seen as a veil of habits that ultimately weigh down and obscure our view of reality. In this context, the quote assigns the role of "cleaner" to art, which is capable of giving our perceptual habits a vigorous shake-up. Krauss agrees, adding the characteristics of cognitive complexity and reflexivity to artistic practices.

The idea that artworks always involve a revolution, or at least a modulation of perceptual habits, aligns with most semiotic approaches to art and aesthetic experience, as we noted at the end of the introduction. Here, I will focus on Eco's and Greimas's theories. Although they might seem disparate and inconsistent, I believe we can discover a common ground that could serve as a foundation for fruitful developments in our discourse.

According to Eco (1976), aesthetic quality, following Jakobson, depends on the coexistence of two characteristics: ambiguity and the self-focusing use of codes. Ambiguity arises from the wealth of possible interpretations; in short, aesthetic quality functions due to the openness of the text. Self-reflexivity closely relates to this: the greater complexity of the aesthetic text draws attention to its

construction, compelling the interpreter to engage in additional cognitive work. In brief, the interpreter is prompted to make inferences to understand the text and how it intrigues them. The process is thus characterized as a back-and-forth between the expectations generated by the text at each step and their satisfaction or frustration: the greater the surprise, the greater the pleasure; the more profound the understanding of the text's craftsmanship, the more significant the impact on the interpreter. In this way, the aesthetic text must innovate to some degree (moderately or radically) to achieve its effects. The renewal of existing codes challenges expectations while simultaneously altering the worldview (or changing the structure of the Encyclopaedia, Eco, 1976; 1986). In summary, through this experience, the subject undergoes two transformations: it develops new interpretative abilities and, as it is a product of the "debris" of the Encyclopaedia (Eco, 1986, p. 45), it contributes to the development of a new "worldview". In other words, 1) the subject learns to see the world differently, thereby modifying the relationships it is part of; 2) the aesthetic text, in the long run, alters the culture in which it exists, reshaping the relationships in which the subject is involved.

Greimas' approach to aesthetic experience is quite different, as exemplified in *De l'imperfection* (Greimas, 1987b). In this small volume, Greimas goes beyond the realm of recognized aesthetic texts, which are the primary objects of Eco's analyses, to delve into everyday experience. In his analyses, he explores certain sudden events that, through a translation from one sensory domain to another, lead the subject to merge with its object of contemplation, redesigning the initial attentional structure. Subjects transform themselves by eliminating the distance from the object and gaining a new awareness, a new way of feeling. However, this process is made possible by a rupture; the habitual course of experience is interrupted by the event: this is the aesthetic grasp, defined by Greimas as "wait for the unexpected". In short, a feeling emerges from the encounter between a particular cultural predisposition of the subject and a particular material poignancy of the object, which anticipates and enables the new reciprocal constitution of the Subject and Object. The subject will only complete its transformation later, becoming fully aware of the nature of the event, albeit imperfectly.

Beyond the differences, we first note 1) that both authors attribute to aesthetic experience the capacity to transform the subject through a sensorial experience. Admittedly, Eco places less emphasis on the impact on the senses, but for both, the outcome is a lasting change in the subject's status and capabilities. Furthermore, 2) both describe the aesthetic experience as the feeling produced by a rupture; something occurs that does not align with expectations. The subject is confronted with aspects that undermine their system of expectations. In summary, for both, albeit in different ways, the aesthetic experience serves as a kind of incongruous (and powerful) response to the subject's expectations.

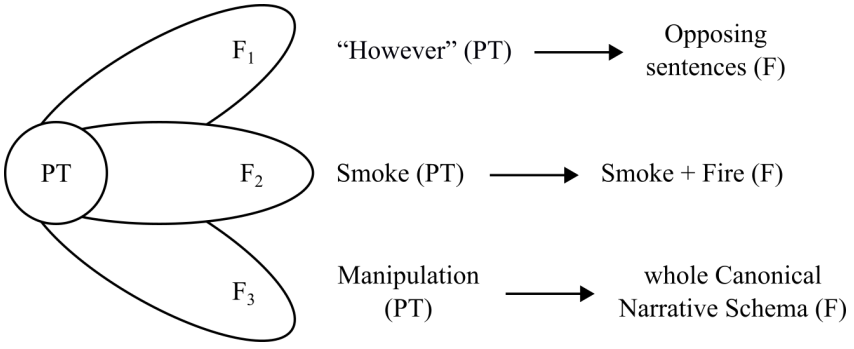
An accomplished treatment of semiotic and aesthetic activity, regarding the tension between expectation and experience, can be found in the work of Daniele Barbieri. For Barbieri, time and meaning hold a fundamental relationship. The

tension toward what is imminent constitutes an essential aspect of our lives, and expectation results from not being passive before the world. The expectations that arise during interpretation are triggered by the recognition of textual elements, which stimulate anticipations. These elements are referred to as perceptual terms (PT) by Barbieri (2004), which in turn give rise to forms (F) of various extensions. A form is described as any perceptual or conceptual configuration to which we can attribute some completeness. These configurations are "sent to memory", so to speak, depending on the subjects' cultural organization and perceptual abilities. Now, Peirce has taught us that there is always a habitual mode of arranging our experience, considering its subjective and emotional nature. According to Peirce, regularity always precedes (and makes possible) singularity. Peirce discussed habits or dispositions to action rather than mere action routines. Thus, producing a text is always a matter of habits and adjustment to the current situation. In this process, we do not merely implement a rule; instead, we follow regular dispositions and adjust them in real time.

The size of perceptual terms and forms depends, of course, on the applied principle of relevance, and a single perceptual term may give rise to the expectation of several possible forms, some of which are more probable. The fact that we first recognize perceptual terms rather than forms entirely depends on the inherently situated nature of perception. To give just a couple of examples (Figure 1): if we see smoke (TP), we will expect the overall smoke-fire form; if we read "but", we will expect a sentence that contradicts in some way what has just been stated; if we detect the manipulation phase, we will expect the entire sequence of the canonical narrative pattern (Greimas, Courtés, 1979, ad vocem).

Figure 1

Barbieri's Theory of Tension: Examples



Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

Barbieri also suggests that the interplay of pro-tensions and distensions precisely constitutes the aesthetic function; that is, an aesthetic text can effectively manage expectations.

More recently, Barbieri (2020) introduced notions that clarify his approach, particularly the characteristics of aesthetic experience from a tensive perspective: *Stimmung* (agreement), Cognition, and Participation. *Stimmung* is understood as an alignment between subjects and their experiences. In short, *Stimmung* is the euphoric response to the world, becoming more intense the less predictable it is. It is a general phenomenon that can be specified as Joint participation—a *Stimmung* that pertains to a subject who feels the alignment but is not consciously aware of it. At the same time, proper Cognition occurs when the accord between internal and external states becomes the object of awareness. Aesthetic experience thus consists of feeling a profound attunement that cannot be immediately transformed into Cognition for communicative purposes. In brief, the subject is somewhat "suspended", serving as a witness to what he is experiencing; once the subject becomes aware of this, the feeling disappears (imperfection). Joint participation is always an interpretation, but a kind of "subjectless" one, where the rhythmic aspects typical of Co-participation are predominant, and the tension (a cognitive phenomenon) takes time to assert itself.

From this perspective, aesthetic experience is a type of experience that initially surprises the subject by imposing an unexpected rhythm, leading to a new level of awareness. It is a complex phenomenon that does not allow for the identification of a specific form (ambiguity) and results in a different understanding of the possibilities of perception (self-reflexivity). This phenomenon suspends all explicit cognition, undermining the translation of bodily patterns (esthesia) into specific forms and blurring the line between subject and object. The translation will only be reactivated afterward (imperfection), but the discovery of new possible dimensions will change it. Therefore, it is a transformative experience in which the subject acquires new habits (Peirce, Eco) or, in other words, adopts a new position among the figures of the world (Greimas).

If subjects are shaped by the expectations they formulate, aesthetic experience radically rearranges their system of expectations, making them more aware of their modus operandi in retrospect. In this way, art is "a sort of reflection in action on the internal image through figures" (Garroni, 2005, p. 98). In this sense, "art makes the observer realize the cognitive mechanism on which his or her relationship with the world is based" (Cimatti, 2017, p. 42).

To sum up, if languages make reality visible to us, artistic languages provide specific forms of visibility. While one of the most critical tasks of language is to offer a stable way to manage our expectations, artistic languages essentially play with them. Starting from what languages have carved out and "torn away" from reality, we produce expectations; art questions them. We understand that artistic languages can rework elements of reality to challenge our perceptual habits or our usual way of textualizing experiences to the point that an entire culture could change its worldview—that is, its understanding of reality. They can also help us

rediscover and appreciate what we often take for granted and view as trivial, prompting us to be aware of how our perception and meaning-making processes function. This is made possible by presenting us with different ways to connect perceptual terms and forms; artistic languages can show us the immense variety of forms that are possible, stimulating our imagination and challenging our need to ground ourselves in what we already know and what we are used to doing.

3. A Few Considerations on the Digital Revolution

Technology is a way of organizing the world
so that man does not have to experience it

Max Frisch

Digital technology is the same revolution as adding sound to pictures and the same revolution as adding color to pictures. Nothing more and nothing less

George Lucas

It may seem that with the rise of digital technology, the relationship between languages and the reality we have envisioned could be compromised. A movie, video, or image produced through CGI or Generative Adversarial Networks depicts what is not physically present in front of the camera. Furthermore, the fact that we live in technologically mediated environments may challenge what we have stated about the power of language and art to shape reality. Of course, opinions on the actual impact of digital technologies on our relationship with reality vary widely, as evidenced by the two quotes above. Who is right: those who argue that this is a real revolution or those who downplay it? Eco (2000) taught us to take a stand between opposing extremes. Therefore, it is wise to proceed with caution, favoring an analytical and dispassionate approach.

First and foremost, we must acknowledge that our habits as human beings have always been technically mediated. Pietro Montani (2014), among others, considers this our distinguishing feature, and he goes further by interpreting even verbal language as a technology—an external technology that we introduce during phylogeny and ontogeny, which in turn influences our way of thinking. He argues that technical mediation has always been a two-way process: we modify the world through technology, and technology, in turn, modifies us and our way of perceiving the world. If the human world has always been a media environment, today we are faced with a new digital technological environment that is increasingly replacing the physical world.

However, this replacement lacks the features of Baudrillard's "perfect crime" (Baudrillard, 1996). It is not merely the world becoming a fable, as Nietzsche said. Nevertheless, it profoundly impacts our lives. This impact stems from two interconnected aspects of this process. First, just a few years ago, access to media was temporary and typically self-controlled; we could enter and exit at will, turning it on and off as we pleased. Now, we find ourselves in a digital environ-

ment without even noticing the transition. There is no longer a distinct shift: we now inhabit a mixed environment known as the post-media condition. Second, the defining feature of a digital environment is not that it is fake; more significantly, it is entirely programmed. It is designed to elicit specific responses.

Moreover, it is a fast-paced environment. We have no time to explore or implement creative or unforeseen responses. There is only room for reactions, which limits our field of experience. Furthermore, this significantly affects our perceptual habits. We gradually lose our ability to identify new and unexpected affordances and respond to potential ongoing changes in the environment. We have specialized in interacting with a programmed and rapid setting. As a consequence, we become increasingly unable to devise rich and diverse textures (coherent textual paths). It is what Montani (2007) calls anesthetization: a canalization of our sensory skills and imagination. Since we shape ourselves as subjects precisely through sense-making processes, the depletion of our ability to textualize experiences directly impacts us. Today, we are more submissive, scared, and angry as subjects because we are less prepared to confront unexpected events.

In a more direct relation to the issue of reality, the proliferation of deepfakes and similar technologies could foster a "spiral of falsehood" (Leone, 2023), making us less certain about what we perceive as reality. This impacts our ability to explore various ways to connect perceptual terms and forms: we do not know for sure which habit or which form to "summon" or use.

However, we should remember what Charles S. Peirce has said: we have no conception of the absolutely incognizable (Peirce, 1868). I believe this implies that no one, not even an intelligent machine, can create anything from nothing. Since we contribute to building reality as much as what stands before us, our expectations are grounded in reality and, more radically, are part of reality too. The process of digital creation is a form of bricolage; it takes something we can experience or imagine and combines it to produce new forms or perceptual terms that we have never encountered before. Essentially, this is what we do every day. Digital art can display several forms that are very labor-intensive to implement otherwise, with a strong realistic effect, and it can present a sign that does not point to an actual object in itself. However, that sign is merely the byproduct of many other signs that have already translated elements of reality. Digital artists transfer part of the creative process to a machine, involving it in a process of co-enunciation, taking advantage of what the machine can produce (D'Armenio, Deliège, Dondero, 2024).

The same principle applies when we paint or film a movie, albeit to a different extent. The "digital" is, therefore, simply a different kind of language, more mediated, intercalating between languages rather than between what we can experience and languages.

Therefore, digital language outputs seem more likely to detach from reality. In some ways, they deceive us. However, art and artists have always misled us, in a sense, through their creative bricolage, their translation process, and their manipulation of our expectations. Nevertheless, they have also consistently en-

gaged with reality. Ultimately, our concerns with the digital environment and the artistic use of digital technology arise from the perception that they often seem to escape our control; that is, the problem remains unchanged: the ability of media products to manipulate us.

However, we know that manipulation is not necessarily a one-way process. In semiotics, manipulation is better understood as a field of pre-established possibilities offered to subjects; it is up to them to find their place within these possibilities. This encapsulates the idea of manipulation as presented by Paolo Fabbri in his article about catharsis (2000). In his work, Fabbri discusses the transformation process stimulated by psychologists through hypnosis. As Fabbri highlights, the psychologist merely proposes the cathartic transformation; the subject must decide whether to accept it. No one is cured if they do not want to be. Thus, we can view media products this way: they propose several different paths for us to follow and ultimately a set of possible identities to assume. We can regard them as both evil and hypnotic senders, as well as provocative and stimulating ones. If we accept being challenged by them, we will identify the different emotional roles we could assume in their presence, which opens a window for choice and, eventually, for an authentic, cathartic experience. Nevertheless, it involves making the sender function of media products consciously unstable, thereby allowing for the fluctuation of the roles we can embody before them.

This is precisely what artists can achieve in their creations, and they can do it for us. Several artists have begun to explore latent spaces in deepfake creations, while directors like Nolan have worked to limit their reliance on digital technology in films. I believe both approaches are valuable for maintaining our ability to imagine different possibilities—that is, to shape our reality. This is the only way to achieve what Pasolini called progress, as opposed to development (Pasolini, 1975). For him, development refers to purely economic and technological advancement, often driven by consumerism and modernization, without necessarily improving human or cultural values. Progress, on the other hand, implies a more profound transformation that enhances social, ethical, and cultural well-being. Well-being, we can argue, often corresponds, at least from a semiotic perspective, with a rich production of alternatives; that is, the freedom to actively test our expectations.

4. Conclusion

We have explored the relationship between language, art, and reality, demonstrating how aesthetic experiences can disrupt our perceptual and cognitive habits, reorganizing expectations through surprise, ambiguity, and self-reflexivity. Scholars such as Eco, Greimas, and Barbieri converge in identifying art as a form of language capable of transforming both the individual and culture, providing new ways to perceive and understand the world. Like other forms of language, artistic languages possess a dual nature, balancing iconic and informative ambitions on one hand and a productive and innovative character on the

other. What characterizes artistic languages is their ability to question established forms and expectations through their playful and experimental nature, which challenges our preconceived notions. Through this, they compel us to change how we shape reality.

The introduction of digital technology, while challenging, is seen not as a complete break with reality but as a further evolution of the technical mediation inherent to human beings. Digital technologies, much like traditional art, manipulate and redefine experience; however, they risk dulling perception when approached without a critical mindset. Nevertheless, digital art can still provide a space for imagination and awareness as long as it challenges our expectations rather than merely reinforcing them.

Ultimately, the work of art—whether analog or digital—continues to play a crucial role in making reality visible, disorienting the observer to enhance their awareness of the perceptual and cognitive structures through which they relate to the world. Art remains a fundamental tool for cultural, subjective, and societal transformation, capable of reactivating imagination and critical freedom.

REFERENCES

Barbieri, D. (2004). *Nel corso del testo. Una teoria della tensione e del ritmo* [In the Course of the Text. A Theory of Tension and Rhythm]. Milan: Bompiani.

Barbieri, D. (2020). *Testo e Processo. Pratica di analisi e teoria di una semiotica processuale* [Text and Process. Analysis Practice and Theory of Processual Semiotics]. Bologna: Esculapio.

Baudillard, J. (1996). *The Perfect Crime*. New York: Verso Books.

Cimatti, F. (2017). Arte e linguaggio. Il problema dell'esperienza estetica visiva [Art and Language. The Problem of Visual Aesthetic Experience]. *Rivista italiana di filosofia del linguaggio*, *11*(2), 30–50.

Eco, U. (1968). *La struttura assente. La ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale* [The Absent Structure. Semiotic Research and the Structural Methodology]. Milan: Bompiani.

Eco, U. (1976). *A Theory of Semiotic*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. (1979). On the Possibility of Generating Aesthetic Messages in an Edenic Language. In U. Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts* (pp. 90–104). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. (1986). *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Eco, U. (1999). *Kant and the Platypus*. Orlando: Harcourt.

Eco, U. (2000). *Apocalypse Postponed*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

D'Armenio, E., Deliège, A., Dondero, M. G. (2024). Semiotics of Machinic Co-Enunciation About Generative Models (Midjourney and DALL·E). *Signata. Annales des sémiotiques / Annals of Semiotics*, *15*, 1–38.

Fabbri, P. (2000). Catharsis. Again? In I. Pezzini, (Ed.), *Semiotic Efficacity and the Effectiveness of the Text* (pp. 289–300). Turnhout: Brepols.

Garroni, E. (2005). *Immagine, linguaggio, figura. Osservazioni e ipotesi* [Image, Language, Picture. Observations and Hypotheses]. Rome-Bari: Laterza.

Greimas, A. J. (1966), *Sémantique structurale. Recherche de méthode* [Structural Semantics: An Attempt at a Method]. Paris : Larousse.

Greimas, A. J. Courtés, J. (1979). *Sémiotique: Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* [Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary]. Paris: Hachette.

Greimas, A. J. (1987a). Toward a Semiotics of the Natural World. In A. J. Greimas, *On Meaning: Selected Writings in Semiotic Theory* (pp. 17–47). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Greimas, A. J. (1987b). *De l'imperfection* [On Imperfection]. Périgueux: Fanlac.

Leone, M. (2023). The Spiral of Digital Falsehood in Deepfakes. *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law—Revue internationale de Sémiotique juridique*, *36*, 385–405.

Lotman, J. M. (2009). *Culture and Explosion*. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Lotman, J. M. (2011). The Place of Art Among Other Modelling Systems. *Sign Systems Studies*, *39*(2/4), 249–270.

Montani, P. (2007). *Bioestetica. Senso comune, tecnica e arte nell'età della globalizzazione* [Bioesthetics. Common Sense, Technology and Art in the Age of Globalization]. Rome: Carocci.

Montani, P. (2014). *Tecnologie della sensibilità. Estetica e immaginazione interattiva* [Technologies of Sensitivity. Aesthetics and Interactive Imagination]. Milan: Cortina.

Pasolini, P. P. (1975). *Scritti corsari* [Corsair Writings]. Milan: Garzanti.

Pisanty, V., Traini, S. (2017). No We Kan't. Percezione, linguaggio e realtà in prospettiva semiotica [No, We Kan't. Perception, Language and Reality From a Semiotic Point of View]. *E/C*. Retrieved from: http://www.ec-aiss.it/index_d.php?recordID=783

Peirce, C. S. (1868). Questions Concerning Certain Faculties Claimed for Man. *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, *2*, 103–114.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 23–34
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.03

Article

BUJAR HOXHA *

AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL WAY OF EXEMPLIFYING ARTISTIC REALITIES: FROM A "TRANSFORMATIONAL" TO A "TRANSCENDENTAL" SIGN

SUMMARY: The present paper shall principally consider two essential theoretical paradigms in semiotics. The first belongs to the post-structural paradigm designated by Greimas and Fontanille, whereas the second belongs to a recent paradigm named existential semiotics, authored by Tarasti. This text shall, therefore, explore how "artistic realities" are created through two semiotic methods: structural and existential semiotics. Theoretically speaking, there is a necessity to demonstrate how "semiotics of passions" enhanced such reality on the one hand and how existential semiotics asserted the notion of "action" and "performativity" through transcending signs on the other. I will focus on determined "classical" works of art (e.g., the position of figures, the text's semiotic comprehension, etc.) to demonstrate the epistemological background of the artistic being (through their pre-, act, and post-signs). Semioticizing an artistic object of analysis (as known in existential semiotics through the *Dasein*), in my opinion, can enhance either inducing or deducing meaning. Such a sort of semioticizing exposes us to various sorts of "existential statuses" of discussable "semiotic objects" (in our case, artworks). By exemplifying fictive characters in the arts in general, I aim to reach a specific meaning of each of them: a fact that theoretically justifies an epistemology of semiotics.

KEYWORDS: semiotics, epistemology, signs, transformation, transcendence.

* The South-East European University, Department of Languages. E-mail: b.hoxha@seeu.edu.mk. ORCID: 0000-0003-3740-0916.

1. Introduction

The present paper shall principally consider two essential theoretical paradigms in semiotics. The first one belongs to the post-structural paradigm as designated by Greimas and Fontanille (1993), whereas the second one belongs to a recent paradigm named existential semiotics, authored by Tarasti (2000). Each method or approach utilized should naturally be scientifically justified. The aim is to prove the object of analysis regarding the discussion to be presented later in this text. This part of the text shall principally focus on the methodological issue, after which a practical analysis of discussable matters shall be presented.

This paper attempts to respond to the following questions: how will such theoretical paradigms apply to artistic expressions? Is this only a theoretical discussion, or can such an issue be exemplified through concrete artworks? If one attempts to respond to the above questions, it is to conclude that "semiotic relations" shall be our object of analysis. In other words, actions, gestures, and mimics that enhance an artwork's movement shall be named "semiotic objects", in our instance. We ask: why do we have to assert such entities? Because of the multiple ways of interpreting the components that build up an artwork. It means that semiotics is a science capable of interpreting a chosen object of analysis, besides its other related possibilities.

I am to say that there is a plurality of semiotic approaches that are sufficient for disclosing a "semiotic reality" that an artwork otherwise contains. One should, however, consider the fact that more than one "semiotic reality" can be displayed (or even "created" by determined semiotic tools) in one single artwork. This text shall attempt to describe the semiotic circumstances that give rise to a "semiotic reality" regarding various forms of artistic expressivity through the recent semiotic paradigms mentioned above. The concept naturally deserves emphasis because each "semiotic reality" differs from one another in the same way as it differs from "lived" reality. This presupposition, naturally, is not novel in semiotics. Although the present text does not aim for a historical overview of the development of the semiotic method, it should be noted that the term stems from the Middle Ages and even earlier, as has been asserted by scholars (e.g., Deely, 2001). I aim to assert the hypothesis that the term cannot be defined one-dimensionally. In other words, it is necessary to use more than one theoretical paradigm to enhance a "semiotic reality" that can be caused (or be conditioned) by a chosen artwork.

Specifically speaking, I have chosen two different methodological approaches because of the facts mentioned above, among other related points, which will be presented later in this text. Let us now elucidate some other relevant matters that hopefully clarify our research method.

2. Structural Semiotics and Artistic Expressions

The subtitle above does not necessarily indicate a generalization. In other words, the aim here is not an attempt to create a theory that would enable "linking" the two notions methodologically. On the contrary, it will explore how structural semiotics can enhance various semiotic relations among artworks. In other words, the "intrusion" of semiotics in the context of this text would mean a methodology, or better expressed, an "intersemiotic sort of translation" (among other related issues, see Petrilli, Ji, 2022) of a given artistic text into a semiotic tool aimed at enhancing meaning.

The dyadic and systemic analysis of chosen "semiotic objects", otherwise characteristic of the structural and post-structural eras within semiotic studies, enabled opposing relations and protagonists' statuses within artworks and similar phenomena that either belonged to an everyday sort of living or to the human imaginative power and ability to create artworks. Therefore, it should be understandable why semiotics necessitates such "conflictual situations", which are designated to obtain meaning or interpret diverse "meanings" as empirical results.

Structuralism, however, opposed determined tiny elements (depending on determined objects of analysis) to construct a structure, a structure that would further oppose another one: the aim was to create a system named a "semiotic system" in semiotics (Saussure, 1959), which would, by semiotics' further developmental stages, prove the chain of trajectories of such systems which generate meaning (among other related issues, see Greimas, 1973). At this point, a new method of "generating" meaning, as Greimas proposes, has been introduced. It meant, and still means, naturally, that not only uniting form and content (or "discourse" and "story", for instance, within arts; e.g., Chatman, 1978) would represent a process, a semiotic process, but such trajectories would intend obtaining "sems" (as their tinniest components; Greimas, 1973) that would result in meaningful semantic units. For this reason (and for other matters still to be mentioned in this text), Greimas's generative semiotics marked a revolutionary shift in semiotics (especially, as we attempt to show, regarding the action of signs). The above assertion, however, is also due to the "active" Subject's participation in the semiotic process, among other relevant matters. The term "semiotic process" is very relevant in our instance, as we consider semiotics to be about processes, in other words, processing signs. Above all, the aim is to obtain, create, manage, and interpret meaning, among other related matters. After all, as I have also observed elsewhere (Hoxha, 2022), Greimas manages to overcome the "binary" way of opposing "semiotic objects" (as he names them himself; Greimas, 1973). In other words, overcoming this phenomenon has opened doors to the hypothesizing status of determined "scientific objects" under analysis.[1] Such hypothesiz-

[1] One should intend this as a "pure" semiotic phenomenon in our instance. Otherwise, as generally known, the "epistemic way", or the philosophic thought of "seeking knowledge", has long ago been evident within philosophy as a science (Deely, 2001).

ing is part of an epistemic understanding of semiotics, as opposed to an ontological one. It is so, among other related reasons principally belonging to philosophy, because of the avoidance of "precision" in determined semiotic processes (as I have emphasized elsewhere; Hoxha, 2016). As I hope to be able to show further in the text, it also concurs with Eco's "unequivocal" transmission of information (in Eco's sense; e.g., Eco, 1968), which, through determined processes, "transform" themselves into signs (Eco, 1976).

Therefore, artworks represent a typical case of such "imprecision". The semiotic statuses of the artworks are thus evident and analysable. Thus, theoretically, this paper attempts to disclose, present, and elaborate on semiotic situations that can practically demonstrate the above assertion. The above assertion, as I hope to be able to show later in the text, concurs with Tarasti's existential semiotics as well (Tarasti, 2000; 2015).

Notwithstanding the above facts, however, the critical phenomenon of the sign definition in semiotics (either according to Saussure or other masters of semiotics that contributed to the above phenomenon; Deely, 2009; Peirce, 1960) was the sign's form, its changeability and relatedness in different given circumstances, and its capacity to unite chosen components that, all together, would enhance meaning, as a result of each semiosis. A question, however, can be advanced: why do we emphasize the meaning component and the "sign" as an essential component in semiotics in the context of the present paper? One must admit that there is more than one reason for this assertion.

First, "meaning" as a semiotic entity in the arts is not always regarded as straightforward. It is so, as it may frequently be encoded or, as Eco says, overcoded (Eco, 1976). In other words, it means that the decoding process, metaphorically expressed as "resolving the enigma", is complex and requires a process. Such processes must obtain determined shapes, including signs in their permanent movement. We call them "semiotic processes", which usually interpret signs' actions. If this thesis holds, then one concludes that it is semiotics that semioticizes artworks (or their purposely chosen elements) on the one hand, and on the other, one concludes that "interpretation" is a crucial term of semiotic analysis in our instance. In such a case, it is logical to conclude that one treats the processing of the signs within artworks and their finalized statuses, considered through the notions of "transformation" and "transcendence", as I shall attempt to show,[2] among other related theoretical paradigms, as belonging to the semiotic method.

Second, if the above thesis does not prove true, how would one process other connotational meanings of an artwork, its protagonists, or relational attitudes besides their denotational ones? In the following lines of the present text, let us

[2] Understandably, the terms in question do not belong only to semiotics. They are above all, an integral part of linguistics and philosophy, as I shall try to show later in the present text.

see how such "semiotic situations" are finalized to obtain their empirical results in concrete works of art.

2.1. A Methodological "Intervention" Through Examples

Authors usually use their experience as a starting point to create art. It naturally, as is generally known, differs from other sorts of "texts", either understood in the semiotic sense of the word or not. Such an experience, however, may sometimes contain elements that belong to human imaginative power. It means, in other words, that the term "experience" here should not be comprehended only within its philosophical understanding (in the sense that determined philosophical, scientific postulates have historically developed it regarding the semiotic method); it should, rather, be intended in its psychological sense as well, to refer to textual analysis, among other related matters.

Notwithstanding the facts, I aim to say that the mentioned "conflictual situation" is created by writing, performing, and preparing for an artistic work. Such a situation, intriguingly enough, is semiotic and has a semiotic nature (either in its general or specific terms). The reasons for this assertion are the following: no text in the shape initially created by the author is finalized as an artwork. As I attempt to show, it needs processing, as artworks are complex phenomena. More "actors" are indispensable in accomplishing the goal in its final form and content. Hence, such texts are objects for a process of "transformation" or reshaping them, aiming to render them artistic.

Moreover, besides various narration procedures, artworks (theatre, opera, ballet, musical performances, etc.) contain an "action" component. It is at this point that, besides an essential semiotic function (which, as we may suggest, is obvious; Eco, 1976; Saussure, 1959), a "complex semiotic function" (such as in (Greimas, Fontanille, 1993; Tarasti, 2015) is necessary. It is indended to overcode the message and its movement and changeability in various shapes in the first place and to interpret it based on determined theoretical models in the second, which would supposedly generate, extract, or deduce its proper meaning.

As should be evident by now, "complex semiotic function" can represent something that cannot immediately be decoded, visualized, or decomposed—besides what is visible, understandable, and decodable to the receiver of the message (if one wants to understand phenomena communicationally). One needs processing to resolve such phenomena: in our case, signs' changeability and their statuses in different stages and given circumstances.

Let us explain this situation. Signs representing a matter of contradictoriness, for instance, among one another and other relations, may sometimes be challenging to decode because of their "transformational" status in different stages of their transformable trajectories. The gradualness of the solution aimed at a final meaning means decoding the message (artistic or of another nature). Based on generating meaning, such theories were explicitly created by Greimas and Fontanille (1993) and, later, innovatively enough, by Tarasti (2000) because of the

explicable transcendent nature of signs. Let us see why these two paradigms and their differences are emphasized here.

First, the "action" component, primarily in performing arts (but in other discussable matters as well), does not mean only "the white" against the "black", as early structuralism used to presuppose. On the contrary, besides the apparent oppositional relations to be "captured" by semioticians, we ask: why is a determined action performed to have inevitable consequences in the work? Such consequences, no doubt, are more than one; therefore, one speaks here of a specter of meaning(s) belonging to a determined entity under discussion. Moreover, is there not any other way to finalize the work? In my opinion, generative and existential semiotics can respond to such questions and other possibilities that modern semiotics can offer, such as those found in the post-structural development period.

Second, the narration process itself is not as simple as it might initially seem. Let me explain: the interruption of a particular event by another (which may not immediately be visible to the audience) has a strong relevance in semiotics. It is there that Greimas's "modalities" and Tarasti's "meta-modalities" can find their places, precisely because of their multifarious interpretations.

Let us now advance some practical questions: was the love between Ophelia and Hamlet "real", for instance, and why? A "model reader" (Eco, 1984) would understand, for instance, how "formal" their love is and what contextual circumstances led to it.

Another question: did Hamlet's father appear on the scene only because of Hamlet's complexities in his psychological status, or was it a reminiscence of certain events in the "story narrated" by Shakespeare? Here, the answer must not be ambiguous: the appearance of his father ("the Ghost"), as described in the play, is part of Hamlet's long-term memory; therefore, it represents his will to take revenge on determined occurrences in the "story narrated". The aim, naturally, based on semiotic terms, is rendering "passions", such as "greed", and a wish, or after all, a desire to have the authority and political power his father had.

Let us go further with some other questions regarding Shakespearean tragedies. Was Othello in a relationship of contradiction with Iago only because of jealousy or other relevant matters? Who "intruded" on their similarly "good" relationship, initially presented in the exposition stage of the play? Naturally, the complex "feeling", if one wishes to name it so, of "jealousy", transforms itself into passion through Cassio's helping the drama's intrigue come about. The examples above are intended to disclose the structural method of disclosing human characters in diverse artworks.

Let us sum up this part of our discussion. "Passional configurations", for instance, as finalized meaningful units (Greimas, Fontanille, 1993), could extract or generate such passions as "love" as opposed to "hatred", "jealousy", and "greed", etc., in certain characters. In this sense of the word, based on the "chain" of either the author's combination of form and content or the audience's imaginative suppositions (as Eco, for instance, explains; Eco, 1994), one can

hypothesize certain conclusions. Since each artwork can be interpreted differently (or, as each sort of "interpretation" has its semiotic relevance), as Eco says, it is "open" to reach such a goal (Eco, 1989). It means that each hypothesis can find a justification, or better expressed, a "truth" of its own. Finally, if there is more than one "truth" (among other related authors, see Goldman, 1986), then each hypothesis is scientifically justified. Epistemologically speaking, then, our thesis becomes justified. It thus makes semiotics a science for seeking knowledge, as has also been noted (by scholars). Before I elaborate on further examples regarding the issue under discussion, I consider it proper to present the main concepts and hypotheses of existential semiotics.

3. Existential Semiotics and the Artworks

This part of the text will attempt to disclose some of the main principles of "existential semiotics": a theory launched by Tarasti (2000). Based principally on post-Hegelian philosophy, existential semiotics prioritizes the Being and the Subject. The novelty in this highly applicable theory in the arts is the term "transcendence", based on the permanent movement and changeability of signs. Instead of the "transformability" of signs (in Greimas's sense) and the trajectory of their transformation in sequence, the signs are transcendent in existential semiotics. This phenomenon is due, at least, to two components: the Subject's existence and its being prioritized on the one hand, and on the other, another communication model that differs from the "classic ones". The semiotic process, as shall be seen, is "intermediated" by the *Dasein*, and it is foreseen, if one may use such a term, in some "stages". Let us describe these "existential situations" subsequently.

Instead of the classical flow of the message, from the source to the receiver (Eco, 1968; 1976; Shannon, Weaver, 1948), the signs (which, if combined, make up the message) do not instantly reach the destination. Their "trip" is somewhat double-sided, intermediated by the *Dasein*. In other words, there may be changes during the "trip"; since the signs are transcendent. The truth is that such a "trip" runs through some stages: the "pre-signs", "act-signs", and "post-signs" (Tarasti, 2000). To my understanding, the matter relies on two components, at least: the cognitive and perceptive. Let me try to explain this situation.

"Perceptive" is used because prior to each process of semiosis, one has to "find out", see, and analyze the components under discussion. The key here is a "preparatory stage" before each semiotic process occurs. It concurs with the "pre-signs", which, in existential semiotics, activate the signs to initiate the process for the forthcoming stages, as I named them.

"Cognitive", however, because each such component must obtain its functionality. The "functionality", however, put in simple terms, means cognition of the phenomena discussed. This notion, however, concurs with the "act-signs", which show the beginning of the signification process itself. Both processes, as known in semiotics, do not suffice as such. They need to be interpret-

ed. The semiotic process, therefore, is finalized by the "post-signs", which interpret the "semiotic object" under discussion. In support of this assertion, let us quote Tarasti:

> A semiotic act occurs as the production of an act-sign by means of the help of a pre-sign or enunciant/utterant; or the act takes place as the interpretation of the act-sign by means of the help of the post-sign or interpretant […]. (Tarasti, 2000, p. 33)

The "interpretation" mentioned above is also empirically visible through existential semiotics' models (in our instance, through the graphical representation): the "Z" or Zemic model. This paper shall not extend to an in-depth analysis of the mentioned artworks, as our attempt is theoretical and methodological. Our goal is to demonstrate the epistemological background of both paradigms on the one hand and discuss their mutual inclusiveness and exclusiveness on the other.

Otherwise, the act of "interpretation" is, of course, not novel in semiotics: it is a matter that seeks the final meaning, the presupposed final meaning of chosen semiotic objects, even in earlier stages of semiotics, named "classical semiotics" by Tarasti (2000). A logical question, then, follows: why? Interpretation is as old as the communication process itself, and it confirms the philosophical paradigms and provenance of semiotic theory, even from the Middle Ages (Eco, 1976; 1997). Notwithstanding the above facts, one must admit that these assertions are not the only ones that create, I would dare say, what one calls "existential semiotics" today. One must provide examples of concrete artworks to elaborate on other related matters regarding existential semiotics.

For instance, one must admit that Othello immediately refuses Iago's "false argument": the handkerchief. He becomes furious in that instance of the play and, as Tarasti says, "negates" it. Two essential components, at least, in my view, can be noted here: first, the notion of "becoming" (known to semioticians from Greimas's theory), and second, the refusal negation, after which an "affirmation" is about to follow. What differentiates this theory from the "semiotics of passions" is the following: instead of the act of finalizing semantic units into meaningful ones, named "passions" (Greimas, Fontanille, 1993), in Tarasti's theory, the signs are "intermediated" by the *Dasein*. This is because of another kind of communication between the parties concerned, as we explained above. Moreover, signs' "moveability" means that they are reshaped or interpreted in various stages. In other words, not only are "seeming" and "reality" strongly differentiated in this case (as Greimasian semiotics has attempted to show), but they are even "flowing", if I may use this term, thus being ready for another process of interpretation (if one wants, inspired by existential philosophy). It is for this reason, if one wants, inspired by Hegelian philosophy ("being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself"), that both "negation" and "affirmation" contribute to the final process of signification. Moreover, the above thesis also discloses that "the

semiosis unfolds according to a certain logic, in which 'being' creates a 'non-being' that is dissolved into subsequent 'being'" (Tarasti, 2000, p. 33).

If matters are understood in the mentioned fashion, signs appear to be transcendental, because they have been transformed into a brand new shape. What one finds instead is the hypothesizing "space" that Tarasti's theory offers to the semiotician. In other words, if the process stops at a certain point, it does not mean "noise" in the communication channel, but, on the contrary, a chance to semioticize the sign through the *Dasein* and the transcending notion. Besides, the subject "activates" the process instead of a given "semiotic object", as Greimas would say, on the one hand, but on the other, as Tarasti says, one does not know the "receiver" if one understands matters communicationally. Let us continue with our example now.

After a determined stage of the play, Othello "accepts" or "affirms" the handkerchief as "proof" for the tragedy to happen later in the "story narrated". In another context, the "pre-signs", in our case, the "seemingly" good relationships between Othello and Iago, create a "semiotic reality". We shall call it animosity between them, which creates "jealousy" (primarily regarded as a "passion" in terms of Greimas's and Fontanille's theory). The Being of Othello, therefore, intermediated by the *Dasein*, obtains a new shape: desperation, his furiousness because of jealousy, and his earlier belief in a glorious and victorious warrior. This "affirmation" concurs with the "act-signs": a semiotic process has occurred. Victimizing Desdemona (through Cassio, as is known, an intrigue initiated by Iago) is a consequence; therefore, it interprets the phenomenon. It represents the "post-signs" in our case.

In contrast to the "classical" semiotic paradigms, as I have attempted to show, one learns that one's existence is threatened if one can use this word in its metaphorical sense. Practically, in our instancing of Shakespeare, it means that Othello's existence is threatened, a fact which can be noted in Act IV of the play (Shakespeare, 2002). "Existence" in Tarasti's theory means "being there" (Tarasti, 2015). Finally, do we not see the main protagonists' existence in each kind of artistic expressivity to the end of the "story narrated"? However, there is a difference in their behavior, displayed by the actors on the one hand and by the audience on the other. In conclusion, the problem is both communicational and semiotic.

3.1. "Transformational" or "Transcending" Signs?

The examples shown above represent an attempt to explicate how a determined artwork becomes semioticized. In this sense of the word, one must emphasize which theory, or paradigm, is followed by another. In my opinion, it asserts a method that prioritizes an epistemic view of semiotic analysis in the first place, and in the second, it represents a method that prioritizes the Subject instead of the Object. The aim of this part of the text, therefore, is methodological: it at-

tempts to demonstrate the differences and similarities between the two paradigms presented above. Let us attempt to explain this situation.

Both theories use their model schemes, which represent applicable matters of whichever "semiotic object". In other words, it means that the practical applicability of a determined research method enables reaching empirical results. This fact represents inclusiveness in both paradigms. However, in my view of this theoretical explication, two notions become noticeable: "transformation" and "transcendence". Let us try to explain both terms.

As is known by now, "transformation" as a critical concept was initially used by Chomsky (2002). Chomsky used the term for other purposes, such as explaining generative grammar. It is used to attempt to create a universal grammar based on determined rules that would create a syntactically sound sentence. Greimas, on the other hand, found the use of such a concept to explain the chain of generating meaning. The method, therefore, found new scientific contexts that attempted to cover other matters besides the already known linguistic ones, as advanced by Chomsky. Naturally, all of that contributed to semiotics, as "transformability" not only referred to the changeability of signs but also to finalizing semantic units through the "semiotic square" (Greimas, 1973). Either used "schematically" or, if one wants, by "mathematical equations", Greimas achieved his goal of seeking the meaning of each chosen "semiotic object". Moreover, calling it "a semiotics of action" (Greimas, Fontanille, 1993), the theory obtained full epistemic status, and the meaning units obtained were empirically and practically explainable to the academic audience. Among other related matters, this is apparently due to the modalities of Being and Doing, which could be foreseen even in Greimas's earlier theoretical production, which, as we mentioned, have created the "semiotic square".

"Transcendence", on the other hand, is one of the crucial concepts in Tarasti's theory, and it marks precisely movement and changeability aimed at obtaining meaning. Thus, the "semiotic object's" Being can only be concretized into a concrete, meaningful unit. Except for the philosophical understanding, which is more than evident in existential semiotics, the inter-relationships among the entities concerned have a strong relevance. This can be proven by the fact that a 'dual' or "systemic" view of phenomena would not suffice for obtaining a single meaningful unit, but, instead, a plurality of meaningful units. For this reason, I contend that existential semiotics further "develops", interprets, and semioticizes the earlier established "passional configurations". In other words, Tarasti's theory further elaborates on "meta-modalities" and multiple possible receivers of the message, or introduces the researcher to more than one semiotic level (or even solution). Finally, the "Subject's" notion and the process's representability through the Zemic or Z model demonstrate such a theory's applicability in precise, meaningful units.

4. Conclusion

The present paper's objective was, as I hope to have been able to show, to attempt to enhance the semiotic process through two recent paradigms. The reason that inspired me to offer this contribution to the academic audience is precisely the essential "shift" of semiotic studies, ranging from the object notion (based mainly on ontology) to the subject notion (grounded mainly in epistemology). Both concepts are semiotically relevant and prove their permanent changeability because they frame the attempt to induce or deduce meaning. Other representatives of "classical semiotics" can naturally prove the facts above. Be it for an essential "semiotic function" or a "complex one", the paradigms in question demonstrate a subsequent flow of the action of signs, or the "signs' way", as Deely (2001) expresses himself, regarding the modern and postmodern development of the semiotic method.

Tarasti's theory has brought distinguishability and in-depth study to these tiny elements, such as a musical work's analysis, relations with the composers or writers, and audience acceptance through semiotic and philosophical models. Let us only remind ourselves of various "authors' and composers'" "transformation" of one single artwork into diverse formats or shapes: if Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, Prokofiev "transformed" it into a ballet, intriguingly enough, through modern music belonging to the beginnings of the twentieth century. It thus represents a "re-semioticizing" of one artwork, thus enhancing a new "semiotic reality".

On the one hand, therefore, Tarasti's existential semiotics asserts the creators' capacities and subjects' pertinence and moveability into various discussable semiotic contexts, and on the other, it asserts the possibility of multiple empirical results. In other words, it means that more than one "meaningful unit" can be obtained through existential models, as well because of the meta-modalities, as explained in Tarasti's (2015).

The goal of the present text is hopefully known by now: the omnipresence of the semiotic method(s) in analyzing and levelling various "semiotic realities". A "semiotic reality", in the sense I have attempted to show above, differently interpreted by the researcher, critic, or audience (in the case of artistic expressivity), can also pertain to an epistemic status of each entity under discussion, precisely because its validity can be conceptualized in its various analytical levels. If all of them are correlated or related to each other, they represent a process of semiosis, either in Peircean terms or in general terms in semiotics.

REFERENCES

Chatman, S. (1978). *Story and Discourse*. Cornell University Press.
Chomsky, N. (2002). *Syntactic Structures*. Walter de Gruyter.
Deely, J. (2001). *Four Ages of Understanding: The First Postmodern Survey From the Ancient Times to the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*. Toronto, London, Buffalo: University of Toronto Press. doi:10.3138/9781442675032
Deely, J. (2009). *Purely Objective Reality*. Berlin, New York: Mouton, de Gruyter.
Eco, U. (1968). *La struttura assente (la ricerca semiotica e il metodo strutturale)* [The Absent Structure]. Milan: Bompiani.
Eco, U. (1976). *Theory of Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Eco, U. (1984). *The Role of the Reader (Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts)*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Eco, U. (1994). *Six Walks in the Fictional Woods*. Cambridge, Mass.: HUP.
Eco, U. (1997). *Kant e l'orintorinco* [Kant and the Platypus]. Milan: Bompiani.
Goldman, I. A. (1986). *Epistemology and Cognition*. London: HUP.
Greimas, A. J., Fontanille, J. (1993). *The Semiotics of Passions: From State of Affairs to States of Feelings*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Greimas, A. J. (1973). *On Meaning*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
Hoxha, B. (2016). Semiotics of Precision and Imprecision. *Semiotica*, *2016*(213), 539–555. doi:10.1515/sem-2015-0077
Hoxha, B. (2022). *Umberto Eco's Semiotics: Theory, Methodology and Poetics*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Peirce, C. S. (1960). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Volume I: Principles of Philosophy; Volume II: Elements of Logic). London: The Belknap of Harvard University Press.
Petrilli, S., Ji, M. (2022). *Intersemiotic Perspectives on Emotions*. London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003056652
Piaget, J. (1969). *The Psychology of The Child*. Basic Books.
Saussure, F. de. (1959). *Course in General Linguistics*. Geneva: Philosophical Library.
Shakespeare, W. (2002). *The Complete Pelican Shakespeare*. London: Penguin Group.
Shannon, C. E., Weaver, W. (1948). *A Mathematical Theory of Communication*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
Tarasti, E. (2000). *Existential Semiotics*. Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
Tarasti, E. (2015). *Sein und Schein (Explorations in Existential Semiotics)*. Berlin; Boston: De Gruyter.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 35–64
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.04

Article

IRINA MELNIKOVA *

SEMIOTIC MAPPING OF READING AND *LOLITA*'S INTERPRETATIONS

SUMMARY: The paper explores the semiotic aspects of reading literature, focusing on the literary text as a unique artefact, differing from other verbal texts, the paradox of the literature's (non)transparency, and the role of sensual perception in its signification/interpretation. It questions how readers engage with literary texts and defines this engagement semiotically. The paper proposes the semiotic classification of reading/interpretation and exemplifies this classification by examining Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* and its interpretations. This non-axiological classification originates from a dialogue with the representatives of the Peircean semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature, Harri Veivo and Jørgen Dines Johansen. It revises and modifies their concepts within the logic of Charles S. Peirce's sign concept and advances understanding of literary reading by integrating the question of textual materiality with Peircean semiotics, offering a nuanced framework to classify and interpret reading strategies. It treats reading as a sign-action, initiated by the reader who chooses the (conventional, contiguity-based, or analogy/resemblance-based) mode of interpretant to connect a representamen (addresser-text) with the dynamic object (semantic whole) and explores how these modes are manifested in reading. It seeks to uncover the differences in the modes and strategies of reading and the reasons/conditions for choosing one or another mode. *Lolita* is presented as a paradigmatic example of a non-transparent literary text that foregrounds its materiality and invites the reader to activate the sight. The paper analyses how *Lolita*'s textual structure prompts visual engagement and how the sight's activation or its lack thereof influences the choice of iconic, indexical, or symbolic mode of reading/interpretation.

KEYWORDS: reading, interpretation, semiotic-pragmatic approach, indexicality, iconicity, symbolicity, Charles S. Peirce.

* Vilnius University, Faculty of Philology, A. J. Greimas Centre for Semiotics and the Theory of Literature. E-mail: irina.melnikova@flf.vu.lt. ORCID: 0000-0001-6832-1714.

1. Introduction

> To see a thing, we must adjust our visual apparatus in a certain way. If the adjustment is inadequate the thing is seen indistinctly or not at all. Take a garden seen through the window. Looking at the garden we adjust our eyes in such a way that the ray of vision travels through the pane without delay and rests on the shrubs and flowers. Since we are focusing on the garden and our ray of vision is directed toward it, we do not see the window but look clear through it. The purer the glass, the less we see it. But we can also deliberately disregard the garden and, withdrawing the ray of visions, detain it at the window. We then lose sight of the garden; what we still behold of it is a confused mass of colour which appears pasted on the pane. Hence to see the garden and to see the window pane are two incompatible operations which exclude one another because they require different adjustments. (Ortega y Gasset, 2019, p. 10)

In discussing the (sociological) effect of a modern work of art, the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset metaphorizes two approaches to reading using an optical metaphor that differentiates two kinds of sight: "looking through the window" versus "looking at the windowpane". Both frame the vision, but the second one changes the shapes of what one sees and makes the pane nontransparent, at least to some extent, especially in the case of modern art. Looking through the window, we engage with the human perspective (live with the figures we see outside), while looking at the pane, we engage with an artistic one. Ortega y Gasset reminds that a work of art is an artificial human-made fictional object, and to perceive something as a work of art, to evoke artistic sensibility, we ought to focus on the windowpane (2019, p. 11). His metaphor recalls Shakespeare's argument on art holding a mirror up to nature, discussed by Oscar Wilde (in *Intentions*), where the mirror opposes the veil. The metaphors introduce the paradox of (non)transparency of the artwork, the twofold issue of sight (a perspective of reception and perception as sensual experience), and the issue of the literary artwork as a specific form of verbal text.

Signification of a literary artwork has been discussed in different semiotic theories that conceptualize the role of the reader in literary meaning-making (Jury Lotman's, Umberto Eco's, Michael Riffaterre's, Harri Veivo's, and Jørgen Dines Johansen's among them). They all keep the acknowledged or unacknowledged trace of Charles S. Peirce's concept of sign, which grounds signification/semiosis on sensual perception. Nevertheless, the issue of sensual perception and sight within literary studies (including that of literary semiotics) is highly problematic, since habitually literature is considered as a medium in which matter does not matter. Literary writing is usually treated as invisible or transparent. Literature uses arbitrary signs or (in Charles S. Peirce's terms) symbols that relate a perceptible form with that for which (we think) the form stands by a habit, a law, a convention (see CP 4.531; CP 2.249). The shape of the written/printed words appears as a technical device, insignificant as such. Still, the process of actual reading activates the sight: we see both the sequences of con-

ventional graphic figures and a unique object, divided into a variety of graphic shapes (such as typeface, paragraphs, stanzas, chapters, lines, etc.). Those figures and shapes configure the tangible, visually perceptible textual body. The arrangement of the words and letters on the page lets us recognize conventional forms of poetry or drama or their disruption, and to understand whether we are reading a novel or a short story, etc. This arrangement of graphic figures activates conventions other than those of language. It requires visual experience. Symbols turn to the visual icons that relate a perceptible form to that for which the form stands by resemblance or analogy. Graphical arrangement doubles the reader's gaze, and this doubling turns the tangible mode of representation into the object of representation, making it a potentially meaningful body. One can find the most apparent examples of literary text as a body in visual poetry (classical example—Guillaume Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*). Such poetry reveals the general principle: the more the text disrupts the axiom of transparency of language, the more we see its body. Nevertheless, maybe to a lesser extent, every published literary text invites us to see the potential significance of its body/matter and the paradoxical asymmetrical tension between symbols and icons. Besides, the other meaning of "sight", manifested in Ortega y Gasset's metaphor—a perspective of reception—inevitably raises the question of indexicality, which relates a perceptible form with that for which the form stands by the real connection, effect, or contiguity.

Actual reading puts in motion all three modes of meaning-making (analogy, contiguity, convention) that outline Peirce's classification of signs based on the relationship between a representamen and a dynamic object (icon, index, symbol). Reading/interpretation practices show that some readers employ sight, reflect the doubling of sight as a meaningful strategy, and actualize the semantic potential of texture and physical configuration, while others ignore it. Actual reading practices and the readers' interaction with a text reveal a variety of reading modes, which raise a whole range of questions: What inspires the readers to choose one or another mode of reading? What are the specific features of a work's texture that influence the reader's choice? How does a text construe the reading mode it proposes to employ? How does a literary text's conception (ideation) depend on its sensual perception? Is it possible to conceive reading as a particular type of iconic, indexical, or symbolic sign, i.e., to identify different strategies and principles of meaning-making?

Those questions configure the field for the discussion proposed in the paper which has two main objectives. First, the paper aims to propose a semiotic classification of reading/interpretation. The classification originates from a dialogue with the representatives of the semiotics-pragmatic approach to literature, Veivo (2007; 2009) and Johansen (2002; 2009). It elaborates on, revises and modifies their concepts within the logic of Peirce's semiotics. The focus point of this classification is the issue of (non)transparency of literary text, which remains an almost unexplored issue even within the Peircean approach. The classification does not relate to any axiological assessment of reading. It does not seek to de-

fine "good" or "bad" readers/readings or distinguish readings from misreadings. It attempts to reveal the differences in the modes and strategies of reading/interpretation and the reasons/conditions for choosing one or another mode. The second aim of the paper is to exemplify the proposed classification in a discussion of Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* (1955)—examining how its textual structure triggers the reader's sight, what kind of reading its texture proposes, and outlining a semiotic viewpoint on how it was read/interpreted.

2. An Artwork as a Sign

The semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature, based on Peirce's semiotics, understands reading as meaning-making appearing in the semiosis or signification of literary text. The latter is regarded as a highly structured artefact, differing from other verbal utterances (Johansen, 2002, pp. xii–xiii; Veivo, 2007, p. 46). Johansen, who creates a comprehensive model of how literature produces meaning, extends the general frame of Peircean semiotics with ideas of Roman Jakobson, Roland Barthes, Eco, etc., and accepts Jakobson's viewpoint on the difference between literary artwork and other verbal texts. As is known, in the article *Linguistics and Poetics*, Jakobson distinguishes six language functions (referential, emotive, conative, phatic, metalingual, and self-referential) and states that all of them operate in any verbal message, but one or another becomes dominant. This dominance determines the type of the message. The dominance of the self-referential function is the characteristic feature of literary text (or *artifice*),[1] so it was labelled as poetic/aesthetic and defined as "the set (*Einstellung*) toward the message as such, focus on the message" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 69). Jakobson underlines that while the aesthetic function is not the only one operating in literary text, it is the main one. It projects the principle of equivalence (based on similarity/dissimilarity, synonymy/antonymy, and other possible correlations) "from the axis of selection into the axis of combination" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 71). This projection creates parallelism that relates different elements within the same textual space, and the parallelism promotes "the palpability of signs, deepens the fundamental dichotomy of signs and objects" (Jakobson, 1987, p. 69). The text becomes a self-defining configuration, a unique *non-transparent* system governed by the principles of its own. Those principles of various and unique inner correlations create the substance which Ortega y Gasset calls the windowpane.

The aesthetic function turns the text into an autonomous sign-representamen, and the reading enables the process of Peircean semiosis or sign-action. At this stage, it is important to remember that Peirce's sign concept has a double meaning. Peirce distinguishes the sign-action (or semiosis) and the sign-representa-

[1] Jakobson adopts the term "artifice" of Gerard Manley Hopkins to underline the artificialness of the text of art.

men (Deledalle, 2000, p. 18).[2] A sign-action or semiosis appears as an interaction of the three interconnected components—*representamen* (a mediated perceptible form), dynamic *object* (physical or mental, real or fictional phenomenon with which the mind relates the representamen, that for which the representamen stands) and *interpretant* (mental construct which establishes relationship between the representamen and the dynamical object and by which this relationship is established). However, the representamen cannot become a sign-action without a "somebody" from Peirce's sign definition:

> 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. (CP 2.228; bold for emphasis added)

In reading as signification, this "somebody" is an actual reader who turns out to be involved in semiosis. It is the actual reader who perceives something as a sign and chooses the interpretant to connect a representamen with an object, i.e., who enables signification. Furthermore, here comes the issue of the mode in which a reader connects a representamen with a dynamic object.

Peirce characterises literature as a medium operating with symbolic signs, relating representamens with objects by a habit, a law, a convention:[3] "Every word is a symbol. Every sentence is a symbol. Every book is a symbol. Every representamen depending upon conventions is a symbol" (CP 4.447). However, Peirce himself never addressed the issues of semiosis in/of the arts or artworks. After Jakobson introduced Peirce's classification of signs to icons, indices, and symbols in linguistics and literary studies, and launched the discussion of iconicity in language and arts, scholars started to discuss the relevance and applicability of

---

[2] The usage of the term "sign" in Peirce's work is not constant. What meaning it conveys—that of semiosis or representamen—becomes clear from the context in which it is used. To avoid confusion between the *sign-action* (sign as triadic relationship) and the sign as one of the constitutive elements of the sign-action, i.e., *representamen* or *sign-vehicle*, I will use the term "representamen" when referring to the latter. In citing Peirce's writings, I employ usual abbreviations.

[3] He repeats the idea in different works:

> All words, sentences, books, and other conventional signs are Symbols. We speak of writing or pronouncing the word "man"; but it is only a replica, or embodiment of the word, that is pronounced or written. The word itself has no existence although it has a real being, consisting in the fact that existents will conform to it. It is a general mode of succession of three sounds or representamens of sounds, which becomes a sign only in the fact that a habit, or acquired law, will cause replicas of it to be interpreted as meaning a man or men. The word and its meaning are both general rules. (EP 2:274)

this classification.[4] Those discussions configure the core of the semiotic-pragmatic approach to literature (the main field of my research, connected to Jakobson's, Lotman's, and Eco's semiotics) and leave traces in Iser's theory of aesthetic response (which itself refers to Jakobson, Lotman, Eco, and many others). The general shape of the reading process and the terms those theories use may make an impression about their affinity. However, this impression is misleading. The rationale, the line of reasoning, and the precision in using terms make Peircean semiotics and Iser's theory essentially different.

3. The Act of Reading: Wolfgang Iser vs. the Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach

Iser's theory of aesthetic response describes the act of reading as a dynamic interaction between the text and the reader, giving primacy to the reader's imagination. Iser is interested in the effect of reading rather than in the meaning of the text (Iser, 1978, p. 54). He regards indeterminacies, blanks, and gaps as a condition for the structuring activity of the reader, which creates "something that did not exist before" (p. 22), an aesthetic object. His "blanks" are associated neither with perceptual quality nor literary texture or textual structure. Even though he argues that "central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient" (p. 20) and refers to Jakobson's poetic function, he prefers the floating "structure" of the reading act rather than that of the text. He pays attention to the textual rhetoric by proposing the concept of repertoire and perspectives through which repertoire's pattern emerges (the narrator, the characters, the plot, etc.), the concepts of theme (the reader's involvement with a perspective at one moment) and horizon (other perspective segments, everything "visible" from one point; see Iser, 1978, pp. 96–97). All the concepts, in fact, are related to the mental imagination while "looking through the windowpane" rather than to the textual structure and its perception. He examines the reading act as producing mental images that refer to the systems of thought and other literary works, but relates them to the (changing) conventions.

In discussing the differences between literary and ordinary speech, Iser turns to the issue of sign in a highly specific manner. He argues[5] that symbols, like icons, constitute a non-given object, enabling one to perceive the world. They are

[4] From 1999, John Bejamins Publishing House has published a book series that explores iconicity's manifestation across various contexts of verbal communication. The general observation of the main fields of iconicity studies in literature is presented in Nöth's paper (2015).

[5] To articulate the statement, he refers to Ernst Cassirer's *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Charles Morris' unresolved question of whether a work of art can be an iconic sign signifying values, and Umberto Eco's explanation of how iconic signs can fulfil the communicative function. In dispute with Morris, Eco finds the solution in the concept of the code. He concludes that iconic signs reproduce certain conditions of the object's perception only after selecting the code (which grounds recognition) and aligning with the existing repertoire of graphic conventions (Eco, 1968, pp. 109–121).

independent of the visible and "no longer denote something, but themselves create what is denoted" (1978, p. 65). They help to produce imaginary objects. Iser treats an iconic sign as a model of a conventional relationship that allows recognition and remembering of objects. He equates it to a symbol, without even noticing that such an explanation destroys not only the value and the point of Peircean classification, but also his concept of sign as such. Iser's theory of aesthetic response completely ignores both the role of the sensual perception of literary work and its semiotic instability that influence reception.

The semiotic-pragmatic approach makes a convincing attempt to explain how different types of relations/signs organize the acts of reading and systematize the vision of that process. The representatives of this approach—Veivo and Johansen—consider the literary texture; nevertheless, their attempt to explain the mechanism of the reading process also lacks attention to the issues of sensual perception and leaves the issues to be solved. Both Veivo and Johansen acknowledge the involvement of the individual receiver in the process of reading and the semiotic instability of literary text, yet focus on different aspects of the act of reading.

Veivo (2007) conceives literary work as a complex sign and a specifically organized set of signs. He explores indexicality as a necessary condition for reading, constituting text as a complex sign, and letting the reader perceive it as a semantic whole. He explains how symbols start to function as indices[6] that change the mode of meaning-making: symbolic representamen, which is connected to the object by a habit or a convention, appears connected to it by the real connection, effect, or contiguity. The real connection becomes crucial in textual indexicality, which covers all the relationships between the texture elements that belong to the same text. Veivo gives examples of personal pronouns and proper names that create continuity of characters, adverbs of time and space that participate in the organisation of the narrative structure of the text, etc. In the case of sensually perceptible elements of the text, which Veivo overlooks, textual indexicality also covers the various elements of its material embodiment, starting from the perceptible formal division into parts that create the inner tensions resulting in both the discontinuity and integrity of the textual body, and ending with the specificity of the typeface that also can become meaningful. In all the cases, "indexical signs are textual elements that direct attention to other textual elements" (Veivo, 2009, p. 167). In turn, contiguity becomes a ground for meaning-making in extratextual indexicality that invites one to find the representamen's object in a historic/real or literary context:

[6] He considers the type of the sign (symbol, index, icon) as a function, but not of a class of signs, in line with Peirce himself (CP 2.276; CP 2.306; CP 2.302). In his semiotics, iconicity, indexicality, and symbolicity are the functions of the sign that depend on the context of semiosis and on the receiving mind rather than the static qualities of a sign.

> This external context may be the historical context in which the text was produced, the reader's existential context of knowledge and emotion that conditions his or her reading, as well as the context of the preceding literary tradition that conditions the text's place in culture. (Veivo, 2009, p. 168)

Although the fields of historic context and literature, in which one can search for or find objects, are fundamentally different, Veivo does not address this distinction. Within the framework of Peircean semiotics, this difference is significant since the case of references to preceding literary tradition covers the issue of marked or unmarked (in Gérard Genette's terms) intertextual, architextual, or hypertextual references to other artworks. In such cases, the representamens of the text or a text as a representamen start functioning as icons, and precisely the iconic principle—one or another kind of resemblance or analogy—becomes the mode of meaning-making. Therefore, I would propose to distinguish extratextual and *intertextual* indexicality, having in mind that the latter becomes just a bridge to turn a symbol into an icon.

Veivo suggests examining a "windowpane", organising the vision, and configuring the meaning of what one sees by connecting indexical axes that a reader can draw. The reader here appears as an unstable figure that determines the variability of reading. Veivo argues that the meaning we produce in reading depends on the reader's cognitive faculties, linguistic and textual structures, and cultural conventions or habits (2007, p. 49). One of those factors—the linguistic and textual structures—appears as an arbitrary stable, and two others as variable. The cognitive faculties of actual readers differ, and these differences determine the variability of the cultural conventions/habits (conventions may be known or unknown to the reader):

> [O]ne material thing—a word, a phrase, a book—can function as a sign according to several conventions and habits, representing different objects and giving rise to different interpretants, all anchored in the experience of the addresser and the addressee and in their dialogical relationship. (Veivo, 2007, p. 44)

These cultural habits also include a habit Veivo does not consider—the habit to (dis)acknowledge the sensually perceivable matter of the text, determining the changes in interpretation. He confines the discussion of the reading to examining aspects of its indexicality, revealing the artifice as a structured "veil".

Johansen is going down a different path. He turns from indexicality/contiguity to iconicity/analogy and reinterprets indexicality in terms of iconicity. He argues that reading presupposes two sets of references—the universe of the text and that of the lifeworld, encompassing the reader's memories (i.e., textual and extratextual indexicality in Veivo's terms), yet focuses on their iconic aspects. Regarding literary representation, he proposes distinguishing the external iconic relationship between representamen and object and the internal iconic relationship between the different parts of the sign, i.e., the similarity of patterning on different levels (Johansen, 2002, pp. 146–147). Regarding reading as the recep-

tion of literary representation, he adopts Jakobson's idea of intersemiotic translation or "transmutation" (Jakobson, 1987a, p. 429) and describes reading as transforming words-symbols into icons. The process of iconization of literary work includes three possible variants that work on different levels and stages of reading and correlate with Peircean differentiation between distinct kinds of icons that create different grounds for analogy, namely *images*, *diagrams*, and *metaphors*. According to Peirce, icon-image relates representamen with object by analogy in "simple qualities", icon-diagram by analogous structural relations between their parts, and finally, icon-metaphor by other possible kinds of parallelism between the representamen and the object (CP 2.277). Consequently, Johansen differentiates the following variants of iconization (2002, pp. 327–341):

– *imaginization* is the subjective and personal production of pictorial and sound images, triggered by symbols,
– *diagrammatization* is the structuring of what is represented by symbols and by the network of inner relationships; it is concerned with the totality of the text,
– *allegorization* relates the sum of imaginization and diagrammatization to other conceptual structures, creating the second meaning or "culturally shared patterns of interpretation" (2002, p. 338).

The reading experience switches between these three levels, capturing distinct aspects of analogy/similarity (which includes resemblance and contrast). If imaginization (which, in other terms, was discussed by Iser) just adds an imaginative pictorial and sound dimension to the text, diagrammatization reveals the iconicity presented in and by the text and organizes its understanding. Johansen acknowledges diagrammatization as the dominant way of meaning-making since it structures all kinds of parallelism on distinct levels (rhythm, syntactical and narrative patterning, etc.), but notes that depending on genre, period, and movement, literary texts may give priority to imaginization, diagrammatization, or allegorization. For example, a realist novel favours imaginization, and concrete poetry requires diagrammatization.

Although Johansen examines the artifice as a self-referential unit and underlines the role of diagrammatization in its reception, he is not interested in the visual aspects of writing. He treats literature as a sound medium, operating with symbols, and analyzes iconic effects as inherent possibilities of linguistic patterning (2002, p. 147). Still, diagrammatization first works at the perceptual level. It is exactly diagrammatization that structures the "physical" arrangement of the artifice and directs literary semiosis.

Johansen considers literary semiosis as the interaction of five components: *sign* [*representamen*], *object*, *interpretant*, *interpreter*, and *utterer*. He builds a controversial semiotic pyramid (Johansen, 2002, p. 55; 2009, p. 17) that maps reading as communication by extending and intensifying the basic model of communication (*sender—message—receiver*) with Peircean dichotomy between *immediate*

(internal, presented) and *dynamic* (external, re-presented) aspects of the sign's elements. In the case of sender-receiver, he distinguishes the utterer (dynamic) ↔ addresser (immediate) and interpreter (dynamic) ↔ addressee (immediate):

– the *interpreter* and *utterer* are the external figures in flesh and blood (2002, p. 57),
– the figures of the *addressee* and *addresser* are the textual figures:
  - the addressee is "the utterer's representation of the interpreter" (2002, p. 57), a position within the text created by the utterer (2009, p. 18),
  - the addresser is a representation of the producer of the text that is determined by the utterer (2002, p. 56).

As regards the "message", he addresses the Peircean dichotomy of *token* (*text-sign, sinsign*)[7] ↔ *type* (*legisign*). As Peirce puts it, a legisign is

> a general type which, it has been agreed, shall be significant. Every legisign signifies through an instance of its application, which may be termed a *Replica* of it. Thus, the word "the" will usually occur from fifteen to twenty-five times on a page. It is in all these occurrences one and the same word, the same legisign. Each single instance of it is a replica. The replica is a sinsign. (EP 2:291)

Perhaps, in the case of a literary text as a sign, we could consider the *type* as a loose analogue of Barthesian "work" in his dichotomy of *work* vs. *text*. In Barthes's words, "the work itself functions as a general sign, and it is natural that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the Sign" (Barthes, 1989, p. 59), and the text "is experienced only in an activity, in a production […], its constitutive moment is traversal" (Barthes, 1989, p. 58). This rough analogy inspires us to relate the token to the book-text-sign we read, to the actual occurrence of the work-type.

Johnasen's semiotic pyramid covers all the possible lines of interaction—the actual reader and that which Iser would call "implied reader", the actual author and that which Wayne C. Booth would call an "implied author", the artwork as an actualized Barthesian "text" and a non-actualized "work". Oriented towards mutual understanding, his model binds the utterer and interpreter in a shared space, thus erroneously bringing together two distinct semiotic acts—the creation of literary work and its reception. It misjudges the utterer's figure in the act of reading and underestimates the sensory input of a text-sign in signification. Actual reading excludes the utterer as a figure in flesh and substitutes it with the text. Reading relates the actual interpreter to the addresser as the text, rather than

[7] In a trichotomy relating representamen to itself: *tone—token—type* (or qualisign—sinsign—legisign), *token* is related to the concrete, individual, actual occurrences of a sign, and *type* is explained as a general rule for the articulation of such occurrences (for detailed discussion, see Stjernfelt, 2022, p. 51).

a textual figure. Johansen's definition of the addresser presupposes not only the "imagining" of the external producer's (in literature—author's) figure in a place from which it is absent in reading, but also a ghost of intentional fallacy. He overlooks the central communicative paradox of reading literary artifice—*the coincidence of the addresser with the text-representamen* that has an organized physical shape, influencing signification. This coincidence encourages defining the communicating figures and the communication process in a mode different from Johansen's.

4. Reading as Communication and Interpretation as a Sign

Although the immediate and dynamic aspects of the sign remain an important issue, the general scheme of the actual act of reading should be shaped as a triangular pyramid, rather than Johansen's octagonal model. Peirce's triadic concept of sign (representamen-dynamic object-dynamic interpretant) forms the bottom of the pyramid, and the interpreter—the reader who initiates semiosis (the sign-action;[1] see Figure 1)—constitutes its top. The *representamen* of this sign-action is rather obvious: it is a system of symbolic figures arranged in a certain order. It is the texture of artifice in its embodied specificity, with all its peculiarities. To understand how we could define a dynamic object and an interpretant, we need to define the immediate ones. An immediate/dynamic object can be described in accordance with Johansen's reasoning:

– the *immediate object* (that which is presented by the representamen) is a set of visual images appearing in the imaginization of symbols,
– the *dynamic object* (that which is re-presented) is a semantic unit—a whole as a result of imaginization, diagrammatization, and allegorization, in Johansen's words, "that which the utterance is about" (2002, p. 355).

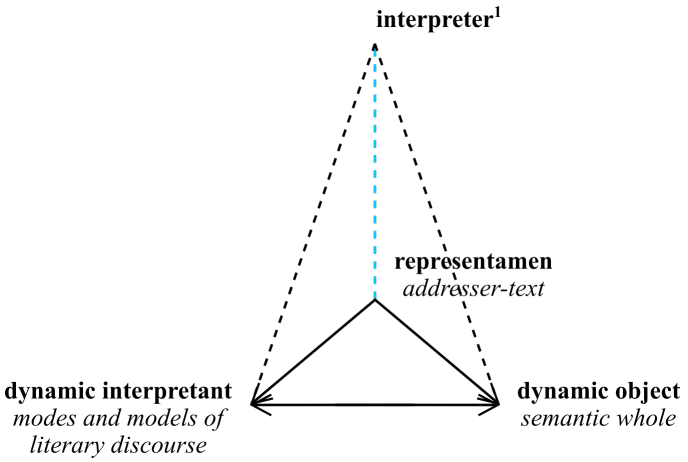
However, the definition of immediate and/or dynamic interpretant (the core of interpretation, determining the identification of a sign as of icon, index, or symbol), differs from that proposed by Johansen. Johansen defines the immediate interpretant in reading as "the sign's potential meaning, […] an indefinite range of possible translations, indicated by the sign" (2002, p. 355). Nonetheless, the (potential) meaning has already been related to the dynamic object. The meaning cannot be associated with both the object and the interpretant. Besides, Peirce associates, yet does not equate, the interpretant with meaning. In several definitions, he clearly differentiates them (CP 1.339, EP 2:493–494) and invites us to conceive the interpretant as a mental construct that connects the representamen with the object in a sign-action, which is determined by the specificity of the representamen. A relevant definition of the *immediate interpretant* in the case of reading literature could be derived from Peircean explanation: "My Immediate Interpretant is implied in the fact that each Sign [representamen] must have its peculiar Interpretability before it gets any Interpreter" (SS 110–111). Peirce out-

lines it as "the total unanalysed effect that the Sign [representamen] is calculated to produce, […] an abstraction, consisting in Possibility" (SS 110–111). Therefore, we can associate the immediate interpretant with a set of linguistic rules and traits (a language), necessary to relate a set of representamens with "that which the text is about", i.e., with the dynamic object. The reader must see the representamens as interpretable ones. If the readers do not know the language (rules, traits), they cannot configure a tripartite sign-action, start the process of imaginization, and signify the text.

Subsequently, the *dynamic interpretant* which was controversially defined by Johansen as "a conscious or unconscious choice between the possible translations of the text in question […] the actual individual interpretation of a sign, whether standard or innovative, plausible or implausible" (2002, p. 356), encompasses the modes and models of literary discourse, the traits that relate representamen with the dynamic object (with the result of iconization, diagrammatization, and allegorization).

Figure 1

Sign-action[1]. The act of reading

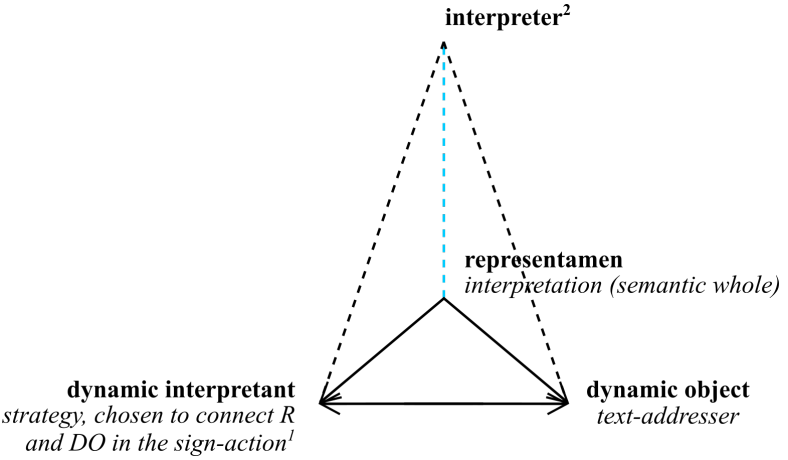


Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

Such reading as a sign-action produces an interpretation which could be classified as performing a function of an icon, index, or symbol. However, identification of this function needs another reader/interpreter[2], who would proceed with semiosis and form the sing-action[2], i.e., who would classify the type of reading/interpretation produced in reading as sign-action[1] (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

Sign-action[2]*. Interpretation as a sign*



Note. Source: author's own elaboration.

The representamen of this second sign is the *interpretation as a semantic whole, an articulated mental or material* configuration as an outcome of reading (e.g., in the form of a paper/article on the literary text). Its dynamic object is the *text-addresser* of the first sign, a literary text interpreted to form a semantic whole. Finally, the *dynamic interpretant* of the second sign is the strategy chosen by the interpreter[1] to connect the *text-addresser* (object) with *interpretation as a semantic whole* (representamen). This strategy helps identify the type of a sign (the function it performs). The *implemented interpretation* can be defined as iconic, indexical, or iconic, depending on how the readers (interpreter[1]) perceive the artifice–addresser, what they pay attention to, and what modes they choose to connect textual representamen with a semantic whole in the reading process.

Once the semantic whole, created by the interpreter[1] in the sign-action[1], reveals the recognition of the figures of the fictional story-world as representing those of the natural one, the perception of those figures as if it would be a connection with the real world, interpretation (*the representamen*) and the text-addresser (*the object*) turn out to be linked up by contiguity, and interpretation gains the traits of index. Such a strategy completely eliminates the difference between the artifice and other verbal discourses and becomes an analogue to Ortega y Gasset's "looking through" the window.

Once the semantic whole exposes the focus on a story-world as an exemplification of various norms, laws, and habits of real human society, and relates the fictional universe to other habitual conceptual structures, the interpretation attains the traits of a symbol. In this case, interpretation is connected to the text-addresser by interpretational habit. It becomes a Peircean "Representamen whose

Representative character consists precisely in its being a rule that will determine its Interpretant" (EP 2:274). Such an interpretation first presupposes the indexical move of connecting the story-world with the real/natural one, then applying (scholarly) analytical tools to assess it from one or another ideological perspective. In this case, interpretation is connected to the object due to a scholarly (e.g., feminist, psychoanalytic, postcolonial) habit. It represents the object (text) "because dispositions or factitious habits of their interpreter ensure their being so understood" (EP 2:460–461). This strategy often reveals attention to the narrative strategies and rhetorical devices, yet usually ignores the textural fibre of the artifice.

Finally, once the semantic whole manifests the attention to the textual whole, to all the aspects of its embodiment, regularities and inner traits of its texture, to the matter which matters, interpretation appears iconic. Such interpretation discloses regard for the distinctive feature of literary discourse—Jakobsonian aesthetic function, which posits the second-degree iconicity[8] as the constitutive device of textual sequences, creating the specific mode of interaction between immediate and dynamic aspects of the sign. In this case, the interpretation (representamen) and the text-addresser (object) are connected by the principle of analogy/similarity.[9] Interpretation "partakes in the characters" of the object-addresser.

An attempt to semiotically classify different interpretations obliges one to remember that Peirce himself underlined the mixed character of the signs:

> Just as a photograph is an index having an icon incorporated into it, that is, excited in the mind by its force, so a symbol may have an icon or an index incorporated into it, that is, the active law that it is may require its interpretation to involve the calling up of an image, or a composite photograph of many images of past experiences, as ordinary common nouns and verbs do; or it may require its interpretation to refer to the actual surrounding circumstances of the occasion of its embodiment. (CP 4.447)

Each mode of sign interpretation includes the admixtures of others. Symbolic interpretation is grounded in the indexical one since it starts from relating the imaginary figures to the figures of the natural world. The iconic one opts for textual and intertextual indexicality rather than an extratextual one. The indexical dimension exists in all the modes of interpretation in distinct forms and proportions. However, as in the case of Jakobson's language functions, it is always the issue of dominance rather than unambiguous definiteness. Each literary text shapes the invitation for iconic interpretation, mirroring it as an artifice, yet each

[8] First-degree iconicity refers to the iconic relationship between the representamen and the dynamic object outside the text (e.g., in onomatopoeia). Second-degree iconicity refers to the relationship of resemblance/analogy between the representamen and the dynamic object within the text (on the difference, see Johansen, 2002, pp. 179–180).

[9] It is important to keep in mind that "Peircean iconicity is not restricted to visual nor perceptual similarity, nor to easily recognizable resemblance" (Stjernfelt, 2022, p. 163).

can be interpreted indexically or symbolically. In other words, actual interpreters—whether naïve readers or scholars—choose the mode for connecting the representamen with the object, depending on whether they acknowledge literature as a specific form of verbal discourse, and once acknowledged, how they conceive the specificity of this form.

To exemplify the tension between the artifice's invitation for iconic reading and the implemented readers' choices, I propose to look at Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*[10] since it is an extremely non-transparent text which triggers the reader's eye in the direct and figurative sense. It thematises the reading issue and continues to provoke interpretations that contradict one another. It allows for a plain showing of the theoretically discussed issues and helps to reveal how an actual reader's "aesthetic choice" influences meaning-making.

5. Nabokov's *Lolita*: Specificity of the Representamen

> My letterbox in the entrance hall belonged to the type that allows one to glimpse something of its contents through a glassed slit. Several times already, a trick of harlequin light that fell through the glass upon an alien handwriting had twisted it into a semblance of Lolita's script, causing me almost to collapse […]. (Nabokov, 1997, p. 261)

Lolita presents a confusing—multiplied and split, fragmented and assembled—vision. It opens with the foreword by the fictional editor John Ray, Jr. and continues with Humbert Humbert's confession—the provocative and verisimilar story wrapped up in the games with language and literary conventions. The foreword articulates three possible ways of its reception—"a novel", "a case history", and "a work of art" (Nabokov, 1997, pp. 6–7)—and comments on their differences. The editor briefly notes on the latter two and goes into more detail on it as a *novel*:

– As a work of art, *Lolita* "transcends its explanatory aspects" (p. 7).
– As a case history, *Lolita* "will become, no doubt, a classic in psychiatric circles" (p. 7).
– "Viewed simply as a novel, *Lolita* deals with situations and emotions that would remain exasperatingly vague to the reader had their expression been etiolated by means of platitudinous evasions" (p. 6).

The description of viewing *Lolita* as a *novel*, quite vague itself, is supplemented with differentiation of the several types of its readers (namely, robust philistine/prude, cynic, and learned) and their viewpoints:

[10] The issue of *Lolita*'s visuality in both English and Russian versions of the novel was partially discussed in my earlier paper (Melnikova, 2021).

– The prude will be shocked by the absence of "a single obscene term" and by the presence of scenes "that a certain type of mind might call 'aphrodisiac'"; here the editor uses the word "aphrodisiac" with a reference to Judge John M. Woolsey's 1933 decision on *Ulysses*, from which the word comes (1997, p. 6; see also Appel, 1991, p. 491).
– The cynic will compare it to commercial pornography that "makes the same claim" (1997, p. 6).
– The learned will assert that it is "a tempest in a test tube" since a lot of American adult males enjoy "the special experience 'H. H.' describes with such despair" (1997, p. 6–7).

All the viewpoints associate the novel with reality, revealing the indexical relationship between the representamens and "natural" objects, however, they presuppose different focus of attention: the prude's viewpoint is oriented towards the language and the details of the storyline (in which they will not find that which they expect), the cynic's viewpoint is oriented towards the theme of tabooed love, and that of the learned towards the character (with a reference to American males). This distinction is commented on by John Ray, Jr. who does not omit certain scenes to comfort the prude and does not accept the possibility of the diarist's ("H. H.") healing by a "competent psycho-pathologist" to save the learned from the disaster, since those actions "would forego the publication of *Lolita* altogether" (1997, p. 6) and would not let the book appear. The editor opposes *Lolita* as *a work of art* vs. *a novel*, articulates the opposition of the *book* vs. *storyline-theme-character*, and distinguishes the appraisal of the *book* and of the *character*. He glorifies the offensiveness of the book ("a great work of art […] by its very nature should come as a more or less shocking surprise"; 1997, p. 7) and condemns the offensiveness of the character (he is "horrible", "capricious", "abnormal"):

> A desperate honesty that throbs through his confession does not absolve him from sins of diabolical cunning. He is abnormal. He is not a gentleman. But how magically his singing violin can conjure up a tendresse, a compassion for Lolita that makes us entranced with the book while abhorring its author! (1997, p. 7)

To grasp the irony of the quoted description, which opposes the character ("not a gentleman") and his "singing violin" and relates his offensiveness to the "diabolical cunning", to conceive the further "interplay between reading and misreading" (Richardson, 2024, p. 136) in the confession of Humbert Humbert, which shows the characters (Charlotte, Dolores, Humbert Humbert and others) as readers, we need to understand what strategy of perception is proposed by the book, to perform diagrammatization.

Diagrammatizing sight reveals that *Lolita*'s representamen appears as a mirror-like heterogeneous structure with the dual title—*Lolita, or the Confession of a White Widowed Male*—resembling the dual structure of the text. The latter

consists of two visually opposed parts/narratives—the foreword and the "remarkable memoir" ("strange pages", "manuscript", "confession") that differ in font style and create visual opposition: italic in the foreword, regular in the manuscript. The foreword by a fictional John Ray Jr., Ph.D., tells the story of the appearance of *"Lolita"* and of its possible reception, and the memoir by Humbert Humbert tells the story of his love for Lolita—her appearance, disappearance, search, and reappearance in the form of Mrs "Richard F. Schiller". In turn, the foreword and the memoir are split into two parts. In the manuscript, the parts are marked by numbers (Part I and Part II), in the foreword, the split is structural: the first three paragraphs describe the circumstances of the manuscript's appearance, explain and/or mention the names of some characters, and announce the death of the two—"Humbert Humbert" and Mrs "Richard. F. Schiller"; the last three paragraphs articulate possible ways of reading the manuscript.

The duality of the novel's title and the doubled duality of textual structure iconically resemble the playful duality/doubleness of anthropomorphic characters (personages) and graphic characters (the elements of written language—letters, numerals, punctuation marks) that (have to) activate the reader's sight. This ingenious game opens and closes both the foreword and the "manuscript". The foreword's author John Ray, Jr., whose style of expression is very similar to that of Humbert Humbert and makes him Humbert's double (Narins, 2002, pp. 913–914), guesses that the decision to entrust him with editing the manuscript is related to his previous awarded work *Do the Senses make Sense?* (p. 5). This title reveals the polysemy—"Are sensations/feelings/meanings meaningful?"—which connects sensory and sensual perception with meaning and inspires the reader to see how the graphic characters configure the fictional world.

The foreword encloses in inverted commas the doubled name of the author, narrator, and protagonist of the manuscript ("Humbert Humbert", "H. H.") and all the names of the characters of his confession. However, the name of the fictional scholar Dr Blanche Schwarzmann and the names of the fictional and real representatives of the law, lawyer Clarence Choate Clark and Judge John M. Woolsey, are free from inverted commas. The foreword visually detaches those who act in the world created by "H. H." from those who exist in the space of creating and defending books. The sneer quotes of the foreword imply irony in establishing a visual boundary between the "reality" of the foreword and the imaginative fiction of the manuscript, the reality of creation and defence, and the fiction of the crime. The irony is shown to the reader in a quite short "epilogue" presented before H. H.'s story starts: John Ray, Jr. addresses those who see in a literary text a mirror of reality and mentions a few details about the further fate of the characters "for the benefit of old-fashioned readers who wish to follow the destinies of the 'real' people beyond the 'true' story" (p. 6). The foreword challenges the creation of the "illusion of reality" in the manuscript by putting in quotation marks not only the names of the characters of "H. H."'s story but also the words "real" and "true" as such.

Then, the foreword invites the reader to see not only the quotation marks but also the (graphic) specificity of the names. First, the name of the author of the foreword, who proposes to see the sense in the senses, is "*John Ray, Jr*.". His name outlines the mode of naming characters in the text titled by the name (*Lolita*). John Ray, Jr.'s name is doubled graphically and semiotically. It functions as

(1) a symbol since graphic characters form the word "ray", which means a beam of light or heat;

(2) an icon as a consequence of intertextual index since the name refers to and mirrors a name of a historical figure—a 17th-century naturalist John Ray, who is famous for creating classification systems in nature (Appel, 1991, p. 493); in the cases of intertextuality the text indexically connects and iconically resembles (the parts of) that to which it refers;

(3) an icon of itself, mirroring itself in repetition of initials J[ohn] R[ay] ↔ Jr.

The abbreviation Jr. graphically repeats John Ray's initials J. R., thus creating a second-degree icon that shows the "face" of a character as merely an assemblage of letters—and, in reverse order, the phenomenon of letters acquiring a "face". The doubled name of the "author-editor-publisher" maps the ways in which *Lolita*'s words create meaning, establishing the pattern of second-degree iconicity in the novel's texture. The text overshadows symbolicity with iconicity arising from textual and intertextual indexicality.

The foreword presents the names of two fictional writers—"Humbert Humbert" and "Vivian Darkbloom". The cognomen "Humbert Humbert" (which, in the confession, changes to Edgar H. Humbert, Humbert the Humble, Humbert the Terrible, Humberg, Homberg, Homburg, Humburg, Otto Otto, Mesmer Mesmer, Lambert Lambert, Jack Humbertson, etc.) is described as a mask "through which two hypnotic *eyes* seem to glow" (1997, p. 5; emphasis added). Pronouncing the word, the reader can hear and then see both "eye" and "I" (Narins, 2002, p. 922), connecting the same sound representamen with two different objects. Thus, the doubling of the name ("Humbert Humbert", "H. H.") creates an icon of seeing while simultaneously mirroring two different "I's"—that of Humbert the narrator and that of Humbert the character.

In the case of "Vivian Darkbloom", the reader also encounters a name that performs several semiotic functions. As an anagram of Vladimir Nabokov's name, it becomes an index and a visual icon, mirroring his name. The object of this icon is not the writer as a human but the name that marks and covers the works. John Ray, Jr. notes that "'Vivian Darkbloom' has written a biography, *My Cue*, to be published shortly", and "critics who have perused the manuscript call it her best book" (1997, p. 6). Meanwhile, Humbert-narrator reveals that "Cue" is a cognomen of Quilty (1997, pp. 273, 274, 277, 303). Thus, the reader is again invited to relate the graphic character/figure—the word "Cue"—to two different objects:

(1) the anthropomorphic character Quilty (Cue is Quilty's cognomen at the dude's "ranch about a day's drive from Elephant [Elphinstone]. Named? Oh, some silly name—Duk Duk Ranch"; 1997, p. 274);

(2) The graphic character Q: pronouncing "cue" encourages the perception of it as a Nabokovian homophone, linking "Cue" with "Q".

The second relationship discloses the ironic ambiguity of the title—*My Cue* = "My Q(uilty)" and not only makes Darkbloom's *Cue* an analogue of Nabokov's *Lolita*, but also puts on equal footing the book, the letter, and the character. *Lolita* ironically demonstrates that those who wish to equate the character with the author should associate Humbert not with Nabokov but with Vivian Darkbloom, the co-author of the playwright Quilty—though even then, they should associate him not with the author's person but with the "signature"—names and letters.

The names of those who defend (the publication and distribution of) the book(s)—Clarence Choate Clark and John M. Woolsey—also work like inverted commas: the first one indexically refers to and iconically resembles the name of the fictional figure Clare Quilty (Clarence Choate Clark—C. C. C. → Clare Quilty—C. Q.), and the second one marks an analogy in situation (with *Ulysses*), becomes its mirror-image.

Finally, the name that opens the foreword and the confession also closes the novel and becomes its title—Lolita. In the manuscript, the object of H. H.'s passion is named Dolores, shifting to Lo, Lola, Lolita, Dolly, Lottelita, Lolitchen, Carmen, Carmecita, etc. However, in the foreword, she is called Mrs "Richard F. Schiller". This surname, which H. H. first encounters in a letter requesting money when he moves to "Readsburg", where he "was to be entertained by some friends and admirers" (1997, p. 271), once more ironically points to literature (the German poet Friedrich Schiller), becoming an indexically appearing icon. The irony lies not only in linking Lolita with the German romantic poet, playwright and philosopher, who created the treatise on the role of art in society, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man,* with its conception of aesthetic freedom,[11] but also in questioning the gender. Just as the female "writer's" name (Vivian Darkbloom) mirrors the male writer's name (Vladimir Nabokov), the female character's name mirrors the male one. Those playful references erase gender—that which is social, personal, human, etc., reinforcing instead the literariness and textuality of names. The text has no gender, and, in the foreword, "Lolita" appears exclusively as a text. John Ray Jr. uses the proper noun "Lolita" only as the title of the "strange pages" enclosed in quotation marks—*"Lolita"*. The only instance where the name is mentioned not as the book's title and without quotation marks refers to a creature of Humbert-narrator's "singing violin" (1997, p. 7), thus, in fact, still referring to the book.

[11] Schiller does not place a moral burden on art, argues that "beauty calls us to play", and formulates an idea of aesthetic experience as a whole in itself. An overview is presented in Kimball's (2001).

The foreword presents "Lolita" not as a "human" figure but as a text—a work of art being created, read, and defended through publication. The opening of the confession continues and explains the game. It begins with an introduction and explanation of the name: "Lolita, light of my life, fire of my loins. My sin, my soul. Lo-lee-ta: the tip of the tongue taking a trip of three steps down the palate to tap, at three, on the teeth. Lo. Lee. Ta." (1997, p. 9). The opening repeats graphemes that provoke alliteration and clearly defines what Lolita is: a word composed of three syllables, pronounced as the tongue takes a three-step journey. The syllable "-lee-"/"Lee" links this word to the backstory of the literary female figure, referring to Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" and becoming its icon. In the same first chapter, Humbert quotes a line from Poe's poem, and, later, iconizes all the components of his story (events, characters, specific naming, motivations for their actions, causes of events, numerals, etc.) through intertextuality. All these elements become icons representing or imitating not living beings but literary figures, events, and other objects of culture that configure a new texture of/on passion and desire. The physical, sensual passion for a humanized character is replaced by the sensual passion for an embodied, configured, constructed, visualized *literary word* drawn from other literary texts. As Adam Piette argues, "[w]hat comes out of *Lolita*, finally, is the portrait of an intelligence whose only joy is to treat language as a kind of incarnate girl-child with whom he can play" (1996, p. 48). Thomas Karshan similarly observes:

> "Oh, my Lolita, I have only words to play with!" (32). In saying this, he [Humbert] is uttering a tautology in which Nabokov is guilty by association: Lolita's name suggests letters, *litterae* in Latin. She is the English language which Humbert, speaking for Nabokov, desires so perversely, and Humbert's play with, and love for, Lolita is an allegory for his, and Nabokov's, play with and love for the English language; Nabokov suggested as much when he called Lolita the record of his love affair with the English language. (Karshan, 2011, p. 170)

Karshan claims that "the main movement of Nabokov's American writing is towards free play" without rules (2011, p. 22). However, the configuration of *Lolita*'s representamen insistently shows that it is a game with rules exposed in the foreword and applied in the "confession". The foreword emphasizes the issue of senses and vision, modelling a chiastic-type structure (publication >< reading) grounded in structural splitting and a deliberate arrangement of mirrored figures. It employs a mode of naming the characters and objects, inviting a reader to connect the different perspectives of vision to create a "three-dimensional" figure. It creates a stream of quotation marks that serve not only as markers of detachment from reality but also as signs delineating another level of textual iconicity—its mirror-like intertextuality. It establishes other chiastic-type structures of *Lolita*'s whole: *foreword* >< *"strange pages"*, "real author-publisher" >< fictional author-narrator. Humbert Humbert's part of the text continues the game: it recruits letters, numbers, typeface, and inclusions-quotations in French that make the words opaque, at least to those who do not know French. It proposes to

see the "faces" in letters and numbers (as it happens, e.g., in the case of the playwright Quilty's car numbers "WS 1564" and "SH 1616" that "mirror" Shakespeare's figure).[12] It invites one to perceive the relationship between the numbers and signify them.

Lolita configures the text as a highly dense artifice, a body one must see. Its visual configuration creates a stained-glass pane from the pieces of the older windowpanes to create a picture of its own. The whole crumbles once one takes out (ignores) a piece (a device). The text shapes an insistent invitation for an iconic reading strategy—one that forms the representamen of a reading-sign as mirroring the text-object, which itself mirrors the others.

Diagrammatization, which brings into evidence the qualities of *Lolita*'s representamen (*what one sees as presented whole, a totality of textual representamens*), reveals what kind of interpretant (*what strategies of reading*—symbolic, indexical, or iconic) is proposed to relate representamen to the dynamic object (*semantic whole*). This proposition could be described in terms of Umberto Eco's semiotics (grounded in the Peircean approach), using his concepts of Model Author and Model Reader. Eco defines the Model Author as a set of instructions in its totality, a unit of objective textual (linguistic, discursive) strategies. This unit coincides with the intention of the text to produce a Model Reader, defined as "a possible reader *whose profile is designed by and within the text*", able to make conjectures about the intention of the Model Author (1990, pp. 52, 58–59, 128).[13] He explains that a "Model Reader entitled to try infinite conjectures" (1990, p. 59). In addition, Eco argues that a text tends to construct two Model Readers, or rather two levels/stages of reading—semantic and semiotic/aesthetic. The semantic one is related to the linear first reading, and the semiotic/aesthetic one to the re-reading in search of what kind of reader that particular text asks

---

[12] In the "interrelated combinations" "WS 1564" and "SH 1616" referenced by Humbert, Shakespeare's (WS/SH) birth and death dates are apparent, and the combinations "Q32888" or "CU88322" reveal the asymmetric identity of Q(uilty) and Cu(e):

> References—incompletely or incorrectly indicated—to the cars the fiend had hired for short laps between Wace and Elphinstone were of course useless; the license of the initial Aztec was a shimmer of shifting numerals, some transposed, others altered or omitted, but somehow forming interrelated combinations (such as "WS 1564" and "SH 1616", and "Q32888" or "CU88322") which however were so cunningly contrived as to never reveal a common denominator. (Nabokov, 1997, pp. 249–250)

[13] Eco's theoretical construct of the Model Reader may seem similar to Iser's concept of the implied reader. However, this similarity is misleading. The difference between the concepts, first, lies in the way they consider the text. For Iser, a text is a sum of narratively organized rhetorical devices—"perspectives" (the narrator, the characters, the plot, and the fictitious reader) that help the reader to produce the "ultimate meaning of the text—or the aesthetic object" (p. 98). For Eco, a text is a device, an existing physical and aesthetic object. Its discursive strategies in their totality potentially include the visual layer of written discourse and configure the profile of the Model Reader.

to become, and what "instructions" the Model Author inscribes to "explain" the request (Eco, 2005). The peculiarities of *Lolita*'s representamen as an artifice strongly invite a reader to connect the representamen and the object iconically and to explore distinct kinds of textural configurations and patterns to form a total sign-action.

6. *Lolita*'s Interpretations as Signs

In Eco's terms, the Model Author of *Lolita* has an intention to create a model reader who would completely accept the practice of iconic reading. However, despite any text construes "the type of reader who is supposed to cooperate in order to actualize the text such as the Model Author (that is, the objective textual strategy) wants it to be", as Eco notes, an actual reader can refuse to play the role of the Model one (1990, p. 128). *Lolita*'s interpretations reveal different interpretative strategies, depending on how one con-/per-ceives the text—an iconic representamen or a collection of symbolic signs. These strategies loosely correspond to those described by John Ray, Jr. (reading *Lolita* as a novel—a case history—a work of art). Two of them (a novel vs. a work of art) configure an opposition of conception vs. perception of the text, and the third one (a case history) becomes a consequence of conception. They are related to the following questions:

– how does one perceive the graphic body and/or the texture of Lolita? (John Ray, Jr.'s "work of art"—iconic reading);
– how does one conceive anthropomorphic bodies (Lolita, Humbert, etc.)? (John Ray, Jr.'s "novel"—indexical reading);
– how does one conceive the models of the relationship between anthropomorphic figures, and what can those models exemplify? (John Ray, Jr.'s "case history"—symbolic reading).

A general look at *Lolita*'s interpretations reveals the issue of the ethical dimension as a bone of contention in Nabokoviana. It may seem that this contention is related to the opposition of (discussing ethics) indexical vs. (discussing aesthetics) iconic reading, but it is not. One can find iconic interpretations in which the demonstrative aestheticism and ornateness of the text are associated with ethics; similarly, many indexical interpretations link ethics with aesthetics.

The iconic interpretations of *Lolita* represent re-reading in a search for a textural whole. They traverse all levels of iconization. On the first reading stage, they perform imaginization, revealing the symbolicity of representamens as deceit, and focus on the patterns that invite diagrammatization. Diagrammatization allows for seeing the logic of textual and intertextual indexicality in the structure of the whole, and results in the creation/understanding of iconic relationships. Only then does the phase of allegorization come: the reader chooses

the relevant interpretant and creates a semantic whole, an interpretation which resembles/mirrors the text-addresser in its totality.

Introduced by Alfred Appel, the iconic interpretations are presented, e.g., in the work of David Packman and Priscilla Meyer.[14] Packman (1982) acknowledges the extratextual indexicality (the "elements of realism") as a misleading trap, "false leads or snares" (p. 42), Nabokovian "cryptogrammic paper chase". He focuses on the textual "surface and structure" and shows how the textural games distract the reader from involvement with the characters, as well as how the text interrelates seriousness and playfulness/irony. He explains how the text moves from snapshots to filmic pieces to reveal the transformation of love, "for love demands not the fetish object, the fragmented, frozen image, but rather the narrative of the body, the classical trajectory Humbert evokes" (p. 50). The analysis allows him to interpret Lolita's body as only a literary text and Humbert's desire for Lolita as an image of the desire for (reading) literature, "desire represented in the text and the reader's desire for the text double each other" (p. 47). Meyer (2007) also grounds interpretation in the fabric of the perceptive whole. She analyzes various kinds of textual symmetry, functions of numbers, different representations of the metaphor of translation, principles of metamorphosis, intertextual strategies, and irony, permeating all the levels of the text. She evaluates the logic of iconic arrangement of different figures of discourse and then comes to allegorization—interprets *Lolita* as an Americanized paraphrase of *Eugene Onegin* (pp. 16–48). In both cases, the interpretative moves appear after identifying the logic of textural patterns. Despite the differences, both Packman's and Meyer's allegorization is rooted in the text as an artifice and mirrors the textural representamen.

Brian Ricardson (2024) iconically examines the modes in which *Lolita* embodies the tension between reading and misreading. He marks the foreword's role and reveals the effect of saturating intertextuality and the "oddly phrasing" of Humbert's manuscript. He shows how, while "brilliantly reproducing numerous realistic traits", the text persistently invites the reader to make an interpretative choice (p. 141). For example, in the case of a rhetorical question, "Did she have a precursor?"—the text requires determining "whether the word is used in the unusual, though expected sense of forerunner or predecessor, or in the strictly literary meaning of textual antecedent" (p. 139). He reveals how the text chooses the aesthetic reader and explains how the realistic scenario created on the level of imaginization, the excessive plausibility and verisimilitude of *Lolita*'s figures, determine the contradiction in the ethical/moral stance and the failure of an attempt to create a self-referential totality. Richardson's conclusion is based on Nabokov's afterword *On a Book Entitled Lolita*. With a reference to the afterword, which, in contrast to the foreword, is not a part of *Lolita*'s textural body,

[14] I do not intend to present a comprehensive overview of interpretations of the novel or even a comprehensive overview of those that interpret the inscription of the issue of reading into the novel. Instead, I limit examples to several works I consider representative to exemplify the semiotic models of reading.

he points to the contradiction in the "aesthetic stance"—in the ethical definition of art by ethical ("tenderness", "kindness") and human ("curiosity", "ecstasy") qualities. This interpretational move is irrelevant from the point of view of iconic reading and the reading model as such, since it underrates not only textual corporeality and the irony that saturates the whole but also the completeness of the text. However, it is precisely this move beyond the limits of the text that allows Richardson to conclude that, despite *Lolita* pretending to reduce "everything else to artifice", it is "immune to real-world ethical judgements" (p. 141). In this case, interpretation takes a step aside from iconic reading.

Indexical interpretations of *Lolita* are limited to imaginization, focusing on extratextual indexicality. Even when commenting on the aesthetics of language, they do not consider the text as differing from the other types of verbal discourse. They examine the text as a transparent rhetorical whole, which does not require any diagrammatization. For example, Robert Merrill (1979) reads the book as a novel of character. Trying to disprove Appel's claim on Nabokov's art as "artifice or nothing" and *Lolita* as parodying realistic tradition and its devotees (p. 447), he argues that the reading depends on how we respond to Humbert. Merrill attributes all the events in the fictional world to Humbert-narrator's experience or whimsy and reasons that "the nature of our involvement with Humbert, as well as with the other characters, will not support the conclusion that Lolita is 'about' literary originality, creative language, art in general, or any similar abstraction" (p. 454). Both Leland de la Durantaye and Marilyn Edelstein also look at Humbert Humbert as the character and consider the novel as representing "human" relationships. Such sight allows to interpret *Lolita* as "a moral book in the simple sense that from its first page to its last explicitly treats moral questions […]. Morality, moral choices, moral falterings, faults, failings, and failures make up the matter of the work" (Durantaye, 2007, p. 190). It provides a possibility to argue that *Lolita* inspires an ethical response from the reader and an analysis of the relation of the text to reality (Edelstein, 2008, p. 47). It lets Richard Rorty, who also "looks through the windowpane" and sees Humbert suffering, to state that the moral of the novel is "not to keep one's hands off little girls, but […] to notice what people are saying. For it might turn out, it very often does turn out, that people are trying to tell you that they are suffering" (1989, p. 164).

The indexical interpretation of Nomi Tamir-Ghez (1979) focuses on the complex linguistic structure of *Lolita* as a multi-level embedding of speech events and sophisticated rhetorical devices. Tamir-Chez explores how *Lolita* designs the incongruity of the speech situations, which receives an explanation at the end of the novel. *Lolita*'s linguistic structure here is seen as a sum of rhetorical devices, filtered through the character-narrator's voice. Humbert is treated as a character-narrator who uses direct arguments (e.g., psychological explanation) and indirect strategies (manipulating speech situations, addressing several audiences, etc.) and has complete control over discourse. Without any irony, almost repeating John Ray, Jr.'s words, Tamir-Chez argues that Nabokov uses Humbert's self-castigation and eventual realization of his guilt to evoke sympathy for him as

a human being, while ensuring the reader condemns his actions (p. 82). Humbert is seen as a character and a pawn in the author's game to achieve a balance between the reader's sympathy and moral condemnation and win: "Humbert at last wins us over, as the author intends him to" (p. 82). The interpretative sight of Tamir-Chez sees Humbert as a talking person and the author's figure with his intention, thus, reminds us of the intentional fallacy.

Leona Toker introduces the aspect that, on the one hand, reveals her reading as indexical, but on the other, explains the condition of such reading. She argues that *Lolita* provokes a cathartic effect; however, this effect is limited to the first reading since the re-reading yields to the aesthetic enjoyments. The cathartic effect (possible in what Eco calls "semantic reading") "derives from its promotion of our temporary sympathy for Humbert and inattentiveness to Dolly Haze and then in its making us modify our attitudes" (Toker, 1989, p. 202). She discusses the character and the rhetoric of the reader's entrapment, describes the metaphysical ethical background of the novel, and concludes that his self-conscious art has an intrinsic ethical dimension.

It is important to note that it does not matter what interpretive or axiological position readers take when they allegorize resting on imaginization only, equating Humbert Humbert with real human(s)—whether condemning Humbert's actions or explaining his "artistic aspirations" (Pifer, 1980, p. 166) and Humbert's passion for unattainable beauty (Josipovici, 1964), etc. Such reading remains indexical, tethered to extratextual indexicality.

Once a reader moves from indexical to symbolic interpretation, considers textual and extratextual indexicality, conceives the text as an exemplification of a system of ideas, and applies external ideological systems or models, we also see allegorization that omits diagrammatization. Symbolic interpretations appear in different *Lolita* criticism fields that examine literature through ideological lenses. E.g., the representative of the feminist approach, Linda Kauffman, explores Humbert-narrator's angle of vision (male gaze)—the ways the narrator objectifies and sexualizes Lolita while she is deprived of the right to have a voice, therefore, personality, feelings, and experiences. Kauffman argues that Nabokov's attempt to create an exclusively aesthetic, self-referential totality fails since he configures a world and characters that refer to reality, that are representational. She invites readers to set Lolita free of the shadows of Humbert's blinding rhetoric and dismantle "the misogyny of traditional critical assessments of Lolita's wantonness […]. Lolita is not a photographic image, or a still life, or a freeze frame preserved on film, but a damaged child" (p. 148). Likewise, Sarah Herbold (1998/1999) argues that Nabokov's novel manipulates its readers, but its "manipulativeness, sexiness, and difficulty are as complimentary to women as they are insulting"; Nabokov "challenges women not to remain victims and acknowledges his dependence on their considerable power" (p. 75). They both propose looking through the "windowpane" and judging the relationship between the figures using the conventions of the feminist approach.

Keith Wilhite's (2014/2015) interpretation represents an example of a different kind of ideological approach. Wilhite argues that the assessment of the contention between moralistic and aesthetic responses "depends upon how we interpret our role as readers—whether we feel we have been conscripted to condemn or absolve Humbert, to resist or embrace the pleasure of *his* text" (p. 3; emphasis added). He acknowledges Humbert as a "person", and *Lolita* as Humbert's text, and inscribes this text—Humbert's confession—into the postwar discourses on politics, aesthetics, and sexuality. Wilhite extends the field of discussion, reads both Humbert and events within a context of Cold War-era urge to classify sexual, parental, and marriage identities, and develops the examination within the context of "advice literature".

In turn, the approach of narrative ethics reveals another aspect of the ideological treatment of literature. This approach considers literature as a space for ethical engagement of the reader through rhetorical devices and shows how a narrative introduces ethics. However, not without a reason Alexander Spektor (2020), who analyzes narrative ethics in Nabokov (and Dostojevsky), does not examine *Lolita*, which extremely complicates the communicating figures and makes it almost impossible to identify the distribution of power between rhetorical devices and other (first—visual) elements of the text that are incongruous with any "human-like" figure of discourse (e.g., that of naming). To sum up, symbolic interpretations see *Lolita*'s representamen as a net of relationships between the characters, as a set of rhetorical devices that distribute power, and connect it to the object (semantic whole) using the interpretant representing precepts of one or another ideology.

7. Conclusion

The transformation of the text-representamen into a sign-action—icon, index, or symbol—in interpretation depends on the dynamic interpretant chosen to connect the representamen with the dynamic object. In literary works, this choice hinges on whether the readers (dis)acknowledge the text's self-referential (aesthetic) function and, if acknowledged, how they understand it. *Lolita* excessively emphasizes its artificiality and corporeality and, at the same time, combines it with a verisimilar plot. The former suppresses the latter to such an extent that the invitation to read iconically is almost impossible not to notice, and the sequences of its acknowledgement or dis-acknowledgement are crucial for meaning-making. In an artifice that minimizes the role of perceptible texture, the iconic and indexical interpretations may look similar: the choice of the mode does not produce such interpretational conflict as in *Lolita*'s case. Even so, they do not coincide since one considers diagrammatization, which can change the direction and principles of meaning-making, and the other does not.

Readers who acknowledge literature as a specific type of discourse and understand that aesthetic function covers the textural fibre in its totality, move from imaginization to diagrammatization that allows understanding of how the text

structures meaning-making, how it creates intertextual patterns, what actions from the part of the reader it presupposes and how these actions influence the shifts in signification—read *iconically*. Their allegorization process is grounded in the gradual *perception* and conceptualization of the self-referential whole. In this case, the choice of an interpretant is determined by how a text structures relations that initiate and verify iconic signification. Furthermore, the actual reader's figure determines the flexibility of interpretation since different readers may focus on different regularities and patterns and have different memory capacities. The meaning-making process proceeds iconically but alters the direction and lets one outline allegorization in a different manner. Such interpretations complement rather than oppose one another.

Readers who disacknowledge literary text as a specific type of discourse or understand it as covering a sum of narratively organized rhetorical devices, read *indexically* or *symbolically*. Both move to symbolic allegorization, omitting the level of diagrammatization. Both are based on extratextual indexicality (usually omitting the intertextual one), unless indexical reading explores how it works inside the text, and the symbolic one applies the systems of scholarly ideas to explain this work.

However, the indexical frame for interpretation paradoxically connects vastly different approaches, including the "naïve" reading, various rhetorical methods, and the classical narrative semiotics of Algirdas J. Greimas, which is fundamentally rooted in Saussurean theory. All of these approaches examine literature as verbal texts that do not differ fundamentally from other forms of verbal communication. The difference lies in the awareness of the structured nature of these messages; while a naïve reader may not recognize the text as a structured message, those employing rhetorical methods, as demonstrated in the interpretation examples, are conscious of this structure. Similarly to rhetorical approaches, narrative semiotics examines not only the relationships among the characters and events in the plot but also how the text organizes its content, though in a more rigorous manner. The classical Greimasian narrative semiotics methodically separates the text from the actual reader and the wider cultural context. The object of such reading becomes the meaning of the text that emerges as a dense "filter" characterized by an isomorphism of content and expression (for which the matter does not matter), allowing for the search and reconstruction of values and deep axiology. The meaning here is shaped by the reader's predefined competencies and the assumption of symmetry between the addresser and the addressee as actants engaged in the content. Such symmetry as the basis for seeking values is crucial in analysing discourses with a dominant referential (denotative) function. Yet the artifice establishes their asymmetry, at least to some extent, even in realistic prose. This asymmetry can play a crucial role in the process of meaning-making, much like the nature of the artifice itself.

REFERENCES

Appel, A. (1991). *Vladimir Nabokov. The Annotated Lolita. Revisited and Updated*. New York: Vintage ebooks.

Barthes, R. (1989). From Work to Text. In R. Barthes, *The Rustle of Language* (pp. 56–64). Berkley, Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Deledalle, G. (2000). *Charles S. Peirce's Philosophy of Signs: Essays in Comparative Semiotics*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Durantaye, L. de la. (2007). *Style is Matter: The Moral Art of Vladimir Nabokov*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Eco, U. (1968). *La struttura assente: Introducione alla ricerca semiologica* [The Absent Structure: Introduction to Semiological Research]. Milano: Bompiani.

Eco, U. (1990). *The Limits of Interpretation*. Bloomington, Indianapolis: IUP.

Eco, U. (2005). Intertextual Irony and Levels of Reading. In U. Eco, *On Literature* (pp. 212–235). London: Secker & Warburg.

Edelstein, M. (2008). Teaching *Lolita* in a Course on Ethics and Literature. In Z. Kuzmanovich, G. Diment (Eds.), *Approaches to Teaching Nabokov's Lolita* (pp. 43–48). New York: The Modern Language Association.

Herbold, S. (1998/1999). "(I Have Camouflaged Everything, My Love)": Lolita and the Woman Reader. *Nabokov Studies*, *5*, 71–98. doi:10.1353/nab.2011.0023

Iser, W. (1978). *The Act of Reading.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Jakobson, R. (1987). Linguistics and Poetics. In K. Pomorska, S. Rudy (Eds.), *Language in Literature* (pp. 62–94). Cambridge, London: HUP.

Jakobson, R. (1987a). On Linguistic Aspects of Translation. In K. Pomorska, S. Rudy (Eds.), *Language in Literature* (pp. 428–435). Cambridge, London: HUP.

Johansen, J. D. (2002). *Literary Discourse. A Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature*. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.

Johansen, J. D. (2009). Structuralism and/or the Semiotic-Pragmatic Approach to Literature. In H. Veivo, Ch. Ljungberg, J. D. Johansen (Eds.), *Redefining Literary Semiotics* (pp. 12–32). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Josipovici, G. D. (1964). "Lolita": Parody and the Pursuit of Beauty. *Critical Quarterly*, *6*(1), 35–48. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8705.1964.tb01211.x

Karshan, Th. (2011). *Vladimir Nabokov and the Art of Play*. Oxford: OUP. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199603985.001.0001

Kauffman, L. (1989). Framing Lolita: Is There a Woman in the Text? In P. Yaeger, B. Kowalski-Wallace (Eds.), *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy* (pp. 131–152). Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press.

Kimball, R. (2001). Schiller's "Aesthetic Education". *The New Criterion*, *19*. Retrieved from: https://newcriterion.com/article/schilleras-ldquoaesthetic-educationrdquo/

Melnikova, I. (2021). (Skaitymo) ikoniškumas. *Lolita* [Iconicity (of Reading). Lolita]. *Semiotika*, *16*, 24–65. doi: 10.15388/Semiotika.2021.8

Merrill, R. (1979). Nabokov and Fictional Artifice. *Modern Fiction Studies*, *25*(3), 439–462.

Meyer, P. (1988). *Find What the Sailor Has Hidden*. *Vladimir Nabokov's "Pale Fire"*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press.

Nabokov, V. (1997). *Lolita*. London: Penguin Books.

Narins, J. W. (2002). "Lolita", narrativnaia struktura i predislovie Dzhona Reia ["Lolita", Narrative Structure and the Foreword by John Ray]. In B. Averin et al. (Eds.), *V. V. Nabokov: Pro et Contra* (Vol. 2, pp. 908–923). Sankt-Peterburg: Izdatel'stvo Russkogo Khristianskogo gumanitarnogo instituta.

Nöth, W. (2015). Three Paradigms of Iconicity Research in Language and Literature. In M. K. Hiraga, W. J. Herlofsky, K. Shinohara, K. Akita (Eds.), *Iconicity: East Meets West. Iconicity in Language and Literature* 14 (pp. 13–34). Amsterdam, Philadelphia: John Benjamins. doi:10.1075/ill.14.01not

Ortega y Gasset, J. (2019). The Dehumanisation of Art. In J. Ortega y Gasset, *The Dehumanisation of Art and Other Essays on Art, Culture, and Literature*, (pp. 3–56). Princeton, New York: Princeton University Press.

Packman, D. (1982). *Vladimir Nabokov: The Structure of Literary Desire*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.

Peirce, Ch. S. (1977). [SS] *Semiotics and Significs*. *The Correspondence Between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby*. Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press.

Peirce, Ch. S. (1994). [CP] *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Peirce, Ch. S. (1998). [EP] *Essential Peirce. Selected Philosophical Writings*. (Vol. 2). Bloomington, Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Piette, A. (1996). *Remembering and the Sound of Words: Mallarmé, Proust, Joyce, Beckett*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pifer, E. (1980). *Nabokov and the Novel*. Cambridge, MA: HUP.

Richardson, B. (2024). *The Reader in Modernist Fiction* (pp. 135–145). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rorty, R. (1989). The Barber of Kasbeam: Nabokov on Cruelty. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (pp. 141–168). Cambridge: CUP.

Tamir-Ghez, N. (1979). The Art of Persuasion in Nabokov's Lolita. *Poetics Today*, *1*(1/2), 65– 83.

Spektor, A. (2020). *Reader as Accomplice: Narrative Ethics in Dostoevsky and Nabokov. Studies in Russian Literature and Theory*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Stjernfelt, F. (2022). *Sheets, Diagrams, and Realism in Peirce*. Berlin, Boston: Walter de Gruyter.

Toker, L. (1989). "Reader! Bruder!": Broodings on the Rhetoric of Lolita. In L. Toker, *Nabokov. A Mystery of Literary Structures* (pp. 198–227). Ithaca, London: Cornell University Press.

Veivo, H. (2007). The New Literary Semiotics. *Semiotica*, *165*, 41–55. doi: 10.1515/SEM.2007.031

Veivo, H. (2009). Dicent, Indexicality, and the Rhetoric of Literary Texts. In H. Veivo, Ch. Ljungberg, J. D. Johansen (Eds.), *Redefining Literary Semiotics* (pp. 161–181). Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Wilhite, K. (2014/2015). Aggressive Tendencies: Lolita and the Conscripted Reader. *Nabokov Studies*, *13*, 1–29. doi:10.1353/nab.2014.0006

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 65–80
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.05

Article

GILMAR ADOLFO HERMES *

PACARRETE: THE AESTHETICS OF THE SCREEN IN JOURNALISTIC TEXTS

SUMMARY: This article addresses how aesthetic aspects appear in cultural journalism focused on Brazilian films. The aesthetic question is semiotically identified based on the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Observing films and analyzing them through textual approaches directed toward the realm of meaning, as defined by Peirce through the phenomenological category of Firstness, poses a challenge. This study considers the film *Pacarrete* (2019), directed by Allan Deberton, which won eight awards at the 2019 Gramado Film Festival. There are various signs within the cinematic realm and the specific production that journalists can articulate. It is observed how signs that align with an approach rooted in Firstness relate to other types of signs. As with all communication between humans, much of the film generates meanings within the phenomenological category of Thirdness, using symbols, words, and elements shaped by diverse cultural manifestations, but a closer attention to aesthetic aspects can offer a different perspective for journalistic approaches.

KEYWORDS: semiotics, cultural journalism, Brazilian cinema, aesthetics.

1. Introduction

This research aims to semantically observe how the film *Pacarrete* (2019) is aesthetically constructed and how aspects related to sensibility are addressed in journalistic texts about it. It is understood that aesthetic aspects—those oriented

* Federal University of Pelotas, Faculty of Journalism. E-mail: ghermes@yahoo.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-1064-3996.

toward sensibility—are the most characteristic features of all artistic production, including cinema, and therefore deserve emphasis in journalistic approaches. One of the paths explored by theorists to analyze the aesthetics of films is to reflect on their constitution as language and signs. In this regard, the semiotic concepts of Charles Sanders Peirce offer valuable insights for understanding aesthetics and considering this aspect of human thought and creativity in filmmaking. In this study the aim is to observe how these productions are semiotically constituted in aesthetic terms, and to assess the validity and relevance of a journalistic approach from this perspective, based on the analysis of journalistic texts that have, in fact, focused on the films in question.

The film *Pacarrete* (2019), directed by Allan Deberton, derives its title from its protagonist, a retired art teacher living in a typical small town in Brazil's northeastern region. Residing with her ailing sister, Pacarrete dreams of performing a ballet piece herself at the city's anniversary celebration, inspired by video images of Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881–1931). Throughout the film, signs generate semioses that connect to the Brazilian context, the representation of hegemonic European culture in the collective imagination, and the coexistence of realism and fantasy in the narrative centered on the main character.

The confrontation between signs associated with high culture and popular culture takes place within the protagonist's life context. The retired teacher still dreams of performing classical ballet, particularly at the city's event, which features only a *forró*[1] music program. Since the film materializes a clash between the values of both high and popular culture, journalistic texts emphasize these mediated aspects. However, the aesthetic elements tend to manifest primarily in interpretations of the main character, as portrayed by actress Marcélia Cartaxo. It is considered that the main aesthetically charged signs—those potentially more relevant in a journalistic text focused on the arts, such as cinema—are those that tend to produce abductive semioses.

2. A Semiotic Perspective on Aesthetics

In defining the characteristics of everything that manifests as existent, whether in the real or imaginary realms, Peirce (1993) identified three phenomenological categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Within his conceptual framework, Peirce developed a series of semiotic terms that assist in addressing aesthetic issues, particularly concerning the category of Firstness. This category encompasses types of signs known as qualisigns, icons, and rhemes (Deledalle, 1990; Santaella, 2000).

In the aesthetic analysis of films, Peirce's concepts are related in this research to approaches involving the reading and creation of images (Dondis, 1973) and

[1] *Forró* is a style of popular music and dance that originated in the north-east of Brazil, but which is now popular all over the country. The instruments which feature in *forró* are the accordion, the bass drum and the triangle, and it is danced with a partner.

cinematic language (Aumont, 1983; Bordwell, Thompson, 2010). A semiotic perspective is also applied to the analysis of journalistic texts, with this study focusing on the actions of signs related to aesthetics.

The concept of the qualisign, formulated by Peirce (1993), helps to understand what constitutes aesthetic specificity. This type of sign, concerning the representamen (the sign itself), corresponds to what can exist—a possibility or a tendency—but which has not yet clearly manifested as such. In situations where a sign manifests as an actual existence, it becomes a sinsign, an occurrence. Thus, the concept of the qualisign, addressing a possibility rather than an occurrence, is connected to the notion of abduction—a form of reasoning related to generating new ideas, which is of interest to both the arts and the sciences.

It is also important to highlight that when a sign fully manifests as something perceptible and is still strongly characterized by its sensory attributes related to aesthetics, it is considered an iconic sinsign. This type of sign relates to its dynamic object through relations of similarity, based on its observable qualities, as is typical of an icon. Among the types of interpretants it can generate, the one most strongly linked to sensibility and the production of new ideas is the rhematic iconic sinsign. In analyzing a film with a focus on aesthetic aspects, we can observe the iconic sinsigns present in the film and hypothesize possible aesthetic interpretants—rhematic iconic sinsigns—generated by the audience.

Sinsigns can be understood as replicas of legisigns—that is, manifestations of habits, conventions, or logical generalities—and they generate semioses even in this form. However, one of the powers of cinematic language, particularly from an aesthetic perspective, is its ability to present signs in motion and within a specific duration. This dynamic quality enhances the production of meaning as occurrences in time and space, making them true sinsigns.

To observe the iconic sinsigns in cinematic production, studies on imagery and cinematic language are combined. Donis A. Dondis (1973) prompts us to examine images in their abstract, representational, and symbolic aspects. Using Peirce's definition of the qualisign as corresponding to aesthetic feeling as an initial reference, Dondis's abstract level is the most relevant for analysis. By defining the abstract level, Dondis (1973) guides us to examine the composition of images, paying attention to the dots, lines, shapes, tones, contrasts, colors, definition, regularity, irregularity, and other elements.

Jacques Aumont and his collaborators (e.g., Alain Bergala, Marc Vernet and Michel Marié), in the reference work *L'Esthetique du film* (1983) lead us to observe productions through concepts intrinsic to cinematic language, such as field, off-field, sharpness, focus, out of focus, shot, framing, types of shots, camera movements, sound, editing, relationship between shots, and so forth.

In this study, the analysis of the film is conducted using these concepts and definitions as guides for an analytical perspective. By observing certain iconic sinsigns—some with a clear configuration of objects and others with a more abstract character—it is possible to hypothesize about potential abductive reasoning the film may generate through its aesthetic elements. In journalistic texts,

attention is given to how aesthetic elements are addressed, using these conceptual frameworks, and whether they suggest ideas—new or otherwise—through these aspects.

3. Aesthetic Aspects in the Film *Pacarrete*

The main character in the film is played by actress Marcélia Cartaxo, who gained significant acclaim for her role in *Hour of the Star* (1985), a production based on Clarice Lispector's novel and directed by Suzana Amaral. This film is considered a classic of Brazilian cinema, for which Marcélia received the Best Actress awards at the Brasília Film Festival (1985) and the Berlin International Film Festival (1986), where she became the first Brazilian actress to win the Silver Bear. Since then, she has appeared in dozens of films, with *Pacarrete* being one of her most recent works. As an actress with visibility and a distinguished career, Marcélia carries a cinematic significance tied to the expectations surrounding the performances of renowned actors. According to Marc Vernet (1983), it is the actors and their qualities that give materiality to the characters in a screenplay. Vernet notes that "the fiction film character does not exist in its own, being dependent upon the traits of a given actor" (Vernet, 1983, p. 107). Thus, much of the expressiveness of the central character in *Pacarrete* stems from the talent and representativeness of the actress, combined with the aesthetic work of the cameras, lighting, set design, costumes, and other elements.

One of the aspects that aesthetically distinguishes the film *Pacarrete* from an abstract perspective (Dondis, 1973) is its use of colors and luminosity, with predominantly lighter tones. Throughout much of the film, warm saturated colors—such as orange and red—dominate the settings, objects, and costumes. Darker tones, emphasized through lighting and contrast, are reserved for the more dramatic moments involving conflict or crisis experienced by the characters. These iconic sinsigns closely align with qualisigns and, by evoking sensations, tend to generate rhematic interpretants in viewers.

The constant heat typical of the northeastern Brazilian climate is conveyed primarily through the colors and luminosity. It is worth noting that films are audiovisual products composed exclusively of visual and auditory signs. Other senses, such as touch, smell, and taste, can only be suggested through synesthesia, where one sense generates semioses corresponding to another. In this case, the interpretants of the rhematic type, closely tied to sensations, are produced by visual and auditory signs.

The opening scene features Pacarrete (played by Marcélia Cartaxo) dancing on the sidewalk in front of her home. The façade of the house, where she lives with her sister Chiquinha (Zezita Matos), is painted in a saturated orange color, and the character wears a red outfit. The brightness of the façade is enhanced by the tonal contrast with the neighboring shop. Additionally, the shadows of Pacarrete's movements on the ground, juxtaposed with the sunlight, emphasize the natural lighting and add expressiveness to the scene. The introduction to the

character, seen by the audience for the first time, is achieved progressively through a sequence of shots—from medium shots to close-ups—culminating in a close-up of her face.

There is only a slow camera movement in the opening scene, highlighting one of the film's prevailing aesthetic features: the minimal use of camera movement. The editing relies primarily on transitions between shots through cuts, avoiding long sequences with dynamic camera movements. The composition and organization of framed objects generate semioses both representationally—providing an understanding of the space and the characters' actions—and symbolically. Throughout the film, certain elements, such as the sidewalk in front of the house, are introduced and reintroduced to produce metaphorical semioses. The way the iconic sinsign "sidewalk" is depicted, associated with the actions of Pacarrete and other characters, gradually suggests semioses that culminate in the film's fantastical conclusion.

It is important to note that the iconic sinsign "sidewalk" generates semioses as a legisign, functioning as a logical generality, as is the case with many objects that compose cinematic imagery. Michel Marie (1983) writes that cinematic language becomes intelligible when we recognize objects, but this identification involves "situating [them] in a class", which constitutes an "iconic naming" and, in Peircean terms, corresponds to a legisign. Marie states, "a person's vision selects the object's pertinent traits, thereby assimilating the object with a social classification" (Marie, 1983, p. 153). The author also explains that the semiosis of objects (iconic sinsigns) is influenced by editing, encompassing the relationships between objects within each shot—"the internal composition of an image"—as well as the sequence in which objects appear in the film. For instance, "an object appears in a film a few moments after another", where the relationship between objects in consecutive shots creates meaning, with each sequence involving the interplay of one object with another.

The character Pacarrete is introduced in the very first scene, setting the stage for the story to unfold. Throughout the film, she is revealed through images, actions, transitions across spaces, interactions with other characters, and dialogues. Her traits, aspirations, history, past, frustrations, dreams, allies, and antagonists (whose roles can often shift) are portrayed. With her modulated voice—at times shrill and raspy—Pacarrete is perpetually on the defensive, striving to assert herself as someone who holds a privileged place in the cultural realm due to her artistic knowledge.

Pacarrete dreams of a close connection with France, reflected in her very name, which appears to be a Portuguese adaptation of the French word *pâquerette* (daisy). However, she is deeply immersed in the cultural context of the Brazilian Northeast. Her clothing, in particular, serves as a localized interpretation of French culture, with its semiosis conveyed through the specific colors and patterns of her outfits. The use of the clochê hat underscores her aspiration to be recognized as a representative of French culture, as this accessory was a modern hallmark of French women in the early 20th century. Thus, the character can be

understood as existing at the crossroads of two cultural systems: French and Brazilian modes of dress.

One of the first scenes reveals the interior of the house where Pacarrete and her sister live, cared for by their domestic worker, Maria (played by Soia Lira). The setting is accompanied by a soundtrack of French music, reflecting Pacarrete's personal taste, as she listens to vinyl records throughout the film. Her sister admires her when she plays the piano, and the house is decorated with objects that convey a sense of artistic refinement, including watercolor paintings by Pacarrete herself. However, this artistic taste is also infused with a kitsch sensibility, featuring figurines and mass-produced reproductions of works by European artists.

One of the characters who will become Pacarrete's allies throughout the story is Miguel, the owner of the local store (portrayed in a special appearance by actor João Miguel). During Pacarrete's first walk through the town, she passes by the storefront bearing the sign "Bar do Miguel", once again featuring saturated red tones. Miguel embraces Pacarrete's friendship and appears to be one of the few characters who understands and appreciates her admiration for French culture.

Pacarrete moves through a typical Brazilian public market, where meat is openly displayed for sale, creating a striking contrast with her ostensibly sophisticated demeanor. Wearing a hat adorned with ribbons and an embroidered dress, she converses in one of the early scenes with the town's female mayor, who will become her primary antagonist. The head of the local government rejects Pacarrete's proposal to perform a ballet presentation during the town's anniversary celebration. Despite this, the determined dancer persists, carrying her idea to its ultimate consequences.

Pacarrete's clothing often features warm colors that contrast sharply with the cooler tones worn by the other characters. The first instance where the protagonist is seen wearing darker tones is during a scene where she practices ballet exercises at home, in a dedicated space equipped with a barre and mirror. The "mirrors" become significant objects (sinsigns iconic) with a metaphorical dimension throughout the narrative, reflecting the complexity of Pacarrete's feelings about her identity in familial, cultural, social, and emotional contexts. Her "ballet slippers", another symbol representing the art of ballet, appear, disappear, and reappear, intensifying the tension surrounding her desire to perform a dance recital.

Abstract elements in the scenes depicting Chiquinha's health struggles, Pacarrete's sister, generate semioses. The lighting shifts to darker and more contrasting tones when the two are in the bedroom. Pacarrete lies in a hammock while Chiquinha, bedridden, asks for assistance to urinate. The intimacy between the sisters unfolds across various scenes, ultimately leading to a tragic conclusion. Their dialogues reveal the nature of their relationship, alternating between lighter moments, depicted with brighter tones, and more somber ones, marked by darker tones and pronounced lighting contrasts.

In a seamstress's clothing shop, Pacarrete is seen wearing a red cloche hat. She declares her desire to resemble Anna Pavlova as she commissions a ballet costume. The seamstress replies, "It will be expensive!" The retired teacher's artistic aspirations are expressed amidst the noise of a loudspeaker truck on the street, announcing her main competitors for the city's anniversary celebration: *forró* and *sertanejo*[2] music. These elements serve as signs of contemporary popular culture and musical preferences, contrasting sharply with Pacarrete's more classical artistic ideals.

The name "Anna Pavlova"[3] is a sinsign that carries with it a rich history, not only in ballet but also in the context of this art form's relationship with Brazil. The Russian ballerina, who lived from 1881 to 1931, is regarded as a symbol of classical ballet and its popularization in the 20th century.

Pacarrete reveres the image of Pavlova performing *The Dying Swan* at home on a VHS tape. The short-lived image of Pavlova that has survived to this day is like a small jewel, kept under seal by the protagonist among her possessions. It represents all the power that classical dance can hold for her and for others who think the same way. The black-and-white footage of this performance on the video screen serves as a major reference for her aspirations as a ballerina. However, as Pacarrete practices in front of the screen under Chiquinha's admiration, the tape breaks. Miguel, who comes to her aid, is called upon to repair the precious recording of Pavlova's performance. The scene where Miguel fixes the tape takes place at the kitchen table, mostly bathed in warm, bright colors. The kitchen serves as a meeting space for the characters and also a place where their conflicts are expressed.

Another encounter takes place between Pacarrete and the mayor, this time on the street. When Pacarrete spots the authority figure passing by in a car, whom she had been previously prevented from speaking to, she leaps in front of the vehicle and enters as soon as the door opens. The two argue inside the moving car, and Pacarrete physically assaults the mayor, pulling her hair, before being thrown out onto the road.

In the next sequence, one of the film's most expressive scenes unfolds, with the protagonist alone on the road, disfigured, her hair tangled, walking towards the ruins of a factory with brick chimneys. She encounters a poodle, initially appearing to be more of an adversary, seemingly ready to judge and condemn her.

The factory in ruins serves as a sinsign, creating a metaphor for the protagonist's feeling of defeat, having seen her dream of performing at the city festival shattered in the previous sequence. As she walks through the interior of the

---

[2] *Sertanejo* is a Brazilian music genre that originated in the 1920s countryside. It is similar to country music in the United States, with similar musical elements and clothing. The lyrics generally depict the beauty of the countryside in contrast with city life. The music often features acoustic instruments like the accordion and the guitar.

[3] Anna Pavlova is especially known for her iconic solo role in *The Dying Swan*. Among her many performances, she visited Brazil in 1918, performing in Belém do Pará, and again in 1920, in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

building, the camera is positioned from above in a high-angle shot, pointing directly downward, making her appear as though she is at the bottom of a well. In this sequence, set in a scene of destruction, darker lighting tones prevail. Extreme close-ups reveal the wrinkles on her face. With her silhouette in backlight, she leaves the place, now holding the dog that has become her new ally.

Upon returning home, she finds her sister, worried, sitting in her wheelchair. Chiquinha inquiries about the cut on her face, which appears in the foreground, and about the dog she brought in with her. In this dialogue, a frequent aesthetic choice in the film becomes evident in conversation scenes: the listener is kept out of focus while the speaker remains in focus. This adds a special flavor to the dialogues. Pacarrete vents about the end of her dream, and her sister consoles her:

> "You were a teacher, you learned to sing, play the piano, dance; you have always loved applause since you were little".
>
> "I scream, and no one hears me, that's why I scream so much", responds the protagonist.
>
> "You hear me, don't you, Chiquinha?"

Pacarrete's sister dies suddenly in the following scenes, as if she had simply fallen asleep. Gradually, the protagonist begins to realize her sister's death, with the tragic nature of the moment being portrayed through a darker and more expressive aesthetic. She carries her sister's body to the bedroom, where a Christian cross on the wall becomes a prominent feature, along with heightened tonal contrasts, with darker shades prevailing. Pacarrete slowly comes to terms with her sister's death as she feels the coldness of her skin. The camera captures her from above, showing her walking quickly and disoriented inside the house. She then runs frantically to wash the sidewalk, an iconic *sinsign* that recurs in other scenes and symbolizes her relationship with society or the public space. The actress's expressiveness in portraying the character's grief becomes increasingly powerful, especially starting from the sequence in the abandoned factory. As she cleans the sidewalk, embodying her feelings of mourning and distress, she weeps and moves her entire body while scrubbing the ground with a brush.

The film does not detail the funeral rituals for the sister, instead employing a time ellipsis. In the following scene, light reappears with Maria's presence as she brings Pacarrete her ballerina outfit, previously left in the mayor's car. Maria bathes Pacarrete in the house's inner garden, mirroring the way Pacarrete had bathed Chiquinha in one of the film's opening scenes. The protagonist's grief is grotesquely expressed in another scene where she urinates in the garden, with the adopted dog by her side.

In another sequence, Miguel is by her side. A time ellipsis is employed, which becomes clear as the scene unfolds. The setting is unrecognizable, leaving the viewer unsure if it is Pacarrete's house or Miguel's bar. Gradually, it becomes apparent that the kitchen, previously seen as colorful and bright, has transformed into a dark and grimy space. Miguel, seated in the foreground, comments on the changes in his store due to the ongoing city anniversary festivities. A perspective

line runs from Miguel to Pacarrete, who sits sorrowfully at the center of the table, positioned lower than him. The light focuses more intensely on the protagonist. Miguel feeds the depressed woman and says,

> "You need to eat. I'm selling cake now too. I won't charge you anything. You are my love". He adds, "Pacarrete, it's been so long since you've stepped outside".

In another sequence, Pacarrete's face is shown in an extreme close-up, reflected in the mirror of a music box with a small ballerina doll spinning inside. Her disorientation is depicted in the scene where she fills a box with jewelry and cash, then buries it in the garden, glancing around to see if anyone is watching. Seated in her rocking chair with the dog in her lap and her late sister's empty wheelchair in the background, she hears the doorbell ring. She goes to the door and sees children shouting and running away, as they often do to tease her by ringing the bell. However, this annoyance compels her to get up, see the sunlight again, and feel the urge to go outside. She visits a children's store, where white dominates the decor and products. There, she buys a crib and toys for the dog she has nicknamed He-Man, whom she now treats as if he were her own child.

The city's anniversary festivities, however, continue unabated. At night, men urinate on her sidewalk, and she complains about the loud music and its poor quality, which she cannot stand. In response, she places her speakers in front of the house and plays Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker*. Her transformation is conveyed through imagery, as the shadows of birds hopping along the power lines. She retrieves her ballerina dress and finds the ballet slippers she thought had been stolen. A detailed shot shows her putting on the slippers. She composes herself, dressing in her ballerina costume, fixing her hair, and applying lipstick. She steps onto the sidewalk, which transforms into the stage of a grand theater. There, she dances to the music of *Black Swan*, with the light focused solely on her amidst the surrounding darkness.

Among the aesthetic aspects observed from a semiotic perspective, the following iconic sinsigns stand out: the actress and her previous performances as generators of semiosic expectations; warm colors and heightened brightness as producers of synesthetic effects; saturated colors and the use of tonalities as expressive elements; the predominance of shots with minimal camera movement; objects that reappear at key moments, generating semioses throughout the film (such as the sidewalk, mirrors, ballet attire, the ruined building, and the poodle); references to both international artistic contexts and local popular culture; costumes that evoke French culture; and grotesque elements (especially in scenes where characters urinate).

4. Aesthetic Aspects of the Film in Journalistic Critiques

In a previous study conducted by the author of this article (Hermes, Dyehouse, 2022), journalistic texts by Luiz Carlos Merten—published in the

newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*—were analyzed to observe how the author rhetorically addressed Brazilian cinema through the semiotic selection of updated sinsigns in his writing. The aim of that study was to identify which types of sinsigns, understood as replicas of legisigns, were frequently employed by the journalist, interpreted as rhetorical procedures.

The analysis considered recurring aspects across his texts, such as commentary on cast members, directors, and processes of production and creation. It was noted that semioses were generated around the films in relation to the cinematic medium and the broader themes under discussion within the journalistic sphere. As a rhetorical procedure, a tendency was observed to relate film themes to aspects experienced within "social reality", understood as a social construct in which various agents interact—including journalism and cinematic production. According to Sérgio Gadini (2009), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields, the cultural field—encompassing the arts and cinema—and the journalistic field mutually influence one another, interacting not only with each other but also with other fields, such as the political and economic.

The previous research also observed semiotic choices made by the journalist that align more closely with the reading expectations of a cinephile audience—readers who are familiar with the language and history of cinema. However, alongside these, there are also semioses directed toward other segments of the newspaper's readership, for whom films are just one among many cultural products, situated within the broader context of news from various spheres of social coexistence.

It is important to note that there are two basic types of cultural journalistic texts: those aimed at promoting the artistic works and elucidating their main characteristics, and those that seek to argue a position regarding the artistic products, which are clearly identified as critiques. In Brazilian journalism, these two forms of writing can be clearly distinct, as seen in graphical presentations that differentiate opinion from information. However, there can also be a certain blending of the two forms in reporting cultural products, whether more informational or more opinionated. The two texts to be analyzed are brief reviews, whose function is to promote the film in the newspapers.

Essentially, journalists address a given context and select signs to incorporate into their writing based on the conventions of journalistic culture, the editorial guidelines of the publication, and their personal style. Among these signs—those that carry a more pronounced aesthetic character from a semiotic standpoint—the key question is which ones are preferred by journalists. Taking into account two journalistic texts published about the film, it is possible to reflect on journalistic work in the realm of cinema and the relevance of iconic sinsigns as representations of an aesthetic bias.

Iconic sinsigns can be understood as those that emphasize aspects of artistic production oriented toward sensibility, which would be a fundamental characteristic of films treated as art, especially aimed at experiences of an aesthetic nature. One of the questions is whether this aesthetic approach qualifies journalistic

texts. Another is whether it is something that holds relevance only for a cinephile audience or also for the general public.

Journalistic texts about films are interpretants, new signs that produce semioses based on certain aspects of the works in question. The elements selected in journalistic approaches can vary, prioritizing or not what could be considered aesthetic.

From an aesthetic standpoint, there may be certain difficulties in dealing with films, as uncertainty is one of the characteristics of interpretants of the *rheme* type—those that remain within the category of Firstness, on the aesthetic plane, with a strong abductive quality. The tendency is for journalists to select signs that generate semioses in Secondness, relating the film's signs to current events, as is more characteristic of the press, and as observed in the previous research, even as a rhetorical procedure. Conceptual aspects of the cinematic medium may also be mobilized, generating semioses in Thirdness in relation to the film.

In the first journalistic text analyzed, *Tratado sobre a desvalia da velhice* (Treatise on the Devaluation of Old Age), published on the website of the newspaper *Correio Braziliense* and written by Ricardo Daehn (2020), the title itself highlights the performance of actress Marcélia Cartaxo in portraying an elderly character. Among the sinsigns addressed in the text—which are not considered in this analysis to be iconic sinsigns—are references to the screenplay, mentions of film characters, the actress's biography (which is noted as a point of emphasis in both texts), and the fact that it is the director's debut feature. A still photo from the film illustrates the article, showing the characters Miguel and Pacarrete smiling in the film's earlier scenes. The photo lacks a caption, and the specific scene depicted is not described within the body of the text.

The text emphasizes that this is director's Allan Deberton debut film, presenting the character as the "Frenchified teacher and former ballerina Pacarrete, confined to the city of Russas (Ceará)" who bets on "the brilliance and glamour disseminated in a simple-minded routine". The author of the critique identifies, to some extent, with the character's perception of European culture by defining the cultural context depicted in the film as "simple-minded". It is notable that, regarding the signs highlighted in the text, there is not, strictly speaking, an aesthetic approach, even though the actress is mentioned—bringing with her the memory of performances in other productions.

What stands out is the cultural contrast established by the narrative between the presence of hegemonic European culture—as an expression of a supposedly refined culture present in the protagonist's daily life—and the value judgment it implies toward the local culture portrayed in the film. The journalist initially aligns with a judgment that implicitly positions the local culture as inferior in a naturalized way, reflecting a recurring tendency in journalistic discourse when addressing cultural contexts beyond the European sphere, including, for instance, the South American context.

The passage most closely related to aesthetic issues appears at the end of the review:

> Gradually, the film's skillful script places the viewer in a position to assimilate the protagonist's exoticism with a Chaplinesque touch. In a painful choreography, the filmmaker examines the principles guiding the lost teacher, fiercely devoted to art, who even claims possession of the sidewalk in front of her house. (Daehn, 2020)

This analysis connects directly to one of the most significant symbolic elements of the narrative: the "sidewalk". As observed in the aesthetic analysis of the film developed earlier in this article, there are several iconic sinsigns that could be highlighted by journalists—particularly the iconic representation of objects that help tell the story, as is the case with the sidewalk, which clearly plays a significant role in the narrative. It is an icon that, throughout the sequences, visually materializes the relationship between the character's inner life—her desires, limitations, and sufferings—and her need for recognition within the social sphere. In this sense, the journalist's task consists, to a large extent, semiotically, in the ability to identify such objects throughout the film's narrative—objects that tell the story alongside the characters.

The article *"Pacarrete" liberta Marcélia Cartaxo de arquétipo de Macabéa* ("Pacarrete" Frees Marcélia Cartaxo from the Archetype of Macabéa) by critic Inácio Araújo (2020) once again highlights the award-winning actress's performance in the production, referencing the character Macabéa, for which she was acclaimed in *A Hora da Estrela* (Hour of the Star, 1985). However, the critic mentions this earlier success to emphasize that the actress does not confine herself to the same type of role, underscoring her ability to navigate between comedy and melodrama genres. As previously mentioned, according to Vernet (1983), actors give material form to characters and function as figures imbued with prior semioses, engaging in the creation of a new interpretive dynamic as they embody a different character within a new narrative context. On one hand, there is the cinephilia of fans who are interested in this aspect, particularly those who follow the careers of actors, actresses, and directors. There is also a more refined cinephilia that focuses on the creative processes of performers. From an aesthetic perspective, we can add here Deleuze's (1983) concept of movement-image, inspired by Henri Bergson, which considers the meaning produced in the duration of a film as it unfolds from shot to shot, sequence to sequence. This relates to time-image cinema, in which that duration may acquire a different meaning, connecting both to the past and to the future. Within the temporal span of a film, characters undergo transformation and exist in an interval of time. The transition between comedy and tragedy in the film—highlighted aesthetically through warm colors at the beginning and more pronounced contrasts toward the end—also expresses this transformation. However, the journalist chose primarily to emphasize the actress's ability to embody this transformation throughout the film, which seems to align with the interests of various cinephile audiences, as can be inferred.

This time, the critic does not describe the cultural context of the story as "simple-minded" but instead uses the term "bumpkin". He also does not align himself with the defense of high culture that the protagonist strives to represent

within her community. Instead, he writes that the character "has in her mind" a "mythical Paris". In this way, the journalist underscores the critical perspective suggested by the film, corresponding to the position of a hegemonic culture represented by the protagonist's behavior—displaced from the context of the city in which the story unfolds and reflective of an imaginary shaped by generations influenced by the ideal of "European culture". Here lies the abductive nature of iconic sinsigns, capable of prompting reflection and questioning of widely disseminated ideas, as is characteristic of films treated as aesthetic objects.

Inácio Araújo (2020) also references non-iconic sinsigns related to the actress's career, her previous roles, the characterization of the protagonist, and key points of the plot. He introduces a conceptual discussion based on the legisign "popular cinema", referring to the historical period of the state-run institution Embrafilme in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s, when Brazilian films reached a broader audience in theaters. He questions whether this film could potentially signal a resurgence of that type of cinema today.

A still image accompanies the article, depicting the character Pacarrete in despair among the ruins of a factory, already holding the poodle in her arms. The caption identifies the actress, the film, and its director. This specific sequence is not discussed in the body of the article and may only be indirectly connected to the critic's references to the film's melodramatic tone.

In relation to the previously conducted analysis, a passage where the author comes closest to discussing aesthetic aspects is when he critiques a restrained use of cinematic resources in the production, while emphasizing the importance of the sequence featuring Anna Pavlova's video:

> There is little room for invention, for shots like that one (in my opinion the best in the film) that brings together a TV screen with a ballerina dancing, Pacarrete imitating her in a lamentable manner, and, in the background, the maid cleaning the house with a mop. (Araújo, 2020)

Here, the author describes sinsigns from the film that possess an aesthetic quality. As observed earlier in the characterization of the protagonist's behavior as shaped by a mythical Paris, the emphasis on the scene in which Pacarrete mimics the Russian ballerina through her gestures is a powerful icon that deserves particular attention precisely because it fosters the abductive reasoning characteristic of iconic signs. This can contribute to expanding the semioses surrounding the film, understood here as an artistic object.

The author critically highlights one of the key issues at the heart of the narrative, which is of aesthetic interest:

> At the center of the production are a bundle of questions involving the dichotomy between popular (and emotional) art or erudite art, indigenous (or similar to it) or imported, the dream of being (French, in Pacarrete's case) and the reality of being Brazilian […]. (Araújo, 2020)

In this passage, the author succinctly refers to the semiosis produced by the character's attire within the context in which she lives, as well as the set of signs that represent her artistic taste.

Another important point raised by the author is the consideration of genres and aesthetic categories, which could further enrich the analysis made earlier. He observes that in the narrative, there is a transition from comedy to melodrama, which was somewhat analyzed through the observation of sinsigns (iconic signs), particularly with the use of colors and light tones in the first part of the story, and darker, more contrasting tones starting from the scene in the ruined factory. He writes that director Allan Deberton uses the issues addressed "to create a film that handles comedy and melodrama with good pacing and fluidity in the transitions". He states: "No one would say this is a bad start for someone making their first feature. This is an interesting commitment to popular cinema". Inácio Araújo thus evaluates the film, considering both its aesthetic aspects and its ability to reach a wide audience, in this blend of comedy and melodrama, two legisigns significant to the film's aesthetic approach. This aspect, represented by the legisigns "comedy" and "melodrama", however, has a conceptual nature and extends beyond the initial proposal of aesthetically observing the film as a semiosis produced by iconic sinsigns.

5. Considerations

After conducting a semiotic analysis of the film, emphasizing its aesthetic aspects, particularly through the guiding concept of iconic sinsigns, it becomes evident how an appreciation focused on aesthetic signs can contribute to and appear in journalism about films. Although these articles often present arguments that synthesize observations about films and their narratives, the examination of aesthetic elements can contribute to a more nuanced perspective on cinematic productions. In each journalistic text, the authors select signs that reflect specific facets of the films—an inherent feature of semiosis, given that each sign is based on only one or a few dimensions of the dynamic object, thus generating a new sign: an interpretant formed in the mind of a given interpreter. In the analyzed texts, the choices made reflect a prior observation of the film focused on aesthetic aspects. There were confirmations of the initial aesthetic reading presented in this article, such as the scene in which the protagonist appears alongside the video of Anna Pavlova and the element of the sidewalk as one of the relevant icons in meaning-making within the narrative. On the other hand, elements such as the expressionist character of the film—for instance, signs of a grotesque nature—were not mentioned. The way signs were articulated in the texts may or may not lead to a probable diversity of interpretants among readers. When abductive meaning is emphasized, there is greater alignment with the aesthetic nature of the signs.

The identification of iconic sinsigns throughout the narrative can help suggest and understand potential interpretants that the appreciation of the film is likely to

produce, particularly through the identification of recurring objects or those that mark the narrative's progression, such as the "sidewalk" and the scene featuring the "video of Anna Pavlova's performance", as mentioned in the texts analyzed. The aesthetic character of these objects lies primarily in their abductive potential, which may serve as the main semiotic criterion for constructing texts about artistic products, such as films.

The actors' performances and the semioses they bring through their previous roles stand out, particularly in this case, given the actress's significance in the history of cinema for her role in the film *Hour of the Star* (1985). However, it is important to view the actors' work as part of a broader set of aesthetic procedures that make up the cinematic language.

The contrast between aspects of "high culture", which demands greater attention, and "popular culture", spontaneously present in everyday social life, is addressed in the film in a way that generates abductive reasoning. The analyzed critiques reflect this, both in the signs used to describe the community to which the protagonist belongs and in the portrayal of how the character appears in the film and her relationship with art.

The aesthetic analysis, particularly considering the approach taken by critic Inácio Araújo, could also be expanded to include the consideration of cinematic genres. Another possibility is the inclusion of aesthetic categories (beautiful, sublime, ugly, grotesque, tragic and comic). In this way, Peirce's semiotics could serve as a tool alongside other traditional aesthetic approach. It is important to underline, however, that the contribution of Peirce's semiotic theory to aesthetic studies deserves more attention by the authors and researchers.

REFERENCES

Amaral, S. (Writer/Director). (1985). *A Hora da Estrela* [Hour of the Star; Motion picture]. Brazil: Assunção Hernandes.

Aumont, J. (1983). *Esthétique du film* [Aesthetics of Film]. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Araújo, I. (2020). 'Pacarrete' liberta Marcélia Cartaxo de arquétipo de Macabéa [Pacarrete Frees Marcélia Cartaxo from the Archetype of Macabéa]. *Folha de São Paulo*. Retrieved from: https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2020/11/pacarrete-liberta-marcelia-cartaxo-de-arquetipo-de-macabea.shtml

Bordwell, D., Thompson, K. (2010). *A Arte do Cinema: Uma Introdução* [Film Art: An Introduction]. Campinas: Unicamp/Edusp.

Daehn, R. (2020). Confira a crítica de 'Pacarrete': tratado sobre a desvalia da velhice [Check out the Review of 'Pacarrete': Treatise on the Devaluation of Old Age]. *Correio Braziliense*. Retrieved from: https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/diversao-e-arte/2020/11/4891477-confira-a-critica-de-pacarrete-tratado-sobre-a-desvalia-da-velhice.html

Deberton, A. (Writer/Director). (2019). *Pacarrete* [Motion picture]. Brazil: Deberton Filmes.

Deledalle, G. (1990). *Leer a Peirce Hoy* [Reading Peirce Today]. Barcelona: Gedisa.

Deleuze, G. (1983). *Cinema 1 – A Imagem-Movimento* [Cinema 1: The Movement-Image]. São Paulo: Editora 34.

Dondis, D. A. (1973). *Sintaxe da Linguagem Visual* [A Primer of Visual Literacy]. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.

Gadini, S. L. (2009). *Interesses cruzados: a produção da cultura no jornalismo brasileiro* [Crossed Interests: The Production of Culture in Brazilian Journalism]. São Paulo: Paulus.

Hermes, G., Dyehouse, J. (2022). A Semiotic Analysis: Journalistic Writing About Brazilian Cinem. In F. Y. Seif (Ed.), *Semiotics 2020/2021: Signs of Ambiguity and Uncertainty, Yearbook of the Semiotic Society of America* (pp. 57–73). Charlottesville: Philosophy Documentation Center.

Marie, M. (1983). Cinema and Language. In J. Aumont (Ed.), *Esthétique du film* (pp. 126–181). Austin: University of Texas Press.

Peirce, C. S. (1993). *Semiótica e Filosofia: Textos Escolhidos de Charles Sanders Peirce* [Semiotics and Philosophy: Selected Texts by Charles Sanders Peirce]. São Paulo: Cultrix.

Santaella, L. (2000). *A Teoria Geral dos Signos* [The General Theory of Signs]. São Paulo: Pioneira.

Vernet, M. (1983). Cinema and Narration. In J. Aumont (Ed.), *Esthétique du film* (pp. 68–125). Austin: University of Texas Press.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 81–100
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.06

Article

EDUARDO YALÁN [*], JOSE MIGUEL GUERRA [**], GONZALO JARA TOWNSEND [***]

ENUNCIATION AND MEMORY: CONSERVATIVE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE PERUVIAN INTERNAL ARMED CONFLICT THROUGH COMICS

SUMMARY: This article analyzes how Peruvian comics represent the internal armed conflict (1980–2000) from a conservative perspective, transforming it into a graphic narrative that contributes to shaping a collective memory aligned with political interests. Motivated by the lack of critical studies addressing comics produced by conservative groups from a semiotic perspective. The analysis focuses on contemporary productions characterized by short formats distributed through print and digital media, which reconfigure both state actors and victims. Methodologically, the study examines the enunciative discursive strategies used to exalt state figures and demonize adversaries through the construction of characters, spaces, and temporalities. The findings reveal that *actoriality* shifts from an empathetic representation of urban victims to an idealized military heroism; *temporality* moves from a closed past toward a narrative of ongoing threat; and *spatiality* leaves behind concrete urban settings to become abstract scenarios that glorify political decisions. Finally, the article identifies the emergence of a conservative protological myth that reactivates epic narratives of the past and turns comics into instruments of symbolic domination, aimed more at mobilizing fear than at fostering historical understanding.

KEYWORDS: narrative, corporeality, semiotics, internal armed conflict, conservative discourse, conservatives.

[*] Peruvian University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Communications. E-mail: pcpueyal@upc.edu.pe. ORCID: 0000-0002-0143-4973.

[**] Peruvian University of Applied Sciences, Faculty of Communications. E-mail: josegt66@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0003-2745-3280.

[***] University of Valparaíso, Faculty of Humanities and Education. E-mail: ga_jaratownsend@hotmail.cl. ORCID: 0000-0002-3086-0891.

1. Introduction

As artistic products, graphic novels possess a notable capacity to shape, reflect, and even create realities parallel to everyday experience. In this sense, as a form of visual narrative expression, graphic novels do not only act as a medium to transcribe reality, but to actively recreate it in its construction and in the configuration of its meanings. From semiotic studies of comics (Bateman, 2023; Cuñarro, Finol, 2013; Quezada Macchiavello, 2024), numerous analyses have been carried out focused on exploring how the images and codes of graphic works have influenced the construction of discourses that shape social perceptions, historical memory and, moreover, consolidate hegemonic discourses in society (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017). From this perspective, the present research focuses on a specific aspect of the relationship between graphic representation and its "real" referent, approaching the comic not as a neutral and de-ideologized medium, but as a tool in the so-called "cultural war", used by conservative groups to rewrite the past, especially in the context of post-armed conflict Peru.

Since 1989, with the publication of the graphic novel *Confidencias de un Senderista*, which addressed the internal armed conflict between the Communist Party *Sendero Luminoso* (Shining Path) and the State, up to the recent proliferation of short comics beginning in 2008, Peruvian comics have followed a trajectory marked by periods of silence followed by resurgence. After nearly two decades of absence of graphic representations of the internal armed conflict under the authoritarian government of Alberto Fujimori (1990–2000), the 2000s witnessed the reactivation of production on the subject, though under new narrative forms and visual strategies. Unlike the comics produced in the 1980s and 1990s, the early 21st-century comics are characterized by a documentary and non-fictional approach, constructing an objective and journalistic representation of events through documented stories of the internal armed conflict. However, this representation was interrupted by a polarized climate that, since 2016, has been experienced not only in Peru but also throughout Latin America, where conservative right-wing narratives clashed with progressive discourses centered on collectivist and social themes. This gave rise to a shorter and more dynamic format, presented mainly as inserts in newspapers affiliated with politically conservative positions. These comics, distributed through digital and print media, align with conservative outlets and perspectives that reformulate the historical memory of the armed conflict, transforming representations of state actors and privileging a particular view of the war.

It is in this context that the need arises for a more detailed semiotic analysis of comic production as conservative ideological devices within collective memory (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017), a field that has so far received attention mainly from progressive perspectives that privilege consensus and the recognition of victims (Gomes, 2024; Gras, 2020; Hodapp, 2022; Nieto, 2022; Pau, 2021; Vich, Hibbett, 2022). This article is framed within the reflection on the contributions that comics make to the so-called "culture war" of the Peruvian

conservative right, focusing attention on how these narrative products not only tell a story, but also react to reality and shape it through a visually articulated political rhetoric. In the case of comics, the visual signs of the actors, the compositions, the demonization of adversaries, and the exaltation of state heroes contribute to establishing a discourse that legitimizes and perpetuates a conservative view of the past. Semiotics, when applied to these comics, becomes an effective tool for unraveling the discursive construction of reality—in this case, through meanings that compose the graphic representations and their narrative elements from a conservative perspective.

This research, therefore, is situated within the analysis of contemporary conservative aesthetics and a broader inquiry into the cultural devices involved in the construction of a particular social reality. Hence, the main research question is: How does Peruvian comics represent the internal armed conflict (1980–2000) from a conservative perspective, transforming it into a graphic narrative to contribute to the shaping of a collective memory aligned with political interests? In this case, the comic is configured as a fundamental space of "ideological battle" within the framework of the so-called "culture war" that seeks to reinterpret and reinscribe the past according to specific political interests—namely, those of the Peruvian conservative right.

2. The Enunciative Position of Latin American Comics

The review of specialized literature maintains that comics, by combining images and words in a predicative way—what Groensteen (1999) calls "iconic solidarity"—enable not only the transmission of information, but also an aesthetic response from the reader, making them a literary genre capable of offering complex reflections on reality, beyond their apparent classification as a medium for children (Jiménez Arriagada, Bañales-Faz, Lobos-Sepúlveda, 2020). This iconic-verbal quality of comics gives them a strategic role in the construction of historical memory, especially in contexts marked by political violence, as they manage to balance the need for historical verisimilitude—to sustain the authenticity of the narrative—with the creation of a sensorial experience in the reader, activating semiotic mechanisms that resist oblivion (Leroux, 2024). It is precisely from this dual function, both informative and aesthetic, that comics have acquired a specific political dimension in Latin America, establishing a place of enunciation characterized, in many cases, by giving voice to peripheral subjects who have historically been disadvantaged due to their class, gender, or ethnicity within social power structures.

Within this framework, studies such as those by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1973) have highlighted how comics in Latin America have functioned as a space of resistance against hegemonic formats and narratives imported from the United States, resignifying the medium as an instrument of identity affirmation and political contestation (Gomes, 2024; Hodapp, 2022; Nieto, 2022). Graphic novels are thus consolidated as devices that not only tell stories, but also reconfigure urban spaces as settings for struggle, defense, and survival, as exem-

plified in paradigmatic works such as *El Eternauta* (1957–1959) and *La Guerra de los Antartes* (1974; Turnes, 2024). This phenomenon also manifests in comics of political exile such as *Tumac* (Aman, 2023) or *Exilia* (Ricalde, 2019), where memory is articulated not only as recollection but as a political act against imposed oblivion. Feminist literary criticism in Argentina has reinforced this perspective by analyzing comics as a praxis of social critique and a means of making structural gender violence visible within the Latin American urban context (Gandolfo, Turnes, 2020), finding examples in works such as *Femimutancia* (Caraballo, 2021) or in the production of authors like Carol Lay (Singh, 2022), where the city becomes not a mere backdrop but a symbolic battlefield where the meanings of everyday life are disputed. The recurrence of humor and satire as forms of denunciation against the dominant classes (Stavans, 2019; Wade, 2024) completes the configuration of a tradition in which comics not only represent but activate a living political memory (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017).

Nevertheless, this centrality of comics as a tool of resistance does not exhaust its field of action. Although critical literature has focused on these peripheral experiences, few studies have addressed the use of comics from the center of the social semiosphere. Although conservative sectors have historically been portrayed as censors of comics—particularly after Fredric Wertham's crusade in 1954 (Condis, Stanfill, 2022)—we also observe a strategic use of the medium by sectors in power for the dissemination of their own ideological discourses. In Latin America, for instance, the Catholic Church systematically used comics as a vehicle for spiritual renewal and moral reaffirmation, as evidenced by publications such as *Vidas Ejemplares* and *Patronos y Santuarios* (Díaz Patiño, 2023; 2024). Here, comics are not resisted but instrumentalized to promote conservative values, relying on representations such as "Humonegro" in the magazine *Aguiluchos*—a character who, under the appearance of an Afro-descendant native, functioned as a passive actant, predisposed to be evangelized and molded by European Catholic values (Díaz Patiño, 2019; Gandolfi, 2024). This use of comics as a medium of ideological dissemination reveals its semiotic flexibility: the same graphic language can serve both as a tool of emancipation and as a device of hegemonic consolidation.

The Peruvian case is inscribed within this Latin American tension, both replicating and transforming the dynamics of appropriation of comics as a medium of symbolic production. From the appearance of *Palomilla* (1940–1942), the first comic magazine in the country, to contemporary representations of the internal armed conflict, Peruvian comics consistently reflect a social construction marked by representations of race, gender, and political marginalization (Sagastegui, 2024). During the government of Manuel A. Odría (1948–1956), there was a consolidation of a preference for popular narratives of a *criollo* (Creole) nature that, although urbanized, maintained subordinated representations of Indigenous and rural sectors, as seen in the magazine *Avanzada Avanzada* (1957–1968; Villar, Sagástegui, 2016), where Indigenous peoples were portrayed through an evangelizing lens that reinforced social hierarchies. In opposition to this trend,

the government of Velasco Alvarado promoted a more inclusive editorial current that, although incipient, opened space for vindicatory narratives within a cultural field still dominated by conservative perspectives.

The political violence between 1980 and 2000, derived from the internal armed conflict between the State and the Communist Party of Peru—*Sendero Luminoso* (Heredia Alarcón, 2021), radically reconfigured the enunciative position of comics. Works such as *Barbarie*, *Rupay*, *Novísima Crónica* and *Mal Gobierno* (Gras, 2020; Pau, 2021) embraced a documentary approach that avoided the simplifying moral dichotomy, presenting social actors in their material, historical, and political complexity (Arango, 2017). In contrast to these projects, however, a conservative narrative also took hold—one that in recent years has gained strength through processes of postmemory that exalt the role of the State and the armed forces, glorify figures such as Alberto Fujimori, and simplify the armed conflict as a struggle between civilization and barbarism (Vich, Hibbett, 2022). In this type of narrative, the representation of insurgents as "psychopaths" or "common criminals" (Sotelo Melgarejo, 2013) not only depoliticizes the conflict but also blocks the possibility of a critical memory by presenting a history in which dissent is pathologized and state violence is legitimized as the only path to order.

In this sense, Peruvian comics, in constant dialogue with Latin American dynamics, reveal a profound ambivalence: while they have been a crucial medium for articulating dissident memories and representing historically marginalized subjects, they have also been instrumentalized as a tool for the consolidation of conservative discourses, adapting to the ideological needs of the moment (Carrasco, Drinot, Scorer, 2017). This capacity for transformation—of becoming a field of symbolic dispute—explains their continued relevance as an object of study for understanding the configurations of power, identity, and memory in Peru and Latin America.

3. Visual Enunciation and Myth

From structuralist semiotics (Greimas, Courtés, 1979), the concept of *enunciation* is generally understood as the act of producing the enunciated text and realizing the various layers of meaning in discourse—whether fundamental, narrative, or surface-level. Thus, although the analyst is faced with an enunciated message, it is conceived as the result of an implicit act of production, which grants it interpretative limits and boundaries. Summarizing its relevance in discourse analysis, Bruno Latour (1998) points out that enunciation is logically presupposed, insofar as it is constructed from the marks present in the enunciated text. These marks can be gathered and analyzed to account for the very process of meaning production. While enunciation may refer to the pragmatic conditions of enunciation production (social, economic, ideological), in Greimasian structural semiotics it is the enunciated text itself that constructs its context through specific marks and inscriptions. These marks are of different types: spatial (here/there), temporal (now/then), and actantial (I/you/he-she). In this sense, the

"I", the "here", and the "now"—the *ego hic et nunc*—are understood as internal stagings within the text, even in the case of visual texts. Thus, these marks and their displacements (the processes of *embrayage* [shifting in] and *débrayage* [shifting out]) operate as *passes* (*passe*) that reveal the constructions of meaning within the enunciated message.

Nonetheless, although studies on enunciation tend to focus on a predominantly linguistic approach, the shift in analysis toward the study of image-based language as extraverbal enunciated forms has also been addressed in the development—albeit fragmentary—of semiotics as a discipline (Basso Fossali, Dondero, 2022). This shift began, in part, with Christian Metz's semiotic proposal in the audiovisual field, and continued with the analysis of still images (Dondero, 2008), where specific modes of enunciation and narrativity have been identified in photographs, illustrations, and static graphics (Lagopoulos et al., 2025). While Greimasian semiotics argues that visual enunciated messages can be analyzed as systems of meaning based on differential relations between forms, colors, and arrangements—that is, on the intersection between the figurative and the plastic—later research (Basso Fossali, Dondero, 2022; Dondero, 2008; Lagopoulos et al., 2025) has increasingly challenged the separation between spatial and temporal arts. This effort has largely been channeled through the analysis of enunciation as a cross-cutting principle in the construction of meaning.

From this perspective, the work of Jacques Fontanille (1989) brings the concept of enunciation into the visual domain, applying it to the analysis of objects such as painting and cinema through categories such as actoriality, aspectuality, and the modes of realization of the gaze. For Fontanille (1989; Lagopoulos et al., 2025), enunciation allows for an understanding of the construction of a point of view and the position the observer is meant to occupy in spatial, pragmatic, cognitive, and emotional terms. In this sense, enunciation becomes an optimal tool for analyzing the values, tensions, and ideological realizations inscribed in visual discourse. Following this line, Dondero (2020) argues that visual analysis through enunciation enables the identification of different types of visual simulacra. Actorial simulacra manifest in the characters and in the roles of the observer, who may be admiring, indifferent, or disengaged. Spatial simulacra, in turn, refer to the perspective from which the scene is constructed: the location of the characters, the framing geometry, the atmosphere, and the implicit spatiality of the visual enunciation. Temporal simulacra, finally, are evident in the trajectories of action (Dondero, 2024), in the simultaneous movement of human bodies, as well as in the temporal programmings expressed not only through the representation of the passage of time, but also through plastic transformations such as changes in color, light, or texture. Thus, the marks of enunciation can be recognized both on the figurative level (bodily actions, gestures, objects) and on the plastic level (colors, textures, compositions). By engaging with both bodily action and the act of observation implied in the enunciated message, visual enunciation reconstructs the discursive simulacrum and accounts for its meaning-making, not only by considering the image as an already-emitted product, but as an act in itself—as the

manifestation of a gaze. In this sense, the image incorporates, in the form of a simulacrum, the very acts of its production and observation (Dondero, 2020).

Within this framework, the relationship between visual enunciation and myth emerges, as the marks of enunciation, understood as meaningful fragments, make it possible to identify axiological elements (in the addressee) and ideological elements (in the enunciative instance) in visual discourse. Jean-Marie Floch (2005), a pioneer in this field of study, maintains that mythic production—like the construction of visual identities—is based on a process of recomposing already-existing visual signs, selected and reorganized creatively. This process constitutes a form of enunciative praxis, that is, a mode of meaning production that operates through formal procedures and engages both cultural structures and personal or collective choices (Broden, 2002). Floch's work highlights how plastic expression—for instance, *bricolage*—can account for mythical trajectories and thematic-narrative configurations conceived as forms of shared thought. In this way, visuality can function as a mythical space, insofar as it articulates cultural oppositions through objects, images, and graphic arrangements. For this reason, this research draws not only from structuralist reflections on myth—reinterpreted through visual semiotics by Floch—but also from the contributions of Furio Jesi (1973; 2014), who links myth to specific forms of power. From Jesi's perspective, there is no single type of myth. On one hand, he identifies the "pure myth", that is, an unmanipulated image that emerges spontaneously in the present and does not serve purposes of domination or logics of control (Jara, 2022). This myth arises as a free expression of popular imagination and operates as a common force. It is manifested through a visual discourse made up of ephemeral, fractal, plural, and intuitive images that do not seek to persuade or mobilize, unlike the heroic or propagandistic myth proposed by Sorel. On the other hand, Jesi distinguishes the "technical myth", a discursive construction tainted by the will to dominate. This type of myth does not arise organically from the collective unconscious or lived experience, but is fabricated or reappropriated by ideologues, intellectuals, or apparatuses of power with the aim of mobilizing, controlling, or manipulating the masses. It is a myth that has been instrumentalized, degraded in its function as a meaning operator, and converted into a tool for action (*faire-faire*). It is precisely in response to this type of myth—and the directionality of the visual discourse associated with it—that this research takes a critical stance.

4. Methodology

To delimit the comics to be analyzed, it is fundamental to establish clear criteria that allow the identification of those works that meet the characteristics of interest according to their content, context of production, and ideological alignment. The selected comics must have been published from the year 2001, as this period coincides with a surge in the production of works that reinterpret the historical memory of the internal armed conflict in Peru, reflecting the impact of the

sociopolitical context following the end of the conflict. Additionally, special attention will be paid to the entities responsible for funding and production, prioritizing those linked to institutions, publishers, or media outlets with conservative leanings, as these reflect in their content the ideologies of their funders. To determine conservative content, themes related to security and national sovereignty with a clear ethical and moral discourse will be identified (moralization of the internal armed conflict, protection of national sovereignty from ethical threats to hegemonic values), as indicated by the specialized literature (Cuevas-Calderón et al., 2024). In this way, in terms of narrative, it was considered whether the comics include elements that glorify state actors, portray victims as part of a "true people" aligned with traditional values, and demonize the State's adversaries (Vich, Hibbett, 2022). This type of narrative is also manifested in the exaltation of morality and order as tools of justice and social protection. Likewise, it is important to analyze how the works reinterpret the events of the internal armed conflict to consolidate a historical memory aligned with conservative values, which is reflected in the review of images, dialogues, and discursive constructions that present an alternative reality favorable to the State.

The methodology employed a qualitative approach focused on semiotic discourse analysis from a structuralist perspective (Courtés, 1991; Greimas, Courtés, 1979), centered on the process of meaning production through the formants of visual enunciation. This approach made it possible to identify the relationship between actoriality, spatiality, and temporality, three key elements for understanding how the comics represented violence, the purification of state actors, and the staging of an alternative reality. The structuralist model holds that the enunciated message presents two dimensions that refer to the *ego, hic et nunc* (I, here, now), as a starting point for the visual analysis of meaning in discourse (Dondero, 2008; 2020; 2024). In this sense, the visual enunciative traces are of an actorial nature (I, they, others), spatial (here, there), and temporal (now, then), identified in the figurative and plastic components of the analyzed object.

The selection of comics produced in the 21st century with a conservative tendency, aimed at modifying the historical perception of the internal armed conflict in Peru and its collective memory, was based on a rigorous methodology that analyzed a total of 17 comics produced between 1980 and 2021. Of these, 7 comics were selected for the final corpus, as they met the criteria that included conservative ideological alignment, sources of funding, and discursive and visual elements reflecting conservative positions in the works. The selected comics are shown in bold in Table 1.

Table 1

List of comics selected for the final corpus

Author	Institution/Publisher	Title	Year	Format
Juan Acevedo	Contracultura	El cuy	1980	Comic strip
Juan Acevedo	Centro de estudios y Acción por la Paz (CeaPaz)	Luchín González: La violencia terrorista	1988	Comic strip
Luis Baldoceda	Comisión de Cultura de la Base Naval	Confidencias de un senderista	1989	Staple-bound
Jesús Cossio	Penguin Random House	Rupay	2008	Book
Jesús Cossio	Contracultura	Barbarie	2010	Book
Miguel Det	Contracultura	Novísima Corónica i mal gobierno	2011	Book
Guillermo Figueroa	**Perú21**	**¡La caída de Abimael!**	**2016**	**Tabloid**
Guillermo Figueroa	**Perú21**	**Barrios Altos**	**2016**	**Tabloid**
Óscar Libón, Walter Dávila, Orlando Tapia	Convoca.pe	Huellas del terror	2017	Digital
Guillermo Figueroa	**Perú21**	**Tarata: El principio del fin**	**2017**	**Tabloid**
Martín Espinoza	**Perú21**	**Chola Power: Nuestros muertos**	**2017**	**Staple-bound**
Oscar Colchado Lucio, Daniela Gamarra	Random Comics	Rosa Cuchillo. La novela gráfica	2021	Book
Author unknown	**Expresso, Compu-palace y Willax**	**La historia san-grienta de Sendero Luminoso**	**2021**	**Tabloid**
Teniente Coronel C. Freyre, J. Castro	**Comando Conjunto de las Fuerzas Armadas del Perú**	**Chavín de Huántar**	**2021**	**Digital**
Oscar Malca	Reservoir Books	¡En la cara no!	2021	Book
Eugenio Antonio Ramirez Pando	**PBO Radio y Diario Expreso**	**La operación Chavín de Huán-tar**	**2021**	**Tabloid**

Note. Source: authors' own elaboration.

These comics were selected due to their alignment with conservative themes and narratives, expressed through their graphic representation, narrative structure, and institutional origin. Although the conservative discourse in the Peruvian context becomes more visible and explicit from the year 2021 onward—with open enunciations such as "the culture war"—the choice of a corpus spanning from 2016 should be understood as an approach to the early stages of that discourse. Already during that period, as Melgar (2016) notes, conservative traits were observable, especially in the biased and partial representation of historical events, through which attempts were made to justify crimes against humanity. In this way, the temporal selection of the corpus makes it possible to trace different degrees of consolidation and realization of conservative discourse from 2016 onward.

5. Results and Discussion

The analysis in this essay addresses conclusions and discussions across three key aspects of enunciation. First, the characteristic traits that construct the characters, or what is referred to as *actoriality*, will be identified. Then, an analysis of the composition of *postmemory* will be carried out through the study of temporal markers present in the graphic enunciation. Finally, *spatiality* will be examined to identify the visual markers that support the first two aspects through backgrounds and settings in which the narratives are instantiated.

Regarding actorial characteristics—that is, those related to the construction of characters within the discourse—representation in the early comics from 2016 (*La caída de Abimael*, *Barrios Altos*, and *Tarata: El principio del fin*) focuses on the victims of the internal armed conflict. Unlike representations such as those in *Rupay*, where Andean subjects historically marginalized appear as a "they", these comics portray the victims as those affected by violence in the capital city. Thus, the enunciation is not structured from a "they", but from a "we": familiar, deeply urban characters who reinforce this collective identity of the country's capital. These characters affirm the connotation of an alert and the presence of a reality manifested in interaction with urban modes of existence, specifically those of the capital. It is important to highlight here that the comics adopt a style typical of the documentary: verifiable, reliable, and journalistic informative content. This non-fiction approach, through iconic resources, generates a more credible effect of reality. Postmemory employs varying degrees of iconicity to create a discourse of non-fiction (Figueroa, 2016).

In these early comics, the "they"—that is, the terrorists—are represented without ethical connotations or elements of personification that might suggest moral weight. For example, Abimael Guzmán, leader of the *Partido Comunista del Perú—Sendero Luminoso* (PCP-SL), is portrayed as a historical figure who led a war against civil society, without being demonized or endowed with an explicit moral charge (Baldoceda, 1989; Figueroa, 2016; Ramirez Pando, 2021). In contrast to what was previously observed in *Confidencias de un Senderista—*

a comic produced in 1989 by the Culture Commission of the Naval Base under the direction of Luis Baldoseda, at the height of the internal armed conflict—the comics from 2016 avoided openly demonizing representations. In these works, the figure of Abimael Guzmán was presented as a historical subject without an explicit moral charge, allowing for a more complex representation of the conflict. However, this trend changes drastically starting in 2021, in a context of increasing political polarization and institutional crisis in Peru. In this scenario, the term "terrorist" began to be used by conservative sectors to delegitimize labor, social, and communal claims. This shift is reflected in comics such as *La historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso* (2021), where Abimael Guzmán is depicted as the embodiment of absolute evil, stripped of historical agency and motivated solely by an ontological evil. Thus, a moral charge that had already been rehearsed in the military narrative of 1989 re-emerges strongly, now updated in a political and media-driven key. This representation prevents any portrayal of the political or sociohistorical agency of the actors involved by reducing the conflict to a binary semantics of good and evil, of saints and demons.

In relation to the construction of temporality, this is articulated in the discourse through figurative and plastic reiterations in various forms. Particularly, in the comics produced between 2016 and 2017, the representation of the internal armed conflict is established through the use of greys as a plastic resource, which constructs the connotation of the past—a time of the "then". This aesthetic finds parallels in progressive graphic novels such as *Rupay* (2008) and *Novísima Crónica y Mal Gobierno* (2011). In this way, greys, as a plastic resource in comics, attribute an affective and intensive quality to the past, one that goes beyond simple objective documentary recording, portraying a past charged with emotional weight that intensifies the temporality of the represented reality.

However, this affective load—documentary, tragic, and dramatic in nature—is altered starting in 2021. At this point, as previously noted, Peruvian society experienced a polarization marked by an electoral clash between a left labeled as "extreme" and "terrorist" (often framed in racist terms) and a populist, radicalized right. This is reflected in comics such as *La historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso*, *Chavín de Huántar*, and *La operación Chavín de Huántar*. Thus, the victim character of the internal armed conflict—who functioned as a figure of a "you" who has suffered its violence in the comics of 2016–2017—is accompanied by a particular figure of the "I" from 2020 onward, a date when social polarization intensified across Latin America and especially in Peru. It is precisely this relationship between the "you" and the "I" that gives shape to the construction of an idea of "us", those who "have" suffered the effects of this war. To construct this "us", the "you"-victim is linked to an "I" represented by the army's intelligence command (Freyre, Castro, 2021). The discourse's main actors are the military forces, represented utopically and stripped of any socio-political agency beyond their operational and programmed function. This discourse has succeeded in converging with a call aimed at future members of the armed forces and a belief in a *criollo* civil society. This occurs in a context marked by a shortage

of personnel in the armed forces after the conflict and a setting of discredit affecting both the state apparatus and urban society (Sierra-Zamora, Tapia, 2020). Within this framework, heroic discourses and ethical myths act as stimuli to counteract such crises.

The temporal representation in comics born out of social polarization since 2021 abandons the tragic past rendered in greys, replacing it with a bloody past that imposes itself upon the present—transforming from an objective past ("then") into a present time that looms and persists. The narration is no longer merely demarcative or conclusive; instead, it acquires a durative and progressive quality, building a bridge between past and present through the continuity of the imperfect tense: Terrorism does not belong solely to the past; it is an ongoing instance, a phenomenon that persists in the present and has not ended. In the comic titled *La operación Chavín de Huántar* (Ramirez Pando, 2021), published in 2021, this effect can be seen: the use of the child as an actantial figure instrumentalized in the armed struggle of *Sendero Luminoso* symbolizes the emergence of a time still under construction, representing not a concluded event but one that continues to take shape in the present. It is the narrative of how children were used to explode with bombs attached to their bodies in urban locations, in the city space. This gives the past not only a latent presence but also an intensified dynamic of permanence.

In relation to the construction of spatiality, it is consolidated through urban traces that aim to concentrate the representation of the internal armed conflict in the city. In the comics published between 2016 and 2017, the urban setting emerges as the central stage of the drama, while the Andean space appears suspended or blurred. The latter, however, is addressed in graphic novels such as *Rupay* (2008), where the represented environment is the Andean village: small communities, marginal and peripheral plazas. By contrast, the conservative comics analyzed omit or virtualize the Andean space, replacing it with a focus on the central city, particularly the capital, which is presented as an environment violated by terrorist insurgency. Subsequently, this socio-historical representation of the city as the center of conflict is radically transformed in the conservative comics published after 2022. In these, spaces are abstracted, suspended, and disconnected from any concrete socio-historical context. They are represented as internal, isolated, almost ontological environments, stripped of agency or rootedness. Rather than emphasizing real-life settings, the comics shift toward constructing space through linguistic messaging, focusing on the dialogues that embody the programmatic decisions which led to the defeat of *Sendero Luminoso*.

In this narrative, the focus is placed on the management and strategic decisions of figures such as President Alberto Fujimori and his advisor Vladimiro Montesinos. The characters are positioned as symbols of military regularity and administrative efficiency. Space, then, is no longer a physical place, but regularity itself—a framework that glorifies the managers of the conflict more than the military for their direct action. In this way, there is a shift from an enunciation that emphasized *doing* (comics prior to social polarization) to one that prioritizes

being (comics after social polarization). This transformation reflects a clear instrumentalization of the comic in favor of a conservative discourse that redefines the narrative of the internal armed conflict. The emphasis on managerial figures, rather than on events or actions, reinforces a centralized view aligned with a specific political-ideological perspective.

The discursive characteristics of comics enunciated from conservative groups about the internal armed conflict reveal how these narratives feed "fear" more than a historical understanding of the events. Furthermore, they metapolitically transmit a mythology that is disseminated in a spectacular fashion. In this way, the symbolic interactions of actorialization, spatialization, and temporalization in the enunciation generate mythological material that becomes embedded as common sense within conservative discourse. Following Furio Jesi (1973; 2014), myth is configured as an extrahuman and extratemporal structure that inscribes itself in memory and is constantly reactivated in discourse. For Rodrigo Karmy (2020), as for Jesi, myth must disappear along with those who use it to perpetuate their power. In *Spartakus*, Jesi (2014) criticizes the presence of myth in the political realm and advocates for its elimination within the phenomenon of revolt. Unlike Georges Sorel, who defended it as a revolutionary engine, Jesi understands it as an instrument of domination that legitimizes oppressive power structures.

In the case of conservative discourse, it is not a matter of an eschatological myth—centered on the future—but rather a protological myth, which constantly recreates the past as a struggle for origins, granting a foundational meaning to contemporary Latin American consciousness. Thus, as Jesi (2014) points out, the construction of myth inevitably leads to an encounter with right-wing culture, whose discourses share traits such as brutality, heroism, sacrifice, traditionalism, and reverence for symbols. These characteristics reflect an ideological structure based on rigid beliefs and the exaltation of collective values that seek to legitimize an authoritarian order. In this way, myth not only preserves cultural memory, but also functions as a political instrument of domination and exclusion (Jesi, 2014).

With regard to actorialization and the personification of military heroism, it is not merely about idealizing the institutional subject, but about reformulating the myth of the hero. Unlike the graphic portrayal of the conflict in *Rupay* and *Confidencias de un senderista*, where the hero remains absent, conservative discourse reinstates a heroic ideal anchored in the past. This heroism does not construct a "new man", but rather reactivates old deeds and epic narratives to reinforce a traditionalist imaginary.

Based on the semiotic analysis developed in this study, it is possible to identify how conservative comics produced in post-conflict Peru reconfigure three fundamental dimensions of visual discourse: actoriality, temporality, and spatiality. These categories reveal the enunciative strategies through which an ideologically oriented collective memory is constructed. As shown in Table 2, these dimensions are not constant but vary significantly between comics published be-

fore the sociopolitical polarization of 2021 and those published after this turning point. The chart compares these two key moments, showing how visual narratives shift from a more documentary and urban representation of the conflict to a heroic, mythified, and abstract narrative that reinforces a conservative view of national history.

Table 2

Summary of Results

Element	2016–2017 (Pre-polarization)	2021–onwards (Post-polarization)
Actoriality	- Urban victims as "us" (common citizens). - Terrorists without explicit demonization. - Documentary, realist style.	- Abimael Guzmán and Sendero Luminoso represented as absolute evil. - Idealized military heroism. - Managerial figures such as Fujimori or Montesinos are glorified.
Temporality	- Greys as a plastic resource to mark the "then". - Tragic and closed sense of the past.	- The past imposes itself as present. - An imperfect, persistent time is constructed. - Durative and moralizing narrative.
Spatiality	- Capital city as epicenter of the conflict. - The Andean world is omitted.	- Abstract spaces, without sociohistorical anchoring. - Predominance of political dialogue over geography.
Myth	- Urban myth of the conflict. - Focus on documentation of facts and mourning. - The myth acts as a tool for recording recent, urban, contiguous, and documentary memory.	- Emergence of a protological conservative myth with heroic traits. - Idealization of the military hero and the state order. - The myth acts as a tool of symbolic domination, consolidating fear and exclusion.

Note. Source: authors' own elaboration.

Right-wing sectors construct a vision of time anchored in myth, idealizing a supposed "golden age" shaped according to their political interests. They present themselves as guardians of an original essence indispensable to humanity, managing to embed many of their ideas into common sense. Within this frame-

work, comics have made it possible to draw parallels with Latin American right-wing movements (Jara, Moya, Berrios, 2023), revealing traits such as the delegitimization of citizens' rights, the questioning of emancipatory principles, the demand for greater control by law enforcement, and the call for an authoritarian state in matters of security. Likewise, the construction of myth through graphic novels reflects a characteristic pattern of conservative discourse in Latin America: the rejection of the non-fictional and documentary format of the graphic novel. This format is perceived as an academic, intellectual, and scientific medium that distorts traditional values, which, according to right-wing views, must be preserved around the pillars of family, religion, and a non-emancipatory vision of society. Furthermore, comics that emerged during a period of social and electoral polarization—marked by opposing stances between right and left, conservatives and progressives—offered a vision of political violence that supports the status quo. In this context, both graphic novels and literary works about the conflict (Lamanna, 2018) share common features: they minimize issues of social justice, avoid portraying the political agency of terrorist groups, and present them as morally evil entities without sociohistorical agency, representing them as existential threats to advanced liberal democracies. In this way, both the graphic novel and literary production converge in their conservative approach to reality.

6. Conclusions

This research shows how the visual representations of the internal armed conflict in Peru, through comics, are significantly transformed as sociopolitical dynamics shift, especially in relation to the tensions and social polarizations that have characterized the country since 2020. Based on three key aspects of enunciation—actorialization, temporality, and spatiality—it has been revealed how comics become vehicles for ideological transmission, shifting from a representation centered on the victims of the conflict to one that places a polarized and heroic interpretation of the armed conflict at the center, seeking to reposition power and historical memory from a conservative perspective.

The early comics from 2016–2017 portrayed the victims of the armed conflict as urban and relatable characters, placing the victims at the center and avoiding a dichotomy of "good" and "evil". However, from 2021 onward, the growing political polarization in Peru changes this representation. Comics begin to present figures such as Abimael Guzmán not as complex actors but as symbols of absolute evil, reflecting a moral simplification and transforming the enemies of the State into demonized myths stripped of context. This evolution in actorial representation responds to a more polarized and polarizing narrative. In the pre-2021 comics, the past of the armed conflict was represented in grey tones, suggesting its irreversibility. From 2021 onward, with the intensification of political tensions, this temporality is transformed. The past is no longer perceived as something distant, but as a persistent presence, in which the conflict remains ongoing, with symbols such as the child figure used by Sendero Luminoso evok-

ing the continuity of the conflict. This temporal reconfiguration turns the past into a living matter that calls out to the present, feeding fear and social vigilance within a polarized narrative. In the 2016–2017 comics, the internal armed conflict was represented mainly in an urban context, reflecting the connection between violence and the city. However, beginning with the polarization of 2021, a transformation in spatiality becomes evident: conservative comics omit the specificity of the sociopolitical context, and the city as the scene of the confrontations disappears. Spaces are reconfigured as internal environments, geographically and socially isolated, reflecting a more abstract approach to the conflict, centered on political decision-making and disconnected from concrete social and political causes. This underscores the importance of the political message behind the narrative.

The conservative narrative constructs a vision of the past that becomes an essential component of collective memory, replacing narratives centered on the suffering of victims with a heroic and somewhat idealized image of the saviors of order. In this sense, the comic becomes an instrument that not only mobilizes emotions but also constructs a certain historical "truth", legitimized through its symbols, which responds to the need of certain elites to maintain a stabilized power structure under the argument of order and security. The structure of conservative mythology reveals how right-wing sectors not only construct an idealized past, but also perpetuate it as an active force, exercising continuous power through symbolic memory and a conception of time that limits critical capacities and deep historical memory. This raises the question of whether this representation of the Peruvian case is shared with other specific contexts in Central and South America—a question that could form the basis of future comparative studies.

REFERENCES

Aman, R. (2023). Semi-Naked Revolutionary: Native Americans, Colourblind Anti-Racism and the Pillaging of Latin America in Tumac. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, *14*(2), 208–232.

Arango, N. M. (2017). Un conflicto entre viñetas: historietas de la violencia política en el Perú (1989–2010) [A Conflict Between Panels: Comic Strips of Political Violence in Peru (1989–2010)]. In: S. Schuster, Ó. D. Hernández Quiñones (Eds.), *Imaginando América Latina: historia y cultura visual, siglos XIX al XXI* (pp. 373–410). Bogotá: Editorial Universidad del Rosario.

Baldoceda, J. (1989). *Confidencias de un senderista* [Confessions of a Shining Path Member]. Lima: Comisión de Cultura de la Base Naval.

Basso Fossali, P., Dondero, M. G. (2022). *Sémiotique de la photographie* [Semiotics of Photography]. Limoges: Université de Limoges. doi:10.25965/ebooks.233

Broden, T. F. (2002). Image, Sign, Identity: Jean-Marie Floch and Visual Semiotics. *The American Journal of Semiotics*, *18*(1–4), 237–258.

Bateman, J. (2023). Multimodal Semiotics for the Analysis of Comics and Graphic Novels. *Zeitschrift fur Semiotik*, *45*(1–2), 11–56.

Caraballo, L. (2021). Abolir el binarismo. Femimutancia y la historieta argentina transfeminista. *Caravelle*, *116*, 117–136.

Carrasco, J. C., Drinot, P., Scorer, J. (Eds.). (2017). *Comics and memory in Latin America.* University of Pittsburgh Press.

Condis, M., Stanfill, M. (2022). Debating With Wertham's Ghost: Comic Books, Culture Wars, and Populist Moral Panics. *Cultural Studies*, *36*(6), 953–980.

Courtés, J. (1991). Analyse sémiotique du discours: de l'énoncé à l'énonciation [Semiotic Analysis of Discourse: From the Statement to the Enunciation]. Paris: Hachette Educ.

Cuevas-Calderón, E., Yalán Dongo, E., Demuru, P., Anzelmo, A., Kanashiro, L. (2024). Guerra cultural de la extrema derecha conservadora en TikTok: estudio comparativo de influencers en Perú, Brasil, Francia e Italia [Cultural War of the Conservative Far Right on TikTok: A Comparative Study of Influencers in Peru, Brazil, France, and Italy]. *Letras (Lima)*, *95*(141), 171–187. doi:10.30920/letras.95.141.11

Cuñarro, L., Finol, J. E. (2013). Semiótica del cómic: códigos y convenciones [Semiotics of Comics: Codes and Conventions]. *Signa: revista de la Asociación Española de Semiótica*, *22*, 267–290.

Dondero, M. G. (2008). Il sacro approssimato: la fotografia artistica e devozionale [The Approximated Sacred: Artistic and Devotional Photography]. In N. Dusi, G. Marrone (Eds.), *Destini del sacro. Discorso religioso e semiotica della cultura* (pp. 129–142). Rome: Meltemi.

Dondero, M. G. (2020). *The Language of Images*. Cham: Springer.

Dondero, M. G. (2024). The Face: Between Background, Enunciative Temporality and Status. *Reti, saperi, linguaggi*, *11*(1), 49–70.

Díaz Patiño, G. (2019) "Vidas ejemplares": la historieta en los proyectos culturales de las derechas en México (1954–1974) ["Exemplary Lives": The Comic Book in the Cultural Projects of the Right in Mexico (1954–1974)]. *Contemporánea*, *11*, 86–101.

Díaz Patiño, G. (2023). Chiquitín: una historieta para la renovación espiritual y moral de México (1945–1963) [Chiquitín: A Comic for the Spiritual and Moral Renewal of Mexico (1945–1963)]. *Cuicuilco. Revista de ciencias antropológicas*, *30*(88), 19–49.

Díaz Patiño, G. (2024). La religiosidad católica latinoamericana expresada en cómic o historieta [Latin American Catholic Religiosity Expressed in Comics or Graphic Narratives]. *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia*, *33*, 231–254.

Dorfman, A., Mattelart, A. (1973). *Para leer al pato Donald* [How to Read Donald Duck]. Mexico: Siglo XXI.

Floch, J. M. (2005). *Visual Identities*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.

Fontanille, J. (1989) *Les Espaces subjectifs: Introduction à la sémiotique de l'observateur (discours-peinture-cinéma)* [Subjective Spaces: Introduction to the Semiotics of the Observer (Discourse-Painting-Cinema)]. Paris: Hachette.

Figueroa, G. (2016). *¡La caída de Abimael!* [The Fall of Abimael!]. Perú21.

Gandolfi, L. (2024). Apuntes para una historia de la prensa católica mexicana en la primera mitad del siglo XX [Notes for a History of the Mexican Catholic Press in the First Half of the 20th Century]. *Hispania Sacra*, *76*(153), 1185. doi:10.3989/hs.2024.1185

Gandolfo, A., Turnes, P. (2020). Chicks Attack! Making Feminist Comics in Latin America. *Feminist Encounters*, *4*(1), 1–22.

Gomes, I. L. (2024). Leituras e cotidianos de trabalho de artistas de quadrinhos na América Latina: uma história oral [Readings and Workday Lives of Comic Artists in Latin America: An Oral History]. *IBEROAMERICANA. América Latina-España-Portugal*, *24*(86), 39–58.

Gras, D. (2020). Novela gráfica y posmemoria. *Rupay* (2008) y Sendero Luminoso [Graphic Novel and Postmemory: *Rupay* (2008) and the Shining Path]. *Cahiers d'études romanes*, *41*, 119–158.

Greimas, A. J., Courtés, J. (1979). *Sémiotique. Dictionnaire raisonné de la théorie du langage* [Semiotics: A Systematic Dictionary of the Theory of Language]. Paris: Hachette.

Groensteen, T. (1999). *Système de la bande dessinée* [System of Comics]. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France

Heredia Alarcón, Á. (2021). El Partido es la luz del universo. La metáfora de la luz en el discurso inicial de Sendero Luminoso (1966–1976) [The Party Is the Light of the Universe: The Metaphor of Light in the Early Discourse of the Shining Path (1966–1976)]. *Antipoda. Revista de Antropología y Arqueología*, *44*, 145–165.

Hodapp, J. (2022). *Graphic Novels and Comics as World Literature*. London: Bloomsbury Academics.

Jara, G. (2022). La revuelta como fenómeno de masas: imagen, mito y telepatía [Revolt as a Mass Phenomenon: Image, Myth, and Telepathy]. *Revista de la Academia*, *33*, 32–49.

Jara, G., Moya, J., Berríos, C. (2023). *Pensar las derechas. Teorías, prácticas políticas e imaginarios culturales* [Thinking the Right: Theories, Political Practices, and Cultural Imaginaries]. Valparaíso: Centro de estudios del pensamiento Iberoamericano.

Jesi, Furio (1973). *Mito* [Myth]. Barcelona: Editorial Labor.

Jesi, Furio (2014). *Sapratakus, Buenos Aires.* Hadriana Hidalgo Editora.

Jiménez Arriagada, V., Bañales-Faz, G., Lobos-Sepúlveda, M. T. (2020). Investigaciones del cómic en el área de la didáctica de la lengua y la literatura en Hispanoamérica [Research on Comics in the Field of Language and Literature Didactics in Latin America]. *Revista mexicana de investigación educativa*, *25*(85), 375–393.

Karmy, R. (2020) *Intifada. Una topología de la imaginación popular* [Intifada: A Topology of Popular Imagination]. Santiago: Metales Pesados.

Lagopoulos, A., Boklund-Lagopoulou, K., Dondero, M. G., Fontanille, J., Katsaridou, M. I., Walldén, R. (2025) *Semiotics of Images. The Analysis of Pictorial Texts.* Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

Lamanna, M. A. (2018). Three Novels of Terrorism: Explorations in the Politics of Literature. *International Review of Sociology*, *28*(2), 336–353. doi:10.1080/03906701.2017.1421027

Latour, B. (1998). Petite philosophie de l'énonciation [Short Philosophy of Enunciation]. In P. Basso, L. Corrain (Eds.), *Eloquio di senso. Dialoghi semiotici per Paolo Fabbri, Orizzonti, compiti e dialoghi della semiotica. Saggi per Paolo Fabbri*. (pp. 71–94). Genoa: Costa & Nolan.

Leroux, M. C. (2024). Cuerpos y voces disidentes: memoria de la dictadura en *Pinturas de guerra* [Dissident Bodies and Voices: Memory of the Dictatorship in War Paintings]. *Quiroga. Revista de patrimonio iberoamericano*, *23*, 310–322.

Melgar, G. P. (2016, November 4). *Cómic Barrios Altos: las 'disculpas' de Perú21. Breve texto publicado en su 'Blog de la Redacción' ha despertado también las críticas de los lectores al considerarlo insuficiente* [News article; Barrios Altos Comic: Peru21's "Apology". A brief text published on its "Editorial Blog" has also sparked criticism from readers who consider it insufficient]. Redacción La Mula. https://redaccion.lamula.pe/2016/11/04/comic-barrios-altos-peru21-pide-perdon-a-quienes-se-sintieron-ofendidos-pero-no-por-desinformar/ginnopaulmelgar

Nieto, L. N. H. (2022). The Comic as a Form of Memory of Two Student Movements in Contempo-Rary Mexico: The Case of Grito de Victoria by Augusto Mora. In L. C. Fernández, A. Gandolfo, P. Turnes (Eds.), *Burning Down the House* (pp. 35–50). London: Routledge India.

Pau, S. (2021). Historieta y memoria del conflicto armado interno en Perú [Comics and Memory of the Internal Armed Conflict in Peru]. *Antares. Letras e humanidades*, *13*(31), 288–321.

Quezada Macchiavello, O. (2024). *Mundo Mezquino.: Arte semiótico filosófico 2a* [Mean World: A Philosophical-Semiotic Art]. Lima: Universidad de Lima.

Ramirez Pando, E. (2021) *Historia sangrienta de Sendero Luminoso* [Bloody History of Shining Path]. Diario Expreso.

Ricalde, M. C. (2019). Cecilia Pego: novela gráfica, violencias y neocolonización [Cecilia Pego: Graphic Novel, Violence, and Neocolonization]. *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, *96*(3), 325–345.

Sagástegui, C. (2024). Género, raza e identidad en los personajes del cómic peruano [Gender, Race, and Identity in the Characters of Peruvian Comics]. *IBEROAMERICANA. América Latina-España-Portugal*, *24*(86), 103–124.

Sierra-Zamora, P. A., Tapia, M. B. (2020). La invisibilidad de la identificación de víctimas en las fuerzas militares y el inicio de una crisis en la defensa y seguridad nacional a raíz del Acuerdo de Paz [The Invisibility of the Identification of Victims in the Military Forces and the Beginning of a Crisis in National Defense and Security Following the Peace Agreement]. *Vniversitas*, *69*(0), 1–12.

Singh, J. (2022). *Feminist Literary and Cultural Criticism: An Analytical Approach to Space*. Singapore: Springer Nature.

Sotelo Melgarejo, M. A. (2013). Representación gráfica de la violencia política en el Perú 1980–2012: Una aproximación a las historietas durante tiempo de violencia interna [An Approach to Comics During the Time of Internal Violence]. *Pacarina del Sur*, *4*(14).

Stavans, I. (2019). This Way to the Ovens, Señoras y Señores: Holocaust Cartoons in Latin America. *The Journal of Holocaust Research*, *33*(3), 214–223.

Turnes, P. (2024). El futuro ya ha pasado: apocalipsis urbano, futurismo y distopía en cuatro obras contemporáneas de historieta argentina [The Future Has Already Passed: Urban Apocalypse, Futurism, and Dystopia in Four Contemporary Works of Argentine Comics]. *IBEROAMERICANA. América Latina, España, Portugal: Ensayos sobre letras, historia y sociedad*, *24*(86), 79–101.

Vich, V., Hibbett, A. (2022). The Political Art of Memory in Latin America. In G. De Ferrari, M. Siskind (Eds.), *The Routledge Companion to Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Latin American Literary and Cultural Forms* (pp. 105–113). Abingdon, New York: Routledge.

Villar, A., Sagástegui, C. (2016). Búmm!: historieta y humor gráfico en el Perú: 1978–1992 [Búmm!: Comics and Graphic Humor in Peru, 1978–1992]. Lima: Reservoir Books.

Wade, P. (2024). Temporalities, Anachronism and Politics in Stories of the Conquest of the Americas. *History and Anthropology*, 1–20. doi:10.1080/02757206.2024.2361632

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 101–128
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.07

Article

VIVIAN MIZRAHI *

A NAÏVE REALIST ACCOUNT OF DEPICTION[1]

SUMMARY: Reacting against the view expressed by the British art critic John Ruskin that "the whole technical power of the painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the innocence of the eye", Gombrich and Goodman initiated in the 1960s several decades of intense discussions aiming to show that Ruskin was wrong and that pictorial perception is never innocent. This paper intends to partially reinstate the innocence of the eye, by giving a novel account of depiction that argues that pictorial perception is not a special kind of perception but rather perception through a special kind of medium. This account appeals not at all to resemblance, symbolic systems, make-believe, illusory experiences or recognitional abilities but relies instead on the phenomena of transparency and causal mediation. It argues that a painting depicts a scene only in virtue of its instantiation of some visual features that are independent of the existence of symbolic systems, artistic movements and styles, the nature of aesthetic experience and the psychology of the artist.

KEYWORDS: depiction, transparency, naïve realism, Aristotle, Walton, Heider.

1. Introduction

In this paper, I propose to take seriously the idea that a picture is like a window open to the world and explore in detail the view that pictures are transparent media enabling viewers to perceive "objects that are distant in time and space"

* University of Geneva, Thumos Group. E-mail: vivian@mizrahi.ch. ORCID: 0000-0002-0729-2427.

[1] Many thanks to Olivier Massin and to two anonymous referees of this journal for their comments and suggestions.

and "that cannot be seen by ordinary means" (Lopes, 1996, p. 193). Although the idea of painting as a window-like aperture to the world already appears in the Renaissance treatise *On Painting* written by Leon Battista Alberti (latin *De pictura*; 1991), there has been little attempt to defend a realist approach to depiction based on the simple idea that a painting is a transparent medium comparable to a pane of glass or a mirror. Unlike recent attempts to capture the phenomenology of pictorial perception by giving an account of pictorial perception in terms of the perception of transparency (Newall, 2015), the present paper intends to explore the view that pictures are transparent, not only to the way they are experienced, but in a realist sense, that is "viewer-independent" (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015, p. 73). The transparency view of depiction I shall defend is an extension of Walton's transparency view of photography to all figurative pictures. Although Walton himself distinguishes between depictive and photographic relations (Walton, 2012), I will argue that all depictive relations are transparent and of the same nature as those exhibited by photographs. Depiction, I will claim, is a relation between a picture—photographic or handmade—and constituents of the physical world which is grounded in causal relations between the world and the picture. While familiarity with a given style or artistic tradition can certainly shape a viewer's interpretation and aesthetic appreciation, the depictive relation itself is, I contend, independent of any particular style or symbolic system, as well as of the intentional states of either the observer or the artist.

The transparency account of depiction defended in this paper is non-intentional and realist in the sense that depiction is explained by appealing to the fact that pictures instantiate some features or relations independently of the way they are perceived. That is, a picture of *O* has intrinsic features by virtue of which it depicts *O*. According to this view, pictures depict a scene in virtue of their transparency, which transmits to the observer some visible features that do not belong to the picture itself. The transparency account is realist in the same sense as mimetic accounts of depiction which explain depiction by the fact that pictures resemble the objects they depict and claim that this resemblance relation is grounded in some features instantiated by the picture and its pictured object (Briscoe, 2016; Hyman, 2015).

Realist views of depiction differ in significant ways, but they agree that depiction is exclusively dependent on some properties instantiated by the picture itself. By contrast, perceptual accounts of depiction (for a nice survey of intentional accounts of depiction, see Kulvicki, 2006b, pp. 537–538), and intentional accounts of depiction more generally, explain depiction by a special mental relation between the perceiver and the depicted object. For example, it has been argued that a picture depicts a particular object *O* because it causes the perceiver to have an illusion of *O* (Gombrich, 1960), because it causes the perceiver to imagine seeing *O* (Walton, 2012), because it causes the perceiver to have a twofold experience of seeing *O* in the picture (Wollheim, 1980), or because it causes the perceiver to mobilize the same recognitional resources he or she uses when perceiving *O* directly (Lopes, 1996). Despite their differences, all these non-

realist accounts of depiction argue that pictorial depiction occurs because pictures cause certain intentional states in their perceivers.

Although this paper addresses the nature of depiction rather than the aesthetics of images, I believe that the contrast between intentional and non-intentional theories of depiction has several important implications for the way aesthetic questions are tackled. As it will be discussed in Section 5, the fact that depiction is rooted in reality rather than in the psychology of the artist or the observer places some constraints on the artist's role in the creative process and imposes some limitations on pictorial fiction. It also has some important implications regarding the understanding of pictorial realism and its alleged "open-ended" ambiguity (Prinz, 2021, p. 67). Building on insights to be found in Leonardo, Fiedler, Heider, Alexander, and Walton, this paper gives a new account of depiction grounded on the transparency of pictures, but it also offers a new perspective on our engagement with pictures, both aesthetic and epistemological.

In the following section, I distinguish the transparency account of depiction from other accounts of depiction. In Section 3, I propose a realist account of transparency inspired by Aristotle, and examine, in Section 4, how this account can be applied to photographs. Building on Fiedler's ideas about art, I argue in Section 5 that painters are merely visual mediators; that is, they use their bodies to relay visual information gathered from their experience of the visual features of objects. I show that paintings, like photographs, can be considered as visual traces that transmit visual information about the external world. I also extend the transparency approach to depiction of non-existent and non-particular objects. In Section 6, I defend the claim that pictorial seeing is not different in nature from face-to-face seeing and confront, in Section 7, the transparency account of depiction with the other main philosophical alternatives. I conclude the paper by considering the implications of the transparency account of depiction for a general theory of pictorial realism.

2. The Transparency Account of Depiction

The transparency account of depiction defended here claims that pictures give direct access to the objects or scenes they depict and rejects the claim that the perceptual relation to the depicted object is mediated by a perceptual relation to the picture itself. What we perceive when looking at a picture, according to this account, are not the visual properties of the picture itself but those of the object *O* it depicts, when *O* exists, or some real visual properties independent of *O*, when *O* is a generic object or a *fictum* (Sections 5.2.3 and 5.2.4). Whereas most accounts of depiction argue that pictures *represent* the visual properties of their depicted object, the transparency account defended here argues that pictures *present* or *display* or *show* those properties or some existing properties independent of *O* when the picture depicts *ficta* or non-particulars. What a picture displays are therefore not its own intrinsic properties but some visual properties independent of the picture itself.

Although the present account shares Lopes' view that transparency is "the key to explaining experiences of pictures of all kinds" (Lopes, 1996, p. 181), its understanding of what pictorial transparency amounts to is fundamentally different from Lopes' approach. Lopes' transparency account of pictorial transparency mainly rests on the idea that counterfactual dependency is at the core of the transparency exhibited by pictures. Yet, although one can acknowledges that some causal dependency is necessary for a picture to depict a scene, counterfactual dependency does not explain how pictures are endowed with the capacity to present visual properties which they do not have. The fact that the "marked, coloured surface" (Lopes, 1996, p. 192) of a picture can be a reliable source of knowledge about a depicted scene does not explain how the visual properties beyond the picture itself can be *visually accessible* to the observer who looks at the picture.[2] Pictorial transparency cannot be limited to the fact that pictures are caused and counterfactually dependent upon their subject, it must also explain how visual properties of the depicted objects can directly shape the viewer's experience.

Pictures are like windows because they are transparent apertures that allow the information contained in the light coming from depicted objects or properties to reach the observer. So conceived, pictures literally extend the observer's visual reach beyond the picture itself to the depicted object and its visual properties. Unlike opaque surfaces, which present "a barrier beyond which the eye cannot pass (Katz, 1935, p. 8), pictures, like windows, correspond to a particular region of the visual field where visual obstacles have been removed.

As the window-like approach to pictures suggests, the transparency account of depiction views pictorial perception as fundamentally similar to nonpictorial perception, and, like the naïve realist view of nonpictorial perception, it asserts that pictorial experiences are presentational in the sense that they are constituted at least in part by or depend on their depicted objects and some of their qualities. In both pictorial and nonpictorial experiences, the phenomenal character of the perceptual experience is explained by mind-independent objects and their qualities.

Although it is mediated by pictures, pictorial perception is direct in the sense that what helps to constitute the perceptual experience are the depicted objects themselves and their properties. Pictorial perception is direct because the pictorial medium does not interfere with the visual properties it conveys. Although depicted objects are perceived thanks to pictures, we are not aware of the pictures' visual properties in pictorial perception. Pictures mediate perception just as corrective glasses and optical instruments do. They give a direct access to visual information which is not otherwise accessible.

---

[2] Unlike the present account which argues that the transparent pictorial medium itself is not perceived, Lopes maintains that pictorial experience is twofold and that pictures "represent the visual world through visual properties" (1996, p. 192) which are counterfactually dependent on, and isomorphic with, the visual properties they represent.

The claim that pictorial and nonpictorial perception are essentially the same is therefore directly linked to the fact that pictures, being transparent, have essentially the same role as all other visual media. The goal of the next section is to understand this mediating role and to flesh out the notion of transparency to which it is essentially related.

3. The Nature of Transparency

In optics, transparency is the physical property of a material that allows light to pass through it. Although the notion of transparency is rooted in the science of optics, philosophers and psychologists use it frequently to describe perceptual experiences. The "transparency thesis" concerning perceptual experience, as it is commonly called, states that the attempt to carry out introspective observation of our perceptual experiences reveals nothing except mind-independent objects and their properties. When attending to our perceptual experiences, we look right through them—that is, we look directly at their objects—and do not discern any intrinsic features of the experience itself. It is therefore claimed that a perceptual experience is transparent "in the sense that we 'see' right through it to the object of that experience, analogously to the way we see through a pane of glass to whatever is on the other side of it" (Kind, 2003, p. 226). In a similar vein, Newall argues that pictorial perception exhibits the same general features we experience when seeing through a transparent medium. Although pictures are not physically transparent, he argues, pictorial perception is a kind of transparent perception or an experience involving a "transparency illusion" (Newall, 2015, p. 131). According to Newall, pictures are indeed transparent in the sense that they cause *experiences of transparency* in the viewer, but they are not transparent in the realist sense explained by Cavedon-Taylor, because their transparency is not "viewer independent" (Cavedon-Taylor, 2015, p. 73).

Appeals to transparency are widespread in philosophical theories of perception and pictorial perception, but few philosophers have tried to understand transparency for its own sake or to explain how it relates to visual perception in a nonmetaphorical way. Although optics defines transparency clearly by identifying it with the capacity of a material to transmit light, the relevance of its definition of transparency to perceptual experience is not obvious. As psychologists and philosophers have recognized, there is a sense of transparency that goes well beyond its restricted sense in optics. As Metelli explains:

> What do we mean when we say that something is transparent? In fact, the term has two meanings. If we are referring to the fact that light can pass through a thing or a medium, then the meaning of "transparent" we intend to convey is physical; if, on the other hand, we mean to say that we can see through something, then the meaning we intend to convey is perceptual. The distinction would not be very important if physical and perceptual transparency were always found together. Such, however, is not the case. (1974, p. 91)

What, then, is perceptual transparency and what is its relation to physical transparency?

As is often the case, the answer can be found in Aristotle. According to Aristotle, transparency is not a property of an object or material that is contingently located between the perceived object and the perceiver. It is a property of the visual medium itself, without which vision cannot occur. Johansen summarises his view thus: "There has to be something in between your eye and the object for you to see it. That is what Aristotle calls the medium. Aristotle takes the medium of sight to be light, the actuality of the transparent" (1997, p. 39).

The implication is thus that transparency is omnipresent in vision and not only in some material, as explicitly characterized by optics. Transparency is the fundamental property of the visual medium that allows visual qualities to reach the eye. There would be no vision without transparency. In *De Anima*, Aristotle famously argues that colours—the proper objects of vision—are visible only through a transparent medium. Now, the transparency that is required for vision to occur is manifested in experience by the fact that we see objects at a distance. By transmitting light from the perceived object to the perceiver, a visual medium like air or water creates an environment where visual perception can take place without obstruction. Unlike "nontransparent bodies, such as opaque solids, [which] are perceptually impenetrable" and "impose visual resistance" (Kalderon, 2018, p. 13), transparent media offer an openness through which sight can pass.

As Aristotle recognizes, physical and perceptual transparency correspond not to different realities, as Metelli claims, but rather to two faces of the same property. It is only because visual media are transparent that light can travel continuously from the perceived object to the perceiver, and it is only because there is no visible obstacle between the perceiver and the perceived object that sight can reach a distant object through a transparent medium. In other words, a visual medium by definition does not interfere with the information it conveys. It must therefore be invisible and hence transparent.

Although the transparency of some materials can be explained in terms of their capacity to transmit light, in Aristotle's account transparency it is not limited to this capacity. Aristotle characterizes as transparent anything that can mediate the perception of visual properties. In this sense, both mirrors and photographs are transparent, because both allow the perceiver to perceive the visual properties of the objects they mediate. Although they are not transparent in the restricted optical sense, they are transparent in the sense that they transmit to the perceiver the information conveyed by light. As defined by optics, transparent materials mediate visual properties of distant objects by allowing light to pass through them, but the central property of a visual medium is its capacity to be "a condition on the visibility of other things" (Kalderon, 2018, p. 235). Now, what matters in order to transmit visible properties to the perceiver is not the capacity to transmit light itself, but the capacity to transmit characteristic patterns of light rays caused, in part, by the perceived objects. What is visible is not

the light itself but the visible properties of objects, which are nothing other than the properties (color, shape, texture, etc.) that cause objects to interact with light in a particular way. Transparency, even in its optical sense, cannot therefore be reduced to the disposition to transmit light but must be understood as the capacity to transmit the information conveyed by light. As a medium, light conveys sensible qualities of the perceived object to the perceiver. It is not itself the perceived object (Johansen, 1997, Chapter 2).

4. The Transparency of Photographs

Understanding transparency as the capacity to transmit information conveyed by light is central if we are to grasp how photographs can store and transmit visual information of objects which are not in the vicinity of the observer. Most accounts of photography suppose that our experience of photographs is mediated by our perception of marks on a two-dimensional surface. This is just what the transparency thesis denies. According to the transparency view of depiction, it is indeed because photographs are transparent, and hence invisible, that our visual access to photographed objects is possible. Photographs do not transmit visual information from photographed objects by reproducing or mirroring this visual information on their surfaces. They rather transmit information by relaying it without interference and alteration. This difference is crucial since it explains how visible properties located beyond the photograph itself can directly reach into and shape the experience of the observer.

Unlike glass and water, photographs, mirrors and other reflective surfaces do not mediate visual perception of distant objects by allowing light to pass through them. They mediate visual perception by relaying the structural unity of the information contained in light. To understand this kind of mediation, we must understand the distinction between perceptual object and medium spelt out by Fritz Heider in *Thing and Medium* (1959).

Like Aristotle, Heider addresses the problem of perceiving at a distance and suggests that a special kind of mediator between the perceiver and the object perceived is needed in order to carry the perceptual information from the perceived object to the perceiver. This perceptual mediator, he argues, should be able to interact causally with the perceived object and the observer, but also to guarantee that this causal mediation occurs without interference. That is, it is crucial that media, as intermediaries, do not interfere with the information they convey. Otherwise, the information would be not only about the perceived object, but also about the medium itself. As Heider stresses,

> the configuration of light rays which meets my eyes, is coordinated to the object, the stone, in a special way. Even a small change of the surface of the stone changes the stimulus configuration. *It is not coordinated to any specific properties of the mediator*. (1959, p. 3; emphasis added)

As stressed by Heider, perceptual media convey perceptual information about perceptual objects not only because there is a causal and a counterfactual dependency between the medium and the object, but also because the medium and the object are of different nature. Heider distinguishes between things, which are internally conditioned, and media, which are externally conditioned. The fact that media are externally conditioned corresponds to the fact that their parts are causally independent of each other. Any air molecule can move freely without affecting the way the other air molecules behave. By contrast, all the parts of an internally conditioned object are interdependent. By moving the back of a chair in one direction, for example, we induce a motion of its legs. (cf. Heider, 1959, p. 8)

The notion of externally conditioned entities explains how media can causally contribute to perception without being part of its phenomenal content. Because the medium's parts are causally independent of each other, the medium as a whole can remain undisturbed by a particular process even while the medium's parts are directly affected by it. As Heider writes:

> The process on the surface of the stone, which reflects the light rays, is a process which is conditioned by the substratum […]. The fact that this particular kind of process occurs, namely, one which contains waves of particular lengths arranged in certain patterns, is determined by properties of the stone. The process in the medium, on the other hand, is conditioned externally. What happens in it is dependent on the form of the impinging process; the special state of the medium is to a high degree irrelevant for the form of the process in it. (1959, p. 4)

Rather than their capacity to replicate or mimic visual information of visual objects, it is their capacity to be externally conditioned, or in other words, shaped by visual objects that make certain entities apt to carry information about external objects. Unlike perceptual objects which are internally conditioned, perceptual media are unstructured and therefore shapable by external objects. By changing the direction and the frequencies of the light rays composing the incident light, coloured surfaces change the incoming the light and impose their own structure on the reflected light. On the contrary, visual media, like mirrors or glass, preserve the structural organisation of the incoming light and therefore do not affect the information it conveys.

Although most visual media allow vision to reach distant objects by offering a direct passage to the light structured by external objects, some opaque materials can serve as visual media by relaying the structural organization of visual objects in a different way. This is the case with screens and photographs. Consider for example the simple case of a shadow play in which hands are used to project shadows of different shapes on a wall. While the silhouettes cast upon the wall derive solely from the positioning of hands and fingers, the perception of these shadows relies on the wall's physical properties. It is because the wall's uniform surface reflects independently each incoming ray of light, that we can discern the visual effects crafted by the strategic placement of hands. As Heider

stresses, we perceive distinct and distant configurations of light rays insofar as there is a medium able to transmit those configurations without imposing its own structure on them.

This principle extends to more intricate scenarios involving light projection onto a screen, such as the early photographic device known as the camera obscura. This simple optical apparatus, resembling a sealed box with a small aperture and an internal screen, operates by allowing only a single ray of light from each point on an object outside the box to pass through the aperture and reach the screen within. As light travels in straight lines, each point on the screen receives light from a specific point on the object, resulting in a configuration of reflected rays that mirrors the object's light-reflecting surfaces. According to Heider, when observing light projections on a screen, our perception is directed towards the external causes shaping the arrangement of light rays rather than towards the screen itself (1959, p. 17).

Heider's explanation of visual media explains how a uniform surface functions as a mediator and why, in this context, the surface's physical characteristics go unnoticed, rendering it transparent to the observer. The transparency of screens is attested phenomenologically by the observation that the colours perceived on the screen, when it reflects light from an external object, do not appear to belong to the screen but rather to the surface of the object perceived through the screen. For instance, suppose you place a red apple outside a camera obscura. The redness you will perceive on the screen appears to belong not to the surface of the screen but rather to the perceived apple.

The same reasoning applies to photography. A camera obscura projects light from a scene through a small aperture onto a screen, while a photographic camera uses a lens to focus selected light rays onto light-sensitive film or electronic sensors. These recorded patterns can then be displayed on a screen or printed. Similar to the coloured shapes observed on a camera obscura's screen, the chromatic patterns in a photograph result from a complex causal process that relies on the individual correlation of the multitude of points, or pixels, on the photograph's surface to properties of the light rays selected by the lens. As Heider noted, photographs act as mediators: film and paper can record and retain distinctive light patterns from the photographed subject. In this sense, photographs are a special kind of trace—akin to footprints in sand or impressions in wax. Heider explains:

> Something static, too, can serve as a mediator, and such mediators are generally called traces. Changes in the position of parts of solid bodies, or changes on the surfaces of soft materials are traces though which we can recognize their causes. Again we find the same relations. The trace is more characteristic of the source the more possibilities of change the mediator had at the moment at which the trace is produced, that is, the more it pictures that which produced the trace […]. If the substratum of the trace loses its mediator characteristics […], the trace becomes permanent and the material cannot serve for further mediation. This is what occurs

> in every "fixation", whether applied to photographic film or a drawing; the hardening of a plastic mass in casting serves the same purpose. (1959, pp. 21–22)

Building on Heider's distinction between perceptual objects and media, we have seen that the transparency of photographs and images produced by optical devices, like a camera obscura or a digital camera, is caused by a complex causal chain that guarantees that the visual properties of a photographed scene are transmitted to the observer without interference. Yet, unlike photographs, handmade pictures do not seem to be constrained in this special way. What can be depicted in a painting is indeed extraordinarily varied and does not seem to be limited to real or existing objects like photographs. This fact alone seems to distinguish paintings, and handmade pictures in general, from photographs in a significant way. The difference between the way photographs and paintings are generated motivates Scruton's famous claim that photography lacks aesthetic value. He argues that because photographs merely record objects' appearances, they do not express thoughts and therefore cannot be objects of aesthetic interest. Scruton's argument relies on the fact that, unlike paintings, the creations of the photographer are constrained by the presence of the photographed objects. Because it has a transparent relation to its object, a photograph is interesting "only because what it portrays is interesting and not because of the manner in which the portrayal is effected" (Scruton, 1981, p. 593).

Although my paper addresses the nature of depiction rather than the aesthetics of images, Scruton's view is relevant because it embodies a widespread misconstrual of the nature of painting and of the painter's role in the creative process. In the next section, I argue, against Scruton's claim, that transparency is not exclusive to photographs but indeed is essential to all figurative pictures. I show that irrespective of whether the painter has observed, remembered, or simply imagined the pictured object, a figurative painting always involves a transparent relation with pictured objects or their properties that is akin to the transparency exhibited by photography.

5. The Transparency of Handmade Pictures

Photographs are transparent media in the Aristotelian sense because they enable the viewer to see the photographed scene by transmitting the visual properties of the scene captured by the camera. As argued in Section 4, photographs are indeed transparent in a realist sense. Like other visual aids, such as mirrors, eyeglasses, telescopes, and microscopes, they give us "a new way of seeing" (Walton, 1984, p. 251). Through a complex causal process of capturing and transmitting the particular arrangement of light rays reflected by an object's surface, a photograph, like any other visual medium, gives access to visual properties of objects distant in time and in space. But what about images that do not rely on a mechanical instrument to capture the properties of the light reflected by a depicted scene? What about images that rely on a painter's eyes and

hands rather than a camera's lens and film? Must we say, like Walton, that such images are not genuinely transparent but only *fictionally transparent* (cf. Walton, 1984, p. 256)?

No. If paintings lack the genuine transparency of photographs, the transparency thesis concerning photography loses its theoretical appeal. The transparency thesis concerning photography asserts that photographs do in fact capture and transmit the visual features of the photographed objects and that the presence of a photographer or viewer therefore plays no role in the causal process. What matters is that the photograph transmits those features and nothing more. Consequently, if a photorealist painting can transmit the same features a photograph can, it does not matter whether it is a painter rather than a photographer who has produced the image. What is perceived through a photograph and what is perceived through a painting that transmits the same features of an object must be identical. This is what a realist account of transparency amounts to.

Unlike most accounts of pictures, the present account holds that handmade figurative pictures are transparent in a realist sense and that their transparency is therefore akin to the transparency exhibited by photographs. Whether we perceive an elephant in a photograph or in a painting made by an artist who has never seen a real elephant face-to-face does not really matter. As I will show, what we perceive in both cases is a real elephant or certain properties of a real elephant or certain properties of more than one elephant.

A likely objection is that this cannot be the case, because painters can paint whatever they want; that is, they can paint without the constraints reality imposes on photographers. Painters would seem to be free from the long chain of causes and effects that guides the work of photographers, who need to be at a particular place in a particular moment to capture the scene a given photograph transmits. Painters, in contrast, can paint anything from seascapes to historic battles without leaving their studios. It would seem that all that is necessary for the production of a handmade picture is the painter's own intentions, thoughts, and skills.[3]

I argue, on the contrary, that the freedom of realist painters is a myth and that their work, like the work of photographers, is constrained by what it portrays. I maintain that the intellectualistic myth, according to which the artist's mind is "filled with an imaginative experience, which he transfers to the canvas" (Alexander, 1925, p. 9), obscures what is in fact necessary for making realistic paintings and that it crucially overlooks the constraints reality imposes on the artist's work.

[3] See, for example, Vasari's comments on Leonardo: "the greatest geniuses sometimes accomplish more when they work less, since they are searching for inventions in their minds, and forming those perfect ideas which their hands then express and reproduce from what they previously conceived with their intellect" (1998, p. 290).

5.1. Painting What Is There

Before dealing with the difficult question of fictive objects, I shall spell out what is involved when artists paint or draw what stands before their eyes.

Observational drawing—or drawing from life—is a complex activity that consists in drawing while attending in alternating fashion to the scene being observed and the picture being drawn. It is often held that in drawing from life the painter undertakes a complex sequence of actions: observing a scene, storing its visual characteristics in the mind, initiating and guiding a manual action, and finally comparing the picture obtained with the model or scene perceived.

This approach to observational drawing is, I believe, misleading because it intellectualizes the creative process and ignores the constitutive role of perception in drawing. Contrary to what is often assumed, the act of drawing does not begin only after the process of observation is complete. Rather, drawing is a complex activity that involves continuous and uninterrupted perceptual activity. Guided by what the artist perceives, the artist's hand produces visible marks on the paper; conversely, these marks guide the artist's ongoing observation of the scene or object. This continuous process constitutes a loop in which the artist's hand and the pencil serve as a transmission belt between the object or scene and what the artist draws. This is precisely the idea put forward by Fiedler, when he argues that sight is privileged, because there are activities which are, in a precise sense he spells out, a continuation of sight:

> What a liberation it must appear to be when we discover in ourselves the possibility of doing in the domain of sight something that other senses do not allow us to do: to realize for the eye what the eye delivers to consciousness. We thus enter a domain of external activity that is no longer opposed to those internal processes in which the life of sight unfolds but follows on immediately from them and presents itself as a continuation in the domain of external activity of these processes. If something that appears to the immediate perception of the eye or to representative consciousness occasions in us a simple gesture, which is supposed to indicate something to be seen, it is sight, and sight alone, that is here at work. (Fiedler, 1887, p. 84–85)

Sight and activity, he continues, may form aspects of one and the same process:

> Sight, which first delivers the sensations and perceptions of a visible thing, now sets in motion the external mechanism of the human body so that what was hitherto given to it only by internal processes undergoes a new and wider development in which the capacity of expression proper to human nature can serve its goals. It is one and the same process which, beginning with sensations and perceptions, finally unfolds in expressive movements. *One must thoroughly free oneself from the conception that distinguishes two different processes, one that ends with the development of visual representations, the other that begins with an attempt to externally imitate the inner representations.* (Fiedler, 1887, p. 85; emphasis added)

As Fiedler observes, in observational drawing "the eye paints for the eye through the hand". This idea is supported by Tchalenko, Nam, Ladanga, and Miall (2014), who show that drawing does not rely on visual memory but on a direct mapping of perception onto motor action. During gaze-shift drawing—where the eyes alternate between the original and the picture—the hand often continues drawing while the eye is still on the model, showing that the visual system drives the hand in real time rather than encoding details for later reproduction (Tchalenko, Nam, Ladanga, Miall, 2014, pp. 330–331).

Fiedler expounds this view further in the course of considering the special abilities of artists. What distinguishes artists from non-artists, he argues, is not their observational capacities but their capacity to embody those perceptions and express them:

> The artist is not distinguished by a special visual talent, not by the fact that he is able to see more or more intensely, that he possesses in his eyes a special gift of choosing, of summarizing, of transforming, of ennobling, of transfiguring, so that in his achievements he reveals only achievements of his seeing. On the contrary, he differs in that the peculiar talent of his nature enables him to pass directly from vivid perception to vivid expression; his relationship to nature is not a relationship of perception but a relationship of expression. (Fiedler, 1887, pp. 99–100)

Although observational drawing relies on seeing, what characterizes artists is what Fiedler calls their expressivity, that is, their capacity to externalize what they perceive (whether or not this externalisation deserves to be called expression is not a question which will be dealt with here). To paraphrase Fiedler, the artist draws for perception, not from it. Visual artists are not merely observers; they are also mediators who use their bodies to relay the visual information gathered from sight. Unlike the bodily movements initiated by active agents, which are *internally* conditioned by their goal, the movements of the artist's hand must obey the artist's eye with a minimum of interference. Artists are indeed mediators whose hand movements, guided by what they perceive, are *externally* conditioned (Section 4). Like the Aristotelian medium, the artist is the causal link between the perceived object and the perceiver. Moreover, because the artist serves as a visual medium, what matters is the artist's capacity to transmit visual features without distortion. To be able to transmit a variety of visual objects, the movements of the artist's hand must therefore be as responsive and nuanced as possible. The fine motor skills developed by an experienced artist play an important role in this respect: they enable the artist's hand to closely follow what the artist's eye perceives, thereby maintaining contact with the object being drawn and ensuring that the picture will accurately transmit visual features perceived by the eye.

When drawing or painting from life, the artist's role is therefore essentially the same as the that of the photographer in producing photographs. The process by which an artist's bodily movements transmit to the canvas what his or her eyes capture is parallel to the process by which a camera's lens transmits to the

photographic film what it captures. Of course, these processes exhibit many differences, but it is essentially the same process that guarantees that photographs and drawings are constitutively shaped by the visual world. To invoke a famous Aristotelian example, drawings and photographs are shaped by the perceived object in the same way a block of wax is shaped by a seal (Aristotle, 1984, III12 435a).[4] The visible features of the depicted object leave a special kind of trace on the artist's paper or photographer's film, and such traces are not, as is often assumed, mere imitations or representations.[5]

This discussion of observational drawing offers, I believe, a new perspective on pictorial realism and depiction by stressing the similarities between photographs and observational drawings. I argue that if we perceive things through photographs as we perceive things through mirrors or eyeglasses, then we must consider the possibility that certain handmade pictures are transparent in the very same sense—that is, transparent in a realistic sense, not only in a phenomenological one. Like photographs, observational pictures capture visual features of existing objects and store them for future and distant perceivers.

Can my conclusions regarding observational drawing and painting from real life be extended to all realistic pictures? If not, what distinguishes observational drawing from other kinds of realistic pictures?

5.2. Painting What Is Not There

Although the activity of drawing or painting from life is often foundational for acquiring and developing the skills needed to produce realistic pictures, many realistic handmade pictures are not the result of direct observation. One can paint

[4] Traces and imprints have long been a focus of philosophical reflection, from Democritus to Derrida. Following Caston (2020), I hold that Aristotle's famous image of wax impressed by a signet-ring is more than a convenient analogy. It is a concrete example of how information can be carried and transmitted through a medium. A block of wax sealed by a signet-ring is not merely any piece of wax with a certain shape and contours—it is a medium that encodes information about a specific ring. In this way, the impressed wax can be said to be *about* an object distinct from itself, much as a figurative picture refers to something beyond its own material form.

As Caston emphasizes, the example is significant because it models a form of information transmission that requires no consciousness. He writes:

> Something can receive information without having any cognition or indeed awareness of it at all. Aristotle's example makes this clear. Sealing wax is completely without cognition or consciousness, much less intelligence. What is essential is that the resulting state is *about* the cause from which it originates. Intentionality in this minimal sense, of *carrying information*, will extend to some inanimate things. But it does not occur in the vast majority of natural changes. (Caston, 2020, p. 24)

[5] Heider explicitly endorses the view that photographs and drawings are special kinds of traces that can serve as mediators (pp. 15–16). I am grateful to Kendall Walton for drawing my attention to the possible similarities between photography and footprints.

from another picture or a photograph, paint from memory, or simply paint some non-existent object realistically. I consider these three cases in turn in order to explore their relations to a transparency account of pictures.

5.2.1. Painting From a Picture

An artist can paint from life or from a picture or from a photograph. But what is depicted by the painting in this latter case? Does the painting depict the original picture or photograph, or does it depict the subject of the original picture or photograph? Although this question might seem complicated, the answer given by the transparency account of depiction proposed here is very straightforward. If a modern painter reproduces Leonardo's *Mona Lisa*, what is depicted in this modern painting is Lisa Gherardini herself, Leonardo's model, and not Leonardo's painting or its content (for a different view, see Kulvicki, 2006, pp. 87–93).

Because realistic paintings are transparent, they give the viewer access to visual features of the objects they depict. Therefore, by transitivity, as long as the picture is shaped by the same visual features that shaped the original painting, the visual access to the depicted object is preserved. This situation perfectly mirrors the case of transparent materials. The presence of more than one pane of glass between a perceiver and a perceived object does not affect the perceiver's visual access to the perceived object—as long as the panes of glass are transparent.[6]

5.2.2. Painting From Memory

If one views memory as a means of storing and retrieving visual information, the case of pictures painted from memory does not pose a significant challenge for a transparency account of pictures. As long as we accept the minimal requirement that an artist can transfer to a canvas visual information gathered by sight and stored in memory, the case of painting from memory is not substantially different from the case of observational drawing—except, of course, for the distortions possibly caused by the malfunctioning or limits of the artist's memory. A picture drawn or painted from memory can therefore serve as a transparent visual medium that transmits to the perceiver the visual properties of the remembered object.

[6] Colored panes of glass can affect the colors of the object perceived. To handle this case, it is possible to argue either that colored glass is not perfectly transparent or that perceiving objects through colored glass gives us access to different, but real, colors (Mizrahi, 2010).

5.2.3. Painting Non-Existents and Non-Particulars

The difficult case for a transparency account of pictures is, of course, the case of pictures that depict non-existents. Because there are no unicorns or dragons, pictures of unicorns and dragons do not present unicorns and dragons on the basis of a transparent relation to unicorns or dragons.

Another problem for the transparency approach to depiction is presented by generic pictures. Not all pictures seem to depict particulars. The shape of a pedestrian on a road sign, for example, does not depict a particular person. In contrast with face-to-face perception that relates perceivers and particulars, it seems possible for pictures to depict something without depicting something in particular. To argue, as I did, that we directly perceive visual features of depicted objects seems therefore problematic since non-particulars do not have visual features.

Should we then retreat and admit that the transparency account of pictures cannot work in this particular case, since it cannot explain pictures of non-existents and non-particulars?

I believe we should not. Realistic pictures of non-existent and non-particular objects, like all realistic pictures, are shaped and constrained by reality in ways as demanding as any of those already described. Depicting dragons depends on reality in the same sense that depicting any existing animal, such as a horse or an elephant, depends on reality. When painting a horse, artists rely on the appearance of real horses. Even when artists do not paint a particular real horse, they nonetheless depict visual properties of certain real horses. As explained above, pictures transmit visual properties of objects. The bearer of these visual properties can be a single object, such as when the hand of the painter transfers to the canvas the visual properties of the model posing in the studio or when the photographer captures through the lens of a camera the profusion of details and motifs belonging to a baroque Sicilian church. But the bearers of the visual properties transmitted by a picture can also be numerous and diverse. This is the case, for example, in Tiepolo's painting of Alexander's famous taming of Bucephalus. Although the visual properties of Bucephalus as depicted by Tiepolo are probably not derived exclusively from a single horse perceived or remembered by Tiepolo, these visual properties belong, I contend, to particular horses. According to the transparency account of pictures proposed above, regardless of whether a handmade picture depicts an object the artist has perceived face-to-face, remembered, or perceived through another picture, the picture transmits visual properties of the external world to the perceiver. Now, the painter who wants to depict a horse, but not necessarily a particular horse must rely on his or her acquaintance with the visual appearances of particular horses nonetheless. The kind of perceptual knowledge or recognitional abilities necessary to paint horses is therefore grounded in the artist's perceptual contact with particular horses. Although the painter is not compelled to transfer to the canvas the visual appearance of a particular horse, painting a horse that looks like a horse requires the artist to

assemble on the canvas some visual properties characteristic of horses' appearances.[7] Then, contrary to what is often assumed, when drawing a horse, the artist does not draw mere lines or shapes but literally draws visual properties of horses, such as their silhouette, their proportions, the relative positions of their constitutive parts, etc. This is true even in the case of a minimalist sketch. As we have seen, to be able to transmit visual characteristics of a horse to a perceiver, a picture must be shaped by visual properties of real horses.

5.2.4. Painting Ficta

Realistic pictures can depict fictive objects, like unicorns and dragons. I contend that a depiction of fictive objects, like any depiction of existing objects, depends on real appearances. Although fictive objects do not exist, the depiction of fictive objects nonetheless relies on how things appear in the external world. The more realistic a picture is, the stronger is this dependency. Consider the general constraints imposed by optical laws. Realist pictures obey these laws and accurately depict the way objects and materials interact with light.[8] Regardless of whether a painting is the work of a 17th-century Dutch master or a 19th-century French impressionist, it will be realistic only if it captures how light affects the different parts of the scene depicted. It does not matter whether a painting pictures a unicorn, Lisa Gherardini, or a peaceful seascape; to be realistic, a picture must accurately convey the distribution of light in the environment, the shapes and colors of proper and cast shadows, the position-dependent intensity of light, the shapes and materials of objects, etc. But a realistic painting also contains extensive information about the specificities of each object constituting the depicted scene. For example, to portray a young woman—remembered or imagined—a painter must be able to convey the particular appearances of skin and hair and therefore to transmit the visual properties of hair and skin stored in memory.[9]

According to Leonardo, an early friend of the sort of view defended here, painting fictive objects is not different from painting existing objects, because both rely on the same constraints imposed by reality. A painter of fictive objects

---

[7] A myth about Zeuxis, one of the greatest of Greek painters renowned for his realistic paintings, which is related by Cicero and Pliny, illustrates nicely this idea. The story goes that Zeuxis, when commissioned to paint the portrait of Helen of Troy for the temple of Croton, did not select one model among the most beautiful maids of Croton, but instead assembled and combined the features of five different maids because "he did not think that he could find all the component parts of perfect beauty in one person only" (Cicero, 1949).

[8] Not all realist pictures depict optical and lighting properties, but when they do, to be realistic, they must not transgress optical laws. For a nice survey of the painters' errors in depicting shadows (Casati, Cavanagh, 2023).

[9] Consider for contrast, the unrealistic appearance of Giovanna Tornabuoni in Ghirlandaio's portrait whose "flesh is presented as somewhat wooden and the hair as artificially, almost metallically, stiff" (Brown, 2010, p. 215).

has only the relative freedom of bringing visual properties that belong to different real-world objects into relation with one another on the canvas. In the chapter *How to Make an Imaginary Animal Appear Natural*, Leonardo writes:

> It is evident that it will be impossible to invent any animal without giving it members, and these members must individually resemble those of some known animal.
>
> If you wish, therefore, to make a chimera, or imaginary animal, appear natural (let us suppose a serpent); take the head of a mastiff, the eyes of a cat, the ears of a porcupine, the mouth of a hare, the brows of a lion, the temples of an old cock, and the neck of a sea tortoise. (Da Vinci, 1961, Chapter CCCLIII)

As far as depiction and realism is concerned, it is the world that steers the hand of the painter. The painter's freedom is to play with these constraints or to infringe them at the expense of realism. But the constraints that constitutively shape a realistic picture always depend on the world as it is and not on the painter's will.

6. The Innocence of the Eye

Goodman and Gombrich are right to criticize Ruskin for holding an impoverished account of vision which reduces our visual experiences to an awareness of "flat stains of colour", failing therefore to acknowledge the complexity of visual perception of coloured objects in space. The eye is never innocent according to Gombrich because "we do not observe the appearance of colour patches and then proceed to interpret their meaning […], to see is to see 'something out there'" (Gombrich, 1961, p. 260). Furthermore, painting and appreciating paintings are by no means "innocent", necessitating thorough training and education.

However, I contend that there is something correct in Ruskin's remark that figurative "painting depends on our recovery of what might be called the innocence of the eye" (1856, p. 22) and that visual experiences of children and painters are of the same nature. Hence, insofar as face-to-face perception is considered innocent, so too should pictorial perception be considered innocent. In contrast to explanations that describe pictorial perception as requiring a specific kind of perception or psychological attitude towards handmade pictures, the transparency theory of depiction attributes the special visual contact with depicted objects and properties to the inherent nature of the pictures themselves, rather than to the mental state of their viewers.

The perception of Piazza San Marco thanks to a Canaletto painting is made possible in the same sort of way as the perception of Mars is made possible by a telescope. And neither situation necessitates anything beyond the observer's usual perceptual capabilities. In both instances, it is the picture's and the telescope's proper ability to convey the visual information carried in light that ena-

ble the perceivers to see depicted and distant objects—no special psychological dispositions toward the picture or the telescope are needed from the perceivers.[10]

Pictorial perception is, then, not so much "innocent" as "naïve" in the sense used by naïve realists to stress the fact that perceived objects and their properties are the only constituents of perceptual experience. The transparency account of depiction claims that pictorial perception is constituted by what is depicted. It is the qualitative features of the depicted objects only that shape the visual experience of the observer. Neither the qualitative features of the medium itself—the painting—nor the observer's sensations contribute to this.[11]

Although a picture carries visual information about what it depicts, the picture itself is transparent and its own visual properties remain unseen. I contend indeed that denying "that we really see the picture surface" is not "an odd and somewhat desperate view" (Nanay, 2018, p. 164), but that it is rather the only view that can free pictorial perception from the limits of the canvas and explain how pictures disclose visual properties of something external to the picture itself.

However, the fact that pictorial seeing involves a direct experience of the visual properties of the objects depicted does not exclude the possibility of perceiving the properties of the physical painting itself, such as the texture of the canvas and its colours. What the transparency account claims however is that seeing Mona Lisa and seeing the canvas on which Leonardo has painted his model are two different and incompatible experiences. Observers can alternate between these experiences, but they can never enjoy them simultaneously. Although pictorial seeing and ordinary seeing are not ontologically different, they both give

[10] Face-to-face perception and perception through media such as mirrors, telescopes, or pictures are of the same nature: the observer's visual experience is shaped by the qualitative properties of the perceived object. Neither the properties of the medium itself (e.g., the mirror, telescope, or painting) nor the observer's sensations contribute to this experience. However, these experiences differ in how vision coordinates with the motor system and other sensory modalities. For example, vision in a mirror requires modified perceptual-motor coordination compared to face-to-face perception. These differences manifest at a metaperceptual level, where control-oriented monitoring underpins our awareness of our own perceptual processes. Moreover, perceptual experiences vary in the way they appear—whether they seem real, immediate, or familiar. Beyond their visual appearance, these experiences establish a specific relationship between the perceiver and the object, influencing how the perceiver is disposed to interact with it (Mizrahi, 2019). This framework is explored in Section 7.2 of the current paper to explain why face-to-face and pictorial perception, while similar in conveying visual content, exhibit distinct phenomenological characteristics.

[11] However, most pictures do not only depict. And it is often the interplay between the figurative and non-figurative elements in a picture that causes aesthetic experiences and reveals the artist special style (Section 8 of the current paper). This paper is strictly limited to depiction and does not therefore engage with these phenomena and the fascinating questions about aesthetics and art they suggest (for the imperceptibility of perceptual media, see Mizrahi, 2018).

access to a different portion of the world.[12] Pictorial perception is no different in this respect from the perception obtained through a prosthetic device. If you look through a telescope, microscope or periscope, you gain access to a portion of the world that is inaccessible to the naked eye, but at the same time you lose the ability to simultaneously perceive the objects around you. Looking into a painting is not different in this respect. It gives access to visual properties of depicted objects and properties, but it prevents observers from seeing the properties of the canvas lying just before their eyes. (Briscoe, 2016, p. 68–69; Mizrahi, 2021, p. 8–9; Newall, 2015, p. 144)

Having sketched the outlines of a transparency account of depiction, I will now flesh it out by comparing it to alternative views and addressing some challenges.

7. Alternative Accounts

7.1. The Resemblance View

Resemblance views of depiction hold that depiction depends on a relationship of resemblance between the picture and the depicted object. Resemblance views come in many flavors and differ in various ways. Due to space limitation, I limit the discussion to Hyman's and Briscoe's accounts.

Hyman proposes that for a picture to depict an object *O*, the picture's surface depicting *O* must have the same occlusion shape and the same aperture colors as *O*. According to Hyman, occlusion shapes, which are the shapes projected from objects onto an intersecting plane along a specific line of sight, explain the resemblance between pictures and depicted objects while remaining immune to subjectivity. Although an occlusion shape is perspectival, in the sense that it is relative to a particular viewpoint, Hyman argues that it "is not merely a feature of the viewer's experience. It belongs to optics, not psychology" (2015, p. 202). Although an occlusion shape is indeed not subjective, Hyman's view entails that the role of occlusion shapes is akin to the role played by appearances or retinal images in subjectivist accounts: they multiply the objects perceived in order to reconcile incompatible apparent properties. Thus, a circular coin perceived in a painting does not only look circular, it also looks elliptical:

> […] the face of the coin is really circular and its occlusion shape, relative to an oblique line of sight, is really elliptical. And there is no reason why it should not look as it really is in both respects, which by and large it does. (Hyman, 2006, p. 79)

[12] An allusion to this point is to be found in Magritte's *La condition humaine* series where, unlike more usual situations, the scene depicted by a painting matches perfectly what lies behind it.

As stressed by Hyman, the concept of an occlusion shape is a concept belonging to geometrical optics which is designed to capture the shape projected from an object to an intersecting plane along a given light of sight. Thus, occlusion shapes and intersecting planes are in Hyman's account purely geometrical properties. They are neither actual, nor particular. It is therefore unclear how they can be perceived. Moreover, resemblance between occlusion shapes may perhaps explain why two objects are similar or are perceived to be similar, but it seems to be of little help when it comes to explaining why one object depicts another object.

The role of occlusion shapes and projection is very different in the framework prescribed by the transparency account of depiction. Some occlusion shapes and projections are indeed actual and particular and can therefore serve as mediators. This is the case for example of cast shadows. The particular shape of a cast shadow is indeed externally conditioned by the shape of an opaque object *O* which obstructs the passage of light. Unlike the object *O*, which structures the light according to its own shape, shadows do not have a proper shape, since their shape depends at any time on the shape of *O*. A shadow, being thus externally conditioned by *O*, transmits the shape of *O*.

The same line of thought applies to photographs and handmade pictures. When the chromatic discontinuities on a photographic paper or a canvas are externally conditioned by some external objects, these chromatic discontinuities do not belong to the paper or the canvas, but rather to the scene they mediate. Although we can see the stroke on the paper as a stroke and a region of a wall as being shaded, the unitary shape exhibited by the picture and the shadow does not belong to the paper or the wall, but rather to the external objects which determine the unity of their shape.

Unlike Hyman's view, the transparency account of depiction does not therefore attribute to a perceived circular coin an additional elliptical occlusion shape, but rather explain why a particular elliptical projection on a paper or a wall can transmit the circular shape of a coin.[13]

[13] The resemblance view and the transparency view diverge in their accounts of how visual properties are instantiated in a picture. The transparency view posits that a medium instantiates visible features in a fundamentally different way than a visible object. Rather than replicating the visible properties of a depicted object—which would render the medium itself visible—the medium serves as a conduit, transmitting those properties without embodying them (see Burnyeat, 1995; Caston, 2020; Johansen, 1997 for the distinction between replication and transmission). This distinction helps explain why Heider differentiates between genuine and spurious unities when describing the changes undergone by a medium. Although a medium can acquire a "unitary form" from the object it transmits, the unity it displays is "spurious", because this structure is entirely dependent on the causal influence of the object. The object's form is causally transmitted; the medium itself remains formless or unstructured. This clarifies why certain processes function as mediators. As Heider notes:

The transparency account of depiction shares important features with Briscoe's deep resemblance theory. For Briscoe, pictorial and face-to-face perception are of the same explanatory kind, because pictures display visual properties that elicit the same perceptual mechanism as face-to-face perception:

> When you have an experience as of a S-shaped object in pictorial space, the very same discriminatory, selective capacity is triggered by the light reaching your eye as would be triggered by the light reflected from a S-shaped object seen face-to-face. (Briscoe, 2016, p. 53)

According to Briscoe, depiction is not representational but substitutive in the sense that pictures "present viewers with nonrepresentational substitutes or surrogates" (2016, p. 66) that resemble the depicted object. A picture depicts an object *O* in virtue of the visible attributes of a virtual model *M* perceived in the picture and not in virtue of the viewer's capacity to correctly interpret the visible marks on the picture's surface. Like the transparency approach to depiction proposed here, Briscoe's deep resemblance theory breaks with a widely held view of depiction according to which depiction is representational and anchored in the way we perceive the pictorial surface.

However, Briscoe's theory differs from my account by rejecting the transparency of pictures and by employing similarity relations to explain depiction. According to Briscoe, although we see visual properties in pictures directly, these properties are not the properties of the objects depicted by the pictures. These properties belong to virtual models that "share certain visual appearance properties with" the objects they depict (Briscoe, 2016, p. 46). Although Briscoe claims that the proper object of pictorial experience is a virtual model and not the depicted object itself, he concedes that "even if pictures do not exhibit what we could call subject transparency, they often exhibit property transparency" (2016, pp. 73–74).

Like Briscoe's account, the transparency account I defend here is presentational as opposed to representational, but it avoids the cost of introducing virtual models, because it maintains that only the depicted objects themselves are perceived. Like Briscoe, I maintain that understanding pictures is nothing like interpreting signs or visual cues on a surface. But I deny, contra Briscoe, that pictures depict objects "by presenting virtual models of objects and scenes in pictorial space" (Briscoe, 2016, p. 46). Pictures present visual properties exhibited by the external world itself and therefore exhibit a deep resemblance with their depicted objects in a trivial sense. Indeed, nothing resembles the depicted object more than the depicted object itself.

> The light rays which meet the eyes are messengers from the object and represent it. This representation of one entity by another is brought about by the close coordination between the two. The mediator processes which meet our sense organs are spurious units; they have unitary form not because of their own character but because they are coordinated to objects. (Heider, 1959, p. 6)

7.2. The Illusion Theory and the Twofold View

The transparency account of depiction defended here shares important features with Gombrich's view. In *Art and Illusion* (1960), Gombrich claims that pictorial and face-to-face perception are of the same nature. Contrary to the twofold account of pictorial perception, Gombrich's account of pictorial perception does not involve the perception of the picture's physical surface features. What makes a picture depictive is it capacity to cause in us a "visual experience of a kind that we know from our encounters with reality" (1982, p. 181). Pictures produce a kind of illusion in the spectators since, in looking at a picture, they perceive objects which are not there. Although most pictures are not deceptive in the sense that "we rarely get into situations in which the eye is actually deceived" (1960, p. 246), sometimes they are. This is the case of *trompe l'oeil* paintings which "fool the eye" and deceive the spectators by making them believe that the object depicted is really present in front of them. For Gombrich, the existence of *trompe-l'oeil* confirms the identical nature of pictorial and face-to-face perception, since perceiving some pictures can cause the spectators to believe they are perceiving the depicted objects.

Wollheim presents a contrasting viewpoint in arguing that pictorial perception possesses a distinctive phenomenology that prevents spectators from perceiving depicted objects as physically present. In his analysis, when individuals look at pictures, they simultaneously apprehend both the two-dimensional surface and the depicted objects. Wollheim identifies this dual awareness as constitutive of pictorial experience. Consequently, he contends that *trompe l'oeil* paintings do not qualify as authentic pictures because they fail to elicit the twofold perceptual experience that genuine pictures cause in viewers.

Who is right? Gombrich or Wollheim? Are *trompe l'oeil* paintings genuine pictures? If not, what are they? If pictures are of the same nature as face-to-face perception, why are we not fooled by other pictures too? As rightly pointed by Wollheim, any theory of depiction must give an account

> of what is distinctive phenomenologically, and not just causally, about seeing something or someone in a representation. It tells us what is experientially different about, for example, seeing Henry VIII in Holbein's portrait, as opposed to seeing him face to face. (Wollheim, 1980, p. 143)

So, why is the phenomenology of pictorial seeing different from face-to-face perception if they are experiences of the same kind?

The transparency of depiction gives an original answer to these different questions by holding that figurative paintings transmit real visual properties to the perceivers. In accordance with this view, pictures are not inherently deceptive, nor are they fundamentally different from face-to-face perception; rather, they serve as real sources of information by conveying visual content that might not be directly accessible to the observer otherwise. However, under certain

circumstances, as with *trompe l'oeil* paintings, pictures can indeed be deceptive by causing in the perceiver an inappropriate feeling of presence.

Unlike Gombrich, who attributes to pictures the capacity to cause quasi-illusions in perceivers and Wollheim, who attributes the special phenomenology of pictorial perception to its particular twofold nature, I argue that the special phenomenology of perceiving pictures is not perceptual but affective. Following Dokic (2012), I rely on the sense of presence to ground the contrast between the phenomenology of pictorial and face-to-face experiences.

Visual perception is not limited to its sensory content. The tomato on the kitchen counter perceived by Sam does not only appear red and round, it also appears real, actual, immediate or familiar. On top of the looks or appearances they reveal, perceptual experiences present a particular relation to their intentional objects which anchors the way the perceiver is disposed to interact with the perceived object. One way to interpret the distinctive phenomenological features associated with the perceptual consciousness of bodily presence, familiarity or absence is to conceive these experiences as constituted by various kinds of metaperceptual feelings "which reflect a specific kind of affective experience caused by subpersonal monitoring of (perceptual) processes" (Dokic, Martin, 2013, p. 118). What distinguishes Sam's visual experience of the tomato in front of him and Maria's experience of the tomato depicted in a painting is not their intentional properties, but rather the occurrent and non-occurrent feeling of presence manifested in these experiences. As summarized by Dokic: "In a nutshell, what is specific to pictorial experience is that it involves the perception of a worldly partial appearance which is unaccompanied by any sense of the presence of what it is an appearance of" (Dokic, 2012, p. 404).

The metaperceptual approach to the sense of presence accounts for the fact that the phenomenology of two perceptual experiences can be different without having to endorse any difference between the intentional properties of the visual experiences. It is therefore possible to hold, contra Gombrich, that pictorial experiences are not illusory and that they are constituted by real visual properties and, contra Wollheim, that the phenomenological difference between pictorial and face-to-face experiences is not perceptual.

8. Conclusion: A Realist Approach to Pictorial Realism

According to the view defended here, properly understood, realism is not a system, movement, or style. Realism depends not on the artists but on the pictures they create.

A picture can be realistic only if it conveys by transparency visual properties of real objects. Paintings, and images in general, are the proper bearers of pictorial realism. According to this view, a style, system, or movement can be described as realist only in virtue of the paintings or other pictures it includes.

Like many visual properties, transparency (or opacity) exists on a continuum. Unlike perfectly transparent objects—which are invisible—a translucent object,

such as frosted glass or fine fabric, remains partially transparent while still being perceptible. Transparency and visibility are, in this sense, opposite qualities: the more transparent an object is, the less visible it is, and vice versa. An object can thus be both visible and transparent only insofar as it is neither fully transparent nor fully visible (cf. Mizrahi, 2018).

From this perspective, a painting's realism can be understood as its degree of transparency. The more a painter intervenes in the visual properties of a scene—through stylistic or expressive techniques—the less the work is transparent and adheres to realism. Yet this very intervention highlights the painter's presence and the materiality of the painting itself.[14]

This tension between realism and expressivity recurs throughout art history. Painters draw attention not only to the scene depicted but also to the canvas as an object and to the act of painting, rather than treating it as a mere window onto reality. Vincent van Gogh, for instance, states he privileges expressive freedom over exact depiction what he expresses in a letter to his brother Theo written in Arlen on 18 August 1888: "Because instead of trying to render exactly what I have before my eyes, I use colour more arbitrarily in order to express myself forcefully" (van Gogh, 1888).

Schiff, on his part, theorizes this in terms of transparency and opacity:

> [T]ransparency converts a picture surface into an immaterial plane—according to the usual metaphor, a window—that renders visible what lies beyond it, the world of traditional pictorial representation […]. For the modernist, self-expression becomes most evident when the normative look of represented objects is transformed by the material substance of paint applied to a surface […], every picture may seem to possess both transparent and opaque features. Obviously, transparency facilitates vision, while opacity impedes vision's course. (Schiff, 1991, p. 131)

Similarly, Pepperell notes the tension between materiality and representation:

> Turner's Rain, Steam, Speed (National Gallery, London, 1844) presents us with a mass of vigorously applied paint, the handling of which pronounces its material properties. We also see a locomotive engine pulling carriages across the Maidenhead Railway Bridge through heavy rain. The paint here functions both as matter spread over a surface and as sky, brick, steam, metal, water, clouds, and fields […], the materiality of the surface "interferes" with our recognition of the forms. (Pepperell, 2015, p. 2)

Greenberg situates this historically, contrasting the Old Masters' concealment of the medium with Modernism's openness:

---

[14] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer of this journal for prompting me to clarify this point further.

> Realistic, naturalistic art had dissembled the medium, using art to conceal art; Modernism used art to call attention to art […]. Under Modernism, these same limitations came to be regarded as positive factors, and were acknowledged openly. Manet's art became the first Modernist pictures by virtue of the frankness with which they declared the flat surfaces on which they were painted. (Greenberg, 1965/1982, p. 6)

Although realist paintings are always constrained by the visual properties of the external world, the artist decides which properties to transmit through the canvas or another medium. Figurative pictures vary in realism depending on what they choose to convey. Whether working within or reacting against tradition, artists always select which visual features of depicted objects to emphasize. Warhol's screen prints (e.g., the *Marilyn* series) display colours incompatible with reality; early Cubist paintings present spatial layouts combining multiple viewpoints in "impossible" ways; stick figures ignore most visual constraints, retaining only basic shapes and proportions.

Through these choices, figurative pictures may more or less resemble direct visual experience, making them more or less realistic. Regardless of degree, however, all pictures remain partly shaped by the external world, independent of the artist's intentions. Pictorial realism is thus polymorphous, its diversity rooted both in the richness of the visual world and in the varied ways artists engage with it.

REFERENCES

Aristotle. (1984). On the Soul. In J. Barnes (Ed.), *The Complete Works: The Revised Oxford Translation* (pp. 641–692). Princeton, N.J.: PUP.

Alexander, S. (1925). *Art and the Material: The Adamson Lecture for 1925*. Manchester: The University Press.

Briscoe, R. (2016). Depiction, Pictorial Experience, and Vision Science. *New Directions in the Philosophy of Perception*, *44*(2), 41–87.

Brown, J. H. (2010). Seeing Things in Pictures. In C. Abell, K. Bantinaki (Eds.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Depiction* (pp. 208–236). Oxford: OUP.

Burnyeat, M., (1995). Additional Essay: How Much Happens When Aristotle Sees Red and Hears Middle C? Remarks on *De Anima 2*. In M. C. Nussbaum, A. O. Rorty, (Eds.), *Essays on Aristotle's De Anima* (pp. 7–8). Oxford: OUP.

Casati, R., Cavanagh, P. (2023). The Art of the Shadow: How Painters Have Gotten It Wrong for Centuries. *The MIT Press Reader*. Retrieved from: https://thereader.mitpress.mit.edu/the-art-of-the-shadow-how-painters-have-gotten-it-wrong-for-centuries/

Caston, V., (2020). Aristotle on the Transmission of Information: Receiving Form Without the Matter. In D. Bennett, J. Toivanen (Eds.), *Philosophical Problems in Sense Perception: Testing the Limits of Aristotelianism* (Vol. 26, pp. 15–55). Springer.

Cavedon-Taylor, D. (2015). Photographic Phenomenology as Cognitive Phenomenology. *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *55*(1), 71–89.
Cicero, M. T. (1949). *De Inventione* [On Invention]. Cambridge, MA: HUP.
Da Vinci, L. (1961). *A Treatise on Painting*. New York: Dover Publications.
Dokic, J. (2012). Pictures in the Flesh: Presence and Appearance in Pictorial Experience. *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, *52*(4), 391–405.
Dokic, J., Martin, J.-R. (2013). Seeing Absence or Absence of Seeing? *Thought: A Philosophical Journal*, *2*(2), 85–177.
Fiedler, K. (1887). *Der Ursprung der künstlerischen Thätigkeit* [The Origin of Artistic Activity]. Leipzig: Hirzel.
Greenberg, C. (1982). Modernist Painting. In F. Frascina, Ch. Harrison (Eds), *Modern art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (pp. 5–10). Harpers and Row.
Gombrich, E. (1960). *Art and Illusion*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Gombrich, E. (1982). Mirror and Map: Theories of Pictorial Representation. In E. Gombrich, *The Image and the Eye: Further Studies in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (pp. 172–214). Ithaca: Cornell/Phaidon Books.
Goodman, N. (1968). *Languages of Art*. Indianapolis: Hackett.
Heider, F. (1959). Thing and Medium. *Psychological Issues*, *I*, 1–34.
Hyman, J. (2006). *The Objective Eye: Color, Form, and Reality in the Theory of Art*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Hyman, J. (2015). Depiction. In P. F. Bundgaard, F. Stjernfelt (Eds.), *Investigations Into the Phenomenology and the Ontology of the Work of Art* (pp. 191–208). Cham, Heidelberg, New York, Dordrecht, London: Springer.
Johansen, T. K. (1997). *Aristotle on the Sense-Organs*. Cambridge: CUP.
Kalderon, M. E. (2018). Aristotle on Transparency. In T. Crowther, C. Mac Cumhaill (Eds.), *Perceptual Ephemera* (pp. 219–237). Oxford: OUP.
Kind, A. (2003). What's So Transparent about Transparency? *Philosophical Studies*, *115*(3), 225–244.
Kulvicki, J. (2006a). Pictorial Realism as Verity. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *64*(3), 343–354.
Kulvicki, J. (2006b). Pictorial Representation. *Philosophy Compass*, *1*(6), 535–546. doi:10.1111/j.1747-9991.2006.00036.x
Lopes, D. (1995). Pictorial Realism. *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *53*(3), 277–285.
Lopes, D. (1996). *Understanding Pictures.* New York: Oxford University Press.
Lopes, D. (2006). The Special and General Theory of Realism: Reply to Abell, Armstrong, and McMahon. *Contemporary Aesthetics*, *4*(23).
Maynard, P. (1985). Drawing and Shooting: Causality in Depiction. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *44*(2), 115–129.
Metelli, F. (1974). The Perception of Transparency. *Scientific American*, *230*(4), 90–98.
Mizrahi, V. (2010). Color and Transparency. *Rivista di Estetica*, *43*(1), 181–192.
Mizrahi, V. (2018). Perceptual Media, Glass and Mirrors. In T. Crowther, C. Mac Cumhaill (Eds.), *Perceptual Ephemera* (pp. 238–259). Oxford: OUP.

Mizrahi, V. (2019). Mirrors and Misleading Appearances. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, *97*(2), 354–367.

Mizrahi, V. (2021). Seeing Through Photographs: Photography as a Transparent Visual Medium. *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *79*(1), 52–63.

Nanay, B. (2018). Threefoldness. *Philosophical Studies*, *175*(1), 163–182

Newall, M. (2015). Is Seeing in a Transparency Effect? *British Journal of Aesthetics*, *55*(2), 131–156.

Pepperell, R. (2015). Artworks as Dichotomous Objects: Implications for the Scientific Study of Aesthetic Experience. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, *9*, 1–13. doi:10.3389/fnhum.2015.00295

Prinz, J. (2021). Realism Relativized: A Cultural-Historical Approach to What Images Capture. *The Journal for the Philosophy of Language, Mind and the Arts*, *2*(1), 49–72.

Ruskin, J. (1876). *The Elements of Drawing, in Three Letters to Beginners*. New York: J. Wiley and Sons.

Schiff, R. (1991). Cézanne's Physicality: The Politics of Touch. In S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (Eds.), The Language of Art History (pp. 129–180). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Scruton, R. (1981). Photography and Representation. Critical Inquiry, *7*(3), 577–603.

Tchalenko, J., Nam, S.-H., Ladanga, M., Miall, Ch. (2014). The Gaze-Shift Strategy in Drawing. *Psychology of Aesthetics Creativity and the Arts*, *8*(3), 330–339.

van Gogh, V. (August 11, 1888). [Letter to Theo van Gogh]. Retrieved from: https://www.webexhibits.org/vangogh/letter/18/520.htm

Vasari, G. (1998). *The Lives of the Artists*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Walton, K. (1984). Transparent Pictures: On the Nature of Photographic Realism. *Critical Inquiry*, *11*, 246–276.

Walton, K. L. (2012). Fotografische Bilder [Photographic Pictures]. In J. Nida-Rümelin, J. Steinbrenner (Eds.), *Fotografie zwischen Dokmentation und Inszenierung* (pp. 11–28). Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag.

Wollheim, R. (1980). *Art and its Objects*. Cambridge: CUP.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 129–149
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.08

Article

HELENA PIRES *

GARDEN OF EDEN. ART AND THE ARTIFICIALITY OF THE NATURAL

SUMMARY: Inspired in Joana Vasconcelos' artwork called *Garden of Eden*, this paper discusses the sociosemiotics relationship between "nature" and art. In turn, the notions of garden and landscape are also considered as fundamental in order to understand the meaning-making process of our contemporary sensitive experience. In fact, the technological conditions of individual and social perception of the surrounding phenomenological world produce a continuous resignification of our embodied imaginary.

What does "nature" (or natures) nowadays mean? In what way the garden, as an artefact, represents a cultural paradigm of our (non)human nature? The very notion of *landscape*, permanently re-created by visual artists, can be useful to problematize our connection to the other living beings, rather animals or plants, in a planet at serious risk or, at least, subject to an irreparable transformation.

KEYWORDS: art, garden, *Garden of Eden*, Joana Vasconcelos, semiotics and landscape/garden/nature, sociosemiotics, meaning-making process, visual-performance art/garden and semiotics.

1. Introduction

The question about the relationship between art and reality can lead us to a second, classic and more specific question, which is the connection between art and nature. In particular, as Cooper (2008) points out, art and nature constitute

* University of Minho, Department of Communication Sciences, ICS; Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS). E-mail: hpires@ics.uminho.pt. ORCID: 0000-0002-5533-4687.

two models for the appreciation of gardens, which we have chosen for reflection and analysis in this article. In the garden, nature and culture come together: "Gardens—at least those that are 'typical'—are natural places transformed by creative human activity, and contain natural elements, such as flowers, chosen, located and organised, at least in part, according to aesthetic considerations" (Cooper, 2008, p. 21).

Based on the case of the *Garden of Eden*, a work by the artist Joana Vasconcelos, we propose to stimulate a critical discussion about the meaning of the garden in contemporary art, taking into account that the deep climate crisis we are experiencing has catapulted us into rethinking our connection with nature. As an artefact that gives expression to a certain cultural and aesthetic vision of nature, the garden can be perceived as a mediating instance between nature and art, or even, by analogy with landscape painting, a work of art in itself. One might even wonder whether all the pleasure in enjoying gardens derives from their association with landscape paintings (Hunt, Willis, 1988, p. 350).

In Joana Vasconcelos' *Garden of Eden*, an artistic work that we will try to analyse, art and nature are mixed, despite the fact that the "nature" to which the work refers is constituted according to mechanisms that produce a kind of artificiality of the natural. Rejecting a simple *mimesis* of the natural, while at the same time suggesting the production of a *simulacrum* that replaces that same natural, the *Garden of Eden* appears to be an exercise in critical thinking about the contemporary conditions that constrain our relationship with the surrounding living world. At the same time, it concerns the aesthetic experience of enjoying a time and space suspended from the ties that bind us to the capitalist reality of production and consumption.

2. The Garden, Art and Nature

If we understand nature from a classical perspective as an original work of art, resulting from divine action, can we think of the garden as a kind of imitation of it? Or even a perfected, rationally controlled version of nature?

We can recognise a similarity between the art of gardening and the art of painting landscapes if we consider nature as a model in both cases. In this way, the garden is understood as a sign, whose nature, indexical because of the organic nature of the material of which it is composed, is confused with the referent. From this point of view, gardens are "garden-images": "to plant a plot of land is to paint a landscape with living things", a practice among the fine arts (Jekyll, 1991, p. 160).

However, it is worth highlighting a few differences between the "garden-image" and a landscape painting. Firstly, the garden is the most impermanent art, it changes all the time. Secondly, unlike a painting, a garden is never complete (Cooper, 2008, p. 29). In addition, unlike painting, where the work is the exclusive result of the artist's action and will, the art of gardening partly consists of the gardener's action and partly goes beyond that action, beyond the gardener's

absolute control. Weeds grow among the flowers, insects eat the leaves of plants, the sun and rain, as well as the changing characteristics of the soil, constrain or mould the (de)growth of species. Finally, it should be noted that a garden is not just an object of contemplation, but above all a place of enjoyment to be travelled through and discovered as we move around or through it. The experience of enjoying a garden is therefore not only visual, but also corporeal, kinaesthetic and multi-sensory:

> The viewer finds himself *in* and surrounded by the natural landscape being admired; is typically *moving* through it, and, hence is *active*, the landscape is not *framed* for the viewer, and nor are there *privileged viewpoints* from which to regard it. (Cooper, 2008, p. 36)

Thus, gardens are not only part of the visual arts, but also of the performing arts. A garden is not just a limited aesthetic composition separated from what is outside it. It invites bodily interaction and not just visual interaction (Berleant, 1993). However, the garden's performative potential does not exclude the possibility of mere aesthetic appreciation. Seeing the garden, admiring it from a static bodily position, gazing at the flowerbeds, trees and flowers, smelling their scent and letting oneself wander in suspended time, is also a possibility: "sometimes the garden, or some bit of it, is the 'object' of a quiet, attentive, even contemplative gaze, not a theatre providing and 'occasion' for experience" (Cooper, 2008, p. 37).

Although the garden is discussed as a kind of second nature, and it is true that many gardens—especially in China and Japan—"imitate" or represent natural settings, the nature they contain is a "transformed", "improved", "methodised" nature. We can consider the gardens of Capability Brown (English landscape architect, 1716–1783), one of the masters of the English garden, as an important reference. In contrast to the French garden, which was geometrically designed and disciplined, reflecting a certain rationalising vision of the world, the English garden is distinguished by its imitation of the more spontaneous character of nature, simulating an intermediate point between what would be an indomitable and dynamic flow and human intervention. In one way or another, the garden is always an artefact: "to appreciate it as a place transformed by human artifice, then its appreciation is not of something as nature" (Cooper, 2008, p. 40).

Having done the maths on what brings it closer to and separates it from both nature and pictorial landscape art, it could be said that "the garden is neither art nor nature: it is art-and-nature" (Cooper, 2008, p. 41). According to Hegel, it is precisely because the garden is a difficult combination or a fragile fusion of art and nature that it is not an object to be admired. As part of the group of German idealist philosophers between the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, Hegel is not very enthusiastic about the art of gardens: "Nature, as we find it in the garden, lacks the 'grandeur and freedom' (Hegel, 1975, p. 699), it enjoys when left alone by man" (Cooper, 2008, p. 43). The enjoyment of the garden is in any case associated with the hedonistic life, with pleasure, happiness and well-being. When meditating in a garden, one is left to oneself

(Cooper, 2008, p. 83), left to one's intimate sphere, to one's most unconfessed thoughts and daydreams (Bachelard, 1994).

Another issue to consider is the question of representation. Can the garden communicate an idea or thought? Does it represent the world of nature, imagined as wild or agrarian? In fact, these questions imply the problem of semiotics and reality. Concerning either the relationship with thought or with "reality", what are the criteria of truth we should consider? What is the "real nature" it must be assumed as a model and its faithful representation? Is there a fundamental distinction between the material nature of the referent and the material nature of the representation? These problems remain unsolved:

> [A] practical semiotics should have some account of the relationship of semiosis and "reality", that is, the material world that provides the objects of semiosis and semiotic activity. Unless semiotics confronts this relationship, it can have no relevance to the world of practical affairs with its confident assumptions about "reality", and it cannot account for the role of semiotic system in the world. This relation bet ween semiosis and reality bears on some problems that have bedevilled. (Hodge, Kress, 2007, p. 23)

From a Peircean perspective, semiosis defines an infinite process of creating meaning, arising from the possibility of an infinite association of thoughts and ideas with each other. Thus, depending on the values of a particular time and culture, in a specific situation, the meaning of the garden (and landscape) is produced. This is why the significance of gardens (Francis, Hester, 1990) responds to the need to legitimise a certain vision of nature, adding to it a rationality and discipline that deceive the illusion of control over its perceived unstable and unpredictable nature, while at the same time giving expression to a social model that changes with the times: "To explain the meaning of an item is to show how the item is suited to, or legitimate, or apt for, communicating, expressing, or standing for something, for being employed in a certain way, and so on" (Cooper, 2008, p. 111).

Since the 18th century, and especially from the moment the Industrial Revolution and Modernity, materialised in the growing urbanisation of culture in the Western world, gained strength with the capitalist system, gardens have been an essential place for well-being, as opposed to the sphere of work and productivity. Thus, from gardens we can discuss the relationship between human beings and "nature", as well as between work and leisure. We can even say that, from a semiotic point of view, the garden is both an expressive meaning (Cooper, 2008, p. 117), representing the emotional universe of its owner, creator or gardener, as a sign or symptom of an artefact whose meaning is opened up and produced by the uses of its practitioners or visitors. This last perspective fits in with the social semiotics approach (van Leeuwen, 2005), according to which what matters are situated social practices and the way in which meaning is produced in these specific contexts. This same assumption is argued by Mieke Bal (1994; 2025), in what concerns the meaning-making process as an act of percep-

tion that implies the spectators and the moment of perception, in this case, of the work of art.

3. The Garden or the Pre-Conception of Landscape?

Taking into account Simmel's notion of landscape (2011), defined as an aesthetic experience of connection with nature, a feeling—*Stimmung*—that allows the individuals, in fragmentary modernity, to connect to that same nature, gardens can be related to the idea of a unity and a flow of which they are a part. It can also be admitted that the garden is expressive of the desire of continuity in what concerns spatial and temporal existence. We can therefore question the gardens today in their relationship with a new phantasmagoria: the catastrophes caused by climate change, the extinction of species diversity, uncontrolled pollution, overproduction and hyper-consumption. How can gardens, today, be used to discuss the relationship between humans and non-humans, including plants, animals and technology (Pires, Pinto-Coelho, Magalhães, 2025)? What is the meaning of creating a garden in contemporary times from a symbolic point of view, as a material that signifies a certain vision of the surrounding natural and socio-cultural world? In its approach, or even as an artistic creation, can a garden serve as a critical essay on how we integrate "technology" and "nature" into our everyday practices? Above all, from the garden we can rethink our current doubts about the naturalness of "nature" (Serrão, 2011, p. 66). On the one hand, the garden currently appears to be a kind of last stronghold, a cut-off from the "natural" world that can be enjoyed with some safety. On the other hand, it is a contradictory place in itself, since it contains both the possibility of connecting with the "natural" and the desire to control and discipline what, by definition, escapes absolute human will. A place of otherness, the garden is also a place of imaginary production, a place of dreaming and of confronting human limitations. It should be added that "[…] the distinction between the primitive or untouched natural, the worked natural or the threatened natural is no longer evident" (Serrão, 2011, p. 66). Today, the perception of a certain (in)distinction between the natural and human order prevails (Serrão, 2011, p. 67).

From a semiotic perspective, we can use Augustin Berque's (2016) notion of trajectivity (*trajectivité*), meaning the simultaneously objective and subjective nature of the relationship that, according to the author, can be defined in reference to the notion of landscape, to try to trace the semiosic complexity of the garden: "A mixed category, cultural in form and natural in content, landscape implies the subjective-objective synthesis, the duplicity of reality and ideality where Life and concept are inseparable" (Serrão, 2011, p. 62).

The notion of landscape, in its aesthetic-philosophical sense, always refers to representation, at the same time as to the apprehended reality. The garden can be understood as an artefact that pre-announces the concept of landscape in the visual arts. Firstly, considering that it already serves as a mediation (*médiance*, Berque, 2016) between nature ("objectivity"), as a continuous and infinite flow

of which we are a part, and a vision ("subjectivity"), a space-time cut-out. In Simmel's perspective, moreover, the notion of "landscape" implies two operations. An operation of analysis, as the delimitation of a "piece" of nature, and an operation of synthesis, which consists of restoring to the elements that make up the "landscape" their sense of intrinsic connection. Secondly, from a formal point of view, the notion of a garden implies, as illustrated in medieval illuminations, a space that is separate and demarcated, although not necessarily opposed, from the universe outside it. Delimiting the space of the garden, structured as a "frame", and the space outside it, there is often a fence, railing or other type of marking, of varying material, acting as a real limit.

Inside the frame, a set of fragments scattered throughout nature are organised in a given, more or less free structure. In this way, we can recognise in the garden the paradigm of all constructions known as "landscapes" (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 18).

The link between the garden and landscape painting is intimate. We only have to think of the impressionist record of artists such as Monet or Renoir, who gave us the delight of depicting playful environments for enjoying the outdoors and the culture of leisure. As with various artefacts, both the garden and pictorial landscapes are expressive of a taste, a norm or convention and a culture. Such an evaluative framework is the semiotic key to reading a painting by Cézanne, Poussin or Lorrain. What are the symbolic forms that underpin the structure of the landscape, be it a garden building or a painting? Can we consider our appreciation of nature as shaped in itself by a certain symbolic framework? Let's look at the following passage:

> This nature composed itself before us in a series of pictures, artificial images, placed before the confusion of things, organised the diverse and mutable matter according to an implicit law, and when we thought to delight in the truth of the world as it presented itself to us, we were only reproducing mental schemes, full of a distant evidence, and of thousands of previous projections. (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 20)

The perfect garden, or the symbolic landscape, ultimately evoked by the *Garden of Eden*, is a place where nature and landscape (con)merge. On the one hand, the garden, especially the English type, which is closer to a less disciplined character, is a quasi-nature, a medium of access to the "pre-human origin of the world". On the other hand, as a cut-out and structure that gives shape to a given vision of the world, it is a quasi-frame, a pre-landscape, as a cultural form imprinted on the natural. We could therefore say that the garden is the zero degree of the landscape:

> Starting from a zero degree of the landscape, when neither the word nor the thing forced its idea. From the zero degree of the image, simply an insufficient copy of the wonders of nature, to question the moment of its emergence and the way in which we must proceed to maintain it. How, then, was this image able to establish itself as the framework and condition of possibility for a vision of nature as landscape? And, no doubt, we must hypothesise a rhetoric worked out in the smallest of our "landscape" gestures, in its domain, in an obstinacy of language in its figures. (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 24)

As Cauquelin (2021, p. 25) states, the landscape, as an expression of our perceptive mechanisms, both hides and reveals nature. The garden enhances the "enjoyment of a part of a chosen fragment of nature and not its condensed metaphor" (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 49).

Although nature serves as its model, the garden constitutes itself as an autonomous artefact, following the invention of leisure and recreation, practices associated with the upper social classes or privileged groups, whose activities lend themselves to contemplation by philosophers, poets and artists:

> The garden is therefore not the small form of the landscape, it has its own symbolic scheme. From the perspective of *otium*, it is not the reduction, to the so-called human scale, of generous Nature, but rather a metabole or synecdoche through which it would present itself. Quite the contrary, it is through a separation from it that it is constituted—and almost in the opposite direction. (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 51)

We can also recognise in the garden its function of creating a *third place*, a more intimate than social one. Thus, it should be differentiated from Oldenburg's (1982; 1989) notion, according to whom a "third place" is neither a public nor a private place but rather a place of sociality, halfway between one thing and another. In what concerns the garden, we can argue that it is not absolutely natural nor urban, but a place that is a reserve of the paradigm of the human relationship with the natural universe, while at the same time being a form of cultural expression. It is in this sense that, even today, the practices of creating gardens (Pires, Mora, Azevedo, Bandeira, 2014), whether amateur, in landscape architecture or inserted in contemporary arts, persist with interest in the discussion about the experience and the sensitive relationship that is currently changing, in terms of interaction with the surrounding living and material world:

> The garden is not an intermediary, a foetus or an embryo of landscape; it communicates, in the form of the eclogue, the bucolics or the ode, the elements that make up the "countryside"—the tree, the cave, the spring, the meadow, the mountain, the hill or the slope, the animals and the tools that complete its lexicon. They will be taken up again in the medieval tradition, and to this day they are inseparable from the attributes that we confer on the landscape nature. We will find them again in the contemporary and immutable arts of the landscape. The garden draws one of the folds of memory, and remains, beyond the landscape, a model of naturalness. (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 50)

As with the notion of landscape, which expresses a symbolic scheme of our close contact with nature, the garden also embodies a certain imaginary. From this point of view, it can function as a refuge, an escape that allows us to find a place of protection from the risks of a nature that is increasingly out of control. This happens especially when climate catastrophes surprise us at a dizzying pace, and the perception of insecurity that comes from the traumatic experiences, accentuated since September 11, in the Western world, have transformed public space into an unpredictable and dangerous arena: "Between the two dangers of nature and society, the garden offers the desired shelter" (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 48). Cauquelin also states that "the landscape object does not preexist the image that constructs it for a discursive purpose" (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 36). Can we say the same about the garden, as a construct, even if we admit the indicative nature of its symbolic or representational nature? What discourses does a garden produce? How are these discourses articulated, considering the relations of power and dominance?

It should be noted that, according to sociosemiotics, discourse can be defined as a recontextualized social practice. Based on Malinowski's (1923; 1935) work, van Leeuwen (2008) discusses discourse as a practice itself. From a sociological perspective, what keeps individuals connected are common practices rather than representation. These practices, including discourses, are often motivated by a strategic and proceduralised purpose, according to certain criteria of legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1994), as well as by the mechanisms of power that inscribe discourse in a supra-subjective order (Foucault, 1997). Instead of asking what gardens or landscapes represent as discursive and cultural constructs, we should ask how they function, what purposes they serve and how they (de)legitimise a given vision of our relationship with a given idea of "nature".

Namely, it is important to distinguish between public and private gardens. While the former correspond to an urban model that was imposed as the bourgeois classes acquired economic and symbolic power (which required strategies to display their new status and flaunt their material well-being through the practice of strolling along the boulevards), the latter depend on the conditions of ownership and the type of housing of each individual. In fact, they were associated with houses of the villa or townhouse type, which immediately implies a greater or lesser adjacent space. Looking at the garden as the origin of the pre-notion of landscape, understood as a performative place, at the same time as a symbolic one, Cauquelin argues: "Its presentation is, therefore, purely rhetorical, it is oriented towards persuasion, it serves to convince, or even a pretext for developments, it is the scene for a drama or for the evocation of a myth" (2021, p. 37).

4. The Garden Is a Symbolic Place

The garden, although linked to nature and art, does not establish a cause-effect relationship with either one or the other. It is not, therefore, a simple symptom that allows us, like a fever referring to an illness, to assess the state of nature

or art, based on the diagnosis of the garden. Nor it is simply a sign that represents or stands in place of nature, by analogy with what would be the representational function of a landscape painting. Neither is an index nor a sign, in its most common sense, considering Peirce's typology. In particular, we admit that the garden can be considered a symbol, an artefact that is at once traversed by a matter and a meaning that confuses it with its dual model, natural and cultural. Symbol and epiphany (Cooper, 2008, p. 129), mystery, the garden always eludes possible decoding. Its changing, unpredictable character, despite being the object of countless disciplinary human practices, goes beyond the limits of what is known, of control, of meaning. Furthermore, at the same time that the changes in the natural world have an effect on gardens, transformations in the latter also change our perception of the world, both natural and social:

> A symbol is related to what it symbolizes, neither in the merely contingent, causal manner of a symptom to the condition it indicates, nor in the purely conventional manner of signs, such as words, to what they stand for. Instead, symbol and symbolized are somehow "fused", or as Wilhelm von Humboldt puts it, in "constant mutual exchange" with one another. (Molesworth, 1995, p. 413)

From this point of view, can we say that in the garden, sign and referent are mixed? That they are co-constituted through a relationship of interdependence? That they are linked in an intimately motivated way, contrary to the principle of the arbitrariness of the sign, according to the semiologist Ferdinand de Saussure, making it impossible to separate art from nature and nature from art? Let's take a look to the following passage: "[…] symbols have meaning through exemplifying what they mean: an item is 'fused' with the properties it refers to in virtue of possessing those very properties" (Cooper, 2008, pp. 129–130).

Ultimately, *nature* itself does not pre-exist a certain conception, a mental framework through which we perceive it, associating it with the idea of an (in)finite unity, of an origin without origin, a material, living flow, to which we both belong and from which we find ourselves separated. The garden, contrary to the partly ineffable and "spiritual" character of nature, is a body, a fabric that exemplifies what lacks materialization:

> Symbols are in "mutual exchange" with what they symbolize, since they enable us to understand, "get a handle on", or become attuned to, the latter. The symbol is not an aesthetically pleasing, but otherwise redundant device for drawing attention to what we are already and independently able fully to grasp and articulate. Rather, it is indispensable to enabling a sense for, an attunement to, what symbolizes. (Cooper, 2008, p. 130)

Let us think of Epicurus' Garden: a place far from the city, as approached by Rousseau, a pleasant place protected from the excesses of the *polis*, conducive to philosophical thought and shared tranquillity. A kind of *Garden of Eden*, exempt from religious value judgments and guilt. The idea of happiness is associated

with moderation and sweet pleasures. Pleasure is what is learned and cultivated, and gardening is the practice of caring for ideas as one would care for fruits or flowers: "'Epicurus' Garden' is the metaphor for a philosophy, the wisdom of a life sheltered from the storms of the world. This remoteness requires an enclosure, almost a cloister, a partition […]" (Cauquelin, 2021, p. 46).

There was already enthusiasm for gardens in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In the ancient empires of Persia, China and Japan, a feeling and taste for gardens seems to be as old as that for painting or sculpture (Cooper, 2008, p. 46). It is therefore not possible to separate the appreciation of gardens from the appreciation of art in general.

Through the illuminated manuscripts of the 13th and 16th centuries, we can glimpse representations of the medieval garden. In common, such representations often reveal a fence, delimiting the garden and separating it from the "infinite" space that extends beyond the walls. Sometimes, the fence appears as a more obvious artifice, when it consists of a wall or similar construction that fortifies the garden (e.g., Lambert de Saint-Omer, *Liber Floridus*, 13th century; Évrard de Conty*, Le Livre des Échecs Amoureux Moralisés*, 15th century). In other cases, it is interesting to note the existence of a fence in the form of a palisade or even alluding to the art of basketry. Composed of plant material, this type of fence seems to impose a less rigid frame on the garden, suggesting a less contrasting relationship between the inside and outside of the walls (e.g., Guiard des Moulins, *Bible Historiale*, 15th century; Guillaume de Lorris et Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, 15th century). In many of these representations, what is depicted is the Garden of Eden, the garden of Paradise, narrating the scene of temptation, the apple tasted by Eve and Adam. At the same time as a symbol of happiness, the garden represents the scene of sin, the scene of temptation. Breaking with the harmony of the scene, after being unable to resist tasting the apple, Adam and Eve end up expelled from the universe. Even so, it is a place that is both material and symbolic, a place of the useful activity of the herbalist or of the encounter between lovers, associated with pleasure and aesthetics, with the metaphysical reflection of Eden. In profane representations, as in the original narrative of Creation, the gardens do not appear to be enclosed. However,

> most of the illuminators portrayed gardens as enclosed spaces. Although there was no enclosure, constituting a separation from the outside world, it was used as a more realistic way to signify that happiness is precarious and that it needs an opening. (Gousset, 2001, p. 7)

In biblical mythology, the garden is the centre of the world, since it is assumed to be the historical starting point, according to Genesis. Such a symbolic representation materialises in the form of an enclosed space, cut off from the outside world. The palisades that serve as its boundaries take on a variety of shapes and materials, seeming to fulfil the function of the frame which, in painting, and in this case, by analogy, in landscape painting in particular, marks the thresholds of the space of representation. In the case of the garden, however, the

boundaries do not necessarily mean an opposition between the peaceful interior and the nature that surrounds it (Gousset, 2001, p. 23). Sometimes, bushes, woods or orchards separate the garden from the land that adjoins it. In the Middle Ages, it is common to see fences with bars alongside natural structures. In one way or another, the garden appears as an ideal place. And more than that, as a sacred place: "Genesis imprints on the garden a sacred character that the human being has transposed into all the domains of its existence: religious, sentimental, intellectual, scientific and even political" (Gousset, 2001, p. 32). The importance of the garden as a symbol of the transition from active life to contemplative life is equally notable: "A special place where love is forged, the garden is also an ideal setting for artistic creation, where the poet, withdrawn from the world, devotes himself entirely to composition" (Gousset, 2001, p. 16).

5. Case Study: Joana Vasconcelos

Joana Vasconcelos is one of the most international Portuguese artists of all time, having exhibited her work[1] in many of the most renowned museums and exhibition spaces around the world for thirty years. Her official website states:

> Born in 1971, Joana Vasconcelos is a Portuguese visual artist with a career spanning nearly 30 years and a huge variety of media. Recognized for her monumental sculptures and immersive installations, she decontextualizes everyday objects and updates the arts and crafts concept for the 21st century, establishing a dialogue between the private sphere and public space, popular heritage and high culture. With humor and irony, she questions the status of women, consumer society and collective identity. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

Her work stands out, therefore, for its large scale, for the articulation between popular culture and high culture, for the feminist criticism implied in some of her works, as well as for its ironic and challenging character, stimulating critical thinking about the conditions of our contemporary times, namely consumer culture and the issues of identity.

It should be noted that Joana Vasconcelos' exhibitions have not only gained the attention of the media and critics, including the specialized press, but have also achieved record attendance in multiple noble and international exhibition spaces:

---

[1] Among her works, the following stand out: *Flowers of My Desire* (1996), *Aspirin Sofa* (1997), *Valium Bed* (1998), Spot Me (1999), *Meeting Point* (2000), *Strangers in the Night* (2000, *The Bride* (2001–2005), *The World at Your Feet* (2001), *Pantelmina #1* (2001), *Mariquinhas' Boat* (2002), *Blup* (2002), *WWW.Fatimashop* (2002), *One Direction* (2003), *Independent Golden Heart* (2004), *Passerelle* (2005), *Nectar* (2006), *Big Booby* (2007), *Maiden* (2007), *Contamination* (2008–2010), *The Jewel of the Tagus* (2008), *Piano Dentelle* (2008), *Marilyn* (2009), *Valkyrie Enxoval* (2009), *Portugal a Banhos* (2010), *Sr. Vinho* (2010), *La Théière* (2010), *Loft* (2010), *Mary Poppins* (2010), *Sugar Baby* (2010), *Tutti Frutti* (2011), *War Games* (2011), *Suspensão* (2017), *Valkyrie Mumbet* (2020), *Valquíria Miss Dior* (2023).

> International acclaim arrived in 2005 with The Bride at the first Venice Biennale curated by women, where she has returned three times to date, in 2013 at the helm of *Trafaria Praia* representing Portugal, with the first ever floating pavilion of the event. The youngest artist and first woman to exhibit at Versailles' Palace; in 2012 her exhibition was the most visited in France in 50 years, with a record 1.6 million visitors. In 2018 she became the first Portuguese artist to have a solo show at the Guggenheim Bilbao, the fourth best that year for The Art Newspaper and the third most visited in the history of the museum. In 2023 she has been granted the honor to exhibit at the Uffizi Galleries and Pitti Palace, in Florence, alongside classical masters such as Leonardo Da Vinci, Michelangelo or Caravaggio. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

6. *Garden of Eden*

Considering the problematics and what distinguishes the artistic discourse of Joana Vasconcelos' work, we will seek to reflect on the work of art, in particular, *Garden of Eden*, in order to discuss its social meaning and its relevance with regard to the representations and practices that, today, characterize our relationship with the "natural" world.

According to Lipovetsky and Serroy (2021), Joana Vasconcelos' work is distinguished by

> an attitude that is expressed through a somewhat strange formal universe, but whose strangeness is less worrying than happy and offers an almost familiar side, as if we were in the presence of a work from which we receive the sensation that it does not have the deciphering code, but which does not, in fact, seem unknown to us. All of this is marked by the seal of paradox. (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2021, p. 15)

This same discussion applies to the *Garden of Eden* as, on the one hand, the use of an imagery that is known to our culture projects us into the familiarity of a symbolic place associated with the civilisational origins of the Christian West. On the other hand, it presents us with a garden whose materiality, technological, causes us profound strangeness. This will be one of the dual aspects to be developed in more detail in the analysis of the *Garden of Eden*.

In Portugal, the piece *Garden of Eden*, the first version of which was created in 2007, was on display at the then Electricity Museum in Lisbon, in 2009, as part of the exhibition *Remade in Portugal*, and has already been shown at the Venice Biennale and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Malta.

As a work of art exhibited in various places and contexts, the *Garden of Eden* is a work whose meaning is co-determined by its relationship with the specificity of that same place. Assuming itself as an artificial installation, the Joana Vasconcelos' *Garden* reproduces, with technological resources, the model of "nature", both vegetal and animal, inviting contemplation and the practice of the Walk:

> *Jardim do Éden* is an installation produced using artificial flowers emerging from cylinders coated in black Lycra. Inside the cylinders, lights, synchronous motors and transparent polychrome discs rotate, activating a light conducting effect similar to that produced by optical fibre, generating stunning colour variations and an illusion of movement resembling insects or a light breeze. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

In particular, we will consider the immersive installation exhibited in the interior space of the Centro Cultural de Vila Nova de Foz Côa, in the North of Portugal, a place known for its unique rupestrian art inscriptions, on display from 14 November to 31 December 2024.

7. The Site Specific

From a sociosemiotic perspective, meaning is always produced in a specific spatio-temporal situation. Thus, the symbolic value of a work is neither immutable nor fixed, but must be articulated with that situation. Furthermore, interactions and social practices should be considered as practices of permanent recontextualisation (van Leeuwen, 2008, p. 4). Both from the point of view of public enjoyment and artistic creation, contexts contaminate the process of producing meaning. First of all, it is important to emphasise the appropriateness of the work of art to the characteristics, both physical and symbolic, of the exhibition site in which it is located. The Palaeolithic art of the Côa Valley has been declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is an Iberian cultural repository of inestimable value:

> The two Prehistoric Rock Art Sites in the Côa Valley (Portugal) and Siega Verde (Spain) are located on the banks of the rivers Agueda and Côa, tributaries of the river Douro, documenting continuous human occupation from the end of the Paleolithic Age. Hundreds of panels with thousands of animal figures (5,000 in Foz Côa and around 440 in Siega Verde) were carved over several millennia, representing the most remarkable open-air ensemble of Paleolithic art on the Iberian Peninsula. (*Prehistoric Rock Art Sites*, 1998)

It is precisely with this regional heritage in mind that the artist uniquely adapts her work to the local symbolic ambience, establishing an analogy between the original character of the garden and the recognition of the Palaeolithic art of the Côa as signs of both the genesis of Western culture and national identity. If we consider that the historical roots of the identity of the Portuguese nation state are identified in the north of Portugal, it is curious to note how the double reference to the origin of national identity and the civilisational origin of our culture on a global scale intersect. Joana Vasconcelos takes this double inspiration. "According to the author—as *agência* Lusa noted—*Garden of Eden* represents the beginning of time and, in Vila Nova de Foz Côa, 'there is the beginning of time through the cave paintings'" (Lusa, 2024). In turn, the artist explains:

> This tradition and this past are very strong, and in some way, I wanted to bring something that was connected to this idea of the beginning, of, at its core, this being the Portuguese heart, which starts beating here in Foz Côa. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

We can also understand that the idea of a garden may, even remotely, be associated with the approximation between the inscriptions of Palaeolithic art in the Côa Valley and the concept of *land art*, as mentioned by the architects who created the Côa Museum:

> Inaugurated in 2010, the Côa Museum was designed by Camilo Rebelo and Tiago Pimentel, a team of architects from Porto. Its design departs from the notion that "Paleolithic art in the Côa Valley is perhaps the first manifestation of 'Land art'". (*Côa Parque*, n.d.)

The suitability of the work to the place, not necessarily inscribed in the genre of *land art*, is also a concern that the artist shows with her artistic work in general. On the other hand, from a semiotic perspective, we can ask whether this approach does not express a paradoxical desire to break away, to separate the work from its model, the sign from its referent. Co-existing with each other, the work and the place, art and reality are somewhat mixed in the artist's work. Yet, the territory that Joana Vasconcelos appropriates is simultaneously a place of identity, considered by some to be one of the possible places of *Portugueseness*, and a place without a place, a symbolic place that goes beyond the boundaries of localism and becomes a truly global instance of communication:

> Even though Joana Vasconcelos' art is deeply characterised by her native Portugal, it is not completely enclosed in a territoriality that would limit her field. Born somewhere, her creations find a place everywhere: the spaces for which she creates literally constitute a territory that the artist appropriates. (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2021, p. 83)

The expression *art in situ* illustrates the relationship that Joana Vasconcelos' works establish with the places and spatial structures in which they are installed. Both from the point of view of the creation of the work, for example suited to a specific public space (*Coeur de Paris*, 2018), and from the exhibition point of view (Joana Vasconcelos exhibition in Versailles, Château de Versailles, France, 19/06/2012–30/09/2012)[2] and even contextual (*Trafaria Praia*, 2013),[3] her crea-

[2] She explained as follows:

> I consider the Palace of Versailles to be one of the greatest exponents of Western culture. It showcased important conquests and is still today a symbol of excellence in art and a leading example of the most daring aesthetical experiences of the West. Versailles' boldness, its penchant for experimentation and creative freedom are my biggest sources of inspiration and admiration. While the fascination and its influence over me is so present in the exuberance of the baroque form, it is no less in perceptible in the discreet conceptual silence that structures the work. When

tions take into account, in different ways, the forms and functions of the signs that make up the surrounding environments. Objects among objects, signs among signs, her works thus produce texts in contiguity with their surroundings. The effects of meaning are often provocative and unexpected, inviting a semiotic re-reading of specific places. Frequently, the relationship with the past is updated by the use of the most avant-garde and modern languages, of which technological imbrication is just one example, as well as it is related "with space that structures her realisations in a different, but no less essential way" as Lipovetsky, Serroy emphasize (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2021, p. 83).

In the case of the *Garden of Eden*, the choice is above all symbolic, stemming from the associations of meaning that emanate from the territory, an ancestral and original place par excellence. In a more or less immediate, more or less subtle way, Joana Vasconcelos' Garden re-establishes our relationship with nature in the context of a present time in which humans' sensitive disconnections with the environment make us think about the urgency of rethinking that same relationship.

8. The Garden-Simulacrum

Produced using artificial materials and technological mechanisms, the *Garden of Eden* is an artefact that initially causes some strangeness, given its character as a sign-*simulacrum*:

> This journey through the dreamlike paradise reveals the artificiality of nature through an unusual optical experience, made possible only by the requirement for its presentation in an indoor space deprived of natural light. Joana Vasconcelos creates an astonishing simulacrum that invariably leads to questioning, subversion, and the appropriation of an ancestral narrative. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

Based on the Saussurean model, the notion of *simulacrum* is understood here in its approximation to Jean Baudrillard's (1995) expression "symbolic exchange". As the author points out, rather than the relationship that each sign establishes with the referential world, it is through the relationship between signs, through their differences in a given system, that their value is defined.

> I walk through the salons and the gardens of the Palace, I feel as though I am between reality and dream, everyday life and magic, between the festive and the tragic. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

[3] The Artists said about this project:

> *Trafaria Praia* is Joana Vasconcelos' project for Portugal's participation in the 55th International Art Exhibition—*la Biennale di Venezia*. The project analyses the historical connection between Portugal and Italy, which developed through trade, diplomacy and art. Lisbon and Venice intersect at various points; the two cities played key roles in the expansion of the European worldview during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, redefining the imago mundi by establishing networks between the West and the East. (Vasconcelos, n.d.)

We could also discuss the possibility of art being able to recreate new sensory experiences, not in response to a mimetic function, representative of a "natural" universe, but as a producer of a new corporeality, materially and technologically co-constituted. In this way, the *Garden of Eden* could be seen as a stimulus for another type of post-phenomenological embodiment (Ihde, 2002), recreated from a feeling of nostalgia for a lost idea of "nature" similar to Simmel's *Stimmung*.

The materials used by the artist to create her garden-*simulacrum* are as follows: Plastic flowers, synchronous micromotors, compact fluorescent light bulbs, transparent polychrome acrylic discs, electric system, spandex, PVC, MDF. Using skilful mechanisms, the work creates the illusion of movement, both for the artificial plants and the simulated insects.

It is inevitable to associate such a creative strategy with the principles of op art, illustrated by the works of artists such as Victor Vasarely, Bridget Riley, Frank Stella, Carlos Cruz-Diez, Jesus Rafaela Soto and Josef Albers. In the 50s and 60s, intrigued by optical effects and the creation of illusions, some of the op art artists at the time painted abstract patterns in contrasting colours or in black and white. In fact, op art is characterised by the creation of the illusion of movement and was used both in art itself and in the media and even fashion. The scientific advances of the modern era, as well as the new aesthetics of both television and computing, seem to have influenced op art. Some art critics argue that the roots of op art may lie in the Renaissance, if we consider other optical illusion resources such as *trompe l'oeil* or anamorphosis (Hodge, 2019, p. 37).

In addition to op art, *Garden of Eden* shares some of its language with other movements, namely pop art and environmental art in the context of contemporary art. As an example of artists whose work could be considered to be in dialogue with Joana Vasconcelos' work, we can mention the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama, whose work was exhibited in a retrospective at the Serralves Museum in Portugal in 2024 (*Yayoi Kusama*, n.d.).

In what concerns environmental art, it is important to underline that as the social and cultural aspects of climate change came to the political agenda, we can observe more and more exhibitions motivated by that same theme. This artistic genre can include both historical approaches to nature and media arts' approach. Indeed, it can be discussed in terms of an artistic relationship to nature through the use of its natural materials or by its intervention in the territory, as is the case of land art, or, on the other land, it can be the subjet of an artist work, as in the case of Adam Basanta's media arts projects (Pires, 2020) Often, the field of ecological art embrace ideas from science and philosophy.

In the case of Joana Vasconcelos' *Garden of Eden*, the approach to the environment is materialised with artificial and technological resources, as if, through irony, the artist was trying to stimulate a critical reflection on the current risks of the disappearance of the truly "natural" character of nature today. By creating a garden-*simulacrum*, Joana Vasconcelos challenges us to question the artificiality of our own experience of (dis)connection with our surroundings. Is the garden in this perspective a virtual double of a real garden? And what does this virtual

double mean? A pure *simulacrum* with no real relationship to its apparent reference? Baudrillard says:

> But if our world does indeed invent its virtual double, we have to see that this is the fulfilment of a trend that began a long time ago. Reality, as we know, has not always existed. We only talk about it once there is a rationality to affirm it or certain parameters that allow us to represent it through coded or decodable signs. (Baudrillard, 2001, p. 36)

Just as Simmel (2011) invented the term "landscape" to designate the experience of relating to the natural environment, precisely at a time when this same experience was at serious risk of disappearing with modernity, so the production of virtual realities and experiences, of which the *Garden of Eden* could be an example, stems from a phenomenon of extinction of what was previously understood as the status quo.

The current realisation that the planet is not an inexhaustible source of resources, the worsening climate crisis resulting from human action, which is corrosive to the balance of the ecosystem, as expressed in the term Anthropocene (Sousa Basto, 2022), the growing pollution, the overproduction or hyper-consumption (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2021), put into question the existing models of economic and social organisation, such as the infinite growth model (Taibo, 2021), and thus lead us to suspect about the sustainability of these very models that structure our daily reality. Considering the ruined "natural" world, gardens can be seen as one of the ways of expressing another place, a utopian, or heterotopic, place dreamt up and cut out of lived reality. Can the sensitive experience of enjoying a real garden be transported to a virtual garden? Does the production of an artificial experience mean that the collective imagination is dominated by the perception of an extinct natural world? The assumption of an irreversible loss?

9. Final Remarks

Emergent climate epistemologies have inspired artistic practices for some time now. From land art, environmental and ecological art (Fowkes, Fowkes, 2022) to some approaches concerning media arts, there are several contemporary artists whose projects, some of them research-based, illustrate a critical view on the way we, as humans, relate to the living and surrounding world. Furthermore, such projects, motivated by a socially shared concern with the profound environmental crisis that, in part, can be illustrated by the expression Anthropocene, also highlight the current paradoxical gap between culture and nature, the symbolic and reality, art and life.

The recognition of the unprecedented impact of humans on Earth systems, considering that humans' action in the natural world has taken on geological proportions, has been the subject of broad public discussion in the most varied domains. Art has not been indifferent to this discussion. Thus, it can be said that contemporary reality has influenced artistic practices and representations in

a very intense and politically committed way. In this context, considering the solidarity with non-humans and their respective agencies, including animals and plants, as a condition for reestablishing the connection with the sensitive universe, constitutes an urgent issue to which art can give voice.

Some artistic practices discuss that "there is in 'no longer' a 'human' who is not already enmeshed in the 'non-human', the 'more-than-human, the 'beyond human', or the 'otherwise-than-human'" (Fowkes, Fowkes, 2022, pp. 7–8). Considering, in particular, the hybrid ontological character that links humans and technology, we could even say, in Haraway's words, that "today, we are already cyborgs". In fact, many contemporary artistic projects allow us to discuss both the relationship with plant or animal agencies, as well as technological ones.

Critically thinking about the way in which changes occur both at the level of practices and representations, based on these real transformations, is one of the issues that has most inspired some of the most recent artistic production, often in close articulation with scientific research. Examples of this include the interactive installation *Calling the Glacier* (2007), designed by German artist Kalle Laar, *La voix des glaces* (2023), a collaboration between photographer Joan Sullivan and sound artist Robin Servant, Felix Hess' *Air Pressure Fluctuations* (2001) or *Sounds of the Anthropocene* by artist Sebastien Vera (2017), a multimedia installation. We find references to all of these examples in the article *Letting the Planet Speak: Non-human Voices Through Narrative, Sound Art, and Technology*, by Mengozzi (2024), where the author includes a discussion of the way in which contemporary artistic practices make the inaudible audible.

Can Joana Vasconcelos's *Garden* be understood as a symbol of the discontinuity that defines our (dis)connection with the natural world? The assumption of artifice? The work *Garden of Eden*, as discussed, does not literally fit into the category of *environmental art*. However, it shares with this genre the concern regarding the importance of maintaining our connection with the idea of nature. In creating a garden, even if artificial, the artist finds a strategy to encourage us to think about the relationship between culture and nature, even when culture, today, is inextricable from technology.

All our experience in contemporary times is permeated by technological processes, equipment and language, so that "artificiality" is increasingly the only mode of aesthetic experience. It is in this new *sensology* (Perniola, 1993) that we can find space for the exercise of critical thinking, particularly through artistic practices. By emphasizing the simulated nature of feeling, creating flowers, insect sounds and the illusion of movement through mechanical and technological resources, Joana de Vasconcelos challenges us to rethink our experience of the "natural" as a way of drawing attention to the transformations in our relationship with contemporary reality, marked by hyperconsumption and the distancing from "nature". A sensory experience, corporeality, space (Marrone, 2022) as an experience of (re)connecting with what we have inherited, often with a sense of nostalgia, and which we call "nature", is today also recreated by technology. This is a new form of perception and aesthetic experience that we should not underval-

ue. In fact, our contemporary (post)human condition forces us to rethink our ontological status, as well as the social semiotic meaning of sharing a new *sensology* in common space (Perniola, 1993).

This is not an explicit discourse, but rather a more or less subtle critical essay that explores the relationship between representation, art and reality. The aim we sought to achieve was to understand the process of producing meaning from all these different layers of significance. In order to do so, it was necessary to highlight the philosophical, socio-cultural, political and aesthetic dimensions that the *Garden of Eden* articulates. With this effort, we hope to have contributed to illustrating how socio-semiotics, from an interdisciplinary perspective, can be useful in understanding the relevance of art to, in contemporary times, revive our critical thinking about the most pressing problems facing us all, (non)human and more-than-human.

REFERENCES

Bachelard, G. (1994). *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bal, M. (1994). *On Meaning-Making: Essays in Semiotics*. Sonama, CA: Polebridge Press.

Bal, M. (2025). *Moments of Meaning-Making On Anachronism, Becoming, and Conceptualizing*. Amsterdam: Valiz.

Baudrillard, J. (2001). *Palavras de Ordem* [Watchwords]. Porto: Campo das Letras.

Baudrillard, J. (1995). *Para Uma Crítica da Economia Política do Signo* [Towards a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign]. Lisboa: Edições 70.

Berque, A. (2016). *La Pensée Paysagère* [Landscape Thinking]. Paris: Éditions Éoliennes.

Berleant, A. (1993). The Aesthetics of Art and Nature. In S. Kemal, I. Gaskell (Eds.), *Landscape, Natural Beauty and The Arts* (pp. 228–243). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1994). *O Poder Simbólico* [Symbolic Power]. Lisboa: Difel.

Cauquelin, A. (2021). *A Invenção da Paisagem* [The Invention of Landscape]. Lisboa: Edições 70.

Côa Parque. (n.d.). Museum—Côa Parque. Retrieved from: https://arte-coa.pt/en/museum/

Cooper, D. A. (2008). *A Philosophy of Gardens*. Oxford: OUP.

Foucault, M. (1997). *A Ordem do Discurso* [The Order of Discourse]. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água.

Fowkes, M., Fowkes, R. (2022). *Art and Climate Change*. London: T&H.

Francis, M., Hester, R. T. (Eds.). (1990). *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place and Action*. Boston: MIT Press.

Gousset, M.-T. (2001). *Éden: Le jardin medieval à travers l'enluminure XIII–XVI^e siècle* [Eden: The Medieval Garden Through Illumination, 13th–16th Centuries]. Paris: Albin Michel/Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Hegel, G. W. (1975). *Aesthetics*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Hodge, B. (2019). *Social Semiotics for a Complex World: Analysing Language and Social Meaning*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Hodge, R., Kress, G. (2007). *Social Semiotics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Hunt, J. D., Willis, P. (Eds.). (1988). *The Genius of the Place: The English Landscape Garden 1620–1820*. Boston: MIT Press.
Ihde, D. (2002). *Bodies in Technology*. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press.
Jekyll, G. (Ed.). (1991). *The Gardner's Essential*. London: Robinson.
Lipovetsky, G., Serroy, J. (2021). *Joana Vasconcelos ou o Reencantamento da Arte* [Joana Vasconcelos or the Re-Enchantment of Art]. Lisboa: Edições 70.
Lusa. (2024, November 15). *Entrevista. Artista Joana Vasconcelos defende Arte do Côa como início da portugalidade* [Interview. Artist Joana Vasconcelos Defends Arte do Côa as the Beginning of Portuguese Identity]. Comunidade Cultura e Arte. Retrieved from: https://comunidadeculturaearte.com/entrevista-artista-joana-vasconcelos-defende-arte-do-coa-como-inicio-da-portugalidade/
Malinowski, B. (1923). The Problem of Meaning in Primitive Languages. In C. K. Ogden, I. A. Richards (Eds.), *The Meaning of Meaning* (pp. 296–336). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Malinowski, B. (1935). *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (Vol. 2). London: Allen and Unwin.
Marrone, G. (2022). Image, Sensoriality, Body. In P. Cobley, K. Kull, *Introduction to the Semiotics of The Text* (pp. 84–120). Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH.
Mengozzi, C. (2024). Letting the Planet Speak: Non-Human Voices Through Narrative, Sound Art, and Technology. In H. Pires, Z. Pinto-Coelho, L. Magalhães (Eds.), *Communicating Human and Non-Human Otherness. Urban Culture, Technology and Post-Humanism* (pp. 61–84). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland/Palgrave MacMillan.
Molesworth, C. (1995). Symbol. In D. E. Cooper (Ed.), *A Companion to Aesthetics* (pp. 412–414), Oxford: Blackwell.
Oldenburg, R., Brissett, D. (1982). The Third Place. *Qualitative Sociology*, *5*(Winter), 265–84.
Oldenburg, R. (1989). *The Great Good Place*. NY: Paragon House.
Perniola, M. (1993). *Do sentir* [Of Feeling]. Lisboa: Editorial Presença.
Pires, H., Pinto-Coelho, Z., Magalhães, Z. (2024). *Communicating Human and Non-Human Otherness. Urban Culture, Technology and Post-Humanism*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland/Palgrave MacMillan.
Pires, H., Mora, T., Azevedo, A. F., Bandeira, M. (Eds.). (2014). *Jardins-Jardineiros-Jardinagem* [Gardens-Gardeners-Gardening]. Braga: CECS/CICS UMinho.
Pires, H. (2020). The Urgency of Recovering Contemplation. New Media Art and the Transformation of Nature Into Landscape. *Im@go. A Journal of the Social Imaginary*, *15*, 101–119.

Prehistoric Rock Art Sites. (1998). UNESCO. Retrieved from: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/866

Serrão, A. V. (2011). La nature retrouvé à travers le paysage [Nature Rediscovered Through the Landscape]. In Basílio, K. (Ed.), *Naturalismos* (pp. 59–74). Famalicão: Húmus.

Simmel, G. (2011). A Filosofia da Paisagem [The Philosophy of Landscape]. In A. V. Serrão (Ed.), *Filosofia da Paisagem. Uma Antologia* (pp. 42–51). Lisboa: Centro de Filosofia da Universidade de Lisboa.

Sousa-Basto, R. (2022). *A Singularidade Humana do Antropoceno* [The Human Singularity of the Anthropocene]. Famalicão: Húmus.

Taibo, C. (2021). *Decrecimiento. Una Propuesta Razonada* [Degrowth: A Reasoned Proposal]. Madrid: Alianza Editorial.

van Leeuwen, T. (2005). *Introducing Social Semiotics*. London: Routledge.

van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and Practice. New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: University Press.

Vasconcelos, J. (n.d.). *Jardim do Éden* [Garden of Eden]. Retrieved from: https://www.joanavasconcelos.com/en/artwork/jardim-do-eden

Yayoi Kusama. (n.d.). *Yayoi Kusama: 1945 to Now*. Serralves. Retrieved from: https://www.serralves.pt/en/ciclo-serralves/yayoi-kusama/

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 151–173
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.09

Article

LEONID TCHERTOV *

SEMIOTIZED SPACES IN PICTORIAL ARTS

SUMMARY: Each picture evoking perception of another space is included in processes of subject-object representation and inter-subject communication. Pictorial arts create their separate spaces distinguished by structures, functions, and relations to reality. The depicting space is two-dimensional and closed, unlike the depicted space, which can be three-dimensional and open. It can be formed in a real object (drawing, painting, photo, etc.) as a flat projection of a volumetric original. The depicting and depicted spaces are semiotized with the help of various spatial codes, and their connection is regulated by a special complex of iconic and indexical semiotic means. It is possible to speak about a special perceptographic code regulating the formation and interpretation of indexes, due to which the viewer's gaze can penetrate "through" the depicting surface into the depicted space "behind" it. Depending on the concentration of the viewer's intention on these spaces or on their connection, diverse spatial codes become relevant in the picture's interpretation. Various stylistic directions have differently highlighted these codes and relations between pictorial spaces. Accordingly, the picture could be treated mainly as a "wall" with a painted surface, a "window" open to a three-dimensional space, or a "curtain" between the real and transcendent worlds.

KEYWORDS: depicting and depicted spaces, semiotization of space, spatial semiotics, spatial codes, perceptogram.

* International Association for Semiotics of Space and Time. E-mail: leonid.tchertov@gmail.com. ORCID: 0009-0002-4968-7598.

1. Introduction

The pictorial arts (painting, drawing, engraving, etc.) represent reality in a special way. On the one hand, the pictures belong to real space—as paintings hanging on the walls of a gallery. On the other hand, they lead the viewer's eye into some other spaces, which are absent at least in the gallery space, and may be absent altogether, beside the subject's mind. So, each picture is stratified into the *depicting* and *depicted* spaces that are different but related.

This stratification has been noticed by scholars of different disciplines. Psychologists have noted the paradoxical nature of the picture, which is both two-dimensional and three-dimensional (Gregory, 1970), and which "always specifies something other than what it is" (Gibson, 1979, p. 273). Different "stratums" of the picture were also distinguished in classic works of aestheticians (Hartmann, 1966; Ingarden, 1989).

The ability of a picture to represent something different from itself makes it possible to include it in the class of signs, which was defined by Augustin as a thing that is not only perceived by itself but also evokes thoughts about something else (Augustin, 1995, I.2.2). It is not surprising that pictorial art became the subject of *sign studies* in both Peircean and Saussurean versions of them, appearing as early as the 1930s (Morris, 1971; Mukařovský, 1978).

A complex semiotic mechanism of objects represented in the picture and their interpretation at various mental levels can be revealed in theoretical analysis with the concepts of *spatial semiotics*. They can help to consider the "doubling of reality" in pictorial spaces as a result of a complex space semiotization with the help of an ensemble of semiotic means. Various spatial codes participating in the semiotization of the depicting and depicted spaces function in the real world as well, although some special semiotic means are used for the connection of these spaces.

The objective of this paper is a semiotic analysis of spaces created in pictorial representation and the codes used in their formation and interpretation. This theoretical analysis is carried out using the concepts of spatial semiotics in its author's version. In particular, a general concept of semiotized space is applied in the article to distinguish pictorial spaces with different structures and functions, whereas the differentiation of spatial codes is applied there to clarify various semiotic means used for the interpretation of the depicting and depicted spaces. The concepts of various semiotic schools are also touched upon in the paper, as far as it is important for the consideration of its topic. At the same time, a detailed methodological discussion of conceptual similarities and differences is beyond its limits (see such discussions in Tchertov, 2019).

2. Diversity of Pictorial Spaces

2.1. Spaces of Pictorial Representation

The *picture* is seen here in a broad sense—as such, a means of an object's representation and inter-subject communication, which can show the represented objects due to certain configurations of lines and color spots on the surface of a spatial bearer. Not all pictures are art pieces, but many art pieces belong to the class of pictures.

The picture can fulfil the same communicative and representative functions that were distinguished for verbal language in its "Organon model" by Karl Bühler (1965, p. 28). Like words, a picture is also capable of expressing some internal states of the author, to evoke similar states and certain behavior in the viewers, and to represent some other objects. However, the structures realizing these functions are different in the cases of words and images. Any picture can represent some objects to the extent that the spatial configurations of spots on its surface induce the perception of another space, where the represented objects are visible.

Whether these objects are of real origin or have arisen only in the subject's imagination, they are perceived visually due to spatial relations formed in a physical bearer as long as optical contact with it is maintained. These relations are involved in processes of pictorial representation together with their mental models formed at different levels of the psyche. Both material and ideal formations of spatial relations, independent of their modelling or modelled functions, can be considered as *pictorial spaces* insofar as they participate in this common process of spatial representation.

The *space* is understood here not as a concept of a particular science (physics, mathematics, art studies, etc.), but as a general philosophical category covering complexes of spatial relationships with different modes of existence. Regardless of physical or psychical existence, the space in this sense is a complex of variable location relationships between coexisting objects, provided that this complex has a constant set of basic qualities. Such qualities as isotropy or anisotropy, discreteness or continuity, openness or closedness, one-, two- or three- dimensionality, etc., can be combined differently in *autonomous spaces* of diverse types with different structural laws of formation. Spaces with common laws and types of autonomy may be *separated* from each other by borders or without them—as far as they do not have a unitary order of relations between their parts, a unitary scale of their measurement, or if diverse, their conditions do not belong to a unitary series of events (for more details, see Tchertov, 2022).

Both concepts of autonomous and separate spaces give an opportunity for a more detailed semiotic analysis of spatial formations involved in pictorial representation.

2.2. Distinctions of Pictorial Spaces by Modes of Existence

A picture can only be perceived as far as a relationship is formed between separate spaces of different modes of existence. If the picture represents *real objects*, they belong to a certain physical space and time (1). The *spatial bearer* of the picture (canvas, paper, etc.) itself exists as a real physical object, although it can be as far distanced from the original as possible in space and time (2). This mediating object can be considered a *picture* insofar as its surface contains the *depicting space* (3) formed by lines and color spots with certain features. These features serve as means for evoking, besides *a perception of the painted surface* (4), also *an alternative visual perception of the depicted space* (5). The latter focuses not on the medium of the picture presented to the viewer, but on the represented objects outside the given situation, regardless of their real existence.

Perceptions of the depicting surface (4) and the depicted objects (5) are formed in the subject's mind as *ideal images* belonging to internal models of space. Unlike them, at least the material bearers of depictions (2) and sometimes also originals represented by them (1) are *real objects* existing in a certain external space and time. As far as a pictorial representation of some phantastic creatures in the depicted space (5) is also possible, their images can be formed only as mental constructions, with a different mode of existence than real objects (1) existing independently of their representation in any depictions.

The perceptions of the picture's surface (4) and of the depicted space (5) also differ in their properties. The bearers of pictures are perceived *directly* as parts of the spatial environment, where they are situated and can be categorized as "paintings", "engravings", etc. In contrast, the depicted space is separated from this environment and current events; it is formed in an *indirect* perception of "virtual objects" absent in actual space and time (cf. Gibson, 1979, p. 283). Such *shifted perception* also differs from images of memory or imagination, because it depends on visual contact with the configuration of color spots on the picture bearer and arises from their perceptual interpretation. This result is formed when the viewer's gaze is directed not *at* these spots themselves, but as if *through* them into the depicted space, where the represented objects are shown. An ability to evoke such shifted perception of the represented objects is a proper feature of the picture that differentiates it from other means of shifted comprehension, like conventional signs intended for their shifted understanding on the conceptual level (Tchertov, 2018).

Not all features of the physical bearer (2) participate in the formation of the shifted perception (5), and not all in the direct perception of this bearer (4) serve the representation of depicted objects. The perception of the depicting surface contains many irrelevant elements: glares on it, shadows from other objects, possible defects, etc., which are not included in the depicting space proper (3), containing only details responsible for the shifted perception of the depicted objects (5). Dividing relevant and irrelevant details requires the cultural skill of picture vision. Therefore, the existence of the depicting space (3) cannot be re-

duced to pure physical or psychical nature but depends on the ways picture vision developed in culture, especially in art. In this respect, the relevant characteristics of the depicting space are similar to those of a written text, which also cannot be reduced either to its material medium or to its perceptual image but needs the ability to select the appropriate elements. The relevant elements of the depicting space (3) form their own *spatial text*, which can be detached from the initial bearer (2a) and transferred to others (2b, 2c, …)—as is evident in the case of printed graphics or photocopies.

This "transferable" spatial text, designed to induce a shifted perception, can be called a *perceptogram* (see also Section 3.4 of the current paper). Although the replacement of an original painting with copies or reproductions is usually associated with the loss of their aesthetic and historical values, such "autographic" works of art (in the terms of Goodman, 1968, p. 113) also contain perceptograms that have the same mode of existence as culturally produced written texts. All these visible texts exist independently of the psychical processes of an individual, but in dependence on both objects serving as bearers of depicting space and subjects culturally prepared for their shifted interpretation.

2.3. Structural Diversity of Pictorial Spaces

There are *structural differences* between these spaces that have not only diverse modes of existence, but also different principles of formation. The pictorial spaces belong to distinct *types of autonomy* and are *separated* from each other.

The structural distinctions between the spaces of different modalities were considered already by Ernst Cassirer (1925, p. 107–108). In contrast to the space of Euclidean geometry that is *infinite*, *homogeneous*, and *isotropic*, the space of perception is *finite*, *inhomogeneous*, and *anisotropic*. The more so there are differences between the *three-dimensional open* space of represented objects (1) and the *two-dimensional closed* space of the perceptogram representing them (3). Similar differences are also found between the *flat* depicting space of the perceptogram (3) and the *three-dimensional* space of its material bearer (2), which can have a *flat*, *convex*, or *concave surface* (cf. difference between *flat* and *surface* in Gabrichevsky, 2002). Artists can, in varying degrees, coordinate the depicting space with the *curvature* of painted surfaces—subordinate to them (as in paintings of ceramic objects) or disregard it (as in Michelangelo's painting of the Sistine Chapel, ignoring the concavity of the painted ceiling).

The structural differences between the space of the material bearer (2) and depicting space (3) can also be related to the properties of *continuity* and *discreteness*. So, the discrete structure of printed raster or display pixels can provide a physical basis for depicting a space that seems continuous—in contrast to the pictorial spaces of Byzantine mosaics or Pointillists' paintings, where discreteness of single brushstrokes is an intrinsic quality of the depicting spaces (3). In a similar way, the *three-dimensional* and *limited* space of depicted objects (5) viewed in their shifted perception differs structurally, on the one hand,

from the *two-dimensional* and *closed* depicting space (3), on the other hand, from the *three-dimensional* and *open* space of objects themselves (1), if they really exist anywhere.

Thus, the spaces participating in a unitary complex of pictorial representation have different combinations of basic qualities and therefore belong to *distinct types of autonomy*. The pictorial spaces are also *separated*—as far as they have different *ordinal structures*, *measures of size*, and belong to independent *streams of events*. Neither the positions of the viewers in front of the paintings, nor their sizes, nor the sequence of their actions are usually included in the pictorial spaces, which are also separated from each other.

In particular, a combination of spots and lines on a flat depiction (3) has its *own order*, which principally cannot save the full three-dimensional order of the depicted original (1). The order of surfaces represented in the depicted space (5) is also separated: it depends on a certain angle of view and could be changed with another perspective. The depicted space formed beyond the linear perspective is also separated by its own order and, for example, can change left-right relations—as is typical for the Medieval paintings composed from "an internal point of view" (Uspensky, 1971). In a similar way, the depicting space (3) has its *own scale* and usually does not save the initial *sizes* of spatial originals (1), decreasing them in miniature or increasing them in monumental painting.

This depicting space (3) contains a simultaneous spatial text of the perceptogram that *should be excluded from the current temporal stream*. On the contrary, its material bearer (2) naturally *cannot be excluded* from this stream and is subject to undesired changes—such as tarnishing of colors, cracking of layers, etc. The restorers try to minimize them, and, for example, their work has helped to preserve Leonardo's fresco *The Last Supper* (Figure 1a) to save its initial spatial text (3), despite heavy damage to its physical bearer (2). At the same time, the depicted space (5) *is fully excluded* from any current events, and no damage to the surface can change it.

Meanwhile, the separated spaces of the picture have common features related to the anisotropy of the anthropomorphic space, in which top and bottom, left and right, front and back are endowed with different meanings.

The pictorial spaces of each mode of existence can be structurally multiplied if they are included in a complex of similar spaces. So, a picture gallery with many separate spaces of paintings (1) can be represented by one depicting space (3), which evokes the shifted perception of a depicted space (5), where many other depicting and depicted spaces can be separated (Figure 4). Similarly, the separate bearers of depiction (2) can be combined into a single polyptych, where their depicted spaces (5) can also be separated—as in the open upper panels of the Ghent altar by the van Eyck brothers—or combined into a single common space—as it is in the lower panels of this altar. Besides the *extensive heterogeneity* of pictorial spaces, *intensive heterogeneity* is also possible if, for example, a depicted space (5) contains several other structurally different, separate spaces belonging to diverse "levels of reality" (Sandström, 1963).

2.4. Diversity in Semiotic Functions of Pictorial Spaces

The *functional diversity* of pictorial spaces can be described semiotically with the help of various theoretical models, which highlight distinct aspects considered at different scales. One of these models can be based on the concepts of *Peircean semiotics*: Object, Representamen, and Interpretant (Peirce, 1960, p. 135). Accordingly, three separated spaces should be differentiated in the case of a picture: the *space of the represented Object*, whether it exists really or is only imaged; the *depicting space* as its *Representamen*, and the *depicted space* formed in its perceptual image and functioning as the *Interpretant* (cf. Nöth, 2003, pp. 382–384).

Although the depictions may show not only the space of existing objects, the relation of representation in any case saves its own semiotic structure. Even phantastic creatures can be depicted and viewed as *Objects* of representation, distinguishable from their perception by the viewer and from the depicting means. The function of the *Representamen* as the second part of the triple is performed by the space of the perceptogram (3), although the space of its bearer (2) and the space of its perceptual image (4) are also connected with this mediating function. At last, the function of the *Interpretant* is fulfilled by the depicted space (5) forming in the shifted perception of the picture. It is important in Peirce's system of concepts that an Interpretant is not a final link in the chain and can be itself interpreted on other levels of mental activity, including various narrations and symbolic interpretations.

The functional distinctions of the pictorial spaces are described somewhat differently using the bilateral model elaborated in *structural linguistics* and *semiology* developed on its ground. As both planes of language in Saussure's comparison are similar to two inseparable sides of a sheet of paper (Saussure, 1959, p. 113), so too are the two planes of a picture connected, because they are literally viewed from one and the same side.

Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, already in the 17th century, considered the picture as a combination of "two ideas", regarded as the represented object and representing means (Arnauld, Nicole, 1996). This division of "ideas" can be treated psychologically as a relation between two mental images—like the relation between *signifier* and *signified* was considered by de Saussure (1959, pp. 65–66). A pictorial analog of the verbal sign should be described by such an approach as a combination of two perceptual images: direct perception of the depicting two-dimensional surface (4) and the shifted perceptual image of the three-dimensional depicted space (5).

Another, "anti-psychological" approach can use an opposition introduced by Louis Hjelmslev between "form of expression" and "form of content", which differ from both their psychical and physical "substances" (Hjelmslev, 1961). Such an approach applied to pictorial spaces gives an opposition between the visual schemas used by the formation of depicting space in the perceptogram (3) and of depicted space in its perceptual image (5).

One further opposition considered by Hjelmslev (1961) between *denotation* and *connotation* prompted Roland Barthes to distinguish *denotative sense* in a picture—as objects which can be seen in the depicted space and *connotative senses*—as various symbolic interpretations that can relate to these objects (Barthes, 1964).

Analogies with linguistics open possibilities for semiotic generalization of the concept *text* to various non-verbal means of representation including pictures (as in Lotman, 1998, p. 482). This concept highlights a complex organization of pictorial art pieces, where the *planes of expression* and *content* are more complicated than the signifier and signified of a single sign.

3. Semiotization of Pictorial Spaces

3.1. Capabilities of Spatial Semiotics

Parallels with verbal language have their limits connected with both the syntactic and semantic peculiarities of pictorial representation. The features of depicting and depicted spaces, as well as their relations, need specific analysis. The expressive and representative means used in these spaces and the way they are connected may be described in more detail with the concepts of *spatial semiotics*. This branch of semiotic studies deals with the ability of spatial forms and their relations to express senses formed at various mental levels. Its subject includes diverse means of space semiotization and distinct spatial codes regulating formation and interpretation of semiotic constructions with non-one-dimensional syntax and non-verbal semantics (Tchertov, 2019, pp. 120–248). Compared to other approaches, spatial semiotics considers the means of representation in art pieces on a "larger scale". A researcher using its concepts can see in the depicting and depicted spaces already not a simple sign with its meaning and even not only a spatial text with its sense, but distinct *fields*, where spatial texts of diverse types are regulated by various semiotic systems.

3.2. Space Semiotization and Its Means

The pictorial spaces distinguished above can be considered semiotized in different ways. The *semiotization of space* takes place as far as relations between objects in it are structured and interpreted according to one or more semiotic systems.

There are various *spatial codes* that can be used for semiotization of space. Each of them sets norms of choosing, formation, and interpretation of meaningful spatial relations and therefore their own ways of semiotizing space. Among them, *somatic* and *extra-somatic codes* can be distinguished. The somatic codes use as meaning bearers some features of human bodies and their relationships—their faces, figures, gesticulations, meaningful distances, etc., interpreting with codes of *mimic*, *kinesic*, *haptic, proxemic,* and so on (cf., in particular, Birdwhistell, 1952; Eco, 1976; Hall, 1966; Kreidlin, 2002).

The extra-somatic codes convey meaning through the diverse forms and colors of various objects and their relations. There are among them the *object-functional codes* connecting the visible forms with their functions in various spatial objects—clothes, utensils, furniture, technical instruments, etc. The *social-symbolic codes* regulate the interpretation of these objects as signs of the social positions of their users. Such *object-based codes* can be differentiated from *quasi-object codes*—like *writing*, *music notation*, *heraldry*, and others—which are based on certain graphic features drawn or painted on various surfaces. Some visible effects not connected with definite objects can be the signs of *objectless codes*, for example, in color or light signaling.

The complex of codes applicable to the semiotization of the pictorial spaces can be more or less large, and there is always the possibility that a new one will be involved in communication through pictures.

All these codes have in their *expression planes* spatial relations between relevant elements that are ordered mainly in non-one-dimensional syntactic structures. Their *content planes* also usually have specific semantics, because these relations can be interpreted not only on the level of logical concepts, but also at various infralogical levels of mental activity—as schemas of perceptions, recognitions or actions, diverse visual ideas, feelings, etc. (for more details, see Tchertov, 2024).

The same area of semiotized space can be formed and interpreted with the help of several codes jointly participating in the creation of a united sense. Various means of space semiotization can be applicable to the depicting and depicted spaces separately, although each picture also contains special semiotic means for connecting these spaces with each other.

3.3. Codes Used for the Semiotization of Depicted Spaces

The viewer's attention is usually directed towards the objects represented in the picture. It is mainly directed not toward *how* it is formed, but rather toward the objects *that* are shown in it. In this case, the *depicted space* becomes the main field, where the considered objects are placed and interpreted with the help of codes used beyond the picture as well. An identification of persons or things represented in the picture needs a *code of recognition* to do so. The recognized objects could again be interpreted with the help of other spatial codes, like the object-functional and social-symbolic codes mentioned above. Some of them can have clear semiotic functions. If a portrait shows a person with some *orders*, *insignias*, *emblems*, and other obvious signs, the interpretation of their recognized depictions needs the involvement of corresponding visual-spatial codes that function in the culture independent of pictures. In a similar way, depictions of *written texts* or *note records* involve codes, which do not need to be connected with the pictorial representation.

Various less obvious spatial codes from the semiosphere of culture can also be found among the means used to interpret the objects of the depicted space. In

the same portrait, a painter can use the *physiognomic* and *mimic codes* for the expression of individual features of the depicted person. *Gesticulation* and *distances* studied by *kinesics* and *proxemics* can be used in theatrical performance or in paintings for the interpretation of figures' movements, facial expressions, meaningful use of objects, etc. (Figures 1a, b).

Figure 1

a. Leonardo da Vinci. The Last Supper. *Fresco. 1495–1498. St. Maria delle Grazie, Milano*

b. Jacopo Tintoretto. The Last Supper. *1592–1594. St. Georgio Maggiore, Venice*

a b

There are also specific *iconographic codes* connecting the depicted objects with certain symbolic senses—as combinations of attributes and colors enabling recognition of definite saints in religious paintings or symbols of the finality of life in sil lifes with skull, extinguished candle, etc. ("Vanitas").

3.4. Codes Used for the Semiotization of Depicting Spaces

Some spatial codes can participate in the semiotization of the depicting space considered as a separate field of their functioning. It is clear in non-figurative paintings, where the depicting function is absent, but the expressive possibilities of the painted surface remain. In this case, the perceived space also contains some figures and color spots that may be interpreted using codes with infralogical semantics.

In particular, the *architectonic code* connecting visible spatial forms with a feeling of balance or imbalance dominates in the abstract paintings of Mondrian and Malevich, influencing static and dynamic impressions from them (Figures 2a, b). It is also used in the abstract compositions of Kandinsky (Figure 2c) together with the means of the *synesthetic codes* (color-thermal, color-tactile, color-sound, etc.) connecting visual sensations with quasi-sensorial images of other modalities (cf. Kandinsky, 1911).

However, the same codes take place in figurative paintings too, although their presence there is not so obvious. For example, the paintings from Figures 1a, b, with a common theme differently treated in the depicted space, clearly differ also

by the syntactic and semantic constructions of the architectonic code formed in their depicting spaces. The "stable" horizontal of the table in Leonardo's fresco contrasts with the "unstable" diagonal in Tintoretto's painting. These are features of constructions from the *depicting space* only, because in the depicted space the tables remain horizontal in both cases.

Figure 2

a. Piet Mondrian. Composition With Red, Blue and Yellow. *1930. Kunsthaus Zürich*

b. Kazimir Malevich. Suprematist Composition: Airplane Flying. *1915. MOMA, New York*

c. Vasiliy Kandinsky. Improvisation 28. *1912. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York*

a b c

The traces of some movements and actions of artists belong to another group of semiotic means that take place only on the surface of the picture. Different brush strokes, pencil strokes, needling, etc., can be treated in both figurative and non-figurative paintings as *indexes* of the artist's technical skill or his emotional state and as *signals* for the emotional response of the viewer.

4. Semiotic Means Connecting the Depicting and Depicted Spaces

4.1. On Connections Between the Depicting and Depicted Spaces

Thus, the depicted and depicting spaces can be semiotized separately by a complex of spatial codes used also beyond the pictorial mode of representation. Meanwhile, nothing in the depicted space could be formed without connection to a particular configuration of lines and spots in the depicting space. These two spaces do not simply coexist as the result of alternative ways of viewing but have a functional connection. The depicting space is designed to evoke a perception of the depicted space, which cannot arise without it.

A picture stimulating some natural mechanisms of vision and cultural ways of achieving shifted perception is more "transparent for meaning" than verbal texts. If the artist, following the advice of Leonardo, hides all brush marks on the

depicting surface, the viewer sees the depicted space as if *through* a window—another favorite idea of Renaissance painters (Figure 3).

The idea of visual transit through the "transparent" surface of a picture is supported primarily by *linear perspective*. Albrecht Dürer had translated the Latin word *perspicere* as *Durchseen*—"vision through" the depicting surface into the depicted space which, as if, unfolds "behind it" (Panofsky, 1998, pp. 664, 716–717).

This vision is an act in a certain sense opposite to the projection of depicted three-dimensional objects onto a two-dimensional surface, because in this shifted perception, the relations of lines on the surface are interpreted as an image of volumetric objects in the deepening space. As a method of formation and interpretation of pictures, the perspective is therefore a "symbolic form", in the sense of E. Cassirer (1923–1929) and E. Panofsky (1998). The linear perspective is one of the methods to connect the depicting and depicted spaces. There are other means for geometric projection of three-dimensional bodies onto a two-dimensional surface, and the choice of depiction method depends on various cultural and historical grounds, including differences in worldviews (cf. Florensky, 1993a; 1993b; Mochalov, 1983; Raushenbach, 2001).

Figure 3

Albrecht Dürer. The Painter Studying the Laws of Perspective. *Engraving. 1525. Extract from Dürer's Treatise on Perspective and Proportions*

4.2. On Iconicity and Indexicality in Relations Between Pictorial Spaces

The picture is considered after Charles Peirce as an *iconic sign* insofar as it "may represent its object mainly by its similarity, no matter what its mode of being" (Peirce, 1960, p. 157). This *similarity* was interpreted by Charles Morris as the *identity* of certain properties between the iconic sign and its denotate (Morris, 1946). An opposed view was suggested by Umberto Eco, who accented a similarity not between the picture and the denoted object, but between perceptual structures, or "perceptual senses", which the viewer has when seeing both (Eco, 1976, p. 194). A real horse does not possess a contour that has its outline

on a sheet of paper, but an impression of their similarity is a result of "a graphic convention". An "extreme conventionalism" (according to Gombrich, 1981, p. 14) was suggested by Nelson Goodman (1968, p. 38), who treated the painting as a conventional sign that could only be understood by means of a certain code. Meanwhile, an impression of some similarity with depicted objects is an irreplaceable feature of each picture, even if it appears not as a condition, but as a result of its interpretation (cf. Sonesson, 1994). In any case, a picture on a material bearer can be regarded as an external model of the represented object to the extent that it has a greater or lesser similarity to it and is therefore capable of evoking its internal models at the perceptual level of mental activity (on relations of external and internal modelling in pictorial representation, see Tchertov, 2025).

In the discussion of the relationship between iconicity and conventionality in pictures, another important component of the Peircean triad—*indexicality*—disappears. Meanwhile, it is no less important for the creation of detailed depictions. Unlike the volumetric sculpture, the planar picture as a bearer of a depicting surface (2) and as the perceptogram formed in it (3) has a limited similarity with figures from the space of physical objects (1). In its projection onto a plane, too few features remain similar to the three-dimensional original. Although an iconicity in the relation of the projected figure to the three-dimensional original always arises due to a similar arrangement of parts in both of them, this is not sufficient for a detailed perception of the depicted object. As mathematicians say, this is a homomorphic but not isomorphic transformation, because not all one-to-one mappings are preserved in it (Gastev, 1975, p. 36).

The impression of the similarity of a picture with an object appears after perceptual interpretation of a flat depiction (3) forming a three-dimensional image of the depicted space (5). This "return" transition can be provided by the same rules of linear perspective demanding, besides iconicity, also deviation from it. These rules introduce, therefore, diverse *indexes* of the third dimension—various intersections, overlapping, perspective reductions, and other meaningful relations between the drawn lines.

In particular, unlike orthogonal projection, which saves the forms of depicted objects representing faces of a cube as squares, circles in cylinders as circles, etc., the rules of the linear perspective demand certain transformations of the volumetric figures projected onto the surface. The drawings, made according to them, contain at the surface oblique quadrilaterals instead of the square faces of the cube, ovals instead of circles in depictions of cylinders, etc. The equal vertical columns should be represented on the depicting surface of the drawing by lines with unequal length, and this inequality in the vertical direction denotes increasing distance in depth of equal horizontal intervals between them, etc. So, the obligatory *deviations from iconicity* are nevertheless important semiotic means serving as *indexes* of relations in the depicted space.

The visual penetration into the depicted space is possible as an alternative interpretation of the sensorial data received from the picture bearer. The indexes

chosen are not those that point to the surface features of the picture, but those that are specifically shaped by the artist to cause a shifted perception of the depicted objects. Just as the reading of letters provides the possibility of their shifted interpretation as signs representing something else, so the view "through" a painted surface is a "reading" of such indexes prepared by the painter. But unlike written words evoking only more or less abstract ideas of represented objects, the painted picture evokes their perception.

4.3. Perceptographic Code as a Pictorial Indexing System

The semiotic means, by which a visual "transit" through the painted surface into the represented space becomes possible, form a special code, where the depicting space functions as a *plane of expression*, and the depicted space is created in a *plane of content* as a result of the shifted perception. Insofar as this semiotic system provides the exteriorization of artists' perceptual images and the stimulation of corresponding images by viewers, it can be named "the perceptographic code". Like many other spatial codes, it has non-one-dimensional syntax and infralogical semantics.

This code includes diverse means of systematic creation and interpretation of meaningful dissimilarity between the depicting and depicted spaces. Various *non-iconic* elements serve here as *indexes* stimulating the perception of objects represented. Unlike the related natural perceptual code that develops in the cognitive processes of individuals, the perceptographic code has evolved in intersubject communication and is modified in culture, especially in art.

The rules of linear perspective are only a part of the perceptographic code in one of its cultural-historical versions. There are also other means, in particular, the distribution of contrasts and nuances between various lines, light and dark spots, and other elements of the depicting space. Combinations of such indexes form specific *spatial texts*, in a broad semiotic sense.

It is essential that the indexes of such pictorial texts do not have any constant meanings, and any "dictionary" of their units is here impossible; the perceptual images of depicted objects can be created only due to their mutual co-relations. The connections of such an indexical text with its perceptual meaning are not "lexical" but rather a "grammatical" in nature—using the terms of F. de Saussure, who had opposed the less motivated lexical units of language to its more motivated grammatic structures (Saussure, 1959, pp. 133–134). An importance of mutual relations between the means of the perceptographic code also falls under the general principle of Saussurean conception, according to which "in language there are only differences" (p. 120).

A similar principle in relation to pictorial arts was formulated independently of F. de Saussure by the artist and art theoretician A. Hildebrand: the depicting space contains only mutual relations of visible factors—sizes, colors, lights, and shadows, etc. They "can have no meaning alone, but gain their significance only through that peculiar connection, which constitutes their total unity"

(Hildebrand, 1907, p. 37). According to Hildebrand, the artist transforms the "form of being" (*Daseinsform*) of the depicted objects into the "form of expression" (*Ausdruksform*) intended for the viewer's perception.

From this point of view, the main work of the painter is the organization of meaningful relations (contrasts, nuances, etc.) among lines and colors that can evoke a perception of depicted objects only in their totality. A syntactic feature of the perceptographic code, which is correlated with the absence of constant meanings by these elements in the semantic plane, is the possibility of continuous transitions between lines at different angles or between colors with distinct lightness, brightness, and similar properties. So, the "principle of palette" is used here instead of the "principle of alphabet" (see more detailed: Tchertov, 2005, pp. 145–146; 2019, pp. 91–100).

4.4. Perceptogram as a Spatial Text

A drawing "from life" can be considered roughly as a "record" of the artist's perception (cf. Gibson, 1979, p. 174), although the explication of Hildebrand shows that the expression of the artist's perception is a more complex process. This "record" can evoke a perception of depicted objects by viewers due to a complex of semiotic means, where some iconic features are coordinated with visual indexes of the third dimension, and spatial modelling is coordinated with coding. Thus, the picture functions as a *spatial text* constructed from lines and colors on the depicting surface, which are able to express the perceptual image of the artist, and to evoke in the viewers a corresponding perceptual image of the depicted objects.

The spatial texts of this type were already called above *perceptograms*, which differ from other forms of shifted comprehension intended for higher levels of interpretation. Unlike *pictograms*, which are simplified depictions sufficient only for the *recognition* of a represented object, and in contrast to even more conventional *ideograms* interpreted at the *conceptual level* of mind, *perceptograms* are spatial constructions intended to evoke the *developed shifted perception* of depicted objects (cf. a difference between notions *schemata* and *pleromata* in Wallis, 1970, p. 524).

At the same time, like the pictograms and ideograms, the perceptograms can be "taken off" a certain bearer and transmitted into another one—as prints or reproductions made in many copies. Therefore, the perceptogram is not equal to the piece of art that can contain some essential moments connected with a given material bearer and saves traces of the artist's movements. Nevertheless, such "autographic arts", in Goodman's terms, have perceptograms as well— like a person's signature, which carries common elements and structures in written form and can be reproducted in other records. Being independent of material carriers, the perceptogram retains its "form of expression". Similarly, the scheme of its perceptual interpretation retains its "form of content".

Thus, the separate space of the perceptogram (3) formed by the means of the perceptographic code differs from the physical space of represented objects (1) and physical bearers of the picture (2), as well as from the space of their perceptual images (4). The perceptogram evokes a shifted perception of the depicted space (5), where a constant "aspect" on the represented objects is formed.

This *aspect* (cf. Ingarden, 1989) contains not all of the details of depicted objects situated in physical space (1), and even fewer details of the depicting surface (2) or space of its perceptual image (4) mediating its emergence. Formed as a colored configuration of depicted surfaces, this aspect belongs to the depicted space (5) and is systematically correlated with the space of the perceptogram (3) as a perceptual sense (cf. mentioned above Eco, 1976, p. 194) extracted from its text as a result of its interpretation by means of the perceptographic code.

4.5. Some Other Codes Connecting the Depicting and Depicted Spaces

Besides the perceptographic code regulating the visual "penetration" into the depicted space, there are semiotic means that connect certain features of a depiction with meanings of the depicted objects. So meaningful distinctions in sizes of represented persons served in Ancient Egyptian times or in Medieval paintings not as indexes of their different distances from a viewer, but as signs of their social or other inequality and distinct places in a hierarchy. These means are sometimes labelled "meaning perspective" (*Bedeutungsperspective*; Onasch, Schnieper, 2007, p. 263).

Another way to significate differences in the importance of the depicted persons is formed by the relations of their depicted figures to the structure of the depicting space as its "regular field" (Schapiro, 1969). Their placement at the top or at the bottom of the picture, left or right, in its center or at the periphery, etc., serves as signs of a semiotic system, which connects these places with different meanings. Through their relations to this spatial structure and to its places with different "energetic charge", the images acquire meanings that they would not have outside the "regular field" of the painting (cf. Daniel, 1990, p. 84). Unlike the proxemic code formed by the relations between figures of people, albeit depicted, the spatial code that emerges within the borders of the picture is formed by the spatial relations between these figures and their places in this field.

These "syntactic" constructions built in the depicting space are often combined with some "lexical" units formed in the depicted space by means of the *iconographic code*. For example, in Medieval paintings, the recognizable figures of saints formed in the depicted space serve as *signs-nominators* equal to their names, whereas their disposition regarding the structure of the picture's "regular field" functions as a set of *signs-predicators* pointing to their importance in a hierarchy. In such a way, some spatial texts of the iconographic code are formed from meaningful units of both depicting and depicted spaces. The possibility of having a subject-predicate structure as well as their discursive semantics brings them closer to verbal sentences. Accordingly, the same feature of the

iconographic code distinguishes it structurally and functionally from the means of the perceptographic code.

5. Relations of Pictorial Spaces to Ways of Seeing

5.1. On the Difference Between the Spaces of Action and Contemplation

The depicted and depicting spaces are not only perceived differently but can also be important to different degrees for the viewer. The depicting or depicted spaces can dominate in distinct viewers' preferences. A viewer can look more *at* the depicting space as on a *wall* or more *through* this surface, like through a *window*. Accordingly, the color spots on a plane become either an independent object of perception or sensorial material for a perceptual image of the depicted space. The preference for one or another way of seeing depends on the kind of art, stylistic differences, and other factors.

In the first case, the picture is considered as an object that exists in the same *space of actions*, where viewers are situated. So, workers hanging painted canvases on a wall deal with objects in the space of actions, and they should take into account their sizes, weights, and other physical and geometrical properties. On the contrary, a story-driven viewer might not notice at all the depicting space and fully dive into the depicted space, traveling among the objects represented in it (Figure 4).

Figure 4

Jean-Antoine Watteau. L'Enseigne de Gersaint [The Shop Sign of Gersaint]. *1720. Charlottenburg Palace, Berlin*

The pieces of applied arts are usually perceived as parts of the space of actions. Accordingly, the depictions decorating them are designed often as parts of their surfaces for looking on them, but not through them—whether they are painted ceramics, textile, or even monumental paintings.

Another case occurs in easel painting and graphics, which create a depicted *space of contemplation*, where only movements of one's gaze looking *through* the depicted space are possible. The space of the picture, as it was formed after the Renaissance, is opposed to the space of the viewers. The frame of the painting sharply divides the space of action with moving observers and the space of contemplation "behind the frame", which is open only to their eyes.

5.2. On Different Relations Between the Pictorial Spaces and Spaces of Actions

Such sharp bordering between the spaces of action and contemplation takes place not always in the history of painting. Not even speaking of pictures on the surfaces of objects in applied arts, paintings on a wall can relate to the space of action in a different way. For example, cave paintings of animals were included in ritual actions imitating hunting for them. In another way, a connection between the space of cult action and the transcendent space "behind" medieval mosaics and frescoes in the churches or cathedrals was established when the worshipper directly addresses the object of worship by standing in front of it.

In turn, the space of contemplation created by pictorial means can "draw into itself" the space of the object or social action. The easel painting breaks the connection between the actions depicted in it and those in front of it, and usually the depicted space is separate from and independent of the place the painting hangs.

The space of contemplation in a painting is separated from the space of action not only by the frame, but also by the picture plane, which can serve as a more or less manifested border between the spaces "behind" and "in front of" this plane. Meanwhile, these spaces can be connected in different ways. For example, the "concentric" space of the Renaissance and Baroque painting are formed by rules of "direct" linear perspective "running away from the viewer", and it differs in this relation from the "excentric" space of Medieval paintings with their "return" perspective "moving towards to the viewer" (Tarabukin, 1993, p. 190).

The spaces "behind" and "in front of" the picture plane can be connected semantically. For example, according to the tradition established in Florence, a fresco depicting the *Last Supper* was placed in the monastery refectory, in which the depicted space was treated as a more or less illusory continuation of the room—as it is in the frescoes on this subject painted by A. Castagno, D. Ghirlandaio and, most famously, by Leonardo in Milan (Figure 1a). This tradition has a semantic reasoning in that people gathered for a meal in front of the mural had to "constantly remember the sacramental value of food and drink" (Sandström, 1963, p. 112).

In these cases, both meal scenes "behind" and "in front of" the depicting plane form comparable spatial texts, which are constructed according to a common complex of codes: object-functional, social-symbolic, proxemic, mimic, kinesic, etc. At the same time, the depicted space is also semiotized by a special iconographic code connecting the represented persons with their significant attributes. It is also arranged in an artistic whole in accordance with certain compositional schemes, and "the forms of being" in them are transformed into "forms of expression", in Hildebrand's sense. The fundamental difference between spatial texts of the depicted space and similar texts of the space in front of it is that the former cannot appear without its perceptual image created by means of the perceptographic code.

5.3. Stylistic Differences in Relations Between the Depicting and Depicted Spaces

The depicting and depicted spaces can be opposed to each other to a different degree, depending on the extent to which the functions of "window" or "wall" are actualized in the treatment of the picture. Relations between these spaces and between codes participating in their semiotization are differently formed in various stylistic directions (cf. the idea to consider art history through the changing of "semantic structures" in Wallis, 1970).

Medieval paintings on the walls and Byzantine icons serve not as a "window" but rather as a translucent "curtain" behind which the skilled eye can find images of the transcendent world (Danilova, 2004, p. 24). Their perceptograms contain not "records" of painters' perceptions, but perceived and recognized symbols of ideas constructed in religious consciousness. They are structured according to canonized composition schemes reproduced by various artists and being "read" by viewers.

Painters of the Renaissance were fascinated by the idea of turning the surface of a picture into a semblance of a transparent window (Alberti, 1991). Accordingly, the means of the perceptographic code are developed here and become of paramount artistic importance. For example, Leonardo's version of the *Last Supper* (Figure 1a) differs from other interpretations of this scene due to a specific application of this code. Christ's head is highlighted here not only with the means of proxemic code and composition placement in the center of the depicted space, but also by being placed at the point of convergence of the lines constructed in the system of central perspective. So the means of the perceptographic code are included here in a joint "rhetorical construction" together with mimic and kinesic codes, which are also developed in Leonardo's work (cf. the concept of "rhetorical text" in Lotman, 1998, p. 611).

However, already the late Titian made this "window" less transparent, and the space depicted there became clouded. Baroque painters such as Rubens or Hals no longer followed Leonardo's advice to hide brush marks on canvas and preferred to show the viewer the mastery of their tools. By opening the brush

strokes to the viewer's perception, they force him to oscillate between the depicting and the depicted spaces, when the same spots of paint are perceived both as material on the canvas' surface and as colored parts of the represented object. An aesthetic appreciation of the skillful combination of both is thus encouraged.

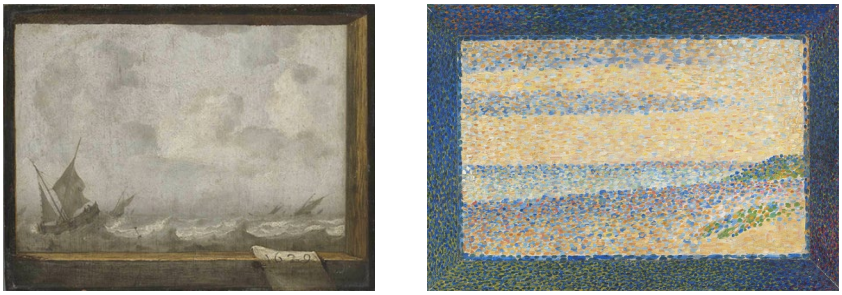
The Impressionists and Neo-Impressionists made the paint on the canvas even more visible, thus further clouding the depicted space (Figure 5b). Many twentieth-century painters—Matisse, Picasso, Klee, and others—return to "flattened" depictions, not to mention abstractionists such as Mondrian or Malevich. In all these cases of preferring spaces, different spatial codes dominate.

Figure 5

a. Jan Porcellis. Raging Sea*. 1629. Old Pinakothek, Munich*

b. Georges Seurat. Seascape*. 1890. National Gallery of Art, Washington*

a b



In this way, the relation between the depicting and the depicted is also an important stylistic moment influencing its aesthetical perception. When the depicting surface is treated as a transparent window, as if hidden from active perception, it functions as an optical tool for seeing the objects depicted (Figure 5a). The space enveloped in this "window" is semiotized mainly by codes used also in the space of actions beyond the picture. On the contrary, when the painted surface forces attention to itself, an aesthetical appraisal of the depiction's quality is evoked due to a comparison of the depicting and depicted spaces. In this case, for example, the exactness of the lines in Dürer's engravings or expressions of brush tracts in the paintings of Van Gogh can be valued aesthetically. Fixation of the viewer's attention on such a painted "wall" entails decreasing the importance of the perceptographic code and increasing the role of the architectonic and synesthetic codes. At the same time, it is clear that analyzing the semiotic means used in pictures does not replace aesthetic analyses of the feelings they evoke, just as grammatical studies do not replace poetic studies of verbal texts.

6. Conclusion

In this way, the concepts of spatial semiotics help to understand in a new way the expressive and representative means in works of pictorial arts. The pictorial mode of representation is carried out due to stratification of depicting and depicted spaces, which are semiotized differently and at the same time connected with special semiotic means. From this point of view, it is right to see in a picture not a single sign, but a combination of manifold spatial texts, regulated by diverse spatial codes. Instead of a single "language of painting", which was to be studied by analogy with verbal language, the semiotics of space considers spatial codes with different structures and functions.

They can be used together or separately for the semiotization of the depicting and depicted spaces. Both spaces can also be understood as planes of expression and of content connected by means of perceptographic code in a certain cultural-historical version of that code.

Thus, an art piece can be seen as a heterogeneous spatial text, where various spatial codes interact in diverse functions, although many of them can be used separately. This heterogeneity is generated not only by the variety of spatial codes used for its formation and interpretation, but also by the differences of pictorial spaces where these codes are involved in distinct ways.

Thereby, in the "magnifying glass" of such semiotic analysis, even a little work of pictorial art can be seen as a small semiosphere, in which the larger semiosphere of culture, in Lotman's sense, is reflected.

REFERENCES

Alberti, L, B. (1991). *On Painting*. London: Penguin.

Augustine, A. St. (1995). *De doctrina Christiana* [On the Teaching of Christianity; Oxford Early Christian Texts]. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Arnauld, A., Nicole, P. (1996). *Logic or the Art of Thinking*. Cambridge: CUP.

Barthes, R. (1964). Rhétorique de l'image [Rhetoric of the Image], *Communications*, *4*(4), 40–51.

Birdwhistell, R. (1952). *Introduction to Kinesics: An Annotation System for Analysis of Body Motion and Gesture*. Washington, DC: Department of State, Foreign Service Institute.

Bühler, K. (1965). *Sprachtheorie. Die Darstellungsfunktion der Sprache* [Theory of Language. The Representative Function of Language]. Stuttgart: Verlag von Gustav Fischer.

Cassirer, E. (1923–1929). *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* [Philosophy of Symbolic Forms] (Vol. I–III). Berlin: Bruno Cassirer Verlag.

Daniel, S. (1990). *Искусство видеть: О творческих способностях восприятия, о языке линий и красок и о воспитании зрителя* [Art to See. On the

Creative Abilities of Perception, on the Language of Lines and Colors and on the Education of the Viewer]. Leningrad: Iskusstvo.
Danilova, I. (2004). Картина как формула мировидения [Painting as a Formula for Worldview]. In I. Danilova, "*Исполнилась полнота времен*". *Сборник статей* ["The Fullness of Times Fulfilled". Collection of Articles] (pp. 19–77). Moscow: RGGU.
Eco, U. (1976). *A Theory of Semiotics.* Bloomington, London: Indiana University Press.
Florensky, P. (1993a). *Иконостас. Избранные труды по искусству* [Iconostasis. Selected Works on Art]. St. Petersburg: Mifril.
Florensky, P. (1993b). *Анализ пространственности* (*и времени*) *в художественно-изобразительных произведениях* [Analysis of Spatiality and Time in Artistic Pictorial Works]. Moskow: Progress.
Gabrichevsky, A. (2002). Поверхность и плоскость [Surface and Flat]. In A. Gabrichevsky, *Морфология искусства* [Morphology of Art] (pp. 219–252). Moscow: Agraph.
Gastev, Yu. (1975). *Гомоморфизмы и модели* [Homeomorphisms and Models]. Moscow: Nauka.
Gibson, J. (1979). *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
Gregory, R. (1970). *The Intelligent Eye*. London: Wienfeld and Nicolson.
Gombrich, E. (1981). Image and Code. Scope and Limits of Conventionalism in Pictorial Representation. In E. Gombrich, *Image and Code* (pp. 11–42). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
Goodman, N. (1968). *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols.* Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill.
Hall, E. (1966). *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday.
Hartmann, N. (1966). *Ästhetik* [Aesthetica]. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.
Hildebrand, A. (1907). *The Problem of Form in Painting and Sculpture*. New York, London, Leipzig, Paris: Stechert & Co.
Hjelmslev, L. (1961). *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
Ingarden, R. (1989). *Ontology of the Work of Art.* Athens: Ohio University Press.
Kandinsky, W. (1911). *Über das Geistige in der Kunst* [Concerning the Spiritual in Art]. München: Piper.
Kreidlin, G. (2002). *Невербальная семиотика*. *Язык тела и естественный язык* [Non-Verbal Semiotics. Body Language and Natural Language]. Moscow: NLO.
Lotman, Ju. (1998). *Об искусстве* [On Art]. St. Petersburg: Iskusstvo.
Mochalov, L. (1983). *Пространство мира и пространство картины: Очерки о языке живописи* [The Space of the World and the Space of a Painting: Essays on the Language of Painting]. Moscow: Sovetskiy Chudozhnik.
Morris, Ch. (1946). *Signs, Language and Behavior*. New York: Prentice-Hall.

Morris, Ch. (1971). Esthetics as the Theory of Signs. In Ch. Morris, *Writings on the General Theory of Signs* (pp. 415–433). The Hague, Paris: Mouton.

Mukařovský, J. (1978). Art as a Semiotic Fact. In J. Mukařovský, *Structure, Sign, and Function. Selected Essays* (pp. 82–88). New Haven; London: YUP.

Nöth, W. (2003). Semiotic Foundations of the Study of Pictures. *Sign Systems Studies*, *31*(2), 378–392.

Onasch, K., Schnieper, A. (2007). *Ikonen. Faszination und Wirklichkeit* [Icons. Fascination and Reality]. München: Basserman.

Panofsky, E. (1998). Die Perspektive als "symbolische Form" [The Perspective as "Symbolic Form"]. E. Panofsky, *Deutschsprachige Aufsätze* (2nd. Ed; pp. 664–757). Berlin: Akademie Verlag.

Peirce, Ch. (1960). *Collected Papers* (Vol. II). Cambridge, Mass.: HUP.

Raushenbach, B. (2001). *Геометрия картины и зрительное восприятие* [Geometry of Picture and Visual Perception]. St. Petersburg: Azbuka-Classica.

Sandström, S. (1963). *Levels of Unreality. Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Painting During the Renaissance.* Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksells Boktryckeri AB.

Saussure, F. de. (1959). *Course in general linguistics*. New York: The Philosophical Society.

Schapiro, M. (1969). On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs. *Semiotica*, *1*(3), 223–242.

Sonesson, G. (1994). Pictorial Semiotics, Perceptual Ecology, and Gestalt Theory, *Semiotica*, *99*(3/4), 319–399.

Tarabukin, N. (1993). Проблема пространства в живописи [Problem of Space in Painting]. *Вопросы искусствознания* [Issues of Art Studies], *1*, 170–208.

Tchertov, L. (2005). Perceptographic Code in Visual Culture. *Sign Systems Studies*, *33*(1). 137–158.

Tchertov, L. (2018). Shifted Comprehension and Psycho-Semiotic Distinctions of Its Means. *Psychology Research*, *8*(2), 39–52.

Tchertov, L. (2019). *Signs, Codes, Spaces, and Arts. Papers on General and Spatial Semiotics*. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Tchertov, L. (2022). Theoretical Models of Space and Its Philosophical Category. *Philosophy Study*, *12*(4). 185–202.

Tchertov, L. (2024). On Semiotic Means With Infralogical Semantics. *Southern Semiotic Review*, *19*, 1–18.

Tchertov, L. (2025). External and Internal Modelling of Space in Pictorial Representation. *Philosophy Study*, *15*(1), 9–25.

Uspensky, A. (1971). О семиотике иконы [On Semiotics of Icon]. *Sign System Studies*, *V*, 178–222.

Wallis, M. (1970). The History of Art as the History of Semantic Structures. In *Sign. Language. Culture* (pp. 524–535). The Hague, Paris: Mouton.

STUDIA SEMIOTYCZNE (SEMIOTIC STUDIES), 38(1), 175–199
ISSN 0137-6608, e-ISSN 2544-073X
DOI: 10.26333/sts.xxxviii1.10

Article

PAULO C. CHAGAS [*], IVANA PETKOVIĆ LOZO [**]

SOUND AS MODULATING REALITY: A SEMIOTIC AND PHENOMENOLOGICAL APPROACH TO ELECTROACOUSTIC MUSIC

SUMMARY: This paper explores the semiotic and phenomenological dimensions of sound, positioning it as a modulating reality, rather than a fixed entity. Drawing from Henri Pousseur's theory of *generalized periodicity* and Michel Butor's intermedial poetics, we examine how electroacoustic music challenges conventional frameworks of composition and perception. Integrating Peircean semiotics, existential phenomenology, and cybernetics, we demonstrate how sound functions as a dynamic sign system that reshapes meaning through interaction and transformation. We introduce the concept of *spectral semiotics* as both an analytical and epistemological tool for understanding how sonic meaning emerges through the modulation of spectral qualities—frequency, timbre, and temporal flux—as experienced through focused, embodied listening. Special attention is given to *8 Études Paraboliques*, which exemplifies sound as a recursive, self-organizing system of modulating relationships. We also draw on *Votre Faust: Fantaisie variable genre Opéra*—not for comprehensive analysis, but as an *object of comparison* in the Wittgensteinian sense—to illustrate how intermedial strategies and open forms reinforce the epistemological potential of sound. This perspective aligns with Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of listening as resonance, where sound is not merely received but co-constituted through perception. By foregrounding fluidity, impermanence, and intermediality, we propose that sound—both in music and literature—functions as a modulating reality that actively shapes experience, cognition, and the aesthetic imagination.

[*] University of California, Riverside, Department of Music. E-mail: paulo.chagas@ucr.edu. ORCID: 0000-0003-1706-5508.
[*] University of California, Riverside, Department of Music. E-mail: ivanarpetkovic@gmail.com. ORCID: 0009-0003-4847-3077.

KEYWORDS: sound, spectral semiotics, semiotics, electroacoustic music, cybernetics, generalized periodicity, *8 Études Paraboliques* [Eight Parabolic Studies], Henri Pousseur, Michel Butor.

1. Sound as Semiotic and Phenomenological Construct

Sound is ephemeral. Unfolding in time, it vanishes the moment it appears. Yet its impermanence does not lessen its impact; rather, it intensifies its presence. In electroacoustic music, this fleeting nature of sound becomes even more accentuated. Detached from traditional instruments and liberated from fixed notation, sound evolves into an autonomous, mutable entity. It is no longer merely an expressive tool, but a dynamic material that shapes perception, invites interpretation, and modulates reality itself (Pousseur, 1970).

This paper explores how the emergence of electroacoustic music transforms the very ontology of sound, shifting our understanding from object to process, from fixed identity to fluid becoming. We engage with semiotic and phenomenological frameworks to analyze how sound operates in Henri Pousseur's music—not as a representation of something else, but as a *modulating reality*: a force that continuously alters both the listener's experience and the structures through which meaning emerges.

To support this view, we draw on Charles Sanders Peirce's triadic semiotics, which defines meaning as the interplay between a sign (*representamen*), its *object*, and the *interpretant*—the response evoked in the perceiver (Peirce, 1931–1958). This model emphasizes the relational and processual nature of signification. In electroacoustic music, sound often functions across all three dimensions simultaneously, generating meaning not through pre-established codes but through interaction with context, perception, and technological mediation (Tarasti, 1994; 2015, pp. 59–60).

We also incorporate Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics, which introduces the concepts of *Sein* [being] and *Schein* [appearance] to highlight the ontological depth of signification. Tarasti emphasizes that musical meaning arises through tension and transformation—sound is never fully present but is always becoming, suspended between what it is and what it could be (Tarasti, 2015, pp. 3–38). His notions of *pre-signs* and *post-signs* reflect how musical signs traverse temporal horizons, resonating with the phenomenological insights of Edmund Husserl (1990) and the resonant ontology of listening articulated by Jean-Luc Nancy (2007).

Henri Pousseur was a pioneering figure in conceptualizing sound as a modulating entity, deeply embedded in the aesthetic and technological transformations of the twentieth century. His influence on electroacoustic music stems from his insistence that sound should not be treated as a discrete object, but as a continuous material, capable of transformation through technological and compositional

intervention. In *Naissance et développement de la musique électronique*, published in the volume *Fragments théoriques* (1970, pp. 79–189), Pousseur argues that electronic music should not be seen as a separate discipline, but rather as an extension of musical practice—one that enriches and reshapes compositional methods. He emphasizes that electronic sound is inherently fluid and multidimensional, breaking free from the constraints of traditional notation and embracing a process-oriented logic in which the act of sonic transformation holds as much importance as any final structure.

This approach aligns with semiotic theories that highlight the instability of meaning: in this view, the significance of sound is not fixed, but constantly renegotiated through *interaction* and *perception*. Pousseur's thought demonstrates that sound is not merely an aural event, but a modulating force that interacts with its environment and the listener. It embodies a state of continual becoming, challenging traditional models of musical structure and authorship, and reinforcing the idea that music, particularly in its electroacoustic form, is a living, evolving entity.

Contemporary electroacoustic music thus challenges aesthetic frameworks grounded in permanence and repetition. Unlike classical compositions based on stable forms and repeatable scores, electroacoustic works often exist in flux, constructed through digital manipulation, spatial diffusion, algorithmic variability, and real-time processing. This impermanence is not merely a byproduct of technology but a central aesthetic stance, one that resonates with poststructuralist and phenomenological approaches to art and perception. Nancy's concept of listening as exposure—*être exposé*—describes the listener not as a recipient of a fixed object, but as someone opened up, affected, and reconfigured by sound's unfolding presence (Nancy, 2007; see also Tarasti, 1995).

Electroacoustic music reinforces this by often severing the sonic event from a visible source, inducing what Pierre Schaeffer termed *acousmatic listening* (Schaeffer, 1966), and what Michel Chion later developed into the concept of *écoute réduite* (Chion, 1983). Detached from cause, sound becomes a field of pure potential—interpreted not through recognition, but through attentive immersion. Therefore, we propose the metaphor of *sound as skin* (Nancy, 2020; Reybrouck, 2024), to highlight the tactile and immersive dimension of listening. Just as skin functions as both boundary and contact zone, sound in electroacoustic music acts as an interface between perception and reality, shaping and being shaped by the listener's attention and environment. In this way, electroacoustic sound becomes a site of continuous negotiation: between *being* and *appearance*, *signal* and *sign*, *structure* and *sensation*.

This aesthetic of impermanence is also central to the work of contemporary composers who engage with real-time synthesis, interactive technologies, and site-specific installations. These works resist fixity; they are co-constructed through each new interaction between sound, space, and listener. Meaning is not embedded within the work itself but arises as an emergent property produced by the encounter. This aligns with poststructuralist theories of signification (e.g.,

Derrida, 1976), which argue that meaning is constantly in flux, continually deferred and reinterpreted.

By integrating semiotic, phenomenological, and electroacoustic perspectives, we arrive at a new understanding of sound as a dynamic, modulating reality. Pousseur's theories provide a foundation for reconsidering the role of sound in both artistic and cultural contexts. Rather than adhering to static or hierarchical models of musical organization, sound emerges as a relational force—fluid, contextual, and resistant to closure.

As we move further into a digital era in which sound becomes increasingly detached from its physical origins and remediated through complex technologies, these insights become ever more relevant. Electroacoustic music, with its emphasis on transformation and impermanence, not only redefines compositional practice but also reshapes our perception of reality itself. In this way, sound transcends its function as an artistic medium and becomes a method of inquiry—a way to experience and interrogate the fluidity of existence.

To fully account for these dynamics, we propose *spectral semiotics* as a conceptual bridge between phenomenological listening and the spectral analysis of sound structures. In this view, sound is not only a temporal phenomenon, but also a continuously evolving field of spectral relationships—shaped by frequency trajectories, morphing timbres, and dynamic instabilities. Drawing from neurophenomenology (Varela, 1991; 1999) and embodied cognition, this approach emphasizes how meaning emerges from perceptual engagement with spectral detail. Sound becomes not just a sign, but a *spectrum of becoming*—where semiotic interpretation unfolds through dynamic modulation, situated attention, and experiential depth. This perspective is crucial for understanding the architecture of works like Pousseur's *8 Études Paraboliques*, where spectral evolution becomes the primary agent of musical meaning.

2. Henri Pousseur's Concept of Sound as a *Homogeneous Potential*

Henri Pousseur was among the first composers and theorists to challenge the discrete, note-based paradigm of Western music by proposing a view of sound as a *homogeneous potential*. This continuous malleable material resists static definition. His theoretical reflections, particularly in the essay *Naissance et développement de la musique électronique* (1970, pp. 79–189), articulate a vision in which electronic music is not a rupture with the past, but a natural extension of musical thought—a deepening of its expressive and structural potential.

For Pousseur, the shift to electronic sound marked a decisive ontological transformation in music: from fixed notational artifacts to evolving sonic processes. In his view, electronic music enables composers to engage directly with the physical properties of sound—frequency, amplitude, spectrum, and spatial distribution—without the mediating constraints of traditional notation. In this context, sound is not segmented into pitches or intervals, but unfolds as a field of potential transformation. This reflects a process-oriented approach in which

composition is not the inscription of fixed values, but the design of interactions within a continuously modulating acoustic continuum.

Pousseur's notion of *homogeneous potential* is closely aligned with Peircean semiotics, in which signs are defined not by isolated meaning but through a network of relational interpretation (Peirce, 1931–1958). Moreover, sound in Pousseur's framework is shaped by its dynamic interaction with other sonic events, listening contexts, and technological mediations. Eero Tarasti's existential semiotics reinforces this interpretation by emphasizing sound's ontological duality: it is both an object of perception and an existential signifier—a becoming that never fully stabilizes into meaning (Tarasti, 2002, p. 142; 2015, pp. 59–60). Meaning, in this model, is not extracted from sound, but emerges through lived engagement with its temporal unfolding.

This perspective necessitates a rethinking of compositional structure. Instead of linear development or harmonic closure, Pousseur embraces *modulation*—understood not merely as a shift in tonal center, but as a general principle of transformation operating across all musical parameters. For Pousseur, modulation encompasses spectral change, spatial movement, rhythmic morphing, and dynamic evolution. It is both a compositional tool and a philosophical stance, replacing hierarchy and permanence with relationality and flux.

Pousseur's electroacoustic works demonstrate this principle in action. His integration of acoustic and electronic sound sources avoids binary distinctions and instead supports fluid interaction. In pieces like *Rimes* (1958) and *Trois Visages de Liège* (1960), he combines live instruments, tape, and indeterminate structures to generate open forms. Chance operations here are not a rejection of authorship but a means of incorporating contingency into musical form. Unlike the theatrical indeterminacy of Berio or Stockhausen, Pousseur's aleatoric methods emphasize the continuity of sonic identity—ensuring that variability becomes a feature of process rather than disruption of structure.

Automation is also central to this compositional ecology. During his work at the Siemens Studio for Electronic Music in Munich (1966–1967), Pousseur developed systems in which algorithmic processes and human decision-making coexisted. He did not treat technology as a replacement for creative agency, but as an extension of it—a set of tools that could enhance the material engagement with sound while preserving interpretative flexibility. This triadic relationship between structure, chance, and automation, models a cybernetic aesthetics of composition that anticipates contemporary algorithmic practices and artificial intelligence.

Integral to this approach is the idea of *micro-macro structuring*: that is, the interrelation between small-scale sonic details (such as spectral inflections or rhythmic textures) and the emergent large-scale form they produce. This aligns with Peirce's semiotics of recursive signification, in which meaning is not deduced from any one level but emerges across scales through interaction and context. In Pousseur's music, harmonic and formal relationships are not pre-imposed but continuously unfold through timbral evolution and processual transformation.

His expanded harmonic language, including the use of microtonality, spectral interpolation, and non-tempered systems, resists codification. These choices reflect not only a technical expansion but an aesthetic commitment to openness. Pitch, rhythm, and form are treated not as containers of meaning but as conditions for sonic becoming. This aligns with Jean-Luc Nancy's conception of sound as an event rather than a substance—a force that exposes the listener to a world of sense without stabilizing into fixed content (Nancy, 2007).

Through this integrated framework, Pousseur redefines music as a relational, adaptive practice. The concept of *homogeneous potential* enables a compositional logic in which sonic material is shaped through transformation rather than inscription, and meaning arises through interaction rather than representation. Modulation, automation, and micro-macro structuring become not secondary techniques but foundational elements of this aesthetic. Sound, in this model, does not signify in isolation—it signifies in motion.

Pousseur's contribution remains essential today as digital technologies further amplify the fluidity and hybridity of musical materials. His insights provide both a philosophical and technical model for navigating a world in which sound is increasingly mobile, immersive, and interactive. As composition moves further into algorithmic, real-time, and spatial domains, Pousseur's theory of sound as a *homogeneous potential* continues to offer a compelling vision: one in which music is understood as a living process, and sound as a continuously modulating reality.

3. Generalized Periodicity and the Multidimensional Nature of Sound

A major contribution of Henri Pousseur's theoretical work is his reconceptualization of sound as a vibrational phenomenon, whose oscillatory nature provides a foundational metaphor for both musical structure and the dynamic processes of signification. By understanding sound not as a discrete sequence of pitches but as a continuous interplay of frequencies, amplitudes, and temporal envelopes, Pousseur bridges the physical properties of acoustic phenomena with philosophical, compositional, and semiotic concerns. This vibratory framework enables him to move beyond traditional categories of musical form and embrace modulation and transformation as both sonic techniques and epistemological tools.

Expanding on his concept of sound as a homogeneous potential, Pousseur introduces the idea of generalized periodicity in his essay *Pour une périodicité généralisée*, also published in *Fragments théoriques* (1970, pp. 242–290). This notion challenges the serialist rejection of repetition and symmetry, proposing instead a more nuanced model in which asymmetry and periodicity interact dialectically. Pousseur's approach does not revert to tonal regularity but reconfigures periodicity as a relational principle—an evolving pattern of recurrence that remains open to transformation across multiple dimensions of sound.

Critiquing the totalizing logic of early serialism, Pousseur observes that the attempt to eliminate periodicity in the name of progress often produced aesthetic sterility. Serialism's rigid asymmetry, while expanding compositional possibilities, also diminished the perceptual anchors that enable listener engagement. For Pousseur, periodicity is not a constraint but a perceptual affordance—a flexible structure that supports orientation, memory, and variation. His vision replaces structural rigidity with *fluid recurrence*—where patterns emerge, dissolve, and reconfigure in response to context.

This model aligns closely with Peircean semiotics, particularly the concept of *infinite semiosis*, in which the meaning of a sign is never fixed but constantly reinterpreted through a chain of interpretants (Peirce, 1955; see, also, Bankov, 2004). Just as signs evolve within a relational network, Pousseur's generalized periodicity treats sonic structures as provisional, recursive forms. The sonic signifier is not absolute, but open-ended—shaped through modulation, contrast, and resonance. As Tarasti (2015, p. 60) notes, sound functions both as an object of perception and an existential signifier that changes meaning as its context shifts—precisely the model of relational semiotic flux that Pousseur's theory supports.

Generalized periodicity thus emerges not as a technique but as a *multidimensional principle*—one that unites time, space, spectrum, and form into a continuous field of interaction. In this perspective, music is no longer composed along a single linear axis, but across multiple coexisting dimensions, each with its own periodic characteristics. Pousseur maps the following wave properties onto musical parameters:

- *Wavelength* corresponds to the duration or recurrence rate of musical patterns.
- *Amplitude* reflects dynamic intensity or expressive force.
- *Phase* refers to the temporal displacement or relational positioning of sonic layers.
- *A waveform* expresses the internal timbral morphology of sound, its evolving character over time.

By conceptualizing musical form through these interrelated wave-like parameters, Pousseur develops a spatialized, processual understanding of composition, in which events are layered and diffused rather than sequenced hierarchically. This resonates with Umberto Eco's idea of the *open work* (Eco, 1989), wherein the meaning of an artwork is not imposed by structure but emerges through interaction between the work and its interpreters. Pousseur's music, like Eco's literary model, invites multiple trajectories of engagement, allowing sonic forms to function as provisional, perceptually activated constellations.

This multidimensional framework also reflects the Fourier-based conception of sound, which understands all complex acoustic events as the sum of simultaneous oscillations at various frequencies. For Pousseur, this becomes both a scientific and aesthetic model: each musical event is nested within micro and macro-periodicities that form an evolving harmonic landscape. These interac-

tions are not imposed from above but arise through the interaction of discrete sonic gestures—modulated in time, shaped in space, and perceived through embodied listening.

Here, Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of listening as exposure and resonance provides further insight. According to Nancy, sound is not an object, but a force of opening: "To be listening is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and not to be caught in a fixed reception of it" (Nancy, 2007, p. 11). Pousseur's periodic structures function precisely this way—they do not convey a stable message but modulate attention, opening zones of perceptual and cognitive resonance. His music does not illustrate concepts; it *enacts* the process of meaning as becoming.

Pousseur's emphasis on *phase relationships* among sonic layers reinforces this dynamic. When multiple waveforms interact—whether acoustically, electronically, or perceptually—they generate interference patterns that evolve continuously. This becomes a metaphor for musical experience itself: meaning arises not from fixed relationships but from *interference* and *resonance*, where perception shapes and is shaped by sound's multidimensional unfolding. Such fluid structuring echoes Nancy's (2007, pp. 31–32) idea of resonance as the condition of meaning: a surplus, a spacing, a reverberation rather than a statement.

In his compositions, this model is realized through complex superpositions of sonic layers with independent temporal, spectral, and spatial properties. The result is music that resists closure, defers resolution, and foregrounds *transformation as structural logic*. Works such as *Scambi* and *Votre Faust: Fantaisie variable genre Opéra* exemplify this open, recursive approach. Rather than prescribing a single path, they configure networks of relationships, inviting listener agency and interpretive variation. In this model, the listener becomes not a decoder but a co-creator or co-composer of musical meaning.

Pousseur's theory also provides a critical alternative to both tonal determinism and abstract formalism. By reintegrating *harmonic reference* within generalized periodicity, he avoids nostalgia while reclaiming music's *communicative dimension*. For Pousseur, harmony is not an inherited convention but a *relational force*—a dynamic of tension, release, and transformation operating within an evolving field. This view aligns with Tarasti's existential semiotics, in which musical meaning is always in negotiation between *Sein* [being] and *Schein* [appearance], between internal necessity and external appearance (Tarasti, 2002, p. 142).

Ultimately, Pousseur's theory reframes music not as a closed formal language, but as an open system of perceptual and semiotic processes. Generalized periodicity becomes a structural metaphor for reality: composed of oscillations, shaped by resonance, and continually renewed through interaction. His concept resonates with both scientific and philosophical models of complexity, drawing on acoustics, cybernetics, and phenomenology to articulate a theory in which sound is not just a carrier of meaning, but its dynamic condition of possibility.

4. Pousseur's *8 Études Paraboliques*: A Cybernetic Model of Modulating Reality

The integration of *cybernetics* into music composition represents a radical shift from traditional, subject-centered aesthetics to models of self-regulating systems, where sound is not merely a composed object but an evolving entity shaped by feedback, modulation, and adaptation. Rooted in Norbert Wiener's foundational work (Wiener, 1948), cybernetics explores systems of communication and control in both living organisms and machines, emphasizing circular causality, homeostasis, and self-organization. This framework offers an understanding of music as a complex, open system where outcomes are contingent, historically embedded, and structurally nonlinear—marking a pivotal departure from classical notions of authorship and musical structure.

In this context, music composition aligns with the principles of non-trivial machines, as theorized by Heinz von Foerster (2003), in which outputs are not deterministic but contingent on internal states and external stimuli. By applying these principles, Pousseur's work exemplifies how sound can function within adaptive frameworks, where meaning and structure are continuously reshaped through recursive interactions between human agency and technological mediation. This approach dissolves the boundaries between composer, performer, and listener, transforming composition into a dynamic process rather than a fixed artifact (Chagas, 2014, pp. 65–102) and introduces an adaptive feedback-driven model in which sound is not merely the result of compositional design, but an emergent property shaped by modulation and transformation.

Henri Pousseur's *8 Études Paraboliques* (1972) exemplifies a radical reconceptualization of electroacoustic composition as a cybernetic field. Rather than generating fixed sound objects, these studies embody a self-regulating sonic environment governed by interdependent oscillations and recursive feedback. Sound in this model is not transmitted from composer to listener in a linear fashion, but continuously shaped through modulation, perception, and intervention.

Composed at the WDR Electronic Music Studio in Cologne, the *Études* were produced without tape splicing or montage—unusual for the time. Instead, Pousseur relied on voltage-controlled oscillators and modular synthesis patches that permitted continuous control over parameters such as frequency, amplitude, phase, and spectral shape (Pousseur, 2002, p. 105).[1] The result is a sonic contin-

[1] Voltage control, a key innovation in analog synthesis during the 1960s, revolutionized electronic music by enabling greater flexibility in sound generation and manipulation. Based on the application of small electrical currents to electronic components, voltage control allows for both audio and control signal processing. While the audio signal is converted into audible sound, the control signal—an inaudible electric flow—modulates various parameters, such as pitch, amplitude, and timbre. This modular design, first commercially popularized by the Moog synthesizer, enabled composers to create complex and evolving soundscapes by dynamically interconnecting different synthesis modules. The principles of voltage control persist in contemporary digital and software-based synthesiz-

uum in which textures evolve organically, rather than by discrete gesture or formal juxtaposition. His decision to avoid edits ensures that the music unfolds as a real-time process, aligning with his broader aim of positioning sound as a living, modulating presence (Chagas, 2014, pp. 115–116).

This compositional strategy is best understood through the lens of *generalized periodicity*, which, as discussed in *Fragments théoriques* (*Pour une périodicité généralisée*; Pousseur, 1970, pp. 242–290), redefines periodicity not as a fixed recurrence but as a dynamic, multidimensional logic. Drawing on Fourier analysis, Pousseur treats every sonic structure as a sum of micro-oscillatory components that interact to form macrostructural fields. These fields are neither static nor predictable but behave as self-regulating modulations—intensifying, diffusing, and reappearing with variation, like waves across time and spectrum.

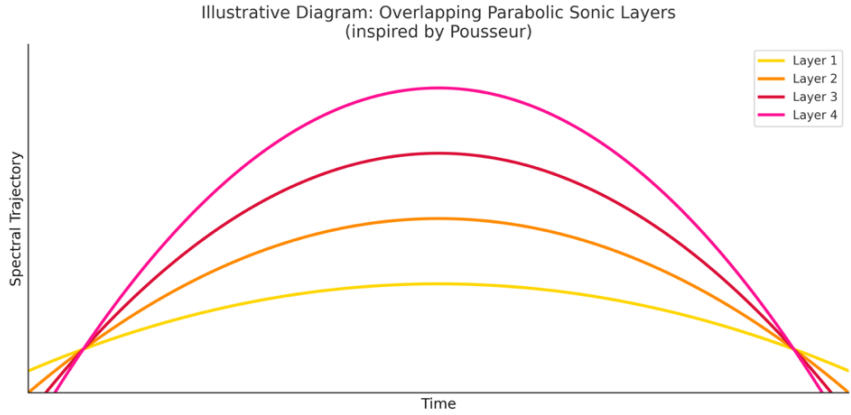
Such behavior parallels Foerster's concept of non-trivial machines: systems whose outputs are influenced not only by inputs but by their own internal states and histories (Foerster, 2003). Each sonic event in the *Études* alters the framework for what follows, producing a recursive structure that adapts both to itself and to the interpretive context of the listener. The composition becomes an autopoietic environment—self-organizing and historically contingent (Foerster, 2003, pp. 213–218).

This structure is particularly evident in *Étude I* (*Les Ailes D'Icare*), where an initial low-frequency pulse gradually unfolds into an elaborate frequency spectrum. Modulation occurs across multiple domains—pitch glissandi, amplitude envelopes, and wave morphologies—all contributing to an evolving texture. As seen in the spectrogram simulation below, the frequency curve follows a parabolic arc, illustrating Pousseur's tendency to shape musical form not through theme and variation but through spectral trajectory (Figure 1).

ers, remaining one of the most widespread methods of sound synthesis and control (Chagas, 2014, pp. 115–116).

Figure 1

Spectrogram simulation of a parabolic frequency gesture inspired by Henri Pousseur's Étude I *from* 8 Études Paraboliques



Note. Source: authors' own elaboration.

This visual representation illustrates a symmetrical spectral rise and fall, simulating Pousseur's use of continuous modulation and generalized periodicity. Rather than rigid cycles, form is shaped through evolving oscillatory intensities.

Pousseur's compositional notes (2002) confirm this aesthetic, describing the *Études* as continuous sound fabrics, woven from recurring sonic characters, rather than variations on a defined material.[2] Each piece is constructed from modulated waveforms—grains of sound that rise, morph, and dissolve according to internal logic. These transformations, governed by frequency modulation (FM), phase shifting, and amplitude sculpting, are often layered in dynamic polyphonic structures.

This poietic approach is especially vivid in *Étude V*, *Mnémosyne disparue*, which draws upon the metaphor of submerged memory. Here, spectral fragments rise and fall through recursive echoes, filtered textures, and elongated glissandi. The result is a musical surface that seems to forget and remember itself—a sonic dramatization of temporal dislocation and perceptual flux. Interpreted semiotically, this structure reflects a Peircean model of signification: the sonic event (*rep-*

[2] The quote means that the étude was not built through planned variations but rather developed organically, like an intricate fabric whose recurring musical figures emerged naturally without conscious control or imposed boundaries:

> As I wrote above, this étude involves no intentional variation and is developed rather from a "tapestry-like" texture, with a "woven" or "knitted" character, marked by the perpetual recurrence of diverse figures; I have not sought to give a representation of these, still less to set their limits. (Pousseur, 2002, p. 196; translated from French to English by the authors of the current paper)

resentamen) acquires meaning not in isolation but through a dynamic interplay with both its sonic context (*object*) and listener perception (*interpretant*) (Peirce, 1955; Tarasti, 2015, pp. 59–60).

This recursive logic resonates with Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of listening. According to Nancy, sound "is meaning in the act of its arrival" (Nancy, 2007, p. 11). The *Études* enact this principle: they do not deliver pre-encoded messages but unfold as emergent forms, exposing the listener to a continuously modulating field of potential.[3] In this way, sound becomes a surface of encounter—a liminal skin—where perceptual and semantic boundaries blur (Nancy, 2020; Reybrouck, 2024).

Although the *Études* were originally untitled, Pousseur later gave each a metaphorical name to reflect their poetic and structural character. In his essay *Die Zeit der Parabeln* (2002), he proposed the following designations. The numbers in parentheses indicate the approximate duration of each *étude* in minutes and seconds:

- *Étude I: Ailes d'Icare* (Icarus's Wings)—evoking mythic elevation and spectral descent (31:22);
- *Étude II: Liebesduett* (Love Duet)—portraying interwoven sonic dialogue (28:17);
- *Étude III: Viva Cuba*—infused with rhythmic vitality and cultural color (23:34);
- *Étude IV: Voyage aux Éléments* (Journey to the Elements)—evoking natural forces through timbral shifts (38:23);
- *Étude V: Mnémosyne disparue* (Mnemosyne Disappeared)—a meditation on loss and memory (28:08);
- *Étude VI: Hymne à Zeus ornithologue* (Hymn to Zeus the Ornithologist)—filled with bird-like gestures and mythic allusions (21:08);
- *Étude VII: Aerial View of Haiphong, Massachusetts*—a surreal, multi-perspective soundscape (36:19);
- *Étude VIII: An Heinrich, Ping-Pong*—driven by back-and-forth rhythmic interplay (21:22).

[3] This multi-stable, modulating field of spectral interactions invites a mode of listening that is inherently polyphonic—not in the traditional harmonic sense, but in the phenomenological simultaneity of coexisting auditory trajectories. As demonstrated in the analysis of Josquin des Prés' motets, the intertwining of spectral and temporal structures establishes a perceptual dynamic already nascent in early polyphony, where informational density operates as a mode of temporal articulation and aesthetic openness. For a historical perspective on the perceptual and structural interplay between spectral and temporal dimensions in polyphonic music (Chagas, 2003).

These poetic titles serve as a symbolic interface between concept and form. They enrich the electroacoustic experience by guiding the listener toward metaphorical associations, while reinforcing the fluid, cybernetic dramaturgy that shapes each *étude*. Henri Pousseur's *8 Études Paraboliques* [Eight Parabolic Studies], available as stereo reductions of the original four-channel electronic compositions via the YouTube playlist *Eight Parabolic Studies* (Pousseur, 1972), exemplify his exploration of generalized periodicity, electroacoustic modulation, and recursive compositional structures.

Ultimately, Pousseur's composition model leads to a reconception of musical form itself. Rather than relying on prescriptive structures or algorithmic finality, Pousseur's *Études* operate as an ecological system of interdependent modulations. Each listening encounter becomes an act of co-creation, where structure emerges through participation, feedback, and historical contingency. Pousseur's lasting innovation lies in his synthesis of technical, philosophical, and poetic logics. His analog modular methods anticipated contemporary practices in live coding, spatial audio, and algorithmic improvisation. Yet beyond technique, his work articulates a sonic epistemology—a cybernetic metaphor for being: adaptive, emergent, and open to transformation.

At its core, Pousseur's work integrates the principle of generalized periodicity, which extends beyond fixed musical structures into wave-based interactions. Drawing from *Fourier analysis*, Pousseur treats sound as an assemblage of multiple oscillatory movements, where microstructural frequencies interact to form macrostructural periodicities. This method aligns with analog synthesis and digital signal processing, where sound is not conceived as discrete events but as a continuous flux of modulations and interferences. Pousseur's serial and parallel connections of oscillators enabled the creation of complex and unpredictable rhythmic and harmonic relationships, forming an interactive sound architecture that resists finality or static meaning (Chagas, 2014, p. 115).

Foerster's non-trivial machine model offers a direct analogy for this approach: while trivial machines maintain predictable input-output functions, Pousseur's *Études* operate as a historically contingent system, where each sonic event transforms subsequent iterations through ongoing feedback (Foerster, 2003). This recursive structure not only shapes sound production but also extends into the listening process, where each audition modifies the interpretive frame of the listener, reinforcing Pousseur's concept of music as a living, evolving system (Chagas, 2014, pp. 113–114).

Pousseur's *8 Études Paraboliques* function as evolving cybernetic systems, where modulation, periodicity, and interaction form a self-organizing musical ecology. These works are best understood through theoretical models developed by Jean-Luc Nancy, Heinz von Foerster, and Umberto Eco, which illuminate the ways sound operates as a recursive, resonant, and open process. Rather than transmitting encoded messages, the *études* enact a sonic dynamic in which listening and form are co-constitutive. In this light, modulation becomes not merely

a technical method but a paradigm for perception itself—a continuous unfolding of transformation and emergence.[4]

4.1. Spectral Semiotics and the Modulating Ear: Spectral Analysis of *Étude Parabolique I*

Henri Pousseur's *Étude I: Ailes d'Icare* serves as a compelling case study for the application of spectral semiotics—a framework that foregrounds temporality, embodiment, and the phenomenology of listening as central vectors of musical meaning. Within this perspective, the "modulating ear" emerges not merely as a receptive organ, but as an active participant in the construction of sonic temporality and spectral meaning. In the context of *Étude I*, listening becomes an enactive, polyphonic, and time-constituting activity, in which spectrum and structure coalesce into a semiotic field of temporal becoming.

The *étude*'s central parabolic form—a slow spectral ascent culminating in saturation, followed by a dissolution into noise—embodies a temporal archetype deeply resonant with "spectrum consciousness" (Chagas, 2010). This spectral gesture operates on multiple levels of temporality. According to Husserlian phenomenology, these include the perceived object-events (morphing textures and timbres), the immanent temporal features of these events (such as frequency expansions and modulated trajectories), and the constitutive flow of absolute time that holds the listener in a state of attentive unfolding. The gradual unfurling of the parabola can thus be interpreted as a temporal object with a clearly articulated durational arc and internal unity—a sonic analogue of the mythic arc of Icarus's flight.

From a neurophenomenological viewpoint (Varela, 1999), the *étude*'s macrostructure activates three nested scales of temporal engagement. The ultra-slow frequency modulations operating over cycles exceeding 100 seconds correspond to Varela's "descriptive-narrative" time scale (≈ 10 s), allowing listeners to perceive the global arc of spectral expansion and retraction. Simultaneously, micro-level fluctuations—rapid phase interferences and evolving textures—engage the "elementary event" scale (≈ 0,1 s), producing a dynamic field of textural multiplicity that continuously modulates auditory focus. Between these poles, the study's middle saturation zone becomes a site of integrative simultaneity, evoking polyphonic multi-stability: a condition in which auditory perception juggles

[4] On the basis of the *8 Études Paraboliques*, Pousseur created a series of so-called *Paraboles-Mixes*—works in which individual *études* or elements from them are recombined with additional musical material, live performance, and visual elements. A significant number of these *Paraboles-Mixes* were performed during Pousseur's lifetime, often under his direct initiative or in collaboration with other musicians. An emblematic example is the *Parabole-Mix* that served as the foundation for the chamber music theater piece *Leçons d'Enfer* (1991), a work dedicated to the memory of Arthur Rimbaud and premiered on the 100th anniversary of the poet's death.

multiple frequency components, interference patterns, and modulatory vectors, producing a sense of emergent complexity from within the texture itself.

The idea of "spectral burnout",[5] as described in the piece's analysis, represents a critical phenomenological turning point. At this apex, the study does not climax in a traditional sense but collapses in on itself: coherence gives way to disintegration, and sonic identity dissolves into bands of filtered noise. In Husserlian terms, this is a moment where retention begins to fail—the decay of overtones and irregular pulses mirrors the "sinking back into emptiness" of temporal objects described by Husserl himself in *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins* (1966). In spectral semiotics, this translates into a semiotic attenuation: a breakdown of clear sonic signs into ambiguity, indeterminacy, and noise—a process of semiotic entropy.

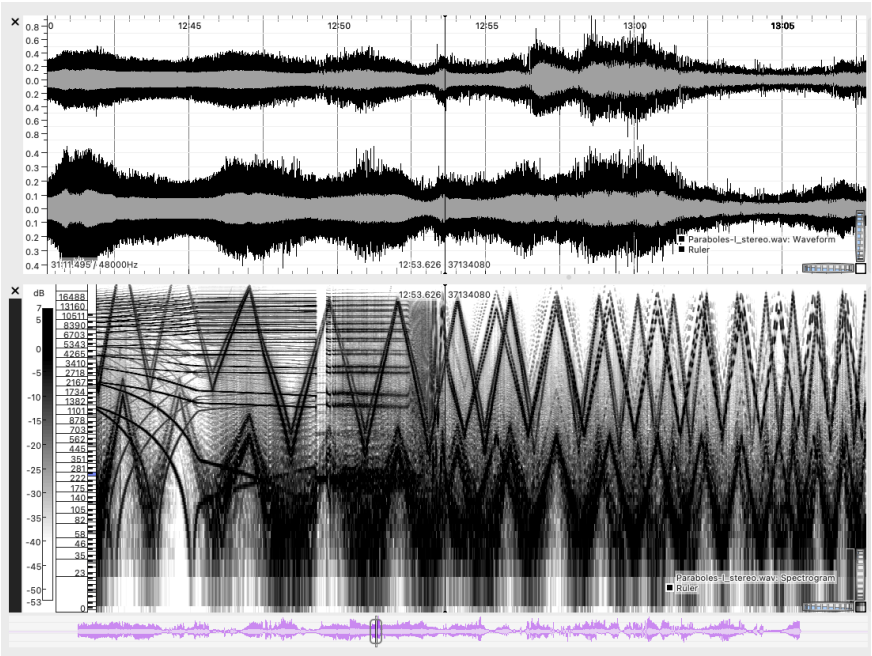
Importantly, *Étude I* also reconfigures the notion of climax. Rather than constructing meaning through dramatic peaks and resolution, it orchestrates a slow unveiling of spectral multiplicity, culminating not in fulfillment but in fragmentation. This resonates with the assertion that in digital sound art, temporality becomes "enacted" through bodily and cognitive engagement rather than formal closure (Chagas, 2010). The study, realized in continuous real-time interaction without montage, demands a mode of listening that is at once immersive and reflexive, attuned to fluctuation, decay, and the porous thresholds of perceptual stability.

Through its structural parabola, its modulation-based architecture, and its refusal of traditional teleology, *Étude I: Ailes d'Icare* exemplifies the core of spectral semiotics: a compositional thinking where spectrum, time, and signification merge in a dynamic interplay of form and dissolution. It sonic terms, this is "sound as enacted experience" (Chagas, 2010). The *étude* thus becomes not only an object of analysis, but a medium through which the modulating ear learns to perceive spectral time—not as static form, but as lived duration, a sonic echo of Icarus's flight through light and void (Figure 2).

[5] "Spectral burnout" refers to the moment in the sonic trajectory where excessive spectral density and modulation complexity lead to perceptual saturation. At this point, the listener's ability to distinguish individual frequency components collapses, producing a state of auditory entropy and semiotic indeterminacy.

Figure 2

Spectrogram of Henri Pousseur's Étude I: Ailes d'Icare*, excerpt from 12:41.866 to 13:07.839*

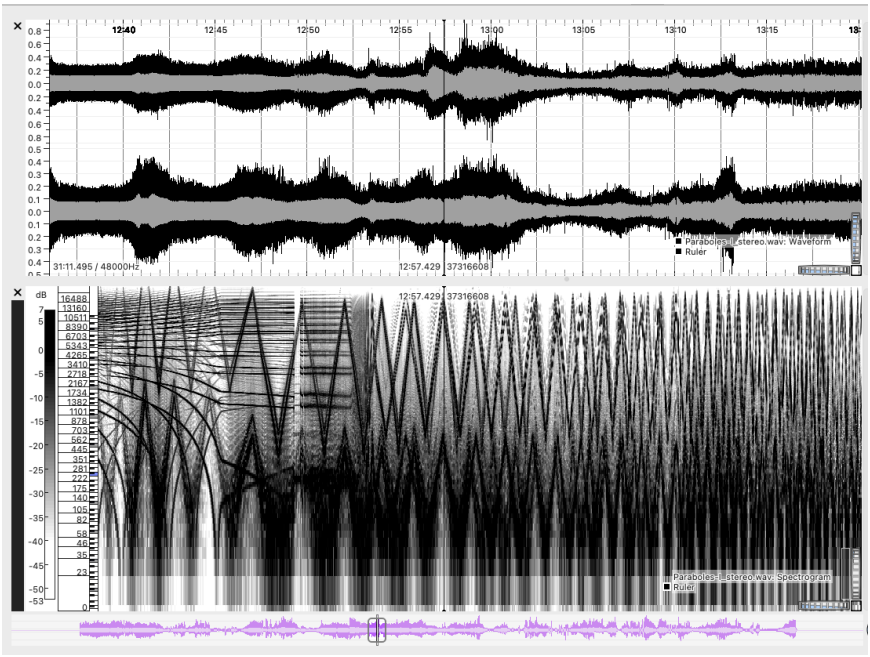


Note. Source: authors' own elaboration.

This segment illustrates the beginning of the *étude*'s central parabolic arc, where spectral density increases dramatically toward a state of saturation. The visual field displays multiple ascending harmonic trajectories, bifurcating modulations, and overlapping frequency bands—particularly between 600 Hz and 8 kHz—indicating layered frequency modulation and morphing timbres (Figure 3). The V-shaped harmonic patterns suggest periodic modulation cycles that progressively destabilize, leading to spectral thickening and rhythmic irregularity. This saturation zone corresponds to a perceptual threshold in which the ear must navigate polyphonic simultaneity and modulating instability. Interpreted semiotically, the spectrogram reflects the iconic shape of Icarus's flight, the indexical trace of gestural control, and the symbolic dissolution of sonic form into noise and entropy.

Figure 3

Spectrogram of Henri Pousseur Étude I: Ailes d'Icare*, excerpt from 12:57.429 to 13:20.170*



Note. Source: authors' own elaboration.

This segment captures the sonic apex of the *étude*'s parabolic form, where the accumulation of frequency modulations reaches a state of near-chaotic intensity. The spectrogram reveals a dense field of V-shaped harmonic trajectories, now tightly packed and overlapping across the spectrum from approximately 300 Hz to 12 kHz. These sharply articulated modulations, increasing in both rate and complexity, form a near-continuous vertical texture.

At this point, the modulation cycles intensify into a rapid pulsation, producing an almost rhythmic grid of spectral impacts. The sonic image becomes vertiginous: coherence yields to textural saturation, and the listener is immersed in a dynamic flux of competing partials and spectral bands. This culminates in a semiotic overload: the moment when the ear's ability to parse individual modulations collapses under the weight of simultaneity. In spectral semiotic terms, this is a threshold event—a critical mass of spectral data that forces the ear to shift from differentiated listening to embodied immersion. Philosophically, this apex enacts the fall of Icarus: what ascended as structure now burns into excess. The music does not resolve, but implodes into saturation signaling not closure but

exposure—a sonic space in which form disintegrates, and listening itself is pushed to its limits.

This point of emergence is crucial within the framework of spectral semiotics. In Husserlian terms, it marks a transition from retention-dominated temporality (where sound objects are still coherent and traceable in memory) to a protentional overload, in which excessive simultaneous signals blur expectation. The listener's intentional arc becomes strained under the weight of concurrent spectral stimuli, producing a state that verges on the *sublime* in its complexity and lack of formal containment. Sonically, this corresponds to what might be termed *spectral vertigo*: a moment where the modulating ear must relinquish analytic clarity and surrender to affective immersion. The modulations are no longer individually traceable; instead, they create a field of vibrating instability. The sound-object loses its discrete identity and merges into a spectral continuum—explained in a broader sense as a "flux of enacted temporality", a non-linear, embodied flow of time rooted in Varela's conception of enaction and the *specious present*, enacted through modulation, perception, and bodily engagement, and central to the aesthetic of digital and electroacoustic sound in spectral composition (Chagas, 2010, 107–127; see also Varela, 1999).

The pre-saturation phase is not merely a technical or structural transition—it enacts a philosophical one. The spectral body of the music, no longer stable or amenable to analysis through discrete frequency or temporal segmentation, enters what Jean-Luc Nancy describes as *l'écoute*: not merely hearing, but a mode of resonant exposure and relational sense-making—a listening into resonance, into the retreat or withdrawal of sound as it exceeds structural form (Nancy, 2007, p. 18). In this moment, the parabolic arc ceases to signify ascent or descent; it becomes a semiotic gesture marking the limits of sonic intelligibility—a threshold where coherent perception is destabilized and reconstituted. This marks the true onset of the *étude*'s climactic saturation: not a culmination achieved through accumulation alone, but a point at which saturation becomes meaningful, as a sonic metaphor for disintegration, overexposure, and the fragile boundary of embodied experience.

5. Intermediality and Open Structures: *Votre Faust* by Henri Pousseur and Michel Butor as Modulating Reality

At the core of the idea of sound as a modulator of reality is the recognition that sound is not a static entity but an evolving, relational phenomenon shaped by perception, context, and technological mediation. Henri Pousseur and Michel Butor's *Votre Faust: Fantaisie variable genre Opéra*—(1960–1968, revised in 1981) embodies this notion by rejecting a fixed narrative structure in favor of an open, dynamic form, where musical and literary elements engage in a continuous process of transformation. Their collaboration directly applies semiotic, phenomenological, and intermedial frameworks, illustrating how sound does not merely reflect reality but actively modulates it.

This section should not be considered an attempt at a comprehensive analysis of *Votre Faust*—an emblematic and complex work in Pousseur's output that would require an extensive, dedicated study. Rather, we treat it as an *object of comparison*, in the Wittgensteinian sense of a conceptual model that illuminates a broader set of theoretical concerns (Chagas, 2015, p. 126). This framing allows us to use *Votre Faust* as a referential and illustrative example, rather than the primary analytical focus.

Pousseur's polystylistic approach—integrating quotation, pastiche, and serial structures—complements Butor's literary techniques of fragmentation, intertextuality, and shifting perspectives (Coste, 2015, pp. 347–470). Their combined strategies reflect the semiotic and phenomenological principles explored in this paper, where meaning is not imposed but negotiated through engagement and interpretation. Through intermedial strategies, *Votre Faust* becomes a model of sound as a modulating reality, where auditory and textual forms merge into a continuously evolving artistic event. This interplay reinforces the notion that sound and meaning are never fixed, but rather, are consistently shaped by perception, interpretation, and interaction.

The concept of *opera aperta*, central to *Votre Faust*, aligns with Pousseur's *generalized periodicity* and electroacoustic experimentation. By structuring the work so that it unfolds in multiple ways, depending on audience participation, Pousseur and Butor enact a model where meaning emerges rather than being predetermined. This mirrors Peircean semiotics, where signs do not have fixed interpretations but evolve through a triadic process involving the *representamen*, *interpretant*, and *object*. The fluid structure of *Votre Faust* reinforces the notion that meaning is an open-ended, participatory process, paralleling how sound operates within electroacoustic and cybernetic frameworks.

Beyond its innovative form, the dialogue between Butor and Pousseur reflects a shared commitment to understanding music and literature as events rather than static objects. In this context, sound is not only a musical phenomenon but also a literary one, where composition and text function interdependently within a modulating structure. This perspective aligns with the argument that sound should not be viewed merely as an expressive medium but as an epistemological model for understanding reality itself (Butor, 1982, pp. 448–463).

Just as electroacoustic music treats sound as an ongoing process of modulation and transformation, Butor's literary strategies invite readers to navigate meaning through shifting textual landscapes. Their collaboration exemplifies how semiotic and phenomenological thought can be integrated into artistic practice. Butor's experiments with language parallel Pousseur's serialism and electronic manipulation, challenging traditional disciplinary boundaries and inviting participatory interpretation. This intermedial synthesis reinforces the broader theoretical claim of sound as a modulating reality—that sound, text, and meaning exist within a continuous state of becoming, shaped by perception, engagement, and interaction.

Furthermore, Butor's textual strategies foster a fluid and immersive reading experience that mirrors Pousseur's compositional approach, encouraging an open-ended listening. By incorporating layered structures and shifting temporalities, their collaboration destabilizes fixed interpretations, demanding a more engaged and dynamic reception from both audiences and scholars. This perspective reinforces the argument that meaning in art and music is constructed through active participation rather than passive consumption.

One of the key claims in *sound as modulating reality* is that sound should not be understood merely as a representation but as an active force that shapes reality. *Votre Faust* exemplifies this principle by blurring the distinctions between text and music, narrative and performance, and past and present. The opera's reliance on citation and polystylism mirrors electroacoustic music's use of sampled and synthesized sounds, fortifying the idea that composition is not about fixing meaning but about generating an evolving field of possibilities.

Moreover, Pousseur's *generalized periodicity* is embedded within the structure of *Votre Faust*, where motifs, themes, and textual fragments emerge nonlinearly, forming a network of associative and recursive connections. This approach aligns with the notion that sound operates as a dynamic system of relationships rather than as a fixed entity. In this sense, Butor and Pousseur's collaborative project serves as a concrete realization of the theoretical frameworks explored in this paper, demonstrating how artistic practice embodies semiotic and phenomenological concepts. Their work also highlights how intertextuality in literature and music creates a web of references and reinterpretations, resulting in multiple layers of meaning. The interaction between musical motifs and textual themes in *Votre Faust* provides a distinct mode of engagement, where the audience's perception actively reshapes the unfolding narrative. This corresponds with the broader claim that sound is an ephemeral yet foundational force in shaping human experience and artistic expression.

Considering the Butor-Pousseur collaboration, we can expand the discussion of electroacoustic music to encompass broader intermedial and post-structuralist issues. Their approach to open structures, participatory meaning, and intertextual soundscapes reinforces the central argument of this paper: that sound, like reality itself, is a modulating phenomenon shaped by interaction, transformation, and perception. This connection further deepens the exploration of sound as both a material and conceptual entity, bridging the divide between literary and musical experimentation. In this context, Butor and Pousseur's work functions as both a historical precedent and a continuing source of inspiration for contemporary artistic and theoretical inquiries into the nature of sound, meaning, and reality.

Furthermore, their legacy challenges traditional artistic categorization, demonstrating that the intersection of music and literature is not merely a stylistic experiment but a significant reconfiguration of meaning-making across media. By positioning *Votre Faust* within the framework of modulation, we can see that artistic forms are never entirely fixed but exist in a constant dialogue with their contexts, interpretations, and audience interactions. This perspective but-

tresses the idea that sound, in both its musical and literary forms, is an open and evolving structure that resists finality and promotes ongoing reinterpretation.

6. Conclusion: Toward a Semiotics of Modulating Reality

This paper has explored the idea of sound as a modulating reality through the lenses of semiotics, phenomenology, cybernetics, and intermediality. Rather than treating sound as a stable object or medium of representation, we have argued that sound should be understood as a relational, dynamic, and transformative phenomenon—one that shapes and is shaped by perception, interpretation, and technological mediation. Drawing on Henri Pousseur's theory of generalized periodicity, Jean-Luc Nancy's ontology of listening, and Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic model, we have examined how sonic meaning emerges not through fixed structures but through recursive processes, evolving contexts, and embodied engagement.

Through the analysis of *8 Études Paraboliques*, we have shown how electroacoustic composition embodies this principle by foregrounding modulation, feedback, and spectral transformation as essential structural and expressive elements. The *études* function not as fixed musical forms, but as self-regulating systems that continually reshape themselves and the listener's interpretative perspective. They illustrate how sound can operate both as a material process and as a symbolic structure, unfolding in time while also pointing beyond itself. This duality encourages us to understand sound not merely as content but as a model for perceptual, semiotic, and epistemological processes.

One of the key contributions of this study is the introduction of *spectral semiotics*—an approach that situates the evolving spectral properties of sound (frequency, timbre, morphogenesis) within a semiotic framework grounded in embodied cognition and neurophenomenology. Spectral semiotics serves as both an *analytical tool*, allowing us to trace how meaning arises through the modulation of sonic materials, and as an *epistemological paradigm*, suggesting that reality itself can be understood as a field of modulating relations. In this view, the act of listening becomes a dynamic site of meaning-making, where the body and sound co-constitute one another through fluctuating states of resonance, attention, and transformation.

By considering *Votre Faust: Fantaisie variable genre Opéra* as a comparative object in Wittgenstein's sense (Chagas, 2015), we have highlighted how the interplay of text, music, and open form, reflects a shared commitment to modulation as an artistic and philosophical principle. The work of Pousseur and Butor exemplifies how intermedial composition can embody semiotic and phenomenological thought, challenging disciplinary boundaries and fostering participatory meaning.

Ultimately, when understood as a modulating reality, sound invites us to reconceive the boundaries between perception and composition, materiality and meaning, structure and improvisation. It calls for a new semiotics grounded in

transformation rather than stasis, in openness rather than closure. As both an artistic practice and a conceptual framework, sound reveals itself not as a static signifier, but as an evolving presence—one that resonates with the very instability, multiplicity, and contingency that define our contemporary condition.

7. *Coda—d'après Pousseur et Butor*: Music as Reality

Music is not merely a reflection of life; it is life unfolding, resonating, and dissolving into time. Music is not a distant echo of reality, but reality itself—in motion and transformation. It does not stand apart from the world like a framed painting on a wall, nor does it attempt to capture existence in stillness. Instead, it breathes, pulses, and expands—an art without borders, a fluid expression of what it means to perceive, to listen, and to be.

A Sounding World

Reality is not a fixed landscape; it is a murmuring river, shifting and reconfiguring itself with each passing moment. In the same sense, music does not belong to the realm of permanence. It vanishes as it arrives, leaving only the imprint of its passing—a vibration in space, an echo in the mind. We do not hold music; we inhabit it. We do not possess it; we move through it, and it moves through us.

Music does not merely mirror reality; it enacts it. The rustling of leaves, the breath between words, and the distant hum of the city at dusk—all shape the contours of the world before we name it, before we comprehend it through language. Unlike the visual, which fixes and frames, the audible remains open, fleeting, and elusive. Music embraces this impermanence; it refuses to be pinned down and resists the constraints of static form.

The Language Beyond Words

If words seek to enclose meaning, to define and delimit, music does the opposite—it unbinds and expands. Music challenges the dominance of the word, suggesting that sound, in its very formlessness, speaks a deeper truth. Language attempts to make the world comprehensible; music reminds us that reality is never fully grasped—only felt and encountered in its shimmering, shifting presence.

Like unspoken poetry, like thought before it crystalizes into speech, music reveals the undercurrent of existence—the unutterable, the unsayable. It is a language without syntax, a meaning without definition. It reaches where words fail, where reason hesitates. It is both fleeting and infinite, vanishing even as it creates new worlds.

The Transformation of Life

To hear music is to feel time bending, stretching, and dissolving. Music does not merely represent life—it transforms it. It alters the way we inhabit space, sense movement, and understand silence. A single note can fracture the ordinary, and a melody can suspend the weight of time. We do not listen passively; we are shaped by what we hear.

And so, music is not only an art—it is an act of becoming. It does not settle, it does not conclude. It leaves us unfinished, constantly returning, perpetually searching. In this way, it is the most faithful reflection of life itself: transient, luminous, unknowable.

A World Made of Sounds

Listening is an awakening. To open oneself to music is to step into the current of reality—not as an observer but as a participant, woven into the fabric of vibration and resonance. Butor's vision invites us to listen beyond the surface, to understand that sound does not exist apart from us but within us and that the world itself is composed of waves, trembling air, and voices calling and dissolving into the wind.

Music, then, is not something to be grasped nor a structure to be preserved. It is the unfolding of presence, the fleeting touch of eternity against the skin of time. Listening is witnessing the world as it is: in flux, in motion, in song…

REFERENCES

Bankov, K. (2004). Infinite Semiosis and Resistance. In E. Tarasti (Ed.), *From Nature to Psyche. Proceedings from the ISI Summer Congresses at Imatra in 2001–2002*. *Acta Semiotica Fennica XX* (pp. 175–181). Imatra: International Semiotics Institute.

Butor, M., Schier, D. (1981–1982). *Music as a Realistic Art*. *Perspectives of New Music*, *20*(1/2), 448–463.

Chagas, P. C. (2003). Information and Polyphony: Spectral and Temporal Transformation in the Motets of Josquin des Prez. In E. Tarasti (Ed.), *Musical Semiotics Revisited*. *Acta Semiotica Fennica XV, Approaches to Musical Semiotics 4* (pp. 411–421). Helsinki: International Semiotics Institute.

Chagas, P. C. (2010). Spectral Semiotics: Sound as Enacted Experience. A Phenomenological Approach to Temporality in Sound and Music. In L. Navickaitė-Martinelli (Ed.), *Before and After Music. Proceedings from the 10th International Congress of the International Project on Musical Signification*, *Acta Semiotica Fennica XXXVII* (pp. 117–126). Vilnius; Helsinki: Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre; Umweb Publications.

Chagas, P. C. (2014). *Unsayable Music: Six Reflections on Musical Semiotics, Electroacoustic and Digital Music*. Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Chagas, P. C. (2015). Musical Understanding: Wittgenstein, Ethics, and Aesthetics. In C. Maeder, M. Reybrouck (Eds.), *Music Analysis Experience: New Perspectives in Musical Semiotics* (pp. 115–133). Leuven: Leuven University Press.

Chion, M. (1983). *Guide des objets sonores* [Guide to Sound Objects]. Paris: Buchet/Chastel.

Coste, M. (2015). *Une leçon de musique donnée aux mots: ruser avec les frontières dans l'œuvre de Michel Butor* [A Music Lesson Given to Words: Outwitting Frontiers in the Works of Michel Butor; Doctoral dissertation, Université Sorbonne-Nouvelle—Paris III et EHESS, ED 120: Littérature française et comparée]. Retrieved from: https://theses.fr/2015USPCA109

Derrida, J. (1976). *Of Grammatology.* Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Eco, U. (1989). *The Open Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Foerster, H. v. (2003). *Understanding: Essays on Cybernetics and Cognition*. Berlin; New York: Springer Verlag.

Husserl, E. (1966). *Zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewusstseins (1893–1917)* [On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)]. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.

Husserl, E. (1990). *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893–1917)*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Nancy, J.-L. (2007). *Listening*. New York: Fordham University Press.

Nancy, J.-L. (2020). *La Peau fragile du monde* [The Fragile Skin of the World]. Paris: Éditions Galilée.

Peirce, C. S. (1931–1958). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Peirce, C. S. (1955). *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. New York: Dover.

Pousseur, H. (1970). *Fragments théoriques I: Sur la musique expérimentale* [Theoretical Fragments I: On Experimental Music]. Brussels: Éditions de l'Institut de Sociologie de l'Université Libre de Bruxelles.

Pousseur, H. (1972) *8 Études Paraboliques* [YouTube playlist]. YouTube. Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_lIvDYiG6OHPRCKQl66HYCEqPtK97w9QJc

Pousseur, H. (2002). *Die Zeit der Parabeln (1972/73)* [The Time of the Parables]. In I. Misch, C. von Blumröder (Eds.), *Komposition und Musikwissenschaft im Dialog II (1999): Henri Pousseur: Parabeln und Spiralen. Zwei Hauptaspekte eines Lebenswerkes. Signale aus Köln/Musik der Zeit* [Composition and Musicology in Dialogue II (1999): Henri Pousseur: Parables and Spirals—Two Main Aspects of a Lifework] (pp. 92–203). Münster: Lit Verlag.

Reybrouck, M. (2024). Music Listening as Kangaroo Mother Care: From Skin-to-Skin Contact to Being Touched by the Music. *Acoustics*, *6*(1), 35–64. doi:10.3390/acoustics6010003

Schaeffer, P. (1966). *Traité des objets musicaux* [Treatise on Musical Objects]. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.

Tarasti, E. (1994). *A Theory of Musical Semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Tarasti, E. (Ed.). (1995). *Musical Signification: Essays in the Semiotic Theory and Analysis of Music*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tarasti, E. (2002). *Signs of Music: A Guide to Musical Semiotics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Tarasti, E. (2015). *Sein und Schein: Explorations in Existential Semiotics*. Berlin; Boston: Walter de Gruyter Inc.

Varela, F. J., Thompson, E., Rosch, E. (1991). *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Varela, F. J. (1999). The Specious Present: A Neurophenomenology of Time Consciousness. In J. Petitot, F. J. Varela, B. Pachoud, J.-M. Roy (Eds.), *Naturalizing Phenomenology* (pp. 265–314). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Wiener, N. (1948). *Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.