General Theoretical Notions About the Semiotics of Culture and the Arts

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ABSTRACT

Aim. This article offers an approach to general theoretical issues in the semiotics of culture and the arts, with an emphasis on key concepts from these areas of knowledge. The evolution of the object of study, theoretical discussions associated with different theoretical and methodological traditions, and the basic categorical system are among the topics covered.

Methods. To prepare the article, general or theoretical methods were used, such as analytical-synthetic and inductive-deductive, which were materialized through documentary analysis, interpretation, and the study and criticism of sources.

Results. This article adopts positions regarding categories and concepts of semiotics, such as culture, languages, the semiotic transposition of languages, codes, text, and criteria of textuality. It analyzes definitions and theoretical proposals from various authors and offers valuable criteria for continuing the scientific debate.

Conclusions. Semiotics is an area of human knowledge characterized by a multiplicity of theoretical and methodological approaches and positions. In many scientific and academic practices, there is still an attachment to the founding notions of Peirce and Saussure, as well as to the traditional designations of semiotics and semiology, or to the dichotomous and trichotomous conceptions of the sign, aspects that are too rudimentary to satisfy current demands for the semiotics of culture and the arts.

Cognitive value. The article provides a solidly argued study, based on an extensive bibliographic review, knowledge of cultural and artistic issues, and the practice of art itself in different manifestations.

Keywords: Semiotics, Semiology, art, culture, text

INTRODUCTION

The theoretical and methodological approaches to the Semiotics of Culture and Arts are limited by the complexity of terminology and the density of the explanations provided by the authors, which poses a challenge to teachers and professors of these subjects in the university training of professional artists and educators in artistic specialties for general teaching.

This is why the authors have proposed a general objective: to explain and exemplify a group of basic concepts of the Semiotics of Culture and Arts, so that the appropriation of this knowledge by university students and other readers who require an approach to this field of knowledge is encouraged.

A study like the one proposed is significant for its application in inclusive educational environments, addressing special educational needs and the development of motivation (Duka et al., 2024), as well as in the teaching of second languages, as it reveals

cultural aspects related to the encoding and decoding of texts that must be addressed by teachers and students during the educational process in the school institution.

The theme has been deeply addressed in the teaching of literature and the arts (Prado Soriano et al., 2024), both in the training of education professionals and in Primary Education.

The different aspects of Semiotics are also related to studies about the relationships between Family and School, the formation of values, and the use of free time (Kralik, 2023), in topics such as the analysis of contexts, forms of communication, dialogue with ideologies, and the semantics of time and space.

The study resulted from the application of theoretical methods such as analytic-synthetic and inductive-deductive, in addition to a group of empirical methods, such as content analysis and source criticism.

The considerations offered have a recognized educational value and are of interest to artists, theorists, historians, and critics of the arts and culture, as well as to teachers and other specialists in the social and human sciences.

The semiotics of art as an area of human knowledge

The study of the semiotics of art as an area of human knowledge is a difficult process, among other reasons because of the incipient development of this particular science, because of the dispersion of general and specific theoretical sources, and because of the insufficient applied research that is carried out in the field of many artistic manifestations, especially from projects led jointly by theorists of semiotics and artists.

In the first place, we think that it is necessary to contextualize the semiotics of art, determine its relations with general semiotics, and specify some general scientific assumptions, essential to delve into the studies of reference, try to offer basic conceptual notions, and what we consider the greatest challenge: to make understandable the didactic transposition of the theoretical and methodological body of the sciences, to turn it into the content of this course, which can be creatively appropriated by artists, theorists, historians and art critics, as well as teachers, managers and lovers of arts and culture.

The semiotics of art is a branch of general semiotics, the latter conceived as „a philosophical discipline because it does not study a particular system, but studies general categories that will make possible the comparison between different systems" (Eco, 1990, p. 11). On this aspect, Jean-Marie Klinkenberg (2006) argues in his *Manual of General Semiotics*: Saussure saw in semiology "the general science of all the systems of signs (or symbols) thanks to which men communicate with each other" (Klinkenberg, 2006, p. 34). Peirce, for his part, wrote the following: "Logic, in its general sense (...) it is nothing more than another name for semiotics (...), a quasi-necessary or formal doctrine of signs" (Klinkenberg, 2006, p. 34). Thus, the two founding fathers converged on two

important points: first, in considering that what one called semiology and the other, semiotics, was the science of signs; next, to put before the idea that these signs function as a formal system.

Beyond the foundational ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, general semiotics has evolved since that future science that was envisioned as a general theory of signs, towards a theoretical nucleus that tries to "highlight the existing relationships between different languages" (Klinkenberg, 2006, p. 40).

It is also argued that general semiotics "comprises a theory of codes and a theory of sign production" (Eco, 2000, p. 17).

In the space of general semiotics, it has become necessary to establish more specific areas of study, determined, fundamentally, by the different languages, codes and systems of signs that are manifested and interrelated in culture, among which natural languages and artistic manifestations stand out, as languages where numerous artistic and ideological codes are superimposed.

The second level is that of particular semiotics, also called specific semiotics. Each of these constitutes the technical description of the rules that govern the functioning of a particular "language", a language considered sufficiently different from others to guarantee the autonomy of its description (Klinkenberg, 2006).

Referring to particular semiotics, Umberto Eco wrote: "A specific semiotics is a grammar of a particular sign system" (Eco, 1990, p. 9). And in the *Treatise on General Semiotics* itself, the Italian theorist specified: "I use the term 'grammar' in the broadest possible sense, which includes, together with a syntax and a semantic, a series of pragmatic rules" (Eco, 1990, p. 9).

From these points of view, the semiotics of art is one of those particular semiotics, insofar as it describes and interprets the functioning of a specific language: visual language. Then, the semiotics of art is constituted as a particular grammar of each artistic manifestation, a branch of semiotics that offers multiple theoretical and methodological foundations for the scientific study of the arts in the system of culture.

In relation to the basic categories or the basic conceptual core of general semiotics, the authors identify several concepts or categories. Yuri M. Lotman, the leading exponent of the Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, identifies in *Semiosphere II: Semiotics of Culture, Text, Behavior and Space*, "three categories such as text, function of text and Culture" (Lotman, 1998, p. 116). Umberto Eco, in the *Treatise on General Semiotics*, establishes as "distinctive categories (...) those of significance and communication" (Eco, 2000, p. 17). But this same author, in his *Semiotics and Philosophy of Language*, states: "contemporary semiotics seems to be agitated in anguish in the face of a dilemma. What is the fundamental concept: the sign or semiosis?" (Eco, 1990, p. 13).

We will begin to approach theoretically some of these basic concepts or categories, so that the foundations are laid to found, subsequently, a conceptual nucleus of the semiotics of art, among them artistic culture, the artistic text and its functions, meaning and communication through the languages of art, the sign and artistic semioses.

Culture seen from semiotics

Culture has been studied by numerous sciences, such as history, the sociology of culture, cultural anthropology and, since the second half of the twentieth century, by semiotics. Umberto Eco (2000) proposes two types of hypotheses related to culture and its semiotic approaches. Eco's hypotheses are: "(i) culture as a whole must be studied as a semiotic phenomenon; (ii) all aspects of culture can be studied as contents of a semiotic activity" (Eco, 2000, p. 44). Later, in the *Treatise on General Semiotics* itself, Umberto Eco argues that "the first hypothesis (...) makes semiotics a general theory of culture, and, ultimately, a substitute for cultural anthropology" (Eco, 2000, p. 51).

The study of culture from the postulates of cultural anthropology, in the ways in which it has been conceived by the different theoretical matrices, from cultural evolutionism to symbolic anthropology and other more current trends, allows us to venture into a definition that conceives it as the complex whole that qualifies society and is expressed in five fundamental dimensions: the creation or production, reproduction and consumption of material and spiritual cultural goods, social participation in the construction, preservation and defense of culture, cultural heritage, cultural identity and cultural management, all conditioned by the system of social relations and power.

The creation or production, reproduction and consumption of cultural goods includes artistic and visual texts, industry and cultural spaces dedicated to the promotion and consumption of art. The artist, researchers, critics, teachers and managers of the arts and culture, take elements of this cultural dimension for the semiotic analysis of the artistic text, as this process is an act of cultural consumption that explains and interprets the know-how on the part of the artist; It reproduces knowledge, skills and values associated with visual artistic knowledge, and favours the enjoyment and positive appreciation of the work of art with its impact on the development of the appropriate consumption of the arts as a social aspiration.

Culture also includes participation, which integrates the active, committed and conscious role of the artist, researchers, critics, teachers, managers and audiences of the arts, in the construction, preservation and defense of national culture and the Cuban and universal artistic tradition. The protagonism of these subjects in the management of knowledge, cognitive independence and creative capacity is fundamental, which are materialized in being part, knowing oneself to be part of, having part and taking part in the cultural and artistic life of the nation.

Heritage encompasses the most significant artistic creation of humanity, nation or locality, as well as cultural spaces dedicated to the promotion and appreciation of artistic heritage. The artist, researchers, critics, teachers and managers of the arts, must be convinced that each artistic work they analyze, and each scientific-artistic production they contribute, are essential parts of the cultural heritage, and are related to ideologies such as traditions, customs, beliefs and others, generated by the daily experience of culture, whether in its predominantly material or spiritual forms, or integrate into hegemonic or peripheral cultures.

Cultural identity as an ideological manifestation of the states of individual and collective consciousness resulting from the daily, positive and significant experience of cultural processes, is oriented towards the essence of national identity also from research and artistic creation. Cultural identity is a heritage asset that is interwoven with the artistic text and other texts of culture, such as knowledge, skills, values, habits, competencies, feelings, emotions, motives, interests, ideals and other social representations that are developed in each act of artistic consumption in which artists and audiences who consume art participate, directly or indirectly.

Cultural management involves the joint work of the manager of the arts and cultural institutions in the transmission and learning of historical, theoretical and critical knowledge, the development of practical skills and values, the promotion of art, and the formation of artistic consumption habits based on the cultural and human development of audiences. It materializes in the sciences on the arts by integrating the dimensions described to the analysis of the artistic text, in a dialogic process between the multiple interwoven fields that make up culture.

From this point of view, in the semiotic study of the arts, the conception of the social being and the cultural being as two concomitant realities must always be faced, which determine the existence and evolution of the manifestations and exponents of culture at a given moment of development. In reality, we insist, it is very difficult to find the boundaries between society and culture. Culture is presented as a complex reality and a concept equivalent to that of society.

An approach to culture in the anthropological and semiotic senses enables an integrated analysis of the origin and evolution of artistic facts, phenomena and processes from the perspective of the subjects involved in the creation and reception of art, and on the basis of textual logic. This component, fundamental in the aspiration of the study and semiotic analysis of artistic manifestations, is based on the cultural conception that includes both the elements of the economic base and those of the ideological superstructure, in the form exposed in this document.

Theoretical approach to the concept of code

Another fundamental concept or basic category identified by the theorists of general semiotics as the core of this science is the code, a term that is difficult to understand in the definitions that appear in the theoretical sources consulted. Umberto Eco (2000) states that the "code is a system of meaning that brings together present entities and absent entities" (p. 25).

Victorino Zecchetto (2002) in his work entitled *The Dance of Signs: Notions of General Semiotics*, defines the code as "the set of rules that serve to semantically associate the values of the repertoire of signifiers and, in this way, organize the meanings of the signs" (p. 92). And he adds:

Signs become understandable only from some code that acts as a convention of a significant system, and that indicates their semantic and unified direction in a text. At this complementary level, the sign thus functions together with a system of rules set by social consensus that governs the production and use of signs, and cultural expressions in general (Zecchetto, 2002, pp. 92-93).

Equally abstract is the definition offered by Jean-Marie Klinkenberg (2006), who conceives the code as "the series of rules that allow attributing a meaning to the elements of the message and therefore to its totality" (p. 58). Later, Klinkenberg points out that the "code is the association of two systems of different nature: a signified system and a signifying system." (2006, p. 139). These ideas refer to the notion of sign and point to the vision of the Cuban author Iliana Domínguez García (2010), who argues that the "code is a limited and moderately extensive set of signs that are combined by certain rules known to the sender and the receiver" (p. 7).

The view of the code as a limited and moderately extensive set of signs, together with the rules of combining these signs to form syntactically more complex units of communication, places this semiotic category on a logical scale lower than that of the specific languages that are treated from particular semiotics, at the same time as in a higher status than the fundamental concept of the sign.

Seeing it in this way, by conceiving the arts as languages, the linguistic, musical-sound, pictorial, iconographic, sculptural, architectural, performative, scenographic, kinesic and visual design codes are those more limited sets of signs that are artistically superimposed to structure the artistic fact. Codes are identified according to the characteristics common to the signs that make them up or predominate in them, mainly those related to the nature of the signifier: acoustic, visual, material, ideal, dynamic, static, corporal or spatial.

A fundamental aspect in this first approach to the code is that referred to its necessary affinity in artists and more or less specialized audiences, which has an impact on adequate communication between them in their condition of senders and receivers. In the words of Julia Kristeva (1988) "the existence of a common code is the basis of communication and makes possible the exchange of messages" (p. 10).

The semiotic transposition of languages

Another transcendental semiotic aspect in this particular look at the arts is that of the semiotic transposition of languages (Greimas, 1987; Bermúdez, 2008), also called transcoding (Klinkenberg, 2006). Transposition is conceived as the semiotic process by which a textual code (for example, literary) is modified, to adapt it to another (say, sculpture, cinema, a pictorial work), generally for artistic purposes.

The transformation that the same code undergoes when passing from one channel to another is called transcoding (sometimes the expression semia substitute also appears). In more

technical terms, a transcoding allows the same meaning to pass through different substances of the expression (...). It consists, therefore, in principle, in establishing equivalences between signifiers (but we will see that the process can have repercussions on the plane of meaning). The use of transcodes has two functions: to optimize the operation of the channels and to increase the level of redundancy of the statements (Klinkenberg, 2006, p. 211).

Nicolás Diego Bermúdez (2008), in his article entitled: "Approaches to the phenomenon of semiotic transposition: languages, devices and genres", expands on this notion and associates it with processes such as adaptation, parody and remake. Greimas (1987), in *Structural Semantics: Methodological Research*, had already stated: "A natural language, considered as a signifying whole, can be transposed and realized in a different sensory order. (…) The same happens in the case of cinematographic language" (p. 18).

The work "Medea and the slave traders", by Ramiro Guerra, is based on the semiotic transposition of the character-motif of Medea, not only from the tragedy of Euripides, but from the epic cycle of the Argonauts and beyond, from Olympic mythology and the archaic period of Greek culture. "Aphrodite, oh mirror", by the Cuban choreographer Rosario Cárdenas, also transcodes the Olympic generation from Greek mythology, and in some way dialogues with the story of the judgment of Paris, and countless literary, pictorial, sculptural, cinematographic works that recreate the Hellenic goddess of love and beauty.

The process called theatricalization of folklore is an eloquent case of semiotic transposition of languages or transcoding, by adapting and recreating the ritual dances or peasant dances of the folkloric focus to turn them into spectacular facts, subject to a preconceived dramaturgy, and integrated into a discursive logic that does not always (and not necessarily) coincide with the utilitarian purpose of traditional practice. The same happens with folk dances transformed into character dances for their integration into the academic dance code, and with medieval legends and folk tales recreated in works of the universal repertoire, such as "Giselle", "The Sylphs", "The Sleeping Beauty", "Cinderella" and "Swan Lake". "Carmen" is a semiotic transposition of the novel of the same name by Prosper Merimée.

The text seen from the semiotics of culture

As we have seen, in the thorny process of theoretical construction of the fundamental concepts of general semiotics and the semiotics of art, the definitions of culture and text that are adopted play a fundamental role. Lotman and Piatigorski refer that "culture is a set of texts or a text constructed in a complex way" (Lotman & Piatigorski 1978, as cited in Lotman, 1998, p. 119).

We consider, therefore, the semiotic conception of culture on the presuppositions of Iuri Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school as a starting point in the semiotic studies of the arts. We conceive of culture as a text-generating mechanism, a large, com-

plexly organized textual system that is broken down into a hierarchy of "texts in texts" and that forms dissimilar interweaving of texts. From this conception, culture, both in its dimension of explicit text and in the dimension of mental activity, has a profound intertextual and polyphonic character.

In the light of semiotics, cultural texts are the different systems of meaning that are interwoven in culture, such as multiple ideologies, traditions, beliefs, values and other semiotic systems, among which natural languages and the different manifestations of art occupy a place. We argue, with Umberto Eco (2000), that "culture as a whole should be studied as a phenomenon of communication based on systems of meaning" (pp. 44-45).

> From the point of view of semiotics, culture is a system of signs subject to certain structural rules. It can also be considered as a set of semiotic systems. According to Lévi-Strauss, culture is a peculiar code of communication or a "text" of complex composition (Savranski, 1983, p. 80).

We define the text based on a series of ideas by Peirce and Charles William Morris, systematized by Eco in his *Treatise on General Semiotics*, where the text is conceived as a sign or system of signs "that, based on a previously accepted convention, can be understood as something that is in place of another" (Eco, 2000, p. 34). And the Italian semiologist specifies: "a text is not just a communication device. It is an apparatus that calls into question pre-existing systems of meaning, often renews them, sometimes destroys them" (Eco, 1990, p. 38).

To the above, we can add the approach of Lotman (1998): "The concept of text—in the meaning given to it in the study of culture—is distinguished from the corresponding linguistic concept" (p. 117). The text defined from the semiotics of culture is, in our opinion, the basic foundation for the study and analysis of facts, phenomena and artistic processes as complex texts, in which codes typical of artistic manifestations are superimposed, such as musical-sound, linguistic, literary, pictorial, sculptural, engraving, and various ideological codes that dialogue with traditions, customs, beliefs and cultural memory.

We assume, from Lotman (1998), that: "From the point of view of the study of culture, there are only messages that are texts. All the others, it would be said, do not exist and are not taken into consideration by the researcher" (p. 119). Victorino Zecchetto (2002) it also offers a definition of text, considering it:

> (…) the product in itself, with a fixed and static structure, a given and original creation, without reference to others, that is, a cultural body outside the dynamic current of social processes, which is the proper of discourse. The text is the discourse before it is inserted into the context. It is a conceptual distinction and merely functional and instrumental (pp. 186-187).

If we paraphrase Lotman (1998) and contextualize his ideas in the semiotic study of the arts, we can assert that textual meanings make up a system that, together with visual morphosyntax, determines the cultural functions of texts (the pragmatic dimension of artistic semiosis). Lotman (1998) identifies three types of relations of meaning:

1. subtextual meanings (which we identify, in the first instance, with a semantics of the artistic code shared by a certain cultural community);

2. textual meanings (which would be the actualization of subtextual meanings based on their contextualized use in a specific artistic work);

3. The functions of texts in a given system of culture (these functions of the text in the system of culture are what have been called cultural meanings, which are concretized in why this artistic work exists, for what and for whom it was created, and what cultural needs the work in question satisfies).

In Lotman's words, "it is possible to describe culture at three different levels: at the level of the linguistic-general content of the texts that compose it, at the level of textual content and at the level of the functions of the texts" (1998, p. 122).

Textuality and the constitutive principles of the text

An issue that must be addressed in this theoretical approach to the basic concepts of semiotics, particularly the notion of text, is that referred to textuality, that group of essential properties or "characteristics" inherent to everything that is considered text. Textuality is materialized in these properties, which "are recognized as textuality criteria or constitutive principles of text" (García, 2010, p. 46).

Being considered constitutive principles of the text, the six criteria of textuality are essential to it, which means that the existence of a cultural or properly artistic text that does not have semantic and formal coherence, a defined intentionality, acceptability, informativeness, situationality and transtextuality is not conceivable:

– Coherence (semantic coherence) and cohesion (formal coherence) are cardinal features of the artistic text. Semantic coherence is manifested in the conceptual and meaning unity in the artistic work, and formal cohesion or coherence is expressed in stylistic unity and respect for the technical demands of artistic manifestations.

– Intentionality consists of the communicative intention of the artist. This intention is declared in the objective of the work, and is materialized in its conceptual, expressive and stylistic unity, in order to transmit a story, an idea or an affective state.

– Acceptability is oriented towards the satisfaction of aesthetic, artistic, and ideological needs of the artistic community, the consumer audiences of the arts, and specialized criticism, fundamentally. The artistic work must be conceived according to the demands of these human groups, and a creative appropriation, favorable states of opinion and a healthy enjoyment must be proposed, resulting not only from the legibility and affordability of the proposal, from its aesthetic and artistic values, but also from the intensity of the aesthetic, sensitive and emotional factor.

– The informativeness of the artistic text consists in its communicative capacity, in the effectiveness of the intentional use of the signs that make up the codes of the artistic mani-

festation, and others that are integrated into the artistic act to transmit concepts and ideas, narrate stories or "touch" the spirituality of the public and mobilize wills.

– Situationality is an obligatory criterion of textuality, since it refers to the necessary contextualization of the artistic proposal in specific cultural and communicative situations, so that it has a decisive impact on the fulfillment of the objective of artistic creation, on the personal and artistic fulfillment of the creators, and on the satisfaction of the spiritual needs of the public. Every artistic text can perform its social function only if there is an aesthetic communication in the collectivity contemporary to this text. Since semiological communication requires not only a text, but also a language, the work of art, taken by itself without a certain cultural context, without a certain system of cultural codes, is akin to "an epitaph in an incomprehensible language" (Lotman, 1982, p. 345).

– Transtextuality consists of the dialogical relationships that the artistic work establishes with other ideologies: the arts, sciences, religion, customs, traditions, memory, ideals, convictions, aspirations of the artist, which are shared with the public consumers of the arts and culture. The semiotic phenomenon of transtextuality in the arts is dedicated to the semiotic phenomenon in class number two, and is based on the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin, the intertextuality of Kristeva and Michael Riffaterre, and the transtextuality of Gerard Genette and the French and German semiotic traditions.

The functions of the text in the system of culture

Having analysed the textuality criteria applicable to the arts, we will address some general theoretical assumptions about the functions of the artistic text. According to Yuri M. Lotman (1998):

(…) The function of the text is defined as its social role, its ability to serve certain needs of the collectivity that creates the text. Thus, the function is an interrelation between the system, its realization and the recipient of the text (Lotman, 1998, p. 116).

Seen from anthropology, the arts are a cultural institution that exists because it satisfies very clear and precise cultural needs in society. These cultural needs, dealt with in some way in previous paragraphs, constitute what we have defined as the basic functions of the arts: symbolic, legitimizing, educational, stimulating-regulating domination of artistic development, cathartic-hedonistic, aesthetic-expressive, axiological and epistemological.

In this semiotic, anthropological and sociological cultural approach to the arts, it is necessary to refer to the fact that artistic manifestations and the creators linked to them are agencies and agents of socialization, respectively. If we were to round off these ideas, we would say that the arts exercise symbolic domination of their audiences, by transmitting values and canons of hegemonic culture, or by showing forms of resistance from the cultural peripheries. That is the first function of the arts: symbolic

domination, but we have identified others, more specific in relation to their link with the publics, creators and managers of art and culture.

The axiological and epistemological functions of the arts can be based on the ideas of Román de la Calle in Aesthetics and Criticism, as well as those of J. F. Lyotard and Michel Foucault, in the way in which Morales (2015) refers them to us in his Reflections on Art Criticism as an Aesthetic Practice. According to the ideas of Desiderio Navarro (1986), we maintain that art also:

> (…) it is called into existence by a series of important cultural and social needs, it is expected that, like certain historical manifestations of literature and art, it will offer knowledge and value judgments about the works; that (...) educates the collectivity that receives, creates and disseminates artistic works; [and that] (…) strives to influence the course of the historical (...) artistic process (Navarro, 1986, p. 338).

The arts also "always, to a greater or lesser extent, fulfil an educational function, whose supreme objective (...) it can be none other than the formation of an audience and a creator of a new type (...)" (Navarro, 1986, p. 353). It is necessary for the arts to contribute to forming in audiences "artistic needs and a high artistic taste" (Navarro, 1986, p. 353), as well as capacities to understand the languages of art, and to experience, as daily and positively, its ideological content and its aesthetic and artistic values.

An essential function of the arts is also to train artists, who are often legitimized by institutions and officials who market their artistic products with their backs turned to their values, in open contempt of the public that consumes them, and of the critics who place them in their rightful place in the cultural system.

Navarro said: "In its relations with creators, our criticism must undoubtedly act as an instrument of ideological-artistic education" (Navarro, 1986, p. 353). And we ask ourselves (and we answer at the same time) if this same formative commitment to creators is not consubstantial to the different manifestations of art.

In addition to the legitimizing and educational functions, the arts have a stimulating and regulating function of artistic development, insofar as they "actively influence the process (...) artistic (...)" Navarro, 1986, p. 354). This process is not only one of creation or reproduction, but also of cultural consumption. For this reason, the arts should not be directed only towards creators, but also towards audiences, and beyond that, towards the institutional and individual managers of artistic promotion.

The cathartic-hedonistic function of the arts is based on the ideas of Émile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski, who wrote about the cathartic function of cultural artifacts. We remember ideas of L. S. Vygotsky about catharsis through communication, and of Moisei S. Kagan about what he called homeostasis, an equivalent concept to express the emotional balance that is established between the subject and culture, through the work of art. Leandro Ernesto Prado Soriano & Geovannys Montero Zayas (2023), has delved into the aesthetic, sensory and emotional component of the elements of visual language.

We consider it prudent to close this section that is dedicated to the functions of the arts in the system of culture, with the words of Lotman (1982), in his work entitled *Structure of the artistic text*. Lotman says: "for the text to function in a certain way, it is not enough that it be organized, it is necessary that the possibility of this organization be provided for in the hierarchy of codes of culture" (pp. 345-346).

Textual typologies

With regard to the textual typologies applicable to the arts, particular theory has established general types and generic groups, without sufficiently delving into the theoretical foundations that support these classifications, which orient towards the epistemic systematization of information related to the complexity and diversity of artistic archtexts. On the importance of knowledge of textual typologies, Victorino Zecchetto maintains:

> (…) Knowledge of discursive typologies provides us with a strong explanatory power, because "textual types" are schemes that are postulated in order to achieve the management of the organization of discursive texts. (…) Semiotics asks three questions in this regard:
>
> – What does the speech say? This is the semantic field (semantic marks),
> – How do you say it? It is the rhetorical field (rhetorical marks),
> – Who says so? It is the field of enunciation (enunciative marks).
>
> From the relations and the conjunction of these three points arise the discursive genres (Zecchetto, 2002, pp. 195-196).

We think, and this does not mean that it is entirely true, that it is a debt of the semiotics of the arts to dialogue with current theories, to substantiate this aspect of the textual typologies applicable to the arts, so that the classifications and generic groups that are generalized, find a scientific basis that supports them and contributes to their legitimation. Beyond the large groups known, for example, as static, kinetic and spatial visual arts, there are subdivisions that transcend the generic and are based on aesthetic, stylistic, and properly technical aspects, which require and support deeper theoretical investigations.

General considerations about the sign and its structure

An operative definition of the sign is offered by Umberto Eco (2000) in the *Treatise on General Semiotics*. Very precisely, the renowned scholar of general semiotics and art proposes "that a sign be defined as everything that, based on a previously accepted convention, can be understood as something that is in place of another" (p. 34).

In an approach to the sign as a basic category of general semiotics and the semiotics of art, it is necessary to specify that it must be analyzed in close relation to culture, insofar as the signifier, the signified and the cultural referent are integrated in its composition. The signifier of the artistic sign is what is seen and/or heard, the sound, iconic, and visual material expression. Meaning, by its ideal nature, refers, in the first place, to the theme or concept expressed in the work, but transcends it to the social functions of art (cultural meaning), and the affective values it contains: what it represents for an individual or a cultural community.

The referent of the artistic sign is the individual creative appropriation, by the creator and the receiver, of the cultural reality represented in the artistic work, based on their cultural experiences. The referent is the component of the artistic sign that allows the appreciation of its meanings and senses to be completed; it is the result of the dialectic (and often the analectics) of the material and spiritual processes experienced by the subject, which has an influence on artistic semioses, and allows us to identify influences, establish relationships and attribute meanings to the images and signs of the arts (Vilches, 1995).

The semiotic triangle of Charles Kay Ogden and Ivor Armstrong Richards summarizes the nature of the artistic sign. Anne Ubersfeld (1989) also assumes this triadic structure of the sign in her semiotic study of theatrical art.

According to Greimas (1987), in his work *Structural Semantics: Methodological Research*: "the constituent elements of the different sensory orders can, in turn, be grasped as meanings and institute the sensible world as signification" (p. 16). From this point of view, the visual work constitutes a secondary modelling system, in correspondence with the terminology of Boris Uspenski and Yuri Lotman (Lotman, 1998).

Taniuz Karam (2014) states that signs have objective existence and a material and spiritual nature. Karam takes a position on the theory of Peirce, who defined the sign as that which is rather than something else.

The artistic sign is conventional, that is, there must be a kind of agreement in the cultural community in relation to its meaning. The conventionality of the artistic sign is contained in the meanings shared and accepted by the cultural community. "In each culture, the established iconic systems constitute a pedagogy of vision, oriented towards the understanding of the canonical forms of its iconosphere" (Karam, 2014, p.18).

The artistic sign also presents different levels of arbitrariness or motivation. Arbitrariness is given by the lower degree of relationship between the sign and what it represents, and motivation refers to the higher level of relationship between the sign and its referent. The iconic sign in the visual arts presents a higher degree of motivation, while the visual sign has a lower level of motivation than the iconic sign and can have the arbitrariness of the symbolic sign (Vilches, 1995; Karam, 2014).

In the artistic text it is not the object that motivates the syntactic organization of the signifiers, "but the cultural content that corresponds to that object" (Karam, 2014, p. 12). That is to say, the meanings and senses that signs acquire, in their pragmatic relationship with the cultural contexts of appreciation and creation of ar-

tistic texts, or in other words, of codification and decoding, motivate their organization as a complex syntagm.

In correspondence with these ideas, the dynamic or static artistic image can be understood as a category of representation that transmits information about the perceived world (Karam, 2014). The artistic image is conventional and motivated, that is, it maintains a high relationship with the object represented, given by the degree of iconicity (Karam, 2014). To the extent that an image faithfully reproduces the object (not the referent), it loses its character as a sign, insofar as it is a signifier almost devoid of meanings and senses. For the iconic image to be a sign, it must carry subjective and expressive nuances that attribute meanings and senses to it, even when they diminish its resemblance to the object represented. "Resemblance is an effect of a sense of reality. (…) From this point of view, iconicity is defined as a kind of illusion of resemblance" (Karam, 2014, p. 12).

Resemblance as a fundamental principle to define the iconic sign has been rejected by some specialists, such as Umberto Eco, based on the criterion that the greater the resemblance, the less the character of the sign. Eco says that the iconic sign draws its meaning from shared cultural conventions (Karam, 2014). Examples: The dove with its multiple meanings, the Latin cross, the white flag and the national symbols.

Conclusions

The article provides a detailed explanation of a series of essential concepts related to the semiotics of Culture and the Arts, with examples that illustrate the different notions, which gives a profound didactic character to the research presented. The essential references come from European and North American semiotic traditions, which are enriched by perspectives from cultural contexts in the south, primarily from Latin America and the Caribbean.

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