

**Systemic Conception of the World: Biases of the Bakhtinian  
Intellectual Circle and the Semiotic School of Culture / *Concepção  
sistêmica do mundo: Vieses do círculo intelectual bakhtiniano e da escola  
semiótica da cultura***

*Irene Machado\**

**ABSTRACT**

How can theoretical concepts which are organized to promote the understanding of sign systems of culture be envisaged by the dialogue which acknowledges controversies? This is the background question guiding this essay, which examines the views of dialogism as it confronts assumptions from the semiotics of culture. Without relativizing the criticism that supports the inferiority of the semiotic method, we seek to examine how, at the conceptual level, the viewpoints only touch the latitude of language as a semiotic problem of culture from a systemic conception.

**KEYWORDS:** Dialogism; Semiotics of Culture; Modeling; Systemicity; Semiosphere

**RESUMO**

*Como concepções teóricas que se organizam para promover um entendimento dos sistemas de signos da cultura podem ser perspectivadas pelo diálogo que respeita controvérsias? Esta é a questão de fundo orientadora do ensaio que examina vieses do dialogismo em confronto com premissas da semiótica da cultura. Sem relativizar a crítica que sustenta a inferioridade do método semiótico, procura-se examinar como, no campo conceitual, os pontos de vista apenas tangenciam a latitude da linguagem como problema semiótico da cultura a partir de uma concepção sistêmica.*

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Dialogismo; Semiótica da Cultura; Modelização; Sistemicidade; Semiosfera

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\* Universidade de São Paulo, São Paulo, São Paulo, Brazil; CNPq; [irenemac@uol.com.br](mailto:irenemac@uol.com.br)

## Introduction

In different contexts of his formulations, Bakhtin and his intellectual Circle examine limits of conceptions taken as reverse to dialogue. In the scenario of the debates in the 1920s, Russian Formalism was a prime target of attacks, mainly for its poetic and aesthetic formulations that Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev acknowledge as opposed to dialogue, as examined in a previous study (MACHADO, 1985). The debate with the semiotic formulations of Tartu School was more dispersed, but it was no less devastating. In occasional positionings, Bakhtin declares, for example, that the structural semiotic method undertaken by Yuri Lotman is analytically insufficient (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.2-3; 135; 155). Paradoxically, many of the assumptions of structural semiotic concepts come from dialogism as it is the very notion of semiotic system of signs as the basis for the study of culture, not as a whole but as a producing source of texts.

The relationship between Bakhtin's intellectual circle and the Tartu School have involved controversial discussions that, although not involved in this study<sup>1</sup>, emerge as the axis that Russian theorists developed about systemic thinking. Accordingly, the conceptual field of dialogism does not end in the formulations of the Bakhtin Circle, but unfolds in the art and poetics of constructivism as well as in its semiotic formulations. The fundamental argument of our hypothesis results from the analyses of the epistemological constitution of dialogism itself, radically distinct from the methodology that made dialogism an instrument of applied analysis which is not necessarily systemic.

The distinction hereby enunciated was observed in an unpretending article that, in less than five pages, opened the controversial debate. In it, semiotician Mikhail L. Gasparov examines, among other issues, the distance that separates the context of adversity that sustained Bakhtin's formulations from the context of worship of his followers. According to Gasparov,

From his creation program, late scholars created a theory of research. And they are essentially opposite: to create is to transform an object; to research is not to deform it. The organic integrity of Bakhtin's

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<sup>1</sup> A panorama of this debate was the object of Desiderio Navarro's study: The response of Tartu School to Bakhtin and a scandalous silencing of occidental science (NAVARRO, 2007, p. 157-171).

philosophy has been broken up into separate tenets: on dialogue, on laughter, culture, etc. <sup>2</sup>(GASPAROV, 1993, p.21)

The fundamental center of Gasparov's criticism lies in the transformation of the "critical artistic program," in the words of semiotician Stefan Żółkiewski (ŻOLKIEWSKI, 1993, p.23), into a methodology<sup>3</sup>. As far as it is reasonable to assume, Gasparov's concern has a precious foundation: the monologization of dialogical thinking when transformed into method aiming at the consecration of a theory. We agree that the monologization of dialogism is a reason for pondering on different levels. We understand, however, that the use of dialogism in its different possibilities has demonstrated the range of propositions in distinct areas of humanities, particularly those with which it shares common objects of analysis. Thus, Gasparov's criticism opened a slot to think about the relation between dialogism and semiotics in another direction, especially because the Tartu School of Semiotics is not situated in line with the followers who turned dialogism in a method, even though the fundamental dialogical relations to systemic conceptions has been preserved. By situating dialogism as an elementary movement of the relation of sign with the signicity of culture, semiotics maintains language at the place that has been designated by Bakhtin's thinking: the place of dialogical transformations motivated by the dynamics of the interactions in cultural systems.

Although controversies often place dialogism and semiotics in antagonistic positions, what is observed in the systemic field is that the evident conflicts of the methodology revert to epistemological problematizations, without fearing the paradoxes. It is worth remembering that in Yuri Lotman's understanding, there is no science without paradoxes (LOTMAN, 1985, p.49). What he affirmed based on the observation of cultural encounters is that, in the spirit of its fiercest clashes, they are driven by conflicts and clashes that, from the point of view of dialogical relations, define the nature of culture itself. Accordingly, despite the animosity, the systemic

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<sup>2</sup> Translated from Spanish version: "Continuadores tardíos hicieron de su programa de creación una teoría de investigación. Y esas son cosas esencialmente opuestas: el sentido de la creación consiste en transformar el objeto; el sentido de la investigación, en no deformarlo. La integridad orgánica de la cosmovisión bajtiniana result desmenuzada en tesis sueltas: sobre el diálogo, sobre la cultura de la risa, etc."

<sup>3</sup> In his study, Zolkiewski acknowledges the importance of Gasparov's work, especially when it comes to Bakhtin's resistance to consolidating his formulations as theory. However, he disputes Gasparov's argument and defends dialogism as a method.

conception reveals how semiotics, whether of dialogue or culture, put forward the dialogism expansion. And this is the foundation of our argument.

## **2 Systemicity in the Dynamics of Culture**

Dialogical thinking, born on the border of the reflections of the Circle that binds the name of Bakhtin with partners such as Medvedev and Volosinov, built its legacy in the transformative interactions of the dialogical relations of language in social discourse. Conceived as the movement between verbal sign (the word) and signicity (sign systems of social life), the dialogical discourse is not manifested out of the signicity emanating from cultural-historical sociosphere. It is then possible to infer that the formulations on dialogical discourse structure the bases of systemic processes transformed into synthesis of the semiosis of culture. The Bakhtin Circle constantly feeds on the notion of system to organize its formulations. Ideologeme constitutes a system of ideas; imagicity comprises a system of images of language; poetics refers to a system of artistic models of the world; the meaning is constructed by the system of dialogical relations. Unlike the current notion of system as a whole organized by parts, the notion of systemicity derived from such conceptions concerns the transformative dynamics capable of promoting changes of condition and, thereby, creating links in a potential space of relations. The system is observed in its structural transformations, both internally and in those movements in distinct contexts as it has been properly reminded by Daniel P. Lucid, “structural linguistics thus becomes the linguistic branch of cybernetics” (LUCID, 1977, p.7), the science which deals with “any kind of systems capable of recognizing, retaining, and processing information and using it for control and regulation purposes”, as the Kolmogorov statement that helped to define the systems of languages as a sort of “cybernetic machine” (LUCID, 1977, p.7).

As Bakhtin’s intellectual Circle achieved the systemicity of dialogical relations in the context of language understood as speech, the semiotic school pursued systemicity in cultural systems such as myth, religion, literature, visual arts, history, cinema, and even in the artificial languages of computational machines endowed with mind and memory. In distinct speculative contexts, the serious commitment to develop methods of analysis and explanatory paths for culturally organized representations as language reveals, without exaggeration, the strength of the systemic treatment of

cultural processes as well as the magnitude of the thought that seeks to articulate a systemic conception of the world.

The embodied notion of language as sign system, besides dimensioning the set of elements and semioses constituting the system, sustains the dynamics of extra-systemic relations responsible for the phenomenon of culturalization, synthesis of what semiotics defined as sign systems studies<sup>4</sup>. A conceptual and theoretical core gravitates here, one that leads the studies of dialogism to the investigation of mechanisms which, by considering systemicity, goes forward and comes up with studies on culturology from the point of view of operations resulting from tensions between internal articulations and external movements of the language system in question.

If the differential point of systemic dynamics is the objectification of dialogical relations capable of interacting with the extra-systemic, there is no way to ignore the interplay of forces in the dialectics of their transformations. That is, if culture is dimensioned as a system, evidently the extra-systemic will be *natura*. We would be facing a conceptual dilemma if, in systemic thinking, transformations were not foreseen as passage from one dimension to another, so well-formulated in the laws of dialectics of nature (ENGELS, 1979, p.34 et seq.) in which the extra-systemic is the dynamic constituent of the cultural process.

In order to investigate such transformation, semioticians of culture define the work of sign systems as the transformation of information into text, the seed of the notions of culture text, of culture as text and of artistic text. Thus, the systemic comprehension of the passage of the extra-systemic to the systemic condition is undertaken, a process that becomes possible due to the semiotic mechanism of language modeling. Therefore, in Lotman's understanding, it was possible to observe mainly in art, but also in myths and religion, modeling sources of cultural languages. Here the notion of model suggests a view which is distinct from the prototype since it presents itself as a transformation program. What Bakhtin formulated as artistic models of the world, observing verbal works, Lotman expands as modeling process of different systems of culture.

### **3 The Work of Signs in the Generation of Culture Texts**

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<sup>4</sup> Sign Systems Studies acclaimed the studies of Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School and the journal that was sponsored by Tartu University from 1960.

The concept of text is not only critical of modern semiotics which heads towards the studies of culturology (IVANOV et al, 1998, p.6; LOTMAN, 1990). It is a concept that problematizes the systemic conception of culture and the semiotization processes that mark the transformation of information into text. In the perspective of semiotic spaces of culture which Lotman (1985) defines as semiosphere, the text gives way to questions about the systemicity of the text / non-text relation, another aspect of the relation between the systemic and the extra-systemic, in which the qualificative *extra* does not evidence opposition, but a field of possibility of what lies at the external region of a system that is becoming systemic.

The Bakhtinian concept of text has defined not only the contemporary semiotic approach but also the precise scope of the Human sciences in general. By stating: "Where there is no text, there is no object of study, and no object of thought either" (BAKHTIN, 1986 p.103), he makes it clear that the object of study of human scientific field can only be human, and this statement is not a tautology; it only emphasizes the capacity of living beings to preserve their vital condition or homeostasis (LOTMAN, 1985, p.80). Consequently, we can synthesize the maxim of semiotic thinking according to which: "When studying man, we search for and find signs everywhere and we try to grasp their meaning" (BAKHTIN, 1986, p.114). Following such reasoning, sign generates sign, just as text generates text, assuming therefore the semiotization of the surroundings. As a result, the fundamental work of culture is to structurally organize the world that surrounds man (LOTMAN; USPENSKI, 1981, p.39).

The semiotic conception that defines culture as a generator of structurality derives from a fundamental attribute: the capacity to transform surrounding information into diversified sets, however organized, of sign systems, able to constitute languages as distinct as the expressive needs of different cultural systems. Where there is language, there will be text, even if the opposite is not evident. Only in this sense the text of art, of rites, of means of communication, of biological or technological transmissions can be apprehended in culturally modeled and structured languages. Based on Lotman, Lucid quotes the following definition.

A modeling system is a structure of elements and of rules for combining them that is in a state of fixed analogy to the entire sphere of an object of knowledge, insight or regulation. Therefore a modeling system can be regarded as a language. Systems that have natural language as their bases and that acquire supplementary superstructures, thus creating languages of a second level, can

appropriately be called secondary modeling systems (LOTMAN, 1967 *apud* LUCID, 1977, p.7).

There is a clear counterpoint between the Bakhtinian concept of text and the semiotic concept: While this one is open to the signic movement including the extra-systemic, in Bakhtin, the signicity of the text revolves around speech and its enunciation. The boundaries between the Bakhtinian logosphere and the Lotmanian semiosphere cannot be disregarded without running the risk of losing the gradient and the friction between the semiodiversity of sign systems of culture. To this, the concept of modeling contributes as a theoretical key for the analysis of dialogical relations among the systems immersed in semiosphere.

The concept of modeling was formed not only from linguistic discoveries, but also from the experiences of artistic and scientific vanguards that proposed a challenge to themselves: to understand art and sign systems as organizations of language endowed with structurality. Considering language as an occurrence in a given context of evolution, language was attributed the character of primary modeling system, assigning the condition of secondary modeling systems to others. Despite the distinction, this is not about hierarchy, but about tensions between logosphere and semiosphere. Lotman understood that the diversity of languages of culture, multiplied with the development of processes and means of communication, was responsible for expanding the modeling process of its systems and texts. Because semiosis is realized through processes distinct from those that generate human verbal language, culture systems modeled both artificial languages of science and secondary languages of culture (of myths, religion, fashion, media, systems). Thus, if narrative is the language of myths, both the poet and the astronomer can build narratives about the world. Yet the verbal model of myth bears no resemblance to the model of formulas and mediations of mathematical and geometric signs. Nonetheless, both are modeling systems of culture. That being so, modelization presents itself as cognitive capacity of a heuristic principle to achieve distinct semioses in the dynamics of culture. Together with social semiosis, in which the interaction among people is mediated by the oral and written word, other semioses occur, generating different texts that are instances of and in culture. Bakhtin was unable to admit cybernetic processes as language (BAKHTIN, 1996, p.147). Evidently, he would never recognize the text as a modeling device.

The text of culture configured by the modeling work of signs does not result from a single code. A language, for example, develops from the verbal code, just as music has in musical code its source, or painting, which found in perspective (linear and inverse) accurate codes of picturalization. A text of culture, besides the codification generative of its semiotic system, is encoded by the environmental context of its production. For Lotman (1996, p.7-90), this means that every text must be encoded, at least, twice: by the code that captures the information and transforms it in an organized set of signs and by the systemic context of culture historically constituted. For example: the discovery of the alphabet spells out a process of encoding information; the production of a poem or a treaty of medicine or a set of laws is already a second encoding, derived from the environment of poetic, medical or legal relations (that said to remain simply at the cited example). The same can be stated in relation to other texts, such as the genetic code whose letters do not report to the verbal text, but to the cellular text. The text is thus constituted as a semiotic space where languages interact, interfere with each other and self-organize themselves hierarchically as thinking, dialogical and meaning-producing devices.

In the general system of culture, texts are modeling systems. As such, they perform tasks for the operation of culture, identified by three elementary functions (LOTMAN, 1990, p.11-19): (1) communicative function for transmitting meanings, (2) sense-forming function, (3) function of the memory of culture. To perform the communicative function it is necessary to consider text as language or code realization. On the other hand, the function aiming at generating new senses is environmental; it depends on the relational activity with other texts and the languages that constitute them. To operate as memory, the text fits into the atmosphere of the intellectual history of mankind, capable of uniting and regulating behaviors focusing on future actions. Memory thus works as a program of spatiotemporal action. The capacity to develop memory reveals one of the most challenging properties of cultural texts: its operation as a space endowed with intelligence, which Lotman (1990; 1998) understands as the «mind» of culture and, as such, capable of supplying unpredictable and explosive operations.

In his analysis of the structure of the artistic text, Lotman has already demonstrated that there is no surprise in multiplicity of languages being spoken in the environment that surrounds man. The challenge is to be able to understand them and to learn how to improve knowledge by turning information into language (LOTMAN,



1978, p.30). The novelty, however, was the commitment to seek the language of each system, or rather the invariant relations from which such a system processes information allowing its decoding and ulterior recoding. The centrality of language becomes the primary issue of the exercise of analysis of modeling systems.

#### **4 Plasticity of Systemic Models as Phenomena of Consciousness and Mind of Culture**

In his study of the structure of the artistic text in the 1970s, Lotman asks why there is no society without art. According to what it seems to him, if the fundamental mechanism of homeostasis is the work of sign systems transformative of information, art is a privileged space of all this process, operating as a vital principle of society.

Facing the arguments of his reasoning, it is characteristic of art itself to make the unknown emerge under the form of language and experimentation of new codes of creation. Art presents itself as the space of emergence of new information thanks to the work of transformation of existences into aesthetic experience and acts of knowledge. The fundamental role of art is to create language capable of constructing the aesthetic object. In this sense, art creates models by means of which it becomes possible to understand the world.

Lotman's main argument develops, in the context of semiotics of culture, a debate that Bakhtin's intellectual circle also faced in different formulations: Vološinov, in his studies about the place of speech in art and life; Bakhtin, in his reflections upon the transformations of the ethical act into aesthetic activity; Medvedev, in his formulations about the ideologeme. All of them in the pursuit of understanding the systemic activity between what belongs to the nature of the system and what gravitates on its exterior, being susceptible to transformation and translation in the language of the system. For Lotman, the issue was developed around the modelization of texts and the culturalization of phenomena, explicating the activity of the mind of culture that thus approaches what, in dialogism, was understood as a manifestation of responsive consciousness. Be it as mind or as responsive consciousness, the fact is that both are at the basis of culturality.

In his debate with philosophical-linguistic theories and trends, particularly the one that understands enunciation as an expression of individual consciousness,

Vološinov discusses the troubled relationship between experience and its expression (evidently in the experience of speech). He challenges the idea of experience as non-semiotic inner expression. In his argument, he insists on the conception of experience, both the inner expression and its outer objectification, as creation. Both are the fruit of the “same and only material,” that is, the sign. If it seems impossible for him to admit “experience out of the embodiment in signs,” it does not seem possible that the artistic representation can be dimensioned out of the sign, as we can read in his defiant statement: “It is not experience that organizes expression, but the other way around – *expression organizes experience*. Expression is what first gives experience its form and specificity of direction” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.85; emphasis in original).

At another point, he adds, “it is a matter *not so much of expression accommodating itself to our inner world but rather of our inner world accommodating itself to the potentialities of our expression, its possible routes and directions*” (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.91; emphasis in original). Thus, consciousness only became an object of study of language as signic reality, materialized by dialogic relations of the enunciative event, when the sphere of ideological creativity and its system of ideas was understood in the broad sphere of social communication interactions. Hence, according to Vološinov, “... *consciousness itself can arise and become a viable fact only in the material embodiment of signs*” in social interaction (VOLOŠINOV, 1986, p.11; emphasis in original). That said, we might then follow some paths that led to broadened spaces of relations. From a semiotic standpoint, expression is materially organized through signs, whether they are word or drawing, painting, musical sound, etc. In this sense, the precedence of a semiotic context within which the experience is configured as semiosis of a specific social horizon where the interactions of speech develop is stated.

Vološinov’s formulation projects one of the conflicts of representation that aims to situate the field of forces of discourse when envisaged by art, or at interaction in life. The triangulation hereby formulated lead to stating that the artistic object is not manifested regardless of a communicative process in the whole of social life. Volosinov builds his argument in the field of aesthetic communication in which “Discourse in life is obviously not self-sufficient. It arises from the non-verbal real-life situation and maintains a very intimate connection with it” (VOLOSHINOV, 1983, p.10). This extra-verbal context (or extra-systemic in the context of our reflection) is articulated from three instances:

1) a spatial purview common to the speakers (the unity of what is, the room, the window and so on), 2) the couple's common knowledge and understanding of the circumstances, and finally 3) their common evaluation of these circumstances (VOLOSHINOV, 1983, p.11).

The set of such instances suggests one of its fundamental notions: speech as systemic realization of the elements that enter its constitution. The structure of the discursive enunciation welcomes the extra-systemic, allowing him to declare:

Consequently, a real-life utterance, as an intelligible whole, is composed of two parts: 1) the verbally realized (or actualized) part, and 2) what is implied. So we may compare a real-life utterance with an “enthymeme” (VOLOSHINOV, 1983, p.12).

Vološinov presents here a diagram of thought in which it is essential to recognize the absence of something that is not materialized, but is not an empty space. If the enthymeme is a logical construct built with the absence of one of the premises, which is thus implied, we can observe that in the structure of the enunciation a place is reserved for the absent, the one outside. Now, the aesthetic work is built in this openness to what is external to it, which does not find a manifest but for which we seek expression, its discursive intonation, which is what Vološinov synthetizes in terms of expressive intonation. Intonation seizes the moment of a transformation and updates it. In the work of art, the sign of absence is potentially creative. This did not escape F. Dostoevsky or Bakhtin. In organizing his poetics, Bakhtin gives a privileged place to the examination of speech with evasions where the unspoken tenses the discursive space and concentrates an enunciative load impossible to be ignored (BAKHTIN, 1984, p.227 ff.).

In another place of reflection, but in the context of aesthetic work, Bakhtin inquires about the transformative displacement in the relation of the author with his/her character. He transports himself to that semiotic space where Vološinov lies in order to build his comprehension of the aesthetic activity that, while not realized out of the experience, moves away from it to constitute itself aesthetically. In his remarkable conception of the “spatial form of the character,” he states that, when one is in art, evidently one is not in life, since experience, so necessary to aesthetic activity, is only a first step. It is clear that we must live experience; however, the aesthetic activity manifests itself only when it returns to the place exterior to experience. This is the ethical condition without which the aesthetic activity is not realized. The two-way

movement comprehends very different and non-coincident experiences, despite the mutual implication. If they were coincident, it would not be possible to distinguish the surplus of vision projected by distinct visual fields, not only visually, but especially axiologically (BAKHTIN, 1989, p.22 et seq.). In the composition of the visual field of relationships between lived experience and experience, the point of view is never unidirectional and continuous, but doubly oriented and dotted: It always lacks some angle that opens itself for interacting with another. The interaction in and through lived experience, with all its limitations, becomes an essential condition of the ethical act.

While we may merely introduce the general line of such rich thought, what Bakhtin rigorously examined and formulated in terms of positioning, perspective, vision surplus and extraposed visual field constitutes a heuristic principle of his systemic conception and the model through which he organizes dialogical relations observed in the dynamics that transforms the extra-systemic into systemic in a process of self-generation in which nothing is given *a priori*, out of an operation of a mind or responsive consciousness.

The plasticity of the point of view that, in the work of art, experiences and realizes its gaps and conflicts is an open and complex field in systemic conception. It is no surprise that it has been placed at the basis of all the semiotic work Boris Uspensky conducts in the field of the poetics of artistic composition, the result of an intense relation of the aesthetic sign with the signicity of culture (USPENSKI, 1979).

Contrasting with his studies on the Byzantine Icon, Uspensky observes that Western tradition developed the notion of point of view around the notion of linear perspective, developed in the Renaissance, to the detriment of the systemic configuration developed in ancient Eastern art. In support of a more accurate understanding of plural and inclusive points of view, Uspensky decides to examine pictorial works of art in which the position of the artist is represented in the work, problematizing the space of representation in his systemicity. He shows how the combination of points of view does not fit within the limits of a unidirectional approach without running the risk of ignoring the points of view of the character and the narrator; the artist and the viewer; the artist and the subject. Starting at Bakhtinian formulations about the verbal works of F. Dostoevsky, Uspensky observes that the artistic model developed in his novels is headed to a direction contrary to the narrative-authorial vanishing point, complexified in the representations of inner speech and the processes of transmission. However, it is in his long investigation on the ancient icon that he

develops the radicality of his observations on the multiplanarity of the work of art as well as of the processes of transcoding, both also studied by Lotman (USPENSKY, 1973a; USPENSKIJ, 1973b; USPÊNSKI, 1979; LOTMAN, 1978).

The key aspect of the multiplanar procedure concerns the discovery that the ancient and medieval artist not only mixed points of view, but also situated himself/herself inside the picture. The internal positioning of the artist in the space represented modifies completely the point of view of the world around him/her, conditioning the perspectivistic system employed. The organization of pictorial space from an internal point of view approaches a semiotic problem that cannot be ignored: the boundaries of representation, its limits, its conjunctions. In this case, the reproduced icon clearly presents how the icon painter treated the pictorial space, how he/she situated himself/herself drawing, therefore, a worldview of his/her time.

Not only are the high and the low, the interior and the exterior blended, but the beginning and the end, the finished and the unfinished are as well. What was created has a beginning and a cyclic existence, but has no end. It is possible to outline a character of culture if your orientation tends to be the beginning or the end. What remains unchanged is the notion of border as a semiotic space capable of investing internal function in what is external to it.

We are back to our starting point: the systemic conception of world hereby shaped by aesthetic representation in its possibility to explore procedures that create aesthetic experience in its most essential characteristic to promote space as transformative movement and the welcoming of changes which always manifest themselves as responses of a consciousness of culture.

## **5 Architectonics of Semiosphere in Culture**

By distinguishing the world of mechanics from the world of dialogic interactions, attributing to the latter the ability to mobilize the things touched by the "internal unity of meaning," Bakhtin (1990, p.1) defines dialogue as the force of responsive consciousness to move to the world of culture, i.e. of points of view, projections of ideological sphere in a broad sense or sphere of ideas. In the movement towards the other, and in the dialogic dynamics of response, the things of the world gain

sense and thus generate the dimension of reality that is constituted as culture and in relation to *natura*.

Bakhtin attributes to architectonics the creative gesture of the production of meaning in which it becomes possible to discern the field of culture, touched by the internal unity of meaning and of *natura*, which gathers the phenomena in its mechanics, independent of relations. The world of culture is the one of architectonic relations, such as those in which man questions himself about himself, his surroundings and, by doing so, articulates interactive relations capable of enunciating answers from which he builds knowledge. This is the world of events, of ethical acts and of aesthetic activity that builds answers that make possible the generation of other formulations of sense.

Because it emerges in motion towards the other, the answer configures a tendency for the extra-systemic. This is the ethical dimension of life itself, or rather of life that generates life, in the epistemic synthesis of biologist, geochemist, philosopher of science W. Vernadsky. Without bragging affiliations to currents, Vernadsky confers systemic treatment to dialogic relations that can be seen both in formulations of Bakhtin's architectonics and Lotman's semiosphere.

In the investigations that led him to the conceptualization of biosphere as a generating source of life, Vernadsky develops the dialogic model in which the theoretical starting point was the idea of biosphere as a cosmic mechanism. Involving the surface of the planet, the biosphere was understood as a film of conservation of living matter, thanks to the transformation of the sun's radiant energy into chemical and physical energy. Due to the change of state, Vernadsky observes a transformation of energy into something distinct and hence capable of generating the metabolism of life. From the viewpoint of human life, metabolism developed reactions that exceed the level of physical matter to generate a cosmic process that manifests itself as the space of consciousness.

The articulation between the two reagent levels, biological and cosmic, is at the basis of what was defined as systemic thinking of ecological character in Vernadsky. In it the human (*humanitas*) develops in the biosphere and offers conscious thinking as a new geological force on the planet, which generates and surrounds it. In this sense, the emergence of human consciousness becomes one of the stages in the development and refinement of the biosphere and its processes, the realm of *the noosphere* (from the Greek *noos*, meaning mind). When Bakhtin turns his attention to think the logosphere built around the word, or when Lotman affirms semiosphere as the semiotic space out of

which semiosis does not exist, both start an open dialogue not only with Vernadsky, but with the responsive awareness of mind in the cosmic space of life.

The dialogical cosmos that makes the responsive consciousness emerge takes Lotman's thinking to another direction. At first, he attributes to cosmic space the activity producing information (LOTMAN, 1978); next, he is guided towards the apprehension of the semiotic space of semiosphere (LOTMAN, 1985) and in it he understands the formation of the "universe of the mind" (LOTMAN, 1990). The transformation of information seems to him the fundamental core of responsive consciousness that, by constituting itself as the space of mind, dimensions processes of intelligence. For all this, it is essential that language be the axis of every transformation of information, ensuring the permanence of life on the planet. If this information is not transformed into language, they will be irretrievably lost (LOTMAN, 1978, p.29). And that, yes, is our primary task as beings endowed with intelligence in the full practice of language generating sign systems of culture.

Also here the qualitative leap in relational dynamics between the systemic and the extra-systemic is crucial to explain the mechanism generating culture, the mechanism of transformation of information into culture text.

Attracted mainly by understanding the biosphere as self-generating space - «life begets life» - Lotman understands that only systems endowed with intelligence can constitute thought and comprehend the field of meaning, wherever it arises. This seems to him to be the case of culture. In the context of different semioses that transform information into texts, culture manifests itself as organism as Lotman puts it:

... a fundamental feature of organisms is homeostasis or the attempt to maintain structural level, that is, the level of obtained information, and to oppose entropy. Nevertheless, Darwin's principle according to which 'every organic being naturally increases at so high a rate, that if not destroyed, the earth would soon be covered by the progeny of a single pair' underscores the local development of information in a specific part of the general energetic system <sup>5</sup> (LOTMAN, 1985, p.80).

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<sup>5</sup> Text in Italian: "... una proprietà fondamentale dell'organismo è l'omeostasi ovvero il tentativo di conservare il proprio livello strutturale – cioè il livello di informazione posseduto – e di contrapporsi all'entropia. Tuttavia il principio già formulato da Darwin, secondo il quale "ogni essere organico si riproduce in una proporzione tanto veloce che, se non fosse sottoposta alla distruzione, la discendenza di una sola coppia occuperebbe molto presto tutta la terra", sottolinea la crescita locale dell'informazione in determinate parti del sistema energetico generale".

For this homeostasis to be realized as force of conservation and structural organization, one has to consider the semioses in the mental diagrams of the system. According to Lotman, “The unit of semiosis, the smallest functioning mechanism, is not the separate language, but the whole semiotic space of the culture in question. This is the space we term the *semiosphere*” (LOTMAN, 1990, p.125). Therein, the homeostasis revealing the intelligence processes is configured into fundamental operating mechanisms, namely: spatial delimitation; semiotic irregularity; heterogeneity. Based on these operations, Lotman speculates about the intelligence of the semiotic spaces of semiosphere elaborating some of his most significant mental diagrams.

The first diagram comprises the spatial delimitation. The notion of space in semiosphere reports to liminality: it is the conjunction that brings together encounters and intersections. Hence the key term of its definition to be «boundary»:

The notion of boundary is an ambivalent one: it both separates and unites. It is always the boundary of something and so belongs to both frontier cultures, to both contiguous semiospheres. The boundary is bilingual and polylingual. The boundary is a mechanism for translating texts of an alien semiotics in ‘our’ language, it is the place where what is ‘external’ is transformed into ‘internal’, it is a filtering membrane which so transforms foreign texts that they become part of the semiosphere’s internal semiotics while still retaining their own characteristics (LOTMAN, 1990, p.136-7).

Nothing but a dialogical mechanism heads the semiotic operations of the border transforming information (non-text) into text. Also quantity turns into quality and, therefore, into a semiotic system dialogically qualified.

The second diagram apprehends the semiotic irregularity in the relations established between center-and-periphery. If every system is constituted around a few dominant semiotic systems – we cannot forget that we are talking about modeling systems – there is no way to impede the movement that expels other systems to peripheral regions. The structural inhomogeneity of semiotic space forms reservations of dynamic processes, one of the mechanisms of production of new information within the sphere. In peripheral sectors, arranged less rigidly and possessing flexible, “sliding” constructions, the dynamic processes experience less resistance and therefore develop more rapidly. For example, the various natural languages that define cultures develop much more slowly than mental-ideological structures.



The third diagram mentioned is that of heterogeneity, resulting from the irregularity and combination of asymmetry and symmetry, manifested mainly in the structural level. Even if we consider a specular symmetry in the whole, the internal relations reproduce a specular formation of symmetric-asymmetric pairs such as: left-right; top-down; center-periphery. According to Lotman, such configuration is so widespread in all the mechanisms generating sense, which we can say it is universal, including both the molecular level and general structures of the universe, and the global creations of the human spirit (LOTMAN, 1996, p.40).

The conceptual diagrams on semiosphere foreshadow not only the systemic relations of human cultural sets. They open to various modeling relations of the living world in their ecosystems that also transform information, if not in cultural texts, at least in behaviors.

Reflections on the coalescence between nature and culture date back to the initial formulations of semiotic thought according to which “the concept of culture is inextricably linked to its opposition to «non-culture»” (IVANOV et al, 1998, p.33). Thus, culture and non-culture become terms of a conceptual repertoire that moves theoretical formulations of cybernetics, information theory, mythology, literature and art. Information became keyword, to be thought of as cosmos emission and as transformation encoded into messages (LOTMAN, 1978). In *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures (as Applied to Slavic Texts)*, which came to light only in the 1970s (see IVANOV et al, 1998), it is clear the need to examine the mutuality of the relations between nature and culture as a process of struggle for information. Culture and non-culture are the living agents of this struggle as a form of guarantee of responsive consciousness and of the spaces of the mind in expansion, as everything in culture.

## **Final Considerations**

The study that aims to understand systemicity as the articulation of dialogical relations in different spheres, and that have been hereby observed in the context of the relation of the sign with the signicity of cultural systems, leads the approach of semiotics of culture to a systemic deepening increasingly directed by the processes of dialogical relations. If, on the one hand, it allows us to work with culture from their sign systems in their transversal relations, on the other, it guides us into the dialogue with

vigorous strands of theoretical thinking that have paved paths in this direction. There is much to understand in the theoretical-conceptual relations that scholars of Bakhtin's intellectual Circle left as legacy of a purposeful research. Resumed in the light of the works of the semiotic school, they allow us not only to acknowledge the magnitude of the formulations, but also to move forward in the direction of other formulations. This seems to be the work of Lotman, Uspensky and so many other semioticians who contributed to the expansion and strengthening of systemic conceptions.

We know that semioticians themselves never failed to reference the field cleared by the Bakhtinian circle as well as the Russian formalists. Bakhtin left on record his knowledge of what scholars accomplished in Tartu, despite the discomfort and disagreement over the direction that Lotman proposed to poetics by resorting to cybernetics and information theory. There are conflicting views and several misunderstandings in the situation that were not immune by Russian and Western critics (an overview of this tension, supposedly replaced by M. L. Gasparov and A. Reid, can be found in Navarro (2007)).

Outside the perspective of revisionism of theorists' ideological positions, it is worth noting the existence of few, but significant studies conjugating concepts that were so critical to configure the field of forces that emerged in the twentieth century in the name of an understanding of sense.

Without calling the revisionist spirit, but seeking a dialogical mapping of the conceptual field, especially between Bakhtin and Lotman, Sanchez-Meza (2004) examines the legacy of ideas in the configuration and continuity of the formulations.

Our proposal, in its turn, focuses on the understanding of the systemic conception founded on the dialogue strained by divergent, but not exclusive points of view. We live in an age where everything is considered language and, however, little do we know about the codes that model such language and even less about what its process of signification feeds on. Language remains a semiotic problem that no method can deplete despite the magnitude of certain formulations as dialogism and the semiosphere.

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Translated by Fernando A. dos Santos Sobral Junior -[fernando@fernandosobral.com](mailto:fernando@fernandosobral.com)

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