

The potential of television image in the audiovisual culture society

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Abstract

Audiovisual culture is increasingly gaining ground, and technological advances contribute dramatically to its development and its scope. Thus, this study is thematic on audiovisual culture and aimed to discuss the importance of the images on television. To do so, it was selected a television advertising example observed in 2006, which could inspire a critical reflection on the importance of hybrid languages on television, illustrating the interference of these in the production of meaning in the message of the television. As a methodological theoretical framework, we will use the image of concepts and hybrid languages from Lucia Santaella. From now, the proposed advertising analysis concluded that it consists of more icons than verbal elements, and that is part of a dialogical conception, constituting therefore a creative process of producing meaning.

Keywords: Television. Audiovisual. Hybrid languages. Advertising. Language.

Introduction

The power of audiovisual culture is undeniable and has been duly recognized. The globalization era has triggered the swift expansion of the media in terms of development,

reach, and sophistication of technology resources (PASCHOAL, 2011). The world cannot seem to thrive without the culture of audiovisual communication. The sudden increase of audiovisual vehicles allowed us to recognize their importance not only in providing entertainment but also in disseminating more knowledge, in a playful manner, to the targeted community's cultural heritage (PIRES, 2010).

The transformation process that the arts, in general, are currently undergoing is not new. As social beings, we are part of the changes that take place and, as a result, we engage in this visual and sonic universe of languages that surrounds us as it flows from television networks, radio stations, and computers, among many other modes.

Societies used to be predominantly verbal, centered on words and largely arranged in writing with regard to form and subject. Today, the cultural trend of society is also audiovisual and modeled after perceptions (BARBOSA, 2013). Outlining reflections on an approach to the building blocks of the new man, Vilém Flusser proposes in his book *O Mundo Codificado (The World Encoded)* that the new man no longer deals with things or concrete actions but with sensations: "The new man is no longer a person of concrete actions but a performer (...). It is not about actions anymore but sensations. The new man no longer wants to have or do it; he wants to experience it" (Flusser, 2008, p.58 – Our translation).

Modern-day technologies disseminate information through interaction, new forms of writing, and dynamic media. In *O Mundo Codificado (The World Encoded)*, Vilém Flusser posits that our interest is shifting from material things to the consumption of information:

We are less and less interested in owning things, and we increasingly yearn to consume information (...). Things are starting to move off our main field of interest. At the same time, an increasing segment of society is concerned with the production of information, services, management, and systems. Fewer people are engaged in the production of things. The working class, i.e., the producers of things, is becoming a minority, whereas officials and apparatchiks, who are producers of non-things, are now getting to be a majority (Flusser, 2008, p.55 – Our translation).

In this scenario of supremacy of information over material things, the gamut of information calls for more wide-ranging and creative languages. By fusing discursive, verbal language and visual, sonic languages, we can find a new way of pondering this world (ABREU; MONTEIRO, 2010). Rather than engaging in polemics about word or image, we may as well discuss the relevance of each one for the construction of knowledge. Even as we live in the age of images that can spread knowledge, words still rule the roost.

In *Matrizes da Linguagem e Pensamento: Sonora, Visual, Verbal (Matrices of*

Language and Thought: Sound, Visual, Verbal), Santaella stresses that film, video, and television are termed as audiovisual; nonetheless, they also have a verbal, discursive feature, inasmuch as “underlying what is often called audiovisual, there is a layer of discourse that supports the argument of what appears in the form of sound and image” (SANTAELLA, 2001, p.387 – Our translation). The advertisement script sample we will later discuss epitomizes Santaella’s statement that however devoid of words, audiovisuals can be regarded as an instance of the use of verbal-visual-sound language. The advertisement, portraying team spirit and shared aims and dubbed “Solidário”, comes with sound, image, and a verbal, discursive feature because it is an intent-ridden narrative depiction that attempts to convey a representation of world experience to someone (the target audience). As a result, the advertisement is looked upon as having a verbal feature although it is devoid of plain speech. Therefore, the object of this study is to discuss the importance of these images, that is, the kind of power they can hold. We intend to explore the importance of these hybrid languages on television — in particular, our *corpus* — and their interference in the production of meaning. As a basis for these discussions, we use the bibliographic method, image concepts, and Lucia Santaella’s hybrid languages.

The advertisement analysis will comply with the arguments made by Lucia Santaella, specifically in the book *Matrizes da Linguagem e Pensamento: Sonora, Visual, Verbal* (*Matrices of Language and Thought: Sound, Visual, Verbal*), which is based on Charles Peirce’s categories.

It is imperative to focus on the study of Semiotics as well as of a theory that applies to other fields such as music, art, film, and television, among others. We single out the last field because this paper deals in more detail with images produced to perform the communication functions of television networks.

Aristotle said, “There cannot be a word without an image”. Accordingly, both the word and the image are equally important in portraying the fact; one complements the other, with both constituting the whole.

Image, as postulated by Gonçalves (2002, p.3 – Our translation), “is basically a synthesis that simultaneously provides features, colors, and other visual elements”. For him, image is characterized by its plethora of available elements, whereas the language has a finite number of elements for linguistic functions.

It is imperative to rethink the importance of image and to note, for instance, that when we see an image of some product on television, there is no need to explicitly advertise its brand for us to know what it is. The nonverbal image will instantly let us know because it is already socially and culturally established in our social environment. When we watch television – a match, a soap opera, or the like – and the symbol of the yellow letter “M” pops up, we immediately set up an associative chain, which links the symbol to a McDonald’s

store. This strategy works as bait to dull the audience's complex thoughts and reflection to a simplistic, immediate association.

In the context in which we live, in the face of a society where images stand out as an artistic production, image has become a new universal language. Lévy (1991, *apud* GONÇALVES, p.4 – Our translation) talks about this emphasis on image as the onset of a new form of writing:

This is not about using image to illustrate or embellish a classic text but to actually usher in a new form of writing: an instrument of knowledge and thought that is also, intrinsically, an animated image. We do not wish to bury writing to celebrate the audiovisual show; on the contrary, we want to make it reborn by diversifying its forms and multiplying its powers. When we create a full-fledged intellectual technology out of images in motion, we are contributing to the sally of critical and imaginative computer-media culture; we are blazing a new trail quite different from that of an extravaganza society.

Breeding of a new reader in view of the audiovisual culture

With today's increasingly fleeting information flow, which requires a number of skills involving the processes of "reading" the world, Santaella (2014) has configured models of readers. According to her, the progression of images has brought on another type of reader. This new reader of a world in motion is dynamic since he/she is "the offspring of the Industrial Revolution and of the advent of large urban centers; the man in the crowd" (SANTAELLA, 2014, p.29 – Our translation). This reader arrived on the monster wave of newspaper photography and the burgeoning film industry and at the apex of television networks. With the advent of audiovisual culture, there is a new human perception of the reality that surrounds us, so this new reader, as introduced by Santaella, reveals new meanings from the reprocessing of sounds and images, thereby reinventing our scenario, which leads to the deconstruction of languages often designed with a linear view impregnated with predetermined conventions. A new expression is then created, arousing the viewer's imagination.

There is no neutrality in the images shown by a television network. It is strong enough to build and add new meanings along with the discursive, verbal language. The pictorial resources produce a new and powerful sense from the way they are used on television. Most of the time, they are shown in a creative symbiosis, cared for in all aspects, which requires closer attention by the viewer, as opposed to their former careless attitude. This "new look" thus established invites the viewer/reader to an effective participation by actuating all the other senses because a contemplative silence no longer works (SILVA, 2009). Accordingly,

the producer of the televised message interacts dialogically with the viewer watching television, who is the non-passive participant in the interaction. The viewer, in turn, also interacts with the producer, and they both become co-participants.

Recipients of televised messages are accustomed to adopting an active behavior since they enhance their critical sense when faced with audiovisual images. They show acuteness in interpreting the broadcast meanings and in acquiring a power of sensitivity refinement, in view of what is being shown, thereby stimulating their insight thereof. According to Santaella (2014, p.31 – Our translation),

There is an isomorphism among the manner in which the reader moves around in the big city, the motion of trains and cars, and the movement of film cameras. The speed that creates new forms of sensibility and thought is another way to interact with the world. As the reader bumps all the time into signs – signs that cross one’s way, outside and inside the home – the reader learns how to move from one language to another – going from things to signs, image to word, sound to picture – with imperceptible ease. This has been accentuated with the advent of television: images, noises, sounds, words, motions, and rhythms on the monitor are intermixed and they blend in with previously experienced situations.

These features add together as one “reads” the audiovisual images. Moreover, the human need for expression dates back to our genesis, and because we are now living in a rapid, technological effervescence, images begin to play a role of utmost importance since they convey simultaneous, nonlinear information, quite different from reading messages expressed in strictly verbal language.

Television in the audiovisual empire and its hybrid languages

The principal subject of our reflections on audiovisual will be television, considered one of the most democratic forms of mass media today. Television was looked upon by some as the greatest invention of the 20th century and the most powerful of means of communication. Since the early 19th century, the transmission of images over long distances was an area of interest for many scientists. Television technical support lies in the broadcast of images through which information is conveyed.

The audiovisual culture on television is the result of the interaction between sounds and images. It awakens viewers into edifying readings by providing a sort of visibility that is easily captured by one’s senses. Paternostro (1987, p.41 – Our translation) posits, “It is with image that television competes with radio and newspaper, exercising its fascination to

get and hold people's attention". For the author, television has a special character, given the fact that it boasts the iconic code – the image. Lobo, Sommer e Cavalieri (1990) emphasizes the importance of image in motion as a source of information.

The viewer assimilates the interaction between sounds and images in multiple ways upon coming across television messages. This process does not occur only when we watch television; it is a steady, ongoing process that takes place even before the act of watching television. It depends on the knowledge acquired through experience in the course of the viewer's life. It continues while the recipient is receiving the televised message and even afterward because the messages are invariably committed to memory, thereby enabling intra- and extra-textual relationship even at moments after viewing an advertisement, for example.

The rewarding plunge into audiovisual images, in general, fills the viewer or Internet user with a kind of enchantment; it brings forth critical considerations – sometimes bold, sometimes simplistic – thus avoiding their prompt and easy digestion.

There is no denying the power exercised by the media and its importance in the life of the human community. Pinho (1990), quoted by Daniel and Amodeo (2014), lists five functions of advertising, one of which is to stimulate action. This can be seen in the advertisement discussed herein, given that it aimed at mobilizing its audience, in this case, to the collection of donations for the Mário Penna Foundation.

Santaella (1996, p.42) describes television as a medium of the media, i.e., it has an anthropophagical character because it gobbles up all other forms of culture, from handcraft to the most erudite forms, such as cinema, newspaper, documentaries, and theater, among others.

To support this statement, Santaella (2001, p.388) states that “television is undoubtedly the one medium that takes multiplicity to the limit of its possibilities” (Santaella, 2001, p.388 – Our translation), the reason being the above mentioned anthropophagism. It absorbs all sorts of languages; radio, theater, or any other form. Santaella stresses that to undergo the absorption process, languages are transformed, but the nature of television language remains unscathed, inasmuch as it is shaped by the very absorption of this plurality of languages:

Among the multiple above mentioned semiotic means, television is undoubtedly the one that takes multiplicity to the limit of its possibilities. First of all, this is because television, by its own constitution, is able to swallow up all other languages: radio, theater, cinema, music performance, shows, advertising, sports, and journalism. Indeed, to be absorbed into the specific language of television, those other languages undergo changes, some of which are quite radical. This, however, does not change the nature of the television language

itself, which is made up precisely by such absorptions and mixes in a very particular syntax (SANTAELLA, 2001, p.388 – Our translation).

Given the multiplicity of languages that television anthropophagically incorporates, we need to ponder more closely the many meanings to which we are exposed daily by a medium that is ubiquitous in our lives. Peirce's Semiotics, which inspired Santaella's matrices of language and thought, is best suited to analyze this quintessential hybrid medium in a postmodern context of fluidity and temporality. According to Aranha (2010), the hybrid spaces of the media enable the actuation of the most varied senses.

Analysis of some aspects of the “Solidário” advertisement from the standpoint of Peirce’s Semiotics

Visual images are generally associated with the pictorial forms of representation of an object. Any verbal or nonverbal sign may be labeled as an image: design, cinema, photography, and advertisement, among others. It is precisely to account for the multiplicity of visual representations of visual signs, the perceptible side, and the characteristic marks of contemporary life that Semiotics came into play as a new discipline of knowledge in the second half of the 20th century.

According to Santaella (2001, p.12 – Our translation), Semiotics is a science that “is becoming increasingly important because the languages and the signs are evolving”¹. For her, the languages are converging into a hybrid model, expanding the “audiovisual media”, such as movies, television, and video. Nevertheless, as Santaella (2001 – Our translation) puts it, the text is all we use to interact with each other. In this sense, verbal language is not regarded as the only strategic resource to be generally used in texts, as we will see in the advertisement sample to be analyzed, in which verbal and nonverbal texts interact. As the text is materially constituted by this interaction, it triggers the sensory organs (hearing, touch, taste, smell, and sight), which are directly responsible for the human perception of the world, and consequently enables us to make sense of that awareness. The publicity speech proposed here is supported by the combination of iconic-linguistic resources and, for this purpose, we use a set of techniques and Semiotic resources, such as play of colors and images, short sentences, a careful lexical selection, clear and objective language, and different filmic plans to produce certain effects of meaning.

The provision of such resources is not random, that is, when a producer makes

¹ Interview with Santaella, by Beatriz Falasco and Joan Ricci, published in *Diálogos & Entrevistas* (Dialogues & Interviews Magazine), whose topic was: “Semiotics as an intellectual luxury”. Our translation.

his/her choice, the following factors are taken into account: the advertised product, the medium in which the message will be conveyed, and the parties involved – in short, the whole expository scene or, in other words, the production conditions. A disregard for these production conditions in the process of developing advertisement texts would cause a fragmented interpretation.

According to Nöth (2008, p.83), the symbol falls into the category of thirdness, comprising rules, habits, and memory, which are dependent on established social contracts. Peirce defines the symbol as a sign that “refers to the object it depicts by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas” (PEIRCE 1997, p.52 – Our translation). The symbol refers to something that does not uphold the identification of anything if isolated from its original context. It is possible to notice the presence of some symbols in the *corpus* under scrutiny, among which the mirror at the conclusion of the advertisement (Figure 3) is a symbol of reflection and self-knowledge that we will discuss later.

Advertising transcends mere product sales. It communicates with society and disseminates its values and beliefs. According to Galvão, “Advertising breeds the ideas, values, and culture prevailing at the time of its conception” (GALVÃO, 1998, p.18 – Our translation). Advertising exercises power over several organisms of reality, leading us to believe in and enter into the universe of tenets and therefore do something about it, as we will discuss in the course of this paper.

We now analyze a 2006 advertisement entitled “Solidário” about the Mário Penna Foundation. In this advertisement, a clown interacts with cancer patients. The opening shots of the clown are set in a hospital for cancer patients. The scene depicts bald people and ends with a shot of the protagonist’s scalp and a message for the foundation. Figures 1, 2, and 3 show three images that were chosen for the analysis. Figures 1 and 2 depict the bonding of “the cheerful doctor” with his patients, whereas Figure 3 shows a poignant imagery that we will discuss later.

The advertisement in question makes use of the multi-semiosis postulated by Pierre Lévy (1993), which enables the tie-in of different resources on the same reading surface, such as icons, sounds, and verbal language, at the end. This is one of the characteristics of hypertextuality: it joins together several languages on behalf of the same text. The “reading” of this advertisement is constructed in a non-linear, interactive way.

Viewing our everyday experiences as interactions with a cast of social actors with whom we intercommunicate, we can say that our interactional relationships are not just isolated discursive events; on the contrary, they are events constituted according to the dialogic participation of participants involved in the communicative interaction.

Figure 1 – Contact of the “cheerful doctor” with patients



The voices that emerge from the advertising speech, in the context of social discourse profusion, are from common sense – from the carriers of the disease, from the viewers, from the institution, and from potential donors – characterizing a dialogical relationship attached to various speeches.

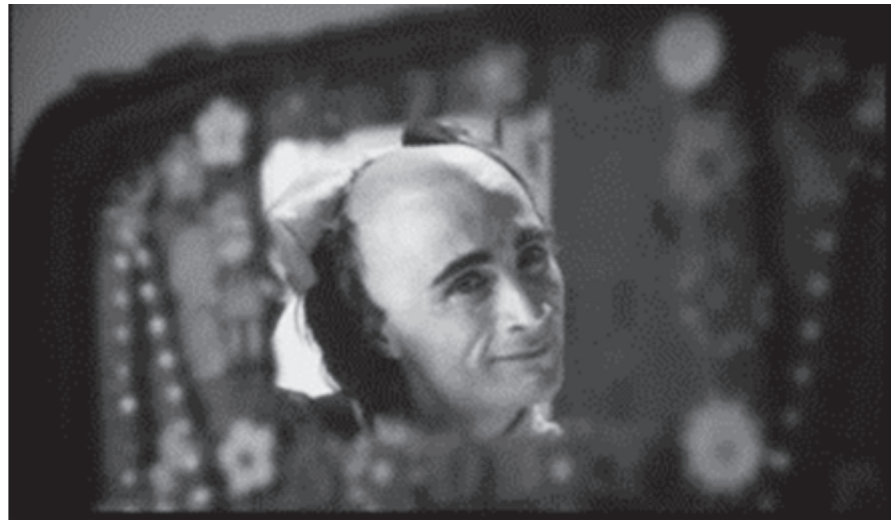
The discourse of the figure represented by the clown is humanitarian because through his actions, we perceive a “donation” of his time on account of others. We can establish an association of the clown figure with the feelings of enjoyment and relaxation; he is the man who left the circus to work in the hospital, so his speech is one of joyfulness.

The clown brightens the apparently empty and dreary place. The figure of the clown wearing a lab coat suggests that he is a doctor specializing in heart and soul, who is there to ease the pain of sick people. He is therefore dubbed “the cheerful doctor”. At the end of the advertisement, depicted in Figure 3, the clown gradually changes his clothes, removes the make-up he used during his rounds of the patients, and reveals what no one expected: he, too, is a cancer patient, as evinced by one of the side effects of chemotherapy – the loss of hair. The expression on the clown’s face, at the moment of revelation, shows a man who, while trying to encourage others to overcome cancer, is not exempted from the daily struggle against the disease. At this point, he establishes communication with his innermost self through a mirror. Moreover, the clown’s figure is made up of several voices: the clown that conveys joy, the doctor who “heals the infirmities of the soul”, and the bearer of the very same disease when he deconstructs his image of “the cheerful doctor” by removing the garments that made him look like a clown. Therefore, we now have the playful clownish speech and the humane discourse of politically correct solidarity.

Figure 2 – Association of the clown with the joy that moved from the circus to the hospital



Figure 3 – Disrobing of the clown figure, who removes his garments and uncovers the unexpected: the clown is also a cancer patient



It is important to remark that in the course of the advertisement, the clown uses several ways to get the attention of patients, from juggling to magic. However, his methods are different from those tricks practiced in the circus: it is devoid of the usual paraphernalia. His performance may be considered a simple art. Here, the message being conveyed is that one does not need highly professional volunteers with many skills, merely the solidarity of ordinary people.

The message from the institution at the end of the advertisement – “You do not need to have cancer to know how important it is to help” – can cause the viewers to question themselves in regard to solidarity, as the message makes the importance of helping quite clear, regardless of one’s state. In this manner, the advertisement exhibits an interaction with the viewer in a kind of dialogue. The message is about solidarity for those who need help and is closely linked to the discourse of common sense, which addresses mutual assistance regardless of the circumstances. Therefore, we can sense the many voices that echo those messages intertwining within the text.

Hypertextuality is characterized by nonlinearity, that is, by multilinearity, interactivity, and hypermodality (ARAÚJO; DIEB, 2009). This multilinearity feature provides the viewer with self-sufficiency. The viewer then executes a process of meaning construction initiated from the repertoire of its cultural production and then from the object under observation. In this case, the object is composed of the words quoted at the end of the advertisement, the motion of the images, the music, and other systems of signs used throughout the script. Thus, the dialogue is established, because nothing has its existence acknowledged in an independent and isolated way.

The advertisement and the lines of dialogue aim at the other’s answer (the others), an active responsive understanding: a reflection and a change of attitude. In visual language, interactivity is the foundation of its own constitution. As we “read” the advertisement, we are putting together one of its multiple possible meanings, contributing to its existence as a culture, and giving it meaning.

The hypertextual design is also founded on the insight that hypertext does offer tangible opportunities for fostering dialogue from interactive activities. In this sense, the development of the hypertext look implies recognition of the other from the dialogue between the viewer of the advertisement under analysis – which is a cultural production – and the creator of the text, thereby establishing relations between the advertisement and the world that surrounds them.

In *Matrizes da Linguagem e Pensamento: Sonora, Visual, Verbal (Matrices of Language and Thought: Sound, Visual, Verbal)*, Lucia Santaella introduces three matrices that comprise the three major logical matrices of language and thought: sound, visual, and verbal. Sound derives from the sense of hearing; visual, of course, from vision; and verbal from the ability to verbalize, which is unique to mankind. Therefore, the sonic, visual, and verbal matrices help us understand all the languages that constitute our social environment, that is, these arrays of language and thought bring forth other types of languages that the human being is capable of producing.

The sonic matrix comprises sound, which possesses an immediate quality of great evocative power. In the advertisement under analysis, there is a dialogue amidst the

background song *Quelqu'un m'a dit*, by singer Carla Bruni, and this prompts the viewer to reflect on the stages of the diagnosis and cure of the disease. The music tries to show life as being similar to a rose that suddenly wilts. The same stimulation is prompted when the disease is discovered, both by the people who are affected by cancer and their families. Thus, the musical choice helps to underscore the message that the advertisement is trying to convey.

With respect to the second matrix of language and thought, the images – not the stationary ones but those in motion – are comprised by hybrid languages, imbricated by the aforementioned sonic matrix and visibility, which will be discussed later. The advertisement in question is built with symbolic elements such as rhythmic movements of soap bubbles, which can be likened to the rhythm of life given its cyclic shape and fleeting nature. We can also infer the daily grind faced by the actors in the advertisement. There is also the presence of “divinity”, illustrated by the sun in the background, from an opening located high on the bedroom wall. The sun rises every morning to keep everyone warm, without distinction of caste, color, or gender, and that can be a sign of hope for better days, a hope renewed every day.

The advertisement starts with the clown coming out of a hallway and ends in a similar manner with him walking back through the same corridor. The representation of the coming and going of the clown through the hospital hallway shows his struggle against the odds and the path he will have to follow in search of his encounter with his past life. The clown wears camouflage pants that can be associated with the military; this depicts the war he is waging against cancer. The weapons and military equipment used in war are replaced here by the power of reflection, overcoming, and, above all, the willpower to battle the disease.

At the end of the advertisement, the clown is seen through the mirror, which is highly symbolic, as already mentioned. The mirror is an invitation to introspection. It is a look inward and an attempt to see the world without any illusions – to live with and accept whatever is offered. The whole advertisement is set indoors: a hallway, a bedroom, and a locker room. This can signal the limitations that life imposes on us, especially when we are afflicted with some sort of disease. Thus, we are invited to see our limitations regarding life.

Santaella makes us think, according to her theory, that thinking and cognitive abilities are linked to the senses. Given the multiple languages that we weave throughout our social exchanges, Santaella teaches us that languages intertwine and become hybrid, which is also evident in the advertisement analyzed.

Furthermore, according to Santaella (2007, p.39 – Our translation), Semiotics deals with sign processes that involve communication acts because “there is no message without signs and there is no communication without a message”. Thanks to previous studies on Semiotics, it is now possible to understand the communicative potential of the multiple

messages contained in the advertisement at hand and the possible effects they will have on the viewer (the idealized recipient).

Final considerations

On the basis of propositions by Santaella (1996), we can conclude that with the advancement in audiovisual culture, writing has been invigorated and the dimensions of language have been expanded beyond the borders that, early on, were merely verbal. It is imperative to seek out new forms of languages. As Lévy points out, “The more languages enrich and expand, the greater are the possibilities of simulating, imagining, and stimulating others to conceptualize an ‘elsewhere’ or an ‘otherness’” (1996, p.72 – Our translation).

The analysis of the “Solidário” advertisement helped us confirm that its creation stems from the use of elements that are more iconic than verbal and that this advertisement is inserted in a dialogical conception, thereby unveiling a creative process of production of meanings. The multiple “windows”, that is, hypertextuality in advertising, allow a new sociability through which the dialogical subject interacts, thereby fostering the establishment of networks of relationships.

Instead of considering the process of signification as the junction of disconnected systems, we should single out the meaningful and communicative potential of the relationship between word and image and its power of cultural representation. In searching for new forms of knowledge production, we cannot ignore the huge informational and communicative potential of images. A strong interaction between verbal and pictorial signs is evident in culture. The two languages function as different elements that together compose a single composition: the image can add something to the word and vice versa. Therefore, we have two voices composing a symphony or, in other words, two languages in a meaningful hybrid relationship.

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