

VISUAL DISCOURSE AS A CULTURAL AND IDEOLOGICAL REFERENTIAL

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Abstract: *In the configuration of scientific theories, visual discourse has a special role, that weaves its way between invention and discovery. For the most accurate account of material reality, science uses images, both verbal and visual. In this sense, what Peirce called icons or symbols, namely: models, diagrams, photographs, graphs, sketches, metaphors, analogies, equations are defining for the foundation of science. They function as "hypericons" or "theoretical images" that give images a central role in the models of mind, perception and memory. The abundance of images in contemporary society implies a non-critical acceptance of the power and influence of mediated images, similar in a way to that attributed to mythological symbolism. The role of the present study is to argue about the importance of dialectics word - image in scientific discourse and to reflect on how the image becomes an echo chamber for human thought, populating it and determining its most intimate resorts.*

Keywords: *visual discourse; eidetic cleavage; ideological signification; hypericons*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the circumstances of the exponential increase of information, the contemporary world is mostly under the sign of image. Visual discourse and iconic coding, increasingly used in science and realized through diagrams, diagrams, graphs, photographs, pictures, provide a synthetic, economical and easily readable data storage and facilitate any communication process and any investment with meaning. Visual discourse is present even in the language that is most distant from visual images, such as science. Thus, a pre-existing text, which can generate certain interpretations either in its spirit or in an autonomous direction, determines the appearance of the image. In this respect, a scientific idea is presented wrapped in an envelope of the imagination, which is of an affective nature, and the intentionality of the discursive thinking is accompanied by the spontaneous production of the images. We could talk about a network in which verbal reason and expression combine, according to an intrinsically logical movement, with the visual image. Such an approach is subject to iconic communication.

2. ICONIC COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTIVE GRIDS OF MEANINGFUL INVESTMENT

According to Charles Peirce, the iconic signs are the defining ones for the foundation of science,

and these include on the one hand the models, the diagrams, the photographs, the graphs, the sketches, and on the other the metaphors and analogies. In addition, they function as "hypericons" or "theoretical images" that give images a central role in models of mind, perception and memory (Peirce, 1990:277, 282-290).

The iconic sign functions as a perceptual structure similar to that of the object to which it refers, in Umberto Eco's conception. It does not have the same physical properties as the object, but has a conventional character. As for communication, it lies in the mechanisms of perception itself, and not in the relationship between code and message. Thus, based on perceptual codes, by selecting certain stimulus - after other have been eliminated - the receiver can construct a perceptual structure similar to that of the object. Terms like *resemblance, analogy, motivation*, are used by U. Eco to define the iconic sign, it considers that the dependence of the sign on object is at the origin of the sign, and the semiotic report is constructed by putting at stake the conventional elements (Eco, 1972:188). In this context, the cognitive psychology analyzes the primary processing of visual information, then focuses on the mechanisms involved in recognizing the figures, obtaining the three-dimensional image of an object, identified and recognized.

Communication through iconic signs implies the existence of perceptual grids, socially and culturally

determined, which guide the production and reception of iconic signs and which are necessary in order to identify certain aspects that make meaningful investment and interaction possible. Therefore, any iconic sign, which is the effect of encoding a perceptual experience, requires a learning process. In the paper, *Signs, Language and Behavior*, C. Morris speaks of the *gradual nature of iconicity*: “iconicity is a matter of degree” (C. Morris, 1946:191), not in the sense of differential parameter for a taxonomy of signs, but to introduce a discourse on the degree of convention or codification of iconic signs. Thus, although the icon characterizes what it denotes and is similar to the denoted object, and the iconic signs represent the referent analogically, the iconicity knows a gradation in the relation to the referent.

Regardless of the scientific cognitive approach, it involves a visual component: “science in general uses images as part of its cognitive apparatus” (Mitchell, 2015:54). This side of the visibility, in which the image has a central role, must be understood phenomenologically: the image has a quasi-presence and it participates in a certain degree of reality. “We might then want to speak, with phenomenologists like Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty, of the “onset” of the image or, with Wittgenstein, of the “dawning of an aspect”. But only an immaterial, phantasmatic conception of the image that treats its being in what Derrida described as a “hauntology” can capture its spectral nature” (Mitchell, 2015:58-59). We speak in this sense about an eidetic cleavage, generated by the intimate essence of the image: on the one hand it designates something we see (a diagram, a graph, a sketch), and on the other hand something we understand, as a significant relationship with something beyond itself, which it expresses in its own way (as metaphors and analogies). If the first aspect involves understanding the image in the realm of empirical investigation and abstract, rational, even mathematical modeling, the second one, on the other hand, implies the understanding of the image as a social and cultural construct, which gives birth to the realm of interpretation and appreciation. As noted W. J. T. Mitchell (2015:58):

The images we should be concerned with in science are not just the pictures, graphs, and physical models, but also the metaphors that provide pictures of a domain of research - the universe “as” a heat-engine or a clock or a ball of string - pictures that need not be made visible or drawn graphically.

3. SCIENTIFIC DISCOURSE AS A VISUAL DISCOURSE

To relate to the cultural and social dimension of the image implies to refer to the human as “a combination of experiences, information, readings, imaginations re-mixed and reordered in various possible ways” (Calvino, 2019). In this sense, the visual discourse is part of the visual memory of the human individual, the latter being determined by the multitude of his direct experiences and by the repertoire of images reflected by the culture in which he lives. So, if the sign and the concept are connected by the person's perception and the concept and the object are connected by the person's experience, then the sign and the object are connected by the conventions, or the culture, of the social group within which the person lives. Thus, we are talking about a *cultural and/ or ideological referential*, which functions as “a system of representations and fundamental attitudes whose assumptions we are not aware of” and which “the ordinary man does not confess, but only follows”, representations and attitudes which “silently governs any culture and, implicitly, any ideology” (Boşun & Borşa, 2004:75).

The cultural and ideological referent refers to those constants of thought around which the mental organization is constituted: “To the extent that people have access to reality only through their referential, it can be said that after changing the referential, they react to a different world. The constitution of the world (‘the horizon of reality’ attached to the horizon of life) takes place concomitantly with the articulation of a cultural horizon, populated by cultural paradigms, sub-paradigms and meta-paradigms, which in turn are compatible with specific languages. From this interpretation it is impossible to remove ideology, the main product of cultural paradigms (in a sense analogous to the way in which scientific theories are the product of disciplinary paradigms) (Boşun & Borşa, 2004:78). In this respect, we are talking about what Goussier called “horizons of reality”, which are determined in the last period more and more by a discourse of the visual, due to the exponential increase of the information and the use of the image, especially as a result of the development of media and ICT. The scientific discourse itself is constituted in the visual area, determining the frames of a certain type of cognoscibility:

but the referential, precisely by its nature, is not perceived as referential: it constitutes the world of the subject, for which 'naturalness' it is able to achieve put his hand in the fire; we are talking about 'horizons of reality' (Gonseth), as they are constituted as a theater of action, perception, experimentation and enunciation, we can better understand why a referential means a world, why changing the referential means changing the world. Changing the referential forces people to see reality with another eye, oriented in a new direction (Borçun & Borşa, 2004:78).

From a sociological point of view an ideological message involves reporting to a *plurimondism principle* (Borçun & Borşa, 2004:92), since it must be differentiated according to the social group to which it is addressed. It implies, on the one hand, the concrete knowledge of the life horizon specific to the group, and on the other hand the establishment of the ideological referent generated by the cultural horizon.

4. THE MITIZING DIMENSION OF THE IMAGE

The proper meaning of a sign, the denotation, is an agreement among the people that they will share the meaning of the sign among themselves. Such meanings appear through social conventions; therefore a sign can have more denotative meanings. In cases when a person has to choose a meaning, it will make the decision by referring to the context of the sign. For signs are generated by myths and in turn serve to maintain them. The term "myth" must be understood in its popular sense, in the sense that it refers to beliefs which are demonstrably false. Myths can be seen as extended metaphors. As metaphors, myths help us to raise awareness of our experiences within a culture. They express and serve the ideological function of *naturalization* (Barthes, 1977:45-46).

The abundance of images in contemporary society implies a non-critical acceptance of the power and influence of mediated images, similar in a way to that attributed to mythological symbolism. The myth must be understood in Barthes's terms, as "language" (Barthes, 1997:15), as a way of meaning or system of communication:

language needs special conditions in order to become a myth (...) we must uphold with determination that myth is a communication system, it is a message. We see that myth cannot be an object, a concept or an idea; it is a way of meaning, a form. It will be necessary, later, to put this form of historical limits, conditions of use, to reinvest the

society in it: but first, we must describe it as a form. (...) Therefore, anything can be a myth? Yes, I think so, because the universe is endlessly suggestive. Any object in the world can go from a closed, moved existence, to an oral state, open to appropriation (Barthes, 1997:235).

Based on the image, which involves several ways of reading, the myth is associated with a social use:

A tree is a tree. Yes, of course. But a tree said by Minou Drouet is no longer a tree, it is a tree adorned, adapted to a certain kind of consumption, a tree invested with literary allowances, with revolts, with images, in short, with a social use that adds to the pure matter. (...) in the image there are many ways of reading: a sketch lends itself to meaning much more than a drawing, an imitation more than an original, a caricature more than a portrait. But here it is no longer a theoretical way of representation: it is about this image, proposed for this meaning (Barthes, 1997:236).

Under the impact of new technologies the mythical dimension of the image is involved in an interdisciplinary approach, the borrowing of research methods from different fields (such as: physics, mathematics, biology, linguistics, computer science, geometry and sacred geography, ecology, etc.) in other domains and the diffusion of concepts being the most frequent of the means chosen by the researchers from different disciplines (Crăciun, 2015:41-42). Under the impact of modern technology, the transition from an analytical model to a synthetic thinking model takes place. We are witnessing the increase of the mathematical degree of the scientific knowledge, this assuring a superior internal organization, as well as the possibility of using some synthetic explanatory models in the cognitive constructions. Moreover, the interference and inter-influence of the fundamental sciences with the applied ones, of the theoretical sciences of nature with the socio-humanistic and technical sciences, is manifested, even at the level of methods (Pârveu, 1981: 9 - 10).

In the construction of scientific theories, metatheoretical perspectives are elaborated, the meta-scientific dimension gaining an increasing role in contemporary science. The general philosophical concepts are replaced by metatheoretical concepts and criteria, elaborated in the form of systematic logical-methodological theories or models. The studies of thinkers coming from the field of philosophy, such as I. Prigogine, A. Robinson, N. Chomsky or I. Rawls are relevant in this regard.

The amount of scientific information has increased enormously in the last period, and the information has become an indispensable, increasingly important source in terms of economic growth and social progress. We are witnessing an information explosion, as a considerable number of scientific journals, patents for inventions, catalogues and commercial brochures, research reports, books, dictionaries and terminological disparities are accentuated every year. The amount of scientific information (internationally, nationally, regionally, locally) is becoming more and more leading to the increase of information-documentation difficulties. In addition, many research papers are published partially or not at all, and the publication is often repeated, in different forms of communication. As for access to scientific information, which is becoming increasingly necessary, sometimes it is very difficult (Răboacă & Ciucur, 2004:100).

In this context, we are talking about the phenomenon of globalization of science, which, against the background of the development of new information and communication technologies, generates interrelations between discursive topics and image, which have a defining role in terms of contemporary scientific research. Phenomena such as: globalization of economic life; deepening the international division of labor; emphasizing international economic, social, political or cultural relations as a whole; exacerbating the conflict between the increasing needs of each nation and the limited resources of the planet; the increasing problems of environmental protection (Răboacă, Ciucur, 2004:97) find a degree of communicability and applicability at the level of visual discourse, constituting themselves in an iconic language.

5. CONCLUSIONS

In contemporary society, the image is increasingly used as a means of communication, and the visual discourse is present in any scientific approach, which has led to an ever closer approximation the image of language. The research methods used in this context, discovered in the

field of linguistics, have surpassed the study of the language, gaining universal applicability. The problem of the legitimacy of extrapolating the border between language and image (between linguistic and iconic), due to the use of linguistic methods, began to acquire general applicability. Currently, there is a frequent use of images, of the iconic sign in the field of sciences, extrapolated from the sphere of advertising, propaganda and consumption, which is why the iconic language has become the object of study of various researches.

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