

THE PRAGUE LINGUISTIC CIRCLE'S CONTRIBUTION TO ART HISTORY*

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The present paper deals with the impact of the Prague linguistic circle on art history. Following V. N. Volšinov's distinction between two notions of language, i.e. language regarded as "energeia" on the one hand and language conceived of as "ergon" on the other, it analyzes the application of W. von Humboldt's and B. Croce's idea of language as an expression to the history of art by J. Schlosser and H. Sedlmayr and compares it with the influence of J. Mukařovský's and R. Jakobson's ideas on art historical writing from E. Gombrich to the semiotics of the history of art.

Drawing upon Wilhelm von Humboldt, V. N. Vološinov in his "Marxism and Philosophy of Language" (1929) distinguishes between two conceptions of language: On the one hand there is "individualistic subjectivism" conceiving of language as "energeia", i.e. as the result of individual speech acts characterized by creativeness and uniqueness. On the other hand, there is "abstract objectivism" that regards language as an impersonal normative system or "ergon" (Bachtin, Vološinov 1986, 230–252). The first idea preferred by Wilhelm von Humboldt was articulated later in an extreme way by Benedetto Croce in his paper "Tesi d'estetica come scienza dell'espressione e linguistica generale" (Aesthetics as Science of Expression and General Linguistic) read at Academia pontiana, Naples in 1900 (Morpurgo-Tagliabue 1960, 69). According to Croce, language as well as art, is an individual expression. Consequently, language is regarded as art and vice versa. Thus, what we are confronted here with looks like the first version of "linguistic hegemonism" (Paris 1975, 4–7). In fact, we are faced here rather with hegemony of expression. Art as well as language is regarded as a particular instance of an original human expression, and, as a consequence, both are subordinated to the general theory of expression. It is evident that there are striking affinities between

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Croce's ideas and *fin-de-siècle* art movements. Particularly, Croce shares the notion of the work of art conceived of as an expression of an artist's individual subjectivity with expressionism, the belief in the autonomous nature of art, the idea of independence and exclusivity of artists and his aristocratic isolation with parnassism, and an attempt to return to an original, unbiased, authentic pre-rational approach to reality with "primitivism". Croce's strategy to argue by means of such authorities like "general linguistics" or "science" can be regarded as an ironic strategy (White 1973). He mocked positivism and rationalism using the term "linguistics" as synonymous with the theory of expression, knowledge with intuition and "science" as a synonym with criticism, i.e. considering it as an activity aiming at evaluation (Gilbertová, Kuhn 1965, 430–433).

The opposite conception of language was formulated, as it is well known, by Ferdinand de Saussure in his lectures delivered at Basel University in 1906–1911. In his *Cours de la linguistique générale* (published posthumously in 1915) de Saussure not only distinguished strictly between "langue" and "langage" or between "langue" and "parole" (Mauro 1996), but he also construed language as a social phenomenon par excellence (Bachtin, Vološinov 1986, 246–250). According to Croce, the original man's approach to the world can be characterized as "imagination" or "intuition" and its aim can be conceived of as self-expression. In contrast to that, according to de Saussure, the fundamental human behaviour can be regarded as communication. From the diachrony point of view, there is a process leading from image to sign or from artistic creation to social communication, according to Croce. Consequently, Croce construed communication as a mere degenerated artistic creation. According to de Saussure, the relation between communication and creation is an inverse one: Human language is considered as the basis of all human knowledge, and social communication is conceived of as the proper aim of all human activity (including artistic creation). Due to the role of language as a principal means of ordering of the human world, art is not only dependent on the structure of language, but it also represents a particular and specialized kind of communication. As a consequence, the formulation of a general theory of signs became a necessity. It is evident that we are faced here with the second version of hegemonism, with a linguistic imperialism in the proper sense of the word. The project of "linguistic générale" not only justified the expansion of "sémiologie" to all cultural spheres, but stimulated also the efforts to look for "differentia specifica" of particular means of communication. De Saussure's deep impact on the development of humanities in the 20th century can be taken as a result of his intention to eliminate insufficiencies of neo-Kantian dualist apology of *Geistes- or Kulturwissenschaften*. In contrast to Wilhelm Windelband and Heinrich Rickert or Wilhelm Dilthey de Saussure's idea of language as the proper basis of all human knowledge, his belief in a common denominator of all forms of human articulation of the world and all kinds of social communication offered the possibility to bridge the gap between natural and social sciences (or humanities).

Nevertheless, what I said cannot be considered as a satisfactory explanation of de Saussure's deep impact on Slavic linguistics and aesthetics in particular in contrast to Croce, whose ideas found an echo mainly in German speaking countries. In addition, there is an analogy worth mentioning between Croce-/de Saussure antinomy on the one hand and the development from Modernism to Avant-garde art on the other. The difference between Croce and de Saussure can be characterized by means of the contrast between an autonomous idea of art characteristic of the late 19th century Modernism and anti-art Avant-garde doctrine that construed art as a means of social communication and aimed at the change of the whole social system (Bürger 1974; Bürger 1984, 20–27). With regard to the important role constructivism played in Russia and functionalism in Czechoslovakia in the 1920s and 1930s, it is no surprise that de Saussure's sociological conception of language was well received particularly in Russian and Czech linguistics and literary theory or aesthetics.

It is well known that Jan Mukařovský's paper "L'art comme fait sémiologique" read at the 8th International Philosophical Congress in Prague 1934 (Mukařovský 1966, 85–88) was one of the first applications of the general theory of signs to the field of aesthetics and art (Steiner 1998, 286). At the same time Mukařovský's semiotic model of art can be considered as a token of his adherence to the Avant-garde movement (Zima 1998). Mukařovský used it as an instrument of legitimization of the Avant-garde communication doctrine of art by means of a general theory. He generalized particular characteristics of Avant-garde art interpreting them as a constant nature of art, as its eternal essence. It is known that de Saussure's concept of the sign was not only applied (to the area of literature and art) by Jan Mukařovský, but also considerably transformed. His contradictory notion of the work of art as an "autonomous sign" served as a justification of the dialectical nature of Avant-garde movements, i.e. its combination of autonomy with the social functioning of art.

Nevertheless, Mukařovský's idea of art as a dialectical unity of autonomy and heteronomy, autonomy and sign (or signifying) was influenced also by Karl Bühler's functional model of language. Karl Bühler in his *Axiomatik der Sprachwissenschaften* (1933) and *Sprachtheorie* (1934) not only unfolded Ernst Cassirer's distinction between "substance-concept" and "function-concept" (Cassirer 1910) regarding the nature of language as a functional one, but also conceived of language as a polyfunctional phenomenon (Eschbach 1984). In his "Organon-model" Bühler reconciled the contradictions of former linguistic theories regarding expression, appeal and representation as three functions of the same phenomenon (i.e. expressive, conative, and referential function) (Veltruský 1984, 161–204; Doležel 1990, 150–151). Nevertheless, Mukařovský transformed Bühler's idea of polyfunctionality into a sociological and dialectical notion of art in his fundamental essay "Aesthetic function, norm and value as sociological facts" (1936) (Mukařovský 1966, 17–54). In addition, following up Jurij Tyňanov's idea of

a reciprocity between system and evolution (Tyňanov 1941, 126–139) the members of Prague linguistic circle replaced de Saussure's synchronic model of language by a historical one regarding synchrony and diachrony as mutually dependent parts of one and the same dialectical whole (Chvatík 1981, 14–15). As a consequence, literary history became one of the preferred fields of study of Prague scholars. Attempts at reconstruction of the evolution of literature and the search for the specific rules governing the development of literature got into the focus of their studies (Galan 1985). Following up the logic of the general theory of signs Jan Mukařovský enlarged his interest to the territory of visual arts too. In search of "differentia specifica" of visual arts (to use H. Sedlmayr's expression) Mukařovský in his essay "The Essence of Visual Arts" (1944) came to the conclusion that specificity of visual arts has not consisted in a specific nature of visual signs but rather in their particular material (Mukařovský 1966, 188–195). Nevertheless, social communication was conceived by Mukařovský as the essence of art and the common denominator of all arts. Likewise, the notion of an "autonomous sign" enabled him to bring into harmony the belief in the specific nature of art with the idea of its active social role. As it is known he distinguished three elements of the work of art thought of as an "autonomous sign" (Mukařovský 1966, 88): the material object or thing, "artifact" in Donald Preziosi's word (Preziosi 1989, 116), the "aesthetic object", i.e. the social or collective concept of art, "signification", according to Preziosi (Preziosi 1989, 116), and "a relationship to a thing signified" (Preziosi 1989, 116). It was a logical consequence of the semiotic notion of art that the socio-communicative function of the work of art (even if conceived of as "autonomous") rather than its commodity nature (or uniqueness) was stressed by Mukařovský. He interpreted the autonomous nature of an artistic sign as the evaluation of the world as a whole (Veltruský 1981, 125), or in other words as the articulation of the world view aiming at "the total context of social phenomena... of a given milieu" (Mukařovský 1966, 88), "to the contextual sum of the social, philosophical, religious, political, and economic fabric of any given milieu" (Preziosi 1989, 116). Moreover, Mukařovský called the material part of a sign a "sensual symbol" ("perceivable signifier" in Preziosi's words) (Preziosi 1989, 116). In spite of the capability to get over the form-content dualism and to integrate aesthetic autonomy with social function, structure with sign, evaluation with cognition or commodity with communication Mukařovský's model got no significant reception from art history for a very long time.

It is worth noticing that simultaneously with Mukařovský's initiative linguistic theory was applied to the history of art in Vienna. Nevertheless, not de Saussure's model but Croce's idea of language was followed up this time. Already in 1926 Croce's close friend and admirer Julius von Schlosser translated Croce's essay "The Theory and Critique of the History of Visual Art" into German (Croce 1926). A little later Schlosser attempted to reconcile Croce's anti-historical, "insular theory of art", i.e. his idea that "there is no history of art, only a history of

individual works and artists... artists creating” and that “artists are isolated organisms entirely disconnected from temporal and spatial conditions” (Kleinbauer 1971, 3, 13–14) with the Vienna School’s basic belief in historical nature of art. In his essay “Stilgeschichte und Sprachgeschichte” Schlosser (1935) proposed to distinguish between the history of styles attributed to great masters and held for the proper, creative and innovative art history on the one hand, and the history of language construed as a mere cultural history or socialized and decayed art history on the other. The question whether Schlosser’s endorsement of aristocratic individualism can be interpreted as a critical reaction against depersonalized style history *Kunstgeschichte ohne Namen* attempting at the status of the exact science, or rather as a polemic against trends that started to dominate art history in the 1930s to conceive of metaphysical collectivities or “mystical entities” in Meyer Schapiro’s words (Schapiro 1936, 258–266) like people (*Volk*), nation or race, as the true subjects of the history of art is still open.

Schlosser’s student Ernst Gombrich followed up his teacher in identifying art with language. Nevertheless, he accepted neither Schlosser’s dualism nor his axiology. Gombrich did not adopt either Schlosser’s antinomy creation versus communication or the identification of style with creativity (uniqueness and artistic value). He conceived of language no longer as a mere recycling or reproducing of conventions. Not only authentic creations and innovations but also traditions and conventions belong to the domain of art, according to him. And vice versa: Not only an average artistic production is dominated by conventions, but also masterworks touched with stereotypes unfold within an artistic tradition (Gombrich 1960). Consequently, art in its totality has to be considered as a language, according to Gombrich. Due to that view the Hegelian spiritual and metaphysical notion of art construed as an expression has to be replaced by the idea of art conceived of as a social communication. Thus it was no surprise that Gombrich’s intention to develop “the linguistics of the visual image” (Gombrich 1993, 105; Preziosi 1989, 118) was inspired by the Prague Linguistic Circle and by Roman Jakobson in particular. Gombrich demonstrated convincingly the crucial role visual schemes and stereotypes had played in the history of art, the works by great masters notwithstanding. Their masterworks represented not only unique inventions but also means of visual communication. Despite that, Gombrich did not adopt a semiotic model (Gombrich 1994, 104–105; Bakoš 2000, 307–308). Referring to “the metaphoric paradigm of language” (Preziosi 1989, 118) he preferred the concept of “surrogate” or “substitution” to sign (Gombrich 1963, 1–11; Summers 1986, 34–43) emphasizing the specific nature of visual communication. There is a resemblance between the visual image and its object; there is a minimal likeness or functional correspondence between them at least, according to Gombrich. “Whatever may hold for words”, Gombrich writes “pictures, visual images are natural signs... they are more or less like the things they depict” (Gombrich 1981). When we accept the enormous role conventions and codes play in the history of art

we can “replace the word ‘resemblance’ by the idea of ‘equivalence’ at the most, according to Gombrich (ibid., 21). That is why Gombrich denies Nelson Goodman’s extreme conventionalism as expressed in his *Languages of Art* (Goodman 1968). Gombrich admits that without the idea of sign-systems historical changes of styles would remain unexplained. At the same time he believes in an unchangeable core of human nature. According to him “we are anthropologically programmed to scan the world in search of objects which we must seek or avoid” (Gombrich 1981, 20). The anthropological constant represents the basis of the specific nature of visual images, i.e. their similarity or equivalence to represented objects. As a consequence, Schlosser’s dualist style versus language (or creative individual language vs. collective conventional communication) returned through the back door despite his strong effort to overcome it: His teacher’s dualism (creation versus communication) was transformed into the dilemma anthropologism versus conventionalism (even if a moderate one) or humanism versus (partial) relativism.

It must be said that the loan taken out from Jakobson to develop “the linguistics of the visual images” was paid back by Gombrich. Some representatives of the Prague school were stimulated by Gombrich’s ideas to examine the particular nature of visual signs. Jakobson himself in his essay “On the Relation between Visual and Auditory Signs” (1964) followed Gombrich affirming that “In the core of visual signs there is a really existing correspondence or association between signs and their objects” (Jakobson 1964, 216–220). Another member of the former Prague Circle Linguistic Jiří Veltruský explicitly acknowledges his indebtedness to Gombrich (Veltruský 1981, 124). Emphasising the role of convention or “codified contiguity” in his words (Veltruský 1975, 251), Veltruský argues that “despite its ability to connect the *signifié* with the *signifiant* by contiguity, the pictorial sign tends more often to connect them mainly by similarity” (ibid., 250). Besides the response to Gombrich, also an inspiration by Ch. S. Peirce’s distinction between index, icon and symbol is evident here. In addition, Veltruský’s assertion that “similarity is inseparable from contrast because there is no similarity without dissimilarity” (ibid., 250) can be regarded not only as an echo of de Saussure’s idea of a dichotomic system but also as an open avowal of Veltruský’s adherence to Gombrich’s programme to bridge the gap between mimetism and conventionalism.

If Gombrich’s communication theory of art can be conceived of in a sense as an attempt to reconcile the classical or humanist artistic tradition with the new world of Modernism, another of Schlosser’s graduate used linguistic inspiration to condemn Avant-garde art. As it is well known Hans Sedlmayr classified Avant-garde not solely as an “anti-art” but denounced it as a “non-art” (Sedlmayr 1978, 199–230). Similarly to his teacher, Sedlmayr returned to Humboldt’s notion of language and identified art with language: “Kunst ist Sprache, nichts als Sprache, doch eine Sprache eigener Art und Struktur, anders als die begriffliche” (ibid., 199). According to Sedlmayr, “differentia specifica” of artistic language (ibid.,

206) consists not only in its nonconceptual nature, or in its ability to convey nonverbal meanings, but also in its capability to express “the deep strata of human soul and spirit in its totality” (“tiefe Schichte der Gesamtseele des Menschens und seines Geistes”) (ibid., 207). Art conceived of as a language is construed as a mediation of transcendental messages. Sedlmayr’s metaphysical interpretation of humanism concealed his mysticism and can be regarded as a hidden polemic against the theoretical apology or even glorification of Avant-garde as represented, i.e. by Mukařovský’s semiotic theory. On the one hand, Sedlmayr regards language and material work as two complementary aspects of art: “Kunst als Sprache und Kunst als Werk sind zwei komplementäre Aspekte” (ibid., 203). On the other, he expels “aesthetic object” from art, resolutely dismissing to reduce the work of art to an “aesthetic object”: “Kunstwerk und ästhetisches Objekt sind ganz verschiedene Kategorien, Ergebnisse ganz verschiedener menschlicher Tätigkeiten...” (ibid., 207). The excommunication of aesthetics from art and the denial of any dependence of art on beholders as explicitly expressed in the sentence: “Das ästhetische Objekt gehört dem Betrachter, das Kunstwerk nicht” (ibid., 211) targeted not only at aesthetic hedonism or formalism, but was intended also as a critique of the idea of art as a social phenomenon. Art and aesthetics are two totally separate worlds, according to Sedlmayr, because the first one represents a realm of transcendental creativity and eternal values, whereas the second one constitutes an area of social reception characterized by relativity and transience. Nevertheless, the Avant-garde art was the proper addressee of Sedlmayr’s essay on art as language. He adopted Humboldt’s essentialist idea of language in order to dismiss the Avant-garde concept of art as a social communication and to restore the old idealistic notion of art conceived of as a transcendental revelation.

It is well known that the effort to apply semiotics to the field of visual arts have intensified since the sixties (Bakoš 2000, 313–349). Roland Barthes followed de Saussure’s model in his *Rhétorique de l’image* (Barthes 1964) while Umberto Eco in *Sémiologie des messages visuels* (Eco 1970, 11–51) leaned on Ch. S. Peirce’s distinction between index, icon, and symbol. Nevertheless, the shift from the concentration on the work to the focus on the text as articulated by Roland Barthes in his paradigmatic essay “De l’oeuvre au texte” (Barthes 1971) can be regarded not only as characteristic of the development from structuralism to poststructuralism, but also as a critical reaction against the commodification that affected art (abstract expressionism before all) at that time. Some leading art historians took an active part in the exploration of applicability of semiotics to the history of art. As it is known, Mayer Schapiro in the essay “On Some Problems in the Semiotics of Visual Art: Field and Vehicle in Image-Signs” (Schapiro 1969, 223–242) and Louis Marin in his paper “Elements pour une sémiologie picturale” (Marin 1971, 17–43) and Hubert Damisch in his meditation “Sur la sémiologie de la peinture” published in 1974 (Damisch 1979, 128–135) started to use the theory of signs for the interpretation of visual arts. They targeted at overcoming of the form versus

content dualism and logocentrism of the dominant art historical methods. They implicitly criticized the neglecting of nonverbal communication and ignoring of the meaning inherently present in the formal means of expression. In comparison with Schapiro's and Marin's concentration on the analysis of syntax of an individual work of art, a Russian semiotician Boris Uspenskij in his essay on the study of the language of Byzantine medieval painting published in 1970 (Uspenskij 1980, 9-31; Uspensky 1976) and Hubert Damisch in the paper "Semiotics and Iconography" (Damisch 1975, 27-36) attempted to apply the theory of signs to the idea of historical process. Uspenskij revised the linear idea of historical development of art and replaced it by a polyphonic notion of history. According to him, the history of art consists of a plurality of incommensurable "language systems" existing simultaneously. Art historical styles are construed by Uspenskij as conventional systems that are equally valid not only concerning their code of communication but also as far as their epistemological paradigm is concerned. Not only Western hegemonism ('Eurocentrism') but also cultural and even epistemological relativism have been challenged here in favour of an optimisticgnoseological pluralism and multiculturalism (Bakoš 2000, 249-271). As a consequence, semiotics of visual signs changed into the semiotics of cultures (Semiotyka kultury 1975; Macura 1977, 151f.; Portis-Winner 1980, 335-363; Fleischer 1989).

It is well known that Prague semiotic structuralism was one of the immediate and explicit models of Moskow-Tartu semiotic school represented by Jurij Lotman, Boris Uspenskij, W. Toporov or Vjačeslav Ivanov. Demonstrating the multifunctional structure of Renaissance work of art Polish art historian Lech Kalinowski in his essay about the functional model of the visual message (Kalinowski 1976, 165-177) drew his inspiration also directly from the Prague Circle's intellectual legacy. Leaning particularly upon Roman Jakobson's "six-part paradigm of literary communication" as articulated in his "Language and Poetics" (Jakobson 1960, 350-377), Kalinowski distinguished six functions operating simultaneously in a Renaissance work of art: 'referential', 'expressive', 'conative', 'aesthetic', 'phatic' and 'metavisual'. In contrast to that, Wolfgang Kemp while transferring the model of the aesthetics of reception as developed by Konstanz school of literary theory represented by Wolfgang Iser and Hans Joachim Jauss to art history (Kemp 1983, 1985) was unaware of its Prague school origin. Instead of Felix Vodička's initiative in developing the idea of the constitutive role of reception in the literary evolution Kemp felt indebted mostly to phenomenology. Another German art historian Werner Busch, the editor of a very influential and successful publication *Funkkolleg Kunst: Eine Geschichte der Kunst im Wandel ihrer Funktionen* (A History of Art as the History of Its Functions) consisting of texts by a group of German art historians originally broadcasted by Saarland Radio in 1984-1985 explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to Mukařovský's multifunction paradigm (Busch 1987, 1-26). It can be taken as symptomatic that Mukařovský's idea of a synchronic multifunctionality of art was transformed by German art historians

into the notion of diachronic taking turns of dominant function in the course of history. As a consequence, Mukařovský's anthropologically based sociological theory of aesthetic function became an instrument of a historicist and relativist conception of art.

As known, the critical revision of traditional art history that had started in the 1970s (Bryl 1999, 217–262; Harris 2001) resulted in an explicit programme of recovering art historical research by means of semiotics in the late 1980s and at the beginning of the 1990s (Bal, Bryson 1991, 174–208; Bryson 1991, 61–73). All art historical trends dominant at that time were strongly criticized by adherents of deconstruction replacing the structuralist conviction in a general theory with the conviction in the generally valid dynamic transdisciplinarity. Adherents of semiotics have been convinced to be able to remove all insufficiencies of iconology and perceptualism or social history of art. Panofsky's iconology was criticized for its "metaphysical circularities", "mystical cryptography" (Preziosi 1989, 112, 116), textual reductionism and the belief in the "Archimedean point" or "Archimedean Lever" (Moxey 1986, 266–269; Preziosi 1989, 116), correspondence theory of truth and "humanist bias" (Moxey 1993, 27; Moxey 1986, 269–271). Gombrich's theoretical position was stigmatized as perceptualism (Bryson 1983, 37–66) that imprisoned artist in his studio, limited his creative activity to the sensual sphere, narrowed representation to an allegedly eternal (generally valid) mimesis, and the neglected political dimension of representation. Similarly, Timothy Clark's social history of art was blamed for sticking to traditional idea of great artist, the metaphysical notion of artistic value (as metahistorical essence), and the inability to overcome the form and content dualism (Preziosi 1989, 159–168; Moxey 1991, 985–999; Moxey 1992, 37–46). Nevertheless, the principal criticism was combined with seeking after historical roots, after predecessors, which would justify the poststructuralist synthesis of semiotics and ideology critique. In addition to Louis Althusser's notion of ideology, also Valentin Vološinov's idea that "The domain of ideology coincides with the domain of signs" was adopted as a credo (Moxey 1994, 43). In addition to Charles Sanders Peirce, Michael Bachtin, Roland Barthes and French poststructuralists, the role of one of the initiators of the poststructuralist semiotics was attributed also to Jan Mukařovský. Norman Bryson included him among semiologists and representatives of "New Art History in France" (Bryson 1988). Donald Preziosi compared Mukařovský to Panofsky regarding him as a guide out of the present "crisis in or of the discipline of art history" (Preziosi 1989, 1–20) despite the fact that "he (i.e. Mukařovský) was unable... to move beyond verbocentrist paradigm" (Preziosi 1989, 116) and his work "retains a logocentrist thrust" (ibid., 117) or even that he "is ambiguous about the status of art as an autonomous system of signs" (ibid., 117). "Multifunctional paradigm of communication" even if applied mainly to architecture (ibid., 117) and the sociological and functional notion of aesthetic value as dependent on "collective awareness", being in permanent flux, and mediating between art and social life

(Moxey 1994, 37–38) have been considered by Preziosi or Moxey as Mukařovský's topical contributions to the present art historical discourse.

It is known that the idea of context, the contextual nature of art as well as art historical theories play a crucial role in semiotic theory (Bryson 1989). In addition, not only the original cultural and historical and ideological context but also the present context of an art historian is regarded by the advocates of semiotics as an inherent and determining factor that results into the constructions of the analyzed phenomena. Thus, the call for a critical self-reflection of art history and the appeal to unmask our own cultural prejudices and ideological biases can be taken as a very consequent step. According to Keith Moxey, we have to "historicize the activity of the historian" himself, "to historicize (even) the notion of deconstruction", to make us "aware of the extent to which history plays a role in the ideological struggles of the present day" and "of the cultural and social function of what we do". In spite of the fact that "we cannot admit the extent to which it (i.e. our culture) shapes our assumptions... we can openly acknowledge the way in which it molds our social and political expectations" (Moxey 1994 a, 1).

Consequently, the semiotic relativism provokes some questions: Are Pierce's, Bachtin's or Mukařovský's ideas considered by semioticians as the concrete responses to historical and cultural and ideological problems rather than as ahistorical epistemological solutions transcending their particular context? Besides, in order to be consequently self-reflexive it is necessary to answer the question "what are cultural and ideological intentions of semiotic analysis and its urgent call for the critical self-reflection?"

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