

On the Unity of Culture: Dialogues among Cassirer, Medvedev, Voloshinov and Bakhtin / *Sobre a unidade da cultura: diálogos entre Cassirer, Medviédev, Volóchinov e Bakhtin*

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have focused on the contributions and/or convergences among the ideas of Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev, and other authors. Brazilian and foreign researchers have shown convergences between the thought of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the aforementioned Russian thinkers. Cassirer problematizes what would give unity to culture, and this is a problem with which Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev are also concerned. Thus, this article analyzes how this question (“what gives unity to culture?”) was answered, seeking convergences among thoughts. We have gone through some of Cassirer’s writings to show how the philosopher has analyzed culture from a unity constituted by symbolization. Next, we see how this issue was addressed by Medvedev and Vološinov. Finally, we seek the way in which Bakhtin sought to understand cultural unity in the essay “The problem of content, material and form”.

KEYWORDS: Cultural unity; Bakhtin Circle; Ernst Cassirer

RESUMO

Muitos estudos têm se debruçado sobre as contribuições e/ou convergências entre as ideias de Bakhtin, Volóchinov e Medviédev e as ideias de outros autores contemporâneos dos autores russos. Pesquisadores brasileiros e estrangeiros têm mostrado convergências entre o pensamento do filósofo alemão Ernst Cassirer e dos pensadores russos supracitados. Cassirer problematiza o que conferiria unidade à cultura – e esse é um problema do qual também se ocupam Bakhtin, Volóchinov e Medviédev. Assim, este artigo analisa como essa questão (“o que confere unidade à cultura?”) foi respondida, buscando as convergências entre os pensamentos. Percorremos alguns escritos de Cassirer para mostrarmos como o filósofo analisou a cultura a partir de uma unidade constituída pela simbolização. Em seguida, vemos como essa questão foi abordada por Medviédev e Volóchinov. Por fim, buscamos o modo como Bakhtin procurou compreender a unidade cultural no ensaio “O problema do conteúdo, do material e da forma.”

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Unidade cultural; Círculo de Bakhtin; Ernst Cassirer*

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Introduction

Over the years, the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Pavel Medvedev, and Valentín Vološinov has been received with reactions ranging from “radicalism to exaltation” to the “discrediting the contributions” of their authors (Marchezan, 2019, p.261). In response to the first reaction, many studies have focused on the contributions and/or convergences between the thinking of Russian authors and other contemporary thinkers at the time when the writings of Bakhtin, Vološinov, and Medvedev were published. In this sense, Brazilian (Marchezan, 2019; Faraco, 2009; Grillo, 2017) and foreign (Poole, 1998; Brandist, 2002, 1997; Lofts, 2016) authors have shown some convergences between the thought of the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer and the aforementioned Russian thinkers.

Lofts (2016)¹ argues that there is “harmony” between Bakhtin and Cassirer, due to the way in which these two thinkers “tune in” with the great philosophical questions of the beginning of the 20th century, that is, Kant’s transcendental philosophy and the philosophy of life. According to Lofts (2016),² these two thinkers demonstrate an attitude that emphasizes the positivity of human culture, in opposition to the cultural pessimism that entered the philosophical reflections of the time.

As highlighted by Verene (2000), Cassirer is one of the thinkers that is most associated with the philosophy of culture, and this – culture – is the great philosophical problem of the 20th century. In Verene’s words (2000, p.vii), “never before has there been such an awareness of the range and variety of cultures.” This awareness of the variety and multiplicity of cultural manifestations leads Cassirer to problematize what would give unity to human culture in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – the very concept of “symbolic form” as a cultural manifestation, as Porta (2011) argues, has as a corollary the issue of unity despite the multifaceted cultural products.

¹ LOFTS, S. T. Bakhtin and Cassirer: The Event and the Machine. *Bakhtiniana*. Revista de Estudos do Discurso, São Paulo, v. 11, n. 1, pp.70-88, jan./apr., 2016.

² For reference, see footnote 1.

This is a problem that Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev also deal with. We see, with greater or lesser emphasis, Russian thinkers debating this question (what gives unity to culture?) in their writings – which highlights the “harmony” or “tune” between these authors and the German philosopher and is described in the article by Lofts (2016).³

Thus, this article analyzes how each author responds to this question, seeking convergences/confluences between the thoughts. We will go through the writings of Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer, 1980;⁴ 1955;⁵ 2011⁶), *Essay on Man* (1944),⁷ as well as lesser-known essays by this author (Cassirer, 1979),⁸ to show how the philosopher thought of culture from a unit that is made by the process of symbolization. Next, we will examine how the same question was addressed by Medvedev, in his critique of the formal method in literary studies (Bakhtin/ Medvedev, 1985),⁹ and by Vološinov, in his reflections on language, particularly, and on cultural products, in general, conceived, in his book *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Vološinov, 1973),¹⁰ as semiotized products. Finally, we will search for how Bakhtin sought to answer this question in the essay *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art* (Bakhtin, 1990).¹¹

³ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁴ CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume one: Language. Translated by Raplh Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980.

⁵ CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume two: Mythical Thought. Translated by Raplh Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955.

⁶ CASSIRER, E. *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*. Volume three: The Phenomenology of Knowledge. Translated by Raplh Manheim. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957.

⁷ CASSIRER, E. *An Essay on Man: An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1944.

⁸ CASSIRER, E. Language and Art II (1942). In: CASSIRER, E. *Symbol, Myth, and Culture: Essays and Lectures of Ernst Cassirer 1935-1945*. Edited by Donald Phillip Verene. London: Yale University Press, 1979. pp.145-165.

⁹ BAKHTIN, M. M./ MEDVEDEV, P.N. *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics*. Translated by Albert J. Wehrle. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1985.

¹⁰ VOLOŠINOV, V. N. *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Translated by L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik. New York: Seminar Press, 1973.

¹¹ BAKHTIN, M. M. *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays* / by M. M. Bakhtin; edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov ; translated and notes by Vadim Liapunov ; supplement translated by Kenneth Brostrom. Austin, Texas: University of Texas Press, 1990.

1 Cassirer's View on the Unity of Culture

To the German philosopher Ernst Cassirer, myth, science, art, and language are different spiritual forms that coexist in unity. In order to answer the question posed in the introduction of this article – what gives unity to these different spiritual manifestations – we need to understand the concept of symbolic form proposed by the philosopher.

According to Cassirer (1980),¹² symbolic forms are specific modes of objectification, ways of creating reality. When formulating the concept of “symbolic form,” Cassirer (1980)¹³ opposes the empiricist view, according to which reality would present itself as a reflection of our sensations, and the rationalist view, which conceives reality as a product of reason. Underlying both philosophical views (empiricism and rationalism) is the idea of a substantial reality, of a “thing” in itself, to which knowledge would access. In contrast, Cassirer conceives that what is established as “reality” is not simply “accessed,” but *produced, created* by a form of symbolization.

In Cassirer's view (1980),¹⁴ one cannot speak of a prior “reality” – the world is created from the “source of light” that illuminates the path, from the condition of vision. The metaphor of light, of the focus of vision, is used by the philosopher to show the different milieus through which the world is configured. In *Language and myth*, Cassirer (1953)¹⁵ compares myth, language, and science from the point of view of the basic semiotization mechanisms of each one of these configurations. If we think of reality as a show of lights and shadows, science can be understood as a constant light that spreads out; myth and language, on the other hand – considering their partial identity – function as spotlights that illuminate certain points and obscure others, “trapping” the spirit in the focused point.

¹² For reference, see footnote 4.

¹³ For reference, see footnote 4.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 4.

¹⁵ CASSIRER, E. *Language and Myth*. Translated by Susanne K. Langer. New York: Dover Publications: 1953.

Each one of these “light sources” does not exist statically; they obey a principle of *progression* (Cassirer, 1980),¹⁶ conceived as creative energies that allow man’s self-liberation from the immediacy of the “here-now,” from the chaos of the organic world (Cassirer, 1979;¹⁷ 1944).¹⁸ By analyzing the symbolic forms of language, myth, and science, when considering this principle (the progression of symbolic forms as creative energies), Cassirer shows how language (Cassirer, 1980),¹⁹ in its initial stages, intertwines with the body and, little by little, tends to take on more abstract traits. As for myth, (Volume 2, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*), Cassirer (1955)²⁰ demonstrates how mythical thinking “widens” from an experience closely linked to the concrete moment towards more comprehensive forms of experience. Science – thinking specifically of exact sciences (Cassirer, 1957)²¹ –, the last stage of man’s spiritual development, finally moves towards a total “de-substantializing,” through the signs of order in opposition to the signs of “things” (chap.III. *Language and Science*, Cassirer, 1957).²²

At the conclusion of *An Essay on Man*, Cassirer (1944)²³ emphasizes this non-static character of symbolic forms (the “transformation” of creative energies), by arguing that they move between a stabilizing tendency and a transforming tendency. The preponderance of one force or another (stabilization or transformation) gives the physiognomy of each cultural form.

Thus, myth tends, for example, towards stabilization, to the conservation of its primitive forms, through rituals, the sacredness of the word, and the magic formula. Language, in turn, equalizes stabilizing and innovative forces: conservation is necessary for language to fulfill its communicative role. However, with each new enunciation, creative energy manifests itself in language. The processes of language acquisition and phonetic and semantic changes, according to Cassirer (1944),²⁴ illustrate this productive

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 8.

¹⁸ For reference, see footnote 7.

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 4.

²⁰ For reference, see footnote 5.

²¹ For reference, see footnote 6.

²² For reference, see footnote 6.

²³ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 7.

character. Science, finally, tends towards conservation, although creativity is a prerequisite for building new theories.

In the essay *Language and Art II*, the philosopher (Cassirer, 1979)²⁵ presents language, art, and myth as the result of a “struggle” between different human faculties – *logos* and imagination. Language would be characterized by the predominance of *logos* in its constitution, while myth would predominantly have the power of imagination. Art, in turn, would be constituted by a relative balance between these two faculties.

The author, however, emphasizes that it would be wrong to outline a “general formula” to define these three modes of objectification (art, myth, language) – a formula from which the myth would be an imaginative objectification; art, an intuitive objectification; language, a conceptual objectification (Cassirer, 1979, p.187).²⁶ To propose such a general formula would be to admit that man is a simple mixture of isolated faculties; according to Cassirer (1979, p.187),²⁷ there are not strictly separate provinces in the human mind, that is, one province strictly devoted to intuition, another to conceptual activity, and so on. What is observed, in the symbolic forms, are tendencies towards different directions. In this sense, myth, for example, tends toward imaginative activity, which does not mean that it does not act, in any way, in any manifestation of *logos*.

Still in the essay *Language and Art II*, Cassirer presents the different forms of human objectification from the metaphor of the mirror with different angles of refraction. In his own words: “Each of them is a mirror of our human experience which, as it were, possesses its own angle of refraction” (Cassirer, 1979, p.194).²⁸ According to this definition, symbolic forms are “mirrors” because when we look at myth, art, language, etc., we see the human being reflected – symbolic forms represent human culture, therefore, we do not find in art or in myth something like a deity, but a reflection of our own cultural activity. However, in this mirror, we do not have a pure reflection, but different angles that refract the human being.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 8.

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 8.

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 8.

²⁸ For reference, see footnote 8.

Finally, in the aforementioned essay (Cassirer, 1979),²⁹ it is interesting to note that Cassirer denies being a representative of an “idealist subjectivism” (appropriating here the expression emphatically used by Vološinov, 1973).³⁰ See the quote below:

In our former discussions I often had the impression that some of you were thinking that what I defend here is a system of subjective idealism in which the ego, the subjective mind, the thinking self is considered as the center and as the creator of the world, as the sole or ultimate reality. I do not wish to argue here about terms. We know that Kant felt very much surprised and very much scandalized when his *Critique of Pure Reason* at first appearance met the same objection, when it was described by a reviewer as a system of subjective idealism (Cassirer, 1979, p.194).³¹

As we will discuss later, Vološinov (1973)³² includes Cassirer in the “idealist subjectivism” that is so criticized by the Russian author, although he makes a reservation to Cassirer’s philosophy as an “advance” in neo-Kantianism. We emphasize, however, that this form of idealism presupposes something “substantial” – the ego, the mind – as the creative center of the world. Cassirer (1979)³³ denies this substantial existence. He emphatically states that symbolic forms are not ways of creating a ready-made, given-in-advance reality; they are, rather, “the sources of light” in the progressive process of objectification of consciousness, as we pointed out above. With this idea, the philosopher does not deny the existence of “reality” – in doing so, Cassirer would subscribe to an orthodox idealism, which is still criticized by the author in the first volume of his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer, 1980).³⁴

In the conclusion of *Language and art II*, Cassirer (1979)³⁵ states that ego, the individual mind, cannot create reality. Man is surrounded by a reality that he did not create, but that needs to be interpreted, apprehended, made intelligible. Making the world

²⁹ For reference, see footnote 8.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 10.

³¹ For reference, see footnote 8.

³² For reference, see footnote 10.

³³ For reference, see footnote 8.

³⁴ For reference, see footnote 4.

³⁵ For reference, see footnote 8.

intelligible is the role of art, myth, religion, science. In doing so, in undertaking the task of making the world intelligible, the forms of objectification reveal a creative and active aspect, since man cannot be conceived as a mere receptacle of sensations coming from the world. In this sense, man, does not create something “substantial” through symbolic forms, but a *representation* of the world.

Symbolic forms, in Cassirer’s view, are forms of (sensible/intelligible, objective/subjective) synthesis, which must be understood according to their specificities, their immanent laws; that is, the functioning laws of myth, for example, are immanent to this symbolic form, which cannot be understood from the functioning laws of science or art. The different symbolic forms cannot be characterized as superior to each other either – myth, science, and art, each in its own way, fulfill its function of building the human world.

Although they constitute a functional unit – that is, although the different paths of objectification are united by a functional, symbolizing link –, symbolic forms do not coexist peacefully. According to Cassirer (1980, p.82),³⁶ “the particular cultural trends do not move peacefully side by side, seeking to complement one another; each becomes what it is only by demonstrating its own peculiar power against the others and in battle with the others.” Each symbolic form wants to establish itself as “reality” – which leads to the existence of cultural antinomies (myth *versus* religion, religion *versus* science, etc.)

In summary, based on the explanations given, we can say that culture, in Cassirer’s view, is a unit constituted by different forms of symbolization or by different symbolic forms. These symbolic forms are defined in terms of: 1. specificity (they are not reduced to one another: rather, they are established on the basis of immanent laws); 2. systematicity (they form an organic unit, a cultural system); 3. “struggle” (each symbolic form wants to establish itself as “reality,” for this reason they do not coexist peacefully, on the contrary, instituting the antinomies of culture); 4. tension between reproductive forces and creative forces (the equalization or preponderance of one force or another will

³⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

define each form of objectification) and among imaginative, intuitive and logical conceptualization faculties.

The symbolizing function, inherent in each symbolic form, gives unity to culture. As we briefly mentioned above, the different symbolic forms – myth, science, art, language – are plural and heterogeneous, considered in their various manifestations. However, culture is not dispersed, it is an organic whole (Cassirer, 1944).³⁷ In *Language and Myth*, when mentioning the forms of human symbolization, Cassirer (1953)³⁸ makes an interesting analogy between this concept and the idea of organs in systematic functioning, clarifying the way in which this functional bond occurs: he states that each symbolic form can be understood as an organ with specificities in its functioning. However, although these “organs” have their peculiarities (their own ways of functioning, their “tissues” and “physiologies”), they make up a totality. The analogy with organs functioning in a body seems extremely interesting because it is capable of synthesizing the cooperation among these different organs in maintaining the whole: each organ of the human body obviously has its own morphology and physiology. However, together they are all at the service of the functioning of life. This is how the various cultural manifestations are: as distinct organs, they have specific morphologies and tasks, but all of them cooperate in the construction of the human through the *symbolizing function*.

In the first volume of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, the author (Cassirer, 1980)³⁹ conceives that the symbolizing function or symbolic function is the common element, the element that allows equating the diversity of these symbolic forms and the unity of these manifestations in the entirety of culture. The concept of “symbolic function” can be defined, in general, as the way to create symbols, understanding that the latter – the symbol – according to Porta (2011), consists of assigning meaning to sensitive factor. The different symbolic forms have their own rules, immanent laws through which the sensitive datum is represented, acquiring an intelligible form – universally accessed.

³⁷ For reference, see footnote 7.

³⁸ For reference, see footnote 15.

³⁹ For reference, see footnote 4.

In short, the symbolizing function that constitutes each symbolic form constitutes not only the common element among these modes of objectification, but also (and, as a result of this principle) is responsible for the unity that binds the symbolic forms into an organic whole.

Having presented Cassirer's view on the unity of culture, in the next topic we will focus our analysis on Medvedev's idea.

2 Medvedev and his Emphasis on the “Laws” and “System” of Ideological Creation

As we explained above, in Cassirer, the concept of “symbolic form” is central to understanding the unity of human culture. In Medvedev, in turn, the key concept presented is that of an *ideological milieu* or *field of ideological creation*.

Pável Medvedev begins the first chapter of *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship* (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985)⁴⁰ stating that the study of literature (its object of analysis) is a field of the science of ideologies – it is an ideological creation like politics, science, etc. Medvedev calls for the analysis of this specific field within the premises of the sociological method and argues that Marxism failed to address the phenomenon of superstructures in its specific particularities. For the theorist, in Marxism there would be a gap between the general law that governs the socioeconomic base and the internal, particular laws that qualitatively govern science, art, morality, religion.

Medvedev seeks to equalize ideological unity with the specificities from different ideological fields. Art, science, morals, and religion have specific laws of refraction. Though they constitute a unit not simply because they are based on the same general law of economic production, but because they are all forms of creation and support of ideological life.

“Law,” “unity” or “totality,” “specificity” or “particularity” are recurrent concepts, both in Medvedev and Cassirer, although the two theorists belong to different fields. The search for equalization between the totality of fields and the specificity of each

⁴⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

of these spheres is something notorious in both theorists. For example, see the excerpt below, taken from Cassirer (1980, p.84, emphasis in original):⁴¹

An escape from this methodological dilemma is possible only if we can discover a factor which recurs in each basic cultural form but in no two of them takes exactly the same shape. Then, in reference to this principle, we might assert the ideal relation between the individual provinces —between the basic functions of language and cognition, of art and religion —without losing the incomparable particularity of any one of them. If we can find a medium through which all the configurations effected in the separate branches of cultural life must pass, but which nevertheless retains its particular nature, its specific character—we shall have found the necessary intermediary link for an inquiry which will accomplish for the *totality* of cultural forms what the transcendental critique has done for pure *cognition*.

The dilemma referred to by Cassirer (1980) in the above passage concerns the subordination of symbolic forms to logic.⁴² The philosopher states that if we stick to the logical unity, the specificity of the symbolic forms would dissolve in a universality of the logical form. On the other hand, the analysis of the particularity of symbolic forms, without finding a common link to all of them, would prevent proposing the way back to the universal form, that is, it would prevent the analysis of the *totality* of symbolic creation. The link that connects these different fields, as we highlighted in the previous topic, is in the *symbolic or symbolizing function* – common to myth, art, and science. The symbolizing function would equalize the totality of symbolic forms and the specificity of each one of them.

Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985)⁴³ do not exactly quote Cassirer, but criticize idealism and particularly neo-Kantianism (philosophical current to which Cassirer is affiliated). According to Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985),⁴⁴ this

⁴¹ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁴² Whereas, in this passage, Cassirer (1980) seeks to base his philosophy of symbolic forms by outlining a critique of Kant – a critique through which he argues that Kant would have subordinated the theory of knowledge to only one specific way of conceiving reality, that is, to logical form. Cassirer (1980) points out that alongside this way of cognizing reality, there are other possible ways, with the same validity (myth, language, art, etc.).

⁴³ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁴⁴ For reference, see footnote 9.

philosophical current would have reduced everything to a system (a “system at all costs”) (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985, p.5).⁴⁵ In this “reductionist” view, it would not be possible to conceive a historical fact as a living something, in its unrepeatability and individuality. In this Bakhtin/Medvedev’s critique of neo-Kantianism, we see an idea that also appears in Vološinov and Bakhtin’s work: the conception of ideological facts as living things, unrepeatably, unique phenomena – this is the idea that underlies the concept of concrete utterance, for example.

For Medvedev, if idealism cannot encompass the analysis of ideological fields in their living concreteness, on the other hand, as we mentioned, Marxism does not conceive the specificities of the different fields of ideological creation. Marxism also proposes a mechanical and direct relationship between the base and the superstructure. In Medvedev’s (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985)⁴⁶ vision, there is not a direct relationship between this base and ideological creations, since art, morality, and science not only reflect, but also *refract* the conditions of existence. The concept of *refraction*, which is also similarly formulated in Vološinov (1973),⁴⁷ is important for Medvedev to analyze how literature does not simply “absorb” current ideologies, but reconfigures them for artistic purposes.

To solve the problem of the specificity of each field of creation *versus* the unity of the ideological milieu, Medvedev subscribes to materialism; he states that only the sociological method can be able to study art in its particularities without losing sight of the unity that it creates in human culture. For the author, ideological fields have in common the fact that they are *semiotic*, different from instruments of production and milieus of consumption. Art, science, and religion have a material, sign base, outside of which they cannot exist. This material existence takes place externally, that is, it is not found “in the heads, in the 'souls' of people” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985),⁴⁸ it is present

⁴⁵ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁴⁶ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁴⁷ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁴⁸ For reference, see footnote 9.

“in words, actions, clothing, manners, and organizations of people and things” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985, p.7).⁴⁹

Medvedev emphasizes *communication* as being responsible for the semiotization process. He states that the common link between the work of art and other ideological products is the semiotized existence in favor of communication, that is, a work of art, a scientific conference, or a religious rite exist to communicate something. This communication presupposes the interaction between individuals and the existence of an organized, social collectivity. In this idea, we find a confluence with the thought of Vološinov (1973),⁵⁰ who also defends that social interaction is the “synthesis factor” of ideological products. Moreover, Vološinov also argues that, for semiotization to occur, the interaction must take place between an organized social group, that is: it is not enough to put two homo sapiens face to face, it is necessary, rather, that these men constitute a collectivity, a social class.

Once defined that the different ideological fields have a semiotic nature, based on the need for communication of a socially organized collectivity (this nature “unifies” the fields of ideological creation), Medvedev proposes that the particularities of each field be analyzed. For the theorist, the analysis of these specificities should not be based on “abstract” meanings, as idealism would have done, but based on concrete and material reality: “social meaning as realized in forms of concrete intercourse, on the other” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985, p.12).⁵¹

Thus, at first, the author proposes the analysis of meanings in relation to the material body that absorbs and transmits these meanings. In art, a relationship would predominate in which all matter is significant, in which there are no accessory moments. The artistic object is a unique “body-sign,” which cannot be translated from one materiality to another. In this sense, an artistic object such as a novel is a totality, a singular unit that ends in itself. In this object, the word is the material medium that constitutes the form and meaning of the work. If the “same story” of this novel is narrated

⁴⁹ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁵⁰ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵¹ For reference, see footnote 9.

in a film, for example, it cannot be said that we are facing the same object, since we find different materialities in the novel and in the film, constituted by different signs: verbal and verb-visual, respectively.

Science no longer has this dependence of meaning on matter, as Medvedev states. The materiality of science is conventional and replaceable: “Scientific meaning is easily transferred from one material to another and is easily reproduced and repeated” (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985, p.12).⁵² A scientific concept, such as force in physics, for example, can be represented by different materialities: force can be defined verbally, as the “capacity to perform work;” it can also be expressed by a formula ($f = m.a$) and, ultimately, it can be represented simply by a vector (\rightarrow). The three materialities are capable of performing the same meaning, which does not occur in art.

Cassirer addresses this relationship between meaning and materiality (or between the representative and the represented) in his philosophy of symbolic forms. Each symbolic form develops a specific dependency/relationship with the material medium that orders it. Myth, for example, establishes a relation of “imprisonment” of the spirit in the sign, in the mythical image. Thus, in myth, there is no perception of the representation of the thing itself; the image becomes, in the mythical perception of the world, the represented itself. Scientific meaning, on the other hand, has an independent relationship with the material that expresses it. The scientific sign is established in a purely relational view “of all cultural forms, only that of logic, the concept, cognition, seems to enjoy a true and authentic *autonomy*” (Cassirer, 1980, p.83, emphasis in original).⁵³ At this point, we can at least partially approximate the theses defended by Medvedev and Cassirer, since both authors converge in the ways in which they think about the relationship between sign materiality and the meaning instituted from this materiality in art and science (“dependency” or absorption of meaning by material in art; material/meaning independence in science).

⁵² For reference, see footnote 9.

⁵³ For reference, see footnote 4.

After establishing this material/meaning relationship, Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985)⁵⁴ states that the functions of the work must be sought in the unity of social life, and he analyzes its object – literature – according to the “laws of refraction” of this ideological field: the refraction of previously refracted contents; the aesthetic re-elaboration of these contents based on exotopy; the refraction of living, “ongoing” ideologies – these would be the specificities of this field (of the literary artistic field); its semiotic nature, constituted in favor of communication, on the other hand, it would be the general principle of literature – a principle that would establish the connection between the other fields or ideological milieus.

In summary, in Medvedev’s view, human culture forms a unit due to the semiotic nature of ideological fields. The author emphasizes communication between socially organized groups as the “origin” of the semiotization process.

3 Vološinov: the Centrality of the Word

Like Medvedev, Vološinov (1973)⁵⁵ addresses the dialectic among the specificities of art, science, religion, etc. (that is, of ideological spheres) and the unity/entirety that these spheres form in human culture. In his words:

1. (...) every domain of ideology is a unified whole which reacts with its entire constitution to a change in the basis. Therefore, any explanation must preserve *all the qualitative differences* between interacting domains and must trace all the various stages through which a change travels. Only on this condition wilt analysis - result, not in a mere outward conjunction of two adventitious facts belonging to different levels of things, but in the process of the actual dialectical generation of society, a process which emerges from the basis and comes to completion in the superstructures (Vološinov, 1973, p.18, emphasis in original).⁵⁶

2. (...) Surely it must be clear that between changes in the economic state of affairs and the appearance of the "superfluous man" in the novel

⁵⁴ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁵⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵⁶ For reference, see footnote 10.

stretches a long, long road that crosses a number of qualitatively different domains, each with its own specific set of laws and its own specific characteristics (Vološinov, 1973, p.18).⁵⁷

In excerpt 1 highlighted above, the author deals with the relationship between the economic basis and the superstructure. Following the Marxist theses, he considers the basis as the economic conditions of production and the superstructure as the ideological products – art, science, morals, etc. – established on the basis. The author, however, questions the idea defended by Marxism according to which the basis determines the ideology in a causal way. In Vološinov’s view, it is not possible to establish a mechanical and direct causality between the conditions of production and the ideological products, since we are facing different phenomena, which are found on different planes. The basis concerns the non-semiotized material conditions of existence; the superstructure, in turn, integrates a *qualitatively* distinct world – the “world of signs.”

The difference based on “quantitative” and “qualitative” terms is relevant in Vološinov’s theoretical construct. The world of signs is a semiotized, human, cultural world, which is organized in discursive communication and integrates different spheres of ideological creation. Signs have different natures – they can be pictorial, verbal, or verbal-visual. These differences, however, are qualitative. The natural world, on the other hand, is a non-semiotized reality, which presents a quantitative difference in relation to the world of signs. So, an animal scream is *quantitatively* distinct from human speech, for example. The latter – speech, represented by a verbal sign – is *qualitatively* different from a pictorial sign, for example.

In the first chapter of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Vološinov (1973)⁵⁸ focuses on the specificities of the sign and on the distinction of the sign reality in relation to other non-semiotized phenomena, such as production instruments and consumer goods (In this sense, we see the same issue addressed by Medvedev in his work). The material conditions of existence are non-signal phenomena; therefore, they integrate realities that are different from the reality of the sign world. This sign world is

⁵⁷ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁵⁸ For reference, see footnote 10.

a product of the material base, although the correlation cannot be established in a mechanical way, not only because they are different phenomena in terms of nature, but also because, in Vološinov's view – and also in Medvedev's view, as discussed above –, the superstructure reflects and *refracts* the material conditions of existence.

The superstructure, as we read in section 1, composes a *totality*. As such, it reacts wholly to economic changes. In excerpt 2, the author, within the scope of literature, argues how changes in living conditions cannot have a direct, causal reflection on ideology. The “superfluous man” does not arise directly from the failure of the nobility. Vološinov endorses that this type of correlation simplifies the ideological phenomenon and does not consider that the different ideological spheres have specific laws and singularities. Thus, for the “superfluous man” to appear in the novel, there is a series of transformations operated in the totality of the spheres and in the totality of the work.

In section 2, the emphasis that the author gives to the specific laws of functioning of the spheres calls our attention. Art, religion, and science have specific ways of refracting reality – and these specific ways constitute the qualitative differences that guide these distinct spheres. Vološinov (1973)⁵⁹ cites the existence of these specific laws but does not dwell on the issue. Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985),⁶⁰ on the other hand, as we discussed earlier, seem to give more emphasis to these laws of functioning of the spheres or of the “ideological milieu.” The author's analysis, however, focuses on the functioning laws of his object of study – literature and more specifically, the novel.

Vološinov's emphasis falls on the sign nature of the ideological world, since, in the author's view, it is this nature that gives unity to the diverse manifestations of the ideological world. In the words of Vološinov (1973, p.10-11, emphasis in original),⁶¹

Within the domain of signs - i.e., within the ideological sphere - profound differences exist: it is, after all, the domain of the artistic image, the religious symbol, the scientific formula, and the judicial ruling, etc. Each field of ideological creativity has its own kind of orientation toward reality, and each refracts reality in its own way. Each

⁵⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶⁰ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁶¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

field commands its own special function within the unity of social life. *But it is their semiotic character that places all ideological phenomena under the same general definition.*

In the aforementioned excerpt, the statement that the fields of ideological creation have their own ways of “orienting themselves in reality,” of refracting this “reality,” stands out. From this statement, it is inferred that these fields of creation would be – and here we “borrow” the Cassirerian definition – the authentic source of light that falls upon the path. Also, like Cassirer (and Medvedev), Vološinov emphasizes the specificity of these “light sources,” of these lenses of refraction or construction (refracted) of reality, while affirming the unity of these fields in social life. For Vološinov (1973),⁶² as read in the excerpt above, the sign character is the “common trait,” it is what unifies the different fields. Art, religion, politics, and science have their specificities, they refract the world in a unique way. However, all these fields, despite their functional diversity, are qualitatively constituted by a sign matter.

The dynamic specificity *versus* cultural unity guided by Vološinov falls, therefore, on the sign – and to this theme (the sign) the author pays special attention, dedicating the entire first chapter of *Marxism and Philosophy of Language* to the discussion on the nature of the ideological sign. Two issues are then central when reading Vološinov’s “sign world”: the nature of the sign and the process of semiotization, that is, the process through which a given reality becomes part of the “world of signs.”

About the nature of the sign, the author argues that ideological, sign products have a material existence. Like Medvedev, he discusses the difference between the signs, nature objects, and consumer instruments, stating that they all have material existence in common, but only signs can reflect and refract another reality, whereas a consumer object or a natural object encloses its meaning in itself.

By defending the primacy of sign materiality, Vološinov opposes idealism, which, according to the author, situates ideology in consciousness. For Vološinov, ideology cannot be located in individual consciousness because it is an objective, material, and

⁶² For reference, see footnote 10.

external factor of the world of culture. In a footnote, Vološinov (1973)⁶³ makes a reservation to Cassirer's philosophy, stating that there is a change in modern neo-Kantianism. That note states:

It should be noted that a change of outlook in this regard can be detected in modern neo-Kantianism. We have in mind the latest book by Ernst Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*, Vol. 1, 1923. While remaining on the grounds of consciousness, Cassirer considers its dominant trait to be representation. Each element of consciousness represents something, bears a symbolic function. The whole exists in its parts, but a part is comprehensible only in the whole. According to Cassirer, an idea is just as sensory as matter; the sensoriness involved, however, is that of the symbolic sign, it is representative sensoriness (Vološinov, 1973, p.11).⁶⁴

Indeed, in the first volume of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Cassirer does not deny the material existence of signs. The German philosopher argues that all symbolic forms have a sensory substrate (Cassirer, 1980) and that “the ideal form is known only by and in the aggregate of the sensible signs which it uses for its expression.” (Cassirer, 1980, p.86).⁶⁵ It is interesting to note that, at this point, Cassirer criticizes dogmatic idealism, which would place the sensory world and the intelligible world in opposition. The symbolic world, in the Cassirerian view, is constituted by the synthesis between sensible and intelligible, since the latter needs the former to express itself and, at the same time, sensory without intelligible expression could not represent anything symbolically.

However, the sign, in the thesis defended by Cassirer, while having a sensory representation, *transcends* this representation. In order to define the symbolic world and the particular way of being of symbolism, the author stands on Kant's formulation, which, according to Cassirer, sought to understand: “how it is thinkable that because “something” is, something “other,” totally different from it, must also be.” (Cassirer, 1980, p.105).⁶⁶ This issue guides symbolism: the symbolic world, without ceasing to have

⁶³ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶⁴ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶⁵ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁶⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

its sensory representation, has, at the same time, a representation that transcends the sensory world. Thus, the linguistic sign, for example, has a sound materiality, but its meaning, while presupposing this materiality, cannot be enclosed in itself; it acquires value by pointing outside itself, to the connections that are established when the sign is represented. Thus, in Cassirer's definition, symbolic signs exist as sensory contents that, being sensory, at the same time transcend this existence. In his words: "a particular sensory content, without ceasing to be such, acquires the power to represent a universal for consciousness" (Cassirer, 1980, p.110).⁶⁷

This last citation reminds us, above all, of the passage in which Vološinov states that a physical object can be transformed into a sign. In the words of the Russian philosopher: "Without ceasing to be a part of material reality, such an object, to some degree, reflects and refracts another reality" (Vološinov, 1973, p.9).⁶⁸

The principle of materiality, defended by Vološinov, while it is constructed in denial of idealism, seems to be influenced by the idea of representation proposed by Cassirer, since the sign materiality to which Vološinov refers is fixed in the material substratum, but, at the same time, transcends it. In this sense, a physical object, when transformed into a sign, simultaneously becomes part of the material reality to which it was linked ("Without ceasing to be a part of material reality"), and part of another reality – the reality of the "world of signs."

About the process of semiotization – the process through which a certain reality passes to a second order, the order of the "world of signs" –, we initially highlight that Vološinov confers sign genesis to the interaction or communication between socially organized groups. Vološinov (1973, p.13)⁶⁹ states that "the reality of the sign is wholly a matter determined by that communication" and that "the existence of the sign is nothing but the materialization of that communication." Furthermore, he emphasizes that "the sign is part of organized social intercourse and cannot exist, as such, outside it, reverting

⁶⁷ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁶⁸ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁶⁹ For reference, see footnote 10.

to a mere physical artifact” (Vološinov, 1973, p.21).⁷⁰ This last citation particularly marks what we call “sign genesis” as a result of the communication process.

In the previous topic, it is seen that Medvedev also defends the thesis that communication is responsible for the genesis of the sign world. However, Vološinov, unlike Medvedev, emphasizes special attention to the verbal sign, conceived as an “ideological phenomenon *per excellence*,” capable of appearing in the most diverse communication spheres, due to the sign neutrality of the verbal word. Vološinov (1973, p.14, emphasis in original)⁷¹ states: “A word, in contrast, is neutral with respect to any specific ideological function. It can carry out ideological functions of *any* kind – scientific, aesthetic, ethical, religious.”

Finally, still on the process of semiotization, Vološinov problematizes the content of the sign and the evaluative emphasis that accompanies this content. The author states: “Every stage in the development of a society has its own special and restricted circle of items which alone have access to that society’s attention and which are endowed with evaluative accentuation by that attention.” Then he points out: “Only items within that circle will achieve sign formation and become objects in semiotic communication.” (Vološinov, 1973, p.21-22).⁷²

Vološinov questions what would determine the evaluative emphasis on a set of objects and concludes that only objects that are related to the socioeconomic premises of the existence of a group would proceed into the order of the sign world.

We consider the quote above interesting because, in it, Vološinov (1973)⁷³ conditions the sign genesis to a certain need for “attention” from a specific group. That is, unlike Medvedev, Vološinov not only highlights communication as being essential to the semiotization process, but also includes the *evaluative emphasis* as necessary to this process.

With the exception (obviously) of the theses related to the socioeconomic premises highlighted by Vološinov, we find a similar idea in Cassirer about the semiotic

⁷⁰ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁷¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁷² For reference, see footnote 10.

⁷³ For reference, see footnote 10.

genesis of myth and language. In *Language and Myth*, Cassirer (1953)⁷⁴ argues that the seal of meaning is given to objects that “awaken” the interest of the community, which, in a way, therefore receive an evaluative emphasis.

Also, in the first volume of *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* – a work cited at least three times in footnotes by Vološinov (1973)⁷⁵ – we find this idea about the semiotic genesis from the *focus* (value) that a certain object or certain activity awakens in human life. In this last work, Cassirer (1980)⁷⁶ emphasizes the active role of language in the process of semiotization. To the philosopher, language does not passively receive impressions: it opposes these impressions, “it distinguishes, chooses and directs, and through this action creates certain centers of objective intuition” (Cassirer, 1980, p.301).⁷⁷

In summary, Vološinov’s view of the unity of human culture is quite close to that developed by Medvedev (and also, in a sense, by Cassirer): myth, science, art, politics, etc. – that is, the different creative spheres – have specificities, but they are united by the same semiotic principle, since they are part of the world of culture, a semiotic world, quantitatively different from the natural world. In Vološinov, the semiotic genesis is attributed to communication and to the ways in which a given object receives evaluative emphasis – to the ways in which it “touches” the living conditions of the community. Vološinov (1973),⁷⁸ however, gives special emphasis to the verbal sign in relation to other sign systems.

In the next section, we will analyze how Bakhtin approaches the question of the unity of human culture. We will see that this latter author presents a different view in relation to Medvedev and Vološinov, by highlighting how the different cultural domains represent not only specific modes of “semiosis,” but, above all, ways of valuing the world.

⁷⁴ For reference, see footnote 15.

⁷⁵ For reference, see footnote 10.

⁷⁶ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁷⁷ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁷⁸ For reference, see footnote 10.

4 Bakhtin: The Bakhtinian Innovation

Bakhtin thinks of the different domains of human culture not only in its semiotic aspect, which would reduce the study of art, science, and religion to technicality – the different domains of culture are, in essence, conscious phenomena, *evaluative phenomena*. Here, we *focus* our attention on the essay *The Problem of Content, Material, and Form in Verbal Art*, dated from 1924.

In this text, by outlining a critique of poetic studies that aim to build the science of each art in particular, without correlating it to a systematic view of art in the unity of human culture, Bakhtin (1990, p.260)⁷⁹ argues that the concept of aesthetics should be studied by a systematic philosophy: “in mutual relation to other domains within the unity of human culture.” That is, art, for the philosopher, builds its autonomy as it participates in culture and differentiates itself from other cultural domains: science, myth, religion, etc.

It is interesting to note that Bakhtin claims to the philosophy of culture the task of elucidating the uniqueness of art in the cultural unity. As we saw earlier, in Medvedev’s (and also Vološinov’s) view, this task would fall to Marxism. Here, therefore, a first distinction is underlined between Bakhtin’s conception and that of the two other authors mentioned above.

In Cassirer (1980),⁸⁰ we also find the idea that only the philosophy of culture has the necessary methodology to describe the different symbolic forms, preserving the uniqueness of each form, and relating them to the whole of culture. The central task of philosophy would be to understand and elucidate the fundamental formative principle of symbolic forms. This principle, as we pointed out in the pages above, refers to the symbolizing function inherent in all cultural domains.

In a sense, this “symbolizing function” brings Cassirer (1980) closer to Medvedev and Vološinov. Although the last two authors are based on Marxism and build their position by criticizing idealism (a current to which Cassirer is affiliated), the “semiotic

⁷⁹ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸⁰ For reference, see footnote 4.

function” of the sign, which builds worlds quantitatively different from the natural world, approaches the symbolizing function of symbolic forms. We find in Medvedev, Vološinov and Cassirer the thesis that the world of culture is a semiotic world, a world of signs or symbols. However, the sign genesis will be a point that will differentiate the authors. Vološinov and Medvedev emphasize *communication* as something that affects the “beginning of the sign world” (that is, they emphasize the idea that communication between socially organized groups would be responsible for the genesis of a world quantitatively distinct from the natural world). We do not find the same emphasis in Cassirer.

Bakhtin’s vision, it seems to us, represents “a step forward,” an innovation: art, science, religion, and life are not just sign phenomena; they are also (or are, “overall”) evaluative phenomena – phenomena that express different positions, different modes of axiological construction. The idea of “value,” in the constitution of the unity of human culture, has, in Bakhtin, a central character.

Examine the excerpt below from the Bakhtin essay:

The problem of any particular domain of culture taken as a whole, whether it be cognition, ethics, or art, can be understood as the problem of this domain’s boundaries. Any *creative point of view*, whether potential or factually extant, becomes convincingly necessary and indispensable only in correlation with *other creative points of view*. It is only at that place on their boundaries where a genuine need arises for this point of view, for its creative distinctiveness, that it finds its solid foundation and justification. From within itself alone, outside its participation in the unity of culture, it is merely naked fact, and its distinctiveness may present itself as simply arbitrary and capricious (BAKHTIN, 1990, p.274, our emphasis).⁸¹

In the excerpt above, we point out the expressions “creative point of view/point of view” because they refer us not only to the displacement of the product to the life of the process (that is, it is not a question of considering “art,” but the act of living (co)creation of the artistic work), but also because these expressions refer to Bakhtin’s central thesis: art, science, and life, etc. are, in essence, different modes of evaluative

⁸¹ For reference, see footnote 11.

construction of reality; they represent creative points of view – systematic and, at the same time, concrete. Creative (in the very sense of “creation”) acts are systematic, since they obey a principle about the way in which they relate to the object and to other creative cultural acts: there are specific ways in which art “looks,” welcomes its object as opposed to the ways science does it, for example. They are also concrete – and the emphasis on the concreteness of culture makes Bakhtin break with any rigid systematicity – because they are updated in the process, in the unique eventfulness of each creation process.

Life, science, and art have a unity not only because they are all cultural, semiotic phenomena, but also because they represent certain ways in which they *evaluatively* constitute their object in mutual relation.

Therefore, the analysis of cultural phenomena presupposes the observation of how the creative act is positioned facing a preexisting reality. In science, neither ethical nor aesthetic values are accepted: “Preveniently encountered evaluatedness and aesthetic formedness of reality do not enter cognition” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.277).⁸² The world of science is a unified world of values, as ethical and aesthetic values cannot penetrate the world of science. The creative act of science – that is, cognitive act –, within this domain, presupposes other acts, since “the separateness and the uniqueness of the cognitive act and of its expression in a separate, individual work are not valid from the point of view of cognition” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.277).⁸³ In this sense, scientific work does not exist in isolation: it presupposes other works. Moreover, science has no end because this is impossible for the cognitive act.

Art, in turn, is “accepting,” and “benevolent,” since ethical and cognitive values are accepted, they are necessary for the construction of the aesthetic world. In this sense, according to Bakhtin (1990, p.278),⁸⁴ “life is found not only outside art but in it, within it.” The values of life and science, when they penetrate art, are obviously worked on within the work, they are “aestheticized,” but art cannot constitute a single world of values, like science, considering that artistic authorial work consists of the outline of a

⁸² For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸³ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸⁴ For reference, see footnote 11.

value – ethical or cognitive –, in the shaping of this value, in the aestheticization and in the finishing touch. The work of art is isolated, and self-sufficient, because each work “occupies an independent position in relation to the reality of cognition and performed action. This creates the immanent historicity of a work of art” (Bakhtin, 1990, p.278).⁸⁵ The creative act also obeys a principle of exotopy, to the “look” from outside of the creative author, who, having an excess of vision in relation to the created object, artistically shapes and finishes this object.

Finally, life is characterized by a relationship of duty towards reality (Bakhtin, 1990),⁸⁶ a relationship in which the subject must position himself, must occupy a unique position in the uninterrupted process of life, and answer for this act, having no *alibi* for his existence. The relationship with preexisting reality, according to Bakhtin (1990, p.278),⁸⁷ “is negative in character, although this character differs from that in the domain of cognition.” This difference to which Bakhtin refers concerns the conflicting character of values that are established in ethical acts. In science, on the other hand, there can be no conflict, due to the homogeneity of values that constitute the knowable world. As stated by Bakhtin (1990, p.278),⁸⁸ “not science but a scientist can enter into conflict.”

In summary, Bakhtin's “innovation” lies in the centrality of axiology as a constitutive element of culture. Art, science, myth, etc. are more than cultural products of a sign nature; they are different visions of the world, they represent systematic and concrete ways through which the subject occupies a position in relation to other positions, to other values. The emphasis that Bakhtin gives to the idea of “frontier” is also worth highlighting culture, according to the Russian author, should not be conceived as any spatial entity, with strict limits, since the cultural unit is built by the evaluative interrelationship among the different domains.

⁸⁵ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸⁶ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸⁷ For reference, see footnote 11.

⁸⁸ For reference, see footnote 11.

Final Considerations

Considering that culture is the great philosophical problem of the beginning of the 20th century, and that Cassirer and the Russian authors P. Medvedev, V. Vološinov and M. Bakhtin focus on this topic, in the introduction to this article we question how each of these thinkers responds to the question: what gives unity to culture, given the plurality of cultural manifestations?

Cassirer argues that philosophical investigation should consider culture, not from the idea of substance, but from the idea of function. Thus, he formulates the related concepts of *symbolic forms*, as different ways of objectifying reality, and of *symbolizing function* as ways of attributing meaning to each symbolic form. He understands that the symbolizing function is responsible for the unit that links the symbolic forms into an organic whole.

In the work of P. Medvedev, *The Formal Method in Literary Scholarship: A Critical Introduction to Sociological Poetics* (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985),⁸⁹ we find the terms “law,” “unity” or “totality,” “specificity” or “particularity” as recurrent concepts, in his search for an equalization between the totality of ideological fields and the specificity of these same fields. The fact that these terms are also recurrent in Cassirer’s *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (Cassirer, 1980)⁹⁰ calls our attention. To Medvedev (Bakhtin/Medvedev, 1985), ideological fields have a semiotic nature, based on the need for communication of a collectivity, and it is this nature that “unifies” the fields of ideological creation, differentiating them from other non-semiotic products (the “natural” world).

Vološinov (1973)⁹¹ also considers the sign character as a “common trait,” responsible for unifying the different fields. Art, religion, politics, and science have their specificities, they refract the world in a unique way. However, all these fields are constituted by sign matter.

⁸⁹ For reference, see footnote 9.

⁹⁰ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁹¹ For reference, see footnote 10.

In summary, Vološinov's (1973), Medvedev's (Bakhtin/Medvedev 1985) and Cassirer's views on the problem presented in the introduction to this article are similar: myth, science, art, politics, etc. have specificities, but are united by the same semiotic principle because they are part of the world of culture – a world that is quantitatively different from the natural world.

It seems to us that Bakhtin's vision represents “a step forward,” an innovation, since to this author, art, science, religion, and life are not just sign (or “symbolic”) phenomena; they are, above all, evaluative phenomena, that is, different modes of axiological construction. The idea of “value” in the constitution of the unity of human culture, has in Bakhtin a central character.

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Received November 25, 2022

Accepted February 12, 2023

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 18 (3): e60006e, July/Sept. 2023

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Research Data and Other Materials Availability

The contents underlying the research text are included in the manuscript.

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Review I

The article departs from the convergences, pointed out by different scholars, among the thinking of Bakhtin, Vološinov and Medvedev and the thinking of Cassirer, to reflect on an important question to these thinkers: “what gives unity to culture?”. It puts the thinkers face to face, interspersing them, and showing their affinities and oppositions. Throughout, the text is already building its conclusion, which indicates, in the field of outlined culture, what receives more attention from each one of the thinkers. The reflection presented is excellent and, in our opinion – obviously, without forgetting the Marxist lenses, especially that of Vološinov and Medvedev –, it reaffirms the importance of Cassirer for the knowledge of the philosophical bases of these Russian thinkers. It is an important contribution. The article deserves to be published, read, and debated. ACCEPTED

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Reviewed on January 10, 2023.

Review II

It is a top-notch article. I feel privileged to have been the first to read it. The content will certainly offer a significant contribution to researchers who intend to delve into the current discussion on the relationship between the Bakhtin Circle and the philosophy of Ernst Cassirer. Some minor corrections, however, are needed: - The reference to Cassirer’s 1979 work appears with the letter “b” in parentheses following the mention of the year on page 6. There is only one work by Cassirer from 1979, so that letter placed after the year must be removed. - The English word “art,” which is in the title of Cassirer’s book appears with the spelling of the Portuguese language “arte” on pages 4 and 5. - Book titles should be italicized, but are enclosed in quotation marks. This is not allowed by *Revista Bakhtiniana*. Italics should only be used for titles of works, which were often enclosed in quotation marks, as well as foreign terms such as “homo sapiens,” which were not italicized by the author. I believe that on page 13, in the last paragraph, the author has put the term “casual” where “causal” was intended. Vološinov is written in lower case on page 15. ACCEPTED

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 18 (3): e60006e, July/Sept. 2023

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Reviewed on December 08, 2022.

Bakhtiniana, São Paulo, 18 (3): e60006e, July/Sept. 2023

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