

Semiotics as resistance in the context of the Latin American semiosphere^a

Semiótica como resistência no contexto da semiosfera latino-americana

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To Desiderio Navarro (*in memoriam*)

ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the relations of Desiderio Navarro's translational-editorial project with the introduction of Eastern Europe semiotic theories into the Latin America. Working as translator-critic-essayist and publisher, the Cuban scholar faced the challenge of confronting the hegemony of French and American semiotic theories with Russian contributions in order to disseminate the ideas of cultural semiotic. Navarro challenged geopolitical doxas and used his critical studies as an authentic semiotics of resistance. From his acquaintance with the semioticians of culture he established the foundations of semiotic thinking among Latin American scholars.

Keywords: Translation, semiosphere, Yuri Lotman, Desiderio Navarro, doxa, semiotics of resistance

RESUMO

O ensaio focaliza o projeto tradutório-editorial de Desiderio Navarro na introdução das teorias semióticas do Leste europeu no continente latino-americano. Com seu trabalho de tradutor-crítico-ensaísta e editor, o estudioso cubano enfrentou o desafio de justapor a teoria russa à hegemonia das teorias semióticas francesa e americana para semear ideias do pensamento semiótico cultural. Para isso, lutou contra as doxas geopolíticas, conferindo ao seu trabalho crítico o caráter de uma autêntica semiótica da resistência. Do convívio com os semioticistas da cultura, assimilou as bases formadoras do pensamento semiótico entre estudiosos latino-americanos.

Palavras-chave: Tradução, semiosfera, Iúri Lótman, Desiderio Navarro, doxa, semiótica da resistência

^aThis essay was written in a first shorter version as a text for a lecture in honor of Desiderio Navarro (1948-2017), which took place during the events of the III Jornadas de Antropología, Literatura y Semiótica, in Mexico, in September 2018. At the time, we focused on the methodology of diagrammatic construction of Navarro's editorial project that resulted in the three volumes of *La semiosfera*.

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INTRODUCTION

EVERY RESEARCHER OF the Russian-Estonian-oriented semiotics of culture has to address the issue of historical resistance. A common humorous saying in Brazil claims that philosophy is only possible in German – alluding to a supposed Germanic intellectual supremacy inherited directly from the ancient Greeks, considered the creators of the founding *logos* of Western civilization (Sodré, 2017, pp. 7-10). Similarly, there is a consensus that *semiotics* began with the French semiology developed from Ferdinand Saussure to Algirdas Julius Greimas to ongoing research in France. At most, the philosophical pragmatism of Charles S. Peirce’s American semiotics is recognized as a counterpoint. All other sources of reflection on signs that arose outside such hegemonic traditions, which are not few, are considered minor, irrelevant derivations.

Contrary to such conceptions, the Russian theorist Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1982a), while investigating the “*great time* of cultures,” dared to challenge not specifically such controversy, but the whole idea of Western dominance in its temporal and spatial limitation. Alluding to an old school joke, he warned that the Greeks, whom today Westerners very naturally calls *ancients*, have never understood or called themselves that; and neither have regarded themselves as the cradle of Western civilization (p. 351). Along the same lines, but based on other assumptions, the Brazilian essayist Muniz Sodré (2017) investigates the supremacy of the “cultural self-image built by the European powers” (p. 7), arguing that the Greeks – informed by *doxa* – just established their philosophy and politics having in mind the essential welfare of the citizens of the *polis*.

Although only schematically outlined, the line of reasoning of both thinkers places the *doxa* of the citizens of the *polis* much closer to a dialogical relationship than to the semiotic-linguistic assumptions of the hegemonic Western tradition. Dialogical relationships, with their focus on interactive and communicative practices, especially when involving different cultural discourses and languages, are a much more edifying exercise of the semiosis of cultural encounters than the much-acclaimed linguistic domination. It is no accident, therefore, that the dialogical theory has channeled a dialogic-systemic semiotics aimed at understanding signs mainly as cultural achievements. Semiotics of culture is thus already born under an impulse for resisting both the assumptions of a linguistic-based semiotics and those resulting in the ideological dogma dictated by the Soviet party, which prevailed in Eastern Europe since the 1930s, which stemmed from a strictly ideological *doxa*.

We address *doxa* in this paper as diffuse practices in society. On the one hand, it involves the assumptions that govern individual conducts and social

consensuses, especially of a political-ideological character. They are not, however, like the arguments in assemblies and courts of the Greeks, for whom opinion based on vague impressions could be taken as a reasoned argument capable of being developed into knowledge; as an ethical-epistemic issue, thus (Pereira, 2001; Ricoeur, 2000; Silva, 2016, pp. 43-67). On the other hand, beliefs and opinions cannot provide the basis for an epistemology when submitted so directly to a political-ideological line; and often become an ethical challenge, instead of integrating ethical concerns and allowing dialogical arguments encompassing different points of view. This is the case of the ideological *doxa* of the Russian-Soviet regime (Machado, 2015), which we will address below (Colón Rodríguez, 2011; 2013).

This paper was written because we felt necessary to examine this theoretical approach, developed to investigate mechanisms, processes and semiotic problems in the historical and spatial context of cultures. We are not proposing here just to summarize what is distinctive in Russian semiotic thought. The aim is to address the importance of Eastern European semiotic thinking in its interaction with different languages and cultures, particularly when it arrived in Latin America. We expect to do so by assessing the potential of one of the semiotic mechanisms of culture: the translation.

In this sense, the Russian-Soviet geopolitical territory and context of the second half of the twentieth century enabled the establishment of a theoretical field for the study of cultural sign systems sensitive to different cultures and regions of the distant, but not forgotten, Latin America, including Brazil.

SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE AS A FIELD OF RESISTANCE

What we are calling here semiotics of resistance is a result of the particularities of the semiotic investigation of cultural communication systems in their historical context. We must, then, address the dynamics of inter and transcultural relations expressed as signs, languages and other forms of communication; in aesthetic and scientific creations; and in historically situated social interactions. This approach aims for a comprehensive knowledge of the conceptual, theoretical and methodological field formulated and practiced by the Tartu-Moscow school, which, since the late 1950s, investigated cultural semiosis wherever it was found. It is a semiotics concerned with its own historical context.

The emergence of a semiotic thinking centered on the processes of culture – or rather on the need to recognize cultural texts in their multiple dialogical conflicts and indeterminacies – like so many other investigations, has developed



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through challenges, persistence and struggling on the many fronts where it is in a boundary and confrontational position.

The investigations of the semiotics of culture bring it close to the theoretical domain of anthropology, particularly regarding the symbolic products of socially organized cultures. However, by understanding communication and cultural constructs as signification converted into systems for generating cultural codes and for creating meaning through interactions, the semiotic approach to culture distinguishes itself from anthropological studies.

This is less evident when confronting the semiotics of culture with the theories of the sign of the first half of the twentieth century, the culmination of conceptualizations extending from Plato to Augustine; from rhetoric and poetics to philosophy and theory of language (Manetti, 1993). At the intersection of these fields of study, two distinct currents have systematized and organized a conceptual framework, as we have already mentioned: Saussure's linguistic investigations and Peirce's philosophy. Although there is consensus on the "double paternity of semiotics as a field of investigation" (Pignatari, s.d.), there has long been dissent and a dispute for theoretical hegemony, making it almost impossible any dialogue between the different fronts of semiotic study. Moreover, researches based on concepts that go beyond hegemonic thinking, when not considered a misconception, are viewed as just another way of saying what the French and the Americans had addressed or elaborated more accurately¹.

As a result, the semiotics of culture takes root in a terrain of resistance not limited to the Soviet context but that reverberates throughout a wider geopolitical context.

Outside the hegemonic center of Western Europe, the Russian-Estonian school did not develop according to the precepts of the French semiotics of Greimas, Saussure's natural heir. Semioticians of culture, working within the block antagonistic to the US power during the Cold War period (1945-1991), also did not align with Peirce's American semiotics, as the historical studies of current Tartu semioticians, such as Peeter Torop (2000, 2017, in press), seek to highlight (see also Boyko, 2007; Feshchenko, 2015; Waldstein, 2008). However, publishing Russian theorists, artists, philosophers and scientists in the West, especially in French translations, did not establish the Russian production as a third approach. It allowed only the emergence of *discoverers* who declared themselves spokespersons of the theorists silenced by the communist regime. A flank opened favoring the appropriation of ideas and formulations without any concern for the ethics of terminology advocated by Peirce (1980, pp. 99-101).

This was not the end of the controversy. While Russian formalists were completely ignored and severely ostracized, constructivist artists and

¹ In line with this reasoning see Lucia Santaella's (2007) understanding of the seeds of the semiosphere concept in Peirce; Winfried Nöth's (2007) analysis of the inconsistencies of Lotman's spatial metaphors, also in the light of Peirce; and Jacques Fontanille's (2004) discussion of the contradictions of Lotman's semiotic thinking regarding the concept of culture as an explosive process of indetermination, when approached in the light of Greimas.

Bakhtin were warmly received and thoroughly adopted by countless self-styled spokespersons. In the case of Bakhtin and his intellectual circle, many, like Julia Kristeva, claimed authority to convey the thinking of the theorist of dialogism, according to Western jargon. Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow semioticians have not fallen into the clutches of Western commentators; on the contrary, there is a “silencing” regarding them among scholars (Navarro, 2007, p. 171). If, on the one hand, such indifference protected their theoretic formulations from unacceptable vulgarization, on the other, it cordoned them off, as if their books, the summer seminars, the Tartu-Moscow school researches had not existed at all². The truth is that because their work has not been the target of the intellectual greed of Westerns³, it remains in a certain obscurity, which was a protection from interpretive reductionism and opportunistic patronage but also has denied it a greater visibility⁴. Thus, the semiotics of culture remains a semiotic of resistance, honoring its roots and the spirit behind its texts.

Moreover, the fact that their texts were translated throughout the 1970s into Italian and later into Spanish – subordinate languages in the contemporary English-dominated geopolitics – has strengthened the resistance character of their semiotic approach.

We should not forget the great confrontations carried out by the Slavic semioticians of culture, who never repudiated the theories of the sign nor understood them as a threat, because their theoretical inheritance arose from speculative demands that were very different from those behind Western studies. If, on the one hand, Russian semiotic thinking is rooted in the tradition of mythological, literary, art and Russian language theoretical investigations (Torop, 2017), on the other, we should consider the great importance of the information theory developed by cybernetics in the 1950s – two fundamental historical traditions of the semiotics of culture.

However, there is a third way within these traditions that should not be ignored: the artistic, scientific and political vanguards of the early twentieth century in Russia, such as artistic constructivism, poetic cubo-futurism, cybernetic languages, theater, cinema and agitation and propaganda, Russian formalism, theories of historical-dialectical materialism, among others. These vanguards show both approximation and rupture points, as in the case of materialism. Even internally, the dispute for spaces for dialogue remained a challenge, clearly revealing their character of resistance.

At least three major events are seldom remembered when the focus is restricted to a conceptual approach: the socialist revolution, the Soviet Cold War regime and the political thawing of *perestroika*. It is limiting to

² Consideration aggravated by the difficulties faced by the semioticians in the 1960s and 1970s, which had to hide their meetings because of the regime's impositions, to the point of self-proclaiming themselves members of an invisible school (Torop, 1983-1984, p. 91). Boris Schnaiderman (2010), who studied the artistic and cultural events of the Soviet period, spoke of an effervescent “underground life,” similar to that experienced by the semioticians, which greatly contributed to the *glasnost* and the *perestroika* (p. 140).

³ Except for Italy, in which were translated many of the Russian texts, due to the ties of the commercial relations that united the country with the USSR. Lotman's first text (1967) translated into Italian precedes the French (Lotman & Ouspenski, 1976) and English (Lucid, 1977) translations. In Brazil, it was up to Schnaiderman (1979) to publish the first texts of the Tartu-Moscow school. We have no data on translations in Mexico and Argentina, where the number of studies of the Russian school is growing, but which unfortunately do not reach Brazil.

⁴ For the reception of Lotman and the semioticians of culture in the West, see Baer (2013); Kull (2011); Navarro (2007); Reid (1990); Waldstein (2008); Winner (2002). Italian chronologies can be found in Sedda (2006) and Gherlone (2014).



consider the history and establishment of the semiotics of culture without taking into account the sociocultural turmoil caused by such confrontations. While Russian formalism and the movements of renewal of arts, science and politics were linked to the socialist revolution of the early twentieth century, the semiotic theories of culture – including the theorists of Bakhtin’s intellectual circle and the semioticians of the Tartu-Moscow school – arise when the Soviet regime is already fully established, a period marked by Stalinism and neo-Stalinism, by the development of cybernetic machines, by Cold War’s clashes. The resistance then experiences bitter struggles against the hegemony of theories, political action, scientific fundamentals and research practices. We should not forget the semiotician debaters that disappeared in Stalinist purges: Valentin N. Voloshinov, Pavel Medvedev, Konstantin Vaguinov, Pavel Floriensi. Lotman and all those who directly and indirectly challenged the historical-dialectical method carried the burden of survival throughout life.

Although the semiotics of culture developed within this historical context, the study of its theoretical formulations should not be limited to the issues raised by this period of confrontation. Indeed, all of this could be understood as an *ideologeme*⁵ through a critical-analytical process capable of sizing the forces operating in a historical epoch as troubled as it was enlightened. It is as an ideologeme that the translation of the semiotics of culture’s theoretical texts stimulated the development of a whole critical-theoretical environment that influenced the way of thinking about culture itself in its interactions. We will review, therefore, the theoretical-critical translation project developed by the Cuban Desiderio Navarro on two mutually related fronts: at the same time he translated and created means to disseminate translations in far reaching publications, he also promoted the analytic thinking of semiotic cultural problems. From Central America, he stirred the development of different analytical perspectives in various regions of Latin America, including in Brazil. Thus, the semiotic investigations of culture began to be practiced in a diversity of linguistic-cultural systems, further developing Lotman’s semiotic studies carried out from the perspective of a critical metalanguage⁶.

THE BIRTH OF A THEORETICAL-CRITICAL TRANSLATION PROJECT

While the main concern of this paper is understanding the semiotics of culture’s character of resistance, after outlining the legacy of the concepts underlying the criticism of consolidated theories, it is necessary to follow

⁵ Ideologeme, a concept Voloshinov proposed in his study dedicated to the quoted discourse as an active reception of someone else’s discourse, considering its values and emphases in order to dialogue with it. It thus implies a debate on the discursive consciousnesses that support the ideological character of discourse (Voloshinov, 1973, pp. 152-155).

⁶ According to Lotman’s critical metalanguage (1998b), when culture becomes the object of scientific study, an unavoidable task is the elaboration of a metalanguage in which the descriptive method is capable of encompassing the functioning of culture in essential configurations. That is to say, culture must be understood in the variety of its articulations as text in different spaces and historical times.

the actual unfolding of such concepts in cultural analytic studies. Navarro's intellectual project became emblematic of such practices when the Slavic theoretical texts were applied to the distant Latin American cultural environment, more specifically to the island of Cuba in Central America. Initially, there was a language shock; the Russian and Estonian languages are not related to the Spanish spoken in the Caribbean island, which itself results from the mingling of Iberian Spanish and the native languages of pre-Columbian populations. Despite this linguistic mismatch, an ideological encounter occurred due to the political links between Cuba and the Soviet bloc, a different context from the entry of Russian theories in Italy, the cradle of Latin languages in the old geopolitical heart of the West.

Not only did Navarro stir such developments, he took active leadership in the whole process. He translated himself the texts and endeavored to transform them into processes of reflection and critical intervention in order to promote the semiotic thinking in the Latin American context, reverberating among Brazilian scholars, who greatly benefit from his translations. He developed a systemic work in which the diversity of Latin American cultures with their different peoples and historical traditions, apart from the supposed European hegemony, would become the object of the semiotic study of culture.

The ground was prepared by Lotman himself. In one of his inquiries about the diachronic-historical method, he argues that not all events of ancient times, in the prehistory of Western civilization, are "outside of History." This is just one of the paradoxes that semiotic analysis investigates⁷ (1985, p. 49). According to his reasoning, there is no way of ignoring, in writing, the watershed between prehistory and history: the production of language, since it was to be the great historical-semiotic event resulting from the fundamental semiosis of human culture. Hence "all the culture known to European science is based on writing," to the point that it is "impossible to imagine a developed preliterate culture"⁸ (Lotman, 1998a, p. 81). Nonetheless, Lotman does a turnaround in his argument and asks: do not preliterate cultures produce language? Let us follow his inquiry:

The nexus that links the existence of developed civilization, class society, division of labor and the high level of social services and techniques of construction, irrigation, etc., constrained by them to the existence of writing, seems so natural that alternative possibilities are rejected *a priori*. Based on the ample material that has really been given to us, we could recognize that nexus as a universal law of culture, if it were not for the enigmatic phenomenon of pre-Inca civilizations in South America.

⁷ As follows: "It is worth asking, at this moment, if semiotics has not entered a new period in its history. There is a basis for this hypothesis. Moreover, in the sphere of semiotic research, some paradoxes are increasingly clearly revealed." In the original text: "E il caso di chiedersi a questo punto se la semiótica non sia entrata in un nuovo período della sua storia. C'è una base per questa ipotesi. Inoltre, nella sfera delle ricerche semiótiche si rivelano sempre più chiaramente alcuni paradossi."

⁸ In the original text: "Toda la cultura conocida por la ciência europea está basada en la escritura. Es imposible imaginarse una cultura ágrafa desarrollada (y cualquier civilización ágrafa desarrollada en general)."



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⁹In the original text: “El nexo que liga la existencia de la civilización desarrollada, la sociedad de clases, la división del trabajo y el alto nivel de los servicios sociales y de la técnica de construcción, irrigación, etc., condicionado por ellas a la existencia de la escritura, parece tan natural, que las posibilidades alternativas son rechazadas a priori. Basándonos en el muy amplio material que nos ha sido dado realmente, podríamos reconocer ese nexo como una ley universal de la cultura, si no fuera por el enigmático fenómeno de las civilizaciones preincaicas suramericanas. // Los testimonios acumulados por la arqueología dibujan un espectáculo verdaderamente asombroso. Tenemos ante nosotros el milenario cuadro de una serie de civilizaciones que se relevan, que crearon gigantescas edificaciones y sistemas de irrigación, que levantaron ciudades y enormes ídolos de piedra, que tuvieron una artesanía desarrollada – alfarera, textil, metalúrgica – es más, que crearon, sin duda alguna, complejos sistemas de símbolos . . . y que no dejaron huella alguna de la presencia de una escritura. Este hecho sigue siendo hasta ahora una paradoxa inexplicable.”

¹⁰In the original text: “Las obras rompen los límites de su tiempo, viven durante siglos, es decir, en un *gran tiempo*, y además, con mucha frecuencia tratándose de las grandes obras, siempre, esta vida resulta más intensa y plena que en su actualidad.”

¹¹In the original text: “Pero la unidad de una cultura determinada es unidad *abierta*.”

¹²In the original text: “No existe nada muerto de una manera absoluta: cada sentido tendrá su fiesta de resurrección. Problema del *gran tiempo*.”

The evidence accumulated by archeology outlines a truly amazing spectacle. We have before us the millenary picture of a series of civilizations that distinguished themselves by creating gigantic buildings and irrigation systems, that built cities and huge stone idols, that developed a craftsmanship – pottery, textile, metalurgical – and more, that created, without a doubt, complex systems of symbols. . . and that left no trace of the presence of writing. This fact remains, so far, an inexplicable paradox⁹. (p. 82)

The semiotic problem proposed by Lotman is mainly a result of the lack of a metalanguage critical of the historical method itself. Besides dismissing semiosis as a transformation of historical cultural practices, the diachronic approach seems to ignore the semiotic nature of writing itself as a logical-cognitive process of language. It therefore does not realize that writing as a historical-semiotic event emerges from the cultural semiosis resulting from the complex work of signification – as the Argentinean semiotician Eliseo Verón (1996), who most probably never knew Lotman, has tirelessly researched.

Like all signification, writing emerges from cultural semioses that, in this case, are monuments, systems of textile production, irrigation and transformation of clay not only in ceramics. How can we ignore that the tablets containing written symbols are themselves products of the transformation of clay, without which no pottery would be possible? How can we maintain that such forms of signification are not historical-semiotic? How can we deny they are texts? Recognizing in such events the historicity of all cultural processes as a cultural-textual web is one of the roles of critical metalanguages.

Our analysis also recognizes the uniqueness of Lotman’s visionary thinking. However, the semiotic historicity of remote Latin American cultures is an inclusive history of civilization, not an exclusive one. Lotman is not alone, his thinking echoes Bakhtin’s “great time of cultures”¹⁰ (Bakhtin, 1982a, p. 349), which established signification as an analytical tool in human sciences, an agent in the dialogical conjugation of distinct and remote temporalities, integrating them into the chronotopic movement of the space-time of culture as an “open unity”¹¹ (Bakhtin, 1982a, p. 351) of signification possibilities. After all, “nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will have its resurrection festival. The problem of great time”¹² (Bakhtin, 1982b, p. 93).

The importance given to Lotman’s inquiries is far from being a mere deterministic justification for the flourishing of semiotic thinking in Latin America. We consider it an exercise of a historical-semiotic method guided by critical metalanguage and by the dialogical character of the great time of cultures – which

Navarro not only have clearly assimilated very well, but also used in his inclusive, temporal-spatial semiotic study of a significant corpus of Western culture.

What could be considered an unfavorable situation – the translation of Russian texts into Spanish in peripheral Latin America – thus resulted in a singular and critical semiotic process of elaborating a theoretical translation project capable of redrawing geopolitical borders, historicizing cultural events, turning interactions into dialogues and integrating cultures in a variety of texts, languages and cultural systems.

Navarro's translation process, therefore, is also guided by a strand of cultural thought that goes well beyond the linguistic mastery of the Cuban scholar, whose command of twenty languages enabled him to traverse more than a dozen semiotic universes in the various languages in which he exercised his translating skills. He understood as few that cultural dynamics are enriched by difference, and that translation and untranslatability are the interactive conditions of dialogue and resistance in semiotic spaces of interaction. This means that cultural translation depends on the clashes and conflicts that emerge in experiencing diversity, often crossing geopolitical limits, such as Navarro's work. The center of gravity of the critical exercise shifts, therefore, between linguistic and cultural translation, both inserted in the broad transmission-translation process of someone else's foreign discourse.

TRANSLATION AS IDEOLOGEME OF THE SEMIOTIC FORMATION

The semiotic approach to translation in cultural studies resembles the dialogic formulations about the dynamics of transmitting the words of others, as proposed by Voloshinov (1973). The argument here is that when a discourse leaves its context in order to be transmitted by the other, the discourse itself turns into a *quoted discourse of someone else*. In language theory, becoming another utterance does not alter the character of the quoted discourse as a merely linguistic problem. However, for Voloshinov, the quoted discourse of someone else is a discursive problem to be examined in its dialogical construction, that is, as an active language interaction. The dialogical dynamics involved in quoting someone else's discourse thus reveal a new discursive behavior: while showing an active understanding of someone else's discourse, it also manifests itself as a responsive performance of the language in interaction. Voloshinov (1973) conceptualizes such mutually dialogical reactions with the notion of ideologeme (pp. 152-154). Far from being a merely linguistic transmission from one to another, the ideologeme encompasses the discursive shifts involved in interactive utterances, making them the fundamental property of the dialogical



relation of speech in action. In other words, in an ideologeme meaning emerges from accents and intonations of the enunciative context, producing discourses conscious of their own condition.

We understand cultural translation as being practiced and operating the same way. When linguistic translation is done as a consciousness-forming enterprise, its character of ideologeme becomes prominent and reveals itself as the dialogical action that it is. That is our understanding of how Navarro translates, bringing together all the characteristics of an ideologeme in which interact the different paths of his intellectual displacement.

We already mentioned the cultural ideologeme in which the translation of Russian and Estonian texts into Spanish was part of a semiotic formation program, outside the geo-linguistic hegemonies. Let us now see how this formative work is carried out as a responsive action.

Navarro handles ideologemes without interfering with or modifying the translated texts, but using them to form another strand of thought, another perspective. Several theoretical approaches contributed to Navarro's critical skills. Pierre Bourdieu's critique of Marxist orthodoxy and Edgar Morin's studies of complexity (Colón Rodríguez, 2011) stand out among them. As Raul Colón Rodríguez (2013) understood well, Navarro's translations are a decisive step in building a resistance doxa critical to the hegemonic, national and international doxas (p. 99), as we pointed out above. His critical approach created a welcoming space for publishing, debating and disseminating the translated texts' ideas. This space was the journal *Pensamento Crítico* (Critical Thinking), which did not last long. After its closure, Navarro bounced back and launched *Crerios* magazine in February 1972.

The launching of *Crerios* and the later founding of the *Crerios* Center for Cultural Theory is a history of resistance, beginning with the naming, far from fortuitous, which expresses his understanding of intellectual work.

While Navarro sees the main political goal of intellectuals expressed in a conscious act of education, they should never be guided by a practice of adherence, that is, a practice of transforming an opinion into a decision. He sees such conduct as a clear defense and perpetuation of individual interests. A commitment to causes "should be nothing but critical, since *criticism is the exercise of the criterion*"¹³ (Navarro, 2003, p. 112). Criticism as an exercise of criterion: this is the synthesis of the practice that Navarro himself had adopted to guide his intellectual activity in a revolutionary society.

In a public session in which he presented his point of view on intellectual participation in the public sphere, Navarro (2003) not only questions the "dominant monologism"¹⁴ (p. 113) in opinative, decision-making discourses,

¹³In the original text: "Con medidas incorrectas hemos topado, y ellas plantean, por lo pronto, un problema de conciencia a un intelectual revolucionario, que no lo será de veras cuando aplauda, a sabiendas de que lo es, un error de su revolución, sino cuando haga ver que se trata de un error. Si adhesión, si de veras quiere ser útil, no puede ser sino una adhesión crítica, puesto que *la crítica es el ejercicio del criterio.*"

¹⁴See full passage in the original text in footnote 15.

but also the supposed “resonance of a heteroglossia in political issues”¹⁵ (p. 113), a current trend in the Cuban regime. *Pensamento Crítico* journal had been the target of this monologic opinative adherence disguised as heteroglossia, that is, the target of many opinions, each conveying individual interests (Navarro, 2003, p. 114). In this sense, *Crerios* emerges from the ashes of a quenching, which Navarro had fought to rekindle. Such is the space of resistance created as a response, in whose ideologeme the *criticism* is reorganized according to the *criterion*.

Crerios was a tool of resistance which enabled Navarro’s to fight the radicalism of both the Marxist doxa and the semiotic doxa of Eurocentrism or American pragmatism. It is worth of notice that, in addition to being on the periphery of the great economic powers, Cuba became isolated in Latin America since the Cold War because for becoming a geopolitical extension of the vast Soviet empire in Eastern Europe, which was also isolated.

The texts published by this editorial enterprise of translation and criticism helped Navarro in its commitment to the “ethics of resistance” (Colón Rodríguez, 2013, p. 105). In order to fulfill this commitment, he promoted transculturality and anti-colonialism (Colón Rodríguez, 2011, p. 101), which caused him many problems and reprisals, resulting in heavy burdens.

Two of Navarro’s many confrontations stand out: the challenge to socialist realism for absence of critical reasoning, which led him to opt for the notion of reality reflection; and the challenge to the unique method of inquiry dictated by the party’s orthodox Marxism. Navarro’s response (2009-2010) was the adoption of systemic analysis, which opens itself to the unexpectedness of creation (p. 17). The result was a work strategy in which translation is committed to avoid the blind replication of the historical-dialectical method based on the mere application of categories to demonstrate or prove representations. He thus struggled to dispel misconceptions, formulating arguments to correct distortions, since “many of the renewing ideas that came to us from various Western authors had their origin and inspiration in twentieth-century Russian science”¹⁶ (Navarro, 2009-2010, p. 5). French structuralism, for example, was based on “the achievements of Russian formalism and of the Prague Linguistic Circle, as well as [on] the formulation of the principles of phonology by Nikolai Trubetzkoy and Roman Jakobson in the 1930s” and became a conceptual framework for Westerners. The same can be said of the narratology that, according to Navarro (2009-2010), “never completely detached itself from the legacy of Vladimir Propp, whose *Morphology of the Folktale* appeared in the early year of 1928”¹⁷ (p. 6, emphasis added)¹⁸.

The publication of *Crerios* faced many impediments and interruptions until its closure, leading Navarro to transfer the magazine to Seville, Spain.

¹⁵The context of the ideas reproduced here is based on the following excerpt of the original text: “Para la mayoría de los intelectuales revolucionarios – pero no para la mayoría de los políticos – estaba claro que su papel en la esfera pública debía ser el de una participación crítica. Alrededor de 1968 se hace sentir con cierta fuerza en esa esfera la intervención crítica intelectual desde diversas posiciones políticas: “el relativo monologismo dominante ya por varios años sobre la base de la coincidencia política espontánea y de cierta medida de autocensura en consideración al peligro de la manipulación informativa enemiga, es roto por voces intelectuales aisladas que emprenden cuestionamientos puntuales o amplios del proceso revolucionario, o incluso impugnaciones globales. // Esa heteroglossia en cuestiones políticas resultaba tanto más resonante cuanto que se presentaba sobre el fondo de una intelectualidad nacional pro-revolucionaria que, por paradójico que parezca, no intervenía públicamente en discusiones extraestéticas.

¹⁶In the original text: “Lo que pocos sabían entonces era que muchas de las ideas renovadoras que nos llegaban con unos y otros autores occidentales tenían su origen o su inspiración en la ciencia rusa del siglo XX.”

¹⁷In the original text: “La narratología – a pesar de las diferencias discernibles en sus versiones posteriores (las de Claude Lévi-Strauss, Algirdas J. Greimas, Claude Bremon, Gerard Genette, Eberhard Lammert, Dorrit Cohn, Mieke Bal) – nunca se desvinculó completamente del legado de Vladimir Propp, cuya Morfología del cuento folclórico apareció en una fecha tan temprana como 1928.”



¹⁸The references can be extended to many other concepts, such as the *statement* that Voloshinov addresses in his 1929 book, but which in the West is attributed to the formulation of Emile Benveniste (1958/1966). Not to mention the very concept of ideologeme, which widens the gradient of discursive possibilities in transmission processes, contesting Charles Bally's (1912) supposedly consensual triad of direct discourse, indirect discourse and free indirect discourse.

¹⁹Unfortunately, texts from both the magazine and the *Crerios Cultural Center* are no longer available online.

After the publication of the physical volumes was gradually interrupted, the magazine's website (<http://www.criterios.es/coleccion.htm>)¹⁹ was also hosted in Spain. There Navarro found a welcome when Cuban publishers refused his publications (Colón Rodríguez, 2011, p. 46).

Living this life of exile and relentless resistance, Navarro conceived and carried out the publication of cultural semiotic texts centered on the work of Lotman, the main theorist of the Tartu-Moscow school. The three volumes of *La Semiosfera* bring together many of Lotman's texts currently known and studied in Latin America. Although these texts represent a quoted discourse – in the sense of ideologeme as presented here – Navarro never posed himself as a spokesman for the semiotician, nor did he claim for himself the condition of his chief commentator. Contrary to the wave of commentators, Navarro focused on the research, translation and publication of texts in Spanish, covering publications from 1970 to 2000.

The concept of semiosphere, formulated by Lotman in his later years, was not a random choice by Navarro. It meets at least two fundamental demands of his project: (1) to clarify the theoretical paths leading to Lotman's critical metalanguage in his long investigative trajectory; (2) to explain the formation of the semiotics of culture based on the formulation of semiotic problems consonant with a historical-typological analysis. The result of this critical-theoretical enterprise, which began as a translation project, is a process of adapting the articles published in the school's collective editions to a new environment, in which the core of semiotic thinking can be fully grasped in its complexity and developments.

Navarro's translation effort, along with his publications, was an act of solidarity as great as the work of the authors he translated. Solidarity because he is aware of the ostracism imposed by the Soviet authorities to both Bakhtin and Lotman, and also to their intellectual circles of colleagues and collaborators, which prevented their texts of being published in the USSR.

DIAGRAM OF THE ANALYTICAL PATHS OF *LA SEMIOSFERA*

In the three volumes of *La Semiosfera*, Navarro's translation project, which guided the organization of Lotman's texts, follows the same principle of the translations for *Crerios*: a semiotic-critical formation. The texts should not be randomly chosen, thus, but should follow a pedagogical strategy of immersion in the semiotic thinking of Lotman and in his investigations of semiotic problems. Navarro then organized them according to Lotman's view of cultural texts as a semiotic problem, the basis of the typological

process of semiotization of culture. The result was an intellectual diagram presenting a line of thought that goes from the semiotic concept of text in the semiosphere of culture to the understanding of semiotic space in its historical and cultural developments, in order to encompass systems typologically organized and structured in signs. This theoretical-conceptual construct was based on a specific demand: the need to develop a translation project consistent with the systematization of semiotic thought formulated by Lotman in each text. It does not follow a chronological ordering, but an intellectual one – or rather *architectural*, in the Bakhtinian sense of a structural arrangement of communication between diverse elements, taking into account their dialogical character.

The texts organized and distributed in the three volumes, therefore, make up an *architecture* whose analytical paths enable the investigation of the complex dialogue of cultures, in their most distinct manifestations of languages and forms of communication. The volumes have reached Latin American scholars throughout the continent, also including – it is worth remembering – Portuguese speakers. This widespread semiotic understanding of culture has emerged as a complex knowledge of the relationships between texts, spaces and systems that scholars can only examine as different semiospheres, expressing in their clashes the cultural dynamics in architectural relationships. This *architecture* is relevant not only to the dynamics of the semiosphere, but also to the semiotics of resistance itself.

We will address next Navarro's translation-editorial project in order to elucidate the expression of Lotman's architectural thinking in Navarro's critical metalanguage.

The chronotopic path: the dialogical plot of the texts of culture

The first volume of *La semiosfera: semiótica de la cultura y del texto* (Lotman, 1996; The semiosphere: semiotics of culture and text) focuses on studies of the text. For Lotman, the text constitutes the indelible precedent of culture. In the text resides the core of the very concept of culture; therefore, it occupies a prime position in modern semiotics. Instead of valuing language – especially national languages, a common practice of French semiotics – the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics turned to the texts of culture.

However, it is not a question of merely substituting concepts and refuting well-established conceptual fields. It involves a semiotic approach to the perspectives of different metalanguages, in order to apprehend their articulations as



²⁰Typology of culture: the study of cultural codes as language-generating sign processes in culture. It both qualifies

great typologies. In this sense, if traditionally the notion of text denotes the unity of a linguistic set, in the semiotics of culture, text is the result of semiotized communicative relations, that is, typologized²⁰, present in a great variety of sign systems, and not only in verbal signs. However, it is not a matter of summation, the basis of intertextuality, but of confrontation between different signs that rub against the fullness of their dialogical power. The cultural concept of text – as a historical and cultural fabric weaved in dialogically articulated movements – is thus expanded and can be apprehended in the full extent of its relational space, which Lotman calls “semiosphere.” Viewed as a fabric woven in the dynamics of cultural interactions, the text takes to a new dimension the role of the historical-typological relations themselves in their different semiotizations, evidencing their chronotopic character.

The synthesis outlined in the previous paragraph shows our understanding of the architectural framework of Lotman’s studies collected in the first volume of *La Semiosfera*, which is also the title of the study that very appropriately opens the collection. Although it was written in his later years, when Lotman’s investigations had already lead him from the dynamics of cultural texts (and of culture as text) to a historical approach aimed at culturology studies, this text establishes the scientific field devised to assess the historical character of the semiotic approach to culture in the light of dialogical relations.

This initial text addresses a structural and systemic construct related to current cultural productions and also to the practices of culture’s mythological system and informational memory²¹. The investigation of these topics deals with one of the fundamental attributes of the text: the tensioning of the constituents of its structural organization. The text has the power to define culture not only because it is a unity, but also because it encompasses relations that are eminently dialogical and, therefore, capable to face the conflicting elements which confront each other from different points of view.

²¹Informational memory is a concept arising from the typological orientation of the history of culture in which different temporalities are configured in cultural spaces. In this sense, it corresponds to cultural information, that is, information that circulates in the flow of interactive relationships at different levels, encompassing beings that inhabit the world in different spatio-temporal contexts.

The typological path: the transformation of information into text

If *text* is the central concept in defining the semiotic space of the semiosphere, as is surmised from reading the first volume’s studies, *information* is central to the studies translated for the second volume of *La semiosfera: Semiótica de la cultura, del texto, de la conducta e del espacio* (Lotman, 1998a). Lotman examine in this second volume the dynamics of semiotic spaces, where the transformation of information into cultural signs takes place.

The study of *information* had a marked impact not only on the semiotics of culture, but also on the understanding of the text as a form of language, thus providing a definition for culture itself: “culture is information” (Lotman, 1979, p. 32). The semiotic foundation of the concept of information lies in its capacity for storage, transmission and creation achieved through cultural codes understood as syntheses of the historical development of cultures. In this sense, the study of information is crucial to understand the workings of cultural semiosis – something that for Lotman is only possible through typology. The object of study can be approached through typology, which Lotman (1979) defines as

the description of the main types of cultural codes on the basis of which the languages of cultures are formed, the description of their comparative characteristics, the determination of the universals of human cultures and, as a result, the construction of a single system of the typological characteristics of the main codes and of the universal properties of the general structure of the “culture of humanity.” (p. 33)

The role of typology in the study of culture comes down to the categorization of codes as distinctive units capable of providing a translation when in contact with another code, thus generating new information. However, instead of focusing on what is predominant, typology reveals correlations. In a fundamental article in the second volume, Lotman (1998b) investigates how typology helps to understand not only how a culture is formed and asserts itself as such, but also how it interacts with and distinguishes itself from other cultures (pp. 95-97). Identity, difference and diversity constitute a semiotic problem of cultural typology.

Of course, the role of information theory in the constitution of the Tartu-Moscow school’s semiotics of culture cannot be ignored. In the second volume, Navarro collects studies presenting *information* as an articulation of basic elements, as the foundation of any communicative process, since information is the basis of any communication activity. Unlike information theory, which understands transmission as a homogeneous flow, Lotman observed that from a culture’s perspective, particularly human culture, the information flow is heterogeneous, because it is naturally based on an “information exchange.” Transformation is thus revealed as an intrinsic characteristic of this informational process. Lotman argues that changes in an information exchange process are similar to an intelligent processing mechanism. In this sense, information exchange in cultures is an intelligent mechanism, organized as memory. Therefore, there is three elements



involved in the process of transforming information into text: mind – memory – text. The studies in the second volume discuss the unfolding of this transformative triadic relationship.

Navarro wisely chose a study of the configuration of the culture’s mind as the second volume’s first text, which addresses the intelligent processes of self-regulation, modeling, translation, metalanguage and engendering of new information as the mechanisms that make the text a thinking device of culture. The studies in this volume suggest a path for investigating how the culture’s mind manifests itself as a dynamic process in which contingencies have an impact on the linear development of history. A study of the conventionality of art – written in collaboration with Boris Ouspenski – was included in the volume to confront the conventional, predictable character of history.

The concept of semiotic modeling²² plays a fundamental role in these studies because it reveals the dynamics of all cultural semiotization and of the historical semiosis itself. This concept is crucial, as Lotman showed in the closing text of the volume with his examination of the controversy of the predictable and the unpredictable in history. He dedicated the last text to Clio, the Greek muse of history and creativity. Lotman proposed in this study a conception of history that does not evade facing its own conflicts, which does not follow a straight line, requiring constant choices and remaking of paths.

The path of cultural modelings

Modeling has become a concept as potent as it is controversial. It was developed to address the process of transforming information into text and also to assess the translational character of this process, when codes are generated from other codes. The modeling of cultural languages generates new information.

Lotman (2000) views modeling as not conditioned by language. To ensure a coherent understanding of the text, modeling involves the signification of semiosis, which takes place in both discrete and continuous signs²³ when iconic qualities depend much more on “correspondence spaces”²⁴ (p. 11) than on discrete sign representation. These issues are addressed in the essays of the third volume of *La semiosfera: semiótica de las artes y de la cultura* (Lotman, 2000). In this volume’s opening article, Lotman asks himself: “Can there be a sign system without signs?”²⁵ (p. 9) – a question that he recognizes as absurd but necessary because semiotic analysis, dominated by verbal language, finds it very difficult to consider painting, music, cinema, landscape and space itself as sign systems, not much different from the verbal system. These are signs

²²The concepts of modeling (verb), modeling (noun), modeling system (respectively “modelirovanie, modelirovat, molgerujusij” [моделирование, моделировать, моделирующий систем] were based on the concept of simulation as practiced in the field of computer data processing; they mean, thus, “production of new information” and not modeling, as in a linguistic translation that ignores its conceptual and scientific origin.

²³Discrete signs are those that may be decomposed into units (sounds, letters, dashes); continuous signs are not susceptible to any decomposition (painting, photography, space).

²⁴In the original, this conception consists of the following reasoning: “Un resultado de la existencia del código es un mínimo ‘espacio de correspondencia’, por debajo del cual el isomorfismo ya no existe. Así, en un cuadro de un impresionista se establece un isomorfismo del objeto a la representación, pero no de una parte del objeto a una pincelada.”

²⁵In the original text: “¿Puede existir un sistema signico sin signos?”

created in pre- or extra-semiotic spaces bordering on allosemiotic²⁶ spaces, where non-text and non-culture dominate.

Navarro collected in this volume studies of sign systems focusing on the cultural modeling of iconic languages structured by continuous codes. They are not treated as nonverbal, but have their constituents categorized by the semioses of distinct codes specific to historical-cultural systems. The modeling approach thus reveals the process of transformation that generates new information, expressed in the codes of a new language. Lotman investigates texts focusing on different artistic objects: myth, portrait, painting, perspective, theatrical scene, architecture, cinema, puppets and space itself. Each of them is analyzed as an artistic language construct, whose codes are the result of historical and cultural modeling.

The book's final article is no less significant. Lotman (2000) examines the dynamics of culture not only as transformation of information into text, but also questioning a view of cultural dynamism starting from a "semiotic zero"²⁷, which proposes a historical process organized from a "zero state"²⁸ of beasts, barbarians, savages (p. 194). From a culturological perspective, the dynamics of historical processes is determined by a "conflict between repetition and the internal dynamics of forms of conduct"²⁹ (p. 196), which is unpredictable. The unfolding and implications of unpredictability in culture, triggering explosive processes, are the themes not only of this third volume, but also of the final study of Lotman, which addresses the complexity of multiple languages and the unpredictable emergence of the new. This is a very significant article, since it was published a year before his death in 1992.

The notion of a dynamics between cultural systems arising from interactions also guides Navarro's editorial project in the organization of the *La Semiosfera* trilogy. At the end of the third volume, the translator-editor publishes an index in which translated and published texts are presented chronologically from 1968 to 1993, covering the whole arc of Lotman's life. With the collaboration of Manuel Cáceres and Liubov N. Kiseliova, Lotman's bibliographical references are presented year by year, including 1,120 titles published in different languages between 1949 and 2000.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

If translation has at its core the interactions between semiotic systems of culture, Navarro became a disseminator and, above all, a pioneer of a critical theoretical formation who does not avoid the challenges of unpredictability,

²⁶ Allo-semiotic designates the non-semiotic, according to the etymology in which in Greek *allo-* means the other, the different, the strange, to be considered even if hypothetically.

²⁷ See the full reasoning in the original text reproduced in footnote 29.

²⁸ In the original text: "Una de semejantes convenciones es la suposición de que en los procesos dinámicos existe un punto inicial, un cero convencional: se establece un 'estado cero' que nunca nos es dado en la realidad empírica. Así, construimos el modelo de la dinámica de la cultura a partir del punto del 'cero semiótico', cuyo lugar coincide con el mundo animal (esto último a pesar de los datos de la ya muy desarrollada zoosemiótica)."

²⁹ In the original text: "El proceso histórico que vino a relevar al cíclico condujo a la formación de un constante conflicto entre la repetición y la dinámica interna de las formas de la conducta."



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following Lotman's analyzes of the semiotics of culture's dynamics in its historical contingencies.

From Lotman's theoretical perspective, which we have learned with Navarro's critical texts, the primary aim of resistance semiotics would be to understand the unpredictability of culture. It is no coincidence that the Tartu-Moscow semioticians have dealt with the semiotic interaction mechanisms enabling sign systems to perform inter- and trans-cultural modeling and translation, and even showed that untranslatability can be treated semiotically. However, such an understanding demands a theoretical and conceptual formation to which Navarro's translations are an invaluable contribution.

Resistance as seen from the perspective of the possible relations between convergent and divergent systems – or according to Lotman, of the dialogue between differences – situates the semiotic experience in interactive spaces that are dynamic as well. The semiotic space becomes the privileged place of operation, transformation and workings of sign systems, even though semioticians have found in the concept of text a web emblematic of the relations between the language systems of culture. The text of culture is nothing other but the locus where the dynamics of semiotic mechanisms and of struggle, conflict and resistance are processed; a space located at the frontier of the dialogue between cultures.

As we sought to examine throughout this essay, not only did we read Lotman thanks to Navarro's translations, but Lotman's own thought was organized following the fundamental processes by which the systems of culture manifest themselves as ideologemes in historically delimited doxa. His translations are the basis of a political act aimed at the dissemination of an approach capable of fostering a theoretical and aesthetic creation. Evidently, many respected and fundamental Western theorists have approached semiosis as a historical-political and cultural act. Navarro, based on Russian theories, established the theoretical discourses of peripheral spaces. Our aim in this paper was to present the efforts of great theorists in their struggle to understand cultures in the semiosphere of a geopolitically divided world.

By making available to scholars who do not speak Estonian and Russian an extensive cultural semiotics literature, Navarro opened an alternative approach for semiotic studies in Latin America. Only Bakhtin and his circle have had their works translated into Portuguese since the late 1970s. The Tartu-Moscow semioticians have had only one book translated into Portuguese and edited by the late Boris Schnaiderman: *Semiótica Russa* (Russian Semiotics), published in 1979. Brazilians scholars have read Lotman's semiotics of culture thanks to Navarro's Spanish translations. Thus our effort

to expose in this paper the Brazilian theoretical investigations enabled by the editorial and intellectual project of Desiderio Navarro. His importance will remain unparalleled, but his theoretical approach is wide open to further investigations.

We are aware of presenting here only certain aspects of *Criterios'* editorial project, focused on Eastern European semiotics in dialogue with the West. However, it was meant to show our appreciation of a theoretical-critical approach that presents to the world a historical discourse greatly relevant to this global space of dialogue between cultures. If Navarro did it through translation, it is because he was aware that thus the particularities of one culture could be made intelligible to another – as we have learned from Sodré (2017, p. 23). **M**

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