

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE “VOCABULARY” AND THE “GRAMMAR” OF A SPATIAL SEMIOLOGICAL STRUCTURE

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Abstract

For linguists, the investigation of gardens from a semiotical point of view, involves a very complex and challenging research material. The research may be conducted in many directions, incorporating numerous topics related to gardens. Gardens may be regarded as “spatial entities” organized by man, endowed with a high semiotic potential. Gardens may be considered “alive cultural phenomena” undergoing a continuous transformation and organization due to the fact that gardens’ identity is represented by nature and art. Gardens may be investigated and treated as “texts” allowing us to analyze the production of significance/meaning, pointing out the communicative effects within any spatial semiological entity. Our research aimed to examine the garden as a “text”, defining its “vocabulary” - its constitutive natural and artificial elements, and the “grammar” - the rules of composition and the manner the constitutive elements are put together or joined, corresponding to the aesthetic or utilitarian function typical of any spatial semiological structure.

Key words: cultural text, spatial semiological entity

Specialized literature has demonstrated that in the area of Semiotics of Culture we witness a transfer of conventional methods which have been developed and applied to a certain cultural phenomenon to other domains, totally different and/or more extensive. Expressing itself by “texts”, Culture has the capacity of conversion or transfer of discourse from one language into another. Given these conditions, the “text” has become a methodological tool for Semiotics of Culture. The “texts” are not only literary. From a semiotic perspective, any physical structure meant to embody ideas may become a “text” and any “text” has/ or is characterized by a special internal organization. Based on the fact that both the “text” and the “space” are defined by a certain construction, made up of different elements arranged in an orderly manner, sharing specific traits, our research aimed to examine the garden - this alive cultural phenomenon, as a “text”, exhibiting a specific “vocabulary” and “grammar”

MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the humanities, different fields of study concern themselves with different forms of *texts*. Literary theorists, for example, focus primarily on literary texts—novels, essays, stories, and poems. Legal scholars focus on legal texts such as laws, contracts and regulations. The idea of what constitutes a text has evolved over time. In recent

years, the dynamics of technology - especially social media - have expanded the notion of the text to include symbols such as emoticons. The concept of the *text* is not a stable one. It is always changing as the technologies for publishing and disseminating texts evolve. In the past, texts were usually presented as printed matter in bound volumes such as pamphlets or books. Today, however, people are more likely to encounter texts in digital space. Specialised literature has shown that the study of Semiotics has originated in a literary or linguistic context and has been expanding in a number of directions since the beginning of the 20th century.

The essential breakthrough of Semiotics was to take linguistics as a model and apply linguistic concepts to other non-linguistic fields or “phenomena-texts” (for example a visual image) and not to language itself. The language, the text, the structure, the model, the system of modelling have represented the major notions and concepts in the studies of the Tartu semioticians till 1973, when the Semiotics of Culture was born.

In the first half of the 90’s, it was noticed a change of the linguistic concerns in the semiotical publications of the time, followed by a more and more marked attraction towards a semiotical approach of some new non-linguistic disciplines including biology among many others. The School of Semiotics from Tartu hasn’t got an unique methodological approach, but concrete and different methodological patterns focused on a way of thinking directed, on the one hand on the

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understanding of the character of *structure* and system of the object under study, and, on the other hand, on the search of several methods for the semiotical description of different languages from non-linguistic fields.

No treatment of Culture can, nowadays, escape the propositions of the Tartu-Moscow school of Semiotics about the *textual nature* of cultural phenomena. According to this school, textual features can be recognised in almost all *spatial representations* (gardens included) both in terms of artefacts and mentifacts.

Within Cultural Semiotics the concept of *text* has been defined and redefined many times. The diverse semiotic and communicative functions of text in culture and in cultural tradition – for example, as a container, a generator or a transmitter of information have made the position of the text relatively fluid on the semiotic metalevel. The text possesses a beginning, an end and a definite inner organisation and this allows, along with other features, the creation of a typology necessary for an adequate deciphering of texts (Lotman I.M., 1974). The three main features or aspects of the text, which have been described by Lotman using the terms "expressed", "bordered", and "structured" come together by virtue of a general property of the different dimensions of the text: their confined or circumscribed nature.

Any garden viewed as a semiotic spatial representation, exhibits *textual* and *cultural* characteristics and may be considered "a cumulative deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving". There is no doubt that all these aspects are to be found in one of the numerous definitions given for Culture (definition available on line at: <https://www.tamu.edu/faculty/choudhury/culture.>)

Seeing gardens as *text* is a way of revealing the meaning-making principles that have shaped garden construction the world over, and thus provides a way to understand the relationship of garden design to the social, philosophical and cultural discourses and traditions which give it meaning. All *sign systems* operate in physical and *semiotic space*, at the same time all space, be it physical or conceptual, is *semiotised* via *sign systems* at several levels of modelling. Culture is located in a certain physical environment, and artefacts are embedded in environment, shaping the later in unique ways that have given reason for the description of the planet in terms of culture areas (Pânzaru O., 2010)

Gardens have been named by Sebeok Thomas A., (2002) as "major semiosic non-verbal constructions" They are endowed with a special "vocabulary" and "grammar" - the heterogenous elements connected to each other through various relationships to create a significant whole with a

complex semiotic potential. In most gardens and parks, the "alive part" represented by plants, and the "inanimate part" made up of ornamental elements and arrangements are harmoniously combined in such a way as to suit utilitarian and aesthetic functions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For many people, the word *vocabulary* is primarily associated with the number of words that a person knows. But the word has many shades of meaning.

As it is shown in Merriam-Webster on line Dictionary, vocabulary may indeed refer to the collection of words known by an individual or by a large group of people. It may also signify the body of specialized terms in a field of study or activity ("the vocabulary of science"). It may designate a physical object, such as a book, in which a collection of words is defined or explained. And it may name things other than words, such as "a list or collection of terms or codes available for use," "a set or list of nonverbal symbols" and "a set of expressive forms used in an art" (as in "the vocabulary of dance).

This last part of the "vocabulary" definition may be applied to the constitutive elements of any garden – be they natural or artificial, as a "set of expressive forms", created by people, which are selected, arranged, combined and ordered according to some rules to form a coherent whole, producing a unity in diversity – the attribute or the defining characteristic of any semiotic spatial entity (Pânzaru O., 2018)

When speaking about the "vocabulary" of most gardens, we have in view a combination of natural and constructed elements, although even very "natural" gardens are always an inherently artificial creation. Natural elements present in a garden principally comprise flora, fauna, soil, water, air and light.

Constructed elements include paths, patios, decking, sculptures, systems for drainage, lights and buildings, but also living constructions such as flower beds, ponds and lawn.

This "vocabulary" or collection of elements is involved in different levels of communication, starting from biological communication up to cultural symbolism, from personal cognition up to social identities, enabling a better understanding of the garden's status as a *text*, related to the multitude of social, religious, philosophical, and cultural discourses (Pânzaru O., 2010).

Specialised literature shows that any *text* may be divided into meaningful units such as words, sentences, or topics. As regards the "grammar" of the garden we have in view the

system of rules or principles that define its *structure*: the classes of words – the constitutive elements, their inflections - the arrangements or special combinations and their functions – utilitarian and aesthetic. Usually every active sentence starts with the subject, or the "doer", the verb (what's being done) and an object (the receiver of the action). In the case of the garden the "doer" is represented by the gardener, "the verb" by gardener's continuous non-interrupted activity, as he projects and designs the garden, but also of the nature's involvement in that design. The "object", that is the receiver of the action, is represented by the viewer, the person who visits or admires that garden.

Kalevi Kull in his scientific work, *Semiotic ecology: different natures in the semiosphere*, (1998) has stated that when people apply certain models, or certain general linguistic patterns upon nature "we have in view the building of second nature". This can be easily demonstrated when considering the notions used to describe gardens. The rules of "order" can be seen as belonging to and coming from certain traditions of gardening schools. However, these are probably something much deeper, since regardless of the particular school, the rules always apply idealised forms to nature. They originate from the discretized descriptions of nature, from the linguistic nature, as limited by the general mechanisms of perception and operation.

Each element from a garden usually holds an individual symbolic content. This is why it is not enough to understand the garden itself as simply a combination of parts. The aesthetic principles are embedded in the spiritual and intellectual experience of the people who have designed them. Gardens are spatial entities where culture and nature combine to form a single entity, a place where different cultures can co-exist.

The garden may be considered a spatial structure or a "stage" which facilitates a dialogue between nature and culture, in other words a place of communication between people and nature, or humanity and universe, where art, science, and nature become most intimately interlocked.

The specific organization of the garden space within its natural environment contributes to a different aura for each garden. In this way, the particular implementation of the elements contributes to a unique experience for each visitor. The design of the physical setting of the garden is a continuous process, a non-interrupted human intentional *semiosis*, a permanent search of the best expression, of that function or complex of functions which are best adapted to the natural and artificial elements of the environment.

According to the semiotic theory, *semiosis* is any form of activity, conduct, or process that involves signs, including the production of *meaning*. In other words, *semiosis* is a sign process. Thus, the space of the garden with its "vocabulary" and "grammar" becomes a *sign*, which assumes the form of the *text*, producing meaning, expressing ideas, experiences, concepts, traditions, philosophical and religious ideals which bring about an interpretative approach in the mind of that or those persons watching or admiring it.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of our research was to analyse the gardens as *cultural* and *textual* phenomena, endowed with a specific "vocabulary" and "grammar".

The particular elements of any garden, that is its "vocabulary" and its "grammar", namely the arrangements or parts of the garden that have been assembled and connected to form a coherent, meaningful whole, provide that unity in diversity which is present in almost any major semiotic non-verbal construction.

Generally speaking, gardens have been created by people transforming principally unmodified environmental objects into *signs* and organizing these into *texts*, which by means of their "vocabulary" and "grammar" have represented social meanings materially encoded. The art of gardening is strongly multidimensional in its *semiotic organizing principles* and *communicative* purposes. The garden communicates using natural materials which are selected for their unique semiotic potentialities and allow the realization of particular *textual meanings*. It utilizes a restricted set of *semiotic materials* and modes to achieve precise *communicative* effects. Through their combination and collaboration, these "semiotic" materials and meaning making principles effectively convey an array of different meanings concurrently.

While communication has generally been considered mainly a linguistic phenomenon, in practice communication involves *meanings*, that is "inscriptions" carried through different material forms that are brought together and organized in various combinations.

Gardens represent a place of communication between people and nature, or humanity and universe, where art, science, and nature become most intimately interlocked. Many mechanisms and signs are involved in these processes of communication, frequently reflecting the result of the interaction between biological and cultural communication.

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