

I have, on several occasions, in publications and in conferences, highlighted the connection between different disciplines, namely between literature, art history, archeology, library and information science, archival science, music history and cultural heritage preservation. These disciplines are all brought together by the reading and interpretation of specific signs. The discipline that studies signs, as is well-known, is semiotics, which derives from the Greek σημείον, meaning “sign” and τέχνη, meaning “art”.

Since culture is, moreover, a phenomenon of promotion and communication, and all communication takes place through the use of signs, it can also be said that the semiotic nature of culture, in this particular case, refers to the semiotics of visual art: a discipline that deals with studying the meaning of a visual work of art.

The correlation between signs and meaning and, in particular between material and historical signs, is also found in the “preservation of cultural heritage”.

This is why then, there is a need for the scholar’s education and international experience in “Semiotics and General Theory of Art” which have resulted in the following scientific contribution. The process forming the image, together with the psychology of perception, be it through sound or movement, as in the expression of a line, rightly complements those aspects of an expressive order in referring to the interdisciplinarity of the Journal and in accordance with the holistic value of the cultural artifact.

Editor-in-Chief

THE ORIGINS OF ART

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1. Introduction

This paper presents a particular line of thought regarding the origins of artistic activities, in particular, art.

The argument remains one of the “eternal questions”, and is perceived as being “eternal”, due to the fact that in all social and scientific activities the same issues manifest themselves, reappearing however in different contexts and presenting new circumstances and new features.

Over the last three decades of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century, these new qualitative circumstances were conditioned by the development and consolidation of a new field in art history, called art semiotics, the science of signs, a naturally occurring feature in art.

At that time, what emerged in the field of humanities, was an understanding of the unifying and meaningful character of social activity, unified by the fact that only signs constituting semiotic systems could be considered unifying conveyors of information on cultural issues. Signs contain, preserve and transmit to future generations, social semantic information, in other words, knowledge.

Historically and objectively, signs in art are grouped together in the semiotic systems of the applied and non-applied arts.

The non-applied arts are those that consider the abstract model of human relationship with the surrounding world, and takes shape in human thought. To this kind of art belong ‘dance’ which represents human behaviour, music which represents the dynamic framework of the world, the figurative arts (including sculpture and decorative arts) which represent the world and the individual in a well-defined fixed moment in time.

The applied arts (i.e. practical, “for embellishment”) are those used to create the artificial world of objects around people, organizing and differentiating the material environment of their lives. They are represented by architecture (creation of an artificial environment for human life), and artistic forms of household goods and clothes (man’s self-appellation). The applied arts are characterized by the dualism of their nature because they combine material and constructive aspects with aesthetics.

In this paper we will look at the non-applied arts, in which the signs are non-verbal means that serve to express human thought in various forms. They are represented

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in societies by the signs of dance (the signs of man's active behavior are the conventional non-verbal means of the idea of the relationship "man-man"), the signs of music (the intonations are the conventional non-verbal means of the idea of the relationship "man-universe"), the signs of images (the lines are the non-verbal means of the idea of the relationship with the space of the objective world around him). Thus the non-applied arts provide knowledge of man's existence, so he understands his position in the objective world of sounds and makes him aware of the intentions and moments of his behavior in the environment of creatures similar to himself.

The nature of signs from the non-applied arts is based on imitation that endows them with ample possibility of expressing meaning, and charges them with strong spiritual impulses.

Mimicry of the sign is visuality, imitation in the form that yields itself to the material of the sign.

The philosophers of ancient Greece interpreted this idea in a broad sense, not simply re-copying it but artistically reproducing reality. Thus Plato treated mimesis as a kind of creation. Aristotle used this word and the concept within it, in the sense of imitating, the result of which is an artistic reproduction of the imitated object. Even today, we distinguish between the "mere imitation of existing reality" and the "infinite field of created reality".

By dint of the imitative nature of the sign thus formed, the nature of the signs of the non-applied arts is twofold: the figurative and expressive origins converge in it, conditioned by the values of the referents of such signs. Unlike in the applied arts, where the subject coexists with its sign, as the form of the sign and as the utilitarian quality of the object itself, in the non-applied arts the position of the signs and their referents in time and space do not coincide, they are separate: the signs are placed in time and space, separately from their referents. This separation explains two fundamental characteristics of the nature of the arts in question: signs in non-applied arts can completely lack the referential correlation expressed, consequently the referent of such signs is not required in relation to the object, but undoubtedly contains the thought of the object; therefore signs in the non-applied arts are symbolic; the remoteness of the referent necessarily activates the mechanisms of memory, creating the phenomenon of memorization which is conditioned and conditions the dualism of the nature of the signs in non-applied arts.

We will now examine the origins of the non-applied arts, in sequence.

2. The origins of the non-applied arts

Our ancestors observed the diversity of the world around them with a watchful eye, including the animals and their uses. Firstly, the variety of animals in the world recorded in cave paintings was useful to early men as a way of studying them (before hunting a beast it was necessary to know what it looked like and what threats it might represent); the aim was one of self-preservation, to protect family members and be able to provide sustenance for them and himself. In this case, the primary function of what we call "art" is that of protection. Secondly, iconographic representation served as a "visual reminder", a visual aid to educate future generations of hunters. Thirdly, anthropomorphic images represented a means of studying and learning about where an individual's position was in the world that surrounded them; the appearance of images

with objects from nature, domestic life, numerological signs and symbols testify to the fact that our ancestors learned to use and handle raw materials. The initial function of images was therefore one of protection, education and cognition.

Let us reason further. The visual means used to express the shape of an object, the only means to create any type of image is a line. It is the line that actually makes it possible to fix the figurative content that is enclosed in the movement of the hand along the surface of the depicted object. The line has become the means to “record” and consolidate the movement simulated and repeated in the human conscience. Made on a figurative surface, the line is a sign of the image, the basis of its signification that is the characteristic definition of the entire form of the object. A line is therefore the basis for figurative activity, its prime element (Figure 1-2).

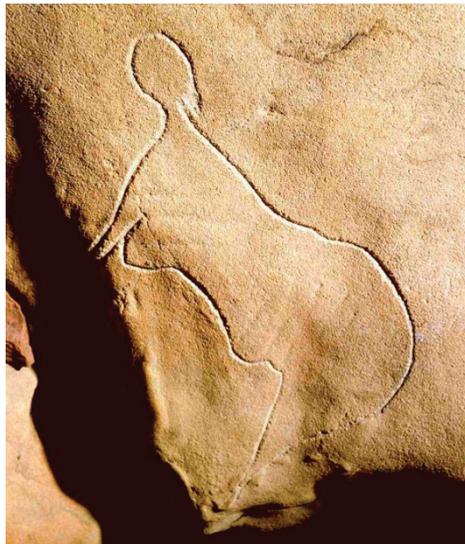


Figure 1. Venus, 28-22 thousand years BC. Cussac Cave (Grotte de Cussac), Dordogne, France.



Figure 2. Anna Akhmatova., Drawing by Amedeo Modigliani. 1905.

The figurative image was exported to the world outside, beyond the subjective limits of individual perception. The beginning of the figurative representation of objects from the outside world appeared in the form of a new objective reality of the surrounding world, which can be defined as a secondary reality.

3. Figurative and expressive result of the line in the process of image formation

In the visual arts, defining “recorded” movement can only be done by means of a line.

By transmitting and strengthening the character of the movement it has been possible to express all objects in the visible world. It is conditioned by the dualism of the nature of the line itself. On the one hand, a line is obtained with a movement along the figurative surface with which either a substance or an instrument leaves a material trace of the movement on the outer surface of the other. Hence, the line is the track of the movement made on the surface. We shall call this the figurative result.

On the other hand, the internalized memorized movement connected with inner emotions arising from the movement on the surface of the chosen object (determined by its curvature), by moving one’s hand with a substance or an instrument that leaves a track/trail along the figurative surface, was also how early humans obtained a line, but as the track/trail of another movement that is memorized produced in the memory. A line that reproduces the thought-of movement on the surface of the object and defined as a recollection. We shall call this the expressive result. The nature of the sign of the line brings together its figurative and expressive origins.

4. The psychology of perception

Historically, the line, as a prime element of the sign, is the only reliable means of expressing, recording, preserving and later transmitting to other generations the memorized movement.

Everything that was common or similar in the cave paintings discovered in various regions was conditioned by the referent of the images’ signs, while everything that was different was conditioned by the style of the images produced, in which attitude was always expressed with respect to what was illustrated as the particularity of the perception of the image of the object; the modes of realizing the thought-of content in the materials conditioned them and gave rise to the stylistic efforts of ancient authors.

Instead, the shape of the depicted object in the cave paintings became one of the clues that guided early humans towards the idea of space in the environment that surrounded them. The shape characterized the object in its entirety, as it was a key component of the visual world. Thus, the form of mimicry too, applied to the material of the signs of the image, was defined by the nature of the referents of these signs, thus by the fullness of the spatial environment and the objects around people.

During the process of forming the figurative image of nature (object) in the drawing, sculpture, etc., the representation of the model itself (object) is necessarily correlated with the depicted object (modeled), given that they are perceived as two different things. But this correlation is not established between our subjective image of the object and the object itself, between the imagined reality of the drawing and the drawing

itself, between the perception of one's own drawing and the drawing itself. That said, it is exactly the understanding of this correlation that holds the key to the explanation of the nature of figurative art.

Let us examine one straightforward example. A person's movement along any obstacle is subject to its geometry; they resemble it, as if carrying their own definition by following the line of movement itself. Thus the principal aspect in this figurative activity, as it is the initial active process of perception, is that activating the idea of space of the objective world (object) and establishing the corresponding expressive form of the imagined reality, is: first of all, a collateral and unexpected result, early humans created the expressive form of the idea of space aspiring to a different result and generally aiming at utilitarian goals. A secondary and unexpected result of the activity was the image of the objective form of the hand-made animal on the surface; this fact is considered to be the beginning of the history of figurative art; secondly, stabilizing form is not done to search for methods to formally express the idea of space, but to produce utilitarian objectives, created not from external visual contemplation, but from those opportunities to act provided by the object itself, from the type of possible operations which allow the individual to come into contact with the objective reality (the objective part of reality). These actions and these types of operations, "suggested" in some ways by the object itself, are defined by the dimensional properties of the object.

The figurative activity initially emerges as an attempt to fix, by means of sign formation in the image, actions performed in space by an individual that are connected with the outer surface of the objects to be perceived.

This qualitative aspect of the surrounding world which is the idea of space, man did not and does not perceive as a separate object (of perception). In the retrospective of time when one thinks of the appearance of figurative art, it is difficult to imagine a person consciously seeking the most virtuous way to express this quality. It is more correct to assume that before the concept of space stabilized itself man, no less than other beings that moved, attempted to exploit the opportunities offered by this quality.

Dimensionality is primarily the ability to move in the broadest sense of the term.

Dimensionality enabled us then, and still enables us today, to physically change position, the point of observation, to choose a different path to go from one place to another. Furthermore, aiming at utilitarian objectives, individuals moved themselves and objects too, they changed their position, took them apart, deformed them, gave them a different shape. In manipulating the objective surroundings in the same way our ancestors did thousands of years ago, modern people do not reflect on the dimensional aspect and size and so are unaware of the forms they persistently create without contemplating it in almost all their actions, which follow very different objectives.

In other words, with representations taken from nature, two steps are covered: first, the object "initiates" the corresponding perceivable activity, with this activity subsequently creating the subjective illustrated product, which is the idea of the shape of the object.

Figurative activity thus becomes a part of the psychology of perception with its special function; it is this function of the positioning of the subject in the objective activity which is transformed into the subjective product (illustrated).

Initially then, figurative activity takes the form of actions that are external and operations with objects of perception that are external in the case of people, which are the objects found in the surrounding environment. Afterwards, these operations, actions, processes are transformed into operations of inner reflection which are our inner emo-

tions regarding the object, the impressions left by the object (by its qualities, particularly the impressions of the curvature of the external surfaces). This is how the thought-of models of movement, connected to the illustrated model, are created. The creation of such thought patterns is the main condition of the transformation dynamics of the design of the objective content (the internal phase of visual language) in the formal design, in the design of the sensitive tissue of the figurative image (the external phase of the visual language). Psychology defines these phenomena with the idea of internalisation, whereas philosophy defines them with the term denomination, the creation of the word. Within the field of visual perception are found primary names, whereas in the field of figurative activities are derived names composed on the basis of primary ones.

This reciprocal double passage from the outside (external activity directed towards the object) to the inside (inner emotion, the impressions made by this activity) and the passage from the inside (impressions seen as the motivation for the figurative activity) to the new external action, this time however, employing tools and materials of the sign formed in the available image, creates the new external product that is the hand-made image (chirographic) of the shape of the observed object.

The 'inner product' that has been created represents the programme for new external actions, being the basis of ideas (the design of the objective content in the creation of the image) it contains what is to be expressed in the new figurative design that has at this point, already taken on a figurative form. In other words, the design of the content of the imagined reality contains within itself the expressive objective of the creation of the new formal plan. This formal design is the representation of the form of the object on the surface. This is the modelling principle in figurative activity.

5. The perception and reproduction of sound: the development of music

Early humans listened carefully to the sounds of nature: anything could represent a source of sound for them, including everything as a whole that was part of the auditory environment.

In memorising what made sounds and what the sounds were, people became familiar with their environment, preserving with camouflaging stabilisation this experience of sound perception of the world of objects and space for their own species and their descendants.

Initially it was necessary to define tribal territories and protect them as well as predicting a change in the weather (e.g. with the sigh, groan and whistle of the wind, the whispering of the leaves, changes in the sound pattern of birds and insects), to find reserves of water (with the lapping of the current of the river, waterfall and sea-waves), and consequently stock up on fish, birds and animals.

The sounds of nature not only guided man in the macrocosm, but also in certain areas of his practical objective tasks. Thanks to the analytical activity of his five senses and his mind, man shaped his knowledge of sound as a means of learning about the world.

In memorising what made sounds and what the sounds were, people imitated (an intentional action) the sounds of nature, of activities that were objective and related to work, of the instinctive passages of the voice (corresponding to different moods, such as joy, sorrow, laughter, crying, etc.) in a form that endowed the material with musical signs, resulting in the figurative element of imitation.

That said, in reproducing the sounds of objects and space from the environment that humans could hear or had heard, they then produced the sounds as echoes of remembered sounds and reproduced them from memory. The intention of imitating the involuntary passages of the voice, presumably led our ancestors to discovering the first musical means of expression and through imitation, seen as being the symbolic reproduction of the sound and musical mimesis of the object, to obtain the expressive result. It would seem that the intensity of musical sounds emerged from the intensity associated with the sounds of nature and the surrounding world; they appeared as a result of specific natural phenomena, such as the flow of water over stones, the rustling of the leaves in the wind, the howling of the storm, with thunder and lightning, the eruption of a volcano, birdsong, the roar of beasts, and so on. This combination of the figurative and the expressive later influenced the development of musical composition.

In the early stages of anthropogenesis the individual depended upon nature for its pacifying “pleasant” manifestations, but was also influenced by those that were destructive. The frightening manifestations of the natural elements were usually accompanied by a particular type of sound, whereas those of a reassuring, conciliatory nature were accompanied by sounds of a different kind. With imagination conditioned by the experience of retrospective sound and music, it can be assumed that the first sounds (the roar of animals, the noise of the hurricane, the storm, etc.) were of a low register and had strong dynamics, whereas others (such as the tinkling of rain droplets, the babbling of a stream, the singing of the birds, etc.), on the contrary, were of a high register and had weak dynamics. Early humans distinguished, noted, and remembered the character (rhythm) and the type of movement (agogics): actions and rapid movements were accompanied and symbolised by short sharp sounds, while slower ones by long smooth fluid ones. It is known that the very first musical instruments which were percussion, according to their characteristics (some have a deficit in high sounds/pitch), with their actions and movements clearly marked the rhythmic pattern that served as a base and accompaniment to their dance movements and was reproduced in their musical sounds.

The relationship between the sound source (the phenomenon of the world of objects and space) and the sound was reproduced several times during the life of an individual and as a result, in their perception, correlations crystallised between a variety of phenomena, objects and actions at the same time as various sounds; these correlations were of a psycho-emotional nature and not rational and reflective. Emotions that were experienced and authentic and caused by different types of sound became evident and led to the appearance of emotional syntheses, which were reproduced by music in people’s movements, in dynamic development; the development of the emotional world in movements was precisely what music was in its early stages, just as it is today. The sound that was memorised, imitated and reproduced by man was perceived as a musical sound.

The principles, methods and ways to construct and shape the act of movement in the emotional world later became the subject of theoretical reasoning and was considered philosophically, aesthetically, ethically during the different historical and cultural eras of musical development: whether they were the ancient doctrines of number (Pythagoras), the epic and suffering (Plato, Aristotle) which saw the purpose of music as harmonising the external aspects of an individual’s life with his state of mind and soul, or the theory of the affections of the 17th and 18th centuries, with the “catalogue of feelings” (A. Kircher, I. Walter and others).

6. The development of dance as an expression of the internal condition of the body through movement

Dance has a direct impact on people: their every move “belongs” to their body, because it takes place in and by means of their body – as signs of dance. Dance movements fulfill the inner, potential condition of the body. Having by nature a high capacity of synthesis and consequently a high degree of standardisation, dance movements have always been and still are, not only a means to know the world intuitively and bodily but also a way of expressing, with the plasticity of the body, the emotional life of the person dancing, seen in the reflection of his mutual relations with other people (Figure 3-4).

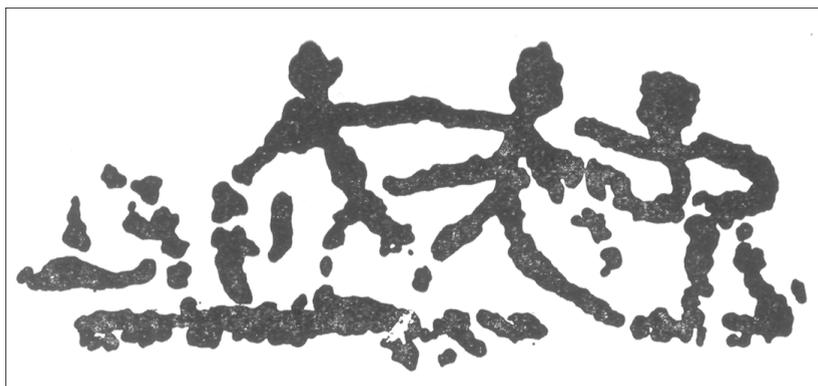


Figure 3. Il girotondo – from Anati E., *Evolution and Style of the rock drawings in the Valcamonica Archives. Vol.6., Capo di Ponte, 1975*

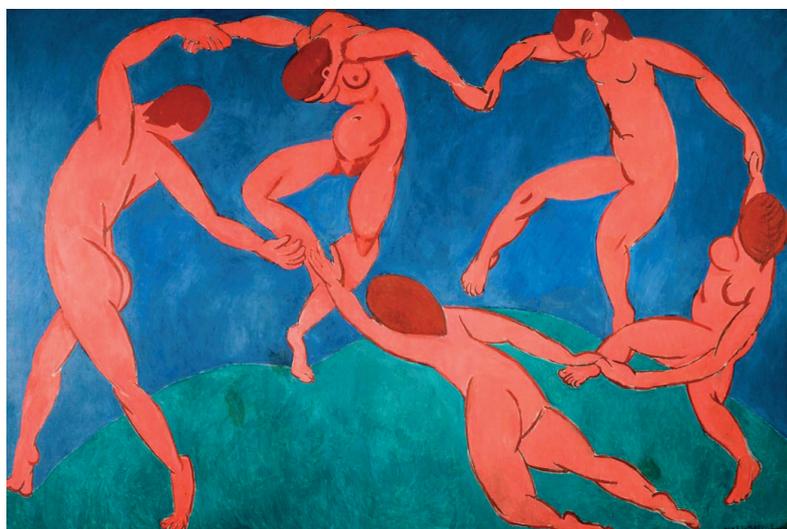


Figure 4. La danse. Henri Matisse – between 1909-1910.

In the history of the arts of the peoples of the world, dance as well as speech and song is realised, preserved and transmitted through natural semiosis. Types of human behaviour with signs occur in natural semiosis in which, specifically with his work, he neither creates the tools for the production of the sign nor the materials of the sign, given that man has been endowed with these tools and materials by nature.

After a long series of developments, dance with its characteristic of using motor muscles, was historically produced as a synthesis of plastic models of figurative and expressive behaviour, transforming the potential energy of the material of the sign into dance movements, which became evident with the passage of time in the range of lines and shapes that made up the typology of national and ethnographic material in various dance genres.

The musical incarnation of the gesture created various “body intonations”, which conditioned the basic functional purpose of the sign in the emerging system of the non-applied arts and is above all the depiction of man and his behaviour in action.

Dance is founded on imitation: the signs of dance are created based on the category of mimesis, which on the one hand conditions the possibility of expression of the choreographic content, and on the other, the possibility to perceive and understand it. Imitation in dance is not the aim but the means to express the psycho-emotional area of existence using the physical movements of the human body.

In the course of creating dance signs mimesis occurs in choreographic structures with the use of the basic principles and methods of sign formation which include morphogenesis and composition, rhythm, meter, dynamic time-metrics, and the volume and dynamic development of stance.

What does dance mimic, what does it tell us? It says nothing about the objective world. The world is not expressed through dance, whereas only action is expressed and explained, so the referent of the sign of dance is the behaviour of the person in action.

Plasticity provides behaviour models, the attitude of one person towards another, hence the language of dance is the behaviour of the person, while dance itself represents the behavioural signs of life.

As the behaviour of a person, dance occupies a considerable space in the social life of man. As is known, even chimpanzees ‘dance’, as all the animal world in general does; they do not learn dance and pantomime. What we take for ‘dance’ in the animal world, is essentially part of their coupling behaviour, a manifestation of the congenital function of the continuation of the species. Our “inclination to dance” is an ethological legacy, but the fact that dance is learned is a manifestation of human socialisation – dance is an acquired behaviour.

Historically the education of the body involves two important aspects: the first is that dance is connected with physical education, but is not really identical because it has the characteristics of a sign while physical education does not. Physical education is free plastic behaviour, while dance is plastic behaviour that has been specifically dissociated from the plasticity of daily existence. Education of the body begins with physical education, but without the objective of creating an artistic image based on imitation; secondly, education of the body is closely linked to the establishment of articulate speech. When new skills in movement (compared with animals) and coordination are developed, speech appears as the art of using part of the respiratory and digestive systems to create articulated sounds. Only when a person has mastered speech is it possible to teach them to dance. So even “wild individuals”, though possessing only

the rudimentary skills of articulate speech, have plasticity consisting of natural symbolic gesticulation and movements that have been learned; this type of preliminary dancing belongs mainly to these movements, ritual, pantomime, ceremonial plastic actions.

Dance like music, has its prehistoric beginnings on the one hand, in its therapeutic value, since it organises physiological functions according to the comparison between the microcosm and the macrocosm through music and a system of methodical body movements. "Dance involves harmony and measure in the soul of the observer, refining one's vision with beautiful performances, enchanting one's hearing with beautiful sounds and presenting a magnificent scene of great physical and spiritual beauty" writes Luciano.

On the other hand, dance acts as a component in rituals of magic; ritual dancing is the modelling of a certain future situation using the predicted influence on the proceedings of events. Thus, the dance of hunters is not only a preparation for "work", submission of themselves, of their movements to the harmony of the world, but also the execution of actions to protect the hunter from hostile forces, which included the real danger from wild animals, as well as more superficial threats, but no less real for the hunter, from unknown forces. These more basic dances were accompanied, very simply, by the rhythmic clapping of hands and percussion sounds that formed the time-rhythm pattern of the dance.

In accordance with their character, prehistoric dance was joyous, with its clearly expressed imitation it launched people into a particular psycho-physical state: "the distribution of roles" was thus already necessarily present in the dance of hunters, that is to say, to ensure the contents of the rite were complete a part of the dancers had to imitate the steps and uses of different animals and birds, etc., the remainder on the other hand, with their plastic behaviour, represented the expected actions and deeds that were aimed at obtaining the desired result. All primitive dances are directly connected with beliefs of sympathetic magic. In the first stage, victory was procured by illustrating it in the dance preceding the fight. But during cultural development, this initially pure image was lost and what becomes evident is the demonstration of skill, strength and prowess, to which are added phallic elements and the impetus to fight and to love.

Consequently, warlike dances became fertility dances that warded off the enemies of growth and attracted the flourishing of agriculture; these are the dances of the ancient Cretan Curetes and the Roman Salii priests which were performed with swords and shields, but were in essence, peaceful and bucolic.

The third aspect of dance is the ritual element; so even at the time of the Old Testament, David danced during the whole journey of the Ark of the Testament, from the house of Aweddhar to Chevron. Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 330-390) considered David's dance "a sort of flexible graceful gait of God".

The various functions of dance were and are present in social life, changing with the passing of time and facing new stages in their development. Each type of dance is related to a particular field of social activity: therapeutic dance is used in the field of psycho-physiological therapy, sacred dance is a component of religious practices, social and domestic dance form and regulate relationships between people, stage dancing exists as a kind of independent art.

Hence, the typical nature of the plastic motif (characteristic of the movement), in addition to containing the concrete features of reality (representation), also contains evidence of its synthesis (expression). It is this very expressiveness that starts the dance because these plastic motifs, which are absent in normal life and reflect the inner life of

man, form typified artificial movements. This is when the dynamics of emotions, different from the dynamics of movement, come into play. It is the emotional aspect that is the basis for the mechanism that influences dancing; given this fact, emotions too are used as a basis, thanks to which movements acquire a conventional nature.

In the history of the cultures of the world, the sense of dance and its functions are not limited by the indicated types of organised movements performed by one individual or a group of people. From a historical perspective, dancing for example, helped in the formation of the military army and the Greek phalanx, characterised in the first place by parallel deployment and secondly by the regular set of the shoulders and legs of the soldiers in each line.

Later on, dance becomes increasingly differentiated according to its function: the different types of dance separate, branching off into medicine (or physical), liturgy, folklore (or popular), and domestic or scenographic fields. With the passage of time, the last two differ considerably, due to the development of kinematics and consequently to the complexity of objectives, methods and modes of plastic expression. The field of folkloristic and popular dance also becomes more specialised, including stage dancing, its main themes becoming "matrimonial", at the same time however, reinforcing dance methods as an affirmation of good conduct (one should behave well), a fact which involves extending the functional purpose of the sign, as well as the use of dance, acting as a moral impact on individuals.

Biographical Notes

Aleksandre Lobodanov was born in Moscow on September 7, 1950. He graduated in 1973 in Romance linguistics at the Faculty of Humanities at Moscow University (Lomonosov). He is professor of history of the Italian language (1997), chair of semiotics and general theory of art at the same university (2003), founder and currently dean of the Faculty of Arts at the same university (2001). He is author of 16 monographs on problems relating to Romance, Slavic-romance linguistics, history and theory of art, art semiotics. He has published more than 100 articles in various languages in Italy, Germany, Belgium, the USA, China, Lebanon. He is a member of the Association for the History of the Italian Language (1998, Florence) and has given lectures on issues relating to grammar, art history and art semiotics in various universities in Rome, Florence, Bologna, Pisa, Berlin, New York, Prague, Belgrade, Beijing, Beirut and other countries.