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THE DYNAMICS OF SEMANTICS AND SYMBOLS IN ART HISTORY: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE

Інтенціональність у свідомості і діяльності людини призводить до необхідності створення послань собі та іншим людям у вигляді смислів, формування і зміна яких створює особливу динаміку в усвідомленні світу, відповідно до знаків, з ними пов'язаними. *Метою* статті є визначення особливостей інтерпретації смислів знаків, представлених в художньому мисленні через твори мистецтва і літератури. Для досягнення мети використані герменевтичний і філософсько-естетичний *методи* дослідження.

У статті розглянуто історичну динаміку смислів і знаків в окремих сферах художньої культури. Для цього визначено характер осягнення світу через знаки та їх **смисли на основі узагальненої парадигми** підходів до проблеми. Зокрема, використана класифікація смислів і знаків, висунута Г. Фреге, Ю. Лотманом, характеристика самого процесу оцінки смислів через зміст предмету і явища, їх оцінки як знака Е. Гуссерля та Ф. де Соссюра, методика формування смислів на основі ідей Н. Хомського тощо на основі виявлення характерних особливостей становлення мистецтва через художнє мислення. Розглянуто можливості самореалізації прекрасного через знаки в прикладних аспектах мистецтва, в тому числі в живописі та літературі. Також проаналізовано співвідношення сенсу і знака в концепті Краса коханої в східній літературі.

Зроблено висновки про те, що динаміка зміни видів мистецтва, їх жанрів і напрямків відбивається на знаковому зображенні смислів. Наприклад, в живопису при цьому змінюється характер використовуваного матеріалу, його застосування, розвиток йде від зображення людини до природи (разом або окремо), далі – до абстрагування зображень, зі збереженням змісту в символічному вигляді. Знакові системи кожного напрямку живопису відрізняються одне від іншого саме характером абстрагування і художнього втілення сенсу. За можливостями символізації та втілення смислів умовність знаків в живописі та літературі змагається зі знаковою системою мови. Аналіз окремого концепту, зокрема краси коханої в східній літературі, показав тісний зв'язок **вибору знака з соціальним оточенням** і особливостями сприйняття його митцем, тобто естетичний зміст даного поняття доповнюється певними цінностями, що відображають соціальні норми життя певного періоду. Крім того, у міру наближення до сучасності посилюється вплив «іконок», що виражають багато аспектів життя, що також позначається на характері зображення якостей розглянутого поняття.

Ключові слова: знак, сенс, семіотика, мистецтво, живопис, література і мова, історія мистецтва, художній текст, філософсько-естетичний аспект.

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Introduction

As is well known, the understanding of the world proceeds through the search for meanings and their expression via symbols. This process is inherently interesting, as meanings are perceived through the senses and the cognitive processes that have evolved over time, whether on an empirical or rational level. Additionally, the social environment plays a significant role, imposing certain conditions on this process. Today, the meanings of things and processes are perceived

through symbols that are comprehensible to many (sometimes even universally, for example, the meaning of a transcendent and omnipotent supreme being, i.e., God). What are the dynamics of changes in meanings (or the things and processes that acquire them) and the symbols used to express them? There is a certain cause-and-effect relationship here. Sometimes, even within the lifespan of a single generation, the semantic content of both things and processes, as well as the symbols used to express them, can change. There is a connection between a person's perception of the world through an established system of symbols (which includes language, methods of figurative expression of meanings, art, literature, body language, i.e., gestures, facial expressions, intonation, artificial languages, information and communication technologies, and the symbolism used therein, and so forth) and the subsequent formation of meanings. As research in epistemology, logic, and grammar shows, this is a rather complex process.

We are interested in how these changes affect human existence, their perception of the meaning of life, their social credo, and their aesthetic mastery of reality. Let us recall the great importance that M. Heidegger attributed to the ability to perceive the world through language, particularly artistic language [Heidegger, 2010]. Hermeneutics is advancing by great strides today. Through the totality of perceived meanings (in the form of moral maxims, social stereotypes, professional and everyday knowledge and skills, unconscious drives and associations at the archetypal level), a person's attitude toward themselves and the surrounding world, their orientations and inclinations, and their will to power are formed.

Degree of problem elaboration

There was a time when the relationship between humans and nature was almost idyllic (the stage of cosmocentrism in the understanding of the ancient Greeks, which modern researchers also agree with), and the "divine spark" in people's consciousness, in the form of creative beginnings and metaphorical imagination, worked wonders. The world was multicolored, vibrant, in constant motion and development. At the same time, it was not fully accessible because it could not be fully known; and now it is clear that this is impossible. Perhaps understanding the complexity of perceiving the world stimulated interest in it. Curiosity was the driving force behind both the cognitive and creative processes. Ancient people created vast narratives, legends, and myths, which were passed down orally from generation to generation. The presentation of all the heroes' adventures in the form of a series of stories meant that the listeners welcomed this style. They perceived the surrounding world in its natural development, striving for harmony. The content unequivocally overlapped with the meaning. Many myths and legends served practical purposes, as they contained teachings on the proper organization of social life. Let us note that from ancient times to the present day, among many peoples, language has been the most important means of codifying meanings. Sound, in the form of the human voice, possesses properties that not only allow the articulation of thousands of words in a given language but also serve as a means of expressiveness. One can modulate the voice, define intonation, facilitate articulation, sing, place emphasis, both in terms of strength and tone, delivering aesthetic pleasure through its melodiousness, syllable, expressiveness, thereby shaping a person's will and character through the persuasiveness of expression and its logic. This is exactly how prophets, great leaders, and thinkers did it.

When analyzing the topic, everything depends on the aspect within which the problem can be considered. There are some aspects of it that should be clarified. This includes the distinction between meaning and significance within the framework of symbols that contain these meanings. There is already an established opinion about these categories. Meaning is the way the designated is represented [Frege, 1948], the way the symbol and its meaning are related when the meaning is the interpretation of the symbol's significance [Nevvazhay, 2023, p. 31]. It should be noted that these definitions do not exclude each other, they simply consider the problem at different levels of specificity.

The evaluation of the essence of meaning, significance, and symbol is closely related to the question of the relativity of knowledge and hence truth as such. In addition, one should not forget the creative possibilities of humans, the metaphorical nature of their thinking, the conditions for the formation of the social environment, and their demands for new and old knowledge. It can be said that a person invests meaning in every significance they assign to individual phenomena and events. Symbols are the formal expression of both significance and meaning. Hence the chain: phenomenon or event – content or significance – meaning – significance and value. Every element of this sequence is

changeable, open, and therefore dynamic. The analysis of these concepts in logic, epistemology, stylistics, and hermeneutics is of great importance since it constitutes to some extent their subject field.

As I. Nevvazhay notes, a symbol replaces the object (denotatum) or points to it in the form of an interpretation: as a result, a symbol can be interpreted in different ways, it can realize different meanings and acquire different significances [Nevvazhay, 2023, p. 31]. The division of culture into types, where “in the first type of culture – the culture of expression – significance determines the symbol, and conversely, in the culture of interpretation, the symbol determines significance” [Ibid] is conditional. It cannot be rigid because symbols themselves are unpredictable, just as significances and meanings are.

In Gabriel Tarde’s book, the very process of linking things according to their significance is characterized. Moreover, the concept of “significance” is interpreted by him in the understanding associated with the accepted meaning. However, the author believes that at the basis of naming things (which implies not their literal “naming” but the creation of concepts, theories, the birth of discoveries, and so on) lies, first and foremost, imitation, whether voluntary or unconscious [Tarde, 1903, p. 3].

On the other hand, if the act of imitation is understood in the broadest sense, then it can probably include all social practice, including logical thinking patterns, such as analogy, resemblance, comparison. That is, if it is impossible to identify causality in this process unequivocally, then other ways of perceiving and understanding reality can be used. The author identifies the leading aspect of the imitation process – the presence of similarity or repetition. Thus, the possibility for analogy is created. The impetus for understanding and subsequent naming of things and processes becomes repetition, i.e., the reproduction of processes.

In addition, it is important to consider the patterns of social life development. Tarde’s idea that any scientific discovery or invention serves as fertile ground for the formation of significances and, based on them, new meanings is noteworthy. The process of accumulating discoveries, both large and small, or in the form of customs and traditions or theories and research methods, also has significance [Tarde, 1903, pp. 14–15]. All of this constitutes the general fund of “education”. Furthermore, as Tarde rightly observes, development leads to leveling, increasing similarity in development, or, as we call it today, “globalization”, under the conditions of which a person becomes an eternal migrant, or “nomad”, as Jacques Attali wrote [Jacques Attali, 1991]. The life of a modern person has undergone significant unification. All of this has unambiguously affected the cognitive processes of the modern human mind, where logical connections and relationships are formed, including through each of our experiential observations.

The question of searching for meaning in works of art, its gradual formation, up to its modern state, thus requires taking into account the influence of the character of one stage’s development on each subsequent stage.

Let us consider the viewpoint of the well-known semiotician and art historian Yu. Lotman, who thoroughly examined the functioning of symbols at the cultural level. As the author notes, a symbol is “a materially expressed replacement of objects, phenomena, and concepts in the process of information exchange within a collective” [Lotman, 1976, p. 2]. However, a symbol can also be an idea embedded in a particular object or phenomenon; as the author writes, social meaning does not correspond in most cases to their immediate natural properties. Y. Lotman divides symbols into two groups – conventional and pictorial. In conventional symbols, the connection between expression and content is not motivated. A pictorial or iconic symbol means that the significance has a single, naturally inherent expression [Lotman, 1976, p. 3]. Otherwise, this can be called a drawing and a word, which imply each other. The iconic language is primarily understood within the framework of a single cultural area, often of a regional nature.

In art, as Yury Lotman notes, two types of art grow based on two types of symbols: pictorial and verbal. At the same time, as mentioned earlier, the successful combination of conventional symbols allows for the creation of a verbal image using phonetics, grammar, and even graphics; as a result, these symbols in poetry become content-rich, i.e., pictorial. Ultimately, graphics and painting “narrate” and simultaneously “depict” reality. This results in the emergence of the most incredible directions in art. As Y. Lotman notes, “any, the most natural human need can be loaded with secondary symbolic value” [Lotman, 1976, p. 4] (especially in modern culture, laden with communication means). In general, “the goal of art is not just to depict a particular object but to make it a carrier of significance” [Lotman, 1976, p. 6].

A significant role in understanding meaning and significance belongs to Edmund Husserl. Husserl believed that the experience of representations, judgments, and cognition cannot occur without preliminary work related to achieving certainty and clarity of concepts and laws that give any cognition objective significance and theoretical unity [Husserl, 2001, pp. 136–137]. Moreover, he believed that evidence is inherent not only in the contemplation of really existing things in sensory experience but also in the contemplation of essences (ideas) [Ibid]. That is, phenomenological reflection reveals that the fundamental property of consciousness is intentionality, that is, the property of its acts to be ‘consciousness of’, consciousness of something – namely, the intentional object (which can be not only real – a thing or a mental act in the real spatio-temporal world but also ideal – an essence, a meaning) [Ibid, pp. 113–115].

Thus, the fundamental distinction between the real and the intentional content of consciousness (in the setting of transcendental reduction – noesis and noema) emerges. Noesis is the act of orientation toward the object, giving meaning to the object; noema is the very meaning that points to the transcendent being in relation to the act (object, real or ideal) [Husserl, 1983, pp. 113–115]. Husserl proposes considering the act of intention itself in all its diversity. It is important to achieve analytical clarity in the expression of the word and its meaning.

The analysis proposed by E. Husserl for conduct shows how complex the process of cognition, the formation of meaning, and the determination of its connection with the symbol is. The author himself repeatedly emphasizes this.

A significant contribution to the understanding of meaning and symbols as the basic elements of human thinking, primarily associated with language, was made by N. Chomsky [Chomsky, 2006]. It is clear that Chomsky’s views and theory require in-depth analysis and a separate discussion. However, it is difficult to ignore his research on the nature of meaning formation in language and his conclusions about the innate nature of the language organ, which later becomes language. This topic does not directly intersect with the formation of the subject of significance and meaning in art. However, it is impossible to ignore the general laws of the formation of meanings in thinking and the most important role of language in this process, given that the “expressive subject” in art is the word in its various manifestations, from the word-picture to sound symbols.

In general, the history of the development of creative activity associated with art is one of the keys to understanding the history of the development of culture in general. Thus, every epoch is marked by various phenomena, among which there are always masterpieces, primarily in the visual arts. As has already been noted, the word, in combination with signs, symbols, and natural sound, is the driving force behind the development of art.

In relation to the problem under analysis, it is pertinent to engage with Ferdinand de Saussure’s perspective on the foundational principles of semiology as a sign system, which encompasses language. The uniqueness of language is evident in its capacity to foreground the activity of speech. It is specifically through speech that semantic nuances are clarified, given that discourse transpires within a particular socio-individual context. Moreover, this process is a psychophysical mechanism enabling the subject to configure linguistic combinations through which they utilize the linguistic code [Saussure, 2004, p. 118].

Saussure acknowledged the significance of language as a semiotic system that includes both a structure of signification (the relational dynamics among signs within the language) and denotations (each sign’s individual meaning) [Saussure, 2004, p. 68]. It is essential to examine Saussure’s demarcation between syntagmatic relations (the relational associations within a sequence of linguistic units) and associative relations (relations external to discourse, embodying connections of commonality or resemblance among linguistic units, both in semantic and phonetic terms, or independently) [Saussure, 2004, p. 128]. Both forms of relations are instrumental in the construction of particular meanings expressed through a given sign, as these relational forms interactively influence each other and are mutually dependent.

Consequently, the process of meaning construction is grounded in the actual operational dynamics of language as a distinctive semiotic system. Of particular relevance here is the notion that the meaning attributed to a work of art may also be articulated within a given language through specific semiotic expressions. Thus, meaning acquires a semiotic manifestation in each sign, which serves as a bearer of particular information in an aesthetic dimension.

If such signs are classified according to Charles Sanders Peirce (as iconic signs, containing the image of the object; indexical signs, directly referencing the object; and symbolic signs, which are arbitrary and based on convention, representing the object) [Peirce, 2009], each of these classifications should be incorporated accordingly.

Roland Barthes explores the symbolic semiotics of myth, underscoring the role of the author and the reading process, which involves a decoding of the embedded codes within the text [Barthes, 1989]. Therefore, across various domains of human activity, information is structured and designated through signs, which are subdivided into signifiers and signifieds (the latter encompassing carriers of connotation and denotation). A sign may convey meaning while lacking definitive denotation (as exemplified by a centaur) [Barthes, 1989]. Understandably, in the artistic domain, metaphorical, analogical, and symbolic signs predominate, representing socially and culturally established signs with specific informational content.

Tasks and objectives

The *goal* of the work is to determine the characteristics of interpreting the meanings of signs represented in artistic thinking through works of art and literature. To achieve this, a brief overview of the main directions and trends has been made, and the nature of the changes in signs and meanings across different historical periods in Eastern and Western artistic cultures has been identified. Interpreting signs will help clarify the characteristics of Eastern and Western interpretations of artistic signs within the framework of their modern understanding. The features of sign expression of commonly used cultural and artistic meanings at different stages of human development, up to the present period, have been determined.

To achieve the goal, hermeneutic and philosophical-aesthetic research methods have been used.

Characteristic Features of the Development of Art as a Consequence of the Formation of Artistic Thinking

The development of art in human history also reflects the development of symbolic representations in human consciousness, spirituality, and creative thinking. This is significantly linked to the practical adaptation to the world, as evidenced by numerous finds from the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras. Assigning symbolic meanings and values to objects and images indicated the formation of a certain self-awareness and evaluative attitude towards the world among ancient people, as well as a desire to distinguish themselves from it. The complication of social relations, which required more specific evaluations of real situations and one's place in them, also played an important role. Clearly, not every object created for practical purposes can be considered a work of artistic expression and aesthetic evaluation. For example, the meaning and purpose of cave paintings or rock carvings cannot be definitively understood as purely objects of artistic self-expression and aesthetic appreciation.

Consider, for example, the content of multi-figure compositions from the Mesolithic period. Scenes of hunting, whether depicted in images or various forms of architecture, sculpture, and so on, primarily serve practical, utilitarian purposes, either for use in daily life or for rituals related to various aspects of life (hunting, other methods of food procurement, domestic arrangements, symbolism associated with social and physical distinctions, etc.).

It likely took millennia for human pragmatism, through a gradual realization of its uniqueness, to begin shifting towards an evaluative attitude towards oneself and the world. This evaluative attitude is associated with two forms of expression: moral (good – bad) and aesthetic (beautiful – ugly). All of this later manifests in the dichotomy of meaning-sign, where the created object determines human reaction, behavior, and is embedded in worldview at the level of everyday consciousness, and perhaps even in the subconscious (such as archetypes). There are many examples that confirm this (e.g., the wearing of a headdress as a sign).

It is interesting to trace how new approaches to evaluating artistic representations of reality gradually form over time. As the artificial world created by humans becomes richer, it increasingly abstracts in its representations of existence, partly due to the development of rational thinking.

Numerous studies on various periods of the development of art show how contradictory the evaluation of this aspect of human activity can be [Benjamin, 1936]. Nevertheless, there are interesting developments regarding genres, methods of reflecting reality, and the impact of produced cultural forms on the further development of human self-awareness [Beletskaya, Yakovleva, 2012].

It is noteworthy that a deep dive into the creative process, which is directly related to the further development of rational thinking, has led to a vast array of types and forms of art, as well as to the awareness of their purpose and evaluation in society. Changes in the social structure of society contributed to the development of special needs regarding the results of artistic creativity. Stimuli for this came from various spheres of life (and the social institutions associated with them, such as religion, family, politics, education, economy, etc.). Each produced artistic sample has its own sign structure and purpose, in other words, its semantic content.

The sphere of artistic creativity, as a form of aesthetic consciousness, has itself become a powerful social institution as a component of spiritual culture. Today, each produced work of art has become a part of human culture, differing from nature in that it (culture) has an artificial, that is, sign-based, character. It is possible that all art is actively used in various spheres of life as a means of influencing human self-awareness.

Education and upbringing of the younger generation, the formation of economic behavior, political technologies, aesthetic taste, and many other factors, apart from the various determinants of their activities, also rely on the opportunities provided by art. The development and implementation of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have become a symbol in this context. Consequently, the possibilities for coded information delivery, including artistic content, have expanded. This has led to a transformation in consciousness regarding the perception of this information, fostering the development of new, distinctive structural-logical connections, which ultimately impacts cognitive processes of thought as a whole.

Today, we observe the emergence of a new individual of the 21st century, for whom the social space primarily consists of an artificially constructed world filled with numerous meanings amidst which he attempts to navigate. Managing such a world is significantly facilitated, as it allows for mass perception of events and processes and their evaluation in the desired direction.

Reflection of the Essence and Meaning of Signs in Art

In the framework of E. Husserl's approach to evaluating reality, as previously noted, a distinction is made between noesis – the act of directing towards a subject, attributing meaning to a subject, and noema – the meaning itself that points to the real subject. The composition of the noema includes the substantive quality or characteristic of the subject, as well as the implied or interdedicated subject. Within the general structure of perception, an objective and simultaneously intersubjective world emerges, perceived and assimilated. This chain of information assimilation, both at the individual and a specific social group level, reveals the cognitive mechanism of meaning formation and the related signs, or objects and phenomena. It unveils the real mechanism of world assimilation, including at the artistic-intuitive level.

From the earliest stages of modern society's development, attempts at intentionality became more diverse and frequent, which was associated with the expansion of the mind's capacity to understand the world. Intentionality was stimulated by self-consciousness at the level of thought, evolving in accordance with societal needs.

The history of applied art vividly demonstrates the impact of a sign's purpose (practical suitability) on meaning formation. For instance, the art of carpet weaving, especially prominent in Azerbaijan, exemplifies this, with the majority of regional carpet compositions originating there. Details and elements used in classic carpets are outlined in the first volume of the monograph "Azerbaijani Carpet" [Kerimov, 1983]. The creation of useful household items, including carpets, has been utilized by people for a long time. Initially, wool, animal hides, and plant stems were used. Over time, with acquired experience, the practicality of developing aesthetic needs increased. Consequently, the meanings embedded in carpet products, related to their purpose, were continuously enriched. The first stage is practicality of use, regardless of real utility or convenience. Carpets were woven on primitive looms made of sticks and branches. The second stage involves more technically and aesthetically refined designs, leading to a clarification and deepening of the meaning.

The artistic aspect reflects the character of daily life, geographical features, climate, flora and fauna, lifestyle, whether sedentary or nomadic. The technique of carpet weaving allowed the transition from plain to pile fabrics, significantly enriching the content of carpet patterns and expanding the purpose of carpet products. It is important to consider a systemic approach to the issue, accounting for the development of all other spheres of social life, including language, economic activity, demographic processes, and spiritual life (applied art, architecture, literature, visual arts, music).

The development was also stimulated by forms of statehood that created certain opportunities for creativity. For instance, the semantic content of the concept of “carpet” was influenced by the Arab invasions of Azerbaijan in the mid-7th century. The Arabization policy, with Arabic becoming the state language, affected not only literary creativity but also architecture, painting, and applied arts. As a result, ornamental forms of art, including those related to carpet weaving, began to develop.

In the first millennium CE, particularly between the 7th and 10th centuries, carpets became symbols of wealth and aristocracy. Thus, the meaning of the sign “carpet” was enriched with new content due to its associated purpose. This was facilitated by both the expansion of technical possibilities (the invention of new knots, the introduction of pile, the improvement of weaving looms) and the development of artistic taste, new thinking aligned with the specific aesthetic demands of people [Kerimov, 1983, p. 34]. These qualities were acquired by individuals due to a new social environment, a new social structure, and lifestyle characteristics.

Possibilities for the Self-Realization of Meaning and Sign in Painting

The distinction between meaning and sign in the materialized, tangible sense lies in their potential for self-realization. Meanings are apprehended through language, where intuition plays a significant role in navigating the labyrinths of meaning. As previously mentioned, linguistic expression is enriched by facial expressions, gestures, and modulation of voice. Signs (objects, phenomena, processes, material basis) have multiple forms of representation. For instance, in painting, these include stone, wood, iron, canvas, clay, and so forth; in music, sounds; in sculpture and architecture, many natural and synthetic materials. They are also created virtually using technical means and can exist in consciousness as specific images. These images may carry evaluative aspects, such as the representation of a real sign. For example, the Maiden Tower, one of the symbols in Baku, has its image complemented by the evaluation of the individual, which retains a dichotomy of good or bad, beautiful or ugly.

Ultimately, both meaning and sign are opened to additional possibilities of expressiveness and evaluation. In human consciousness, this manifests in a kaleidoscope of various sensations and representations that influence one’s mood and attitude towards life. This layer of feeling can be pleasant, desired, and anticipated. Conversely, it can be something a person may wish to forget quickly. Understanding specific forms of art in this context is a more complex process. Artistic perception of reality requires special preparation of taste, understanding, and evaluation. Hence, when reflecting on facts, the meaning may sometimes be distorted. Abstract paintings, for instance, are perceived ambiguously by many connoisseurs. The same can be said for music, sculpture, and applied arts. By tracing the formation of preferences and, consequently, meanings in the history of art, one can understand not only the nature of the influence of one stage on another but also the cumulative result of the development of modern art as a sign system significant for members of society. Comparing primitive and modern individuals in terms of art comprehension reveals an advantage for the contemporary person, given the exponential growth of today’s “artificial” world. However, the meanings that a primitive person lived by were fully satisfying to them, indicating that the social and natural environment played a crucial role.

Pragmatism and realism in meanings associated with art signs in ancient times were gradually replaced by evaluations based on spiritual categories such as idealism, fashion, national identity, and so forth. For instance, in every country, historical art monuments are invariably linked to ethnic uniqueness, the history of the people, and are declared cultural values, including at the global level, such as by UNESCO. Thus, the symbolic nature of meanings ascribed to art signs in different eras is evident. Petroglyphs in Gobustan [Babakhanov, 1984] are interpreted today differently than they would have been by their creators. Nonetheless, the meaning remains, perceived by each individual from their position and level of development.

Let us examine the possibilities of the self-realization of meaning in signs with a more detailed look at painting. The possibilities of visual art are fully utilized to impact the viewer (emotionally and aesthetically) and to form a certain perception (meaning). Meanings are related to all spheres of life — religion, history, mythology, daily life, and family. As a result, through the established rhythm, dynamics, and achieved balance between the parts of the composition (painting or sculpture), a certain truth, in our understanding — meaning — is apprehended. Overall, events depicted in painting reflect not only the occurrences but also the style of the era, its content, and the moral and artistic values it embodied (see, for example, Nicolas Poussin’s painting “The Magnanimity of Scipio”) [Blunt, 1966, p. 38].

The expansion of the understanding of the world has led, to a certain extent, to a shift in values, where the depiction of both people and the surrounding environment became significant. This indicated a shift in the focus of searching for sign variables from the human to nature and, further, to abstractions. The history of painting illustrates the movement of depicted themes towards abstraction, while still retaining perspective and viewpoint. This can be easily observed when moving from gallery to gallery in any major art museum (for instance, in the Hermitage). The chain of sign – content – meaning is realized in human consciousness based on a general worldview, which in turn leads to the understanding of the content of an era and even civilization as a whole. Hence, the significance of the ideas of Husserl and F. de Saussure regarding the necessity of considering cognitive and psychological components of this process, the outcome of which is the apprehension of meaning.

In painting, the content is skillfully revealed through the use of light and shadow, as their interplay focuses details and determines the dynamics and drama of events. The materials used in painting (paints, oil, water, etc.) are also crucial for conveying meaning to the viewer's consciousness. The history of painting demonstrates the extensive experience accumulated by artists in mixing paints, applying them to canvas, working with watercolors, charcoal, chalk, ink, and in making engravings, whether raised or recessed, stencils, and so forth.

In contemporary painting, the advent of photography has facilitated a shift to acrylic paints, plastic, and polymer materials. The variety in conveying meanings to people's consciousness, especially with the rise of ICT, has distorted the previous process of world meaning formation through the active embodiment of real perspectives and values on canvas. The clear concept of beauty and harmony, which had been cultivated for centuries, particularly in Western art, has been replaced by the simplicity of lines and the logic of abstractions.

A particular feature of painting is its impact on the viewer through color, combined with light and shadow. This allows for determining the distance between different parts of the painting, creating emotional impact, and thus generating expression, such as calming (blue) or stimulating (red) with color. Texture, achieved through brushstrokes, is also significant, providing greater expressiveness and the ability to convey the intended meaning. For example, in China, the brush and ink were of great importance in this regard.

Numerous schools of European painting, such as the Renaissance, Rococo, Baroque, Classicism, and Neoclassicism, reveal how movement, light, and shadow can be used to evoke strong emotions through the play of colors and their contrasts [Daniel, 1986, p. 92]. During this period, there was also a flourishing of thematic diversity, expressive forms, from still lifes to landscapes, from human characters to religious scenes. Applied art also saw significant development, with great attention paid to architecture and sculpture, which reflected the spirit of the era: striving for expressiveness and simultaneously for monumentality. The modern appearance of leading cities and cultural centers in Europe was shaped by this period, which laid the foundation for modern painting based on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Each painting direction is associated with a pursuit of a strict yet elevating style related to fundamental canons of beauty and harmony.

The history of painting vividly shows the intriguing path this art form has taken in terms of clarity and expressiveness in depicting ideas or meanings. This path can also be illustrated through the works of some leading Azerbaijani painters. The ancient period is represented by depictions of animals, nature, and hunting scenes, using various available means. Applied art was developed, related to the decoration of household items, clothing, footwear, headgear, and so forth. This was influenced by climatic conditions, flora and fauna, terrain, water sources, as well as trade with other regions of the world. Spiritual processes (religious beliefs, the development of writing, the formation of a general worldview), as well as political systems and social structures, also affected this process.

Islamic religion permitted the creation of works only in applied art forms, and thus in Muslim countries, including Azerbaijan, graphic art, miniature, and all forms of decorative-applied art flourished [Hajiyev, 2012]. Here, it is also important to mention calligraphy [Kerimli, 2015; Kaziev, 1964], wall and architectural sculpture, illustrations for classical poetry [Kerimov, 2000], and so on.

It was only in the second half of the 19th century that individual works of painting emerged, significant even today from the perspective of classical understanding of this genre. Overall, perceptions of beauty through painting and applied arts reflected people's worldview, understanding, and perception of the surrounding world. The value aspect was also important: the meaning of themes was significant for individuals as it achieved the understanding of a complete picture of the world and satisfaction through joy and pleasure.

Starting from the period of capitalist development in the formation of the Azerbaijani school of painting, one can observe processes common with global trends. Specifically, painters adopted many painting genres, techniques, and methods for depicting the surrounding world.

In contemporary art, there is a clear manifestation of this tendency towards abstraction in depiction. Overall, as the world became more “artificial”, i.e., culturally developed, signification manifested through encoded meanings, brief and clear, concise and accessible to the general public, while also being visually grounded to the level of ordinary, everyday objects (such as using empty bottles, matchboxes, and cans to express meanings). The luxury of natural colors and forms is replaced by grotesque, even parodic representations of natural essence. Meaning is fixed through forms reflecting global contemporary processes – deterioration of the natural environment, turning each person into a potential migrant, nearly losing ethnic identity, standardization of daily life, food, fashion, and overall lifestyle.

Thus, the perception of paintings by any artist and the understanding of their meaning are directly related to the features of human artistic thinking, the era in which one lives, its socio-political and economic characteristics, and the preparedness for perception in specific contexts.

Meanings of Literary Signs: The Image of Beauty in Azerbaijani Poetry

Perception of the beauty of a loved one is filtered through the general conceptions of beauty, harmony, and perfection. Additionally, there is a pragmatic dimension: beauty also signifies health. The choice of a loved one is guided by the “heart”, where intuition determines adherence to certain standards of beauty and suitability. Historically, human language has been the most refined means of representing beauty, as previously mentioned.

Let us examine the canons of beauty for the beloved in Azerbaijani literature, both oral and written, and their evolution across different historical periods. Understanding the beautiful in a person, in a beloved, required specific modes of expression. We will delineate the dynamics of this process within historical development.

The notion of beauty is directly linked to the idea of harmony and proportion concerning the need for the beautiful. Like any concept, it can be reflected in human thought in a neutral sense (although this is rare, as every human action has an inherent goal) or on an evaluative level. This attitude is manifest, among other forms, in artistic expression, particularly in poetry. The history of Azerbaijani poetry spans many centuries; however, we will focus on the most illustrative periods — the Middle Ages and the Modern era. During these periods, poetic language evolved, and conceptions of beauty, including physical beauty, transformed. In oral folk literature, comparisons, personifying epithets, and other metaphorical devices were frequently employed to describe the appearance and spiritual attributes of the beloved.

Both meaning and sign, in terms of content, underwent significant transformation. In antiquity, the concept of beauty in a young woman or beloved was associated with natural perfection, often imbued with a magical or inexplicable quality. This is exemplified by the beauty of Fatima, referred to as Goychek Fatima, meaning “Fatima the Beautiful”. Her beauty was further accentuated by her virtuous deeds, despite the suffering inflicted by her stepmother. Witchcraft provided assistance in her time of need. It is noteworthy that the expressive means in fairy tales were quite limited: fairy tales were aimed at ordinary people of various ages and social statuses. The crucial aspect was the action itself – where good leads to good, and evil is always punished.

With the advent of writing, the capabilities of language and its expressive means expanded significantly. Moreover, the conceptual world, including notions of human physical perfection and moral and social qualities, became richer. This is evident in the works of poets from the Middle Ages. The portrayal of the beautiful beloved was enriched through literary language with new attributes and social dimensions. The dynamics of these meanings in subsequent historical periods are particularly noteworthy.

With the growth of written literature, the means of expression and the content associated with the concept of the beloved’s beauty evolved. This evolution is apparent in the works of Eastern poetic luminaries, such as Nizami Ganjavi. The emotional and affective dimensions, as well as real attitudes toward the concept of beauty, are reflected in the meanings attached to the ideal beloved. Concurrently, there is a certain static quality, abstraction, and romantic veneer. These reflect the norms of gender relations tied to social class. Social strata constrained communication opportunities, resulting in the image of the beloved being embellished with numerous artistic features associated with an idealized depiction of her appearance.

*Gecə nurlar saçan aydır o dilbər,
Demə, abi-həyat imiş o gözlər.
Gümüştür xurma ağacı onda sima.
İki zənci dərir üstündə xurma.
Dedikcə Şapur o şirin dodaqdan,
Dadırdı ağzı qənd, xurma bayaqdan.
Saçır mirvari dişlər nur hər dəm,
Su almışdır o dişlərdən sadəf həm.
Əqiq idi sulanmış iki şəkər,
Kəmənd idi burulmuş bir cül ənbər,
Saçı qıvrımlarından qəlb xəstə,
O zülf ilə çəkib xətti gül üstə.
Saçarkən mişk ilə ənbər saçından,
O yorğun nərgizə od düşdü ondan.
[Nizami, 2011, p. 58].*

This beauty is the moon that shines at night,
And her eyes are a spring that gives birth to life every moment.
Her face is like a silver persimmon.
And her black eyebrows pluck persimmons there.
Shapur, from these sweet lips as he heard speeches,
He always felt the taste of sugar, persimmon.
And her pearl teeth radiate a glow,
Those teeth became a model for mother-of-pearl.
And her sugar lips resemble agate,
And her braids are twisted like a long lasso,
From her luxurious curls the heart grabs,
That brush of hair drew a pattern on a flower.
That exudes the aroma of amber and musk,
Having sensed it, the tired narcissus became full of fire

Thanks to Khosrow's love, Shirin's beauty becomes even more impressive, reaching new heights of perfection and flourishing. Her face also embodies the image of a just sovereign. This positive female figure encompasses many universal human qualities.

As poetry developed, the artistic means of shaping the image of the beloved began to include evaluations of her spiritual and moral qualities. The lover himself also became more assertive: he openly expresses his feelings toward his beloved, revealing his desires and dreams.

A striking example of lyrical talent is the work of the 19th-century ashik, Alaskar, who lived and worked in Geicha (present-day Armenia). A distinctive feature of his praise for the beauty of his beloved is the depiction of elements of this beauty in motion and development, through the emotional responses of both the poet and his audience. Here, the evaluation of a particular quality is directly intertwined with the lover's reaction, revealing his state instantaneously under the influence of the girl's charms:

*Yanaqların güldü, solmaz,
Oxlasan, yaram sağalmaz.
Qaşın cəllad, gözün almaz,
Bağrımı kəsə tellərin.
Kamallı gözəldə xəta kəm gərək,
Sevgi gərək, söhbət gərək, dəm gərək,
Aşıqə vəfalı bir həmdəm gərək
Həmdəmsiz bal yəsə, ona ağıdır.
[Alasgar, 2024].*

Cheeks are flowers, they do not fade,
I touch you, and they wound me to death.
Your eyebrows are executioners, and your eyes are two diamonds,
And your curls are tearing my chest apart.
Perfect beauty should have no flaws,
It needs love, sweet talk, a hangover,
She must be devoted to the lover.
And the honey that he eats without her will be like poison

Another well-known poet of the 19th century, Vagif, specifically defines the nature of his beloved's beauty, also paying considerable attention to her moral traits and character. Here is how he characterizes her virtues:

*Əvvəl gözəllərdə gərəkdir çağlıq,
Ondan sonra ola sadəlik, ağılıq,
Nə ağzında yaşmaq, nə üzdə yaylıq,
Çirkinlik üzünü bürüyəndədir.
[Vagif, 2019a].*

A beauty must be young,
She will be adorned by simplicity and
the whiteness of her face,
And her mouth should not be covered by a yashmak,
her face by a scarf,
Since concealing ugliness is necessary only.

The lyrical hero, while describing the qualities of his beloved, justifies his demands not only by natural but also by social and moral needs:

*Qası tağ-tağ gərək, qabağı nazik,
Ağzı, burnu, dili, dodağı nazik,
Baldırları yağun, ayağı nazik,
Var əndamı dolu olur gəlin.
[Vagif, 201b].*

Her eyebrows are curved like a bowstring,
Like a nose, her mouth, lips and tongue are graceful,
And her hips are wide, and her legs are slender,
She is full and graceful at the same time

Changes in the boundaries of literary language and artistic styles in literature lead to shifts in the possibilities of semantic expressiveness regarding the concept of a beloved's beauty. Each representation of the beloved's beauty conveys the meaning that is inherently embedded in human consciousness, shaped by the developed worldview.

Conclusion

The historical evolution of visual art, from cave and rock paintings with their often enigmatic depictions that encode ancient peoples' views and myths about deities, reflects a process of refining the concept of the surrounding world. This evolution involves clarifying and restricting meanings for better understanding, and possibly combining them, thus illustrating the interplay of meanings and signs in our lives.

One of the main goals throughout this progression has been the pursuit of a balance between harmony and beauty, which is evident in artworks from various regions of the world. It was essential to convey many meanings inspired by everyday needs and interests to different societal groups, including ruling elites.

The history has preserved what could be maintained over time: cave and rock paintings, sculptures — whether standalone or in the form of bas-reliefs and high-reliefs. Art, alongside language, has provided a wealth of symbolic representation of both real and imagined life, serving as a vital reference for many generations and their secure existence. The dynamics of art forms, such as those in Western Europe, and the transition between styles are driven by the meanings within the creations, dictated by the era's needs (e.g., Baroque, Classicism, Neoclassicism, Romanticism, Modernism, Futurism, Orphism, etc.), as well as the cognitive capacities of human thought.

Regarding the search for aesthetic meaning of beauty through artistic expression, the worldview of people, their social needs, and interests are undeniably significant. Thus, the concept of a beloved's beauty is consistently associated with practicality, utility, and the simultaneous need for harmony with oneself and the universe through the appreciation of nature's perfection and the recognition of beauty in a social context.

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THE DYNAMICS OF SEMANTICS AND SYMBOLS IN ART HISTORY: A PHILOSOPHICAL AND AESTHETIC PERSPECTIVE

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Intentionality in human consciousness and activity necessitates the creation of messages for oneself and others, forming and transforming meanings that drive a unique dynamic in world understanding through associated symbols. *The aim* of this study is to identify the peculiarities of interpreting the meanings of symbols as represented in artistic thought through works of art and literature. To achieve this goal, hermeneutic and philosophical-aesthetic research *methods* were employed.

The article examines the historical dynamics of meanings and symbols within various domains of artistic culture. To this end, the nature of understanding the world through symbols and their meanings is defined, based on a generalized paradigm of approaches to the issue. In particular, the classification of meanings and symbols proposed by G. Frege and Y. Lotman is utilized, along with the characterization of the process of evaluating meanings through the content of objects and phenomena, their evaluation as symbols by E. Husserl and F. de Saussure, and the methodology for forming meanings based on the ideas of N. Chomsky and others, grounded in the identification of the characteristic features of the development of art through artistic thought. The potential for the self-realization of beauty through symbols in applied aspects of art, including painting and literature, is also considered. Additionally, the relationship between meaning and symbol in the concept of the beloved's beauty in Eastern literature is analyzed.

Conclusions are drawn that the dynamics of the evolution of art forms, genres, and directions are reflected in the symbolic representation of meanings. For example, in painting, this is reflected in changes in the nature of the material used, its application, and the development from depicting the human figure to nature (together or separately), followed by the abstraction of images while preserving content in a symbolic form. The symbolic systems of each direction in painting differ from one another precisely in the nature of abstraction and the artistic embodiment of meaning. In terms of the potential for symbolization and the embodiment of meanings, the conventionality of signs in painting and literature rivals the symbolic system of language. The analysis of a specific concept, particularly the beauty of the beloved in Eastern literature, revealed a close connection between the choice of symbol and the social environment, as well as the poet's perception, meaning the aesthetic significance of this concept is supplemented by certain values reflecting the social norms of a specific period. Furthermore, as we approach modern times, the influence of "icons" expressing many aspects of life becomes more pronounced, which also affects the nature of the depiction of the qualities of the concept under consideration.