

mathematics. This concern remains, but it has been supplemented by a growing interest in the place that signs have in the manipulatory and consummatory phases of action. Thus attention has been increasingly directed to rituals, myths, morality, art, law, politics, religion, and philosophy. Since these topics involve values, I shall turn now to the theory of value (axiology), the relation of signs and values, and the place of values in human action.<sup>16</sup>

## II

## ESTHETICS AND THE THEORY OF SIGNS

## 1. GENERAL APPROACH

The theory of signs (semiotic) offers a vantage point from which to consider, and upon which to ground, many disciplines which have long been felt as related, but whose relations to each other and to the natural sciences have not been easy to state: such disciplines include logic, mathematics, linguistics, and esthetics. In this paper it is proposed to indicate the larger outlines of a possible approach to esthetics in terms of the theory of signs.<sup>1</sup>

From this point of view the work of art is conceived as a sign which is, in all but the simplest limit case, itself a structure of signs. The problem then becomes that of stating the differentia of the esthetic sign; such differentia may be found either in the kind of things which function as esthetic signs or in the kind of objects which are designated, or (as will here be suggested) in a combination of both. The work of art, so conceived, must be distinguished from the vehicle which serves as the basis for the sign structure; Dewey uses the term 'work of art' and 'art product' to mark this distinction; we shall occasionally use the

<sup>1</sup> The formulation of semiotic here followed is contained in my monograph, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (University of Chicago Press, 1938. Also this volume). The position taken in regard to art agrees in all essentials with the formulation given by John Dewey in *Art as Experience* (Minton, Balch, and Co., New York City, 1934), especially when this is viewed in the context of Mead's conception of the "act" (George H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act*, University of Chicago Press, 1938). It is my conviction, however, that esthetics, conceived in pragmatic terms (and the book of Stephen C. Pepper, *Aesthetic Quality* [Scribner's, New York City, 1937] should be mentioned in this connection in addition to the works of Dewey and Mead), can be given a much more precise formulation (though not such a pleasing one), and its relation to the whole of the scientific edifice be much more clearly seen, when it approached specifically in terms of a theory of signs. I. A. Richards, in the *Principles of Literary Criticism* (London, 1924), and in other works, has been a pioneer in the development of this approach to art.

<sup>16</sup> Some readers may be interested in how the account of the present chapter differs from that of *Signs, Language, and Behavior*. There is here a different formulation of sign behavior, an attempt to do away with the formative dimension of signification, and in general a greater stress on the dimensions of signification (earlier called "modes of signifying").

same terms, but where precision is wanted the terms 'esthetic sign' and 'esthetic sign vehicle' are preferable. The work of art in the strict sense (i.e. the esthetic sign) exists only in a process of interpretation which may be called esthetic perception; hence the formulation of the central problem of esthetics can equally well be stated as the search for the differentia of esthetic perception. A general answer to the problem, whichever formulation be chosen, would determine the domain of art or esthetic experience, while the delimitation of the various arts would be stated in terms of classifications made within the field of esthetic signs. Esthetic analysis then becomes a special case of sign analysis, and esthetic judgment a judgment on the adequacy with which a certain sign vehicle performs the function characteristic of the esthetic sign. Esthetics in turn becomes the science of esthetic signs (or, on the alternative formulation, the science of esthetic perception – perception itself being statable only in terms of sign-functioning). Esthetics thus becomes in its entirety a subdivision of semiotic, and its place in the system of the sciences is determined when the place of semiotic is established. Such in brief is the point of view which the following sections are to amplify.

## 2. SEMIOTIC

It is advisable to give some indication as to the use of a few fundamental terms of semiotic which will constantly appear in this paper.

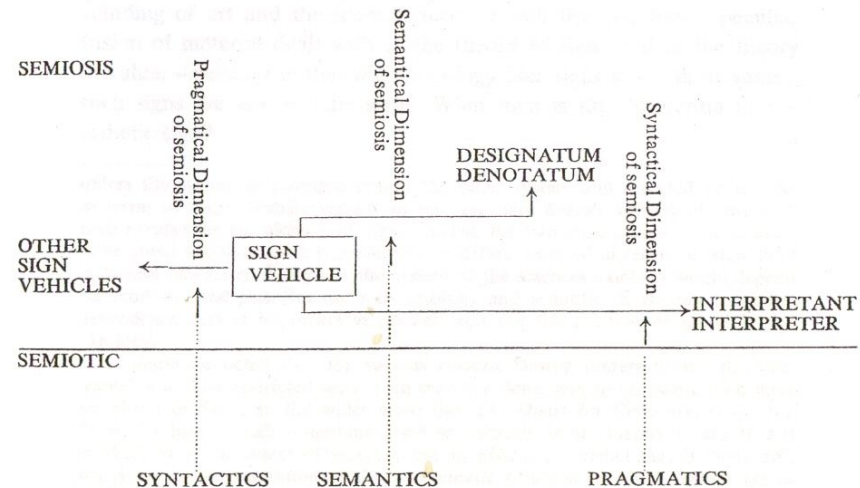
A sign-situation, or a process of semiosis, is any situation in which one thing takes account of something else, which is not directly causally efficacious, through the mediation of a third something; a sign process is thus a process of "mediated taking account of". A certain whistle causes one to act as if an otherwise unperceived train were approaching; the sound then signifies an approaching train to the person hearing the whistle. That which operates as a sign (i.e. functions in a signficatory manner) is called the *sign vehicle*; the act of mediated taking account of, performed by the interpreter, is called the *interpretant*; what is taken account of mediately is called the *designatum*. By definition a sign must designate ("have a designatum"), but it may not actually denote anything ("may have no denotata"). One may take account of an approaching train (act as if a train were approaching) when in fact no train is coming; in this case the sound heard designates but does not denote ("has a designatum but no denotata"). A designatum is thus a class of objects as determined by a certain defining properties, and as

a class, may be without members; the denotata are the members – if any – of the class in question.

The relations of sign vehicles to what is designated or denoted may be called the *semantical dimension of semiosis*, and the study of this dimension *semantics*; the relations of sign vehicles to interpreters may be called the *pragmatical dimension of semiosis*, and the study of this dimension *pragmatics*; the remaining semiotically relevant relations of sign vehicles to other signs may be called the *syntactical dimension of semiosis*, and its study *syntactics*. Semiotic, as the general science of signs, thus contains the subordinate sciences of syntactics, semantics, and pragmatics.

A sign is exhaustively analyzed when its relations to other signs, to what it denotes or can denote, and to its interpreters are specified. The specification of such relations in concrete cases of semiosis is called *sign analysis*.

A fuller discussion of these matters is found in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*: the following diagram may help to fixate these terminological usages.



## 3. THEORY OF VALUE

If the theory of signs is one base upon which to erect the proposed type of esthetics, the theory of value is an equally necessary base<sup>2</sup>—since it will be held that the designata of esthetic signs are values, or better, value properties. Again, this is not the occasion to develop or defend a theory of value, but it is essential to indicate the type of approach which is being followed in order that the nature of the underlying assumptions will be clear. Fortunately this can be done in brief form since there is a considerable body of literature devoted to the interest theory of value, and it is this theory, especially in the form developed by Dewey and Mead, which is here presupposed<sup>3</sup>.

✓ On this general approach, a value is a property of an object or situation relative to an interest—namely, the property of satisfying or consummating an act which requires an object with such a property for its completion. There is an interest in food in so far as there is an activity which seeks out objects which terminate hunger; to seek such objects is to act in a way which will bring objects with the required properties into the field for direct stimulation. The object has food value only in relation to hunger; 'value' (like 'magnetic') has reference to relations within a system, and characterizes properties of objects with respect to interests; the value is neither to be located in the objects apart from interests nor in interests (and hence not in the "emotional" aspects of interests in process of satisfaction) apart from objects which permit the satisfaction of interests. Values are consummatory properties of objects or situations which answer to the consummation of interested acts<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> I. A. Richards: "The two pillars upon which a theory of criticism must rest are an account of value and an account of communication" (*Principles of Literary Criticism*, London, 1924, p. 25).

<sup>3</sup> See R. B. Perry, *General Theory of Value* (New York City, 1926), and articles in *International Journal of Ethics* (1931), *Journal of Philosophy* (1931), and *Philosophical Review* (1932); J. Dewey, *Essays in Experimental Logic* (Chicago, 1916), pp. 349-389; J. Dewey, *The Quest for Certainty* (New York City, 1929), Chap. 10; G. H. Mead, *The Philosophy of the Act* (Chicago, 1938). Reference may also be made to a forthcoming monograph, *Theory of Valuation*, by J. Dewey in Vol. II of the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* (Chicago, 1939).

<sup>4</sup> There are interesting problems connected with the question as to the relation of the theory of signs and such an objective relativistic theory of value. It may be desirable to use 'sign' in defining 'interest'; thus there may be two systems so related that contact of one with the other is necessary for the preservation of one of the systems, but this would hardly be described in terms of interest

To speak in value terms is thus to consider things "interestwise"—to use R. B. Perry's suggestive phrase. And the properties of things so viewed are no more "subjective" in a scientifically disparaging sense than are other field or systemic properties such as color, magnetic power, velocity, or even mass. It is true that science seeks intersubjective knowledge, and that many interests are highly unstable and of narrow distribution; but it is also true that many interests (and so values) are highly constant and perhaps common to all living beings, and that knowledge of the peculiarities of individuals can be intersubjective knowledge—witness, for instance, "individual psychology" or Mead's theory of the subjective. There is nothing in this objectively relativistic theory of value<sup>5</sup> which makes impossible a science of axiology; terms such as 'good' and 'better' can be given a precise empirical signification capable of meeting the most rigorous requirements of the theory of signs and the methodology of science.

## 4. THE ESTHETIC SIGN

The scientific study of value properties is not, however, the goal of the artist, nor is the general theory of value itself esthetics. The understanding of art and the identification of esthetics requires a peculiar fusion of material dealt with in the theory of signs and in the theory of value,—peculiar in that while axiology uses signs to speak of values, such signs are not esthetic signs. What then is the differentia of the esthetic sign?

unless the system in question sought the other system and directed its seeking in terms of signs. Mead's version of an "act" and Perry's version of "interest" both involve the functioning of signs; indeed, the two conceptions seem at heart to be about the same. If it is preferable to define 'interest' in terms of 'sign' (and of course other terms), then in the system of the sciences axiology would depend on semiotic, and esthetics on both axiology and semiotic. It is only the latter dependence that is important at present, and not the relation of semiotic and axiology.

<sup>5</sup> It might be noted that for various reasons Dewey prefers to use the term 'value' in a more restricted sense than we have done, and to use some such term as 'object of liking' in the wider sense (see *The Quest for Certainty*, chap. 10). Thus, for him, to call something good or valuable is not merely to say that it is liked, or is an object of interest, but to affirm or predict that it "will do", will serve in the resolution of the problematic situation in which likings are in conflict. This seems to me to be a legitimate emphasis congenial to Dewey's whole philosophy, but not to involve a difference in principle—for in the last analysis those factors which resolve conflicts of likings (or lower level values) have value (at a higher level) only relative to the interest in the resolution of such conflicts.

This problem can be approached by distinguishing two main classes of sign vehicles: those which are like (i.e., have properties in common with) what they denote, and those which are not like what they denote. These may be called *iconic signs* and *non-iconic signs*; the various kinds of non-iconic signs are not relevant for the present problem. The semantical rule for the use of an iconic sign is that it denotes any object which has the properties (in practice, a selection from the properties) which it itself has. Hence when an interpreter apprehends an iconic sign vehicle he apprehends directly what is designated<sup>6</sup>; here mediated and unmediated taking account of certain properties both occur; put in still other terms, every iconic sign has its own sign vehicle among its denotata.

These facts, taken alone, do not delimit the esthetic sign, for blueprints, photographs, and scientific models are all iconic signs – but seldom works of art. If, however, the designatum of an iconic sign be a value (and of course not all iconic signs designate values), the situation is changed: there is now not merely the designation of value properties (for such designation takes place even in science), nor merely the functioning of iconic signs (for these as such need not be esthetic signs), but there is the direct apprehension of value properties through the very presence of that which itself has the value it designates<sup>7</sup>. Such sign functioning answers to an often noted character of esthetic experience: the work of art is apprehended as “meaningful” or “significant” and yet this character seems to be embodied in the work itself – so that esthetic perception is tied to the work itself and does not use this merely as a springboard for evoking reveries and recollections. This whole character of “immanent meaning”, of “significatory but not referential” status, of “disinterested interest”, – formulations which seem so contradictory – is accounted for in the fact that in the apprehension of the iconic sign there is both a mediated and an immediate taking account of certain properties; and the frequent though confused use of ‘meaning’ in discussions of art to include both signification and

<sup>6</sup> But perhaps not all the value of what is designated, since an iconic sign may have other phases of designation beyond those determined by its iconic character. The painted man is not fully a man, and all that the picture designates is not there in the picture for direct inspection. Such considerations are of particular importance in literature, where the iconic and non-iconic aspects of sign functioning are both so prominent. These considerations will be subordinated here for the sake of simplicity; they complicate but do not falsify the criterion of the esthetic sign here presented.

<sup>7</sup> The qualification in the preceding note is also important here.

significance (value) is an indicator that in the case of esthetic signs (though not in the case of all iconic signs) the properties in question are value properties.

One additional point may be noted to confirm the sign status of the work of art: the artist often draws attention to the sign vehicle in such a way as to prevent the interpreter from merely reacting to it as an object and not as a sign: the pictures are framed, parts of the canvas are at times deliberately left unpainted, the play is performed on a stage in which various technical devices are visible, the musician performs within view of his audience – such are some of the means employed to prevent that form of illusion in which the sign vehicle is not distinguished from the denotata. It is true that in the work of art the sign vehicle is (with the qualifications already mentioned) one of its own denotata, but in esthetic perception it must be realized as such, i.e. the two must not be confused; the value must be there for direct inspection and yet also there as indicated by signs.

Such consideration give some of the grounds for the definition of the esthetic sign as an iconic sign whose designatum is a value.

##### 5. ESTHETIC PERCEPTION

Because of the fact that the work of art is a sign and as such exists only in a process of semiosis, and since the interpretation of a sign is basic to what is loosely known as “perception”, the statement which has just been given in terms of signs may be paralleled by a statement in terms of the perception of esthetic signs, i.e. in terms of esthetic perception<sup>8</sup>.

As a preliminary to this statement, it may be noted that while not every element in a sign vehicle need itself be a sign, nor all aggregations of signs constitute a single sign, those sign combinations which have a rule of usage built upon the rules of the component signs vehicles are themselves signs. In the case of complex iconic signs, the sign structure which constitutes the iconic sign may or may not itself be composed of iconic signs. Thus a mathematical structure, since it is a relational structure, may be regarded as an iconic sign designating the class of similar structures and yet none of the individual component sign vehicles need be iconic, and indeed in most cases are not. In the case of a complex esthetic sign – which by definition is iconic – it seems as

<sup>8</sup> Dewey uses this term in *Art as Experience*; the notion that the esthetic experience is an active perceptual process is central to his position.

if at least some of the individual component sign vehicles must be iconic signs and at least partially of the same character as the complex icon itself.

This vague and general statement<sup>9</sup> can be made somewhat more concrete in considering complex esthetic semiosis in terms of the perceiving interpreter. In looking at a picture or hearing music or reading a poem there is a connected tissue of references in which one aspect of the work sets up demands and expectations which are met, or partially met, by other aspects, these other aspects in turn functioning in a similar manner – and in this process the character of the whole is built up in terms of the character of the parts. A certain rising series of notes determines to some degree the succeeding notes; a certain type of rhyme in the earlier parts of a poem sets up expectations as to the type of sound sequences which are to occur in the remaining portion; certain lines in one part of a painting prepare the interpreter for the kind of line to be encountered elsewhere. A complex sign structure is operative in such esthetic perception, and the interpreter (including the creator) performs a complex perceptual activity, passing from part to part of the art object, responding to certain parts as signs of others, and building up a total response (and so total object of perception) in terms of the partial responses. In this process non-iconic signs play their part as in any perceptual process; what differentiates esthetic perception from other perceptual activities is the fact that perception is directed to value properties which are directly embodied (though perhaps only partially embodied) in certain of the iconic sign vehicles which form part of the total sign complex. What is taken account of through the complex esthetic sign is thus a complex value property which is partially indicated by the value properties of various component sign vehicles, other signs of a non-esthetic and even non-iconic sort serving as a secondary symbolism to build up the esthetic sign vehicle or serving to direct attention in such a way from one part of the esthetic sign vehicle to another that the effect is cumulative and the total icon emerges.

<sup>9</sup> It is vague and general partly because we are at the bare beginning of a semiotical theory of esthetics, and partly because to make it more precise would involve a consideration of how non-iconic signs function in esthetic discourse, and this in turn is connected with the problem of the semiotic differentiation of the various arts. Often secondary forms of symbolism function in building up the complex icon; thus the notes on a musical score and the words of a printed poem are devices for calling into being the genuine esthetic sign vehicle – tones in the case of music, and perhaps tones and the interpretants of the subsidiary symbolism in the case of the poem. The 'perhaps' indicates the complexity of the phenomena involved in esthetic semiosis.

In esthetic perception value properties are taken account of both mediately and immediately: mediately in that they are presented by signs, immediately in that the sign vehicles used embody in themselves in varying degrees the value properties which they present. In such perception the sign vehicle is not simply used as an instrument to direct the interpreter to some other object with the property in question, nor as an occasion for contemplation in reverie of the indicated value; esthetic perception, as perception, is focused upon objects, and it discerns – even if only partially – in the very object itself that which the object signifies. In this process there is consummation because the object does embody the value it signifies, but the consummation is in another sense incomplete, since it is mediated by signs, and often by signs which are not themselves iconic of, or are only partially iconic of, what they signify – and the work of art, as a whole, still remains a sign.

Esthetic perception, found in all normal persons to some degree, can be developed, and the realm of works of art indefinitely extended. The artist is the person able to so form objects that esthetic perception is facilitated, intensified, and perfected, but in the strict sense there is a work of art wherever something is the object of esthetic perception – and there is nothing which in this sense and to some degree cannot become a work of art. There is no medium which art cannot utilize – not even the process of living. And when life itself becomes a work of art, the opposition between art and life (between esthetically indicated values and activity aiming to control and directly possess values) is overcome.

## 6. ESTHETIC GENERALITY

The account which has been given considers the work of art a single sign which is, except in the trivial limiting case, component signs constituting a complex sign structure. But if the work of art is itself a sign, then by definition it has a designatum. Such a doctrine seems to run foul of the oppositions which theories of "imitation" or "representation" in esthetics have encountered; since so-called "abstract art" seems the farthest removed from the suggested position, it forms a convenient point of discussion.

From the point of view of semiotic, abstract art is only one aspect

of the phenomenon of sign generality<sup>10</sup>. A sign may be general in a number of respects: the process of semiosis may be called out by any one of a number of sign vehicles; the permissible sign vehicles may be interpreted by a number of interpreters with varying processes of interpretation; the process of interpretation may be satisfied by a number of objects or situations so that the sign has a plurality of denotata. Thus a poem may be printed or read time and again, and by the same or different persons; there may be a number of incidents in the life of the same person at different times, or in the lives of different persons, to which the poem is applicable, and which therefore are denotata of the poem. There are various degrees of such generality, and abstract art is simply an extreme case of high generality of semantical reference, the generality of the component iconic signs and the total iconic sign being so high that their range of possible denotata is very large. Even though the complexity of the total icon is so very great that no denotatum (other than the esthetic sign vehicle itself) can in actuality be found, the work of art can still be considered a sign – for there can be designation without denotation.

A comparison of abstract art to mathematics may be clarifying at this point. Abstract art has a relation to the total language of art similar to the relation of mathematics to the total language of science. At first sight this thesis might seem to lend support to the view that such art has no semantical dimension, since a mathematical system is commonly regarded as purely formal or syntactical. It is of course true that one may be concerned with exhibiting the structure of a linguistic (or possible linguistic) system, and not with the question as to which situations, if any, are denotata of the system in question. None the less it may well be that the structure of the system itself was in origin suggested by, or partly patterned after, some existing structure (such as the relation of Euclidean geometry to the solid bodies of ordinary experience). And even the finally formalized structure has a semantical character, since the relations among its terms limit the choice of semantical rules which may be used in assigning empirical meanings to the component expressions; the mathematical system designates the class of structures similar to itself and denotes any structure which in fact is so similar – though in fact there may be no denotatum other than the sign vehicles of the system itself.

In the same way, the elements used in abstract art have various and

<sup>10</sup> See *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, Section 13, and Dewey's discussion of abstract art in *Art as Experience*, especially pages 93-94, 100-101.

pervasive semantical dimensions: the work of art taken as a whole is a sign structure which designates the class of objects or situations which have the characteristics it has – only now the relevant characteristics are value properties, and the work denotes any object or situation which does in fact have these value properties; and again there may be no denotatum other than the esthetic sign vehicle itself. There are differences, to be sure, as in the fact that while all of the component sign vehicles of the mathematical system may be non-iconic, certain of those of the esthetic system must be iconic; but in both cases the systems as a whole are iconic, and they have designata – and so a semantical dimension – in the same sense.

It may be added that the recognition that signs may be built up which have no denotata (or none other than their own sign vehicles in case the sign is iconic), frees the artist (and the scientist) from the literal representation of the actual world which such a semiotically grounded esthetics might at first suggest; the creativity of the artist is fully protected. Just as the scientist may develop complex theories which do not have a counterpart in reality, but serve to integrate the material at hand to suggest new hypotheses to be tested, so the artist may build up elaborate sign structures, the elements of which may be suffused with the values of many things, and yet which as a whole present a value complex which has no realization elsewhere – and this structure may not only serve to integrate existing values but may suggest possibilities for the embodiment of the created value structure into the situations and problems of daily life.

## 7. ESTHETIC ANALYSIS

If the work of art is conceived as an esthetic sign, it follows that esthetic analysis is a particular case of sign analysis. And since a sign is exhaustively characterized by giving its syntactical, semantical, and pragmatic components and relations, the same is true of the analysis of esthetic signs. Within the general field of semiotic we distinguish esthetics or esthetic semiotic, and corresponding to the subdivisions of semiotic we may distinguish *esthetic syntactics*, *esthetic semantics*, and *esthetic pragmatics*; each of these has its *pure* and *descriptive* part – i.e. pure esthetic syntactics would elaborate the language in which to talk about the syntactical dimension of esthetic signs, while any actual case of analysis of this dimension of an esthetic sign would be an instance

of descriptive esthetic syntactics. A few words concerning each of the three main subdivisions of esthetics will be relevant, since these, together with their interrelations, constitute the field of esthetic semiotic.

#### 8. ESTHETIC SYNTACTICS

Esthetic syntactics has as its task the elaboration of a language applicable to the syntactical or "formal" interrelations of esthetic signs. It has the relation to esthetic discourse that "logical syntax" in Carnap's sense<sup>11</sup> has to scientific discourse; both are subdivisions of the still more inclusive field of syntactics which is concerned with the syntactical relations of all forms of discourse – and art and science are only two such forms. Since logical syntax (the syntactics of scientific discourse) is the best developed part of syntactics, it offers a fertile field of suggestions for the development of esthetic syntactics (the syntactics of esthetic discourse). Thus the concepts of logical syntax (such as formation and transformation rules, primitive terms and sentences, consequence relation, probability relation, demonstration, derivation, valid, contravalid, synonymy) can be regarded as special cases of even more general concepts which equally well find special exemplifications in other forms of discourse (esthetic, technological, etc.). Thus in any work of art (say a piece of music) there are only certain sign vehicles which are used ("primitive terms"); these are initially combined only in certain ways ("formation rules"); from certain combinations other combinations are obtained, or the range of combination obtainable is at least limited in certain respects ("transformation rules", "consequence relation", "probability relation"); certain combinations are congruous or incongruous with other combinations ("valid", "contravalid"). By making precise what has here been only indicated, it would be possible to develop a language in which to analyze individual works of art much as one would analyze a mathematical or scientific system; individual works of art could then be classified into larger groups in terms of their formal properties; significant comparisons could be made between the individual works or the larger groups much as mathematical and scientific systems can now be compared.

Because of the developed state of logical syntax, and because of the large body of material in esthetics ready to be interpreted and assimilated,

<sup>11</sup> R. Carnap, *Philosophy and Logical Syntax* (London, 1935); *Logical Syntax of Language* (London, 1937); *Foundations of Logic and Mathematics* (1939).

lated, it should be possible to make rapid strides in the development of esthetic syntactics. Such a development would be timely in virtue of the contemporary stress upon attention to, and analysis of, the esthetic sign vehicle; it would also be of significance for the wider field of semiotic, through the extension of interest to fields of sign functioning now either ignored or treated in isolation from other fields. The possibilities opened up by esthetic syntactics may well make prophetic the words of Dewey<sup>12</sup>: "Probably a time will come when it will be universally recognized that the differences between coherent logical schemes and artistic structures in poetry, music and the plastics are technical and specialized, rather than deep-seated."

#### 9. ESTHETIC SEMANTICS

The logicians have come of late to recognize that the powerful tool of syntactics is not sufficient for the realization of their purposes, and that semantics supplies another tool of great power. It is to be hoped that estheticians will take this lesson to heart, and not neglect esthetic semantics.

Many of the statements made in preceding sections would, in a systematic presentation, be placed within esthetic semantics. The distinction between iconic and non-iconic signs, and the localization of the esthetic sign among the former, is a semantic distinction and localization. The characterization of the designata of esthetic signs as value properties was a semantical characterization. All discussions as to the relation of esthetic signs to objective situations from which they spring are properly carried on in the language of semantics. The treatment of abstract art in the section on esthetic generality was primarily a semantical treatment. The question as to whether the work of art as a sign structure is itself a single sign, is partly a question as to the conditions under which semantical rules for diverse signs unite to form a single semantical rule defining a single sign.

The problem of "esthetical truth", may be taken to illustrate the transformation which a problem in esthetic undergoes when seen as lying within esthetic semantics. It is perhaps wise, once it has been distinguished from 'knowledge', to regard 'truth' as a semantical term. In logic 'truth' is a predicate applicable only to certain kinds of signs, namely, statements, when such a sign has the claimed denotatum or

<sup>12</sup> *Philosophy and Civilization* (New York, 1931), pp. 120-121.

denotata. Since a statement must say something about something, it must involve signs for locating what is referred to, and such signs are ultimately indexical signs. An iconic sign in isolation cannot then be a statement, and a work of art, conceived as an iconic sign, cannot be true in the semantical sense of the term. Nevertheless, the statement that a work of art is "true" might under analysis turn out to be an elliptical form of syntactical, semantical, or pragmatical statements. Thus semantically it might be intended to affirm that the work in question actually is iconic of the value structure of a certain object or situation – a claim in fact made when a Jonson painting is entitled *Winter* or a Scriabine composition is entitled *Prometheus*, for then to an icon is added other signs sufficient to generate a statement. Such statements are, strictly speaking, not made by the work of art, but are statements made about the work of art at the level of descriptive semantics; and while the work of art is not itself true in the semantical sense of the term, statements in semantics made about it are true or false in the same sense in which scientific statements are true or false – for while the work of art is esthetic discourse, semantics is a form of scientific discourse.

#### 10. ESTHETIC PRAGMATICS

Under this field fall problems connected with the relation of esthetic signs to their creators and interpreters, i.e. all the biological, psychological, and sociological factors involved in the functioning of esthetic signs. The previous discussion of esthetic perception belongs here; so would a consideration of the process of esthetic creation, or an analysis of the similarities and differences between esthetic creation and recreation ("appreciation"), or an investigation of the degree and range of communication achieved through various esthetic signs.

Many of the problems in this field center around the question as to the function which art performs for the individual and for society, so it is fitting to single out this problem for emphasis and illustration. The pragmatist has argued that the reflective type of sign process arises with and functions in the solution of problems which hinder a developing act from reaching its goal; in what sense is the instrumental role of esthetic signs the same and in what sense different? It seems clear that Dewey intends to extend his general instrumental doctrine of signs to what we have called esthetic signs<sup>13</sup>. A sign arises when conduct is

<sup>13</sup> See especially *Art as Experience*, p. 97, and Chapter 4.

blocked, and allows the act to take account of relevant considerations not presented by the immediately given environment; the hypothesis which issues from reflection presents the basis for a plan of action aiming to allow the blocked act to proceed to its consummation. What now of the esthetic sign?

If an act moves uninterruptedly to its consummation, there is no reason, and perhaps no mechanism, for the indication of this consummation by signs. But let the act be blocked, and then the presentation of the goal of the act, or the various possible goals, becomes as important as the presentation of the various conditions which must be met for reaching the goal or goals. The esthetic sign performs in general the important function of making available for the control of the ongoing act the values answering to the termination of the act, and a particular esthetic sign vehicle presents in objective form the solution of a conflict of values; it thus corresponds somewhat in the realm of ends to the achievement that, say, the gasoline engine represents in the realm of means. There is, however, an important difference: while the engine exists as a physical means to reaching many ends, the esthetic sign vehicle exists as a means to the realization of a work of art (as a way of producing esthetic perception). Hence the work of art itself has only the type of existence which a sign has, though its sign vehicle (or vehicles) has the status of physical objects. It is this fact – coupled with the iconic character of the esthetic sign – which throws light upon the confusing sense in which art seems to be both consummatory and instrumental. Since the value properties of what is designated are, in part at least, embodied in the esthetic sign vehicle, the artist has actually molded the world nearer to his heart's desire and presented the basis for consummatory experiences; but since the values embodied in the component sign vehicles are instances of value found elsewhere (even if the value of the whole has no other embodiment), and since in its capacity as a sign the work of art presents these values mediately (as the sign vehicle presents them immediately), the values and the solution are raised to consciousness, and in their generality may perform an instrumental role in other value situations – including the original situation which was the matrix for the creation of the esthetic sign<sup>14</sup>. It hardly need be added that the artist, in meeting his problem, may furnish a pattern available for many other problems than his own, and so may in his work embody, clarify, and advance the value structures

<sup>14</sup> It should be added that in so far as there exists an interest in esthetic perception as such, this interest may find its complete satisfaction within art itself.



of a group or epoch – or, at the limit, the value structure of man in all times and places.

#### 11. ESTHETIC SEMIOTIC

While it is useful and legitimate for certain purposes to stress some one dimension of the functioning of esthetic signs, and so to confine oneself to esthetic syntactics, semantics, or pragmatics, this restriction has certain disadvantages. Thus, for instance, the various schools of esthetics stress primarily one or the other of the three dimensions, and their apparent rivalries are in the main the distortion produced when various descriptions of aspects of a complex process are taken to be rival accounts of the whole process – a distortion which has taken heavy toll in the field of esthetic criticism. It is therefore necessary to stress the fact that esthetic semiotic – as a subfield of general semiotic – is a unified whole, and that it is only in terms of this whole that the differentiations and interrelations of the subordinate esthetical sciences can be discussed. Here, as elsewhere, analysis and synthesis, worm's perspective and eagle's eye, must support each other if the double dangers of superficiality and vacuousness are to be avoided.

Once esthetics is approached in terms of the wide outlook furnished by semiotic, the character of esthetic discourse, as a particular kind of semiosis, will stand out more fully and sharply. When a similar result is obtained for other forms of discourse (such as scientific, technological, philosophical, and religious discourse), a new road is opened for the clarification of the interrelations between the major human activities in terms of a comparison of the forms of discourse which they have created and molded to their images. It is in this way that the semiotical approach to esthetics is not only significant for esthetics itself, but has wide implications for tracing the relation of art to the whole domain of human activity and culture. Seen from this perspective, art, science, and technology, appear as complementary and not competing forms of human activity (though they may compete in the life of the individual), each nourishing and completing the tasks which the others perform; art presenting and making available for conscious control values and possible value reconstructions, science giving the knowledge relevant to the realization of any value, and technology (including morality under this term) furnishing the techniques by which man may "chisel and carve and file" until his "vague dream imprints its smile on the unyielding flint".

#### 12. ESTHETIC JUDGMENT

The analysis of a sign is carried on in the metalanguage of semiotic, and eventuates in statements about the sign in question. Such statements must be clearly distinguished from another type of sentence, also in the metalanguage, which evaluates the sign in question; it is convenient to reserve the term 'esthetic judgment' for this latter type of sentence. Esthetic analysis and esthetic judgment would then together comprise the field of esthetic criticism.

It is impossible to go deeply into the topic of esthetic judgment at this point, because to do so would necessitate an elaborated theory of value in connection with a developed theory of technological discourse. So only a few words are in order, and these more to show the nature of the problems than to solve them.

*Technological discourse* is characterized by sentences containing such expressions as 'You ought to', 'Don't do it', 'It is to be done', 'It must not be done'. Such sentences are characteristic of all the applied arts, including morality. Such sentences aim to induce a mode of behavior conducive to the realization of a certain end, though this end is seldom explicitly stated. The term 'ought' under sign analysis is found always to involve reference to an end, an implied claim that a particular mode of procedure is more effective than others in reaching that end, and an aim of getting the person addressed to adopt the procedure in question. It is now necessary to note that terms such as 'good', 'bad', 'better' (in common with many other terms) function both within scientific and technological discourse, and it is easy to overlook the difference of function in the two cases<sup>15</sup>. To say that something is bad may be a scientific statement intending to affirm a relation of something in question to a particular interest, or it may mean that the something in question ought to be disapproved – in which case the expression is technological in character and aims to produce a certain attitude and mode of behavior. The two sentences are very different in character, and the second cannot logically be deduced from the first; in general it is never possible to deduce a sentence of technological discourse from scientific statements alone. This and this alone can be rationally meant by the statement that "science is not concerned with values". For science can

<sup>15</sup> Another instance can be found in the use of modal terms; contrast the 'must' in 'a heavy unsupported body must fall' and in 'you must be more considerate of your children'. It is planned later to study in detail the nature of technological discourse, and its relation to scientific and esthetic discourse.

of course be concerned with values descriptively, and the data which it presents can be used to direct and even modify our interests. But technological discourse involves an accepted end, and has no leverage over one who does not accept the end in question.

This analysis, brief and fragmentary as it is, throws some light into the dark jungle of esthetic criticism. The basic confusion here is between esthetic analysis and esthetic criticism, i.e., lies in confusing esthetic discourse as an object of scientific discourse with esthetic discourse as an object of technological discourse. Otherwise expressed, the sentences of the critic are often functioning primarily in the pragmatic dimension while giving the impression of being entirely semantical in character.

But even if this basic confusion be avoided, and the technological nature of certain criticisms recognized, there are still numerous sources of confusion possible through neglecting the fact that a sentence in technological discourse can only be appraised in terms of the end to which the technique in question is relevant, and in so far as these accepted ends differ in various critics without being recognized as different, the resulting judgments will differ and will even appear as contradictory. The various schools of criticism in fact are – as already indicated – prone to accept some dimension of esthetic semiosis as standard, and then to estimate works of art in terms of how far they have the syntactical, semantical, or pragmatic characteristics taken as normative by the view in question. The result is scandal as far as esthetic criticism is concerned; there is perhaps one good effect of the resulting babel: it must force persons to respond more directly to esthetic discourse itself and to approach art more freely and widely than the devotees of the various “isms” have been able to do.

Some clarity will be gained if the above-mentioned sources of confusion are recognized, and it is seen that esthetic judgment must make clear the point at which it has passed into technological discourse and left behind the scientific discourse of esthetic analysis. Esthetic judgment is a judgment about esthetic signs; it can be concerned in the last analysis only with the adequacy with which such a sign performs its distinctive function of presenting values through their incorporation in an appropriate sign vehicle; and in the answer to this question the data offered by syntactical, semantical, and pragmatic sign analysis are all relevant. Only if it is the task of a work of art to embody all values, or the highest value in some table of values, it is legitimate to apply a judgment upon the amount or rank of the value designated by a sign to

the sign itself. It is true that the distinction in practice becomes difficult to draw because the esthetic sign vehicle, as an icon, embodies the value it signifies, and so may be judged not as a sign but simply as an object of value. It would be pedantic to insist upon the distinction were it not for the fact that the theory which has been developed should sensitize the art critic to the fact that his concern is with esthetic signs, and while as a person he may also criticise art from various other points of view (such as the moral point of view), he can legitimately be held responsible for recognizing when he passes from the sphere of esthetic judgments to other forms of judgment which the domain of value permits.

The theory of signs, when linked with a suitably developed theory of value, may thus not only furnish a theory of the nature of art, but also make important contributions to the technique of esthetic criticism.

### 13. ESTHETICS AND THE UNITY OF SCIENCE

In conclusion it is only necessary to make explicit a point which has been implicit throughout the course of the discussion. The specific character of esthetic discourse gives the basis for differentiating art as a form of human activity from such other forms of human activity as are reflected in scientific and technological discourse; in this way it should contribute in an age dominated by science and technology to an understanding of the nature and importance of art, and to the release of creative artistic forces. Nevertheless, esthetics, as the theory of esthetic discourse, falls within the same field as the theory of scientific or technological discourse; that is, esthetics, as part of the theory of signs, is one field of science, and has whatever place in the system of science which is ascribed to semiotic itself. The approach to esthetics in terms of the theory of signs, is thus not merely significant for art, esthetics, and semiotic, but for the whole program of unified science. The relation of semiotic to the system of the sciences, and its strategic position in integrating the natural and socio-humanistic sciences, will be the theme of a later study.

[Addendum, 1971: For a later discussion of this approach to esthetics, see Chapter 5 of *Signification and Significance*.]