

GILMAR ADOLFO HERMES \*

## ***PACARRETE*: THE AESTHETICS OF THE SCREEN IN JOURNALISTIC TEXTS**

**SUMMARY:** This article addresses how aesthetic aspects appear in cultural journalism focused on Brazilian films. The aesthetic question is semiotically identified based on the theory of Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Observing films and analyzing them through textual approaches directed toward the realm of meaning, as defined by Peirce through the phenomenological category of Firstness, poses a challenge. This study considers the film *Pacarrete* (2019), directed by Allan Deberton, which won eight awards at the 2019 Gramado Film Festival. There are various signs within the cinematic realm and the specific production that journalists can articulate. It is observed how signs that align with an approach rooted in Firstness relate to other types of signs. As with all communication between humans, much of the film generates meanings within the phenomenological category of Thirdness, using symbols, words, and elements shaped by diverse cultural manifestations, but a closer attention to aesthetic aspects can offer a different perspective for journalistic approaches.

**KEY WORDS:** semiotics, cultural journalism, Brazilian cinema, aesthetics.

### **1. Introduction**

This research aims to semantically observe how the film *Pacarrete* (2019) is aesthetically constructed and how aspects related to sensibility are addressed in journalistic texts about it. It is understood that aesthetic aspects—those oriented

---

\* Federal University of Pelotas, Faculty of Journalism. E-mail: ghermes@yahoo.com.  
ORCID: 0000-0002-1064-3996.

toward sensibility—are the most characteristic features of all artistic production, including cinema, and therefore deserve emphasis in journalistic approaches. One of the paths explored by theorists to analyze the aesthetics of films is to reflect on their constitution as language and signs. In this regard, the semiotic concepts of Charles Sanders Peirce offer valuable insights for understanding aesthetics and considering this aspect of human thought and creativity in filmmaking. In this study the aim is to observe how these productions are semiotically constituted in aesthetic terms, and to assess the validity and relevance of a journalistic approach from this perspective, based on the analysis of journalistic texts that have, in fact, focused on the films in question.

The film *Pacarrete* (2019), directed by Allan Deberton, derives its title from its protagonist, a retired art teacher living in a typical small town in Brazil's northeastern region. Residing with her ailing sister, Pacarrete dreams of performing a ballet piece herself at the city's anniversary celebration, inspired by video images of Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova (1881–1931). Throughout the film, signs generate semioses that connect to the Brazilian context, the representation of hegemonic European culture in the collective imagination, and the coexistence of realism and fantasy in the narrative centered on the main character.

The confrontation between signs associated with high culture and popular culture takes place within the protagonist's life context. The retired teacher still dreams of performing classical ballet, particularly at the city's event, which features only a *forró*<sup>1</sup> music program. Since the film materializes a clash between the values of both high and popular culture, journalistic texts emphasize these mediated aspects. However, the aesthetic elements tend to manifest primarily in interpretations of the main character, as portrayed by actress Marcélia Cartaxo. It is considered that the main aesthetically charged signs—those potentially more relevant in a journalistic text focused on the arts, such as cinema—are those that tend to produce abductive semioses.

## 2. A Semiotic Perspective on Aesthetics

In defining the characteristics of everything that manifests as existent, whether in the real or imaginary realms, Peirce (1993) identified three phenomenological categories: Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness. Within his conceptual framework, Peirce developed a series of semiotic terms that assist in addressing aesthetic issues, particularly concerning the category of Firstness. This category encompasses types of signs known as qualisigns, icons, and rhemes (Deledalle, 1990; Santaella, 2000).

In the aesthetic analysis of films, Peirce's concepts are related in this research to approaches involving the reading and creation of images (Dondis, 1973) and

---

<sup>1</sup> *Forró* is a style of popular music and dance that originated in the north-east of Brazil, but which is now popular all over the country. The instruments which feature in *forró* are the accordion, the bass drum and the triangle, and it is danced with a partner.

cinematic language (Aumont, 1983; Bordwell, Thompson, 2010). A semiotic perspective is also applied to the analysis of journalistic texts, with this study focusing on the actions of signs related to aesthetics.

The concept of the qualisign, formulated by Peirce (1993), helps to understand what constitutes aesthetic specificity. This type of sign, concerning the representamen (the sign itself), corresponds to what can exist—a possibility or a tendency—but which has not yet clearly manifested as such. In situations where a sign manifests as an actual existence, it becomes a sinsign, an occurrence. Thus, the concept of the qualisign, addressing a possibility rather than an occurrence, is connected to the notion of abduction—a form of reasoning related to generating new ideas, which is of interest to both the arts and the sciences.

It is also important to highlight that when a sign fully manifests as something perceptible and is still strongly characterized by its sensory attributes related to aesthetics, it is considered an iconic sinsign. This type of sign relates to its dynamic object through relations of similarity, based on its observable qualities, as is typical of an icon. Among the types of interpretants it can generate, the one most strongly linked to sensibility and the production of new ideas is the rhematic iconic sinsign. In analyzing a film with a focus on aesthetic aspects, we can observe the iconic sinsigns present in the film and hypothesize possible aesthetic interpretants—rhematic iconic sinsigns—generated by the audience.

Sinsigns can be understood as replicas of legisigns—that is, manifestations of habits, conventions, or logical generalities—and they generate semioses even in this form. However, one of the powers of cinematic language, particularly from an aesthetic perspective, is its ability to present signs in motion and within a specific duration. This dynamic quality enhances the production of meaning as occurrences in time and space, making them true sinsigns.

To observe the iconic sinsigns in cinematic production, studies on imagery and cinematic language are combined. Donis A. Dondis (1973) prompts us to examine images in their abstract, representational, and symbolic aspects. Using Peirce's definition of the qualisign as corresponding to aesthetic feeling as an initial reference, Dondis's abstract level is the most relevant for analysis. By defining the abstract level, Dondis (1973) guides us to examine the composition of images, paying attention to the dots, lines, shapes, tones, contrasts, colors, definition, regularity, irregularity, and other elements.

Jacques Aumont and his collaborators (e.g., Alain Bergala, Marc Vernet and Michel Marié), in the reference work *L'Esthétique du film* (1983) lead us to observe productions through concepts intrinsic to cinematic language, such as field, off-field, sharpness, focus, out of focus, shot, framing, types of shots, camera movements, sound, editing, relationship between shots, and so forth.

In this study, the analysis of the film is conducted using these concepts and definitions as guides for an analytical perspective. By observing certain iconic sinsigns—some with a clear configuration of objects and others with a more abstract character—it is possible to hypothesize about potential abductive reasoning the film may generate through its aesthetic elements. In journalistic texts,

attention is given to how aesthetic elements are addressed, using these conceptual frameworks, and whether they suggest ideas—new or otherwise—through these aspects.

### 3. Aesthetic Aspects in the Film *Pacarrete*

The main character in the film is played by actress Marcélia Cartaxo, who gained significant acclaim for her role in *Hour of the Star* (1985), a production based on Clarice Lispector's novel and directed by Suzana Amaral. This film is considered a classic of Brazilian cinema, for which Marcélia received the Best Actress awards at the Brasília Film Festival (1985) and the Berlin International Film Festival (1986), where she became the first Brazilian actress to win the Silver Bear. Since then, she has appeared in dozens of films, with *Pacarrete* being one of her most recent works. As an actress with visibility and a distinguished career, Marcélia carries a cinematic significance tied to the expectations surrounding the performances of renowned actors. According to Marc Vernet (1983), it is the actors and their qualities that give materiality to the characters in a screenplay. Vernet notes that "the fiction film character does not exist in its own, being dependent upon the traits of a given actor" (Vernet, 1983, p. 107). Thus, much of the expressiveness of the central character in *Pacarrete* stems from the talent and representativeness of the actress, combined with the aesthetic work of the cameras, lighting, set design, costumes, and other elements.

One of the aspects that aesthetically distinguishes the film *Pacarrete* from an abstract perspective (Dondis, 1973) is its use of colors and luminosity, with predominantly lighter tones. Throughout much of the film, warm saturated colors—such as orange and red—dominate the settings, objects, and costumes. Darker tones, emphasized through lighting and contrast, are reserved for the more dramatic moments involving conflict or crisis experienced by the characters. These iconic sinsigns closely align with qualisigns and, by evoking sensations, tend to generate rhematic interpretants in viewers.

The constant heat typical of the northeastern Brazilian climate is conveyed primarily through the colors and luminosity. It is worth noting that films are audiovisual products composed exclusively of visual and auditory signs. Other senses, such as touch, smell, and taste, can only be suggested through synesthesia, where one sense generates semioses corresponding to another. In this case, the interpretants of the rhematic type, closely tied to sensations, are produced by visual and auditory signs.

The opening scene features Pacarrete (played by Marcélia Cartaxo) dancing on the sidewalk in front of her home. The façade of the house, where she lives with her sister Chiquinha (Zezita Matos), is painted in a saturated orange color, and the character wears a red outfit. The brightness of the façade is enhanced by the tonal contrast with the neighboring shop. Additionally, the shadows of Pacarrete's movements on the ground, juxtaposed with the sunlight, emphasize the natural lighting and add expressiveness to the scene. The introduction to the

character, seen by the audience for the first time, is achieved progressively through a sequence of shots—from medium shots to close-ups—culminating in a close-up of her face.

There is only a slow camera movement in the opening scene, highlighting one of the film's prevailing aesthetic features: the minimal use of camera movement. The editing relies primarily on transitions between shots through cuts, avoiding long sequences with dynamic camera movements. The composition and organization of framed objects generate semioses both representationally—providing an understanding of the space and the characters' actions—and symbolically. Throughout the film, certain elements, such as the sidewalk in front of the house, are introduced and reintroduced to produce metaphorical semioses. The way the iconic sinsign "sidewalk" is depicted, associated with the actions of Pacarrete and other characters, gradually suggests semioses that culminate in the film's fantastical conclusion.

It is important to note that the iconic sinsign "sidewalk" generates semioses as a legisign, functioning as a logical generality, as is the case with many objects that compose cinematic imagery. Michel Marie (1983) writes that cinematic language becomes intelligible when we recognize objects, but this identification involves "situating [them] in a class", which constitutes an "iconic naming" and, in Peircean terms, corresponds to a legisign. Marie states, "a person's vision selects the object's pertinent traits, thereby assimilating the object with a social classification" (Marie, 1983, p. 153). The author also explains that the semiosis of objects (iconic sinsigns) is influenced by editing, encompassing the relationships between objects within each shot—"the internal composition of an image"—as well as the sequence in which objects appear in the film. For instance, "an object appears in a film a few moments after another", where the relationship between objects in consecutive shots creates meaning, with each sequence involving the interplay of one object with another.

The character Pacarrete is introduced in the very first scene, setting the stage for the story to unfold. Throughout the film, she is revealed through images, actions, transitions across spaces, interactions with other characters, and dialogues. Her traits, aspirations, history, past, frustrations, dreams, allies, and antagonists (whose roles can often shift) are portrayed. With her modulated voice—at times shrill and raspy—Pacarrete is perpetually on the defensive, striving to assert herself as someone who holds a privileged place in the cultural realm due to her artistic knowledge.

Pacarrete dreams of a close connection with France, reflected in her very name, which appears to be a Portuguese adaptation of the French word *pâquerette* (daisy). However, she is deeply immersed in the cultural context of the Brazilian Northeast. Her clothing, in particular, serves as a localized interpretation of French culture, with its semiosis conveyed through the specific colors and patterns of her outfits. The use of the cloché hat underscores her aspiration to be recognized as a representative of French culture, as this accessory was a modern hallmark of French women in the early 20th century. Thus, the character can be

understood as existing at the crossroads of two cultural systems: French and Brazilian modes of dress.

One of the first scenes reveals the interior of the house where Pacarrete and her sister live, cared for by their domestic worker, Maria (played by Soia Lira). The setting is accompanied by a soundtrack of French music, reflecting Pacarrete's personal taste, as she listens to vinyl records throughout the film. Her sister admires her when she plays the piano, and the house is decorated with objects that convey a sense of artistic refinement, including watercolor paintings by Pacarrete herself. However, this artistic taste is also infused with a kitsch sensibility, featuring figurines and mass-produced reproductions of works by European artists.

One of the characters who will become Pacarrete's allies throughout the story is Miguel, the owner of the local store (portrayed in a special appearance by actor João Miguel). During Pacarrete's first walk through the town, she passes by the storefront bearing the sign "Bar do Miguel", once again featuring saturated red tones. Miguel embraces Pacarrete's friendship and appears to be one of the few characters who understands and appreciates her admiration for French culture.

Pacarrete moves through a typical Brazilian public market, where meat is openly displayed for sale, creating a striking contrast with her ostensibly sophisticated demeanor. Wearing a hat adorned with ribbons and an embroidered dress, she converses in one of the early scenes with the town's female mayor, who will become her primary antagonist. The head of the local government rejects Pacarrete's proposal to perform a ballet presentation during the town's anniversary celebration. Despite this, the determined dancer persists, carrying her idea to its ultimate consequences.

Pacarrete's clothing often features warm colors that contrast sharply with the cooler tones worn by the other characters. The first instance where the protagonist is seen wearing darker tones is during a scene where she practices ballet exercises at home, in a dedicated space equipped with a barre and mirror. The "mirrors" become significant objects (sinsigns iconic) with a metaphorical dimension throughout the narrative, reflecting the complexity of Pacarrete's feelings about her identity in familial, cultural, social, and emotional contexts. Her "ballet slippers", another symbol representing the art of ballet, appear, disappear, and reappear, intensifying the tension surrounding her desire to perform a dance recital.

Abstract elements in the scenes depicting Chiquinha's health struggles, Pacarrete's sister, generate semioses. The lighting shifts to darker and more contrasting tones when the two are in the bedroom. Pacarrete lies in a hammock while Chiquinha, bedridden, asks for assistance to urinate. The intimacy between the sisters unfolds across various scenes, ultimately leading to a tragic conclusion. Their dialogues reveal the nature of their relationship, alternating between lighter moments, depicted with brighter tones, and more somber ones, marked by darker tones and pronounced lighting contrasts.

In a seamstress's clothing shop, Pacarrete is seen wearing a red cloche hat. She declares her desire to resemble Anna Pavlova as she commissions a ballet costume. The seamstress replies, "It will be expensive!" The retired teacher's artistic aspirations are expressed amidst the noise of a loudspeaker truck on the street, announcing her main competitors for the city's anniversary celebration: *forró* and *sertanejo*<sup>2</sup> music. These elements serve as signs of contemporary popular culture and musical preferences, contrasting sharply with Pacarrete's more classical artistic ideals.

The name "Anna Pavlova"<sup>3</sup> is a *sinsign* that carries with it a rich history, not only in ballet but also in the context of this art form's relationship with Brazil. The Russian ballerina, who lived from 1881 to 1931, is regarded as a symbol of classical ballet and its popularization in the 20th century.

Pacarrete reveres the image of Pavlova performing *The Dying Swan* at home on a VHS tape. The short-lived image of Pavlova that has survived to this day is like a small jewel, kept under seal by the protagonist among her possessions. It represents all the power that classical dance can hold for her and for others who think the same way. The black-and-white footage of this performance on the video screen serves as a major reference for her aspirations as a ballerina. However, as Pacarrete practices in front of the screen under Chiquinha's admiration, the tape breaks. Miguel, who comes to her aid, is called upon to repair the precious recording of Pavlova's performance. The scene where Miguel fixes the tape takes place at the kitchen table, mostly bathed in warm, bright colors. The kitchen serves as a meeting space for the characters and also a place where their conflicts are expressed.

Another encounter takes place between Pacarrete and the mayor, this time on the street. When Pacarrete spots the authority figure passing by in a car, whom she had been previously prevented from speaking to, she leaps in front of the vehicle and enters as soon as the door opens. The two argue inside the moving car, and Pacarrete physically assaults the mayor, pulling her hair, before being thrown out onto the road.

In the next sequence, one of the film's most expressive scenes unfolds, with the protagonist alone on the road, disfigured, her hair tangled, walking towards the ruins of a factory with brick chimneys. She encounters a poodle, initially appearing to be more of an adversary, seemingly ready to judge and condemn her.

The factory in ruins serves as a *sinsign*, creating a metaphor for the protagonist's feeling of defeat, having seen her dream of performing at the city festival shattered in the previous sequence. As she walks through the interior of the

---

<sup>2</sup> *Sertanejo* is a Brazilian music genre that originated in the 1920s countryside. It is similar to country music in the United States, with similar musical elements and clothing. The lyrics generally depict the beauty of the countryside in contrast with city life. The music often features acoustic instruments like the accordion and the guitar.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Pavlova is especially known for her iconic solo role in *The Dying Swan*. Among her many performances, she visited Brazil in 1918, performing in Belém do Pará, and again in 1920, in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

building, the camera is positioned from above in a high-angle shot, pointing directly downward, making her appear as though she is at the bottom of a well. In this sequence, set in a scene of destruction, darker lighting tones prevail. Extreme close-ups reveal the wrinkles on her face. With her silhouette in backlight, she leaves the place, now holding the dog that has become her new ally.

Upon returning home, she finds her sister, worried, sitting in her wheelchair. Chiquinha inquires about the cut on her face, which appears in the foreground, and about the dog she brought in with her. In this dialogue, a frequent aesthetic choice in the film becomes evident in conversation scenes: the listener is kept out of focus while the speaker remains in focus. This adds a special flavor to the dialogues. Pacarrete vents about the end of her dream, and her sister consoles her:

“You were a teacher, you learned to sing, play the piano, dance; you have always loved applause since you were little”.

“I scream, and no one hears me, that’s why I scream so much”, responds the protagonist.

“You hear me, don’t you, Chiquinha?”

Pacarrete’s sister dies suddenly in the following scenes, as if she had simply fallen asleep. Gradually, the protagonist begins to realize her sister’s death, with the tragic nature of the moment being portrayed through a darker and more expressive aesthetic. She carries her sister’s body to the bedroom, where a Christian cross on the wall becomes a prominent feature, along with heightened tonal contrasts, with darker shades prevailing. Pacarrete slowly comes to terms with her sister’s death as she feels the coldness of her skin. The camera captures her from above, showing her walking quickly and disoriented inside the house. She then runs frantically to wash the sidewalk, an iconic *sinsign* that recurs in other scenes and symbolizes her relationship with society or the public space. The actress’s expressiveness in portraying the character’s grief becomes increasingly powerful, especially starting from the sequence in the abandoned factory. As she cleans the sidewalk, embodying her feelings of mourning and distress, she weeps and moves her entire body while scrubbing the ground with a brush.

The film does not detail the funeral rituals for the sister, instead employing a time ellipsis. In the following scene, light reappears with Maria’s presence as she brings Pacarrete her ballerina outfit, previously left in the mayor’s car. Maria bathes Pacarrete in the house’s inner garden, mirroring the way Pacarrete had bathed Chiquinha in one of the film’s opening scenes. The protagonist’s grief is grotesquely expressed in another scene where she urinates in the garden, with the adopted dog by her side.

In another sequence, Miguel is by her side. A time ellipsis is employed, which becomes clear as the scene unfolds. The setting is unrecognizable, leaving the viewer unsure if it is Pacarrete’s house or Miguel’s bar. Gradually, it becomes apparent that the kitchen, previously seen as colorful and bright, has transformed into a dark and grimy space. Miguel, seated in the foreground, comments on the changes in his store due to the ongoing city anniversary festivities. A perspective



line runs from Miguel to Pacarrete, who sits sorrowfully at the center of the table, positioned lower than him. The light focuses more intensely on the protagonist. Miguel feeds the depressed woman and says,

“You need to eat. I’m selling cake now too. I won’t charge you anything. You are my love”. He adds, “Pacarrete, it’s been so long since you’ve stepped outside”.

In another sequence, Pacarrete’s face is shown in an extreme close-up, reflected in the mirror of a music box with a small ballerina doll spinning inside. Her disorientation is depicted in the scene where she fills a box with jewelry and cash, then buries it in the garden, glancing around to see if anyone is watching. Seated in her rocking chair with the dog in her lap and her late sister’s empty wheelchair in the background, she hears the doorbell ring. She goes to the door and sees children shouting and running away, as they often do to tease her by ringing the bell. However, this annoyance compels her to get up, see the sunlight again, and feel the urge to go outside. She visits a children’s store, where white dominates the decor and products. There, she buys a crib and toys for the dog she has nicknamed He-Man, whom she now treats as if he were her own child.

The city’s anniversary festivities, however, continue unabated. At night, men urinate on her sidewalk, and she complains about the loud music and its poor quality, which she cannot stand. In response, she places her speakers in front of the house and plays Tchaikovsky’s *The Nutcracker*. Her transformation is conveyed through imagery, as the shadows of birds hopping along the power lines. She retrieves her ballerina dress and finds the ballet slippers she thought had been stolen. A detailed shot shows her putting on the slippers. She composes herself, dressing in her ballerina costume, fixing her hair, and applying lipstick. She steps onto the sidewalk, which transforms into the stage of a grand theater. There, she dances to the music of *Black Swan*, with the light focused solely on her amidst the surrounding darkness.

Among the aesthetic aspects observed from a semiotic perspective, the following iconic sinsigns stand out: the actress and her previous performances as generators of semiosis expectations; warm colors and heightened brightness as producers of synesthetic effects; saturated colors and the use of tonalities as expressive elements; the predominance of shots with minimal camera movement; objects that reappear at key moments, generating semioses throughout the film (such as the sidewalk, mirrors, ballet attire, the ruined building, and the poodle); references to both international artistic contexts and local popular culture; costumes that evoke French culture; and grotesque elements (especially in scenes where characters urinate).

#### 4. Aesthetic Aspects of the Film in Journalistic Critiques

In a previous study conducted by the author of this article (Hermes, Dyehouse, 2022), journalistic texts by Luiz Carlos Merten—published in the

newspaper *O Estado de S. Paulo*—were analyzed to observe how the author rhetorically addressed Brazilian cinema through the semiotic selection of updated sinsigns in his writing. The aim of that study was to identify which types of sinsigns, understood as replicas of legisigns, were frequently employed by the journalist, interpreted as rhetorical procedures.

The analysis considered recurring aspects across his texts, such as commentary on cast members, directors, and processes of production and creation. It was noted that semioses were generated around the films in relation to the cinematic medium and the broader themes under discussion within the journalistic sphere. As a rhetorical procedure, a tendency was observed to relate film themes to aspects experienced within “social reality”, understood as a social construct in which various agents interact—including journalism and cinematic production. According to Sérgio Gadini (2009), drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields, the cultural field—encompassing the arts and cinema—and the journalistic field mutually influence one another, interacting not only with each other but also with other fields, such as the political and economic.

The previous research also observed semiotic choices made by the journalist that align more closely with the reading expectations of a cinephile audience—readers who are familiar with the language and history of cinema. However, alongside these, there are also semioses directed toward other segments of the newspaper’s readership, for whom films are just one among many cultural products, situated within the broader context of news from various spheres of social coexistence.

It is important to note that there are two basic types of cultural journalistic texts: those aimed at promoting the artistic works and elucidating their main characteristics, and those that seek to argue a position regarding the artistic products, which are clearly identified as critiques. In Brazilian journalism, these two forms of writing can be clearly distinct, as seen in graphical presentations that differentiate opinion from information. However, there can also be a certain blending of the two forms in reporting cultural products, whether more informational or more opinionated. The two texts to be analyzed are brief reviews, whose function is to promote the film in the newspapers.

Essentially, journalists address a given context and select signs to incorporate into their writing based on the conventions of journalistic culture, the editorial guidelines of the publication, and their personal style. Among these signs—those that carry a more pronounced aesthetic character from a semiotic standpoint—the key question is which ones are preferred by journalists. Taking into account two journalistic texts published about the film, it is possible to reflect on journalistic work in the realm of cinema and the relevance of iconic sinsigns as representations of an aesthetic bias.

Iconic sinsigns can be understood as those that emphasize aspects of artistic production oriented toward sensibility, which would be a fundamental characteristic of films treated as art, especially aimed at experiences of an aesthetic nature. One of the questions is whether this aesthetic approach qualifies journalistic

texts. Another is whether it is something that holds relevance only for a cinephile audience or also for the general public.

Journalistic texts about films are interpretants, new signs that produce semioses based on certain aspects of the works in question. The elements selected in journalistic approaches can vary, prioritizing or not what could be considered aesthetic.

From an aesthetic standpoint, there may be certain difficulties in dealing with films, as uncertainty is one of the characteristics of interpretants of the *rheme* type—those that remain within the category of Firstness, on the aesthetic plane, with a strong abductive quality. The tendency is for journalists to select signs that generate semioses in Secondness, relating the film's signs to current events, as is more characteristic of the press, and as observed in the previous research, even as a rhetorical procedure. Conceptual aspects of the cinematic medium may also be mobilized, generating semioses in Thirdness in relation to the film.

In the first journalistic text analyzed, *Tratado sobre a desvalia da velhice* (Treatise on the Devaluation of Old Age), published on the website of the newspaper *Correio Braziliense* and written by Ricardo Daehn (2020), the title itself highlights the performance of actress Marcélia Cartaxo in portraying an elderly character. Among the sinsigns addressed in the text—which are not considered in this analysis to be iconic sinsigns—are references to the screenplay, mentions of film characters, the actress's biography (which is noted as a point of emphasis in both texts), and the fact that it is the director's debut feature. A still photo from the film illustrates the article, showing the characters Miguel and Pacarrete smiling in the film's earlier scenes. The photo lacks a caption, and the specific scene depicted is not described within the body of the text.

The text emphasizes that this is director's Allan Deberton debut film, presenting the character as the “Frenchified teacher and former ballerina Pacarrete, confined to the city of Russas (Ceará)” who bets on “the brilliance and glamour disseminated in a simple-minded routine”. The author of the critique identifies, to some extent, with the character's perception of European culture by defining the cultural context depicted in the film as “simple-minded”. It is notable that, regarding the signs highlighted in the text, there is not, strictly speaking, an aesthetic approach, even though the actress is mentioned—bringing with her the memory of performances in other productions.

What stands out is the cultural contrast established by the narrative between the presence of hegemonic European culture—as an expression of a supposedly refined culture present in the protagonist's daily life—and the value judgment it implies toward the local culture portrayed in the film. The journalist initially aligns with a judgment that implicitly positions the local culture as inferior in a naturalized way, reflecting a recurring tendency in journalistic discourse when addressing cultural contexts beyond the European sphere, including, for instance, the South American context.

The passage most closely related to aesthetic issues appears at the end of the review:

Gradually, the film's skillful script places the viewer in a position to assimilate the protagonist's exoticism with a Chaplinesque touch. In a painful choreography, the filmmaker examines the principles guiding the lost teacher, fiercely devoted to art, who even claims possession of the sidewalk in front of her house. (Daehn, 2020)

This analysis connects directly to one of the most significant symbolic elements of the narrative: the "sidewalk". As observed in the aesthetic analysis of the film developed earlier in this article, there are several iconic sinsigns that could be highlighted by journalists—particularly the iconic representation of objects that help tell the story, as is the case with the sidewalk, which clearly plays a significant role in the narrative. It is an icon that, throughout the sequences, visually materializes the relationship between the character's inner life—her desires, limitations, and sufferings—and her need for recognition within the social sphere. In this sense, the journalist's task consists, to a large extent, semiotically, in the ability to identify such objects throughout the film's narrative—objects that tell the story alongside the characters.

The article "*Pacarrete*" *liberta Marcélia Cartaxo de arquétipo de Macabéa* ("Pacarrete" Frees Marcélia Cartaxo from the Archetype of Macabéa) by critic Inácio Araújo (2020) once again highlights the award-winning actress's performance in the production, referencing the character Macabéa, for which she was acclaimed in *A Hora da Estrela* (Hour of the Star, 1985). However, the critic mentions this earlier success to emphasize that the actress does not confine herself to the same type of role, underscoring her ability to navigate between comedy and melodrama genres. As previously mentioned, according to Vernet (1983), actors give material form to characters and function as figures imbued with prior semioses, engaging in the creation of a new interpretive dynamic as they embody a different character within a new narrative context. On one hand, there is the cinephilia of fans who are interested in this aspect, particularly those who follow the careers of actors, actresses, and directors. There is also a more refined cinephilia that focuses on the creative processes of performers. From an aesthetic perspective, we can add here Deleuze's (1983) concept of movement-image, inspired by Henri Bergson, which considers the meaning produced in the duration of a film as it unfolds from shot to shot, sequence to sequence. This relates to time-image cinema, in which that duration may acquire a different meaning, connecting both to the past and to the future. Within the temporal span of a film, characters undergo transformation and exist in an interval of time. The transition between comedy and tragedy in the film—highlighted aesthetically through warm colors at the beginning and more pronounced contrasts toward the end—also expresses this transformation. However, the journalist chose primarily to emphasize the actress's ability to embody this transformation throughout the film, which seems to align with the interests of various cinephile audiences, as can be inferred.

This time, the critic does not describe the cultural context of the story as "simple-minded" but instead uses the term "bumpkin". He also does not align himself with the defense of high culture that the protagonist strives to represent

within her community. Instead, he writes that the character “has in her mind” a “mythical Paris”. In this way, the journalist underscores the critical perspective suggested by the film, corresponding to the position of a hegemonic culture represented by the protagonist’s behavior—displaced from the context of the city in which the story unfolds and reflective of an imaginary shaped by generations influenced by the ideal of “European culture”. Here lies the abductive nature of iconic sinsigns, capable of prompting reflection and questioning of widely disseminated ideas, as is characteristic of films treated as aesthetic objects.

Inácio Araújo (2020) also references non-iconic sinsigns related to the actress’s career, her previous roles, the characterization of the protagonist, and key points of the plot. He introduces a conceptual discussion based on the legisign “popular cinema”, referring to the historical period of the state-run institution Embrafilme in Brazil during the 1970s and 1980s, when Brazilian films reached a broader audience in theaters. He questions whether this film could potentially signal a resurgence of that type of cinema today.

A still image accompanies the article, depicting the character Pacarrete in despair among the ruins of a factory, already holding the poodle in her arms. The caption identifies the actress, the film, and its director. This specific sequence is not discussed in the body of the article and may only be indirectly connected to the critic’s references to the film’s melodramatic tone.

In relation to the previously conducted analysis, a passage where the author comes closest to discussing aesthetic aspects is when he critiques a restrained use of cinematic resources in the production, while emphasizing the importance of the sequence featuring Anna Pavlova’s video:

There is little room for invention, for shots like that one (in my opinion the best in the film) that brings together a TV screen with a ballerina dancing, Pacarrete imitating her in a lamentable manner, and, in the background, the maid cleaning the house with a mop. (Araújo, 2020)

Here, the author describes sinsigns from the film that possess an aesthetic quality. As observed earlier in the characterization of the protagonist’s behavior as shaped by a mythical Paris, the emphasis on the scene in which Pacarrete mimics the Russian ballerina through her gestures is a powerful icon that deserves particular attention precisely because it fosters the abductive reasoning characteristic of iconic signs. This can contribute to expanding the semioses surrounding the film, understood here as an artistic object.

The author critically highlights one of the key issues at the heart of the narrative, which is of aesthetic interest:

At the center of the production are a bundle of questions involving the dichotomy between popular (and emotional) art or erudite art, indigenous (or similar to it) or imported, the dream of being (French, in Pacarrete’s case) and the reality of being Brazilian [...]. (Araújo, 2020)

In this passage, the author succinctly refers to the semiosis produced by the character's attire within the context in which she lives, as well as the set of signs that represent her artistic taste.

Another important point raised by the author is the consideration of genres and aesthetic categories, which could further enrich the analysis made earlier. He observes that in the narrative, there is a transition from comedy to melodrama, which was somewhat analyzed through the observation of sinsigns (iconic signs), particularly with the use of colors and light tones in the first part of the story, and darker, more contrasting tones starting from the scene in the ruined factory. He writes that director Allan Deberton uses the issues addressed "to create a film that handles comedy and melodrama with good pacing and fluidity in the transitions". He states: "No one would say this is a bad start for someone making their first feature. This is an interesting commitment to popular cinema". Inácio Araújo thus evaluates the film, considering both its aesthetic aspects and its ability to reach a wide audience, in this blend of comedy and melodrama, two legisigns significant to the film's aesthetic approach. This aspect, represented by the legisigns "comedy" and "melodrama", however, has a conceptual nature and extends beyond the initial proposal of aesthetically observing the film as a semiosis produced by iconic sinsigns.

## 5. Considerations

After conducting a semiotic analysis of the film, emphasizing its aesthetic aspects, particularly through the guiding concept of iconic sinsigns, it becomes evident how an appreciation focused on aesthetic signs can contribute to and appear in journalism about films. Although these articles often present arguments that synthesize observations about films and their narratives, the examination of aesthetic elements can contribute to a more nuanced perspective on cinematic productions. In each journalistic text, the authors select signs that reflect specific facets of the films—an inherent feature of semiosis, given that each sign is based on only one or a few dimensions of the dynamic object, thus generating a new sign: an interpretant formed in the mind of a given interpreter. In the analyzed texts, the choices made reflect a prior observation of the film focused on aesthetic aspects. There were confirmations of the initial aesthetic reading presented in this article, such as the scene in which the protagonist appears alongside the video of Anna Pavlova and the element of the sidewalk as one of the relevant icons in meaning-making within the narrative. On the other hand, elements such as the expressionist character of the film—for instance, signs of a grotesque nature—were not mentioned. The way signs were articulated in the texts may or may not lead to a probable diversity of interpretants among readers. When abductive meaning is emphasized, there is greater alignment with the aesthetic nature of the signs.

The identification of iconic sinsigns throughout the narrative can help suggest and understand potential interpretants that the appreciation of the film is likely to

produce, particularly through the identification of recurring objects or those that mark the narrative's progression, such as the "sidewalk" and the scene featuring the "video of Anna Pavlova's performance", as mentioned in the texts analyzed. The aesthetic character of these objects lies primarily in their abductive potential, which may serve as the main semiotic criterion for constructing texts about artistic products, such as films.

The actors' performances and the semioses they bring through their previous roles stand out, particularly in this case, given the actress's significance in the history of cinema for her role in the film *Hour of the Star* (1985). However, it is important to view the actors' work as part of a broader set of aesthetic procedures that make up the cinematic language.

The contrast between aspects of "high culture", which demands greater attention, and "popular culture", spontaneously present in everyday social life, is addressed in the film in a way that generates abductive reasoning. The analyzed critiques reflect this, both in the signs used to describe the community to which the protagonist belongs and in the portrayal of how the character appears in the film and her relationship with art.

The aesthetic analysis, particularly considering the approach taken by critic Inácio Araújo, could also be expanded to include the consideration of cinematic genres. Another possibility is the inclusion of aesthetic categories (beautiful, sublime, ugly, grotesque, tragic and comic). In this way, Peirce's semiotics could serve as a tool alongside other traditional aesthetic approach. It is important to underline, however, that the contribution of Peirce's semiotic theory to aesthetic studies deserves more attention by the authors and researchers.

## REFERENCES

- Amaral, S. (Writer/Director). (1985). *A Hora da Estrela* [Hour of the Star; Motion picture]. Brazil: Assunção Hernandes.
- Aumont, J. (1983). *Esthétique du film* [Aesthetics of Film]. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Araújo, I. (2020). 'Pacarrete' liberta Marcélia Cartaxo de arquétipo de Macabéa [Pacarrete Frees Marcélia Cartaxo from the Archetype of Macabéa]. *Folha de São Paulo*. Retrieved from: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2020/11/pacarrete-liberta-marcelia-cartaxo-de-arquetipo-de-macabea.shtml>
- Bordwell, D., Thompson, K. (2010). *A Arte do Cinema: Uma Introdução* [Film Art: An Introduction]. Campinas: Unicamp/Edusp.
- Daehn, R. (2020). Confira a crítica de 'Pacarrete': tratado sobre a desvalia da velhice [Check out the Review of 'Pacarrete': Treatise on the Devaluation of Old Age]. *Correio Braziliense*. Retrieved from: <https://www.correiobraziliense.com.br/diversao-e-arte/2020/11/4891477-confira-a-critica-de-pacarrete-tratado-sobre-a-desvalia-da-velhice.html>

- Deberton, A. (Writer/Director). (2019). *Pacarrete* [Motion picture]. Brazil: Deberton Filmes.
- Deledalle, G. (1990). *Leer a Peirce Hoy* [Reading Peirce Today]. Barcelona: Gedisa.
- Deleuze, G. (1983). *Cinema 1 – A Imagem-Movimento* [Cinema 1: The Movement-Image]. São Paulo: Editora 34.
- Dondis, D. A. (1973). *Sintaxe da Linguagem Visual* [A Primer of Visual Literacy]. São Paulo: Martins Fontes.
- Gadini, S. L. (2009). *Interesses cruzados: a produção da cultura no jornalismo brasileiro* [Crossed Interests: The Production of Culture in Brazilian Journalism]. São Paulo: Paulus.
- Hermes, G., Dyehouse, J. (2022). A Semiotic Analysis: Journalistic Writing About Brazilian Cinem. In F. Y. Seif (Ed.), *Semiotics 2020/2021: Signs of Ambiguity and Uncertainty, Yearbook of the Semiotic Society of America* (pp. 57–73). Charlottesville: Philosophy Documentation Center.
- Marie, M. (1983). Cinema and Language. In J. Aumont (Ed.), *Esthétique du film* (pp. 126–181). Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Peirce, C. S. (1993). *Semiótica e Filosofia: Textos Escolhidos de Charles Sanders Peirce* [Semiotics and Philosophy: Selected Texts by Charles Sanders Peirce]. São Paulo: Cultrix.
- Santaella, L. (2000). *A Teoria Geral dos Signos* [The General Theory of Signs]. São Paulo: Pioneira.
- Vernet, M. (1983). Cinema and Narration. In J. Aumont (Ed.), *Esthétique du film* (pp. 68–125). Austin: University of Texas Press.