

**Paper: A Comprehensive Exploration of Polysystem Theory and Cultural Planning in Humanities and Social Sciences: Bridging Disciplines, Analyzing Factors, and Assessing Impact**

**Abstract:**

This paper debates the absence of discussion on the object of study in various humanities areas, especially in studies of activities, products, and humans covered by Humanities and Social Sciences. The presentation defends the scientific nature of disciplines like Philology, Comparative Literature, and Historiography of Literature, citing the theory of Polysystems and Semiotics as supporting evidence.

The concept of science being applicable only to certain knowledge branches is questioned, drawing attention to Aristotle's multidisciplinary approach without discrimination. The study emphasizes the need for literary theory to undergo empirical and rationalist scientific legitimization, acknowledging the potential for theories to evolve or be discarded over time. This perspective encourages open-mindedness and adaptability. For those reasons, I use the Polysystem Theory, which incorporates social, philosophical, literary, linguistic, and historical elements into its framework.

The discussion delves into the socio-semiotic cohesion provided by cultural planning, its necessity for large social entities, and its dependence on a power base. The research discusses six planning characteristics, including its constant cultural procedure, role in socio-semiotic cohesion, and need for a power base.

This article explores the theory's application to market factors and the resistance to new repertoires, with examples from academic fields like gender studies. The consequences of cultural planning failure are highlighted, drawing parallels with historical examples like the Eastern Roman Empire.

The paper concludes by acknowledging the potential factors that may distort cultural plans and institutions that control cultural consumption.

**Keywords:** Literature, Cultural Planning, Polysystems Theory, Semiotics, Humanities

## **A Comprehensive Exploration of Polysystems Theory and Cultural Planning in Humanities and Social Sciences: Bridging Disciplines, Analyzing Factors, and Assessing Impact**

Naturally not everything that is new and unfamiliar is frightening, however; the relations is not capable of inversion. (Freud 1992 [1919], 220).

Itamar Even-Zohar (1997, 16) maintained that the absence of discussion concerning the object of study in many areas of the humanities is typical (one could be more cautious and say that it appears recurrently), a fact that is particularly evident in studies of activities, products, and humans, that is, in the areas covered by the studies of Humanities and Social Sciences.

At this point, the following digression is “apropos,” even though it seems not to: From this point and from now on, this text will position itself on the side of those who maintain that Philology, Comparative Literature, Historiography of literature,...., are science, which has been demonstrated on countless occasions by the theory of polysystems and by Semiotics. The concept of science applicable only to certain branches of knowledge is a construct created at the beginning of the 20th century. It should be remembered that Aristotle specialized in every one of the fields of knowledge of his time without any discrimination. He was not wrong.

Furthermore, every literary theory should submit to its empirical and rationalist scientific legitimization in each and every one of the stages of history. That is why a theory can be valid at the moment in time and be discarded over the years. Similarly, a hypothesis can take us to the Moon and not be mathematically demonstrated until 2004, as it happened with Albert Einstein's theory of relativity. What distinguished this hypothesis from others? In the words of Tzvetan Todorov, the difference is that the scientific method that "does not require the observation of all instances of a phenomenon in order to describe it [...] proceeds rather by deduction" (1974, 10) [Personal translation from: no exige la observación de todas las instancias de un fenómeno para poder describirlo [...] procede más bien por deducción].

In any synchronous research process, methods that make excessive use of statistical techniques, as Montserrat Iglesias Santos (1999, 15) would affirm, and also quantitative techniques require weighting of the approach and its conclusions, as well as a synchronous interpretation of these data. It could be stated: "You can always turn the statistics and data as many times as necessary until they say what I want to defend." This research alerts us to the need for new theoretical models in both synchronous and asynchronous forms that are valid for as long as possible and have specific characteristics of the human and social sciences. As Norbert Elias and Eric

Dunning (2008) assert:

It happens often in the development of a science or of one of its branches that a type of theory that has dominated the research direction for some time reaches a point where its limitations become apparent. One begins to see that several significant problems cannot be clearly formulated and cannot be solved with its help. The scientists who work in this field then begin to look for a comprehensive theoretical framework or another type of theory altogether, which will allow them to come to grips with problems beyond the reach of the fashionable type of theory. (189)

This need for expansion and creation of models has been exemplified by successive approaches and methods such as the formalist movement, structuralism, semiotics, and polysystem theory, among others. These models and many others have created their own canons and canonization strategies [2]. Although we do not believe that we should stick to a given model because it seems insufficient for a specific field or not stick to the data collected, the last theory mentioned above has served as a significant advance for studies of comparative literature and for what we could name comparatist literature, created by Dionysus of Halicarnassus, and not developed until almost nineteen hundred years later[3]. This theory of polysystems included social elements, in addition to others already taken into account before this method emerged, namely philosophical, literary, linguistic, and historical elements, among others. Psychology is not absent from these studies either. To all this, anthropological elements and other non-human or social sciences can be added, as we will show later. It is our purpose, therefore, not to offer a totum revolutum but a firmissima totius, to show once again that no science is at odds with another unless it is due to particular interests.

To achieve this goal, the theory of Polysystems has been of great help and has opened the eyes of many researchers. On the one hand, according to this proposal, the set of phenomena should not be conceived as an independent entity but as a related entity (Even-Zohar 1997, 18-19). We must point out here that in addition to being based on Roman Jakobson (18-20), this conception was possibly inspired by John Arundel Barnes' social networks (1969). On the other hand, he considers market planning essential and lists what we understand as characteristics as follows:

Planning as a constant cultural procedure (Even-Zohar 1999, 77-80). The various cultural plans seen throughout history have become valid instruments, but sometimes they were insufficient. According to Even-Zohar (79-80) of early Greek thinkers and ancient Israel, such is the case where free prophets competed with the status quo. For

our part, we assume that there are probably others, but we lack written testimonies to prove it, or at least, we have no knowledge of them. In addition to the political and religious elites that Even-Zohar mentions, we believe that the same could be said of the academic elites (with a certain margin of error) since, as an example, the confrontations between structuralists and generativists are famous or of the latter and the sociolinguists, and that have come to divide knowledge in some countries such as the USA between universities that give preference to one branch or another. Likewise, something similar could be stated about other fields of knowledge, such as medicine (preventive versus curative), economics, ...

The implementation of planning provides socio-semiotic cohesion (Even-Zohar 1999, 80-82) through the feeling of affiliation and ensures that any culture is imposed without the need for the use of force. We have to observe how every one of the empires has been and will be maneuvered. This brings up the dialectical, non-Manichean distinction between generative empires and predatory empires[4] that the philosopher Gustavo Bueno created, and that would allow us to observe that the former make better use of the implementation of planning[5]. As a simplified summary, it could be stated that generative empires, such as that of Alexander the Great, the Roman or the Spanish empires, despite the actions generated by colonial exploitation, converted colonized societies into full-fledged societies, favoring the transformation of the intervened societies into culturally and socioeconomically developed political societies. Furthermore, generative empires share language and technology with colonized societies. On the other hand, predatory empires use their technology to destroy the reality of the intervened society, and one of its main characteristics is its refusal to mix with the native population of the occupied territory biologically.

Socio-semiotic cohesion is a necessary condition for the creation or survival of large social entities (Even-Zohar 1999, 82-85). What better example than the Roman Empire, which, after almost a millennium, fractured this cohesion and succumbed. Planning needs a power base (Even-Zohar 1999, 85-88). Its promoters must be part of the power; in this way, cultural planning will be more effective. The implications of this statement are apparent and do not deserve further comment.

Effective planning can become the interest of a social entity (Even-Zohar 1999, 88-90). It is sufficiently proven that planners and those who exercise power can gain dominion or control of a certain entity through the effective implementation of planning (88). At the academic level, gender studies, postcolonialism, or Afrofuturism have filled the gap left by the slow but sad and inexorable disappearance of many components of philological studies [6].

Market factors do not easily accommodate new repertoires (Even-Zohar 1999, 90-92).

The market is made up of the set of factors involved in the purchase and sale of cultural products, which is why it promotes certain types of consumption» (90), and although the institution created by the powers tries to control the types of consumption, «establishing the values of the elements that make up production, what determines its success or failure is the type of interaction it establishes with the free market (90). Exempt here are nations led by oligarchs or dictatorships, whether associative or personal, where the cultural institution has incontestable absolute power and, therefore, assumed. An example of this is the treatment of scientific fiction and fantastic literature as minor genres, even in representative constitutionalist regimes [7], reducing it to children's and youth literature (Jonathan Swift would cry out to hell if he knew of the atrocities that have been committed and continue to be committed with his brilliant work), or to the distortions, plagiarism, falsifications and modifications of works of scientific fiction throughout of history in countries like the People's Republic of China, to give an example[8].

The consequence of the failure of cultural planning is not the collapse of the social entity but the creation of energy (Even-Zohar 1999, 92-96) in the image and likeness of what happened in the Eastern Roman Empire, which survived the collapse of its sister for another millennium.

From all of the above, we can conclude that there have been, exist, and will exist cultural plans in pursuit of controlling the consumption of culture and institutions that are established with power in order to guide consumers; however, there are some factors to take into account. Keep in mind that they can distort the marked route. A possible case is that of all the attempts to defame and destroy the works of Howard Phillips Lovecraft. However, the fruits of so much hostility have not been as satisfactory as intended and have not reduced his influence and heritage one bit. Cultural [9]. So, what has allowed Lovecraft to prosper, not to remain in memory? Although many factors are involved, and this author has not been, by far, the greatest harm, let us remember the hungry and desecrated Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra. I believe that the key element in the case of the creator of cosmogonic horror was its original and differentiating use of fear, along with the sensations and feelings that his pen awakens and that can never be silenced because fear is "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind" (Lovecraft 2000, 423).

[1] We trust Todorov's pagination once we have confirmed the accuracy of his words in the Spanish, French, and English versions.

[2] A very explicit example is offered to us, Sheffy and Rakefet. 1994. «Strategies of

Canonization: Manipulating the Idea of the Novel and the Intellectual Field in Eighteenth German Culture.» [Artículo]. Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University. Last modified on January 1, 2024.

[3] For more information, read the excellent work of Mombelli and Davide (2019). «La metodología comparatista en los estudios literarios». *Revista Española de Educación Comparada* 34, nº julio-diciembre: 97-117.

<https://doi.org/10.5944/reec.34.2019.24379>., in which he compiles a crucial text by Benedetto Croce on the matter and his early warning about another slip of ego in some very influential authors of the 20th century.

[4] That is to say, all empires are generators and predators; the difference lies in the degree of importance of one of these axes over the other. It could be exemplified by the case of the Japanese empire, which, depending on the country or region occupied, had an attitude of a generative empire in Taiwan but a predatory one in China and both Koreas.

[5] For more information, see Bueno, Gustavo. 2019 [1999]. *España frente a Europa*. Oviedo: Pentalfa.

[6] For more information see the masterful work of Rubio Tovar, Joaquín. 2005 [2004]. *La vieja diosa: de la filología a la posmodernidad (algunas notas sobre la evolución de los estudios literarios)*. Alcalá de Henares: Centro de Estudios Cervantinos.

[7] We avoid using the term democracy to distance ourselves from Athenian democracy.

[8] Teng, Yu-Peng. 2020. «Estudio de la ciencia ficción en chino. Trilogía de Los tres cuerpos». Trabajo de fin de máster, Tamkang University. Tamkang University Database tku-109-606120102-1.

[9] A direct attack on his legacy has been the abandonment of the author's bust as a World Fantasy Award trophy since 2005 due to his racist comments during his lifetime. See Flood, Alison. 2015, November 9. «World Fantasy award drops HP Lovecraft as prize image.» *The Guardian*. Last modified on January 1, 2024. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/09/world-fantasy-award-drops-hp-lovecraft-as-prize-image>. Comments, it must be said, made by a person who counted among his friends a black writer, one from Latin America, and who married a Ukrainian Jew.