



ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAŃ

Faculty of English

Figuration in the discourses of art: A reception study report

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1. MuCADA explained
 2. Example analysis in accordance with MuCADA
 3. Reception study analysis in accordance with MuCADA
 4. Brief discussion of the findings
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Funding for the reception study



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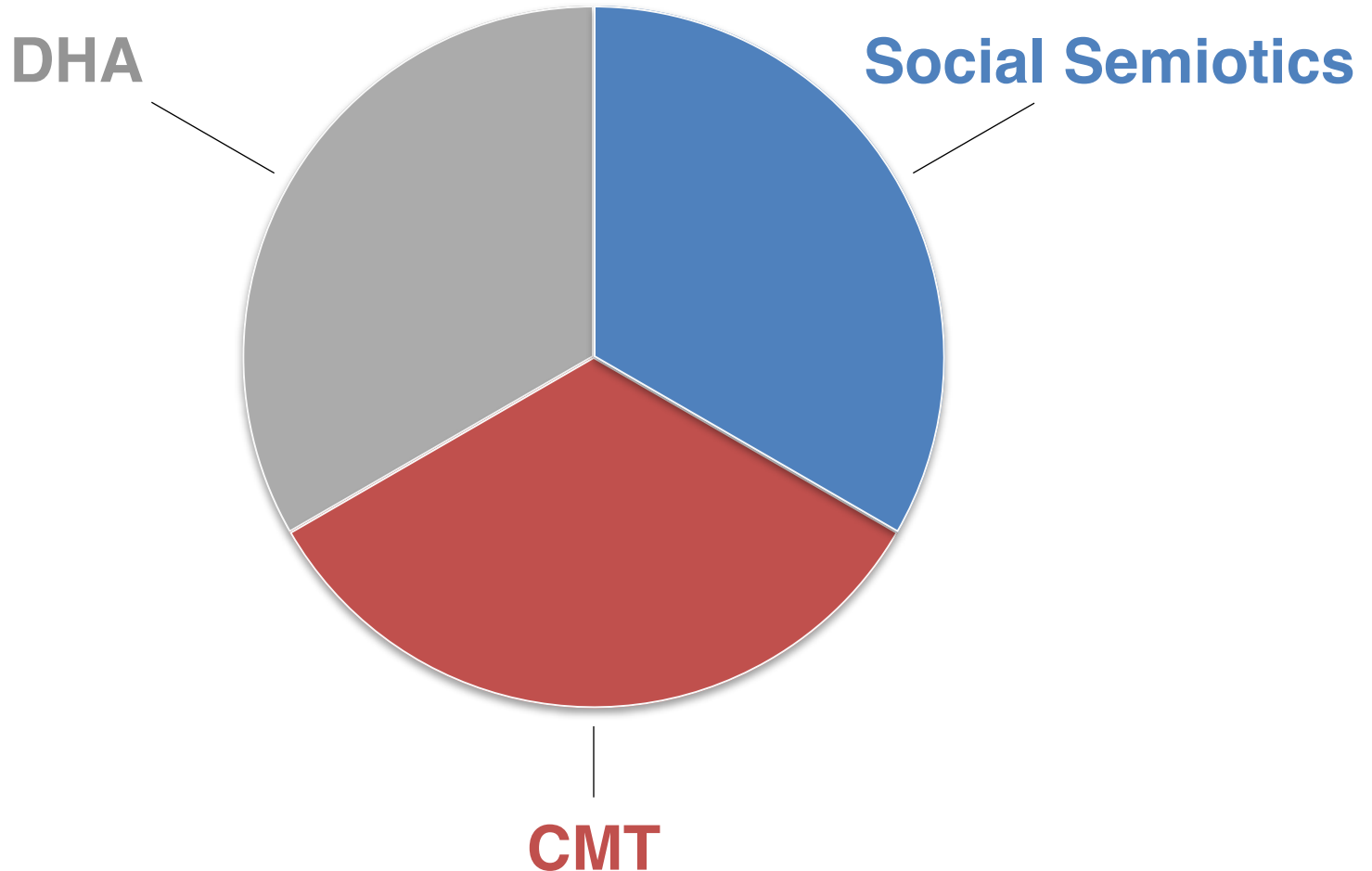
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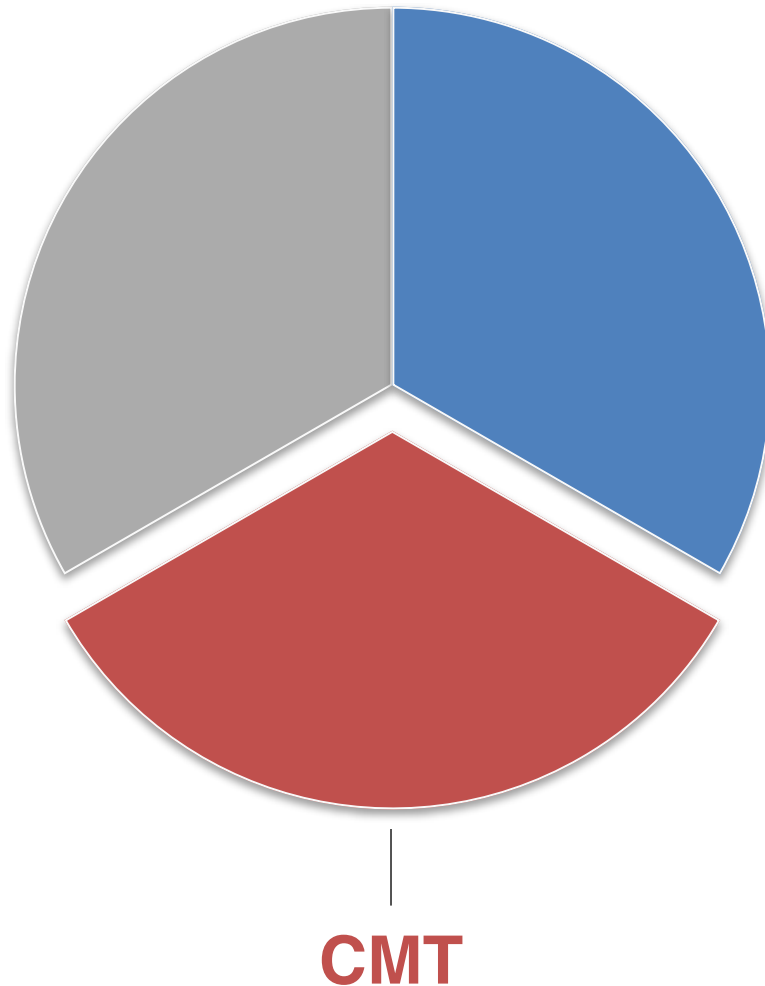
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MuCADA - Multimodal Critical Analysis of Discourse of Art



MuCADA - Conceptual Metaphor Theory



CMT

analyzing figurativeness of artworks

(Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 1999, Cienki 1998, Kennedy 2008, Dancygier and Sweetser 2014, Forceville 2011, 2013, 2017, El Rafaie 2015) **along 3 levels of figurative meaning-making** (Kwiatkowska 2013: 63-73)

- figurative in general
- figurative in component parts
- figurative in totality

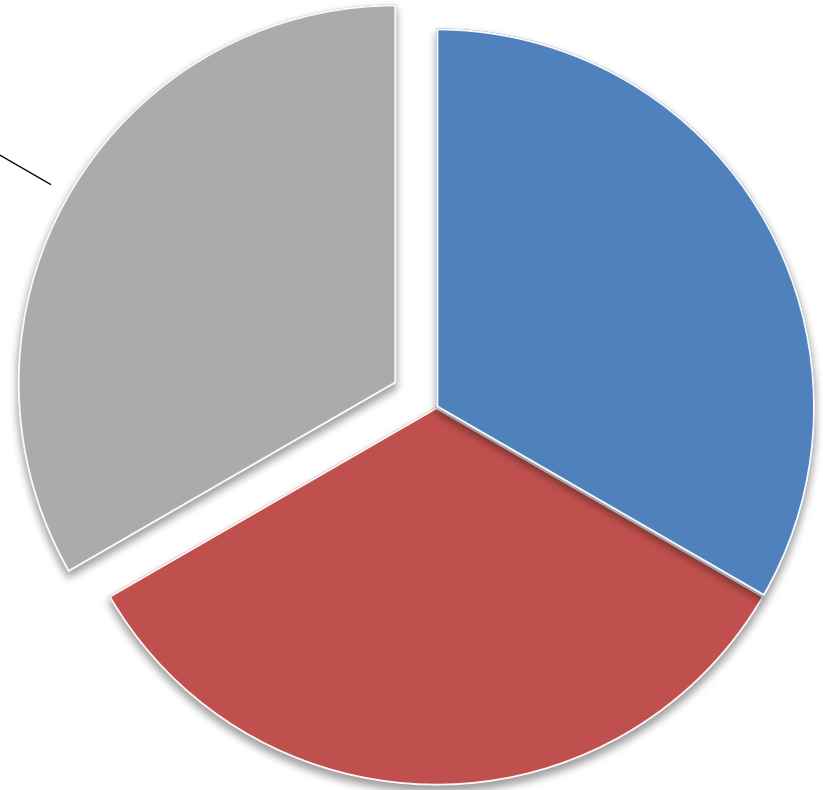
MuCADA - Discourse Historical Approach

4 layers of context

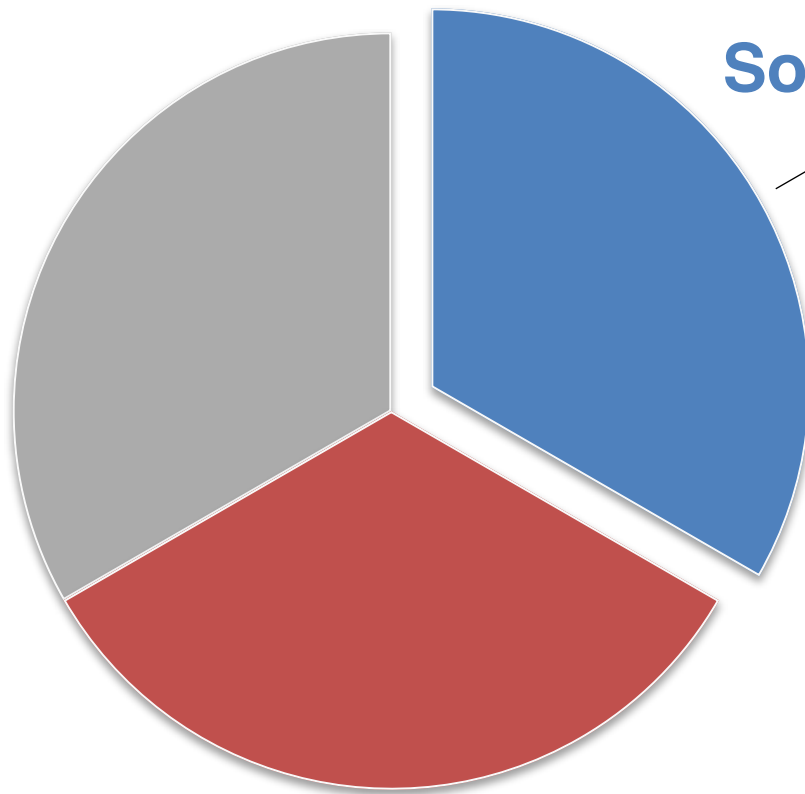
(Reisigl and Wodak 2009)

1. The **semiotic** level of co-text
2. The **interdiscursive** level
3. **Social** context of the **situation**
4. Socio-political and historical **macro**-context

DHA



MuCADA - Social Semiotics

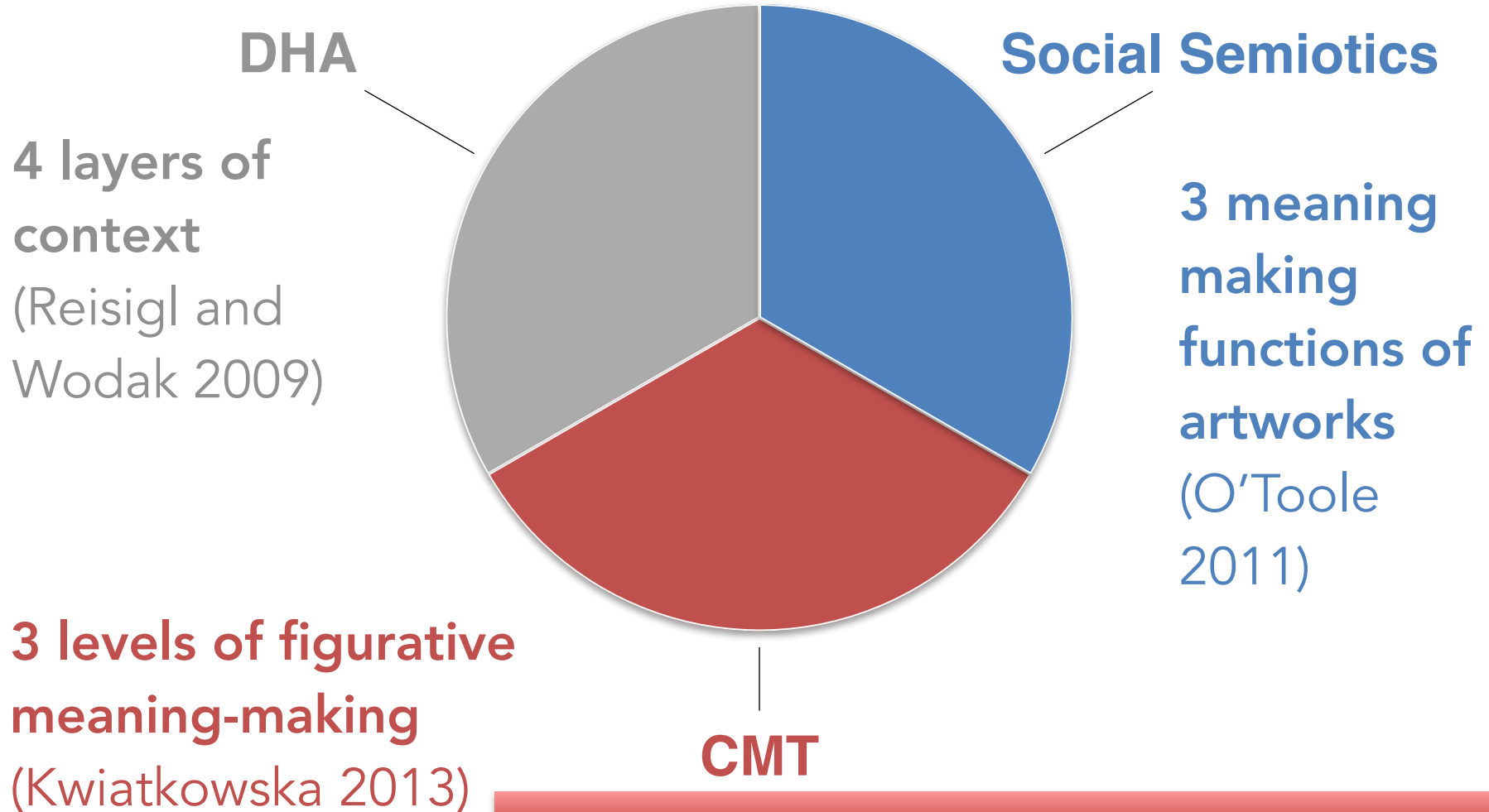


Social Semiotics

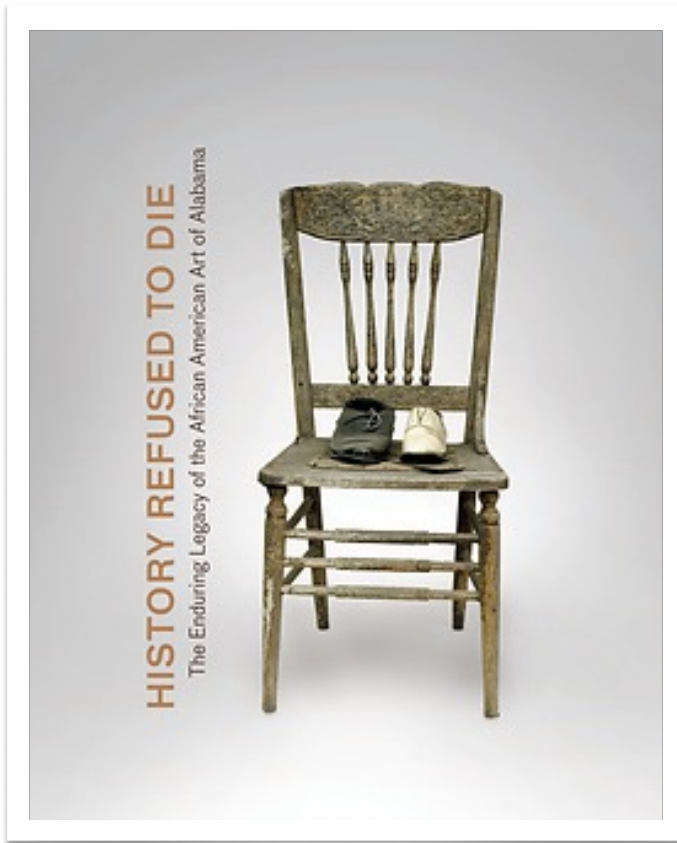
**3 meaning making
functions of artworks**
(O'Toole 2011, O'Halloran 2008)

- **Representational function**
- **Modal function**
- **Compositional function**

MuCADA - Multimodal Critical Analysis of Discourse of Art



Data set nr 1



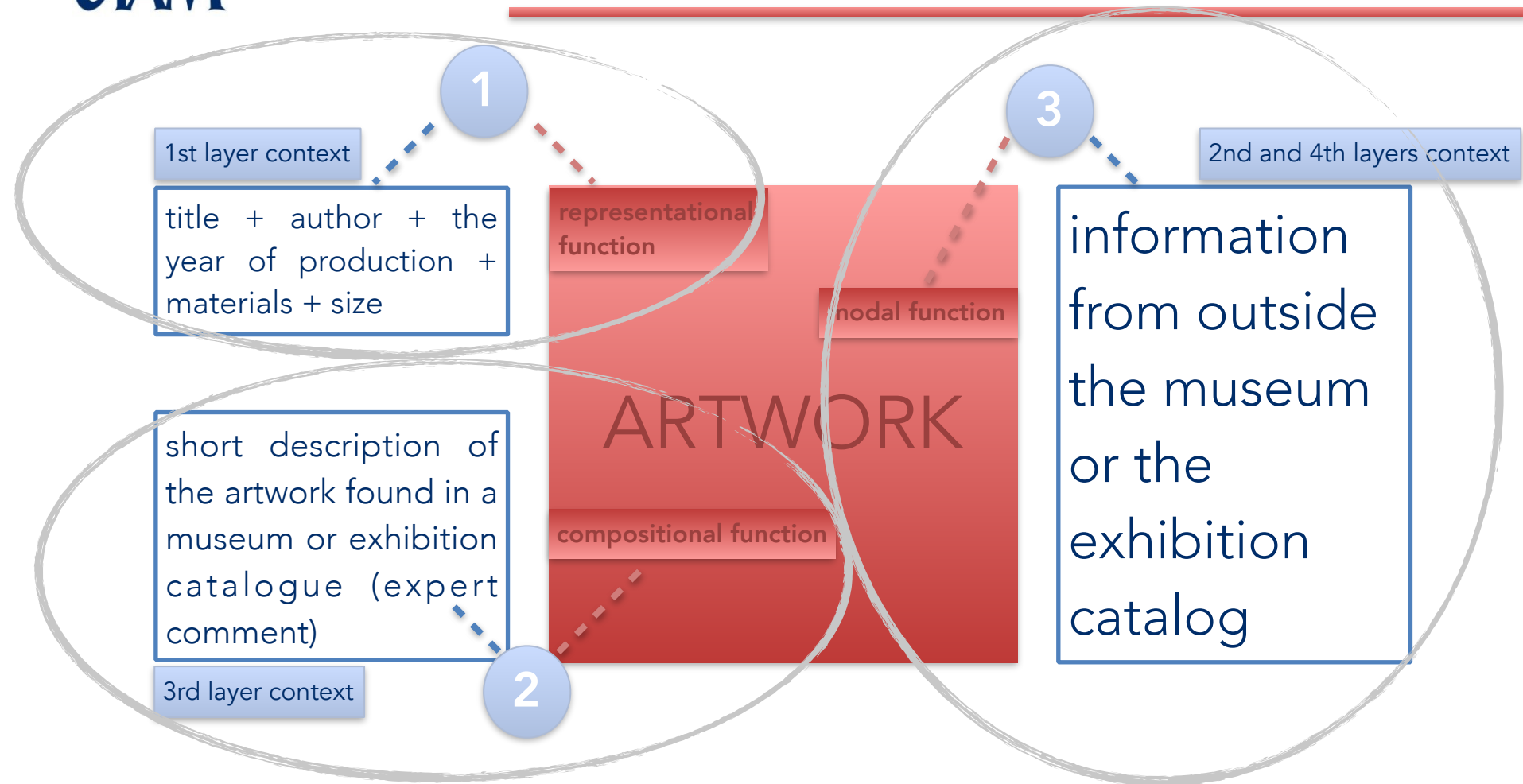
exhibition catalogue
**History Refused to Die:
The Enduring Legacy of
African American Art in
Alabama (2015)**

Data set nr 2



self-taught and folk artists' collections
at Tubman Museum of African-American Art in Macon (GA)
and High Museum of Art in Atlanta (GA)

An example model analysis



Bessie Harvey (1929-1994)

Untitled

Wood/Mixed Media

representational function

general level of
figurativeness





general level of
figurativeness

- HUMAN is OBJECT
- PAIN is DEFORMATION
- metonymy: BLACK FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN



Born in Dallas, Georgia, Bessie Harvey lived most of her life in Tennessee. Harvey began making art as a tool for **perseverance**. A mother of eleven children, she also had to contend with an **abusive husband**. She created evocative sculptures using roots, tree branches, paint, glitter, beads, and sometimes pieces of her now hair. Harvey's creative process was a kind of **prayer**, through which she often **communed with God**. She began exhibiting her works in the 1970s. In 1995 she participated in the Biennale exhibition at the Whitney Museum of American Art. She was aware of the popularity of her work, but remained independent. In a 1989 interview for Antique Magazine she stated that "I've got a free spirit and I won't be under nobody's thumb. **Nobody will conquer me.**"

compositional function

component parts figurativeness





component parts figurativeness

- PAIN is FACE AND BODY DEFORMATION
- IMPORTANT is UP

metonymies:

- WOOD for PERSEVERANCE
- COLOR RED for STRENGTH
- WHITE for BEING CLOSER TO GOD

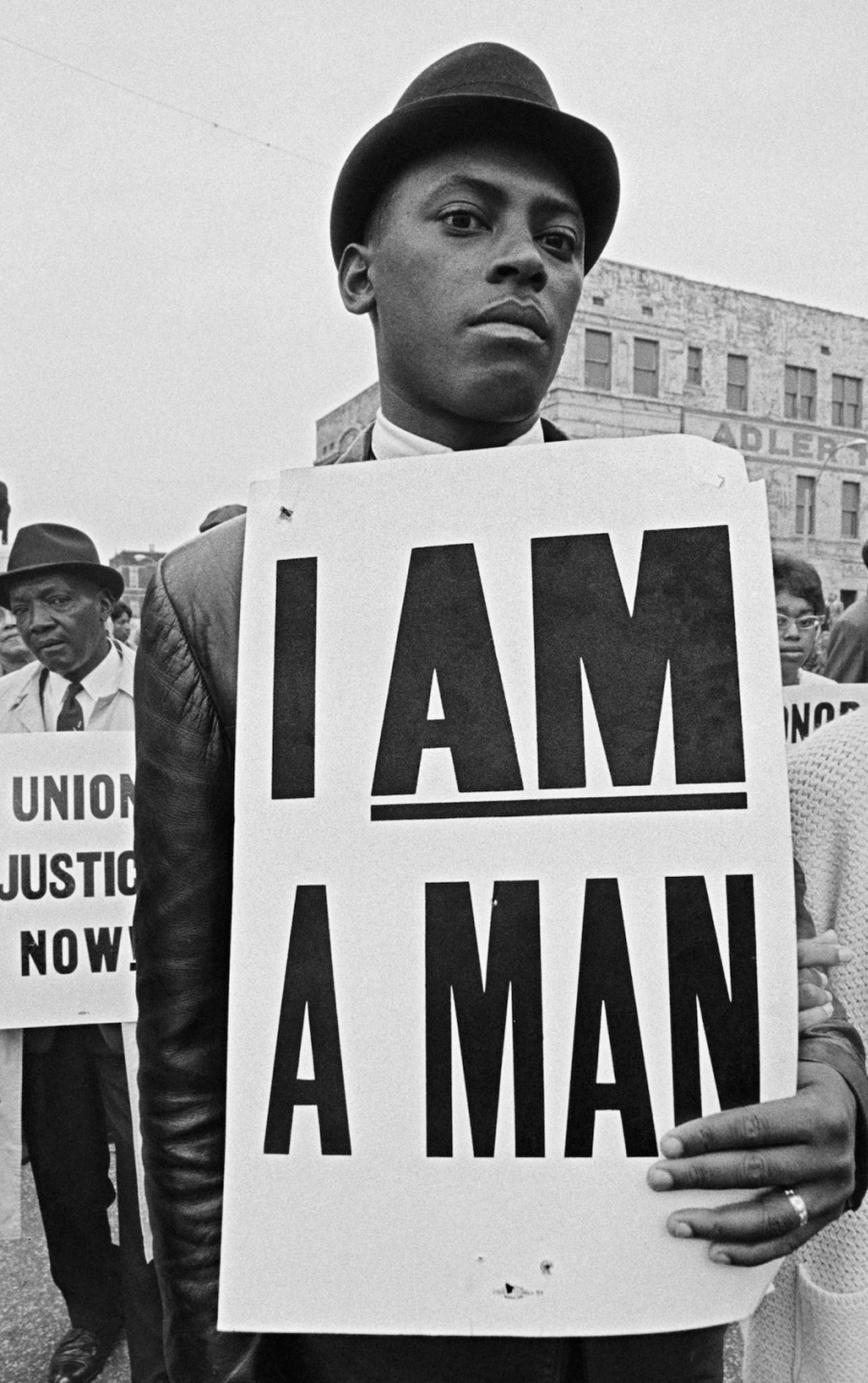


information from outside the museum or
the exhibition catalog
(the intertextual level and broad socio-
political macro-context)

modal function

figurativeness in totality







figurativeness in totality

- CONTROL OVER IMAGE is
CONTROL OF THE BODY

metonymies:

- PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION
- PHYSICAL EXAGGERATION for
RACIAL STEREOTYPING
- BLACK FACE FOR RACIAL
DISCRIMINATION
- BEADS for CULTURAL IDENTITY /
SPIRITUALITY



Reception study in-situ

the dynamics of interpretation

to what extent the model of meaning-making resulting from a semiotic analysis (analyst's perspective) correlates with the meaning as constructed by the visitors to the exhibition (recipient's perspective).

analyst's perspective

VS

recipient's perspective

Reception study in-situ

interviews:

- a) **What do you think this artwork represents?**
What makes you think so?
- b) **Is there anything in the piece that stands out?**
What is it? Does it remind you of anything?
- c) **What do you think or feel when looking at the presented artwork?**
- d) **<after disclosing the the title of the artwork>**
Does it affect your interpretation? If yes, how?
- e) **<after disclosing the placard information>**
Does it affect your interpretation? If yes, how?

REPRESENTATIONAL

COMPOSITIONAL

MODAL

Reception study analysis

Demographics	Figurative meanings produced	Ratio
Males (10)	36	3,6
Females (7)	22	3,1
White (6)	26	4,3
African-American (11)	32	2,9
18-35 (6)	23	3,8
36-50 (4)	13	3,25
51-70 (6)	15	2,5
71 and over (1)	6	6
museums visited - occasionally or rarely (9)	20	2,2
museums visited - often and quite often (8)	31	3,9

Reception study analysis

Demographics	Figurative meanings produced	Ratio
White men (3)	15	5
Black men (7)	21	3
White women (3)	11	3,6
Black women (4)	11	2,75

Reception study analysis - ethnicity

level of figurativeness	White audience	African-American audience
general	• HUMAN is AN OBJECT • HUMAN is AN NATURAL OBJECT • WOOD for AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE ENVIRONMENT • TREE for AFRICAN-AMERICAN • PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for STARVATION • RED for BLOOD x2 • RED for SADNESS • RED for PASSION, • RED for AUTHORITY • PRIDE is HEIGHT (UP), • POWER is HEIGHT (UP) • BLACK for AFRICAN-AMERICAN	• WOOD for FOUNDATIONS • WOOD for GOING BACK TO THE ROOTS • WOOD for STRENGTH • RAGGED CLOTHES for POVERTY • HUMAN is AN OBJECT • <u>BLACK PERSON is A UTILITARIAN OBJECT</u> • PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for BEING HUMAN • TREE for NATURE • NATURE for FEMALE • FEMALE for CYCLE OF LIFE • FEMALE for STRENGTH

Reception study analysis - ethnicity

level of figurativeness	White audience	African-American audience
component parts	• CREATIVE PROCESS IS AN ESCAPE FROM ABUSE x2 • <u>PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for PHYSICAL ABUSE x2</u> • PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for CHILD BIRTH • FIGHTING REPRESSION is STANDING TALL • CONTRAST for TERROR	• ARTWORK is A CONVERSATION x2 • CREATIVE PROCESS IS AN ESCAPE FROM ABUSE x4 • ART CREATION is STRENGTH x2 • ART CREATION is SPIRITUALITY

Reception study analysis - ethnicity

level of figurativeness	White audience	African-American audience
totality	• CONTROL OVER IMAGE is CONTROL OF THE BODY • BLACK PERSON for A DRUG • DRUG (TOBACCO, ALCOHOL) is A TOOL OF CONTROL • TREES for LYNCHINGS • PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for LYNCHINGS • <u>THE UNKNOWN is A THREAT</u>	• BLACK PERSON for SLAVERY • <u>GENDER FLUIDITY</u> for <u>HOMOSEXUALITY</u> • PHYSICAL DEFORMATION for RACIAL DISCRIMINATION x2 • PHYSICAL EXAGGERATION for RACIAL STEREOTYPING x2 • BLACK FACE FOR CULTURAL APPROPRIATION x2 • <u>RED</u> for <u>LACK OF DIGNITY</u>



Reception study. Analysis of responses

Group 1: question 1

S6 FEMALE	well to me I think it represents... I guess ... to me, the strength of an african-american, I guess, how it was, built on... it looks like it's on a piece of wood , so I'm thinking like, foundations , starting (?) this strength, I think it also... it's... showcase I guess how...we, somewhat have been viewed for a long time, like especially like with the dark skin, and some of the material that's been placed upon it , umm but... that's how I see it
S5 MALE	so I didn't see it when we were walking around but just looking at the picture it reminds me of like the minstrel kind of things , or .. I don't know what the term is, but umm...like sambo , or those
S5 MALE	you know, when they kinda exaggerate , umm... the skin
S6 FEMALE	the skin
S5 MALE	of a black person and they exaggerate the color of the lips
S6 FEMALE	yeah
S5 MALE	so that's kinda what it would remind me of, and the clothes seem kinda raggedy , so I guess the person is probably poor ... umm... maybe kinda wayward , or kinda like on a street , kinda thing, so that's how I would interpret that

QUALITY	BASIC PHYSICAL FORMS
PROCESS	
THEME	
PROCESS	
BODY	
BASIC PHYSICAL FORMS	
CONTEXT LEVEL 2	
CONTEXT LEVEL 2	
CHARACTERIZATION	
CONTEXT LEVEL 2	
CHARACTERIZATION	
DRAPERY	
PARTICIPANT	



Reception study - first takeaway

Personal experience and knowledge, as well as embodied cognition play a crucial role in the interpretation of artworks.

Access to more layers of contextual information allows the viewers to narrow down their interpretations

(cf. Kövecses 2015. Where Metaphors Come From: Reconsidering Context in Metaphor)

Reception study - second takeaway

differences between ethnicities

African-American	White audience
closeness to nature	red
spirituality of the artistic process	history of the lynchings
racial stereotyping and discrimination (+ ref. to blackface)	African-American bodies

Reception study - third takeaway

Meaning construction takes place through dynamic interaction on all of the described levels simultaneously, where art's functions come together in most diverse configurations.

(Cameron and Larsen-Freeman 2007,
Mingers 1999, Maturana and Varela 1987)

MuCADA model identifies these analytical levels and does not specify the nature of their interactions (in fact, it assumes the default diversity of these interactions).

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