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**ON SOME PROBLEMS IN CULTURAL**  
**SEMIOTICS**

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A detailed discussion, one which would not only differentiate between individual approaches but would also include the evolution of the views of West European scholars within cultural semiotics, is beyond the capacities of a paper this short.

Thus, I must confine my discussion to the state of research concerned with problems which I consider central to, and representative of, current studies in cultural semiotics by articulating a few general ideas of my choice without referring to specific works unless they provide particularly illustrative examples.

I shall present the situation starting from the second half of the 1960s, when research procedures for cultural semiotics changed significantly.

In the brief history of contemporary semiotics, which derives from a generalization of linguistic research methods viewed as a model for all studies on systems in humanities, there was a period when the seemingly predominating view — among scholars studying communication systems other than the natural language — was that a classification of social practices in a community (usually done according to different criteria for different types of practices) solves the problem of the classification of semiotic systems, which are typical, as with the practices, of the community's culture. Hence the ideas of creating separate languages for individual practices which are often coupled with a single-minded and utopian pursuit of double articulations specific to these languages, thus, discrete units were also attempted to be distinguished in imitation of phonemes: e.g. the term 'gusteme' in a national

culinary system. There were also attempts to create languages for painting, film, theatre, the etiquette and other behaviors.

Today, however, it is generally accepted in semiotic studies that individual social practices, including communication practices, all use within their limits not one but many different semiotic systems. Moreover, some of these systems are specific to a given practice, while others are used more broadly — in many different types of practices of a given community.

These problems were reflected in the studies on the semiotic typology of cultures, initiated by Yuri Lotman, which attempted to further differentiate primary modeling semiotic systems, such as natural languages, from secondary modeling systems, which are built upon language, such as literature and other ideological systems. As a result, the very concept of world modeling in semiotics systems had to be refined. The primary system of natural language started to be treated as if it was a "forging" device, useful in structuralizing all orders of culture. It was yet another limitation placed upon the inspirational Sapir—Whorf hypothesis. Whereas secondary systems started to be divided into systems which program human behavior under the supervision of a community (that is, world modeling systems), into those which operate on basic axioms, such as mathematics, and into those which operate in a more complex way, such as religion. The central question at that point was what kind of semiotic systems function in a particular culture of a given community and how do they relate to one another? A need arose to analyze semiotically as many diverse cultural phenomena as possible and culture itself as a typologically recognizable whole. Thus formulated hypotheses presupposed, in keeping with Mauss, that when we are studying a culture we are dealing with "a world of symbolic relationships." Mauss's thesis, however, was overly broad and a little too strong when he claimed that "the social is only real when integrated in a system." Not all that is social is also systematic. Moreover, we know now that it is precisely some secondary modeling systems, which play such a major role in cultures, that do not have all the necessary attributes defining systems as such. Even the model system of a natural language is not, for example, closed, so it does not meet this particular criterion of full systematicity. Nevertheless, culture understood as the whole of communication processes of a given community in a given time, may indeed be tentatively described as a set of texts which are realizations of semiotic systems characteristic of this particular culture. Three major issues illustrate the state and the development trends of hereby discussed cultural semiotics.

Firstly, how are the texts of a particular culture given to us? To what

extent should we take into account the role of the media which transmit these texts and the cultural functions of this media in comparison with the semiotic functions of the texts themselves. Can we e.g. analyze the semiotic functions of individual texts included in the programs of national television systems or should we take into account the cultural role of a TV channel, broadly understood as a medium with a specific technology, and the role of everything that makes it possible for a message to be meaningful, decodable as a representation of something else or someone's speech etc.? Should we take into account the anthropological influence of a message and its power to condition and modify semiotic functions of texts? Should we take into account the impact of the physical aspect of the technology itself, of the medium, the channel, that is, of the entire technology behind a TV system while analyzing the meanings of these texts?

Secondly, given what was said above, how should we study aspects while analyzing a text semiotically? Can we infer a pragmatic relationship between a sender/receiver and a text from the results of an analysis of the syntactic and semantic aspects of the text, supposing that a different syntax or semantics imply a different function and a different pragmatics? Or perhaps an analysis of the pragmatic aspect ought to be carried out separately and on a different level than the analysis of syntactic and semantic aspects?

Finally, what conclusions can be drawn from this discussion in relation to the problem of typologies of cultures?

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In their well-known dissertation, Lotman and Piatigorsky claim:

The concept of text is defined in accordance with an article by A. M. Piatigorsky [Piatigorsky 1962: 145 and *passim*]. Particular attention is given to such features of a text as its expression [*vyrazhennost'*] in a given system of signs — its "fixation" — and its capacity to perform in a certain relationship (in the system of signals functioning in a community) "as an elementary concept." The function of a text is defined as its social role, its capacity to serve certain demands of the community which creates the text. Thus, function is the mutual relationship among the system, its realization, and the addresser-addressee of the text. (Lotman, Piatigorsky 1978: 233)

As the research developed, other clarifications were introduced, like the concept of a multidimensional text (Zaliznjak, Ivanov, Toporov 1962: 134—143), when the signs of a natural language are used to code the signs of a mythological system and then the latter are used to code the meanings of

a religious system. Texts are not only multidimensional, but also organized by multiple codes. It so happens that we decode a certain text with the use of not one but many codes.

Finally, texts appear to be multi-systemic. If we wish to claim that every text is a realization of only one system of signs, it will be merely a convention. In that case we would have to introduce some principal concept that would define the textual realization of more than one semiotic system and moreover, the realization would have to make signs of all the realized systems functionally and structurally interdependent. It seems, however, that it is more convenient to speak of possibly multidimensional texts and typologically distinguish one-dimensional texts from multidimensional ones. It is more convenient to treat a poster in a magazine as a realization of a certain system of iconic signs and, simultaneously, on the level of inscriptions, a realization of a natural language system. It is more convenient since that way we single out such a poster as an individual, complete text within a defined and recognizable practice in a given culture: the practice of advertising. If we stood by the thesis that each individual text realizes only one semiotic system, we would have to use the initial, elementary data — the text — which would then be distanced from socio-cultural reality and would often turn into an  $n$ -degree abstraction.

How are texts actually given to us? To what extent these elementary initial data are indeed abstracted? What relationship do they have with social practices and their classifications?

According to Lotman, what is characteristic of a text is that it is fixed with the use of particular signs, it is demarcated (that is, it is opposed to all materially fixed signs which are not included in this text) and finally, a text is structured, in other words, it is not a simple, linear sequence of signs, but it is internally organized (Lotman 1970b).

A fixed (either in time and space or only in time), demarcated and structured text with its meanings — both in terms of the signifying (*signifiant*) and the signified (*signifié*) — cannot do without a specific material object-medium. What is meant here is a physical material which as such is neutral in terms of meaning — it may be e.g. an acoustic material or a material in the proper sense, e.g. the fabric of which clothes are made in such a way that, in the context of a particular folk culture, it allows us to distinguish an unmarried woman. Hence, such an object performs a semiotic and textual function, but also the medium itself, which is inseparable from the text, performs an objective function — it covers the body and protects it from the influence of the natural environment. I believe that this media,

as well as the texts themselves, may be called semiotic objects and qualified as semiotic components of the interpreted culture, the latter being understood as a set of processes and functions of social communication.<sup>1</sup> It seems necessary, given the close relationship between the semiotic, the textual and the objective functions of semiotic objects and their force of impact, to modify semiotic functions through objective functions, which are always co-present to one another and which influence both senders and receivers in communication processes, but which are never anthropologically neutral.

The hereby discussed cultural semioticians seem to assume in their more detailed analyses (e.g. Toporov 1973) that all texts, except a few liminal cases, are the realization of numerous systems. Texts are usually multi-systemic due to their multidimensional and multi-semiotic character (or sometimes both), the latter being a result of a cooperation of different systems which are simultaneously at play. The same analyses carried out in the late 1960s indicate show the abandonment of the thesis that social practices and separate languages or semiotic systems characteristic of a given practice supposedly correspond with one another. Classifications of systems and practices are separate. The classification of texts, as well as the demarcation of each and every one of them, are secondary to both of the previous classifications, provided that it is our priority to classify practices and to distinguish them as processual entities of different degrees depending on the theory of a given practice. Hence, we speak of the texts of e.g. ritualistic behaviors, ludic behaviors (carnival-like), as well as literary, mythological, film or poster texts and diverse texts of the JW program etc. The procedures of distinguishing practices as semiotic objects, media for texts and texts themselves are dialectically co-dependent.

Therefore, texts can be classified in two ways: first, by referring to the criteria of distinguishing social practices, second, by referring to the criteria used to distinguish, within a culture, semiotic systems and their functional relationships, when realized in multi-systemic texts such as films. The criteria derived from these theories of classification of different types and degrees of social practices are incomparable. Technological characteristics of different types of practices are the least comparable, while their social characteristics are easier to compare. The latter, however, are very hard to define in an unambiguous fashion without a semiotic analysis. Therefore, only the classifications of cultural texts which refer to the criteria of distinguishing

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<sup>1</sup>These problems, although slightly differently understood, were the preoccupation of A. J. Greimas (1968) and J. Kristeva (1968). We should also consider more detailed discussions by the contributors of 10th issue of *Langages*.

semiotic systems realized in these texts, according to the rules of their internal organization, are truly comparable.

By confirming their fixation, demarcation and internal organization, a semiotic analysis and a classification of texts allow us to verify hypotheses on classifications which refer to the often ambiguous criteria of distinguishing different types and degrees of social practices and their realizations in the form of semiotic objects.

A semiotic object carries the text which makes a given practice comprehensible and meaningful to people. It is text, the entire text, that is the elementary data. Isolated signs, sometimes meaningful on their own, are so only after they have been abstracted from a text. A semiotic object as a complete component of a culture is distinguished only if it is a medium for some text. Yet, these types of texts are determined by the classification of objective functions of semiotic objects.

A realization of some pattern of a certain social practice, fixed in a closed process or in time and space, is what we call a semiotic object. Its objective function are the anthropological consequences it has for an individual or a collective body, consequences which always arise when a social practice is realized.

Semiotic objects, due to their role of fixing and carrying texts, perform not only the objective, but, as we know, also semiotic functions. We have already said that e.g. a folk outfit can be considered a semiotic object. Its objective function — to dress a human and to protect him/her from the cold — is the basis which allows us to single out the text of folk clothes typical of many cultures. While the text, carrying the shape of that outfit which, as Bogatyriev claims, informs us about the gender, age, social and economic status, the magical and erotic intentions etc. of the person wearing it, allows us to determine which object with a co-dependent objective and semiotic function is an outfit and which no longer is one. Only in liminal cases the medium and the text appear to be materially identical. Usually, many material characteristics of the medium have no semiotic valence and only some of them are semiotized (e.g. colors can be meaningful, but textures or kinds of fabric cannot, at least at a given stage of the analysis). But the overall complex of relationships between meaningful units demarcates a certain semiotic object as both a medium and a text. For example, a meaningful decorative pattern on an outfit which can be read allows us to ascertain that the ornaments belong to this or that outfit, even though, in many other aspects, the outfit only covers the body and does not inform us about anything else with these aspects. Thus, in the proposed interpretation

of a culture, demarcation of a text serves to demarcate semiotic objects.

Semiotic objects, as well as their objective functions, are very much heterogeneous and they have clear time and space specifications: certain objects appear in some cultures but not others. Determining if particular objects appear in a given culture requires empirical descriptive research.

What is common to these heterogeneous classes of semiotic objects is their textuality and texts, as realizations of sign systems, are always homogenous because of the common metalanguage used to analyze them. They can be described with one language, the language of semiotic analysis. A typology of texts is based on the same kind of criteria: the rules for realizing communication processes, the result of a text analysis which includes all three aspects: syntax, semantics and pragmatics. A semiotic analysis can be used to interpret the functions of all texts. Therefore, it allows us to specify the functions of semiotic objects, and consequently, the functions of social practices in terms of their meaning for people and their value for both individuals and collective bodies to which these communicating individuals belong. Since for a scholar, in his attempt to fully interpret a certain culture, the development patterns, technologies and objective functions of social techniques are as important as the meanings these practices have for individual human beings. For the latter determines the hierarchization of techniques, their fixed equivalents as values. In this respect, a semiotic analysis acts a fundamental role. In a community, every human chooses and hierarchizes values as the participant of communication processes, a sender or receiver of messages (texts) in different situations, such as in the conflict situation of a strike, during a mass, while reading a book, bragging about the newest car and exercising one's "know-how" skills in the creation process.

But if the semiotic functions of a text in question and the text itself are given to us from the particular aspect of a semiotic object, inseparable from its objective aspect and objective functions, what is the correlation between these objective and semiotic functions?

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These problems *expressis verbis* are discussed mainly in Polish cultural semiotic (Żółkiewski 1972, 1973, 1974), but they are inspired by detailed Soviet analyses, among which Ivanov's generalizations, Lotman's more systematic research, as well as Piatigorsky's and Uspiensky's attempts play a major role (esp. Lotman 1970a: 105, 1973b: 94; Ivanov 1973: 206—236, 1965: 75—90).

The ability to distinguish between social techniques requires theoretical knowledge that supersedes all semiotic research. Such knowledge also helps us to formulate hypotheses on distinctions between semiotic objects, which may, in a particular culture, be media for texts characterized by fixedness, demarcation and internal organization of a structural nature. This proper, theoretically organized knowledge of the history and technology of social practices in a specific community and in a specific time allows us to distinguish e.g. an entire folk outfit instead of bits and pieces of fabrics or a book as opposed to a newspaper instead of scraps of paper. These hypotheses must be verified and, if need be, revised, depending on the semiotic analysis of the semantic functions of a text, whose medium is the semiotic object that we have distinguished. Distinguishing that object is determined above all by the answer to the following question: does this object, if distinguished as proposed, participate in a given culture and does it indeed participate in the communication processes of that culture? Only after having analyzed the semiotic function of the textual aspect of this object can we confirm our hypothesis on classifications and determine the required characteristics of the semiotic organization of this particular text, which is carried by this very object.

Defining the relationships between objective functions of a given semiotic object and its semiotic functions is an empirical question, which depends on the way a particular object functions in the communication process of a given community in a given culture.

Yet, there are at least three types of basic, invariant relations between these functions. If the semiotic function of a text depends primarily on its internal organization, on the type of semiotic system (or systems) and on the number of levels the next realizes itself, then it is the objective function of a semiotic object that has the power to modify the controlling power of the semiotic function.

Objective functions of a semiotic object may, first of all, ACCOMPANY semiotic functions on a metonymic basis.

Secondly, they may TRANSMIT semiotic functions on the basis of both metonymic and metaphoric organization at the same time. Thirdly, they may BE INTERPRETED through semiotic functions on the basis of a metaphoric organization. For example, in terms of the first case, the objective aspect of a folk outfit and its objective functions co-occur in one semiotic object — the very outfit — along with the semiotic aspect, the textual aspect and its functions. An outfit covers the body but at the same time it means something — it distinguishes the wearer in terms of gender,



matrimonial and social status etc. This objective function is susceptible to the modifications brought about by the semiotic function. The nature of this influence constitutes yet another empirical problem and we could possibly notice numerous types and tendencies of such modifications in a given culture. From a theoretical standpoint, it is vital that such influences occur and that while analyzing a text we should always bear in mind the properties of its medium. With the metonymic organization discussed in this example such influence is not considerable. In this case, semiotic functions have a high degree of autonomy. Nevertheless, the very fact that the objective and semiotic functions constantly co-occur results in a "familiarization" of the latter (in a particular culture, obviously). Their co-occurrence is marked by permanence which has a great semiotic valence. This leads to specific connotations. It would be shameful and ridiculous to ignore e.g. the semiotic attributes of an outfit which designate gender. But when (in a different culture of this community) this distinction ceases to be permanently connected with objective functions such as covering the body, e.g. when women are allowed to wear trousers, then this change is a semiotic expression with a considerable social function to perform, since it contributes to the processes of gender equality. An observer who watches these phenomena occur in morally conservative peasant countries which are undergoing a social revolution and experiencing all of its consequences knows the importance of such supposedly insignificant phenomena.

In the same way, we can analyze a different example of such a metonymic organization. For example, the Christmas Eve supper follows a certain order of serving meals. Its objective function is, among others, to feed the hungry. But people who participate in it can decode its text so that when a visitor arrives and sees sweet pasta with poppy seeds being served, he knows that the supper is almost over and that he is grossly late. The fact that the goal of the feast is to satisfy hunger and that the physiology of the process is accounted for, causes the semiotic aspect — the order of the supper — to become "naturalized." Especially, since the custom of serving a sweet desert as the last meal is common in our culture, although not in all cultures. This purely conventional act tends to be regarded as justifiable in the light of the physiology of hunger. Sweets are to be eaten only after a fat meal, not before, although we know that the human organism can tolerate even that "wrong" order.

The second correlation between the objective and the semiotic functions of semiotic objects is by far more important for its formation through information due to the strong link between information and social practice,

which manifests itself in the form of particular semiotic objects. McLuhan was the first to describe these phenomena so vividly, yet at the same time with one-sided exaggeration. Through the linear, printing technique proposed by Gutenberg, a copy of a book transmits information contained in the text of that book. But the social practices preserved in the physical copy, or in fact in many copies of the same text, are not anthropologically neutral in communication processes. The objective function of the transmission of this text in numerous printed copies accompanies its semiotic functions. It does so not only on the basis of metonymy, but the metonymic relationship that occurs here is of crucial importance. The possibility of printing a large number of copies thanks to modern printing techniques turns some texts and their codes into the public property of many receivers — these texts become a common repertoire of information available to a particular community and the appropriate codes become so well-known that they impose themselves onto the minds of receivers and they usually have great chances of dominating the hierarchy of possible codes. Hence, in literary communication, the cultural habit of the receivers accustomed to the poetics of 19<sup>th</sup> century critical realist novels accounts for the popularity, intelligibility and "easiness" of texts which follow this code, but also offers an opportunity of decoding other texts which the sender intentionally reorganized so that they resembled the critical realist poetics. Another face of the homogenization of reading experiences in mass literary communication, such as the reading of Faulkner's *Sanctuary* as a crime novel, can be easily explained by the influence of the objective functions of the semiotic object (the medium for the text) on the semiotic functions of the text: it suffices to publish and sell *Sanctuary* as part of a crime series with other novels of the genre, adding a proper cover and a symbol of police romances, to impose such a hierarchy of codes that will make the reader decode Faulkner's book as crime fiction. In cases when the objective function of the medium is mainly (or, in extreme cases, merely) to TRANSMIT information, when the medium is nothing more than an actual information medium, the distinction between the medium and the text, the objective and the semiotic function seems artificial. But it is not. Obviously, in our example, the design and the symbols used to mark detective fiction perform semiotic functions, such as implying that the content of the book falls into the criminal romance genre. But that is only on the level of a single copy. Meanwhile, from a social perspective, it is the number of copies that also plays a role — the number of copies of this book as well as the number of analogous (or pseudo-analogous) titles in the entire series. Only the objective function of the MEDIUM OF "SERIALITY" of a particular

type of texts, a medium with many copies and many titles, has the power to modify, as it has already been described, the semiotic functions of an individual text which is atypical of a given series and to impose on readers a certain hierarchy of codes, which in our example is represented by the dominance of the action code.

The quantitative aspect, which is decisive in this case, is not important in itself. It is a manifestation of the objective function of TRANSMISSION with social parameters allowing it to neutralize, at least to some extent, the controlling power of the internal properties of the text of the abovementioned *Sanctuary*, provided that it is not only labeled with symbols of seriality, but also distributed along with many other seemingly analogous titles labeled in such a way that they fulfil the quantitative conditions of seriality in the mass culture of a given community.

But, as it was already said, that is not what is important. For, in this example, there is also a metaphoric relationship between the objective and semiotic function. Let us consider two semiotic objects which represent two different social practices of passing on information: a printed book and an entire television system of a given region broadcasting respective entertainment programs. The meaning of a text contained in a book as well as the world model implied in this text as a realization of a particular semiotic system are also a metaphoric interpretation of these attributes of the transmission medium determined by the very technology of communication. These attributes, metaphorically interpreted, act as limiting frames setting the tone for the way in which the text models the world. Hence, they have their share in determining the organization of this model. Print bombards different receptors than television: for example, given the linearity and cause-effect presentation of events characteristic of print, this medium favors a significantly different type of modeling than television which attacks the entire human central nervous system, but also stimulates the imagination which is needed to fill in the gaps in a TV "worldview" caused by the specific nature of TV technology and its limited, in comparison with cinema, capacities to transmit iconic images. This does not explain the final interpretation of the famous aphorism that the medium is the message, but this fact is valent enough to prevent an isolated analysis of semiotic functions of an abstracted text without taking into account its unbreakable relationship with the semiotic object and the unbreakable relationship between semiotic and objective functions, that is, the technological properties of the objective function of the very act of transmitting or of using a certain channel.

Finally, the third type of relationship between these two functions is

called metaphoric. This is an organization in which the semiotic function is only an interpretation of the objective function. I believe this category mainly includes the texts of behaviors which we cannot segment "naturally." However, they are not the orders of behaviors (such as rituals) which simply transmit encoded information (e.g. myths).<sup>2</sup> In the latter case we are dealing with a variation of the above analyzed organization. It seems that the third category is about texts which are realizations of the various classification systems of particular global and fragmentary social practices. For example, we may become familiarized with the artisanal practice of making horseshoes through our own competence in this craft, through observation of relevant behaviors or, indirectly, through descriptions encoded in natural language signs. We are able to understand production practices and treat these usually processual phenomena as semiotic objects. Their objective function is to produce, while the semiotic function answers the question: produce what and how? If we can refer particular factors and elements of the manufacturing process to classes of certain activities and to classes of elements, and then if we can adequately classify the relationships between these components as well as classify their functions in the analyzed process, the semiotic aspect of an object may be recognized. This is because a classification is *de facto* an interpretation of objective functions through semiotic ones, but it should be detailed enough to correspond with the point of view of the usually fragmentary practice. For example, a hammer is a tool and a tool of this kind is used in many practices. When interpreting (that is, classifying) the particular hammer in a particular process of manufacturing horseshoes we identify it as a sledgehammer for making horseshoes. On the other hand, as to the classification of the processes of a particular practice as a whole, that is, of its higher degrees, we have to distinguish between e.g. a craft product from an assembly-line product and, to go further, between capitalist and socialist methods of production or between other, theoretically more general classes used to organize a practice. Generally speaking, in this example we are interpreting the stylistic features of social practices, features which relate to certain stylistic orders and specify the manner of executing these practices along with the attributes that determine their quality and meanings (Kluckhohn 1962: 37f; Żółkiewski 1965: 183—200). I have referred in this example to the classification of practices from the perspective of the theory of production, but many more classifications could be used: for example, the approach proposed by personality theories, as is done in the well-known

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<sup>2</sup>Some scholars negate the communicational functions of a ritual (Greimas 1968: 26). However, I stand in favor of a contrary interpretation by Yu. Lotman (1973a).

study by Piatigorsky and Uspensky (Piatigorsky, Uspensky 1967).

In our typology, we have always said that objective and semiotic functions accompany one another in a metonymic fashion, that semiotic functions are transmitted by objective functions in a metonymic and metaphoric fashion, and that objective functions are interpreted metaphorically through semiotic functions. In other words, we speak of types of relationships between dominating functions (on the side of the objective and semiotic ones) in reference to the analyzed semiotic object. Objective functions ACCOMPANYING the semiotic ones in the foreground of a social practice, may, in the background, TRANSMIT information and perform other functions if we look even deeper. For example, a folk outfit above all protects and covers, which is what objectively dominates the practice of wearing an outfit dominated, but after all it is the outfit (or its certain elements) that BRINGS us information related to its semiotic aspects.

When the objective functions of information TRANSMISSION are dominating, as it is the case with e.g. ritual dance or the entire practice of using mass media, then certain secondary objective functions, such as those of information electronic equipment, may only accompany the semiotic functions, like some socially (prestige-wise) functional physical properties of the casing of a single receiver.

Finally, in the third case, the interpretative relationship dominates over, for example, manufacturing practices and their pre-established correlates. But even then the relationships between objective and semiotic functions may be richer, although manufacturing practices usually lack informative intention, which they compensate with clear productive intention.

I realize that my simplified analysis does not explicitly state that a classification of social practices, which precedes a semiotic analysis, shares all epistemological difficulties and problems of major cultural theories. A semiotic analysis does not free us from cultural theories. Semiotics cannot replace a worldview. Nevertheless, I am convinced that a semiotic analysis allows us to specify the interpretation of signs and meanings and to make respective hypotheses REJECTABLE. Yet, a Marxist would still use the results of a semiotic analysis differently than a phenomenologist or a neopositivist.

The thing is that we should accept the rigors of describing the initial data: the rigors of texts and the rigors related to ordering the initial documentation of cultural phenomena and processes. At the same time, we should adopt

such rigors which would prove the most productive from the point of view of reconstructing the semiotic systems realized in texts along with their world models.

The semiotic analysis of a text has essentially three aspects: it refers to syntax (the internal organization of a text), to semantics (the approach of a text to that what shapes the image of the world external to the text itself) and finally, pragmatics (the relationship between the sender or the receiver to the text and to the adequate sign system. The results of such a triple analysis allow us to establish the function of a text and its social role.

There are two options: either to treat culture as a collection of texts, or as a set of functions. In the first case, a function determined through reference to a particular text acts as the meta-text. While in the second case, a text is derived from a function.

The function and the text may be analyzed at the same level or at two different levels. The one-level analysis of the text and its functions is in fact a syntactic and semantic analysis. In that case, the pragmatics of the text are deduced only from syntactic and semantic determinants. We assume that the change of syntax and semantics of a text modifies its pragmatics, as well as the sender's/receiver's approach towards it, and consequently, the very functions of the text. Therefore, we attribute a special controlling power to syntactic and semantic signals over behaviors connected with sending and receiving information. It is essentially a utopian, quasi-linguistic theory, as it attributes such a controlling power that only natural language systems could have to different cultural systems realized in a text.

As a result, this quasi-linguistic theory assumes a special status of the sender and the receiver as intra-textual facts. There are signals in a text, which incorporate not really its sender, but rather its addresser, or, the intra-textual "image of the author," as Vinogradov would say. On the other hand, the text contains signals which determine the intra-textual concept of the addressee (rather than the receiver), in other words, the virtual receiver. Only surrendering to the controlling power of signals which incorporate the virtual receiver can a real, "correctly" reacting receiver be formed. I believe, however, that both the receiver and the sender actually operate outside the text.

Both approaches appear in the semiotic studies analyzed here. These studies include descriptive works which treat culture as a collection of texts, as well as those which treat it as a set of functions. There are also such works which examine only the syntax and the semantics of a text, drawing conclusions about its pragmatics only on the basis of these two analyses.

But there are also works which carry out the pragmatic analysis separately, at a different level than the syntactic and semantic analyses. Therefore, they operate in two types of research: on the one hand, the approach which treats the addresser and the addressee as intra-textual constructs and on the other hand, the one which considers the sender and the receiver part of the communication process taking place outside the text itself. A classic example of the latter approach to text, sender and receiver is e.g. Toporov's study *On the Cosmological Origins of Early Historical Descriptions*.

The superiority of empirical descriptions clearly speaks in favor of the second view: culture as a set of texts and the sender and receiver as operating outside a text. Such a conclusion is also supported by everything that was said above: about how texts are given to us, about the existence of the strong connection between a text and its medium and about the dependence of the semiotic functions on the objective functions of a semiotic object —that is, a social practice. All of the above mentioned relationships and phenomena require separate pragmatic analysis, as the objective functions of semiotic objects modify, as it was proven in this discussion, the semiotic functions of texts primarily in their pragmatic aspect.<sup>3</sup> These modifications are based on the varying hierarchy of codes (dependent upon the objective functions of text media) used to decode a text, on a varying hierarchy of text levels and on a similar hierarchy of systems realized in all complex texts. This is what was discussed in our examples.

Changing hierarchies of codes in different epochs are the reason why the seventeenth-century satirical reading of *Don Quixote* is so different from the romantic reading, which emphasizes mostly the conflict between an authentic individuality and a conformist society. And, after all, the hierarchy is established on the basis of the sender's/receiver's attitude towards texts. Of course, the pragmatic approach is not independent of the internal, syntactic and semantic structure of a text — the signals sent by the latter certainly have controlling power, it is, however, historically variable within certain limits. Especially, e.g. in terms of literature, within textual phenomena of the *longue durée*, as Braudel claims. For example, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century the controlling power of the literary generic code could not be ignored by the receiver while he was hierarchizing the codes of a given text. Thus, it is necessary to choose between the two possibilities — to treat culture as

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<sup>3</sup>This is how the functions of a semiotic analysis of non-verbal cultural texts were perceived by P. G. Bogatyriev already in his research from the 1930s (1971 — e.g., see an article from this book written in 1937: *Funktsii natsionalnogo kostyuma w Moravskoy Slovakiï*, p. 297—366).

either a collection of texts, or as a set of functions. The hereby discussed analytical practice seems to favor the approach to culture as a set of texts. In that case the intra-textual concepts of addresser and addressee, as well as the extra-textual concepts of receiver and sender, can be as I regarded as complementary.

However, while searching for answers to the question about the social functions of a text, we should put an emphasis on the sender /receiver operating outside the text, since the social functions of a text are determined by the hierarchization of codes.

We said, for example, that the functions of a semiotic object, such as an outfit protecting its wearer against the cold, affect the semiotic functions of the outfit as a text — marking the gender of the user. The every-day, metonymic relationship between the objective and the semiotic functions of a constantly worn outfit leads to a "familiarization" of the latter. Consequently, a violation of the semiotic functions — despite the fact that a women's outfit may just as well be worn by a man from the objective point of view — becomes highly semiotically marked. A man in a woman's outfit is usually a masquerader; hence, when observing such a phenomenon in any cultural text (a text of behaviors, a literary text, a film etc.), we refer to the code of a carnival, which we treat as the dominant, at the top of the hierarchy. This hierarchization obviously determines our decoding of the function and the social role of this text.

The said scholars believe that starting out with the attempts to classify heterogeneous cultural phenomena, social practices and semiotic objects creates enormous difficulties in terms of hypotheses which point out the differences and similarities of cultures in time and space. Although it seems that no study of cultures can do without hypotheses which theoretically justify the initial classification of social practices specific to a particular study, but it can be scientifically controlled by distinguishing semiotic types of cultures. The latter procedure allows us to separate ourselves (already in the initial phase of research) from the heterogeneity of phenomena, practices and semiotic objects. It allows for the characterizing of these objects from the perspective of what they have in common, their textuality. It also allows for the grounding of the initial hypothesis of classification in the identified similarities and differences of the semiotic functions of these objects. For example, B. Uspensky's research — which proves that semiotic objects, as different as a literary work and a painting, despite clear semiotic differences, share some important features which allow us to classify them both as works of art — follows this pattern. Hence the possibility to test the



hypothesis on the homology range of social, literary and painting practices as artistic practices of a given culture or of many cultures (Uspiensky 1970, especially the final chapter). Even more important is Bakhtin's discovery of the homologies between carnival customs and a carnivalesque model of literature, in other words, a special literary practice and a corresponding practice of ludic behaviors.

Within the works on cultural semiotics discussed in this article we may identify the following major typologies of cultures. The first typological proposal distinguishes the features of the sets of text or of the functions of a culture which are expressible with the language of typology, starting out with the basic opposition between that what is within the scope of a given culture, that what is beyond it. The second typology distinguishes types of cultures according to the criterion of the dominant code in relation to auto-model texts of a given culture (texts, in which a culture interprets itself as a whole), which leads to distinguishing the following types: semantic ("symbolic"), syntactic, a-semantic and a-syntactic at the same time, and, finally, both semantic and syntactic. The third proposal refers to the criteria for defining what qualifies as a text in a given culture and what does not. It also refers to the criteria adopted in a particular culture for varying the degree of cultural authoritativeness of its texts. Finally, the fourth proposal takes into account the types of pragmatic approaches of senders/receivers to the signs of a given culture. The latter is divided into two types: it either explores the pragmatic approach by drawing conclusions from a syntactic and semantic analysis of a text structure and of changes within this structure, or — as it was already mentioned — it treats the pragmatic aspect of a text separately, at a different level than the syntactic and semantic aspects.

The first proposal out of those listed above (to be clear: the typological one) seems to lead to a dependent classifications, complementary to other methods of classification. The second (the criterion of the dominant code) presupposes a utopian harmony and unity of a culture under discussion, and consequently, the dominance of one type of text structure, that is, it allows only one possible auto-model of a given culture. This assumption is challenged by the empirical results of the studies of different cultures and an observation of their internal contradictions. The third proposal (the criterion for determining what qualifies as a text and what does not) fails to sufficiently differentiate between the concept of a text as an element of the metalanguage of a semiotic analysis and that of a text as an element of an object language. Consequently, the concept of a text is always relativized to the uses of an object language, to culture-specific meanings. This results either in an

argumentative vicious circle or in the fact that such a classification can be used only to describe auto-models of cultures. For when coming up with a typology of cultures we must know what does and what does not qualify as a text, regardless of how these concepts are used in object languages of different cultures, but rather according to the rules of using these terms in the metalanguage of the classifier who wishes to observe, instead of participating in the studied cultures.

Finally, the fourth proposal in its first variant, the one which treats culture as a set of functions, has already been criticized above. What is left is the second variant of the fourth proposal, which refers to the presupposition that it is possible to tentatively describe culture as a set of texts. I believe that most of the elaborate works by the abovementioned semioticians assume precisely that second variant of the fourth proposal (the fourth in this classification) as the basis for their research procedure. A classic example of that is the previously cited *On the Cosmological Origins of Early Historical Descriptions* by Toporov (1973). In this study, the ideological, and, therefore, pragmatic attitude of the sender/receiver to the sign system of cosmological description and a different system of historical description is the criterion for the typologies of cultures in which these various systems function. According to Toporov, these two cultures are divided by the social, political and religious crisis which determines the abandonment of one type of description — the cosmological one — and the creation of a new sign system — the historical system for describing cultural phenomena. The functions of the second type of description, the one expressing human meanings of the crisis, determine the approach of the sender/receiver to the new type of historical texts. A pragmatic approach of the sender/receiver to the systems of cosmological and historical descriptions does not depend only on the semiotic function of these descriptions already verbalized in earlier sources. It also depends on the objective function of the most ancient media of cosmological descriptions, media such as rituals, whose objective function consisted in the participation in timeless, mythological processes of "creating cosmos" or conquering chaos. Objective functions which changed under the influence of new and foreign traditions penetrating a culture with its rituals modified also the semiotic functions of a cosmological system, deprived it of its original meaning and made it insufficient for the new historical communicational situation. Similarly, in Bakhtin's works, a reconstructed approach of the sender/receiver to a text determined whether a given text should be qualified as part of the folk culture, in which the primary function is fulfilled by a sign system capable of realizing the model of a "world turned

upside down,” or, on the contrary, a text should be treated as part of the official culture, in which the main role is performed by the ruling system realizing the model of a hierarchical world based on the order of the class system (Bakhtin 1965, *passim*).

We may conclude — from these examples and this entire discussion — that the results of semiotic analyses help verify many hypotheses formed in the process of studying cultures, especially those initial hypotheses which aim to classify social practices. Descriptions and semiotic analyses are useful in theoretical and historical cultural research, which studies the dynamics and patterns of cultural shifts, but they can never replace the latter research and its methods.

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