Social semiotics: communicative and socio-cultural practices. The Russian-speaking contribution to the development of social semiotics in 1970–2000s

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ABSTRACT

The intensive transformation of literally all spheres of life in modern society stimulates the search for an adequate conceptual apparatus in order to understand these processes. The purpose of this work is to show the possibilities of applying semiotic analysis to social-cultural phenomena and processes, which involves going beyond the traditional limitation of semiotics with linguistic phenomena and the reduction of social semiotics to the pragmatic contexts of language use. At the same time, particular attention is given to approaches and developments obtained in the last quarter of the previous century by Russian-speaking authors such as Yuri Lotman, Georgy Bogin, Aron Brudnyj, Tamara Dridze, Aleksandr Portnov, Vladimir Sulimov, as well as their colleagues and students. The priority function and significance of the developments of the aforementioned authors and schools is specifically associated with the discovery of non-trivial possibilities of the semiotic approach, which goes beyond considering the peculiarities of using language in various social practices for the semiotic analysis of such practices themselves.

Introduction: articulating the issue

Social communication is a key practice that determines the formation and development of society (sociogenesis); the establishment, consolidation, and transmission of values and norms (culturogenesis and creativity); the formation, development, and positioning of a personality (self-awareness, selfhood, socialization, individualization). Therefore, the intensive transformation of social communication in the format of digital technologies radically changes modern society's entire way of life: business activity, forms of employment, management, education, cultural industries, and personal life. These processes pose serious challenges to politics, law, and morality which presuppose the comprehension and rethinking of established ideas, approaches utilized, conceptual apparatus, and the identification of promising areas for their application.

The purpose of the following work is the systematization of possibilities in the analysis of modern communication processes that social semiotics provides. At the same time, of undoubted interest is the potential of approaches and developments obtained in the last

quarter of the previous century by Russian-speaking authors such as Yuri Lotman, Georgy Bogin, Aron Brudnyj, Tamara Dridze, Aleksandr Portnov, Vladimir Sulimov, as well as their colleagues and students.

An important stimulating role in the formation and development of these areas was played by the generalizing interdisciplinary nature of semiotic analysis, which opened up the research field to Soviet scholars free from the ideological dominance of the official 'Marxist-Leninist philosophy.' And the interdisciplinary approach developed in the abovementioned scientific schools in regard to the analysis of sign systems and their dynamics, the key role of communication in such an analysis, not only remains relevant, but also seems to be very fruitful for understanding current socio-cultural processes and their prospects. However, the limitation of international contacts in the USSR, language barrier, subsequent collapse of the USSR, passing of school leaders, and organizational problems of the humanities in the post-Soviet space are quite understandable reasons that explain the loss (for some time) of these authors, schools, and the concepts they developed from the scientific community's field of view. Therefore, it is all the more important to not only recall them, but to draw attention to the relevance, importance, and prospects of the developments made and, if possible, to present a complete picture of this multi-vectored, and at the same time quite integral, scientific movement.

Achievement of this goal presupposes a solution to two complementary problems.

Firstly, recognizing the non-triviality of social semiotics as the application of semiotic analysis of communication (translation and perception of meaningful information) to socio-cultural phenomena and processes, assumes going beyond the traditional limitation of semiotics with linguistic phenomena.

Thus, secondly, the priority role and significance of the developments of the mentioned authors and schools are revealed.

This work is structured in accordance with the sequential solution to these problems.

Social semiotics: practical language contexts or the semantic content of the practices themselves

The advances of modern technology are impressive to say the least. They are based on the ability to impersonally model cognitive processes and as a result, knowledge is understood as information (literally a measure of diversity), i.e. as data and information that can be obtained using a certain option. The ambiguous consequences of such a reduction are already well known and diagnosed in their vagueness, including anthropological ones.

The volumes of transmitted information and the speed at which it is processed have reached such a degree that a person is not required to reason, but rather to react quickly. This boils down to activating the 'correct' options that implement some predetermined algorithms. Giorgio Agamben rightly qualifies this as a 'new animality.' It is important to understand that such anthropological ambiguity, if not danger, is associated precisely with the identification of communicative processes with information, knowledge and information, reduction of signs to data, and semiotic systems to information-signaling. Therefore, it seems that in the humanitarian examination of these processes the role of the semiotic approach is increasing. Semiotics deals not only with signals as information impulses, but with signs and sign systems that carry and convey meanings and significance. This does not concern information as a measure of diversity, but

rather meaningful information, which in the process of its repetition, is also reinterpreted anew. And semiotics is an important interdisciplinary conceptual apparatus for overcoming such reductions, deepening and expanding the possibilities for analyzing the methods of gaining new experience and new knowledge that is important for a person as a social being. Existence as a social being is due to coexistence, 'sociality,' realized in communication. Given the impact that communication processes have on the transformation of society, the special role of social semiotics is manifested as a branch of semiotics concerning the functioning of sign systems in society (Sotsialnaja semiotika, 2020).

The writing of this work was largely due to the realization that a wide circle of the advanced community of scholars in the humanities is characterized by an ambiguous idea of the subject and possibilities of social semiotics. I understand that this, to a large extent, contributed to the recent publications by colleagues Suren Zolyan, Mikhail Ilyin, Ivan Fomin (Fomin & Ilyin, 2019; Ilyin, 2015), and some of my own recent work within the framework of a grant from the Russian Science Foundation as well as preparation for a conference dedicated to social semiotics at Saint Petersburg University in 2020. The last straw was Zolyan's publication of correspondence between Gunther Kress and Bob Hodge (Hodge & Kress, 1988) regarding their understanding of social semiotics as well as their teacher's – M.Halliday (Zolyan, 2019, pp. 412–416).

In this correspondence and Zolyan's commentary to it, two important points stand out:

(1) Kress and Hodge speak about the demarcation of social semiotics 'from linguistics.' In this case, social semiotics appears as a description of the functional contexts of language and practices (frames) of its usage.
(2) They both, especially Hodge, acknowledge that entry from other cultures (and languages of description) reveal new possibilities. The point is not only in reaching Max Weber in terms of sociology, but namely in culture.

Actually, what was interesting and important for Lotman, prior to M.Halliday, who spoke about social semiotics, was that he wrote more and more about the semiotics of culture, the semiotics of behavior and social action (Lotman, 1967, 1976, 1981, 1984, 1992, 2010). Surprisingly, the above-mentioned foreign semiotic scholars, as it turns out, are completely unfamiliar with Lotman's works. They did not know him and did not read his works.

Meanwhile, Lotman was a member of the editorial board of several international semiotic journals and published in them. This includes the journal 'Semiotica,' whose permanent editor-in-chief for 32 years (until 2001) was Thomas Sebeok. Sebeok expanded semiotic analysis to signaling and communication systems not related to humans, invented the terms 'zoosemiotics' and 'biosemiotics,' and his personal library on semiotics (more than 4,000 volumes of books and 700 journals) is preserved at the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu where Lotman worked. In the journal *Semiotica* in 1970-80s, informative articles by many authors on signal analysis of various cultural phenomena and processes were regularly published. These articles went far beyond the analysis of language: laughter, caricatures, behavior, etc.

Many Russian scholars in the humanities, including the author of the present article, believed that even in those years there was already a fairly general understanding of semiotics as a science of sign systems that affix and transmit meanings or semantic

complexes, which in themselves have a cultural nature. Why did Lotman refer to himself at times as a culturologist (when culturology as we understand it had not even been heard of)? In this regard, it was natural to be interested in the ideas of Vygotsky and the younger Bakhtin, which were manifested in domestic and foreign humanities. It is not for nothing that the reception of Bakhtin's ideas ('inverse' to the chronology of writing his works) led to his interpretation almost as a structuralist. This interpretation was confirmed abroad by the translations of his texts by Julia Kristeva – a respected author among semiotic scholars.

Superimposed on this was a wave of interest in the legacy of Russian formalism. And taking into account the name imiaslavie (from imiaslavts themselves to Sergei Bulgakov, Pavel Florensky, Aleksei Losev, Osip Mandelstam, and the mathematical school of Yegorov), we obtain a detailed picture of the Russian vector of semiotics, open interdisciplinarity not through language but including language. And Gustav Shpet's circle of ideas coincide with this (Tulchinskii, 2019). In light of this, it is time to discuss the Russian contribution to the development of semiotics as a platform for interdisciplinary humanitarian (and not only) knowledge.

By the end of the 1980s, one could speak about the establishment in the Russian-speaking segment of the humanities of the semiotic approach as a powerful interdisciplinary field, within which many phenomena in nature and society are considered as sign systems that ensure the fixation, storage, and transmission of meaningful information. In this regard, culture appears, according to Lotman, as a system of extragenetic inheritance of the behavioral experience: a system of generation, selection, storage, reproduction, and translation of social experience in sign systems. Any component of social experience, from these positions, appears as a sign. A table, book, church, any technical system, animal, landscape, etc., included in social practice, become signs and sign systems with their own meaning. Furthermore, an individual himself appears as a multi-level sign system. Thus, semiotics is not reduced to the analysis of language, but just a language operating with signs of a culture of signs as a guide to the world of this culture, the development of which presupposes language communication.

However, as time has shown, such an expanded understanding of semiotics as an approach to the analysis of a wide range of socio-cultural phenomena was limited to the Russian-speaking horizon. Today, the majority of the scientific community is still inclined to view semiotics as a part of linguistics, at best, philology (Gavrilova, 2016; Halliday, 1978; Leeuwen, 2005), or an addition to it (Krejdlin, 2002). Probably, this is due to the inertia of the expansion of the English language journalistic analytical tradition, which is not very friendly to the continental hermeneutic tradition. Nevertheless, attempts are being made to overcome this opposition. A striking example is the special issue of the aforementioned journal Semiotica (issue 173/2009) edited by Paul Cobley and Anti Randviir where the editors indicate the emerging interchange between European and English-speaking traditions, noting the paradox: if the European 'sociosemiotics' echoes the English-speaking tradition of sociolinguistics, then Halliday's 'social semiotics' brings this tradition to the contexts of linguistic practices (Cobley & Randviir, 2009). Also, the journal Social Semiotics, which began to be published in 1991, steadily adheres to the topic of discursive practices in politics, art, media, and social networks.

However, more often semiotic analysis is applied not only to discursive practices in politics and international relations, but it also to trade, social statuses and roles, gifts,

visual arts, and children's toys (Blackledge & Angela Creese, 2020; Bouvier & Way, 2021; Luckmann, 2009), other material artifacts associated with a wide range of socio-cultural practices. According to Douglas Lemke, social semiotics provides a basis for multimedia analysis to go beyond the internal multimodality of separate works to understand the nature of social meaning of transmedia franchises and trans-institutional lives, to a broader intellectual project of sign systems, including the political economy of the sign (Lemke, 2009). In this regard, Halliday's social linguistics appears to be an important approach to the analysis of culture, social activity, which determines the contexts of situations for creating meaning and significance. Such an expansion returns to the reinterpretation of the ideas and concepts of Bronislaw Malinowski and John Rupert Firth (Halliday's teacher), when language as an action is considered not only as a means of conveying lexical or semantic information, but also as a means of conveying social meaning (Hess-Lüttich, 2009), acting as a part of a wide socio-cultural mechanism for generating meaning and transmitting meaningful experiences, i.e. social communication.

In the discursive practice itself, it is emphasized that the generation of meaning is provided not by separate signs, but by texts and sign systems in the process of their use primarily in dialogues (Ponzio, 2009). This turn draws attention to the well-known ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, etc. on the tradition of continental philosophy and hermeneutics with the emphasis on the problem of understanding as the generation and reproduction of semantic structures. And this implies the inevitable inclusion of human subjectivity, personal selfhood, and identity in the semiosis – not only as a result of semiosis, but as an active factor in its realization. At the same time, semiosis inevitably turns out to be associated with values and obligations, which opens up the prospect for the development of semioethics of responsibility (Petrilli, 2009) completely in the spirit of metaphysics of morality and Bakhtin's philosophy of an act. It was precisely these questions that were in the center of attention of Russian-speaking semiotic scholars from 1970-2000. It is important, as the discussion at the recent XVIII International Bakhtin Conference has shown, that this process of convergence of the lines of the formalist-structural (Viktor Shklovsky, Yury Tynyanov, Boris Eikhenbaum, and others) and phenomenological-hermeneutic approaches continues. The foundations for this process were laid in 1970-2000.

This encouraged the author to immerse himself in more detail regarding the context of the modern reception of ideas and developments of the late Soviet and early post-Soviet periods in the problem field associated with social semiotics.

Modern specialists are well aware of the contribution of Russian formalists (Viktor Shklovsky, Roman Jakobson, Yury Tynyanov, Boris Eikhenbaum, and others) to the theory of communication (Lanigan, 1991) and the possibilities of structural analysis of poetics and literature. There are works dedicated to semiotic perspectives of Shpet's and Bakhtin's ideas (Xiao & Wang, 2020). A significant summary of the contribution of Soviet authors in the development of semiotics up until the 1970s was Vyacheslav Ivanov's *Semiotics in the USSR* (Ivanov, 1976).

From the semiotic developments of Russian-speaking authors, the ideas of the authors associated with the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics are presented quite clearly, especially the ideas and works of Lotman, Boris Uspenskij, Viktor Zhivov, and A. Piatigorsky (Freiberger-Sheikholeslami et al., 1982; Mazzali-Lurati, 2014; Merrell, 2008). Recently, translations of their works have appeared in the context of analysis of

historical processes in Russia after Ivan IV (Zhivov & Uspenskij, 2019). Based on the material of this school, detailed studies of the social context of its development were carried out and the non-trivial features of the intellectual and personal strategies of humanitarians in the late USSR, as well as the potential of Soviet science, were revealed (Waldstein, 2008).

However, unfortunately, the works of Russian-speaking authors and entire schools of semiotic analysis that have developed outside the Tartu school remain unknown even to Russian specialists, not to mention foreign specialists. The names and works of, for example, Dridze, Sulimov, even Brudnyj are practically not mentioned or cited in the context of social semiotic analysis and referring to them results in surprise at their depth and relevance. Using them gives rise to quite an understandable discomfort in regard to the protracted tradition of their absence or references to them. The main reason, of course, was the collapse of the USSR. As a result of this, scientific correspondence and contact was disrupted, a subsequent crisis of scientific activity in almost the entire post-Soviet space.

Therefore, it seems important to return to this circle of ideas, developments and authors, especially since they turn out to be more and more relevant and promising in relation to the modern civilizational situation.

It is, perhaps, worth accepting Hodge's proposal regarding the promotion of the unknown (or little-known) Western analytical community for the socio-cultural expansion of semiotics. The review provided below examines the established and actively developed areas that are being implemented within the established institutionalized and informal schools. Of undoubted interest are also individual authors and researchers, including prominent ones such as Vyacheslav Ivanov, Myroslav Popovich, Rolandas Pavilionis, and Boris Porshnev. Their creative legacy, without any doubt, deserves attention. However, for most of them, the issues of social semiotics were not the core of their work, and for the purposes of this article, it is important to present the scale and variety of approaches developed by the scientific teams and their leaders, focusing specifically on topics related to semiotic analysis of socio-cultural communicative processes.

Russian-speaking schools of social semiotics

Yuri Lotman and the school of semiotics in Tartu

The consideration should, of course, start with the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics and its central figure Yuri Lotman. He was a prominent researcher who made a significant contribution to the development of Russian humanitaristics and other areas. Many philologists, philosophers, and sociologists grew up on the editions of *Sign Systems Studies* published at the University of Tartu under his leadership. The appeal to his legacy still gives impetus to new transdisciplinary research. We can concur with Suren Zolyan in that currently, neither in semiotics nor in linguistics or literary theory, there is no generalized description of Lotman's concept in its correlation with modern notions even though these ideas are important for the development of new approaches in the study of culture, text, and communication (Zolyan, 2020).

According to Lotman, text, intellect (consciousness), and culture (semiosphere) are actually different aspects of the same phenomenon, in which each member of this triad mutually determines, creates, and develops others. Lotman's distinction between

text and non-text is based not on linguistic or semantic factors, but on social-cultural (pragmatic) criteria. In this regard, text appears as a complex relationship (in the functional and mathematical sense) with three variables: sign composition, addressee, and context, which opens a wide spectrum of interdisciplinary research in neurolinguistics, cultural theory, and communication.

The experience of historical literary criticism, knowledge of the structural approach in linguistics, allowed Lotman to fill the concept of the text with content that overcomes both the reduction of the text in connection with linguistic elements and the expansive ambiguousness of the text. Culture itself, the space of artifacts generated by human experience, acts as a textual reality that is organized as a space of texts, a metatext, a system of cultural codes external to a certain text that allows for interpreting a specific text (Lotman, 1981). In this instance, the semantic assessment of such a text becomes a semantic picture of the world expressed by the commonality of a given culture's texts. This concerns the folding of certain text layers into closed words, which in cultural practices correlate with extra-semiotic reality.

Specifically, for Lotman text is not so much a tool for the transmission of information as it is a mechanism for generating meaning. In the current time of forced digitalization, including online education formats, this is especially important for distinguishing information as data, a measure of its diversity (in bits and bytes), and knowledge as meaningful information. The text is a generator of meanings, a dynamically self-developing object, if not an organism: a self-growing logos and in the spirit of Heraclitus of Ephesus, a rational psyche. It appears as a 'thinking structure,' as a model of consciousness where the role of a trigger mechanism is played by a text coming from the outside; the text sets the original consciousness in motion. This allowed Lotman to apply such an interpretation of text's semiotic heterogeneity to contemporary neurolinguistic research (Lotman, 1992). Studies on the neurophysiology of the brain have confirmed this. As studies demonstrate, the semiotics of narration turn out to be an apparatus that allows to operationalize the formation of self-awareness as autobiographically myself (Damasio, 2010). The operationalization of self-awareness 'in the first person' makes it possible to outline the prospects for solving the fundamentally important task of studying self-awareness and development of humanitarian knowledge in general.

The development of Lotman's concept of the prospective-retrospective model of historical description seems extremely insightful, relevant, and methodologically important. In accordance with the concept, events that are unpredictable at the time of their occurrence appear as deterministic due to the historian's retrospection. When a random and non-deterministic event post factum is interpreted as inevitable, it leads to deterministic concepts of the philosophy of history. And logical-semantic analysis illustrates that such 'fatalism' is not inherent of the events themselves, but of statements about them due to the limitations of the inevitable narrativization and textualization of history as a form of knowledge that depends on the position of the cognizing subject. As a result, the present is a time in which the past and future are simultaneously rethought at each occurrence. Thus, the collapse of the USSR gave rise not only to new national states, but also a new history, and new political parties. The previously unified narrative of the USSR also disintegrated. And the creation of new histories is inevitably accompanied by the correction of previous ones, including the practice of remembering and forgetting. This does not refer to political voluntarism, but rather changing contexts. Such an approach

allowed Lotman, using the material of Russian literature and historiography, to present the content of a meaningful picture of Russian history in the minds of many generations (Lotman, 1967, 2010). No less significant were the results by representatives of the Moscow schools: the above-mentioned semiotic analysis by Boris Uspenskij and Viktor Zhivov (Zhivov & Uspenskij, 2019) concerning the historical process as the dynamics of codification of social culture, Vyacheslav Ivanov's promotion of Lev Vygotsky's ideas about the development of the psyche as mastering sign systems, their 'rotation' into an individual's consciousness, and behavior correction by means of semiotic resources.

In connection with this, important prospects for the contribution of Lotman and his colleagues to social semiotics are revealed. Usually, Lotman is perceived as a literary critic and semantic scholar of culture. The question of how legitimate it is to consider his ideas within the framework of social semiotics has not yet been raised. Halliday is accepted as the author of the idea of social semiotics and his concept was later developed by Hodge and Kress. However, the term 'social semiotics' appeared in Lotman's works in 1975, at the same time as Halliday. Moreover, unlike the latter, Lotman did not limit social semiotics by considering linguistic practice in various patterns of social communication, insisting that linguistic analysis should be supplemented with a method he referred to as 'structural-ideological.' Lotman semiotically examined social and political relations themselves, in which communication is realized.

In light of the above regarding Lotman's understanding of culture (the manifestation of which is social relations) as a text, his approach appears more as one that is generalized and promising for the development of a deeper theory, in which not only linguistic signs and messages are considered as sign phenomena (texts), but also social actions and behavioral structures. It is no coincidence that Halliday's followers pursued work in the same direction that was similar to Lotman. This allows us to correlate the concepts of social semiotics with the main concepts of theoretical and applied sociology. Zolyan thoroughly conducts his correlation with basic concepts such as Weber's 'understanding of sociology' as social action, meaning and communication, with Bronislaw Malinowski's methodology of field research. Zolyan convincingly illustrates the fruitfulness of such convergence. It should be noted that the tradition of realizing the 'cultural' potential of semiotics is preserved today at the University of Tartu (Randviir, 2004).

In this regard, Lotman's reflective attitude to the dramatic situation of the collapse of the USSR and the formation of new states, which he witnessed during the last years of his life, is particularly significant. While maintaining a responsible civic position, Lotman did not shy away from the responsibility of a scientist who possessed a non-trivial apparatus of fundamental analysis in order to comprehend the emerging challenges of society's development and offer answers to them. Behind slogans, ideologies, and people, he saw the nerve and the nature of the problem, which led him away from momentary conflicts. Lotman saw the essence of the post-Soviet period in the dependence of political processes revealed by him on the principle of the binary organization of cultural-semiotic systems as a constant oscillation between explosion and stagnation, an inevitable catastrophe at the end of each path. Lotman connected the way out of this impasse with the switching of the binary system to ternary (Lotman, 2010). The historian and sociologist Aleksandr Akhiezer arrived at similar ideas about the necessity to search for 'mediation' that provides the possibility of compromise, the ability to refuse the zero-sum game, and overcome the pendulum and inverse character of Russian (and Soviet) social

development (Akhiezer, 1998). However, today's political language is built on the binary 'us-them,' 'ours-others,' and 'good-bad,' from which there is no alternative, and this implies conflict and a splitting of society.

Thus, the comprehension of Lotman's legacy, revealing the various ways of focusing the semiotic approach, create a non-trivial cumulative and synergetic effect demonstrating the possibility of a 'new life' for Lotman's ideas. It also encourages a dialogue regarding their future development.

Science of understanding, Frunze (Bishkek)

The communicative nature of meaningful knowledge was the main focus for a group of scientists and colleagues of the philosopher, psychologist, and linguist Aron Brudnyj (13.01.1932-14.03.2011) who worked at the Institute of Philosophy of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and taught courses on philosophy and social psychology. Having started with the analysis of the formation of knowledge, Brudnyj moved on to issues of language presentation and transmission. His main works are dedicated to psycholinguistics and problems of comprehension (Brudnyj, 1996, 1998). Brudny defended is doctoral dissertation in philosophy on the topic 'Language, consciousness, and reality' in 1970. His first book *The Science to Understand* was published in 1996 in Bishkek and later republished in 1998 in Moscow under the title *Psychological hermeneutics*. A year later, his second lifetime work was published – the book 'The Space of Opportunities: Introduction to the Study of Reality' (Brudnyj, 1999, 2003).

According to Vladimir Zinchenko, Brudnyj, along with Evald Ilyenkov, Genrik Batishchev, Merab Mamardashvili, and Vladimir Shvyirev, made a substantial contribution to philosophical psychology by accepting the challenge of Niels Bohr who in response to the question 'Can the atom be understood?' said 'I think that it can, but prior to that it is necessary to understand what exactly is understanding' (Zinchenko, 2013).

It is precisely understanding for Brudnyj that acts as the main mental process specific to an individual. In the 'radical psychology' he developed, understanding is rooted in the individual being, which makes it dependent both on the socio-cultural context and on the irrational unconscious archetypal components (Brudnyj, 1999, 2003). The concept, in principle, coincides with the ideas of 'deep semiotics' that includes personality in semiotic analyses as a source, instrument, and result of semiosis (Tulchinskii, 2019).

The uniqueness of personal understanding, according to Brudnyj, is determined not so much by the availability of material goods and conditions of existence, but by culture, socio-biological and information-semiotic connections and relationships in society that are realized in communication. He distinguished three worlds as three fields of understanding that are realized in three different ways. The first field defines the relationship between objects, the world of facts with the dignity of a direct entity: 'what is, is proved,' 'facts are a stubborn thing.' The variability and fragmentation of reality accessible to a person presupposes a second field – the space of relations between concepts, theoretical concepts, that make it possible to generalize and streamline factology. The third field is the world of culture, the space of communicative relations between people, in which various semantic connections are generated and implanted in texts (*textus*, Latin. – connection, combination, fabric) and cultural artefacts used to achieve mutual understanding and transfer experience. The 'essence of cultural phenomena is that they matter to people; having lost their meaning, they lose the status of cultural phenomena

while preserving their physical existence. In culture, relations between people are reified and this reification is semiotic' (Brudnyj, 1998, p. 17). This social-communicative nature of understanding and meaning-making gives rise to such aspects as responsibility and social control in the creation of a semantic picture of the world (Brudnyj, 1998, p. 24). This approach not only brings Brudnyj's concept closer to the philosophy of an act where participation in meaning-generating dialogical polyphony not only structures social being but endows it with initial responsibility. It makes the approach promising not only in terms of the emerging culture of responsibly taking the word (parresia) (2020), but also for semiotic applications in cognitive science (Kane, 2005).

At the same time, Brudnyj distinguished two types of communication dependent on their organization. The first type is 'axial' communication (axis, Latin – axle), which is directed to a specific addressee. As people would say nowadays, it is aimed at a precise and concrete targeted group. The second type is 'retail' communication (*rete*, Latin. – network) that is addressed to an indefinite and unlimited circle of recipients. The understanding of the second type presupposes adjustment to the addressee. To clarify, Brudnyj used a biological analogy with the activity of the nervous system, which transmits an impulse to a point from which a certain reaction is required, and the circulatory system washes all organs that require certain substances for development. Today, an even more accurate example is private messages (mailing lists, instant messengers, personal messages) and public messages on posts in the news feed. In the conclusion of his opus magnum, written in the middle of the 1990s, he writes about the rapidly approaching perspective of texts that are capable of semantic autonomy, referring to artefacts generated by digital technologies that 'actually duplicate' the familiar three-dimensional world (Brudnyj, 1998, pp. 323–324). Since the world of things was supplemented by the world of cultural meanings, semiotically embodied in sounds, pictures, texts, photographs, and sound and video recordings that conveyed the experience realized in behavior, art, and technology, then digital technologies create new things in the virtual and physical reality (for example with the assistance of a 3D printer) as well as the relationship between them (Internet of things).

Brudnyj himself, overseeing the Department of Comprehensive Human Research at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan, preferred to call his field of research philosophical anthropology, which corresponded to the depth and scope of his interests. It is not for nothing that the extent of his colleagues', students', and followers' self-realization is so extensive: Emil' Shukurov (1938—2019) – a student, coauthor (Brudnyj & Shukurov, 1977), close friend of Brudny and distinguished biologist, geographer, ecologist, and corresponding member of the National Academy of Sciences of Kyrgyzstan; Roza Otunbayeva – a candidate of philosophical sciences (1975), from 1981 a Soviet and later Kyrgyz politician and diplomat, head of the interim government and president of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010-2011); Vitaly Nishanov (1990) – a candidate of philosophical sciences, specialist in the area of management of organizational change, business negotiations, from 2006 he has been a professor at the Foster School of Business at the University of Washington; Askar Kakeev – academic of the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences and head of the Department of Philosophy at the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University. Tatiana Indina – CEO and founder of the business-communication agency Indina-Consulting, and researcher at the Berkman Center for Internet and Society (Harvard University); Jhamgyrbek Bokoshov – professor at the Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University;

Nadezhda Bagdasarova – daughter of Brudnyj, editor of his last publications, candidate of psychological studies, head of the Department of Psychology at the American University of Central Asia. This list of students, colleagues, and followers could be continued (Aron Brudnyj, 2021), but just from the above-mentioned individuals the extensive scope for social applications of social semiotics is revealed by knowledge of the communicative mechanisms of understanding.

Tamara Dridze's semi-social psychology

A large-scale research and project program, important for the development of social semiotics, was established and implemented by Tamara Dridze (1930-2000) and her students. Dridze began with linguistics and communication, which opened up the understanding of sign systems as a mechanism for generating, storing, transmitting, and reproducing social experience up to a society's particular way of life. In her books, first *Language and Social Psycholo*gy (Dridze, 1980) and then *Textual Activity in the Structure of Social Communication* (Dridze, 1984), the concept of semi-social psychology was developed. The basis for this was the idea of an information-targeted (motivational) analysis of text, which makes it possible to reconstruct the 'chain,' or rather the 'tree of goals' for reconstructing a text. The chain represented the structure of the embodiment of meaning. This practice has been successfully used during the analysis of normative, regulatory documents, and other materials necessary for the development of projects and programs. Meaning-making appeared as a rather strict algorithm, set by the context of the corresponding cultural practice.

Later, Dridze focused on the problems of sociology in regard to urban management, including an in-depth field study of social life in the city of Taganrog. It is in the urban environment that the most intensive communication is realized with the largest range of sign systems used. Throughout Dridze's entire career, she focused on the intentionality of human activity: a 'living person' in his diverse communication with the environment. From a sociological point of view, it was a 'human environmental' sociology of human exchanges ('metabolism') as a social being with a living environment. This exchange is most intense in the urban environment. Therefore, her transition to the analysis and design of the urban environment was more than logical. In fact, it regards the expansion of the motivational-target (intentional) nature of communication to all forms of social and cultural activity, which appears as texts that fix and translate the semantic structures of social experience. The task of the researcher is to be prepared to adequately interpret them.

It turns out that Dridze set the broadest horizon for social semiotics as an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis and construction of socio-cultural systems and practices. In this horizon, Dridze actively collaborated with major sociologists, philosophers, and urbanists such as Aleksei Leont'ev, Aleksander Akhiezer, and Vyacheslav Glazychev (Dridze, 1976; Orlova & Kuchmaeva, 1998; Sajko, 1999), those who viewed the semiotic analysis of communication as a tool of socio-cultural engineering, the disciplinary platform that Dridze saw in social management (Dridze, 1989, 1994). If such engineering is presented as a system of factual, causal, and value-oriented narratives, then it is the latter narratives that turn out to be key both in posing problems and in assessing the results obtained in attempts to solve them. This is the informative, target-oriented(motivated) semiotic analysis of texts generated by socio-cultural activity and those representing them. If Lotman

formulated the foundations of social semiotics and developed it in relation to the analysis of socio-cultural phenomena, then Dridze used a socio-semiotic approach to design a socio-cultural environment. This potential is especially important for humanitarian expert review not only in regard to the consequences of new technologies, but their development and process of implementation.

Therefore, the legacy of Dridze is preserved in the work of her numerous students, colleagues, and followers (Akimkin et al., 2005; Glazychev, 2011; Shirinkin, 2014; Veshninskij, 2012) who study the problems of social communication in management processes and the development of the urban environment, which become the topic of discussion at the regular 'Dridze Readings' at the Institute of Sociology of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Semiodynamics, Leningrad

In consideration of this review, one cannot ignore 'Semiodynamics' – a seminar of young Leningrad State University students under the guidance of professor Rem Barancev. He was a physicist and laureate of the USSR State Prize in 1973 for his contribution to the field of aerodynamics. Participants of the seminar actively distributed the semiotic approach to a wide range of social practices: from science to art and to social management. An attempt to publish the works of the seminar in 1984 fell victim to the wave of ideological control at the very end of the Soviet regime. The seminar was dispersed, and several participants were subjected to relatively mild administrative repressions (Semiodinamika, 1994). In the framework of the seminar, students and graduates at the time began their scientific work, such as Andrei Paribok a candidate of philological sciences who began his education as a physicist, linguist, and philologist, later becoming a major expert in the ancient Indian philosophical tradition; Aleksei Chernyakov (1955-2010) – candidate of physico mathematical sciences and doctor of philosophy, he was a leading philosopher and brilliant translator of ancient and medieval authors including Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, and Alain Badiou; Natalia Pecherskay – the founder and leader of the St. Petersburg School of Religion and Philosophy; Yuri Kurikalov – physicist and lawyer as well as a leading expert on urban planning. Although brief, the bright fate of 'Semiodynamics' demonstrated the interdisciplinary potential of semiotics in social applications. Only recently have analysts appeared for the application of semiotics in sociological research, such as semiotic sociology (Heiskala, 2009). Therefore, the methodological value of the experience of 'Semiodynamics' deserves serious attention, especially due to its focus not so much on the semiotic analysis of social structures, as to the procedural nature of their development.

Tver hermeneutic school

This school refers to the system of practices of understanding developed in the 1970s-2000s in Kalinin (Tver) State University by a team of students and colleagues of professor and doctor of philology Georgy Bogin (1929-2001). Studying the theory and practice of teaching foreign languages, participants of this group came to the necessity of teaching language norms within the framework of a particular culture, simultaneously with the development of the skills in the profession students were being trained in. According to Bogin, the main task was to teach a person speech actions and the formation of a linguistic personality.

In this regard, Bogin considered hermeneutics not just as a theory and practice of interpreting texts, but as the activity of a person or a group in understanding or interpreting any phenomenon that can be interpreted as a text (Bogin, 2001, p. 7). He compared hermeneutics to social practices such as teaching children, building construction, librarianship, etc. All these spheres require an understanding of the norms of the practices themselves. Therefore, such practical hermeneutics is able to ensure entry into social practices, mutual understanding between representatives of different cultures, and hence the development of these cultures themselves and the societies associated with them. In this case, a key role is played by the emerging communication, due to its socio-historical reasons (Bogin, 2001, p. 23). This approach was very close to the idea of Georgy Shchedrovitsky: understanding certain semantic content translates it when we begin to act into the form of 'the reality of our reality' (Chshedrovitskij, 1974, p. 90).

To solve the problem of misunderstanding by the supporters of the Tver hermeneutic school, a system of 'belts' of understanding was developed as types of specific techniques, such as: the discretion and construction of meaning (19 techniques); the usage of a 'reflective bridge' (6 techniques); 'ungluing' mixed constructs (12 techniques); 16 interpretative techniques; 26 transition techniques; 26 techniques for finding a solution to understanding through a new state of consciousness (Bogin, 2001, p. 54). In practical terms, Bogin understood the concept of the 'hermeneutic circle,' which he limited to the level of identified belts. In instances when the accepted reflection in the belt of systemic-thinking methodology needs to be replaced by logically conscious knowledge, a break in the hermeneutic circle occurs.

The direction developed by Bogin and his supporters was innovative and attractive. From 1985 to 2008, 18 candidate degrees and 4 doctoral dissertations were successfully defended with his oversight. Together with Shchedrovitsky in 1990, Bogin initiated the annual international conference in Tver 'Understanding and Reflection in Communication, Culture, and Education' (known as the 'Bogin readings' from 2001). Bogin and his followers were active participants of the Russian Communication Association. At the end of the 1990s, the online journal 'Hermeneutics in Russia' was released.

The Bogin school is appealing for social semiotics in that it was not limited to social contexts (frames) of communication, as factors of the transmitted content, but developed specific hermeneutics for understanding practices. The concept of belts and corresponding techniques of understanding are used today in biosemiotics (Chebanov, 2021).

However, with the passing of Bogin in 2001, the Tver hermeneutic school practically ceased its scientific activities. One of the reasons for this was that the school was informal in nature and lacked an institutionalized organizational form: Bogin himself and his university colleagues worked at the Department of English Philology. Nevertheless, the interdisciplinary nature of practical hermeneutics made it possible for many of Bogin's students to be successful in various fields: from science to teaching and public administration, business, and the Orthodox Church (G.I. Bogin, 2005).

Philosophy of semiotics, Ivanovo

Starting from the philosophical and semiotic analysis of language, research became more focused on the semiotic analysis of consciousness as well as its content and appearance in the social activities of researchers who united around Aleksandr

Portnov (1947-2010) (Portnov, 1992, 2008; Portnov & Turchin, 2002). From 1975, Portnov worked at the Department of Philosophy of Ivanovo State University and headed this department the last ten years of his life. The interests of researchers included the philosophy of language and general semiotics, semiotics of culture, linguosemiotics and psychosemiotics, the analysis of the possibilities and significance of sign analysis and not only language, but consciousness, culture, the structure of the human world as well as the urban environment, and advertising (Portnov, 1995). The works of Karl Japsers, Martin Buber, Alfred Shutz, and Thomas Sebeok were actively translated and published on the relevant topic. Therefore, for social semiotics, focused on rapprochement with the continental philosophical tradition, Ivanovo's philosophical semiotics is of undoubted interest due to its thorough elaboration of the semiotic content of phenomenology, personality, philosophy, and culture of the greatest thinkers of the 20th and early 21st centuries.

Semiotic culture, Syktyvkar

This new and very promising direction of socio-cultural semiotics in Syktyvkar represented a very successful synthesis of the philosophy of language, culture, personality with specific ethnographical research and an intense trend towards social engineering. Unfortunately, this direction was greatly weakened by the unexpected death of its leaders. Irina Fadeeva (1952-2017), founder and head of the Department of Culturology and Pedagogical Anthropology at Syktyvkar State University named after Pitrim Sorokin, was a doctor of culturology and student of the well-known Leningrad philosopher Moisei Kagan. Doctor of culturology Vladimir Sulimov (1952-2018) studied at Lviv University under the guidance of Kazimierz Ajdukiewicz's and Tadeusz Kotarbinki's students and he was a postgraduate student of Aleksei Leont'ev – a leading linguist and social psychologist as well as communicativist. Sulimov was the department head after the passing of Irina Fadeeva. This group began with the philosophy of culture and symbols (Fadeeva, 2003), symbolic and textual activity in socio-cultural communication (Sulimov, 2003; Sulimov & Fadeeva, 2004), semiotic structures and content of the linguistic continuum (Sulimov, 2005, 2009), but the large-scale program of analysis of the sign and symbolic content of the communicative space of culture, developed by them, led the researchers to the topic of social semiotics (Fadeeva & Sylimov, 2013), including the cultural practices of the Russian North (Fadeeva & Sylimov, 2016; Sulimov, 2017). This was a significant transition, firstly, from structurally static models of semiosis to multidimensional dynamic ones, and secondly, to taking into account the personality factor in socio-semiotic analysis. Thus, various social practices, from modernization to education and socialization, are introduced into the field of semiotics. In fact, after the collapse of the USSR, there was departure of the Russian-speaking space of the University of Tartu as well as in Kyrgyzstan where there were intense efforts for self-determination. It was in Syktyvkar that a developed and advanced direction of socio-semiotic research appeared. Unfortunately, the founders in Syktyvkar passed away in a year's time. However, a fairly extensive group of students and colleagues remained (Lyudmila Gurlenova, Nikolay Vokuev, Galina Kitaigorodskaya, Vladimir Muravyov, and others). Thanks to their efforts, the large-scale conference 'Semiosis and Culture' continues as well as the publication of quality scientific journals ('Human. Culture. Education.' and 'Nasledie').

Ergo

The above analytical review allows us to state several seemingly non-trivial circumstances.

(1) In the period of the 1970s to the beginning of the 2000s, which fell on the last years of the Soviet Union as well as its disintegration and transformation of post-Soviet states, a number of directions and schools were presented in Russian-language humanitarian studies. These studies were, in one way or another, associated with the development of the potential of social-semiotics and, more precisely, the different directions of this development.

(2) The emphasis of the connection between semiotic analysis and problems of communication, the irreducibility of communicative processes to information and signal processes, their connection with understanding and interpretation of semantic content, generated, transmitted, and perceived in communication, unites these different concepts. Such an emphasis is important and fundamentally essential not only for understanding the prospects, opportunities, and anthropological consequences of the rapid expansion of using information and communication technologies in digital format, but also as a conceptual platform for further expansion in regard to the use of semiotic analysis. Since communication, its regularity and intensity, is a decisive factor in the formation and development of social institutions, such an approach makes it possible to increase semiotic analysis to socio-cultural practices.

(3) The real contribution of the considered concepts in the development of social semiotics and their continuing relevance are expressed in the fact that in most of them an important step has been made towards the expansion of semiotic analysis beyond the use of language, taking into account the socio-practical (pragmatic) contexts of such an application to the study of socio-cultural practices themselves. Moreover, the schools considered expressed various degrees of advancement for such an expansion, which makes the discussion carried out in this work especially revealing. If the Ivanovo school of philosophy of language and understanding was mainly associated with the reception of phenomenology and hermeneutics, which is important for the general understanding of communicative practices, then already in the Tver school of hermeneutics and Brudnyj's school of understanding, considerable empirical material for the implementation of such practices was accumulated and systematized. In the Tartu school of semiotics, the analysis of social communications and sign systems in relation to cultural and historical material acquired the character of a stable humanitarian paradigm. The next, and quite decisive, step was taken by Dridze, the particiipants of 'Semiodynamics,' and also Sulimov and Fadeeva, who transferred the semiotic approach to the analysis of direct socio-cultural practices including the organization and planning of urban settings, the management of social processes and regional socio-cultural engineering.

The founders and leaders of the above-mentioned scientific schools and communities in some ways replicated the fate of Mikhail Bakhtin, Aleksei Losev, Gustav Shpet, Sergei Averintsev, and Viktor Shklovsky – leading Russian thinkers who were forced, for various ideological and political reasons, to professionally study philology, art history, and even translation. Their work achieved outstanding results and led to

semiotic generalizations that allowed them at times to avoid direct confrontation with official doctrines. In other instances, while working in philosophical departments, their work on the analysis of philosophy of culture, consciousness, and language was enhanced with the help of semiotic analysis. They were able to avoid an ideological bias in understanding the problems as both a larger fundamental problem of human life and the modern ways of life. However, in both situations, conceptually, it was a path that derived from the semiotics of language and through it to the semiotics of socio-cultural systems and processes. The condition and instrument for such a transition in all instances was the consideration of the communicative nature of socio-cultural processes, structure, and content of which allows the semiotic approach to be presented systematically.

The potential developed in the concepts discussed above remains relevant. From these positions with their orientation on the key role of a 'living person' and the relationship of a person as a social being and an environment, there is something to be said about the socio-cultural and anthropological consequences of digitalization as well as the consequences of online communication formats in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which have radically changed the face of modern civilization.

Communication as the exchange of meaningful information is important at all stages of active purposeful activity: when identifying and formulating a problem, developing and implementing a solution, and evaluating the results. In fact, these stages appear as stages in the embodiment of meaning, up to the institutionalization of meaningful structures. This is the role of culture as a system of generation, selection, storage, reproduction, and transmission of social experience as the implementation of a certain semantic picture of the world, included in the orbit of socio-cultural practices. And if the historical process is the essence of the resultant of various wills and intentions, then it is fundamentally important to streamline this communicative process not only as the resolution of conflicts but as socio-cultural engineering. It is this interdisciplinary approach, focused on comprehending the ever-expanding horizon of the not always well-thought-out expansion of digital technologies and related social practices, including managerial ones, that seems to be key in the modern civilizational situation.

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