

On the dynamics of culture¹

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One of the primary presumptions of semiotics is the existence of pre- or extra-semiotic space, against which the basic concepts of semiotics are defined. This approach is entirely warranted as a heuristic. The error lies not in this presumption itself, but in a confusion of principles: it leads us to perceive logical convention as empirical reality.

One such logical convention is the proposition of the existence of a certain initial point, a relative zero, in dynamic processes. We are never confronted by the “zero state” in empirical reality. So we have constructed a model of cultural dynamics which begins from a point of “semiotic zero”, whose place coincides with the animal world (in spite of the capabilities of an already highly developed zoosemiotics). This transfers the zero from the realm of heuristic convention into our conception of reality: “conventional zero” conceals in itself a creation myth. When a chronicler says: “and the ancients lived in a bestial manner, behaving like swine. They murdered each other, engaged in all uncleanness, and there was no marriage among them,” he is introducing an initial “zero point,” an initial state declared to possess no indication of order). What follows is a process of organization. Such a point of view, equally mythological in its essence, derives from a hypothesized dichotomy between language and speech.

The actual historical process may be described as diametrically opposed: it is in fact the earlier stages that appear to have a more rigid organization; here one can compare the still prevailing attitude towards zoosemiotics with already discarded views on the behavior of “savages”. At a point not historically distant from our own, the “savage” was described as free from all limitation, following an instinctual “animal” pattern of behavior, whereas subsequent development took the form of an introduction of a system of “regularity” into this chaos of individual drives; for example, the replacement of promiscuity by a system of moral rules.

The study of the behavior of the higher animals paints for us a starkly contrasting picture – one of rigid organization. The key moments of life – mating, the rearing

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of young, hunting, the evaluation of a situation and the appropriate response to it – are strictly ritualized. However, it is important to emphasize that ritual itself possesses a unique character. The *organization of memory* plays a fundamental role in ritual, and ritual serves as a mechanism for initiating the individual into group memory. Therefore, outside the human world, ritual creates a system of constant organization, excluding or highly limiting further development. Ritual removes the individual's freedom to engage in individual behavior while strictly predetermining behavior in general. In this sense, a characteristic example would be a situation where an animal in nature is removed from the normal conditions of its behavior (for example, a predator which has been separated from its pack or removed from its natural habitat). Hunters speak about such a predator as being particularly dangerous because of its unpredictable behavior (“to behave like one is rabid”). But such unmotivated, dangerous behavior might also be described from a different point of view: though representing a degradation from ritual, it entails a sharp rise in unpredictability and represents a dynamic moment in which the role of individual behavior explosively increases.

The shift from the cyclical repetition of collective behavior, which maintains a strict sign structure, to the disorder of unpredictable behavior (possibly the result of a catastrophe severely disrupting the entire structure of the species' situation) can be viewed as a moment of change from cyclical to historical development (the conception of “moment” here is, of course, relative: we are talking about a process with a gigantic chronological scope).

The historical process, supplanting cyclical change, led to the formation of an ongoing conflict between repetition and internally dynamic forms of behavior. At certain critical points dynamic processes became unpredictable; however the processes of stabilization replacing them remain highly predictable² and, what is more, extremely limited in their range of possibilities. This dual nature of the dynamic process means that human history, depending as it does on the selection of a language of description, appears both to repeat one and the same structure and to have an unpredictable nature. In this manner, it makes sense to distinguish the cyclical and linear forms of dynamics; we may divide the latter into a gradual form of dynamics that arises through consolidated laws and is consequently marked by great predictability, and a catastrophic dynamic, with drastically less predictability. From the point of view of these two forms of development, the dynamic of regular repetitions is experienced as a stasis. For example, Plato described the state of organized change of stabilized forms as static in his stylized image of Egypt.

² Cf. the concept of bifurcation points in dynamic processes (I. Prigogine). [This and further footnotes from original.]

The situation is more complex in the real historical process, where we never encounter a uniform, sequential, rhythmic alternation of dynamic (catastrophic) stages of development and subsequent “normalized” stages. In actual history many dynamic yet non-synchronized processes, developing at different rates, exist alongside chronologically simultaneous processes, surviving the period of stability in other spheres of development. Thus, for example, tempestuous developments and explosions in a given sphere of science may not be chronologically or causally connected with corresponding explosive movements in the various spheres of everyday life. An explosive state in art may be synchronous with stability in the political sphere. However, during a particularly tempestuous outbreak of individual explosive periods, these explosive periods may impose their language on other processes, and as a tendency, on all dynamic processes. Thus, during the socio-political explosion of the great French revolution of the 18th century, the terms of socio-political revolution were used to describe explosive processes in the most diverse spheres. In this case, the naming of processes exerts an opposite influence on the character of their development.

Self-naming, like all sorts of naming, often defines both a type of given behavior and its historic fate. So, the terms “Bolsheviks” or “Mensheviks” owe their historical origins to a relatively chance distribution of votes at the second gathering of the RSD party; subsequently, however, these terms largely described the real historic fates of these two parties. The term “Bolsheviks” created an image of **massiveness** and **power** and appealed to the broad workers’ circles – the term “Mensheviks” concealed within itself the semantics of **victimhood** and **selectivity**, which clearly aimed at appealing to the intelligentsia.

This in part proves the magic of naming – from the Latin “*nomina sunt omena*” to the fate of Gogol’s character Bashmachkin. Akaky Akakyevich receives along with his name a dual fate: both through the Greek meaning of the word (“mild”) and through its Russian folk etymology. By emphasizing that the hero could not be named otherwise, Gogol accentuates the name’s ominous character.

Cases like the latter are usually attributed to the magic of naming; they have, however, a much deeper meaning, revealing the *real* involvement of naming with practice. The naming of reality changes its essence and the nature of its behavior.

From the above it follows that real historical processes are multifaceted and polyfunctional and consequently may be described variously from various points of view. However, in the following, we will consider, for the sake of simplicity, only the development patterns of the dominant structures of this or that process, having specified beforehand that in real historical movement they are all invariably affected by various secondary explosions and “explosive waves” from previous stages.

As was already mentioned, in pre-human culture (in this case, the culture of higher animals) species memory predominates. Conventional behavior is a way to preserve expedient experience in the life of the species or group, and properly repeats in established forms. In the shift from a cyclical scheme of motion to a linear dynamic, the choice of potential behaviors expanded drastically. This would have led other animals to perceive the early form of man as an “insane” creature. A “normal” animal would not be able to predict its behavior, just as it is impossible to predict the behavior of a madman, whose consciousness has rejected the majority of a healthy person’s inhibitions.³

This situation resembles one of the conflicts from R. Kipling’s *The Jungle Book*. The regular, “rational” behavior of the animal heroes – the characters of the book – is here opposed to the mindless and unpredictable actions of the Bandar-log (monkeys) and their feigned organization. One might propose that this is precisely how the behavior of early man would have appeared to the first animals who encountered him. This unpredictability, that is to say, the fact that man had much more freedom at his disposal than his adversaries, limited as they were to a relatively small collection of behaviors (gestures), placed man in an advantageous position that more than adequately made up for his relative helplessness vis-à-vis other animals. Kipling astutely observed the world of animals observing “proto-man”: animals see “proto-man” not only as insane but immoral, as carrying out a “war without rules.”

A similar situation will recur: the man of the Renaissance from the point of view of people living in the more strictly organized (less dynamic) Middle Ages, will seem to violate rules and achieve victory by prohibited means, comporting himself “inhumanly.” The collective immersed in a previous stage of linear development subjectively experiences the undermining of behavioral norms – an unavoidable condition of progress – as not only madness, but moral degradation. This explains the frequent assertions throughout the history of culture that animals are more moral than people. The breakthrough into new, broader systems of rules is experienced as a movement from a world of rules into a realm of unlimited freedom. Man, the “mad” creature (from the point of view of the animal world) turned out to be exclusively a result of his particular point of view. As his enemies from the animal world could not predict man’s behavior, their opposition to him suddenly lost its effectiveness.⁴

³ A similar case, albeit in an immeasurably lesser degree, is when an animal enters into a situation profoundly anomalous for it, for example, a geological catastrophe. But whereas the stable behavior of the animal comes into conflict with the altered world, the madman’s profoundly altered behavior widens conflicts with the stable world.

⁴ The dynamics of human behavior, in turn, profoundly refashioned animal behavior. It is a mistake to think that animals of the Stone Age behaved in the same way as their descendants (our contemporaries). They were considerably more defenseless. The current behavior of animals would also seem “mad” to them, since many of its features are dictated by contacts with man.

However, these new potentialities required reinforcement, and here it became obvious that the departure of behavior from the preceding realm of predictability led not to unlimited possibilities – that is, to chaos – but to a new, organized construction (that is, one having its own expanded boundaries). As this new experience had to be transmitted through successive generations, it rapidly acquired a conventional, evidently gestural character. Expedient nonhereditary behavior was reinforced in a system of movements that was unchanging for the collective. This effective, expedient behaviour was reinforced and transmitted thanks to its transformation into proto-ritual. Contrary to popular opinion, man at this stage would not have been a “savage”, doing “whatever he pleases”, but a creature with maximally “ritualized” behavior.

Thus, at the beginning of human culture lay a great explosion, perhaps of a catastrophic nature. This was followed by a stage in which the results of the explosive moment were reinforced.

The drastically distinctive feature of this new dynamic of behavior was that, while superimposed on biological memory and hence linked with the pre-human stage of evolution, it simultaneously featured a continual increase in the role of individual experience. In the animal world, periods of ritualized behavior are introduced into the memory of the species. “Free”, that is to say individual, behavior only encompasses secondary aspects of life and is not recorded by the memory of the species. What is beneficial is reinforced in the collective, while what is chance and individual is consigned to oblivion. In human society the regular and the random have changed positions: unpredictable behavior assumed the important role as the generator of new possibilities. This generator became linked with individual actions and expanded the range of freedom. The opposing mechanism – collective in nature – evaluated and included some of these individual actions in the memory of general behavior, erasing others.

At moments of bifurcation, the instability of boundaries results in an explosion of new forms of behavior. During a period of slowed development, the new forms of behavior which turn out to be expediently warranted are selected and reinforced.

In this manner, chance outbreaks are transformed into behavior. The selection process reinforces and transmits to succeeding generations those actions which, having arisen in the explosive period, receive a specific impetus.

The task of preserving individual experience required new and significantly more complicated memory functions. From all of the multifarious, often chance types of behavior, expedience selected, and memory preserved and transmitted, a relatively limited series of those which made sense. This took place in two stages: in the first stage, new possibilities for behavior increased unpredictably at bifurcation moments, while in the second stage (during periods of slowed development) the most expedient variants were selected. This leads to an important conclusion: at

the earliest stage the choice of forms of behavior was not creative in nature, that is, it was governed by certain rules (the role of chance was consequently limited). The reinforcement of selected expedient gestures and actions also demanded ritualization: a conventional system of movements, cries and musical howls enabled memorization. The need to transmit non-hereditary actions required its combination with certain forms of proto-art.

The idea that human activity in the early stages of its development was practical in our sense of the word – that is, opposed to an emotionally “artistic” principle – is supported neither by the material we have at our disposal nor by theoretical considerations. Precisely at this stage, the task of reinforcing experience demanded mnemonic mechanisms not possessed by man. The completely new need to preserve a continually growing reserve of non-hereditary knowledge gave rise to an apparatus for memorization that was artistic in nature. This was not a human invention: one could cite the famous example of how the bee transmits non-hereditary information by translating it into the conventional language of “dance”. Of course, the relative stability of the knowledge being transmitted allows bees to limit themselves to the hereditary and relatively restricted system of “dance”, whereas the open nature of human information requires a significantly richer and more dynamic mechanism.

Thus, even at the earliest stages of human behavior, about which we can only speculate (as is well known, everything that can be observed, even among the most “primitive” peoples, either belongs to a considerably later period or is the result of secondary simplification), we may hypothetically delimit two tendencies which, though opposing, are similar in structure. The first tendency is the expansion of possibilities for gestural behavior and the creation of new types of ritualization; the second tendency is the limitation and selection of variants, a reinforcement of variants in collective memory which is associated with the increased stricture of ritual. In both cases, however, a ritual is not separated from a practical act nor does it oppose it; rather it is a language in which a practical act assumes the function of social behavior. Therefore, the system of conscious actions in the archaic epoch was considerably more rigid than at later stages. Just as people at early stages of written culture prohibit the superfluous use of written script but nonetheless ascribe it both a ritualized sacral function and a practical role in life, so too did man, for whom behavior as a whole (gesture, vocalization etc.) had acquired meaning, prohibit the superfluous use of these means; they were *simultaneously* action, memory and myth.

The following stage was associated with the separation of the practical from the mythological spheres of life. The practical sphere gained significantly greater freedom, that is, it was translated into a language with significantly more elements and more possibilities for their combination, a language with so much more diversity

that it could survive subjectively as a non-language, that is, as an unorganized sphere. The area of mythological language narrowed and became markedly more structured in nature. At this stage, semiotic comprehension and practical behavior were still identified with one another or were closely intertwined. However, within this system a differentiation begins to appear between actions having meaning and meanings corresponding to actions: between an action that signifies something and a meaning that is realized as an action.

The distinction between these aspects subsequently acquired a profound significance. Action gave rise to the perception of distinct forms of cultural behaviors as bearers of certain semantics. On this basis, for example, practical eating became separated from sacral eating – while one became deritualized, the ritual character of the other became emphasized. However, both instances of eating retained not a symbolic, but a gastronomical nature. The physical experience of food constituted an integral part of ritual eating as well. Eating must have been accompanied by the joy that follows physically satiating hunger. The acquisition of richer, fatter, more delicious food was to a large degree linked with the inseparable comingling of the magical function and physical satisfaction. In precisely this manner, the gestures, howls, exclamations and laughter that emphasized happiness also had a magical character, but were not a game. They were products of sincere, direct emotions which an outside observer would have incorrectly perceived as chaotic. Furthermore, the physical side of eating acquired a secondary, ritual character which has been described by M. Bakhtin and a whole series of ethnographers. Bakhtin interpreted this system as an invasion of freedom into the sphere of ritual limitation; however he himself demonstrated that this very “freedom” was realized in ritualized forms. In this manner, subjective deritualization leads to a redoubling of ritual. The subsequent intensification of the magical function of eating, as with other physical processes, led to a serious redistribution of emphasis.

If, as has been noted, eating was initially (in a logical sense, as it is difficult to speak of any concrete historical evidence) the *content* of an as yet unformed ritual, it later became a sign, a ritual form. On one hand, this expanded eating’s sphere of content. Not only the satisfaction of hunger, but also the entire complex of positive emotions and meanings (the conclusion of peace treaties, the entire sum of marriage rituals, etc.) could take the form of the ritual consumption of food. The feast becomes a universal form of ritual, possessing a broad, positive meaning. It is a ritualized expression available for simultaneous use with a wide range of contents. Even emotions, whose physical foundation becomes more and more significantly ritualized, become more intense in nature. Ritual gestures like the expression of joy at a feast lend a significant character to behavior as a whole. The need arises *to learn* merry and tragic behaviors, as well as the ability to distinguish and understand them

(cf. the folk tale about the fool who cries at a feast and laughs at a funeral:⁵ here the “fool” is a person who lacks command over a shared language of behavior). The realm of expression also expands: food may be replaced by a symbol of food, while bloody, carnivorous eating may be replaced by vegetarian eating. A complicated and highly diverse system of substitutions develops, in which past content transforms into an expression, a sign.

In this manner, a pagan priest or other sacred person is replaced in the sacrifice by his temporary substitute – another person, such as the member of another tribe, a slave, a general “other.” And since the “other” is perceived as “not a full person” (in many languages the word for person and the tribal endonym are synonyms), then the next step is the replacement of the sacrificed man by a sacred animal. Semiosis becomes more complicated in the process: the slain and, in the complete ritual, eaten priest signifies God, and the substituted slave in turn represents the priest (and consequently, God as well). Initially the eaten ritual animal also signifies God. Only later does the sacrifice by God replace the sacrifice to God. The mechanism of replacement itself, however, is constant, right up to the Communion of Christianity – first the Last Supper (“And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake *it*, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave *it* to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood”. – Mar 14: 22–24), and then the Eucharist with its complete replacement of the sacrifice by bread and wine (the Host). In this manner the Last Supper is not simply a prediction of the crucifixion, as it is rationalized by later thinking, but *is rather the crucifixion itself*, simply in a different language.

Later ways of thinking found this type of substitution difficult to grasp, giving rise to narratives which perceived a play on words where initially there had been one signified in different symbolic systems. Later rational thinking tends to simplify this mythological unity. An example of this is the Roman practice of deceiving the gods. The Romans promise a divinity a certain quantity of heads (it is understood that the god prefers the heads of livestock) and after the successful completion of business, the god is presented with the heads of poppies. The perception of the episode as a play on words and a deception is, of course, a later interpretation of an earlier mythological equivalency between a figurative sacrifice and a commercial exchange of things of equal values. Here Roman juridical thinking translated mythology into a language of its own.

A correspondence may also be postulated between the physiological and the semiotic in the perception of sexual relations. This perception has undergone a

⁵ One must differentiate this from cases in which a lack of correspondence between behavior and its interpretation is ritualized, for example, ritual laughter at funerals and wakes or the ritual weeping of the bride in the wedding ceremony.

no less complex evolution. At certain stages of their development, sexual relations were semiotically indistinguishable from eating, being part of a larger image of abundance translatable into a more general language (the limitation and ultimate removal of proscriptions). At other historical moments, the physical side of sexual relations was able to become highly semiotized. Thus, the ritual of courtly love included a degree of opposition between quotidian and significant aspects, which in principle excluded the possibility of sexual relations (the veneration of the Holy Virgin as an object of courtly love). At the same time, the physical act, for example, the rape of peasant girl by a knight, in principle was not translated into the language of love. The behavior of youth in the second half of our century could be considered a diametrically opposed behavioral system, one which translates sexual relations into the sphere of the “habitual”, the “everyday”, and separates it from the behavior of love or the family. The stage at which action corresponds to speech is replaced by a tendency towards the separation of action and speech.

A principally new stage in the formation of culture is related to the appearance of conventional signs, completely separated from the object they signified. This profound revolution created speech as we conceive it. Of course, verbal communication appeared considerably earlier, but at a time when a word could not be separated from the object it signified; it performed precisely the same role that gesture does in modern communication, that is, the role of an accompaniment, a reinforcer of meaning, a carrier of nuance; the basic semantics of these forms remained at the level of the signified object or gesture. Jonathan Swift demonstrated the possibility of such a paradoxical language when he described one of the languages of Laputa as being characterized by the inhabitants carrying around a large number of objects and pointing to them *in place of words*. Here, the object was the expression, whereas the word was its content. This language, despite its obvious inconvenience, would have had one incontrovertible advantage: it excluded the possibility of lying, as expression and content were one and the same. The separation of a word from an object had innumerable consequences: most immediately, the possibility of lies, more remotely, the rise of poetry.

The subsequent history of humanity becomes a history of word usage. If previously the dominant role of semiotics in culture had been masked by practice, now semiotics (the function and role of speech) becomes the dominant mechanism of history. One of the fundamental questions of culture becomes its relation to speech. The complexity of this question is magnified by the following circumstance: traditional philosophy of history proceeds from the premise that the appearance of each new stage entails the complete annihilation of the preceding one. However, just as how in biological evolution earlier forms of life do not completely die out but rather evolve and adapt to new conditions, the emergence of new dominant forms

in human history and culture does not cause the disappearance of preceding forms. Thus the appearance of new civilizations did not cause the disappearance of slavery, nor other, earlier economic forms. In equal measure, archaic systems of customs and forms of behavior retreat to the periphery, though, as a rule, they exist alongside later structures. For example, the possibilities for the dual function of armed combat: in the immediate practical sphere as well as in the conventional-semiotic sphere – in historical practice they are continually intertwined. As feudal codes of ethics became established, a wound inflicted by an enemy acquired a dual significance: along with its practical meaning, its symbolic meaning becomes all the more apparent. A wound becomes desirable as a sign of bravery (this tradition endures to the present day; for example, the famous practice of members of *Burschen* at German universities of lacerating their faces and artificially giving these wounds a terrifying, pronounced character: the wound acts as a sign of honor). The semiotics of honor transforms everyday concepts, changing the undesirable into the desirable. Simultaneously, its real activity is replaced by a figurative representation. Thus, during induction into knighthood real bloodshed is gradually replaced by a figurative blow with a sword. Along with this there arises the concept of a “wound of honor” – a wound that enhances dignity – as well as the concept of the humiliating wound. The first relates to dangerous, frontally inflicted wounds; the second relates to wounds inflicted from behind without a weapon. The encroachment of conventional-semiotic concepts into practical ones was reflected, for example, in the later version of “The Russian Truth” – the juridical text of the early Russian Middle Ages, in which blows inflicting damage to honor (blows with the flat side of a sword, with the handle and those with the back of the hand) demand a higher compensation to the victim than physically grievous wounds.

Through a theoretical approach we can arrange the elements of cultural semiotics by their degree of complexity in the process of evolution. In reality, however, various semiotic structures, from the most primitive to the most complicated, exist simultaneously, interweaving with one another. Thus, for example, the duel as a distinct semiotic structure represents the intersection, in essence, of various mechanisms. Even its relation to physical confrontation (brawling) is no longer unambiguous. The famous duelist F. I. Tolstoy (the American), according to Vyazemsky, used the relation of the duel to fistycuffs to his advantage in the following manner: “Prince *** owed Tolstoy a rather considerable sum through a promissory note. The deadline of payment had long ago elapsed, and extensions had been given, but the prince still did not pay him the money. Finally Tolstoy, having lost patience, wrote to him: if you do not pay your debt in full by such and such date, then I will not go and seek justice in the courts, but will address myself directly to your highness’s

head”.⁶ Here before us is a multistage pun. “To address oneself to the head” is a bureaucratic expression meaning “to complain directly to the management” – at the same time, in Tolstoy’s letter it also signifies an insult accompanying a challenge to a duel (in real practice, a slap signifying an insult is, as a rule, replaced by the *sign* of a slap in the face: by a threatening gesture, the throwing down of a glove, or a verbal insult⁷). Tolstoy-the-American, however, threatens the offender in another way as well; he threatens that he – having broken out from the semiotic sphere into practical behavior – will simply beat the offender up – “giving him one in the mug” (the expression “to give someone one in the mug” is a ritual refusal of ritual. It is no coincidence that the Master in Bulgakov’s novel, speaking from the non-ritual point of view of the “mad man”, first demands an explanation of whether his offender has a mug or a face. “To give someone one in the mug” or “to give someone a slap in the face” are not synonyms in the language of behavior but rather antonyms). In this manner, F. Tolstoy’s pun “to address oneself to the head” belongs simultaneously to bureaucratic language, ritual gesture, and anti-ritual practice.

The duel creates a situation directly opposed to a brawl. The threat of physical pain is entirely eliminated and is replaced by combinations of related elements: “life” – “death”, “infliction of insult” – “removal of insult”; in other words, material harm is replaced by the semiotics of honor. The first result of this is the need for equality. A duel is possible only between equals. The age or social status of the participants must be equal: Pushkin’s impudent speech directed at M. Orlov in Kishinev could not have led to a duel, not only because of the latter’s magnanimity, but also because the status of the general, a commander of division who had shed blood at war and had been afforded honors, and that of the exiled novice poet were too disparate. Orlov could choose not to pursue a duel without any harm to his dignity. Bulgarin’s refusal to duel with Del’vig is a similar situation. Bulgarin got out of it with a pointed remark: “Tell the baron that I have seen more blood than he has seen ink”. Pushkin noted this down as an example of pointed and quick-witted speech rather than a cowardly avoidance of danger. A duel between the former Napoleonic officer and the nearsighted Petersburg poet could be refused without any loss of honor by the

⁶ Vyazemsky, P. 1929. *Staraya zapisnaya kniga*. Leningrad, p. 70.

⁷ A glove or playing card could be flung into someone’s face as a symbolic slap, or could be thrown on the floor – as a sign of a sign. O. Mandelstam, challenging A. N. Tolstoy to a duel, simply touched his palm to his cheek. Stenich (according to E. M. Tager), who described this episode, saw in it only a comic incongruence between Mandelstam’s cast of mind and a “chivalrous” situation. It is probable that he is not correct and Mandelstam’s behavior constituted an exceptionally subtle form of insult: the resemblance to a brawl, insofar as it was naturally understood by A. N. Tolstoy, was entirely eliminated and changed into the insulting gesture of touching the face.

one possessing the clear advantage. Equally, a duel between a nobleman and a non-noble intellectual was impossible. Herein lies the grotesque comedy of Bazarov's duel with Pavel Petrovich Kirsanov. It is known that the poet Voiture was a reckless duelist precisely because he suffered from the inferiority complex of the non-noble intellectual. Voiture was refused a duel by his insulter, who simply ordered his footmen to beat the brazen young intellectual with sticks.

In this manner, the duel unites the threat of death with a confirmation of the participants' social equality, thereby introducing the insulted person into the semiotic space of nobility. Let us compare the epithets: "to ready an *honorable* grave at a *noble* distance" (*Eugene Onegin*). The material side of the duel is always associated with a certain hierarchy of concepts, conventional by their very nature. The duel is a ritual for removing insult and restoring honor. All one has to do is destroy the semiotics of these two phenomena and the duel transforms into murder. The conventional character of the duel also determines the semiotic convention of compensation. If a person competent in questions of honor recognizes that an insult lacks a fatal character, then the element of real conflict may gradually weaken, while the hierarchy of conventional semiotics will expand. The restoration of honor may take the form of a conventional spilling of blood (if only an insignificant drop), an exchange of gunfire. The latter is also ritual in nature: even in the absence of blood-thirsty intentions, a demonstration of peaceability is only permitted in certain forms. The semiotics of gesture plays a role here. Thus, for example, a shot into the air should not be too overt (the position of the first shooter is particularly sensitive in this regard, in that, by shooting into the air, he effectively compels his opponent to restrain his behavior as well, depriving him of the freedom of choice). An overt shot in the air, especially by the first shooter, may be understood as an offensive gesture of disdain. It was precisely this which enraged Martynov and provoked his blood-thirsty behavior during his duel with Lermontov. The upper limit of conventionality was the replacement of the duel by gestures in a conventional situation, the exchange of conventional formulas of usage or equally conventional forms of duelist behavior. Thus, for example, the duel between Griboyedov and Yakubovich lacked any real cause: neither of the participants had been insulted and neither had any justification for desiring bloodshed. They should have exchanged shots only as participants in a renowned fourfold duel where they acted as seconds. Here, however, the encroachment of direct emotion (resentment, animosity) into ritual nearly caused the duel to end in tragedy.

The semiotic aspect of culture has a contradictory structure. One of its tendencies is associated with the multiplication of various languages. The dynamic character of the process determines the continual emergence of ever newer sign systems and the rearrangement of their positions of dominance. Gestures, singing, dance, and various forms of art successively replace one another as leaders of the semiotic process. This

process is never monostructural. Only in a heuristic can one isolate the history of literature, painting or some other type of semiotics from its surroundings. In reality, movement is realized as a continuous exchange – the perception of alien systems, accompanied by their translation into a familiar language. This can be compared with the cooperation of groups of instruments in an orchestra. Writing an isolated history of a given language – the language of poetry, for example – outside of its surrounding context, is the same as removing a single instrument group from an orchestra and analyzing it as a whole composition.⁸ In fact, upon these ideas Y. N. Tynyanov based his conception of the dominant role of secondary literary movements and the constant alternation of first and second order literature. Tynyanov's idea – that high poetry is not born of high poetry, but rather originates as an outcast of other orders (compare Akhmatova's lines: "If only you knew from what rubbish heap/ verses grow, knowing no shame") – may be paraphrased as a thought about how a new stage, for example, of literature, is not born from the previous stage without the dominating influence of lateral lines.

The opposite trend is associated with the efforts of each, different tendency to seize the dominant position and force its own language on the epoch as a whole. Thus, in the Russian and, more broadly, European culture of the second half of the 19th century the novel became dominant, forcing its language on every form of art (it would also be interesting to study the influence of the Russian novel on Russian and European philosophy, as well as on the nature and everyday behavior of the political struggles of the epoch). The period of Romanticism was in equal measure associated with poetry's exceptionally broad invasion into political thought and everyday life. One could also note the invasion of military, Napoleonic thought into various spheres of European consciousness, from politics to art (contemporaries stubbornly noted similarities to Napoleon in the persons and figures of Pestel and Muravev-Apostol. Pestel and Muravev-Apostol were not similar to each other, and the fact that the features of the French emperor were seen in both suggests that political role dictated the perception of external appearance and not the other way around). For Prince Andrei Bolkonsky in *War and Peace*, the expression "my Toulon" comes to signify an entire life program, whose goal is the attainment of a historical role, which Lermontov expressed with the lines:

⁸ This phenomenon is, however, initially bipartite. Similar to how a given human individual is both part of a collective and an integrated unit, an individual history of literature or of some other artistic area or art as whole may be examined both as part of a cultural conglomeration and as a complete likeness of this conglomeration.

I was born so that the whole world would bear witness
To my triumph or downfall.

A principally new function of language was connected with a highly developed process of alienation. The separation of language from deed reduced activity to gesture. If, at the outset of language, speech had been inseparable from action and comprised a part of it, then language had now become self-sufficient and verbal language and gesture (deed) could become separate from each other. This drastically increased the independence of the semantics of speech. The second aspect of the process is the separation of the sign from action and the possibility of self-sufficient signs. An expression of verbal language's "liberation" was the possibility of lying speech. This became excellent proof that language had attained an entirely new degree of freedom.

The tendency of speech towards stable forms, towards fixation in non-modifiable texts on one side, and towards increasing freedom in the combination of elements of speech on the other constitute two opposing tendencies, the dynamic conflict between which lies at the foundation of the entire process.

One may suppose that the initial function of speech was connected, on one hand, with magic, and with the establishment of repeated gestures in complex aspects of behavior on the other. Such a type of speech should have been inclined towards stability, towards repeated formulas. It was conservative and, ideally, directed towards ossification and sacralization. The periphery of speech developed in the opposite manner. Associated with ritual, it nonetheless preserved great freedom. Kipling's mindless Bandar-log (in contrast to the protagonists – animals with ritualized speech) "babble", that is, they pronounce words whose sense is only loosely associated with a concept. Such "babbling" may have also prevailed outside the confines of ritual. And precisely here, outside of the boundaries of ritual, verbal speech received a degree of freedom which allowed for the formation of verbal art. Non-sacral poetry required a degree of freedom of speech which could only arise in play – a type of behavior that is principally opposed to the sacral.

This new, significantly more dynamic structure, as it entered the sacral world from outside – from the world of play, drunkenness and permissiveness (for a deep analysis of this aspect of history, see the works of M. Bakhtin), reaching its apogee, became sacralized itself. Thus, Dionysus, surrounded by a crowd of his divinely mad companions, intruded into the orderly world of the Greek gods, entering into a competition with Apollo. Before us is a complete cycle: a structure, anti-sacral by its very nature and positioned on the periphery of culture, enters into one-on-one combat with its sacralized centre, thereby hoping, in the future, to squeeze it out and occupy its place. This could be compared with the Renaissance, when a desacralization of culture took place within the borders of Catholic states, thereby

provoking a dramatic dialogue between sacralized and non-sacralized forms of culture and art. This dialogue, so it would seem, concluded with the global victory of profane forms of culture in 18th-century Europe. However, the place of the sacral was filled by profane forms of culture which had taken on a sacral function. A typical example is Russian literature, which, beginning in the 18th century and continuing on through Gogol, Dostoyevsky and L. Tolstoy, took on a function which, in medieval culture, possessed a sacral character. Art (primarily literature) took on a religious-ethical function which did not belong to it. In equal measure, it spilled over into the sphere of philosophy (engendering the specific character of the Russian philosophical school), journalism and took on the universal function of a general language of culture.

If previous “action possessing meaning” was replaced by “meaning expressed through action”, then, with the increasing dominance of verbal language, a meaning may come to express another meaning; in other words, all meaning may become an expression of some sort of content, which, in turn, may become content of the third, fourth and N-th degrees. Medieval mysticism has already demonstrated how far the art of many-leveled symbolism can be extended. The resultant semiotic structure forms as a tension between two opposing tendencies, the introduction of ever newer languages, their quantitative expansion – and their stabilization within a limited quantity. Thus, for example, at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries the activity of artistic semiotics rapidly developed in spheres which until then had been neither artistic nor semiotic. The *balagan*, the circus, the popular fair along with the entire complex of structures they include, the cries of street vendors etc. became perceived as arts in their own right. The clearest result of this process was the rehabilitation of the cinematographer. At the other end of the cultural world, however, traditional forms of art, having become petrified, retreated beyond the borders of artistic activity.

Yet another process was simultaneously underway. The antithesis of speech and language, as an antithesis between empirical reality and conventional model, contained two potential possibilities. From one point of view it was possible to analyze the large and diverse amount of texts actually created by the arts, as well the language constructed in the process of their enumeration, as a conventional model. In the history of culture, however, we also encounter an opposing view: that the most extreme generalization opens the way to reality, with the specific leading into the realm of the chance and the readily apparent. This real binarity of the semiotic mechanism was reflected in the medieval debate between the nominalists and realists.

The two-fold nature of human culture is, to the very depths of its being, associated with the conflicting combination of its linear directionality and its cyclical repetitiveness. The dual nature of human culture is the real foundation of

two semiotic approaches to its history. Culture may be analyzed in its linear dynamic as the continual replacement of old structures by new ones, as is the case in the traditional study of history. Such a view will illuminate the continuous emergence of the new forms which replace and discard the old ones. In the history of culture, however, cyclical conceptions have arisen which see the repeating substitution of structures as dominant. This question could be resolved by pointing out that repetition belongs to the language of culture, while dynamic diversity belongs to its speech. However, it has already been emphasized above that the opposition of language and speech is only absolute in the conventional process of description. In reality, they constantly change places. Both cyclical and dynamic processes are equally real. Different types of description will only illuminate different types of reality.

Translated by Tyler B. Adkins