

The concept of text in cultural semiotics¹

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In this article, I will be concerned with interpreting a concept — or rather, several concepts masquerading under one single label — of a particular system of interpretation, Semiotics of culture, as introduced by the Tartu school, and later developed by, among others, Roland Posner. Since my goal is, in the last analysis, to understand something about the interpreted domain, rather than about this particular system of interpretation, I will feel free to have recourse to other systems of interpretation, including the vernacular, to the extent that they use the same label and/or the same concept.

Text as interpretation

The label involved is “text”. The occasion for raising the question “what is a text” is the generalisation of this word from its vernacular sense in the Semiotics of culture. Specifically, the question was generated by my own use of the Tartu school model, to analyse a particular domain of culture, the art world, in particular under the regime of Modernism. This then prompted me to return to the foundational writings of Lotman, Uspenskij, and their colleagues, as well as to the systematisation of the system by Posner.

“Text” here appears as that which is going in and out of “culture”. It may also be described as that which is (should be or could be) subject to interpretation. But this is where the problems begin.

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The Tartu school model

In the conception of the Tartu school, cultural semiotics is concerned with making a model of the model implicitly held by any member of a culture (Fig. 1).² It is taken for granted that, in the ordinary case, members of any culture will think of themselves as insiders, while persons from other cultures are outsiders. On the inside, life is ordered and meaningful; outside of it, it is chaotic, disorderly and impossible to understand. Also, the inside is normally more highly valued.

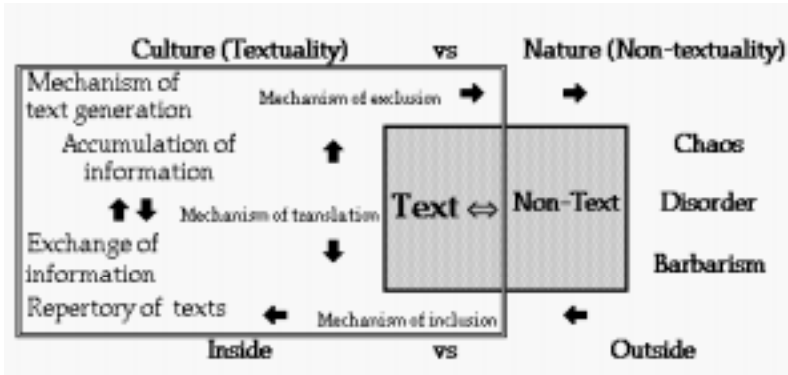


Figure 1. The Tartu school model

Under these circumstances, “texts” (which, as a first approximation are anything inside the culture which can be understood) cannot exist outside culture: but there is at least a potentiality for “non-texts” coming from the outside being transformed into “texts”. More commonly, however, non-texts are excluded by the peculiar mechanism of exclusion which exists inside the culture; or they are received, but in a deformed way, by the mechanism of inclusion. In due time, however, the accumulation of many deformed texts may give rise to a new mechanism of interpretation which makes it possible to understand

² Torop (1993) argues what no single doctrine is common to the members of the Tartu school. However, it seems to me that a certain number of articles written, mostly by Lotman and Uspenskij in collaboration, sometimes by Lotman alone, and in a few cases involving other scholars, form a fairly coherent doctrine about the nature of culture. This is that it understood by the term “Tartu school” in the present article.

them inside culture; and even to a mechanism of generation, which allows culture to create its own texts of the kind earlier only existing outside culture.

The Tartu school uses this model, notably, to understand the relationship between Russia and the West, during the time of Peter the Great and the slavophiles, for whom the part of culture is played by the West and Russia, respectively. However, I have suggested that the art-sphere, particularly during Modernism, can be conveniently understood using the Tartu school model, and substituting the opposition between art and non-art for that between culture and non-culture (Sonesson 1992; 1993a; 1994a,b). The same rules of inclusion/exclusion, translation, impossibility of translation, and translation as deformation, will then be found to pertain. I am not familiar with any use, by the Tartu school members, of this model to study the relationship between art and non-art; yet, in order to adopt the model, the art-world simply has to be conceived as a sub-domain, a “sub-culture”, inside the totality of Occidental culture, which, under the regime of Modernism, tends to absorb other “sub-cultures” into its domain.

In discussing the process of inclusion into the art world, I have mainly given two examples, in both cases works by Marcel Duchamp: his “L.H.O.O.Q.” consists of a reproduction of Leonardo’s “La Gioconda” with a moustache and a pointed beard. Since similar “La Gioconda” modifications have appeared before in satirical magazines, we could consider this a transference from another sphere of picture production. Duchamp’s “Fountain” is simply a urinal placed in the context of an art exhibition; it is, so to speak, transferred from the sphere of tools or use objects to that of aesthetic contemplation.

The whole history of Modernism may be seen as a process of transforming ever more non-texts into texts. However, within Modernism there is also a second movement, which tends to exclude ever more texts from the artistic domain, trying to isolate that which is really “art”. The latter is particularly true of such currents as abstract expressionism, minimalism, and everything that the American critic Joseph Greenberg would call Modernism. The second movement starts out from Dadaism and includes what is nowadays called Postmodernism. However, even the second tradition transforms some texts into non-texts, notably, for a large part of Modernist history,

works which depict things of the perceptual world (Sonesson 1992; 1993a; 1994a,b).³

One may wonder, nevertheless, whether these are really “texts”. In the second of the Duchamp examples, no change (apart from the signature) has been made to the material artifact (only to the interpretation procedures); in the first case, the modifications do not seem to be comparable to the substitution of units, the combinations of which make up the artifact called text in verbal language. But how should we then respond to the suggestion, made by a student of mine, that tiger hides are “non-texts” in Swedish culture? Unlike “La Gioconda” and the urinal, these are natural objects. Perhaps it could be said, however, that they are texts in relation to an African or Indian usage which is foreign to Swedish culture. But the questions then become: 1) whether they are cultural objects (certainly if even fire is a cultural object, when considered inside the frame of the semiotics of the natural world, as Greimas 1970 suggests); 2) whether they are signs: it is true that, according to Barthes’ (1965) classical discussion, all objects in a culture acquire a sign function, but this is then derived and parasitic (cf. tools with a parasitic sign function), not transformed into signs like the urinal in the art gallery.

If “text” is simply anything going out and in of “culture”, cultural semiotics will be a diffusionist model in the sense of anthropology — though there is more emphasis on what is done with that which is received (exclusion, deformation), even admitting that modern diffusionists are also quite conscious of the necessity for the receiving culture to be prepared for the reception.

“Text” as that which belongs

The wide use of the term “text” in cultural semiotics is anticipated in semiotics generally: everything which “belongs” to (may be accounted for by) a particular system of interpretation is considered to be a “text”. There has been a lot of rather unpremeditated uses in semiotics of terms like visual text, behavioural texts, etc. In pictorial semiotics, it is true, the common term has been “visual discourse”, but the generalisation of the latter term poses a similar problem. There has

³ It seems to me that history is a powerful mechanism for transforming text into non-texts, as well as the opposite, but as far as I know, this second aspect is not considered by the Tartu school.

also been a generalised use of “text” in hermeneutics, media studies and cognitive psychology, particularly in the study of oral as opposed to written culture.

The idea of “belongingness” (and not much else) is clearly implied by the characterisation of culture, by the Tartu school, as “a collection of texts”. It is not easy to find any succinct definition of text in the articles written by members of the Tartu school. In an early article, Lotman (1966) variously tells us that “a text is a separate message that is clearly perceived as being distinct from a ‘non-text’ or ‘other text’”; “A text has a beginning, end, and definite internal organisation”; and it is not “an amorphous accumulation of signs”.

Taking this in a more precise sense, we may end up with the conception of the linguists Halliday & Hasan (1976), according to whom “text” is defined by consistence as to register and cohesion, that is by inner connection, as well as connection to the situation.

On the other hand, we may also be reminded of several notions of text which are notoriously difficult to grasp, such as “text” as “productivity” (the late Barthes and Kristeva), opposed to work, “*œuvre*”, i.e. that which transforms language, redistributing its resources. Bakhtin (1986: 103ff), who is one of the averred precursors of the Tartu school, has also written an article about the notion of text, which he describes as “the primary datum of the human sciences”; “the immediate reality (reality of thought and of experience) within which this thought and these disciplines can exclusively constitute themselves”.

Every use of the term “text” outside of verbal language would seem be subject to the perils of what I have elsewhere called *ontological and epistemological panlinguisticism*: i.e. of either presuming that all meaning is built on the model of language, or that it is only accessible for use through the mediation of language (cf. Sonesson 1994c). Both the Tartu school and the early Barthes seem to hesitate between these two doctrines, with the former leaning towards the first alternative and the latter towards the second one: all texts are built on the model of verbal language (secondary modelling system); all other sign systems are received (and analysed) by means of verbal language (Barthes 1965: “objects of our civilisation as far as they are spoken”). However, it should be possible to use the label “text” simply to point to some kind of analogy, without prejudging on the question of causality.

Posner's three generalisations

Roland Posner (1989) has divided the process of generalisation from “text”, in the ordinary language sense, to the sense found in Cultural semiotics, into three phases: from writing to speech, from speech to any sequence of coded (i.e. conventional) signs; and from any coded sequence to any coded sign, even when it does not enter into a sequence (cf. Fig. 2).

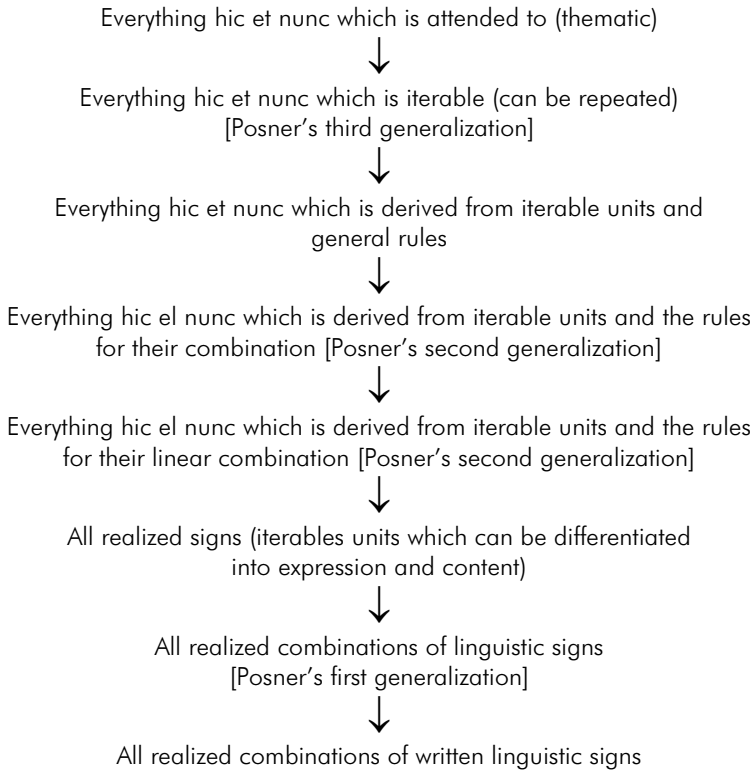


Figure 2. The first hierarchy of textuality: From attention to writing

The *first generalisation*, then, goes beyond mere writing to include *speech*: any sequence of words, not only persistent language artifacts but also instantaneous ones, can be called a “text”, as long as the

content is determined by a code. According to Posner's definition, a code should be taken, in this context, to be a conventional or innate relationship correlating content and expression, but if we attend to his examples, things regularly perceived as going together will also fall into this category. This generalisation is the most common, and the most straightforward, one. It is as far as Halliday & Hasan (1976) are prepared to go, and it is also where Bakhtin (1986) says he would like to stop, although he goes on to talk about "the 'implied' text which could be music, fine art, etc."

Posner's *second generalisation* brings us from spoken or written signs only to *any sequence of coded signs*. At this second stage, certain traffic signs will be included: thus, a sign instructing you to reduce your speed to 80 km, then to 60 km, followed by "roadwork ahead", a notice that the two lanes will merge, etc. It may be remembered that Mounin (1970) denied semiotic status to traffic signs precisely because they did not form any sequence. However, it could be argued against Posner that continuity between the signs is merely produced by the contents, not by the expressions, i.e. there is no anaphoric chain, and the like. If a text is a semantic unit, i.e. is defined by consistence as to register and cohesion, as Halliday & Hasan (1976) claim, then this is a text; yet the very book in which they give their definition is mainly about anaphors and cataphors. Other traffic signs do not form sequences, as Posner himself shows, and would thus not be texts in this sense.

The *third generalisation* abandons the notion of sequence: *every coded sign* (token), even if it does not form a sequence, may be called a text. Thus, text seems to be simply anything which may be reproduced (token in relation to type). Posner here refers to Goodman (his *allographic* art as opposed to *autographic*) but does not develop the issue. Perhaps we should start out from the distinction type/token (from Peirce to linguistics).⁴ Contrary to Goodman's claim, pictures cannot be entirely *autographic*, i.e. they are not only repeatable as wholes, since they contain categories, as defined by perceptual psychology, which set the limit for density (Sonesson 1989; 1995b). If so, even pictures could be texts, to the extent that they are coded in Posner's sense.

Posner's analysis is enlightening, as far as it goes, but it has only a limited relation to the notion of text as used in the Tartu school model.

⁴ In linguistics, of course, the opposition language/speech is very complex, as shown by Jakobson, Hjelmslev, and Coseriu interpreting Saussure.

The Tartu notion is much richer. Probably the latter is too rich — but before we abandon it for this reason there may be further insights to gain from its analysis. Actually, even Posner uses aspects of this richer notion of text when he later assimilates the concept couples “culture *vs* non-culture” to “semiotisation *vs* desemiotisation” and applies them not only to extra-cultural and non-cultural as opposed to cultural but also to that which is more or less central in culture. If something becomes more semiotic by entering culture, and by going from its margins to its core, then it seems that some texts are more texts than others — more “meaningful”! But that seems to raise questions of value and interest for which there is no place in Posner’s hierarchy.

Reading the dictionaries

There is no reason to believe, as perhaps some Oxford philosophers, and certainly the Greimas school, claimed, that the solution to our analytical problems can be found in dictionaries, whether they are the “Oxford English Dictionary”, or “Le Petit Robert”. But is useful to have a look at a number of dictionaries, if only just to realise that the meaning of “text”, in ordinary language, is so much more than just “a combination of verbal signs conveyed in written form”, which Posner takes as his point of departure.⁵

In the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1987), “text” is defined in opposition to non-verbal sign systems, considered as marginal contributions to the meaning process (opposed to “the main body”), and there is a reference to singularly important contents, such as those of the Bible.⁶ In the favourite source book of the Greimas school, *Le Petit Robert* (1977), content is again emphasised, although with more reference to the expression side, at least its order; and there is also a concern for some particular contents, those of the Bible (just as in the English quotes) and of famous authors. Only in one instance is there mention of something outside written signs, but then only as

⁵ Ideally, of course, we should have consulted Russian and/or Estonian dictionaries, but that must wait until another occasion.

⁶ “*main body* of a book or printed page (contrasted with notes, diagrams, illustrations, etc.); “*original* words of an author, apart from anything else in a book”; “short passage, sentence, esp. of Scripture, as the subject of a sermon or discussion”.

the written basis of non-written works, and then order, Posner's sequence, continues to be important.⁷ Also definitions in Swedish dictionaries concern books and similar objects, opposed to pictures (and music), and content, as opposed to expression.⁸

In all the language considered, there seems to be a particular Biblical sense to "text", sometimes extended to important non-religious authorities. In all the languages, "text" is thus used to refer to what the Prague school would call "exemplary works" (part of the Canon); in other words, something which Foucault would term a "monument" as opposed to a "document", i.e. something to which you add comments, which is the pretext of further verbal productions. This interpretation seems to be implicit in much of the use of the term in the Tartu school, as is more obviously the case in hermeneutics, and, more strangely, in the work of the cognitive psychologist David Olsson.

The "text" is often seen as the original. English and French dictionaries talk about the original, as opposed to the copies or the falsification — which is a paradox, since writing, followed by print, made possible the reproduction which, at least according to Benjamin, should abolish the distinction. The metaphorical use of the term often seems to repose on this general idea about the *autographic* as opposed to the *allographic* (in Goodman's sense). Indeed, rather than abolishing it, printing may actually render the distinction possible, for it could be said that mediaeval codices do not allow an absolute distinction between original and copies, since every manuscript is a new variation on the earlier one. But causal links to the original is that which guarantees the authenticity of the object.

The "text" could also be seen as that which is most important. This is suggested by the expression "the main body", and the same idea is implied by the opposition between text and illustration — which again is a normative element. However slight this suggestion may be in ordinary language, it looms large in Tartu semiotics.

⁷ "les termes, les phrases qui constituent un écrit ou une œuvre"; "Écrit considéré dans sa rédaction originale et authentique"; "passage de l'écriture sainte"; "page, fragment d'une œuvre, caractéristique de la pensée ou de l'art de l'auteur"; "tout document écrit prévoyant un ordre déterminé d'opérations à la radio, à la télévision, au cinéma et au théâtre".

⁸ "det som är att läsa i en bok m.m. Mots. *illustration*: ord till melodi; stycke (i bibeln m.m.) över vilket predikan hålles" (Främmande ord). "en skrifts egentliga *innehåll*; bibelställe; ord till sång" (Wessén, Våra ord).

The term “discourse” is often generalised in the same way as “text”. Faircloughs (1992) considers “discourse” to be something more general than “text”, such as the social conditions of production (à la Foucault), whereas “text” is used in the sense of Halliday. However, the Greimas school uses “discourse” as others use “text”, e.g. plastic discourse, etc. The dictionaries give us a similar repertory of meanings.⁹ In the vernacular, discourse has more to do with spoken language, and should thus offer a more ready base for a generalisation. But it does seem to offer less foundation for a normative generalisation, if we except the French cognitive interpretation.

The first hierarchy of textuality: From attention to writing

If, like Posner, we start out from the linguistic sense of text, we will at once come up against a generalised usage, which is already broader and also, in some respects, in contradiction to the vernacular usage. The Danish linguist Louis Hjelmslev (1943) who was an important source of information for the French structuralists and the Tartu school, placed text in opposition to the system, more or less like Saussure placed “parole” in opposition to “langue” (for which another disciple of Saussure, Buysens, used the terms “discours” and “langue”). Where Hjelmslev clearly deviates from common usage is in not requiring any kind of closure of the text (beginning and end, standing out from the non-text, which is important to Lotman, as we saw).¹⁰ However, the opposition between text and system for him at once subsumes two more elementary oppositions: between that which is present *hic et nunc* and the rules having some more subtle mode of existence; and between isolated instances and combinations of signs.

⁹ According to Le Petit Robert, it is a “développement oratoire fait devant une réunion de personnes”; “écrit littéraire didactique”; “expression verbale de la pensée”; “pensée discursive, raisonnement”: The Oxford Dictionary tells us it is “speech; lecture; sermon; treatise”.

¹⁰ Thus, this is more general than the text concept of text linguistics, according to which a text is not only a contiguity of signs, which supposes coherence/cohesion, anaphoric chains, etc., and in particular Halliday’s idea that texts are not a mere combinations of sentences but are found on a higher level — thus forming a new whole, a Gestalt.

These two aspects are hardly possible to distinguish in Hjelmslev's theory. That which can be perceived *hic et nunc* is opposed to something which is presupposed by it, which is at the same time a vocabulary of units which may be repeated (*iterable* units, in Husserl's parlance) and the rules for combining these units. The same applies to generative grammar. If the system is identified with a generative grammar, which recursively generates all possible "texts" (and the Tartu school often uses these terms), the categories and their combinations are given at the same level, and thus grammaticality and "belongingness" are the same.

The metaphor of combinatory rules is certainly presupposed by the notion of "ungrammatical texts", often found in the Tartu articles and elsewhere in semiotics. It is explicit in Lotman et al. (1975) theses about the study of culture, where "non-texts" correspond to that which is "ungrammatical". It is arguable, of course, that an ungrammatical sentence does not (entirely) belong to the system, for, while it reproduces the vocabulary of the system, it does not follow the rules of combination.

It is common to suppose that combinatory rules concern the (linear) ordering of the elements. In ordinary language, as we saw, sequence is important in the definition of "text". This seems to be true of two popular metaphorical applications, first introduced by Barthes (1965; to which Posner refers when discussing the notion of text), the menu and clothing.¹¹ Although one may argue, as I have done elsewhere (Sonesson 1993b), that there are two combinatory dimensions in clothing (not only body parts, but also layers of clothing), both are spatially ordered and linear. Linguists and anthropologists like Halliday and Douglas, who have developed the menu analogy in comparisons with non-western cultures, also find linearity to reign supreme (i.e. certain kinds of food are eaten before, and others after, the main course). Even behaviour, to which both Lotman and Posner refer to as texts, may to some extent follow linear rules, though the sequence is usually temporally, rather than spatially, distributed (but

¹¹ These are of course not sign system, but only symbol system, in Hjelmslev's sense (no separation of expression and content), so it is not clear that he would be ready to apply the term "texts" to them. However, space does not allow me to discuss sign criteria here.

this, of course, also applies to spoken “texts”, the first level of Posner’s generalisations).¹²

But it is pictorial text which most obviously contradicts the grammar analogy. In the Tartu theses, a basic distinction is made between “discontinuous (discrete) vs continuous (non-discrete) texts”. Lotman et al. (1975) articles refer to “text as composed of discontinuous or continuous signs”, claiming that the former, as exemplified by painting, dance, sculpture, television, film, dominate in contemporary culture. But clearly, if these texts are really made up of discontinuous signs, we could not expect them to obey the grammar analogy. Indeed, there are no rules for where certain objects should appear in pictures (apart from some very restricted genres, like Russian icon painting), and so it is not possible to break any linear rules of combination (cf. Sonesson 1992).

However, Hjelmslev (1943: 35ff) defines text/process as units in “relation” (both-and-relations), opposed to the system which is in “correlation” (either-or-relations). Jakobson has made similar generalisations when talking about the “syntagm” as the axis of combination, and the “paradigm” as the axis of selection. In this sense, we could say that any combination of elements, which does not accord to the norms, whether these concern spatial and/or temporal distribution, or something else, will yield “non-grammatical” texts or “non-texts”.

In this way, the distinction can also be applied to pictures and other visual artifacts. A collage (e.g. a combination of paint, subway tickets, newspapers, etc.) could be said to contain “un-grammatical” combinations in relation to earlier art, although there are of course no rules for their spatial and temporal distribution, only their realisation inside the same general category. This also applies to ready-mades: Duchamp’s urinal in the art gallery demonstrates a lack of “pragmatic acceptability”, i.e. it is not consistent as to register, in Halliday’s terms.

We could also consider at least some happenings as “ungrammatical” behaviour in this sense. Thus, to put a bottle of jam on a car is “ungrammatical”, not because it fails to follow the menu syntagm in Barthes’ sense, but because it introduces the jam bottle into a category which is not in the food system at all. Some actions typically included in happenings may similarly be inappropriate to the general sphere of “spectacles” of which happenings are a part (again a case of not being “pragmatically acceptable”), either because they are things normally

¹² Lotman (1979: 85) even refer to situations as texts, in which case linearity seems irrelevant.

done in private, or because they appear to be routine doings not normally considered interesting to watch (which brings us into the neighbourhood of our second hierarchy of textuality).

Groupe μ have discussed similar examples in terms of visual rhetoric: the collage, which we mentioned above, but also, for instance, a red flag in a black-and-white movie (Eisenstein's "Potemkin"), or a figurative representation in an Abstract Expressionist painting (e.g. de Kooning's women). To Groupe μ , ungrammaticality, or, as they prefer to say, rhetoricalness (admitting that the operation takes place at a secondary level) occurs in the visual domain in the form of non-permitted *combinations* of transformation rules. An excellent example would be Picasso's paraphrase of Velázquez "Las Meninas" or, even better, Hamilton's paraphrase of the latter. But why should we not also consider non-permitted transformations (Cubist transformations before Cubism was accepted, etc.) as being "ungrammatical", or "rhetorical", in themselves? In this case, every one of Picasso's and Hamilton's figures are "ungrammatical", each in a different way (cf. Sonesson 1996; 1997b).

This then brings us to a further generalisation of the opposition between system and text. The system could involve rules of another kind than the *rules of combination*, typically presupposed by the grammar metaphor, e.g., *rules of transformation*, which serve to map the perceptual world into the picture plane. That pictorial meaning must in fact be accounted for in terms of perceptual transformations was a conclusion of my critique of the critique of iconicity (Sonesson 1989; 1997a,b,c).

It will be observed that the most general feature of the "system vs text" opposition is still retained: we have something general, of the order of rules, which contrasts with something particular, individuated in space and time. We may still refer to Peirce opposition of type and token ("legisign" vs "sinsign" functioning as a replica): indeed, it will be remembered that to Peirce the "legisign", as Thirdness, is essentially a rule.

Typicality in time and outside of it

There is a problem with identifying "text", as Posner suggests, with the Peircean token; for, although we may certainly sometimes use the word "text" to refer to instances presented *hic et nunc*, we also often

employ the same word when talking about something which is rather of the order of types. While I am writing this article, I may refer to it as a “text”, thinking about the single token which is still in my computer; however, when I afterwards ask you to look at page 12 of the text, the text I am talking about is a kind of type, and you will probably all look at different spatially individuated tokens of it.

Lets begin by making a distinction between two kinds of typicalities, in the sense of recurrent units, or rule-like entities, i.e. Peircean Thirdness. These could be called type 1 and type 2 typicalities, or, with somewhat more descriptive terms, *temporally unbound* and *temporally bound typicalities*, respectively (cf. Sonesson 1997d).¹³ In the first case, different tokens are derived from a type, without the type being perceived as emerging in time, as is the case with phonemes, letters, and words (Fig. 3). We can think of this typicality as omnitemporal and omnispacial in Husserl’s sense. This is of course a fiction, for even words and phoneme change, but time is not relevant, or must be supposed to stand still, at least during the act of communication.¹⁴

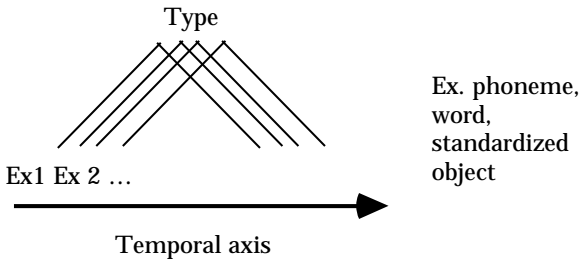


Figure 3. Temporally unbound typicalities

As temporally unbound typicalities I also count what are ordinarily called standardised objects (usually factory-made), such as a particular model of an iron, a glass recipient, a urinal, etc. In many ways, such

¹³ There is a relation, though not a clear-cut one, to Goodman’s distinction between autographic and allographic arts.

¹⁴ Naturally, some words or perhaps even some phonemes are felt to be old-fashioned, but contrary to Jakobson’s claim, this does show that diachrony in inside synchrony, in any interesting sense — at least not in any sense which is interesting in this context.

objects appear to be much more clearly “dated” than a phoneme or a word. Perhaps they should really be assigned to some third type of typicality. However, from the point of view of the user, their date of fabrication is of no avail (apart from such accessory interest as acquiring the latest model, or knowing if the warranty is still valid, which is a question pertaining to the copy). Here, then, we will continue to count them as temporally unbound typicalities.¹⁵

In the second case, the type is constituted in time by a particular subject at the same time as he creates the first token (Fig. 4). This is of course the case of the original painting in relation to all its reproductions, and of the photographic plate in relation to all the copies made of it (Indeed, photography was the first context in which I encountered time-bound typicalities).

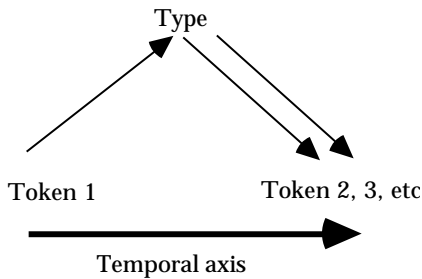


Figure 4. Temporally bound typicalities

Sketches and models may have preceded the original but do not constitute the type.¹⁶ Contrary to what Eco (1992) suggests in his article about “doubles”, temporal priority is not enough to distinguish the original from its copies. The painter’s sketches, many computer print-outs, some photographic prints, and the model of a building, precede the constitution of the type. More extreme examples are offered by Warhol, Sherrie Levine, Koons, etc. making originals by copying temporally prior advertisements, art-works, or hand-crafted

¹⁵ I am not discussing, as a philosophers could do, what “really” exists, but what must be supposed to exist for the user of meaning systems.

¹⁶ The case of music and architecture is not so clear to me; in architecture there may even have been a historical development in what counts as the work, i.e. as constitutive of the type.

objects. Only an attribution of value can decide which objects, in the temporal chain, should count as the original, or, more generally, as the token constitutive of the type. In our society, it is often the identity of the producing subjects which decide the value, separating, for instance, a paraphrase of Velázquez “Las Meninas” by Picasso or Hamilton, from a copy, made by an obscure contemporary of the original painter; or even Linde’s token of the ready-made types created by Duchamp (and the tokens which are really copies of Linde’s copies) from the paraphrases by Roland Jones and Sherrie Levine.

Now, in the way that the word “text” is often used in ordinary language (though our dictionaries do not specifically mention this), it applies to an artifact manifesting a time-bound typicality, itself made up of combinations of temporally unbound types. The temporally unbound typicalities are, of course, in the ordinary case, words, phonemes (or rather, more directly, graphemes or letters), grammatical rules, and the like. In the second hierarchy of textuality, referred to in the work of the Tartu school, it appears that it is this typicality sense of “text” which is presupposed in all the usages.

Combinations of several units, as in the grammar analogy, are not necessarily fundamental to this transformation from temporally unbound to temporally bound typicalities. Consider the case of Duchamp’s ready-made, the urinal, which is a factory-made object, and therefore a token of the unbound typicality type; when it is made into a work of art (by being presented in a gallery), this token is transformed into a type, but now of the temporally bound kind, which means new tokens can be made with reference to it, as were those by Linde and others (Fig. 5). These things do not only happen in the strange world of Modernist art: incunabula, for instance, are tokens of a type which have become so rare, that they may be treated as types from which new tokens can be made (but in this case both type levels may well be experienced as time-bound)

The artifact, which, in the Prague school model is subject to different concretisations, would in this sense be a time-bound typicality. Like Posner, then, we may well use the term artifact as a more general term than text, though in a rather different sense: both would, in our analysis, be some kind of typicalities.

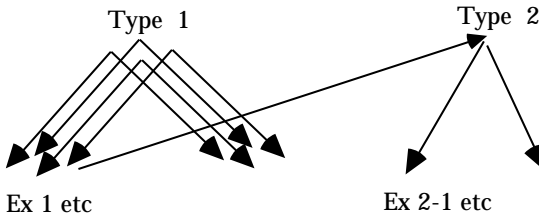


Figure 5. Transformation of unbound into bound typicality

Closing the text

In ordinary language, a text has a beginning and an end, i.e. “closure”; as the members of the Tartu school will claim, it even stands out “on all sides” as against that which is not a text (or perhaps another text). To Hjelmslev, however, the text is without end, it is the sequence of all possible realisations of the system. But the Hjelmslevian text is at the level of a token. A text as a temporally bound typicality, however, could normally be expected to have closure.

There are several senses in which a text may be said to have closure or not. Clearly taking the cue from Hjelmslev, Kristeva and the late Barthes talked about “texte” opposed to “œuvre”, where the former is considered to be a continuous process, while the second has fixed limits. Certain more or less contemporary literary works were hailed as “texts” in this sense. It is not clear how this feature of openness, which Hjelmslev ascribed to the token level, could be retained at the level of time-bound typicality, with which literature is concerned.¹⁷

When discussing the fragment as opposed to the text, however, it is instead the text which is supposed to have closure, this time of a more local, internal kind, absent from the fragments. Even if the fragments do not form a text, each one of them individually must possess this

¹⁷ Bakhtin (1990) very clearly demonstrates the necessary “closure” or time-bound typicalities, in terms of “finalisation”, though it seems that in some later works (on Rabelais, notably) he failed to take this demonstration into account

kind of closure. Indeed, many collections of fragments have become texts, in the sense of the second hierarchy of textuality.

Rather than being opposed to the text, the intertext is contained in it. All texts probably contain some amount of intertext, which may be taken to mean that no text possesses a complete closure (which is really a trivial observation). Many intertexts are themselves highly organised, and may really form some super-texts together with the text of departure. This is true of many of those “paratexts”, “architexts”, and “metatexts” discussed by Genette (1982).

A particular case could be the opposition between text and hyper-text. It is not clear, however, whether the hyper-text is a kind of text or something beyond it.¹⁸ If we take notes to be an example of a hyper-text, in this sense, then it is certainly opposed to text, in the dictionary meaning of “main body of work”. The computer mediated hyper-text would then be a kind of hypertrophy of the note apparatus, in which the notes (like in the proverbial German dissertation) are transformed into the main body of the work.

Something more is perhaps meant by the opposition of cyber-text to ordinary text. Text is usually understood as a monologue, but cyber-space is, at least potentially, a place of dialogue, of interchange, and like all dialogues, it cannot have closure in any strict sense. On the other hand, to the extent that dialogue is a sequence of behaviour, it may well acquire textuality in another way — or rather, in another sense. In spite of the importance of closure for many definitions of text, we will not explore it further here. We will merely note that it is presupposed in all the senses of text appearing in the second hierarchy of textuality.

The second hierarchy of textuality: From interpretability to excellence

At one point, Hjelmslev (1943) actually imagines text to be “everything which is the case”, i.e. everything which is present (or could be present) *hic et nunc*. In this sense, text is continuous in a different way from the one considered above; or, as Hjelmslev puts it himself, it is “heterogeneous”. However, since different parts of this text have

¹⁸ The latter interpretation is suggested by the comparison with such terms as “hyper-marché”.

different “connotations” (in Hjelmslev’s specific sense, not in the familiar logical or stylistic senses, e.g. as each sentence in Danish connotes “I speak Danish”; cf. Sonesson 1989: 119ff, 179ff), hetero. — geneous text can be divided into several homogeneous ones. It will be noted that, unlike the heterogeneity found, for instance, in the intertext, this one is found on the type-level (actually the temporally unbound type level), not on the token level (or perhaps rather: not on the temporally bound type level).

What Hjelmslev actually says is that all “real” texts are heterogeneous. So we should distinguish a “text-for-a-system” and a “real text”. The closest we come to this notion in the model of the Tartu school would seem to be the idea of “the cultural text”, which is the sum total of all texts in a culture. This text is heterogeneous, whenever its parts are ascribed to the language system, the picture system, the behaviour system, and so forth. It is, however, homogeneous when considered in relation to the culture system. The situation is really more complex: when considered in relation to Swedish culture, art is heterogeneous for being art; and when considered in relation to the system of art, Swedish art is heterogeneous for being Swedish. Art made by Latin American exiles living in Sweden would be even more multiply heterogeneous.

Behind this distinction is a more general notion of “belongingness” than suggested by the grammar analogy: something is a non-text because it does not belong to the system at all, it lacks both the vocabulary and the rules, not only the combinations. Lotman (1966) actually claims that something could be a text from a linguistic point of view without being it from the legal point of view; analogously, something may be a text from the point of view of the picture system, but not from that of the art system (for instance the “La Gioconda” with moustaches before Duchamp introduced it into the art sphere).

The second hierarchy of textuality emerges from the different meanings attributed to something which is a text, as opposed to a non-text (Fig. 6). Sometimes, a text is that which can be interpreted, in contrast to that which is *impossible to interpret*. This meaning is implied by the notion of system in the model of the Tartu school: texts can be interpreted, because they are inside culture, where there are systems for their interpretation: “non-texts” cannot be interpreted, because they are excluded by culture or deformed by being interpreted according to systems other than those by means of which they were engendered. It is easy to see how this sense of “non-text” emerges out

of Hjelmslev’s structuralist world-view, according to which “substance” without “form” cannot even be thought.

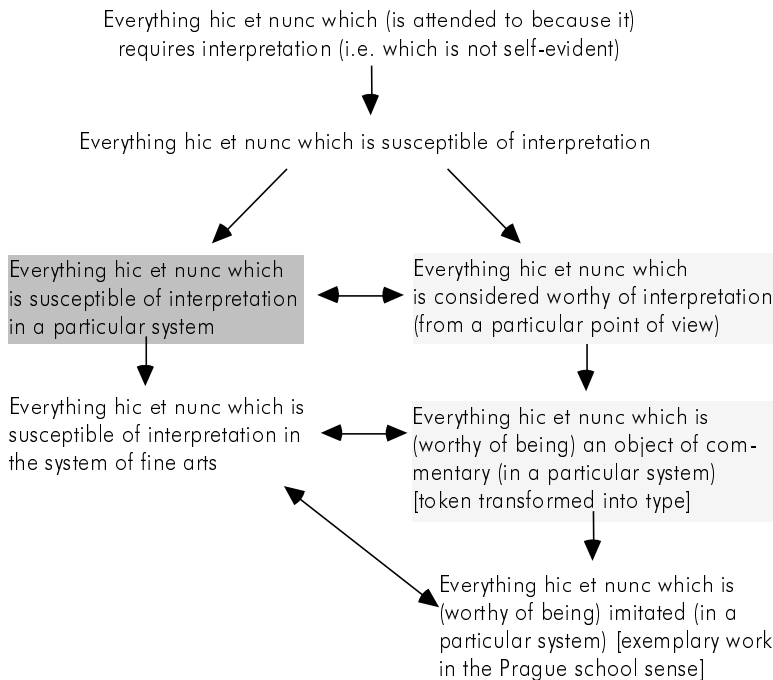


Figure 6. The second hierarchy of textuality: From interpretability to excellence

Sometimes, however, the non-text is that which is *not worth interpreting*, the text then being that which is worth while. Lotman & Pjatigorskij (1968) talk about “a mass of non-texts” which form “the background against which a group of texts is distinguished as displaying traits of an expressiveness that is complementary and meaningful in the cultural system”.¹⁹ When writing is invented, not everything is considered worth writing down, or, alternatively not everything is worth being orally conveyed. In some cultures, written texts, in the linguistic sense, but not oral ones, are texts in culture, and

¹⁹ This seems to mean that there are non-texts also inside culture!

in other cultures, the reverse is the case. Or rather: some texts are more texts than others!

In the prehistory of Russian semiotics, the formalist Jakubinski termed “aperceptive mass” (a term taken over by Vygotsky) that which is so obvious that it is interpreted without the process ever becoming conscious. It is something which does not require any particular interpretative work, but is given as a matter of course, equivalent to that which is present in the Lifeworld, in the sense of phenomenology. Now it would seem that this characterisation should apply to most texts, certainly in the linguistic sense, particularly those which are more perfectly grammatical (or perhaps rather, more perfectly “acceptable”). The non-text would then be that which *resists interpretation*. There is indeed a hint of this conception in the idea of non-texts being deformed when they enter the culture. But we saw in the last quote, from Lotman & Pjatigorskij (1968) that it is rather the non-texts which constitute the “aperceptive mass”.

In his article about the Decembrists’ semiotisation of ordinary life, Lotman (1984a) claims that routine behaviour is not semiotic “Semiotic behaviour is always the result of a choice”. However, non-semiotic behaviour becomes semiotic, Lotman continues, for those who do not master the code, for instance for foreigners.²⁰ This is analogous to Ricœur’s position in hermeneutics: text appears when there is no ready interpretation. It is the non-text which is *interpreted as a matter of course*.

But this is a real paradox. It means that routine behaviour will be a text for those who do not belong to the culture in question, for the outsiders, those who use other codes — and this seems to be quite the opposite of the linguistic analogy, as if we were saying that something is a text for those who do not understand the language. Here then, we have arrived at two concepts of texts which are not simply different, but appear to exclude each other. If text in the linguistic sense (grammar of combinations) could be seen as a more specific case of the sense of “belongingness”, then it seems that something which is a text according to the linguistic analogy must be a non-text in the sense of offering no resistance to interpretation.

There is the text of the other (which requires “outsideness”, in the sense of Bakhtin), and there is the text of the ego.

²⁰ It should be noted that it is Posner, not the Tartu school, which claims the texts differs from the non-text in being “more semiotical”. Still, in the same article Lotman (1984a: 87) does talk about “behaviour-texts”.

Meaning as attention and value

Semiotisation would seem to mean that something is transformed into a sign, thus having an expression separate from its content — which means that, given the expression, there is something to interpret. But to the Tartu school, semiotisation often seems to mean simply attracting attention. Lotman (1984a) says that, to the Decembrists, behaviour in ordinary life “has become a subject of attention, in which value is attached not to the acts themselves but to their symbolic meaning”; and Lotman & Uspenskij (1971) claim that “against the background of non-culture, culture appears as a system of signs”.

Actually, this seems to mean that something becomes a sign merely by being attended to. Nevertheless, simply because we attend to something, we do not have to differentiate it into expression and content, to apply the criteria of Piaget and Husserl, (cf. Sonesson 1989: 49ff). There are some particular cases in which attention may well have this function: thus, for instance, to be recognized as such, instruments may have to signify their use, as Posner suggests; and every use may even, in contemporary society, be transformed into the sign of this use, as Barthes famously indicated. But these seem to be special cases.

But we could take Lotman’s discussion of the Decembrists to show that, to him, a minimal requirement of something being a text is *that it is attended to*. This means that something is singled out as important, that it stands out as something we should attend to, perhaps interpret, that it is not understood as a matter of course.²¹ All other requirements of textuality, with the exception of text as that which is taken for granted, would then add further requirements.

In this sense, a routine action or an everyday object which is placed in a context where it will be attended to, such as an art gallery, or on a scene, etc., will become a text. This would be true of many parts of a happening and of most ready-mades. Of course, Lotman’s examples actually illustrate a case which is the opposite of the one just mentioned: the acts of the Decembrists take place in the middle of ordinary life, but they have a spectacular quality about them which attracts an audience.

²¹ According to Husserl’s criteria, of course, a sign is an entity in which that which is perceived is precisely not attended to, not “thematic”. What is singled out is that which is not perceived, the content.

Sometimes, becoming the subject of attention implies, for the Tartu school, being *conventional*. Thus Lotman claims that when death is exchanged for honour in the Roland song, this is a conventional sign and therefore semiotic, as are the acts of the upper classes generally, whereas the life of other social classes is not semiotic (cf. Lotman 1984a,c). But perhaps at least the second example could be reduced to the last one, if we admit that the life of the upper classes is more attention-getting than that of the others (once upon a time at the scene of the court, and now by the mediations of the media).

The cognitive psychologist David Olsson (1991) defines text as that which is the subject of comments, that which is discussed, i.e. that which is a quote or is considered worth quoting. In other words, a text is something which gives rise to a *meta-text*. Originally, he had supposed these properties to apply only to that which is called a text in ordinary language, i.e. instances of written language. However, when anthropologists demonstrated to him that many oral pronouncements are treated in the same way in other cultures, he chose to generalise the notion of text to that which is quoted and which invites commentary. In fact, he could also have generalised from the dictionary meanings of Biblical, or otherwise Classical, quotations.

There are only indirect hints at such a notion of text in the Tartu school writings. According to Lotman & Uspenskij (1971), texts serve to select that which is to be remembered or forgotten, thus changing the concept of “facts to be remembered”. Again referring to the Decembrists, Lotman (1984a) says that “the very act had to be seen as significant, to deserve the memory of posterity and the attention of historians, and to be of the utmost value”.

Quotation means that a token is in a way promoted to a type, more precisely to a time-bound type.²² In this sense even actions may be quoted. This could apply to the actions of the Decembrists, discussed by Lotman (although he does not describe them in that way). It certainly applies to a lot of what happens in the “Queste of Grail”, where those who are involved in an “adventure” repeatedly ask themselves “what it means”. The adventure often is retold several times, notably to hermits, who furnish the interpretation — thus becoming subject to commentary. In this case, the actions, unlike

²² More strictly metalinguistic uses of quotation marks, to refer to the lexicon entry “word”, etc., are of course temporally unbound types. The case considered here is the quotation of sentences or even larger stretches of discourse.

those of the Decembrists, actually become signs, since the meaning which the knights ask for is not the cause, nor intentions or social norms, not even unconscious motives as in contemporary hermeneutics — it is a separate “content” which is retrievable in heaven (cf. Sonesson 1997c).

When the knights tell about their adventures, they are of course “quoting” their behaviour in a verbal metalanguage. A more interesting case, also found in the Grail story, is when that which does the quoting is behaviour itself. Thus, the different adventures refer to each other, and, more fundamentally the actions of the knights refer to the acts of Joseph of Aramitheia, which refer to the acts of Christ, etc. Still this remains a reference which could only be clear in the world of the story, that is, conveyed by language (for once Barthes is right about linguistic determination).

Marshall Sahlins (1981) gives some other examples of actions which are quoted. Kmahehmeha said to Captain Vancouver that both should jump, and that the one whose god helped him to survive would decide the religion of the people, but the same event is also found in the myth about Pao. When Captain Cook later arrived he inadvertently came to repeat the Lono ritual and therefore was killed.

All ritual and ceremony could be seen as behaviour quoting other behaviour. As in the Grail story, the behaviour quoted would itself be “significant”, that is, have a value in itself, as Lotman says about the acts of the Decembrists. A more pure case of an action quoting another action would therefore be the happening, in which the quoted action has no value, apart from the fact that it is quoted.

In the Tartu school, texts are not everything which is quoted but rather something which is worth quoting. They are what the Prague school called “exemplary works” — of which the dictionary senses of quotations from the Bible or Classical Authors are special cases. Often, it seems, texts are even something more particular, a certain type of quotable work, art works.

Ougebenine (1981), a former member of the Tartu school, claims that when opposing culture to non-culture, Lotman is thinking about literary culture, indeed that he is referring to the distinction between culture and civilisation familiar to earlier Russian thinkers (and, as far as I know, even more to German ones). Such an interpretation is confirmed by Lotman’s & Uspenskij’s (1971) claim that “culture never encompasses everything, but forms instead a marked-off sphere”, as well as by Lotman’s (1970) affirmation that only the most

qualified members are concerned with culture. But in the same article Taylor's well-known definition of culture, which inaugurates anthropology, is referred to: "the aggregate of all non-inherited information and the means for organising and preserving it", where information is anything which is not a material object. Since culture is also repeatedly defined as the sum-total of texts, the notion of text itself will vary between everything which is not a (mere) material object, and that which is a recognized work of art.

This value-laden concept of text is also the one which, implicitly, as opposed to explicitly, is taken over by Posner. According to the Tartu school, texts coming from the outside enter culture from the margins, and then sometimes make their way into the centre. From the point of view of literature, the central texts are of course those which are recognised inside culture as being the most valuable ones. Now, Posner, who posits a difference between non-culture and extra-culture (outside our culture but inside other cultures), claims there is a process of semiotisation (which we encounter already in Lotman's work) which proceeds, as texts go from non-culture to extra-culture, from extra-culture to intra-culture, and from the margin to the centre. But this means that, even to Posner, not all texts are created equal: some texts are more texts than others.

Conclusion: a diversified approach

We are indebted to the Tartu school for having made visible all these different meanings of the notion of text. Of course, the different meanings really only become visible on a second or third reading, but they are clearly there, in the context of enunciation of the label "text". It may be argued that it would have been better to have different terms for such divergent concepts as those which we have encountered here: but we have to accept these new concepts as they were born, sharing a single name.

It could be argued that the Tartu model represent a prototypical case, in which the borders between different oppositional pairs happens to occur at the same point (in space, time, and whatever): here, the limit between signs and behaviour patterns which are possible to understand and those which are not appear at the same place as the limit between those which are worth while interpreting and those which are not, from the point of view of a given culture or a

group in the culture. Thus, to the slavophiles, not only were old Russian texts the only one which could really be understood (as opposed to Western non-texts), but they were also the only ones which merited the effort of interpretation. However, it seems to me that, already in the case of Peter the Great, the respective domains of that which is most readily understood, and that which is considered worth interpreting, come apart: however Westernised the upbringing of Peter had been, it seems probable that Russian signs and behaviours were intrinsically easier to interpret than Occidental ones, and so were his texts in the sense of those most readily understood, and yet he certainly considered Western behaviours and signs to be his texts, in the sense of being the ones which merited interpretation. In the same vein, it may be possible to imagine an ideal situation, in which the domain of objects subject to commentary is the same as the domain of objects worthy of being interpreted, and in which the latter corresponds with the domain of objects worthy of being imitated, itself identical with the art sphere. The interesting situations will occur about then these domains fail to coincide. A domain *intensionally* contained in a wider domain may or may not be *extensionally* identical to the wider domain in a particular culture. But the identification or separation of the principal sub-domains (such as that which is possible to interpret and that which is worthy of interpretation) may be even more significant.

It should be clear that it is the second hierarchy of textuality, not the first, which is the most fundamental one: it concerns values and interests, which serves to show that the project of a semiotics of culture is a sociological project. In this sense, it may be seen as a foundation for that study of the life of signs in society, from which Saussure finally opted out; but also, more importantly, as a new start for the study of dialogicity uniting the *ego* and the *alter*, which was sketched long ago, in so many divergent ways, by the members of the Bakhtin circle.

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Концепция текста в семиотике культуры

Со времени создания семиотики культуры Тартуской школой, понятие «текста» было одной из ее ключевых метафор, которая остается центральной и для теоретической реконструкции Роланда Познера. Несмотря на то, что настоящая статья оформлена как чисто филоло-

гическое исследование, его задачи гораздо шире. Действительно, основная часть статьи посвящена демонстрации того, как лексема «текст» широко варьируется в употреблении в работах Тартуской школы (эта неоднозначность также проходит и сквозь познеровские реконструкции), однако, нас в большей степени интересует выявление всего разнообразия концептов, покрываемых термином «текст». Мы показываем, что все употребления этого термина имеют своим источником обыденный язык (в приложении к разным языкам западной традиции). Простейшим выходом было бы предложение дать этим концептам в научной реконструкции различные наименования. Тем не менее, в конце мы предлагаем другое решение.

«Текст» в качестве оппозиции к «не-тексту» всегда (пред)полагает определение, что находится «внутри», а что — «вовне», в грандиозной игре Культура versus Природа. Однако, критерии весьма разнообразны. Познер четко описал одну из весьма очевидных иерархий такого разнообразия, проведя нас от всех зафиксированных на письме комбинаций лингвистических знаков, через все комбинации лингвистических знаков и все линейные комбинации знаков, до всех знаков, которые могут быть воспроизведены (повторены), т.е. до всех элементов, которые могут быть приняты за дифференциальные признаки инварианта или типа. В нашей работе нам удалось добавить несколько промежуточных ступеней в эту иерархию, а именно, комбинации, не являющиеся линейными, и правила, которые не применимы к комбинациям. Кроме того, мы выявляем два различных типа зависимости между признаками и инвариантом. Основным объектом рассмотрения является вторая иерархия текстуальности, имеющая своим основанием то, что нуждается в интерпретации, сводимой затем к тому, что подвержено интерпретации, однако, до этого разделенной на две линии, не являющиеся с необходимостью параллельными: ту, что может быть интерпретирована в конкретной системе (например, в искусстве), и ту, что подлежит интерпретации с конкретной точки зрения, или потому что она является субъектом комментария, и/или поскольку она рассматривается как образец жанра. Эти две линии различаются уже в классическом для Тартуской школы примере Петра Первого, где то, что наиболее очевидно для понимания и то, что рассматривается как требующее интерпретации, едва ли могут считаться идентичными. Так, несмотря на вестернизированное воспитание Петра, русские знаки и программы поведения кажутся для него внутренне более легкими для интерпретации, чем западные, и именно такими были его «тексты» по линии наибольшей легкости понимания, но с другой стороны, Петр вне всякого сомнения рассматривал именно западные

программы поведения и знаки в качестве своих «текстов», в том смысле, что они заслуживают интерпретации.

Далее говорится, что Тартуская модель являет собой прототипический случай, при котором границы между различными бинарными оппозициями всегда совпадают (в пространстве, времени и в чем бы то ни было): здесь, граница между знаками и моделями поведения, которые могут быть поняты, и теми, которые непонятны, оказывается в то же время границей между тем, что требует интерпретационного усилия, и тем, что такового не требует, с точки зрения данной культуры или внутрикультурной группы. Так для славянофилов древнерусские тексты не только были единственными, которые могут быть по-настоящему поняты (в противовес западным «не-текстам»), но они также были единственными достойными интерпретационного усилия. Однако эта гармония отсутствует в модели, используемой Петром Первым. Мы используем термин «прототип» здесь в понимании Роша: случай наиболее вероятного совпадения качеств. Однако это означает, что существует множество случаев, когда совпадение не будет иметь места, и именно эти случаи могут представлять интерес для семиотики культуры, что доказывает пример Петра Первого, один из наиболее ранних примеров приложения семиотики культуры к реальной истории.

Teksti mõiste kultuurisemiootikas

Alates ajast, mil Tartu koolkond rajas kultuurisemiootika, on “tekst” olnud selle üks alusmetafoore, ning see jääb keskseks ka Roland Posner'i poolt rekonstrueeritud teoorias. Hoolimata käesoleva essee filoloogilisest lähtepunktist, on selle eesmärgid palju laiemad. On tõsi, et artikli põhiosa käsitleb seda, kuidas sõna “tekst” asetatakse Tartu koolkonna kirjutistes mitmekesisesse kasutusväljadesse, ning et vastuolud säilivad ka Posner'i rekonstruktsioonis, kuid tegelikult huvitume me selle termini kõigi erinevate algkontseptide esiletoomisest. Näitame, et kõigi kasutuste toitepinnas on tavakeel, nagu võime seda leida mitmete keelte puhul lääne traditsioonis. Lihtne lahendus võiks olla ettepanekus, et teaduslikus rekonstruktsioonis tuleks neile mõistetele anda erinevad nimetused. Siiski — lõppkokkuvõtteks soovitame teistsugust lahendust.

Suures mängus Kultuur vs. Loodus on “tekst” vastandatuna “mitte-tekstile” alati selle teenistuses, et määrata, mis on “sees” ja mis “väljas”. Kuid kriteeriumid on suuresti lahknevad. Posner on lahknevushierarhiat (kahtlemata kõige ilmsemat) selgesti kirjeldanud, viies meid üldtunnusta-

tud kirjalikest keelemärkidest, esmajoones keelemärkide kombinatsioonidest ja igasugustest lineaarsetest märgikombinatsioonidest, kõigi niisuguste märkide juurde, mida saab korrata, st elementide juurde, mida saab käsitleda kui teatud tüüpi esindavaid märke. Me lisasime sellele hierarhiale mõned vahepealsed astmed, mis on märkimisväärsed neisse kombinatsioonidesse puutuvalt, mis pole lineaarsed ning nende reeglite suhtes, mis ei kehti kombinatsioonidele; oleme sedastanud ka erinevused märkide ja tüüpide kahe suhestatusviisi vahel.

Selle artikli üks keskseid arutlustemasid on aga tekstuaalsuse teine hierarhia, mille aluseks on see, mis nõuab interpretatsiooni ning mis on seejärel omakorda allutatud interpretatsioonile. Eelnevalt jaotub see kaheks liiniks, mis ei pruugi olla paralleelsed: see, mida saab interpreteerida teatud süsteemides (nt kunstis) ning see, mida peaks interpreteerima teatud vaatepunktist — võibolla seepärast, et ta on kommenteeritav ja/või seetõttu, et teda peetakse oma žanri näidisteoseks. Need kaks joont lahknevad juba Tartu koolkonna klassikalises näites Peeter Esimesest, milles see, mis on kõige valmimalt arusaadav ning see, mida vaadeldakse kui interpreteerimist vajavat, on vaevu samased: kui läänelikustatud Peetri kasvatamine ka polnud, näib tõenäosena, et vene märgid ja käitumisprogrammid olid tema jaoks kergemini interpreteeritavad kui õhtumaised; samuti ka ta “tekstid” valmimalt arusaadavamad, kuid ometi pidas ta Lääne käitumist ja märke enda “tekstideks” selles mõttes, et nood väärtsid interpreteerimist.

Väidame, et Tartu koolkonna mudel esindab prototüüpset juhtumit, kus piirid erinevate vastandpaaride vahel alati kattuvad (ruumis, ajas, kus iganes): siin ilmneb piir nende märkide ja käitumismallide vahel, millest on võimalik aru saada ning millest pole, samas kohas piirina nende vahel, mis on antud kultuuri või grupi vaatepunktist interpreteerimist vajavad ja mis mitte. Nii olid slavofiilide jaoks vana-vene tekstid ainukesed, millest võis täienisti aru saada (vastandina lääne “mittetekstidele”) ja ka ainukesed, mis olid interpreteerimisvaeva väärt; kuid see harmoonia ei kehti enam Peeter Suurele rakendatud mudelis.

Me kasutame “prototüüpi” tähenduses nagu kasutas Rosch: enim võimalik omaduste kokkulangemiste juhtum. Kuid see tähendab, et on palju juhtumeid, kus see kokkulangemine aset ei leia, ning need juhtumid võivad osutada kultuurisemiootikas tõepoolest huvitavaks, nagu kinnitab seda ka näide Peeter Suurest, mis on varasemaid näiteid kultuurisemiootika rakendustest reaalsele ajaloofaktile.