Semiotics of mediation
Theses

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Abstract. Semiotics of mediation is based on comparative analysis of mediation processes, on typology of forms of mediation and on the subsequent complementary analysis of culture. Not only does cultural analysis that is based on semiotics of mediation proceed from communication processes, it also searches for possibilities of correlation between concepts of describability, analysability, translatability. Depending on the strategy of mediation semiotics it is possible to create an overview of the main parameters of cultural analysis and to specify the boundaries of semiotic analysis of culture. The main types of mediation are simultaneously parameters of cultural analysis. The main types include autocommunicative mediation, metalingual mediation, intertextual mediation, interdiscursive mediation, and inter- or transmedial mediation. Typology of mediation types facilitates the understanding of the autocommunicative aspect of culture and creates the basis for analysing communication processes not on the level of the immediate sender and receiver but as part of the culture's communication with itself. Semiotics of mediation starts from semiotic mediation and ends with a culture of mediation in which one and the same cultural language or text operates as a means of dialogue with itself, as a means of communication with others, as part of some textual system or discourse, or as a transmedial phenomenon. Semiotics of mediation is a means of studying the correlation between implicit semiotic mediation and forms of explicit semiotic mediation, thus complementing cultural semiotic study of culture.

1. Semiotics of culture is one of the fields of semiotics searching for its disciplinary identity, which it has been doing for more than forty years already. Meanwhile, semiotics of culture has been strongly related to the development of general semiotics. One of the examples could be Roman Jakobson's endeavour to create a new science with three distinct disciplinary levels:
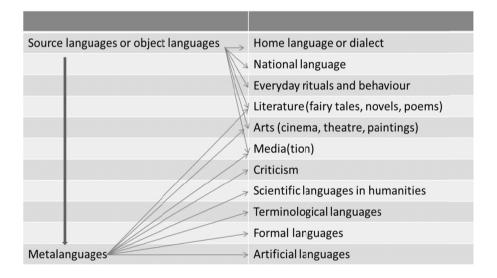(1) study in communication of verbal messages = linguistics;

(2) study in communication of any messages = semiotics (communication of verbal messages implied);

(3) study in communication = social anthropology jointly with economics (communication of messages implied). (Jakobson 1971[1967]: 666.)
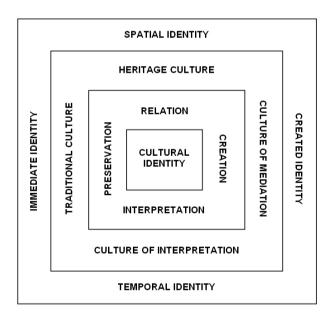
Within the same period, Umberto Eco's work *A Theory of Semiotics* was published. In the preface, dated with the years 1967–1974, Eco distinguishes between two theories: a theory of codes and a theory of sign production. In relation to the former he stresses: "In its first part, devoted to a theory of codes, I have tried to propose a restricted and unified set of categories able to explain verbal and non-verbal devices and to extend the notion of sign-function to various types of significant units, so-called signs, strings of signs, texts and macro-texts..." (Eco 1977: viii). Roland Barthes comes very close to this logic in his *S/Z* from 1973, where he differentiates between the code in general, the code of actions, the empiric code, the hermeneutic code, the cultural or referential code as being simultaneously present in a single literary work (Barthes 2002: 18–20, 261–262).

2. In the collective programme of the Tartu–Moscow School from 1973, semiotics of culture is defined as "...the study of the functional correlation of different sign systems. From this point of view particular importance is attached to questions of the hierarchical structure of the languages of culture...". On the one hand, this approach synthesizes the views of Jakobson, Eco and Barthes. On the other hand, 'sign system' and 'language' become synonyms in this context, and the notion of language is metaphorized, especially, when the notion of modelling system is added. A field of notions emerges: language – sign system – modelling system, to which a differentiation of object language and metalanguage (descriptive language) is added. The Tartu–Moscow School does not represent a unified system of knowledge in semiotics of culture. Nevertheless, Juri Lotman was searching for a disciplinary synthesis – a fact that was first noticed by Karl Eimermacher who entitled his introduction to the German collection of Juri Lotman's works as "Ju. M. Lotman. Bemerkungen zu einer Semiotik als integrativer Kulturwissenschaft" (Eimermacher 1974) ("J. M. Lotman. Notes to a semiotic version of integrative culturology"). 'Integrative' is an appropriate word, taking into account Lotman's special position in the typological studies of culture. If we try

to summarize his works from the 1970s, we get the following picture. According to Lotman, the typology of culture should be based on the universals of culture. The most universal feature of human cultures is the need for self-description. Every culture has its own specific means for it, its own languages of description. The descriptive languages facilitate cultural communication, perpetuate cultural experience and model cultural memory. What the coherence of culture is based on, is the repetition and interpretation of the same things. The more descriptive languages a culture has, the richer the culture is. Consequently, every culture is describable as a hierarchy of object languages and descriptive languages, where the initial object language is a so-called home language and is surrounded by semiotic systems related to everyday rituals and bodily techniques. There are certain languages of culture that can serve the functions of both object language and metalanguage from the point of view of everyday cultural experience:

Source languages or object languages	Home language or dialect
	National language
	Everyday rituals and behaviour
	Literature (fairy tales, novels, poems)
	Arts (cinema, theatre, paintings)
	Media(tion)
	Criticism
	Scientific languages in humanities
	Terminological languages
	Formal languages
Metalanguages	Artificial languages

While home language, native language and everyday rituals as semiotic mediation are object languages, the experience of literature, art and media can be both object and metalinguistic, depending on their position in and on their impact on a person's (especially child's) life. In an ordinary situation it can be claimed that literature, arts and media channels depict a certain reality; criticism interprets it in a language of the given medium that is easily

understandable for the audiences; the humanities do this in their metalanguage in which strict terms exist alongside with metaphors; and exact and natural sciences do this, using strict terminological systems ranging to formal languages and artificial languages.

Humans acknowledge their relations to the world by means of object languages and shape their individual identities by learning and using metalanguages. Culture does the same. The more descriptive languages there are in culture, the more numerous are the possibilities for self-identification and the constitution of a cultural identity. The immediate identity is based on object languages, the created identity on metalanguages. The immediate identity is thus born out of a living cultural environment or traditional culture, which turns into a culture of mediation in the process of human development. On the other hand, metalanguages form a culture of interpretation, and relations with the lost past remain in the realm of heritage culture.

Identity becomes the implicit key term of the semiotics of culture: as human identity in culture, the identity of cultural texts and languages, a culture's own identity and the identity of the researcher of culture. First, cultural identity means the relationship of immediate and created identities in time and space.

This relationship is dependent in its turn on the relationship between traditional culture that is inseparable from everyday life, heritage culture that belongs to the past, school, the culture of interpretation formed by cultural research and criticism, and the culture of mediation that influences the consumption of culture. Seen against this background, cultural identity depends on the relation between the preserved and the created, or between the old and the new, in the life of a human being or of a culture. From another aspect, cultural identity is expressed in the ways of merging the contemporary and the heritage culture, or in the specificity of interpreting of one's own present and past. These keywords constitute the field of cultural identity and this field in turn forms an implicit background system for semiotics of culture.

From the position of a complex understanding of cultural identity, culture has to be understood as a relation between traditional, heritage, interpretative and mediational cultures. In understanding identity it is important to distinguish between the immediate, created, temporal and spatial identities. These parameters of culture and identity make the definition of cultural identity possible through four processes: preservation, creation, interpretation and relating. Thus, they facilitate the understanding of culture in a process based on mediational activity.

3. The similarity between the notions of (cultural) language and sign system in semiotics of culture, makes it possible to distinguish between two typological approaches. The first distinction is based on the juxtaposition of primary and secondary modelling systems:

I.   Language as a primary modelling system
II. Secondary modelling systems:
    1. language as a higher sign system (myth, literature, poetry)
    2. language as a metalanguage or a part of metalanguage (art, music, dance, etc. criticism and history)
    3. language as a model or analogue (language of film, dance, music, painting etc.)

Proceeding from this classification, language as a primary modelling system is the humans' main means of thinking and communicating. As a secondary modelling system, language is the preserver of the culture's collective experience and the reflector of its creativity. As a metalanguage, natural language is

the translator and interpreter of all nonverbal systems, and from the methodological perspective, especially during the 1960s and 1970s, language offered cultural analysis a possibility of searching for discrete (linguistic) elements also in such fields of culture where natural language either does not belong to the means of expression, or does it only partially.

The second distinction is based on the possibility of differentiating between the statics and the dynamics of cultural languages:
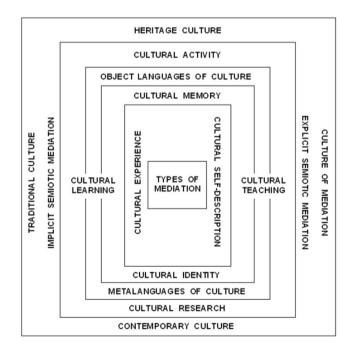
I.   Statics:
1. continual (iconic-spatial, nonverbal) languages
2. discrete languages (verbal languages)
II. Dynamics:
1. specialization of cultural languages
2. integration of cultural languages:
    (a) self-descriptions and meta-descriptions
    (b) creolization

While the level of statics is based on the distinction between verbal and nonverbal languages, the level of dynamics is related to different paces of development of the different parts of culture. This means that during any given period in culture there are certain fields where there is balance between creation and interpretation (criticism, theory, history) and it is possible to speak about specialization and the identity of the field. At the same time, there are fields where, either due to the fast pace of development or for other reasons, a split between creation and interpretation brings along the need to integrate the field into culture. This can be done in two main ways – by using the creators' self-descriptions also for general interpretation, or by borrowing tools of analysis from other fields and, combining them, creating new creolized languages of description.

4. Cultural identity is based on relations and relations are based on the processes of mediation in culture. The importance of the processes of mediation, their fast transformation in time and their importance for understanding culture as a whole have created the need for systematic description. If the functional correlation of different sign systems in culture can be regarded as the main object of research for semiotics of culture, this is a correlation created in processes of communication that simultaneously are processes of mediation.

Semiotics of culture leads us to semiotics of mediation. Semiotics of mediation begins with the comparative analysis of cultures and a search for universal characteristics in order to typologize cultures. The peculiarity of Juri Lotman's semiotics of culture is expressed in his collection of papers from 1973 titled *Articles on the Typology of Culture 2* (*Статьи по типологии культуры. Вып. 2*), which elevates every culture's need for self-description to the status of a cultural universal): "The need is realized on the metacultural level in the creation of self-descriptive texts which can be regarded as grammars that culture creates for describing oneself" (Lotman 1973: 5).

Understanding the types of mediation starts from distinguishing implicit semiotic mediation from explicit semiotic mediation. The former operates in traditional culture, the latter in culture of mediation. Both in the case of traditional culture as well as in that of culture of mediation, the relatedness with contemporary culture and heritage culture is important.

The importance of self-description in culture also means that an important feature of culture is being simultaneously an environment of learning and a

system of teaching. The complementarity of learning and teaching begins with the activity of learning object languages and saving them in cultural memory and leads to the cultivation of metalanguages of culture within the studies of culture or within the acknowledgement of culture as the basis for identity. The experience of culture, together with cultural self-description as a way of conscious recognition and mediation of the experience, form the basis for typologizing mediation.

5. The basis for semiotics of mediation is the complementarity of types of mediation. In order to speak about types of mediation, one has to start from the arrival of the term in science in the works of Lev Vygotsky: "The central fact of human existence is mediation" (Vygotsky, 1997: 138). In interpreting mediation, the term of semiotic mediation has gained currency, and based on this, in turn, researchers have arrived at distinguishing between explicit and implicit mediation (Wertsch 2007: 180–181). The foundation of semiotics of mediation is still a comparative analysis of the process of mediation, the typology of the forms of mediation and the complementary analysis of culture that stems from it. The analysis of culture within the framework of semiotics of mediation does not stem from communicational processes only, but is also looking for the possibilities of correlations between the notions of describability, analysability and translatability. Proceeding from the strategy of mediational semiotics, it is possible to create a depiction of the main parameters of cultural analysis and to specify the boundaries of semiotic analysis of culture. The main types of mediation are simultaneously also the parameters of cultural analysis:

1. self-communicative mediation (culture as a process of learning, culture as inter- and intra-personal communication);
2. metalingual mediation (culture as a hierarchy of object- and metalanguages, culture as a mechanism and metamechanism on the mythological, artistic and scientific basis);
3. metatextual mediation (culture as a system of texts and metatexts; culture as translation);
4. intertextual mediation (culture as a polylogue between texts);
5. interdiscursive mediation (culture as a hierarchy of discourses);
6. inter- and transmedial mediation (culture as media diversity, culture as a storyworld).

The typology of the modes of mediation facilitates a better understanding of the autocommunicative aspect of culture and generates prerequisites for an analysis of the communicational processes in culture not on the level of the immediate sender and receiver but as a part of the culture's communication to and with oneself. The process of learning and teaching culture as the environment of the generation and development of cultural identity and cultural memory can best be analysed as mediation, for the essence of mediation stems from the different levels of conventionality that are created by the metalanguages, textual collections, discourses and media in the processes of communication. Semiotics of media begins with semiotic mediation or with the conventionality of words in the signification of a given world, and ends with the culture of mediation where one and the same cultural language or one and the same text operates as a means of dialogue with oneself, as a means of communication with others, as part of a textual system or discourse, or as a transmedial phenomenon. In its simplest shape, semiotics of mediation is a means of studying the correlation of the forms of implicit semiotic mediation and explicit semiotic mediation, and, as such, it supplements cultural semiotic study of culture.

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Семиотика опосредования

Основой семиотики опосредования является сопоставительный анализ процессов опосредования, типология форм опосредования и последующий комплементарный анализ культуры. Основанный на семиотике опосредования анализ культуры занимается не только коммуникационными процессами, но и ищет корреляцию между понятиями описываемость, анализируемость и переводимость. На основе стратегии семиотики опосредования можно создать представление об основных параметрах анализа культуры и уточнить границы семиотического анализа культуры. Главные типы опосредования одновременно являются параметрами анализа культуры. В число главных типов входят автокоммуникативное, метаязыковое, метатекстовое, интертекстовое, интердискурсивное, интер- и трансмедийное опосредование. Типология типов опосредования помогает лучше понимать автокоммуникативный аспект культуры и создает предпосылки для анализа коммуникационных процессов в культуре не на уровне отправителя и получателя, а в рамках автокоммуникации культуры. Семиотика опосредования начинается с семиотического опосредования и кончается культурой опосредования, где один и тот же язык или текст культуры является средством диалога с самим собой, средством общения с другими, элементом текстовой системы или дискурса, трансмедийным явлением. Семиотика опосредования является средством исследования корреляции между имплицитным семиотическим опосредованием и формами эксплицитного опосредования, дополняя тем самым изучение культуры в рамках семиотики культуры.

Vahendussemiootika

Vahendussemiootika aluseks on vahendusprotsesside kõrvutav analüüs, vahendusvormide tüpoloogia ja sellest lähtuv komplementaarne kultuurianalüüs. Vahendussemiootiline kultuurianalüüs ei lähtu üksnes kommunikatsiooniprotsessidest, vaid otsib korrelatsioonivõimalusi mõistete nagu kirjeldatavus, analüüsitavus, tõlgitavus vahel. Vahendussemiootilisest strateegiast lähtuvalt on võimalik luua ettekujutus kultuurianalüüsi põhilistest parameetritest ning täpsustada kultuuri semiootilise analüüsi piire. Vahendamise põhitüübid on ühtlasi kultuurianalüüsi parameetrid. Põhitüüpide hulka kuuluvad autokommunikatiivne vahendus, metakeeleline vahendus, metatekstiline vahendus, intertekstiline vahendus, interdiskursiivne vahendus ja inter- või transmeedialine vahendus. Vahendustüüpide tüpoloogia aitab paremini mõista kultuuri autokommunikatiivset aspekti ning loob eeldused kultuuris aset leidvate kommunikatsiooniprotsesside analüüsiks mitte vahetu saatja ja vastuvõtja tasandil, vaid osana kultuuri suhtlemisest iseendaga. Vahendussemiootika algab semiootilisest vahendusest ja lõpeb vahenduskultuuriga, kus sama kultuurikeel või -tekst toimib dialoogivahendina iseendaga, kommunikatsioonivahendina teistega, mingi tekstisüsteemi või diskursuse osana või transmeedialisena. Vahendussemiootika on implitsiitse semiootilise vahendamise ja eksplitsiitsete semiootilise vahendamise vormide korrelatsiooni uurimise vahend, täiendades sellisena kultuurisemiootilist kultuuri-uurimist.