

# Gustav Shpet's deep semiotics: A science of understanding signs

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**Abstract.** The article examines the implicit tradition of *deep semiotics* in Russia initiated by Gustav Shpet, a Russian philosopher of language. Shpet's semiotic approach was developed synchronously with the major lines of European and American semiotics (Saussurian and Peircean), but has not been sufficiently known or studied. The recent publication of previously unknown papers by Shpet makes this Russian philosopher an advanced figure on the Russian semiotic scene. Shpet was one of the first Russian scholars to use the term 'semiotics', by which he meant a "general ontological study of signs". Shpet used this term in his work *History as a Problem of Logic* as early as in 1916. Shpet's main work on semiotics, the book *Language and Sense* (1920s), traced back the origins of semiotic thinking and laid the foundations for new semiotics, by which he meant a science of understanding signs. It is here that Shpet spoke of the ontological study of a sign, calling this study *semiotics*, or else *characterics*, and raising the issue of the *semiotic mind*.<sup>1</sup>

**Keywords:** deep semiotics, Gustav Shpet, philosophy of language, study of signs

## 1. Gustav Shpet and semiotics

Russian humanities of the 20th century can boast of many groundbreakers in virtually any field of scholarly expertise and critical thought, who worked ahead of or synchronously with their Western counterparts, yet appeared to have a less enviable career on their native soil than their peers from Europe and America. This is also the case with Gustav Shpet (1879–1937), Russian philosopher of language who, apart from making other

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<sup>1</sup> The article is a modified and updated version of the author's earlier publications in Russian (see Feshchenko 2008a) and in French (see Feshchenko 2008b).

valuable contributions to philosophical thought, initiated a particular tradition of *deep semiotics* in Russia. Shpet himself did not use the term ‘deep semiotics’, but the metaphor of depth was omnipresent in his writings on language, signs, and understanding. The main objective of this approach was to study the deep layers of the self and the “depths” of the sign’s structure, that is, the relation of inner and outer dimensions of the sign as a carrier of human cognition. Shpet’s semiotic approach was developed synchronically with the major lines in European and American semiotics (loosely speaking, the Saussurian and Peircean ones), but is not sufficiently known and studied. The recent publications of previously unknown papers by Shpet makes this philosopher an advanced figure on the Russian semiotic scene.

Until quite recently, Shpet’s name rarely came up in semiotic studies. References to his works occasionally appeared only in outlines of the history of Russian and Soviet semiotics. The Russian semiotician Vyacheslav Ivanov was the first to highlight Shpet’s role in semiotics, characterizing him as the “first Russian philosopher to give a detailed justification of a need to study signs as a specific domain of scientific inquiry and to develop the foundations of a phenomenological and hermeneutical approach to it” (Ivanov 1999[1976]: 681). Alongside with Pavel Florensky and Andrey Bely, Shpet was mentioned among those pioneers who undertook a general synthesis of semiotic ideas about literature, arts, and culture in the early 20th century (Freiberger-Sheikholeslami 1980). What proved to be most notable was Shpet’s ideas derived from Edmund Husserl about signs as a “general layer” which determines the original assumptions of any social and historical knowledge. Also noted were his attempts of semiotic interpretation of aesthetics in “Aesthetic fragments” (“Esteticheskie fragmenty”; see Shpet 2007[1923]), which envisaged the aesthetic object – such as the word in poetry – as a multi-layered complex sign. In 1982, during the Soviet years, the journal *Sign Systems Studies* (*Trudy po znakovym sistemam*) published Shpet’s article “Literature” (“Literatura”; Shpet 1982) that he had planned to publish in the *Dictionary of Artistic Terms* in the 1920s (Shpet 1982). However, not much can be said about the influence of Shpet’s legacy on semiotic studies in the 1960s-70s. Shpet’s name appears in recent Russian textbooks on semiotics (Pocheptsov 2001: 204–218; Mechkovskaya 2004: 38–42), and the philosopher’s psychological views on language and the word form the subject of another study guide (Zinchenko 2000). In her book on Shpet, Tat’yana Schedrina very briefly outlines his role in the development of Russian structuralism and semiotics (Schedrina 2004).

Only three of Shpet’s books have been translated into European languages: *Appearance and Sense* into English and French (Shpet 1991; Chpet 2013), *Hermeneutics and Its Problems* into German (Shpet 1993) and *The Inner Form of the Word* into French (Chpet 2007). Besides, the year 2009 saw the publication of a highly valuable edited volume *Gustav Shpet’s Contribution to Philosophy and Cultural Theory* (Tihanov 2009), but this scholarly collection does not contain any specific studies on Shpet’s relevance

in semiotic studies (apart from indirect references to his vision of signs in the context of phenomenology and philosophy of language in Brandist 2009; Radunović 2009; Seifrid 2009). Another important scholarly collection in French (Dennes 2008) includes several articles on Shpet's philosophy of language (Velmezova 2008; Ioffe 2008). Philip T. Grier (2009) has made an interesting account of Shpet's concept of discourse as a philosophical challenge to modern semiotics. In Russia, however, Shpet's major work on semiotics *Language and Sense* was published on the basis of archival material only as recently as ten years ago (Shpet 2005), and we can postulate that Shpet's semiotics is just now beginning to be seriously studied. Shpet's semiotics is addressed in recent Russian publications on Shpet (Schedrina 2004; Lektorskij *et al.* 2006; Dennes *et al.* 2010).

The aim of this article is not to outline the whole spectrum of Shpet's semiotic ideas. I will only concentrate on his general conception of semiotics and discuss the term 'semiotics' as used by Shpet, as well as the basic semiotic categories as treated in his works. I will also give a slightly more detailed account of Shpet's original model of the sign as different from other major sign theories. Finally, I will place his ideas on semiotics within the more extensive tradition of *deep semiotics* in Russia, of which Shpet was one of the pioneers.

## 2. The term 'semiotics' in Shpet's writings

At the time of the publication of Shpet's first essays on the topic of semiotics in the 1910s, the discipline was only just beginning to assert its academic rights, although problems of semiotics had been a subject of discussion in European thought from as early as the Antiquity. Yet Shpet was arguably one of the first Russian thinkers to use the term 'semiotics' outside of medical context. By semiotics he understood an "ontological study of signs in general" (Shpet 2007[1923]: 230). For Shpet, ontology was the core problem for a metaphysics that inquired into life, lived experience, and essences of being. At this point I will stress the attribute 'ontological' which will appear in a more specific context below.

Shpet first introduced the word 'semiotics' in the 1915 article on the history of rationalist philosophy (Shpet 1915). Later, the article was transformed into a chapter of his lengthy treatise *History as a Problem of Logic* (Shpet 2002[1916]). Already in this early essay, he advanced the idea that logic is not able to address historical notions adequately, as these are subject to a specific "semiotic knowledge" which requires its own methodology. According to Shpet, the logic of a historical notion regarded as a certain articulated meaning should be, in effect, a semiotic discipline. The meaning of a historical notion is already a sign in itself, which can only be deciphered through a special kind of hermeneutics. It should be noted, though, that in the beginning Shpet still hesitated about how to name this new science – hermeneutics or semiotics. However, as we shall

see later, in defining this discipline he prioritized not the terminological title as such, but rather its ties with other fields of knowledge involved in the analysis of *understanding* as a historical mechanism. From his point of view, semiotics should be a branch of hermeneutics. Following Wilhelm Dilthey, Shpet understands hermeneutics as a study of the trinary structure “experience-expression-understanding”. The key innovation in Shpet’s hermeneutics was that “he placed the task of a philosophical grounding for the hermeneutic canon squarely within a fundamental analysis of understanding” (Haardt 1993: 127) and that in this he was guided by a “combination of semiotics and hermeneutics within the horizon of a ‘phenomenology of understanding reason’” (Haardt 1993: 136). Shpet analyses signs through a hermeneutical lens (Bird 2009).

What was even more important to him was that semiotics should become an alternative to the studies of logic that do not account for the semiotic essence of historical thinking. Meanwhile, reintroducing the term ‘semiotics’ he, in his own words, adhered more to John Locke<sup>2</sup> than to more modern philosophers dealing with signs, such as, for example, the German thinker Gustav Teichmüller who worked in Tartu (then known as Dorpat) in the 1870s–80s (Shpet 1915: 381)<sup>3</sup>. Peter Steiner (2003: 353) remarks that, according to Shpet, in the historical discourse words are meta-signs or “knots in a truly endless mesh of semiotic permutations, substitutions, reflections”. Hermeneutics understood as semiotics is aimed at undoing these knots.

In his book *History as a Problem of Logic*, Shpet developed the idea of a rapprochement of hermeneutics as a study of understanding, and semiotics as a method of understanding signs. Evidence in a historical inquiry is not a mere “observation”, he notes, but always a sign subject to interpretation. Reasoning about how historical knowledge is created he wrote, “historical knowledge is never a sensual or rational knowledge, or a knowledge of the outer or inner experience, it is always knowledge assuming comprehension and interpretation as a means of comprehension. It can be agreed to call this kind of knowledge semiotic knowledge. It requires its own gnoseology”<sup>4</sup> (Shpet 2002[1916]: 287). History, for Shpet, deals with the word as a sign, which is of interest to the historian primarily because of its meaning, i.e. that what the word communicates. A need for hermeneutics arises when, “a will arises consciously to realize the role of the word as a sign of communication” (Shpet 1989: 234). This need leads to a fundamentally semiotic approach. In *Aesthetical Fragments* Shpet wrote that “the theory of the word as a sign is an objective of formal ontology, or the study of objects, as a branch of semiotics” (Shpet 2007[1923]: 208). Here and there, Shpet equalled semiotics to characteristics,

<sup>2</sup> Shpet specifically referred to Chapter 21 of Book IV of *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, where Locke distinguished semiotics as a separate science – a doctrine of signs.

<sup>3</sup> Shpet also made a reference to Teichmüller in his essay *Consciousness and its Master*.

<sup>4</sup> Translations from Gustav Shpet are mine – V. F.

apparently referring to Leibniz's doctrine. He also raised the question of a "semiotic mind" as he called it.

Later on, in the 1920s, Shpet wrote the book *Language and Sense* where he traced the origins of semiotic thinking and laid the foundations for new semiotics, now more clearly defined as a 'study of understanding signs'. It should be specially emphasized that semiotics for Shpet is not just a study of signs or sign systems, but a study of *understanding* signs: "We should look more closely", he wrote, "at the very fact of the sociohistorical, we should reveal that the sociohistorical is a comprehended sign and is given to us as a sign. The sign in general and the social-historical sign, in particular, have a common fundamentally ontological nature" (Shpet 2005: 476). We can see from these remarks that Shpet treated semiotics from a broad social-historical perspective. The origin of any historical knowledge lies in the word and the word "is the sign from which the historian approaches his object with its specific contents constituting the meaning and sense of this sign" (Shpet 2002[1916]: 303). What he was guided by in his thought is the problem of understanding that lies on the border between semiotics, hermeneutics and phenomenology.

In opposing formal logics, based on Immanuel Kant and analyses of forms of expression beyond sense and understanding, Shpet drew on German and Austrian philosophy of language, represented by Anton Marty and Heinrich Gomperz, both representatives of the Brentano school of philosophy, and the authors of a theory of semasiology as a study of functions and meanings of linguistic means (Marty 1908; Gomperz 1908). Semasiology, Shpet maintained, allows to consider not the sociohistorical origin of a sign (which is the method of formal logics and empirical semiotics), but to categorize the very sociohistorical object in terms of the sign: "All this should be prepared by specifying of the semasiological object in the material and ontological respects, too" (Shpet 2005: 476). Holding that semiotics only studies formal ontology in contrast to the material study of sign varieties Shpet seemed to deny semiotics in favour of semasiology, but made the reservation that "a special task would be a philosophically material study of this issue as an issue of semiotic consciousness" (Shpet 2005: 477). It follows, then, that semiotics should be based on semasiological principles (see Ageeva 2008). Shpet was aware that studying this range of issues requires an elaboration of specific terminology. In *Language and Sense*, he proceeded to defining the key terms and concepts of his semiotical theory.

### 3. Semiotic concepts according to Shpet

Let us recall the classic definition of the sign by Saint Augustine: “a sign is a thing which, over and above the impression it makes on the senses, causes something else to come into the mind as a consequence of itself” (Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine* 2.1)<sup>5</sup>. Building upon this definition, Shpet pointed out that the main philosophical problem of reality or, more precisely, of the relation of the ideal and the real, is fundamentally related to the problem of the *sign*. However, one cannot define the sign *a priori*, he continued, without addressing a whole range of semiotic and phenomenological issues.

In the first instance, the problem Shpet was interested in was the problem of an *object* and the *form* of its expression. Does any object possess “semiotic properties” or not? This was Shpet’s first concern. If any object could be said to possess semiotic properties, then “we would have to consider the object implied by this sign as a sign of something else, in its turn” (Shpet 2005: 492). This would result in an infinite semiotic regression: “Any object, then, would be essentially semantic in its character: any point in its logical layer would correspond to a point in its ontological nature”. Shpet is not satisfied with this kind of semiotic theory. According to him, formal semiotic analysis does not settle the problem, and there is still doubt “whether there is something else in the object that would not be reduced to its semiotic properties, for is the sign given to us not only as a sign but also as a certain physical thing, for example?” (Shpet 2005: 492–493). In defining the sign, therefore, he proposed to go beyond formal logic and resort to semiotics as an *ontological* study of signs.

As an object of double essence, the sign refers both to the actual empirical world and the ideal plane comprehended in thinking. However, the relation between these two planes is not limited to mere relation between the individual and the kind: “To expose this relation as an object *sui generis* and to specify the experience correlative to it – this is where the magnetic pole of the problem resides” (Shpet 2005: 512). It should be made clear, Shpet noted, what exactly makes the sign two-faced and what specifically distinguishes it from the whole sphere of real objects: “A ‘sign’ is correlative to a ‘meaning.’” It should be shown, Shpet writes, “what is this correlation about”. The sign acts as a term of correlation, at the same time being a certain object, a thing. “Is any thing a sign or can any thing be a sign? What makes a thing a sign...? [...] A sign given to us as an object of sensual reality – is it a *thing* or a *property*?” (Shpet 2005 512–513). These are the questions raised and discussed by Shpet.

The chapter titles of the book *Language and Sense* outline the conceptual framework of Shpet’s semiotics: “Sign as subject of correlation”, “Sign as object of actual world”, “Sign as correlation”, “Sign-meaning as correlation *sui generis* and its system”, “Differentiation of signs”, “Signs in attributive reality” and so on. Without entering a detailed discussion

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine’s text can be accessed at <http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/augustine/ddc.html>.

of all of them here, I will just comment on the focal point of this conception. Through the concept of *sign* Shpet seeks to get an answer to his main questions: What is a notion? What is a word? What is a meaning/sense?

#### 4. From the structure of sign to the structure of the sense: Shpet's dynamic model

Shpet's original conception of the sign differs substantially from most other conceptions prior or contemporary to him, namely those of Charles Sanders Peirce, Ferdinand de Saussure, Gottlob Frege, C. K. Ogden – I. A. Richards and Karl Bühler. The core difference lies in Shpet's *ontologism* and orientation towards the process of *understanding* signs. As for Saussure, he never actually considered the problem of communicating signs<sup>6</sup>. Frege only established the basic scheme of the sign's reference to reality. Peirce and Bühler made a move towards the communicative function of the sign and the problem of the interpretant. However, neither Peirce nor Bühler accounted for the authorial, or personological, nature of human semiosis. Curiously enough, Bühler was, as much as Shpet, drawing on Marty's studies in semasiology. However, Shpet's conclusions differ significantly from Bühler's, whose classification of signs falls short of both ontological and hermeneutical dimensions. Moreover, Shpet made a step towards theorizing the sign in the act of artistic and literary communication, a problem Ogden and Richards were approaching without ever questioning the inner structure of the sign in creative activity. We might call Shpet's semiotics an alternative path taken towards *deep semiotics*.

Shpet began his reasoning about signs and sense by commonly accepted postulates. For example, the sign was seen as having *contents* and *meanings*: "By content and meaning we eventually mean the same thing, but depending mainly on whether we address it on the part of the object or the sign" (Shpet 2005: 477). According to him, this determines the correlativity of ontology and logic. Meaning is as correlative to sign as content to form. Meanwhile, the formational role of the object in contents (ontological forms) differs from the same role of the sign (logical forms). Shpet stressed the specific ontological position of the sign among other objects, which results from the fact that "the sign is a certain object as such with its contents and at the same time it acts as a sign of other subject contents" (Shpet 2005: 478). Shpet called this relation of the sign to its contents a "semantic" or "semasiological" correlation, differentiating it from the semiotic properties of the sign. Marty's and Gomperz's semasiology serves for him as a quest for sense in the essence, before the essence manifests itself as a sign. He explains this in his essay "Wisdom or

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<sup>6</sup> Shpet might have had an idea about Saussure's study of signs from the discussions held in the Moscow Linguistic Circle. However, at any rate, Saussure's argument for the sign's arbitrary nature seems to contradict Shpet's own point about the "inner" dimension of the sign.

reason”: “we regard essence itself as a sign [...] the semasiological approach to essence itself forces one *eo ipso* to search in it, as in a ‘foundation’ (*nachale*), for *sense*, which opens up before us as the rational basis (*razumnoe osnovanie*) deposited in essence itself; here essence in its content proceeds out of reason (*razuma*) as out of its founding principle” (cited in Seifrid 2009: 171). Therefore, Shpet distinguishes two types of relations within the structure of the sign: semiotic (relation of the sign as an object of empirical reality to its specific contents) and semasiological (relation of the sign to the referential meaning preceding the sign’s objective form).

What is the correlation between sign and meaning, form and content, about? Shpet explained it in philosophical terms: “The specificity of the sign as an agent of correlation should be seen in the fact that upon being distanced from its given sensual being, for example, its physical being, it is in the forms of ideal being but not in the new forms of the same status of being, that it leads us to other terms of relation, to a correlate” (Shpet 2005: 518). In purely semiotic terms, this problem would appear as the complexity of the sign’s structure, the sign being an agent of correlation of the signifier and the signified. Again, what Shpet stressed was the task of determining the ontological (semasiological) properties of the sign itself, rather than its logical and formal properties.

The category of *correlation* is a key point in Shpet’s conception of the sign. The “ontological status of the sign” was seen in that the sign is “not only the agent of relation, correlative to its meaning but also a certain relation in itself implying its specific terms” (Shpet 2005: 520). What did Shpet stress in differentiating the two notions: ‘agent of relation’ and ‘relation as such’? ‘Agent of relation’ is a *static* category, whereas relation itself is a *dynamic* concept. ‘Relation’ in Shpet’s sense meant the process of reference. Sign as an agent of relation is informed by its “outer forms”, whereas relation itself may be analysed through “inner forms”, as Shpet called them.

The difference between outer and inner forms was the subject of Shpet’s later book *Inner Form of the Word* (1927). Based on Wilhelm von Humboldt’s seminal concept of ‘the inner form of language’ and its further elaboration by Alexander Potebnya towards a more empirical understanding of ‘the inner form of the word’ as the word’s etymological meaning, Shpet proceeded to study the inner form as an “algorithm” of the word’s formation. He distinguished between the inner form of the concept in logic (“inner logical form”) and the inner form of the trope in poetry (“inner poetic form”). According to him, inner forms are carriers of semantic structures inherent to words in their discursive realization. The word as a unity of its outer and inner forms constitutes “the only completely universal sign”, capable of replacing any other sign, and provides “the ontological prototype for every other social or cultural artifact”, as Thomas Seifrid (2005: 163) summarizes Shpet’s philosophy of the sign.

In the semiotic context of *Language and Sense*, the difference between outer and inner forms was important in order to explain the structure of the sign. Shpet constructed the following table:

Table 1. Outer and inner forms of the word (Shpet 2005: 531).

Forms	outer	<i>gestaltqualitäten</i>
	inner	form-generating elements forms of relation

As we can see, Shpet described inner forms as forms of relation itself, whereas outer forms, otherwise called “forms of combination” by Shpet, refer to the empirical and material substance of the sign. Projected onto the structure of the sign, this scheme does not look like a dyadic Saussurian model or a triadic model according to Peirce, Frege or Bühler. Shpet’s model represents a *dynamic* process of semiosis rather than a static entity.

Why is this model dynamic? The point is that the outer form of the sign is finite. But each sign is always a means of effecting a goal, producing an idea, which means that from the static perception of the outer form we proceed to establishing a relation between the means and the ends as a subjective action: “From perceiving the outer form of finiteness I proceed to the relation of the idea’s self-implementation” (Shpet 2005: 553–554). This process is, indeed, dynamic, as it implies movement from intention to implementation. Shpet illustrated this dynamics through a very simple example of how words change into utterances: “A ‘part’ of the word moves and advances to the ‘full word’; the ‘full word’ – to a ‘collocation’, for example, to a sentence or a larger utterance; the utterance – still further and more extensively and so on. The part results in the whole, the ‘thing’ – in a ‘relation’, the relation – in a higher-order relation; and in whatever categories – logical, grammatical or metaphysical – we express this essential characteristics of the word, *dynamism* and movement become clear” (Shpet 2005: 584). The word as a sign is fundamentally dynamic, according to this conception.

The *word* as a sign correlative to its meanings thus becomes a *notion*: “As such, the sign is no longer a means of effecting a thought [...] the sign becomes thought itself, a notion, an idea, a content” (Shpet 2005: 554). The meaning implemented in the sign produces sense. Shpet’s semiotics differed from other traditions contemporary to him in that it introduced the category of *purpose* into semiosis, only several decades later actualized by classics of pragmatic semiotics such as Charles Morris, Émile Benveniste and John Austin. As early as in the 1920s Shpet was paving the way for the *semiotics of understanding*, which conceptualized the sign within the dynamic process of sense-production.

## 5. Deep semiotics: an implicit tradition in Russian philosophy of language

The notion of the ‘inner form of the word’ mentioned above lies at the core of Shpet’s philosophy of language. More specifically, it allows analysing the structure of the sign in its *depth*, and in the very relation between sign and sense. It is worth noting that Shpet’s conception of the inner form was introduced in his study of aesthetic forms in literature, more precisely, in poetry. According to him, poetic language differs from ordinary speech in that it serves not the pragmatic purposes of everyday communication but, as Shpet put it, “its own inner purposes of self-development”. In other words, in the artistic semiosis self-communication dominates. Poetic language implements a systematic authorial intention. The inner form is the rule of the image’s production. This rule, Shpet explained, is nothing else but a device, a method and a principle of selection with a purpose of expressing, communicating and transferring of sense. By introducing the term “inner form” Shpet sought to analyse the forms of human creativity in language. Shpet’s semiotics described the signs used by a particular person or author with a particular creative goal. Considering the sign as a perceived thing or, more importantly, as a comprehended thing we “go deep into the thing itself”, as he put it (Shpet 2005: 559). The metaphor of depth is ubiquitous in Shpet’s writings. For example, he uses it when he metaphorically describes the sign as a cabbagehead with multiple layers and leaves covering the cabbage stalk.

Deep semiotics in this sense allows for a transition from a two-dimensional analysis to a stereometrical one, providing for the depth of an object analysed. This kind of analysis digs deep towards the sources of sense-production in its dynamics. To a certain extent, this kind of analysis may remind of generative, or transformational, grammar developed in the 1970–80s, which distinguished between “deep” and “surface” structures of language. Poetics also developed a similar generative approach based on both Chomsky’s ‘deep structures’ and Greimas’ studies of the structure of literary text (see, e.g., Van Dijk 1971; Scheglov, Zholkovsky 1987). The Danish poet and semiotician Per Aage Brandt even coined the term ‘deep semiotics’ to point at the dynamic nature of linguistic transformations in grammar (Brandt 1989). What is meant by a Shpetian tradition of ‘deep semiotics’ is somewhat different, though. As Grigorij Tul’chinsky (2003: 73) suggests, deep semiotics implies the extension of the theory of sign systems by means of the categories of conceptualization and meaning-making. Such an approach “is similar to the transition from two-dimensional, surface analysis to a stereometrical one, providing for the depth of analysis” (Tul’chinsky 2003: 73). The object of deep semiotics in this sense would be sign systems in creative processes. It is exactly the creative potentialities of the word as a sign that Shpet was mainly interested in.

Shpet was to abandon his philosophical and semiotic studies in the 1930s. Most of his writings were left unpublished and remained so long after his execution by the

Soviet state in 1937. He did not manage to elaborate his semiotic methodology any further, nor did he have the opportunity to discuss it with a large academic public. Meanwhile, in Russia Shpet was not the only one working in the field of semiotics, poetics and philosophy of language. Features of deep semiotics are also present in the works of his contemporaries – for example, the poet Andrey Bely and the theologian Pavel Florensky. Modified versions of the conception of the inner form may be found in Wassily Kandinsky's theory of art, as well as in scholarly writings by Lev Vygotsky, Mikhail Bakhtin, Vladimir Voloshinov and others (for a larger context of deep semiotics in Russian philosophy of language see Feshchenko 2005). All these authors of the early 20th century Russian theory sought to analyse semiotic properties of the inner self (as expressed in culture, literature and the arts). Some of these authors were artists or poets themselves (such as Kandinsky, Bely, Malevich, Eisenstein) and implemented the deep-semiotic principles in their art (for the links between semiotics and the Russian Avant-Garde see Stepanov *et al.* 2006; Feshchenko 2009).

Due to historical circumstances, Gustav Shpet's direct legacy in the tradition of deep semiotics was broken down at the turn of the 1930s–40s. Further developments in this direction could be the subject of another paper. By further developments of Shpet's semiotic ideas I mean not only their (very rare) reception in post-WWII Russian semiotics but also reactualization of his studies in literary semiotics and semiotic aesthetics. Shpet's approach to problems of the sign may be relevant today in developing further the *semiotics of understanding* as an anthropocentric approach to linguistic and artistic creativity. Today's semiotics is highly concerned with advancing the understanding of human sign systems (Deely 2001; Luure 2006; Petrilli 2009) and the man-machine hermeneutics (Dem'jankov 1998). In a still broader light, Shpet's "deep semiotics" may contribute to understanding the nature of human creativity and cognition in a way similar to how "deep ecology" (Kull 2011) contributes to today's critical environmental concerns. The "depths" of Shpetian semiotics leave much to explore in the context of linguistics, literature and cultural studies.<sup>7</sup>

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### Глубинная семиотика Густава Шпета: наука о понимании знаков

Статья посвящена неявной традиции «глубинной семиотики» в России, ведущей свое происхождение от русского философа языка Густава Шпета. Семиотический подход Шпета развивался синхронно с магистральными линиями европейской и американской семиотики (соссюровской и пирсовской), но к настоящему моменту недостаточно известен и изучен. Недавняя публикация ранее неизвестных работ Шпета выдвигает этого русского философа на авансцену русской семиотики. Шпет одним из первых среди русских ученых стал употреблять термин «семиотика», под которой понимал «общее онтологическое изучение знаков». Шпет импользует этот термин впервые в 1916 году в труде «История как проблема логики». Главная работа Шпета по семиотике – книга «Язык и смысл» (1920-е годы) – прослеживает истоки семиотического мышления и закладывает фундамент новой семиотики, рассматриваемой как науку о понимании знаков. Именно в этой книге Шпет пишет об онтологическом исследовании знака, называя эту дисциплину «семиотикой» и «характеристикой», а также поднимая вопрос о «семиотическом разуме».

### Gustav Špeti süvasemiootika: märkide mõistmise teadus

Artiklis vaadeldakse *süvasemiootika* varjatud traditsiooni Venemaal, millele pani alguse Vene keelefilosoof Gustav Špet. Špeti semiootiline lähenemine kujunes välja üheaegselt Euroopa ja Ameerika semiootika (Saussure'ist ja Peirce'ist lähtuvate) pealiinidega, kuid pole olnud piisavalt tuntud ning seda pole küllaldaselt uuritud. Špeti seni tundmatute tööde hiljutine avaldamine näitab seda Vene filosoofi edasijõudnud kujuna Vene semiootikamaailmas. Špet oli üks esimesi Vene õpetlasi, kes kasutas terminit “semiootika”, mille all ta mõtles “üldist ontoloogilist märgiuurimist”. Špet kasutas seda terminit oma teoses “Ajalugu kui loogika probleem” juba 1916. aastal. Špeti semiootika-alane peateos “Keel ja mõte” (1920) viis tagasi semiootilise mõtlemise päritoluni ning pani aluse uuele semiootikale, mille all ta mõtles märkide mõistmise teadust. Just siin kõneles Špet märgi ontoloogilisest märgiuurimisest, nimetades seda *semiootikaks* või *karakteristikaks*, ning tõstades *semiootilise mõistuse* teema.