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ALEXANDER PIATIGORSKY AND YURI LOTMAN ON TEXT AND FUNCTION (AN EXAMINING ATTEMPT TO UNDERSTAND)

In their article *Text and Function* (1975), A. Piatigorsky and Yu. Lotman address the issue of MUTUAL relationships between the concepts of text and function. They assume the understanding of the concept of text presented in another article by Piatigorsky (which will NOT be discussed here — see 1975: 114—129). Let it therefore be reminded that it was a non-analytic, globalising approach: "Every text . . . can be approached as a SINGLE SIGNAL" (115[1]). A text is a quantum of signalisation, however, it is to be identified with a communication. Thus, to use the language of information theory, the "grain structure" of the message contained in a communication (Seidler 1965: 5—9) is not taken into account here, which should have resulted in the resignation on the concept of code, since the theory of codes is a theory of registering and transmitting messages by means of grain-structured signals. In such a non-analytic interpretation, even the usage of the notion "text" loses its etymological meaning (*textum* — fabric, texture, structure). Instead of saying that something is (or is not) a "text" of a given culture, it would have been enough to say that something is (or is not) an "object" of a given culture. After all, describing "text," Piatigorsky and Lotman emphasise its "capacity to perform as an ELEMENTARY concept" (100), i.e. one that is

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[1]Each number in brackets without any indication refers to a page in this book. The citations come from Ann Shukman's English translation of the article in question (Piatigorsky, Lotman 1978).

undividable, and they define text "for working purposes" as "a CONCRETE OBJECT having its own internal features which cannot be deduced from anything else apart from itself" (101). As seen by the authors, a linguistic expression is a "text" in the linguistic sense, while they use the term text to refer to a "text" in the cultural sense (101), but in my opinion it is rather a "text" in the SEMIOTIC-cultural sense, i.e. in the sense imposed by semioticians, present only in their "semiotic culture."

It should be remarked at this point that in this commentary, we will not be able to CONSTANTLY (continuously) adapt to the rising number of reservations and corrections (e.g. consequently use the term "object" instead of "text"), as it would impede on — from a certain point — the contact with the original article. It should be remembered, though, that our reservations accumulate and SHOULD be taken into account globally, even if then they seem... a noisy crowd. After all, they are a gradual, developing reaction to the crowd of flaws and ambiguities contained in the article.

For the issues discussed in the article, it is inaccurate to say that the text MUST "acquire a MATERIAL form in a certain system of signs ("acquisition")" (100), as the SYSTEM is only of importance where gradual encoding and decoding of information occurs, and not — as is the case here — the mere general recognition of the textuality of a message. It would be enough to mention the WAY (kind) of material fixation, as it CAN perform a text-creating function: for instance, writing something down can make it a text (102), but the same CAN be achieved by consolidating it in community memory (103) or by linguistic "supplementary supraorganisation," if we ascribe to these moments (or to some completely different moments!) the FUNCTION of cultural nobilitation and authoritativisation. Obviously, "liguistic supraorganisation on the utterance plan level" (102) was treated in a non-analytic manner, i.e. not as a way to complicate the content plan, but only as a global indicator of textuality (102). It was, however, intentional of us to mention the SYSTEM OF SIGNALS which comprises the system of texts (since texts function as ELEMENTARY concepts of the system of signals). One cannot describe the relationship of "text" and "function" without a third concept: "system." Here, "culture" is (as we may think at the beginning!) considered systemic, while function and text are intrasystemic concepts. The term "culture" is not, as a matter of fact, used consistently; at times its meaning is narrow, specialized, cross-sectional, determined by the authors — here, "culture" is a given system of culture (101), a type of culture (105); sometimes, however, the meaning is colloquial, broad, "cross-social," as in the following sentence: "In most human cultures, these principles [i.e. various

systemic principles which constitute "cultures" in the narrow sense — *S. D.*] are interwoven" (108).

Władysław Tatarkiewicz wrote about Alfred North Whitehead in the following way:

Even a thinker so well trained in mathematics and natural science as Whitehead formulated no definite and clear statements in metaphysics. In his works, we find a sentence: "It is as true to say that God is permanent and the world fluent, as to say the opposite; to say that God is one and the world many, as to say the opposite; to say that, in comparison with the world, God is actual eminently, as to say the opposite; to say that God transcends the world, as, to say the opposite; to say that God creates the world, as to say the opposite." If this is the final conclusion, then — it must be agreed — it is neither definite, nor inviting to metaphysics" (Tatarkiewicz 1950, vol. 3: 449).[2]

Recognising the MOTIVES of Tatarkiewicz's discontent, let me say the same about Piatigorsky and Lotman: in their works, we find the opinion that culture can be treated either as a "totality of texts" or as a "totality of functions," but the statement is so unclear that it dissuades from culture semiotics (at least practised in this way). In addition, this alternative was not endowed by the authors with the symmetry we would have expected: that culture is either a functionalisation of text or a textualisation of function. The authors say a different thing: should we treat culture as a system of texts, then function is a certain kind (?) of METATEXT; should we treat culture as a system of functions, then text is a DERIVATIVE of function (101). The metatextuality of function is completely incomprehensible. If metalanguage is the "language" of language description and the "language" of scientific definitions (the so called algebra of logic — Ivić 1966: 181), if metalogic is the science of the "language" of logic (or more generally: the structure theory of logic — Czeżowski 1968: 22, Kowalewski 1959: 408), then metatext should (consequently) be a kind of "text" about a text. However, the text itself was defined once as an elementary signal, once as a culturally specified message, and once as a "concrete object." Function, on the other hand, cannot be accurately referred to with similar terms, thus, it cannot be

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[2]It is an opinion similar to that of Immanuel Kant, who said that (because of the impossibility to prove experience) metaphysics is empty for the very reason that it can prove anything: that God exists or the opposite, that souls exist or the opposite, that the world is one or the opposite (Gilson 1968: 162). But, as we know, Piatigorsky and Lotman assume the logical equivalence of concepts, of which any given one can be treated primary, and a certain relativity of concepts being primary. See Lubański 1975: 59, 93—94.

said that function is a "signal" about a signal (= text), a "message" about a message (= text), or an "object" about (?) an object (= text). Moreover, the authors say (inconsistently and unclearly), that (101) the function seems (!) to them EITHER to be "a pure construct" (a research fallacy?) OR an instruction or a possibility of interpretation: "one [which one?! — *S. D.*] in the sense of which a given text may be interpreted," OR what is indicated or presumed by a text: "FUNCTION ... is one [thing] ... in relation to which ... features of a text can be examined as features of the FUNCTION" (could the *circulus in definiendo* be more obvious? — *S. D.*); OR, finally (100), a "mutual relationship [thus, also a relation! — *S. D.*] among the system [of signals? — *S. D.*], its realisation, and the addresser-addressee of the text." In similar cases, the scholastics would say: *Mutliplex est prius distinguendum quam definiendum.*

If function is a "social role," then it cannot be a "pure construct;" if it is a "relationship," then it is neither a "capacity to" (100), nor a "construct," ETC. In this simultaneous multidefinition, the functional, colloquial, personificating ("role," "capacity") sense of "function" was confused with the formal, mathematical, relational or correspondence-related one ("function is a mutual relationship"). There is no point in mentioning the "addresser-addressee of the TEXT" (100), as the article DOES NOT suggest that this factor has any theoretically significant justification when describing the functioning of SYSTEMS (thus, the last segment of the definition can be partially reduced). Likewise, it is pointless to mention the social factor ("the community which creates the text"), as here, "social" only has the meaning "cultural:" the "social role" of the text is its cultural role, and the "social functions of texts in a given culture" (110) are no more and no less than cultural or (more generally) signal functions (see 100). Thus, the sociological dimension of this semiological article is a pure illusion (I do not insist, however, that it must be so).

Indubitably, Piatogorski and Lotman tie two ideas together: that function is a "metatext" and that it allows (?) for the interpretation of a text. But does it really? It can be concluded from the descriptions that function (whatever it is) CREATES the text, makes a message a text, determines the "textuality" of the message etc. But then, we cannot speak logically of the "function of a text" (as it would be a pleonasm). There is no "function of the text." We could only speak of a function assigned to a MESSAGE which MAKES it a text. Unable to agree with the thesis about the metatextuality of function (100), one could ask whether "text" is not a metamessage according to this concept. Text is a functionalised message. There is no text without a function (which

would still be a cultural one), and vice versa: being textual equals being cultural (and functional). Here, the assumption arises that one of the terms is excessive, that (in this description) there is no difference between function and culture, or RATHER: that culture is a certain function; that varieties of function are equivalent to varieties of culture[3] (do extracultural functions exist?). Having this reservation in mind, let us ask what the message gains thanks to its function (i.e. when it becomes a text). The authors' answers are as incoherent and metaphoric as was the case with the question about the function itself. The function makes a message a text, that is, it endows the message with (cultural) existence, (cultural) sense, (cultural) significance, (cultural) value, (cultural) dignity. In this list, one could (must?!) replace the word "cultural" with the word "functional," which will reveal the tautological nature of the authors' answers. "Textuality" means the same as "sense," "existence," "value," "significance." After all, the "written culture" is no more and no less than the functionality of the written message. Cultural = fulfilling a function = meaningful = respected = true. Indeed, these pseudosynonyms are too many.

"Nontext" is a message not fulfilling a function. There is no such thing as "written text" (contrary to 101), but there is a written message, WHICH (in a given culture) is a "text" or (in another) is not. It is pointless to speak of the "text point of view" determining the nature of "truth" (104), as this point of view is simply the "culture," which elevates some kinds of messages to the status of being "true," "textual," "meaningful." According to Piatigorsky and Lotman, the "truthfulness" (= "textuality") is determined by its function; thus, to introduce the concept of "point of view" (= "position") is to introduce new excessive synonyms and to SEEMINGLY develop the theory. An argument which supports my opinion is that the same authors speak of a point of view which is internal or external (to a given culture). The former is one determined by the given culture; it is related to its texts, although is not defined in respect of these texts (as it "defines" them). Likewise, the "value relationship" is the same as "cultural relationship," a relationship defined by the given culture.

It seems that (to reveal and reduce the crowd of synonyms) it must be assumed that culturality was also identified with authoritativeness. After all, the term "true," appearing in the article a couple of times, means here (in the given contexts) no more than "authoritative," demanding respect (or respected). This would have been a very limited (not to say: derailed)

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[3]"The system of text meanings inherent in that culture" (106) means the same as "system [of the meanings] of a given culture."

understanding of "truthfulness."[4] The authorities are not to be questioned here. The sentence "Truthfulness is assigned to a given text" (104) is — once again — a tautology (as a matter of fact, there are plenty of tautologies in the article and it is impossible to list them all), since the authors perceive the words "textual," "true," "functional," "valuable" as synonyms (I call this an overuse of pseudoequivalence). Since they escaped from DEFINING culture (and defined text only "for working purposes," which is a kind of theoretic dodge[5]), we also have to draw conclusions from the ways of use of the word "culture" about meanings which result from them.

I already mentioned that written "culture" is the same as "functionality" (= authoritativeness) of the written form of message. Symmetrically, "oral culture" is the "functionality" (= authoritativeness) of the oral form of message. But since authoritativeness is sometimes assigned with "supplementary supraorganisation" (to a proverb), with an oath (to a declaration), with personal prestige (to a declaration) or with a guarantee of witnesses (declaration) — should we therefore speak of a culture of "supplementary supraorganisation," a culture of oath, of personal prestige, of witnesses etc.? Such a conclusion could be drawn from the article. The "cultures" would then begin to multiply like Memmi's "sociologies" ("sociology of forcing an open door," "sociology of desire," "sociology of imagination," etc. — Memmi 1973: 80—103) and, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT the constant overlapping and connecting of the arguments of oath, dignity, and witness in social practice (!), and the fact that the "cultures" would start to form hardly definable hybrids, THEN, such an understanding of culture is subject to the same criticism (leading to confusion on the verge of absurdity) which Roger Trigg pointed against Kuhn's "paradigms" and S. E. Toulmin's and R. W. Beardsmore's

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[4]Let me mention a remark by Piaget that in the case of little children unilateral respect (i.e. the power of authority) results in a situation where first moral values are a slavish following of the rule imposed, the spirit of which is not understood, but the letter of which is accepted. It is thus the transgression which allows the moral sphere to become autonomous and the rules of conduct to become a system (Piaget 1966: 43).

[5]Among others, Wittgenstein first considered words to be "images of meanings," but later perceived them as tools (hence his claim that one should examine the usage to find the meaning, to which phenomenologists ascribed objective existence; he identified meaning with the manner of use), which referred to the 13th-century rationalist tradition, e.g. to Thomas Aquinas. Ayer considers this identification to be "a step of doubtful value." Since, for example, the analysis of the manner in which a THEOREM is used should not question the theorem itself, because the theorem and its analysis are placed on different levels (reductionism limits an expression about X down to an expression about non-X), then a similar reasoning can be applied on the level of TERMS. See Rosnerowa 1975, Trigg 1977.

"lifestyles" (Trigg 1977: 16, 26, 31—33, 64—65).

Given the fact that the "point of view" is identical with the "function," and the function, as seen by Piatigorsky and Lotman, corresponds directly to the culture (hence the monofunctionality of "culture" understood in this manner), then the expression "cultures with a hierarchy of points of view" (104) does not fit into their own theoretical plan, as it leads to the utterance: "cultures (1) with a hierarchy of cultures (2)," that is, to an equivocation fallacy (*aequivocatio a casu*) resulting from using the term "culture" both in the colloquial (1) and the definitive (2) meaning. This equivocation was already mentioned in another example. Correspondingly, the following sentence: "the same values (1) will occupy different places in the value (2) scales of these different types of culture" (105) is a hybrid of tautology ("cultural value scale" = "culturality," "culturedness" scale) and equivocation: the word "value" is used once in the colloquial (1) and once in the "semiotic" meaning (2). The authors should have said: the same qualities will be perceived as values in some cultures and in some not (just as: the same messages will be considered "texts" by some cultures and by some not). Likewise, instead of saying: "the text is significant ("sanctified") because [?] it is a text" (105), it should have said: the message is a text, which means it is significant ("sanctified"), important etc. The following sentence is indeed a battology: "the text (1) is significant (2) because [?] it has a particular meaning (3) which determines its functional (4) value (5)." But, as we know, $1 = 2 = 3 = 4 = 5$ (of course within the approximations resulting from the pseudosynonyms). To the series of synonyms, we should also add "semiotic meaningfulness," expressiveness, suggestiveness, "cultural function" (109), as in Chekhov's story the reason for Olga's bursting into tears at the incomprehensible word "dondezhe" was that she perceived it as religiously highly expressive ("significant," suggestive). Piatigorsky and Lotman will say: highly "semiotic" (106). It appears that the maximum semiotic "meaningfulness" equals zero linguistic meaningfulness.

Let me ask one more time: why force words to simultaneously serve mutually exclusive meanings? In fact, it can be concluded from this semiotic-cultural approach that culture (or rather, the various "cultures") is a domain of "mysteriousness" and suspended comprehension which can only regain its rights outside of culture. Piatigorsky and Lotman claim that every culture has its own intracultural commentator (interpreter; 107). Is it again "comprehension" (i.e. specific comprehension, pseudo-comprehension) that is meant here? But comprehension would rather lead us out of the culture (the domain of "suggestive" incomprehensibility); even the authors

say that "the addressee is interested not only in the truthfulness ["cultural truthfulness" — *S. D.*] of the information, but also in the ["extracultural"? — *S. D.*] information itself" (107), and THAT is exactly why "together with the text necessarily arises the figure of its interpreter" (107). But should the interpreter hinder the interest in "the information itself," that is, to support the... incomprehensibility of the "text," in the same way as "ritualisation" does, acting openly at the pole of incomprehensibility? It seems to me just another variety of the one-sided understanding of culture. One can get the impression that the intense one-sidedness "shows up a latent tendency" (107), a polemic one. What according to the authors is characteristic for the functioning of mechanisms of all cultures refers actually only to (to use the cryptoterm) "Tibetan" cultures and its task is to serve THEIR "rational decoding" (107).

"Culture" is reduced here to the moment of authoritativeness (the same applies for the function), but it is a moment without any internal structure. One cannot speak of "the system" of a GIVEN (particular) "culture" in the NARROW sense. Systems can be only discussed on a supracultural level (e.g. oral culture vs written culture, manuscript culture vs print culture etc.), analogously to the saying that "railway signals, the red and the green one, create a system within which they are opposed to each other" (Milewski 1969: 10). But text and function create no "system" (of a "culture"?) in the way that green and red colours do in the railway signalling system.

The only way to diversify the stiff qualitative "text — nontext" alternative would have been to introduce a "quantitative" moment: the degree to which a message is marked with authoritativeness ("functionality"). It seems that instead of speaking of the "degree of text semiotic meaningfulness" it would have been enough to say "degree of textuality," degree of being a text (108). Depending on the degree of being marked, something is a text to a greater or lesser extent, e.g. it is valued more that a testimony is given as on oath than that the person who gives it is a dignitary (or vice versa); it is valued more that the testimony is supported by witnesses than it is given as on oath (or vice versa), etc. But then (as I have already mentioned), the cultures begin to overlap in a manner that can in no way play an ordering role. The sense of the term "culture" is here arbitrarily too narrow. We read: "the masses of linguistic messages circulating [!] in the community are perceived [!] as nontexts" (101). This means that there exists extracultural social circuits of linguistic messages, that is to say, it is possible to socially perceive things which do not exist culturally (because we also read that TEXTS "are THE SOLE ONES, from the point of view of

the given culture, TO EXIST," 101) and there exists some precultural "types of social self-organisation" (15). This would mean that a member of the community participates in innumerable "cultures" at the same time which could multiply on any level of specification. These remarks are enough to belie Piatigorsky and Lotman's opinion that according to THEIR approach, "culture is a synthetic concept" (101). In their approach, behind every function (more or less specific) lies a corresponding culture. The axiology of culture understood in this manner is an egocentric axiology on the verge of solipsism, a primitive axiology of a single sign which does not recognise the existence of only the positive values of others, but also of negative values as a whole (evil = lack of good). Within it, something that is different (= someone else's) is at the same time "evil" AND non-existing. It is the axiology of monolithic cultures. The concept of "text" is in this case, of course, a normative concept (the concept of message is neutrally descriptive), but it is incorrect and in fact senseless to claim that "texts ... are handed down as fixed norms" within a culture (103). But it is clear that the "culture" itself is a "norm," a gauge, a criterion (Łempicki 1966), and the "text" is what meets its conditions. To say: "written culture," "functionality of the written form of a message" and "the norm of the written form of a message" — is to say the exactly same thing. The concept of norm comprises several meanings: validity, authoritativeness, significance.

The preliminary alternative, either of the culture as a totality of texts or the culture as the totality of norms, could now be subject to reformulation. Its point is either to normalise texts or to textualise norms. To make use of the expression "material form" (102), which in the article is of no use, one could propose a formal (and thus primary) and material (and thus secondary) understanding of culture. Culture in the formal sense is a system of norms (if norm is a "culture" in the narrow sense), and in the material sense — a set of texts corresponding with the norm; that is to say, the norm creates culture, it is a necessary and a sufficient condition of culture. This proposal cannot be reversed, thus Tatarkiewicz's criticism does not apply to it. But it does not have a separate "culture" lying behind each norm and therefore speaking about a system of culture is in this case possible. For Piatigorsky and Lotman, the linguistic norm is subcultural (!), while for me it is one of the norms of culture, although my understanding of culture can in neither of the cases be identified with the colloquial one. It is easier to speak (or: it is more justified to speak) of a system of norms than of a (cultural) system of texts, although it could be assumed that a SYSTEM of norms must (can?) be in a way reflected in a SET of texts, which would be quite similar to an

expression in the article: "features of a text can be examined as features of the function" (101). One can also conclude from these remarks that the authors are wrong in their claim that, if we see culture as the "totality of functions" (= a system of norms!), then "text and function [= norm] can be ... investigated on one level" (100). The norm and everything that it SUBORDINATES (similar to: "function and everything that is DERIVED from it") cannot be discussed on the same level.

If somebody claims that "culture is the totality of texts" (105), they cannot maintain that the emergence of texts is a sign of the emergence of culture (105), but rather that the emergence of texts of a certain kind is AS MUCH the emergence of a given type of culture. For Piatigorsky and Lotman, the sentence "culture is the totality of texts" is not logically followed by "culture is a megatext." They assumed a signal-based, globalising understanding of "text" as a "fact" or "object" (not a structure) — and saying that culture is a text, they would ascribe the same non-analytic, monolithic character to the concept of culture. For somebody who perceives culture as a whole as a "semiological" text, it could neither have a structure nor be a system. The expression "structural code of the culture" could not apply to it (Piatigorsky and Lotman use it interchangeably with "cultural code system," 106). What is more:

1. Cultural function creates text. But if the culture itself is a text, then, WHAT is it created by, by which function? Who cannot answer this question should not speak of culture as a text.

2. If culture is a STRUCTURE (?) of texts (Piatigorsky and Lotman speak of a "structural code of the culture"), then it is the structural moment that constitutes it and not the textual one.

3. Who sees culture as a metatext (100) cannot see it as a megatext.

3a. It is worth mentioning that Piatigorsky and Lotman introduce another category: "text supracommunication" (107), which for them is a commentary to a "text" made illegible by "culturality" (!). Such a commentary should rather be referred to as "metatext," because: a) it IS a commentary to a "text," b) it is "subject to" a given culture, it "serves" the culture and is in this sense one of ITS "texts" (see p. 111: a remark about the negative attitude of counterculture to literary criticism expressing the views of the dominant culture), it could be maintained, though, that a norm of a culture is represented by its text and the addressee of it, while the commentary constitutes a metaculture: a second-level esotericism which comprises

not only the explained object, but also the technique of the explanation. Not every member of a community can participate in a given "culture;" not every member of a given "culture" can be its commentator.

But according to the authors, does a separate "culture" really lie behind every "function" (= norm)? They seem not to even notice that they violate their own approach. For instance, "not every message is worthy of being written down, but everything written down takes on a particular cultural significance, becomes a text" (101). This sentence SEEMINGLY refers only to the issue of the textualising (= sacrifying, authoritising) "fixation." But the beginning of the sentence says something much more complex: apart from the "cultural" (ritual, technical?) significance of FIXATION, there also exists a substantial (moral, sacred?) one and it is RIGHT ("dignum et iustum est") that it be enclosed in the form of the fixation. Because, obviously, one has first to DISTINGUISH the CONCEPTS of graphicality and sacredness in order to tie them together (e.g.) firmly and permanently (perhaps even identify them). But even "identifying" them, we have no doubt that it is the sacredness that ennobles the graphy and not vice versa; even if the nobility of the graphy has become to a certain extent "autonomous." As it seems, Piatigorsky and Lotman would have to interpret this (after revealing it) as an overlap of graphic and sacred "culture," but is it enough to speak of an overlap of graphic and sacred "function" (norm?, principle?). After all, they also introduce the SUBSTANTIAL (not only functional) understanding of "meaning," e.g. saying that in a "nonclosed culture" the text "has a particular [general linguistic! — *S. D.*] MEANING which determines its functional value" (105) — and they do so, albeit at the cost of the ambiguity of the word "meaning" [Polish: *sens* — sense; translator's note].

Also ambiguous are the words "meaning" [Polish *znaczenie* — meaning; translator's note] and "message" (106), as the authors speak of "textual" (and linguistic) "meaning," "general linguistic" (and cultural) "message," but they ALSO use both these words without the modifiers.

Another proof of the SEEMING consistency of Piatigorsky and Lotman's approach: it was said that in a "written culture," what is fixed graphically is "accepted as the SOLE ONE TO EXIST" (101), which can only mean: the SOLE ONE TO HAVE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE. But right after that, the authors say that what is written takes on a PARTICULAR CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE. It follows, however, that what is written is not the sole one to have cultural significance, or that there exists at least precultural or extracultural significances.[6] Analogously: "in relation to a nontext, a

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[6]This is an absurdity resulting from being placedon the level of culture things that

text has SUPPLEMENTARY MEANING" (103); here, one could think that the extracultural meaning is basic, and the cultural one — supplementary. The linguistic dimension of the message, as well as that related to "everyday, practical purposes" (103),[7] was pushed down to the subcultural level ("the pretext stage is the preculture stage;" 105). But it is obviously arbitrary to consider what is scientific, poetic, legal, religious, ethical, medical (etc.) as "cultural," but not what is linguistic ("everyday;" 106), because what is linguistic is allegedly "natural" (106). It cannot be assumed that culture is LIMITED TO "secondary modelling systems." As a matter of fact, the meaning designed this way ("culture" is "a given system of culture") is apparently too narrow for the authors themselves; they say, for instance, "IN THE SPHERE in which the utterance is received as a text" (104), although they should have said, "in the culture in which...," similar to: "in a preliterate culture..." (102). Correspondingly: "a poem is not received as a text for the definition of the scientific, religious, or legal POSITION..." (104), although, according to Piatigorsky and Lotman's concept, it would be appropriate to say "culture" instead of "position," because, if we avoid being consistent , 1. we make the impression that our own proposal is a burden to us, 2. we foster misunderstandings.

Piatigorsky and Lotman not only recognize the extracultural existence of "nontextual" message; they even speak of a "nonmessage." They see an example of it in Kosoy's views, who only saw in the cross "the meaning of the primary message — the weapon of execution" (106), or, to use the an expression coined by Antonina Kłosowska, "an interactional *residuum*" (1981: 607, footnote in the subject index). But then, it has to be said that 1. the word "meaning" was used here in the extracultural sense (Kosoy did not conform with Christian culture and its symbology); 2. "message" (= announcement, [Polish: *komunikat* — communication; translator's note]) is a synonym of "message" [Polish: *przekaz* — message; t. n.] and therefore the remark about nonmessage is pointless here; 3. the very concept of nonmessage (*conceptus infinitans*) is not, as it seems, effective in terms of cultural studies, because if we place the message outside culture, then were on Earth should we put the "nonmessage?"

The authors distinguish "linguistic semantics" (the linguistic meaning) from the "purely textual" one, while it would be enough to distinguish

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which belongs to the level of one of the norms of culture.

[7]We hear a slightly deformed echo of Russian formalism (in Poland associated with Kridlov), which put a distinction between literature and writings of everyday, practical purposes.

meaning from significance (as historians do). The example that follows speaks for the point of my criticism, as a "written contract" is endowed with significance ("validity") depending on whether it is affirmed by oath or by a promise (etc.) (103—104).[8] Indeed, by now I can see no reason to accept their proposals in terms of terminology and theory, but I can see an effective "urge to partial comprehensibility, ambiguity and polysemia" (107), which they define as a "typical process whereby ... texts become sacred" (106) and ritualised. In my opinion, Lotman followed a far more effective way of discussion (which, after all, evoked less reservations) in his article *The problem of meaning in secondary modelling systems* (published a year later, in 1977), where he used the configurational term of sign and not the synthetic term of signal.

The thesis according to which the criterion of culturality is reversible (103) is substantially correct and culturally important. It helps realise that although each culture holds self-glorifying axiological claims, from the point of view of cultural studies these claims become neutralised — analogously to religious studies. For example, Trigg says: "The affirmation of a particular religion as true is not the role of the philosophy of religion ... A philosopher (*qua* philosopher) cannot investigate the question of whether Christianity is true, but the question of whether it is something that may be true is of course a philosophical one" (Trigg 1977: 79). This thesis — let us also make a pragmatic digression — should be observed in the practice of cultural policies and protected from its mistakes which are culturally harmful. A similar role should be assigned to the considerations on "Tibetan" and developing cultures, as well as to the warning that a researcher must not impose the norms of his own culture on the investigated one.

Contrary to what Piatigorsky and Lotman say, I believe (strongly in line with my earlier reservations and counterproposals) that there is no "nonclosed" culture, as it is exactly the closure that allows us to separate (constitute) a culture (a system). After all, an open system is in a way a paradox.[9] Retrospective and prospective cultures (104—105) have each their own type of limitation ("closure"). A retrospective culture sees the history of the world as an external space of "pilgrimage;" a prospective one perceives it as the womb from which it "emerges." The former is a culture of faith and

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[8]Again, the difference is blurred between "semantics," "functionality," "significance" ("importance"), because of the so called "purely cultural semantics" = "cultural functionality" = "cultural significance." Not to mention that "functionality" = "culturality."

[9]Berfalanffy's thermodynamic explanation of the theory of open systems is considered questionable by Piaget (1967: 97).

a saved deposit (gift), a value existing "from the beginning" (absolutisation of the primeval experience); the latter is the culture of labour, working to achieve a value (absolutisation of historical experience). The former is conservative (preserving), the latter creative (generating). An intermediate type could be a hermeneutic culture, which is preserving through processing. It is rather the latter that is eschatological (that is, it expects to achieve fullness "at the end of time"). The former — seeing its fullness at the beginning — is rather a mythical, "edenic" culture which believes in the preservation of the primeval fullness of truth (e.g. Christianity) and not in its gradual loss. I do not think ANY culture perceives itself as degrading. An "edenic" culture would be a culture of MESSAGE (not of "text") and transmitting (= *traditio*), and an eschatological one — a culture of labour and action (= *functio*). The latter is not just "nonclosed." It EXPECTS its future closing, its "achieving the fullness of truth ... in the future" (105). It seems that only in retrospective cultures (not even in hermeneutic ones!) it is possible to receive a linguistic communication without comprehension but with full respect; the communication is then treated non-analytically as a "significant" non-complex object (108).

Sometimes the authors distinguish 1. monolithic cultures ("with one point of view common to all texts") and 2. hierarchical-paradigmatic cultures ("with a hierarchy of points of view, or with a complex paradigm of them;" 104); sometimes, in turn, they distinguish 3. paradigmatic cultures (with "a single hierarchy of texts with successive growth of text semiotic") and 4. syntagmatic ones ("a set of various types of texts which embrace various aspects of reality and have equal value position;" 108). Subsequently, the authors say that in most HUMAN CULTURES (5.) these two principles are complexly interwoven. Meanwhile, this overview shows that this (typological?) list is already "interwoven" and unclear. Is (3.) not an intermediate type between (1.) and (2.)? The only unquestionable thing is the polar diversity of types (1.) and (4.), although it is not said definitely whether (1.) is the pole of "closed" culture and (4.) that of "nonclosed" culture. But it is in relation to (4.) and (1.) that we should ask whether a culture without of its own paradigm is possible. It also comes to mind that culture understood as a system of norm could be referred to as "paradigmatic" and culture understood as a set of texts — "syntagmatic." And if this remark can play an ordering role, it becomes understandable why the authors' typology is so unclear:

a) too many categories were used as indicators in an inconsistent manner: text, semiotic meaningfulness, aspect, value, hierarchy, paradigm, syntagma,

of which the first four can be treated as poorly hidden synonyms;

b) no choice was made between the "functional" and "textual" understanding of culture. In addition: just as the comment about the alternative "functionality OR textuality of culture" (100) lacked symmetry, so did the comment about the alternative "nonclosed OR closed culture" (105). As a matter of fact, both alternatives "are parallel" (104), so the lack of symmetry is perhaps just as "parallel." But another reason lies in the double naming and double meaning which is secretly (and simultaneously) conveyed. It would have been counter-symmetrical to say: in a closed culture (*CC*) the meaning results from the authority and in a nonclosed culture (*NC*), the authority from the meaning, thus, two terms would be enough. But Piatigorsky and Lotman introduce the term "meaning" for the *NC* and the term "significant (sanctified)" for the *CC*. They treat the MEANING itself as a synonym of authority, and so the basis of the distinction between *NC* and *CC* disappears.

It is time to present my general reservations. It seems that in the description of "culture," the "points of view" were confused: the internal with the external one, i.e. the intracultural with the intercultural (culturological?) one. This confusion (as well as the ambiguous — colloquial and definitive — use of the term "culture") results (artificially and falsely) in the paradox of the textuality of nontext (109). Let us take a closer look at what led to its emergence (108).

In a "highly semiotic culture"[10] (i.e. one that is arbitrary, authoritative, thoughtless), "pure textual meanings" (i.e. the purely formal prestige of a "text" which does not require comprehension; its function) tend to intensify and subordinate, if not annihilate, the "linguistic meaning" (i.e. the substantial value of an utterance, its content). Such a culture (as a type) ONLY knows this state. But Piatigorsky and Lotman say that is EVERY "text," function and message war against each other, from which results : 1. in no historical situation can any "type" of culture ("a system of truths and values") achieve an absolute monopoly; 2. no message is subject to absolute "textualisation" (because one should rather say that in every MESSAGE, and not in every "text," "textuality" and message war against each other) or, perhaps, absolute ideologisation; 3. in relation to every dominant culture, "the opposite tendency also exists," i.e. a counterculture which questions the validity ("truthfulness and valuability") of the dominant ideology and establishes ITS OWN "texts" which (IN RELATION to the "texts" of the

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[10]For examples of various meanings of the terms "semiotic" and "semantic," see: Rosnerowa 1975: 146, footnote 9; Reczek 1978: 440—441.

dominant culture) are countertexts (and only FOR the dominant culture they are nontexts).[11] To make use of an example cited by the authors: the teaching of Christ was a text for His followers, an anti-text IN RELATION TO the Pharisees, but FOR the Pharisees (and later FOR the Athenians) a nontext. Only a Pharisee (or an Athenian) — and not a theorist-semiologist - could sensibly say that "nontexts fulfil the function of texts."[12] But it is also important to notice that the category of nontext (as that of counterculture) is not very fortunate (and the example of Christ's teaching makes it very clear), because it suggests a lack of inherent positive values of the opposition culture, which possesses so little autonomy that it needs another culture to question; it is negatively secondary. This suggestion is affirmed by the authors as they speak of "a secondary, inverted relationship" (108) and say that "nontexts fulfil the function of texts" (109).

It has to be remembered that they place "message" on the "subcultural" level (notwithstanding the type of the dominant culture). This might allow us to (consequently) think that a counterculture, establishing countertexts, also establishes its own counterideology (its own "semiotisation"), which tries to subordinate "subcultural," "general linguistic" meanings. But the authors' considerations lack decisiveness here:

1. It can be concluded from one sentence that for the counterculture "the value of the message is determined [only? — *S. D.*] by its truthfulness [? — *S. D.*] on the level of general linguistic semantic well-formedness and ordinary 'common sense'," which could mean that, if a dominant culture is pure ideologisation ("semiotisation"), a counterculture is pure substantiation ("semantisation," "natural" general linguisticness); then, the mentioning of "truthfulness," which before was identified with "semiotic meaningfulness," would not apply to counterculture.

2. However, in the subsequent sentence (for unknown reasons) we find the idea that the diversification (scaling) of "truthfulness" also exists in a counterculture, thus (?), "alongside the general linguistic meaning, we have to make do with some [what kind of? why? — *S. D.*] additional text meaning" (109). Given the claim that the counterculture resigns from the "supplementary supraorganisation" to choose "simplicity, uncontrivedness," it is not

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[11]Here, "Lenin's principle of two nations within each nation, two cultures within each culture" (Kuznecov 1977: 76) may be recalled, as well as the thesis (considered by Adorno as Freud's deepest culturological view) that civilisation gradually creates anti-civilisation ("discontent in culture") and allows for its gradual establishment (Adorno 1978: 353—355).

[12]See e.g. Piagets remarks (1966: 61—62) on the differences in the attitude of younger and older children towards the "truthfulness" of newly introduced rules.

clear what (which socially recognisable moment) becomes a suprasemantic indicator of the new textuality.

Speaking of two "tendencies" constantly warring in every culture (that is, the dominant culture and the counterculture), Piatigorsky and Lotman use the term "culture" in the colloquial sense, as only the "tendencies" are cultures in the narrow, definitive sense. The sense becomes so narrow that we cease to distinguish "culture" from the stylisation of an utterance; the war of the dominant culture against the counterculture from a situational game of style, an example of which is the persiflage epistle of Ivan the Terrible to Bekbulatovich (the subtext of the "self-belittling formulas" is determined by the situation, that is, the actually despotic rule of the tsar). Nevertheless, the epistle does not create a "counterculture" (it does not fight despotism), but it presents within its scheme a mocking reversal of the roles of the ruler and the subject (an adynaton), where the one who mocks is the tsar. Therefore, it is not true that "the authority of the given text principle is undermined" (110); on the contrary, actually it cannot be undermined and is all the more intimidating. Thus, neither in the text nor (contrary to what Piatigorsky and Lotman maintain) in the subtext do we encounter pure "features of a general linguistic message," making their usage of the terms "subtext (general linguistic) meanings" and "subtext message" inaccurate. "The noncorrespondence of text and subtext information" (110) cannot be reduced to the noncorrespondence of text and message, of "semiotic meaningfulness" and semanticness; what follows is the collapse of the ordered eusynoptic table presented by the authors. Moreover, the misuse of the word "meaning" was taken further. In most cases, it was used in relation to the "textuality," sometimes to the "general linguistic meaning," but now we read: "the noncorrespondence of text (S_1) and subtext (S_2) information creates supplementary meanings (S_3)." Indeed: "literary parody is constructed along analogous lines" (110). Before in the article, the authors said that the function transforms the message into a text (101), that is, it endows the message with cultural meaning. Now, we read the opposite: "the system of text meanings determines the social functions of texts in a given culture" (110). The reason I find this a glaring discrepancy is the (already discussed) failure to choose between the "functional" and the "textual" understanding of culture. Because of this discrepancy, the order of the table is completely disrupted, or more correctly: the idea behind the table reveals is clumsiness. What is more, the description lacks the necessary remark that the "discrepancies" revealed by the table are only possible in an intersystemic (intercultural) context, i.e. between VARIOUS systems

of which each has its own "text semantics" (whence this expression, since before "semantics" was opposed to text "semiotic meaningfulness"?), or (?) "cultural function" (of which another synonym is "pragmatic function").

And so we face the last task of our critical commentary, and perhaps the most difficult (and self-controlling) one: to analyse (and comment) as well as to discuss (and reinterpret) the table itself. Piatigorsky and Lotman continue to use a confusing multiplicity of terms, which leads them to inconsistency. The three vertical columns are once described as "relationships," once — as "levels," "meanings" or even "links" (100—111). Thus, it has to be said that:

1. It would be better to reserve the term "level" for the eight horizontal rows, to which the authors refer as "cases."

2. The terms "relationship" and "meaning" cannot be used interchangeably.

3. The THIRD column should be the column of FUNCTION. If the columns are referred to as "meanings," the function falls within "meanings" and the distinction between columns 2 and 3 is blurred (according to my assumption that it is merely a seeming one).

4. The authors created battological, peculiar terms, as "functional meaning" means exactly the same as "function" and "text meaning" means "textuality" (since "text" is a meaningful message); "the meaning of cultural value" (112) is a battological pleonasm. Either the expression "subtext meaning" is contradictory or the word "meaning" is used in a colloquial way without relation to its definition (thus, this word is ambiguous throughout its entire usage and it is not clear which of the meanings refers to the "meaning" columns).

5. Finally, the expression "subtext message" is either a pleonasm or (rather) an erroneous expression, both when the "subtext" (or better: context) is determined by the SITUATION of the message (as with Ivan's epistle) and when it comes to the alleged "subtextuality" of the message itself. (When a message is elevated to the status of text and becomes a significant message, one cannot say that the message is the subtext of the text. Would it make sense to say that in a culture of engravings in stone — see p. 102 — the NAME of a ruler engraved in a stone wall is the subtext of the fixation (engraving) itself?) So much just for the preliminary remarks, but we must still question the elements of the composition of the table.

Let us now discuss the authors' comments on each of the eight cases (in the same order as Piatigorsky and Lotman did).

Ad 1. The word "text" was used ambiguously; once colloquially, as in: "any one of a number of texts [= pieces!]," and once in the definitive

sense: "a language communication [= piece!] which, in order to become a text [= a significant message]..." Contrary to what the authors claim, what happens here is not a coincidence of message, text and function, but an overlap of the folk "culture" and the literary "culture" (a fairy tale is rendered "literary" — as we can interpret the unclear expression "particular [?] kind of expression"), just as it is possible for the sacred "culture" and the written "culture" to overlap (the revelation is documented in a book). It seems that "case" 1 can be explained in a different way: a fairy tale is a "text" (not only a message!) in folk "culture;" the supplementary "kind of expression" renders it a "text" in the literary "culture;" two "textualities" overlap at the crossing (or verge) of the "cultures," and what results is a kind of "supplementary supratextuality" or intensified textuality. But the table was meant to describe "cases" within a "system" and not those which are intersystematic. As a matter of fact, seven of the "cases" (apart from the eighth) are actually intersystematic (that is, intercultural), which shall be demonstrated.

Ad 8. Here we have... an accumulation of void: a non-functional non-textual nonmessage; a cultural, social, substantial zero! This "case" apparently results from the erroneous interpretation of Kosoy's opinion about the cross (106).

Ad 2. This "case" has been already discussed, since Piatigorsky and Lotman repeat it (extensively). Here we have to deal with the emergence of counterculture (C_2) as a response to the dominant culture (C_1). For order's sake we shall introduce labels: T_1 = text of C_1, T_2 = text of C_2 and say that $T_2 = -T_1$, that is, C_2 values what is questioned in C_1. The fallacy of the authors' commentary lies, among others, in the fact that following the opposition of style and genre (poetry — prose), the authors unjustifiably identify prose with a "general linguistic message" (although prose is characterised by a certain degree of artistry), with "truthfulness" as well as with accessibility — all in all, completely different notions. Bearing in mind that "semiotic meaning" is "textuality," we see how much of the comments consists of a pure accumulation of vocabulary, elaborate and vainly intricate. We read: "the removal of the text from the [previously — *S. D.*] usual norms of semiotic meaning [T_1] and [?] its outward desemiotization are conditions for the high semiotic meaning of the text [T_2!]." Instead of "and," the authors should have said "or," as the previous "norm of semiotic meaning" referred to what is "outward" (e.g. the form of a poem). What is more, the "semiotic meaning" was already spoken of in relation to incomprehensibility (106), so it is again unjustified to speak of "high semiotic meaning" of T_2,

which should be "comprehensible" and directly obvious.

Let it be reminded that the object of the discussion is still an intercultural situation (the clash of C_2 and C_1), and therefore it does not seem necessary to use the terms "message" and "function" (the term "text" is enough): to put it simply, SOME "messages" are subject to textualisation in C_2 and OTHER in C_1. A culture (here I agree with Piatigorsky and Lotman) only contains a "text" (whereby in each culture, a different moment determines the text), OR a "culturally" functionalised message (more briefly: a "culturised" message). It appears to be probable that column 2 is simply C_1 and column 3 is C_2. Then we could say that in the first "CASE," the later culture tolerates the values of the earlier one, whereas in the second "CASE," C_2 rejects everything that belongs to C_1.

Ad 3. Since we do not recognise any difference between columns 2 and 3, we shall neither recognise the difference between the "cases" 2 and 3, which according to the authors are "complementary." In my opinion, the sentence: "where [= C_2!] the function of a text (T_2) can be fulfilled only by a message without text expression, ritualised texts (T_1) lose the capacity to fulfil this function" is: 1. excessively full of paradox as a result of the failure to distinguish the particular terms (C_1, C_2; T_1, T_2); 2. only seemingly complex (which is my constant criticism), as it is pointless to speak of the "function of a TEXT" if it is the assignment of a function to a MESSAGE that makes it a text ("text" — according to Piatigorsky and Lotman's approach — is only present in culture as the fulfilment of function "upon" a message; so much for the "text semantics").

Ad 4. Since it is the assignment of a function to a message that makes it a text, then the lack of such a function can be identified with the lack of "texuality" of a message, which is the only thing expressed by "case" 4: cultural "nonexistence" ("semiotic meaninglessness") of a message (not of a "text," which is the author's erroneous claim).

Ad 5—8. "Cases" 5 to 8 should, according to the logic of the table and to the previous remark, refer to "nonmessages" (message is a general linguistic communication) and their (?) position regarding the culture. Meanwhile, the authors' commentary does not follow this logic: alongside the expression "general linguistic" it introduces the expressions "nonsense," "in another language," "incomprehensible," "silent (mental)," "insignificant" — which can be considered neither mutual synonyms nor substantially correct oppositions of "general linguisticness;" referring to "case" 6, the authors use the term "message," although the minus sign in the first column means "nonmessage," as in the second column it means "nontext." The commentary

does not take into account the authors' earlier remark that for Kosoy, the cross was (allegedly) a nonmessage (106). In fact, the point of the scheme is not "messageness," but rather sign comprehensibility (whether of a linguistic expression, an object or a behaviour; silence can be treated both as an expression and as a behaviour). Something can be comprehensible or incomprehensible; it can be also culturally functional (i.e. textual) or nonfunctional (i.e. nontextual); finally, various cultures can tolerate (folk culture in Romantic literature) or war against each other (anti-classicism of the Romantic era). The text of the tolerated culture retains (or can retain, at least to a certain extent) positive textuality in the culture by which it is tolerated; a text of a combated culture is not as much a nontext (i.e. a zero text) as more a counter-text (a text of the "enemy") for the culture by which it is combated. Piatigorsky and Lotman apparently fail to distinguish nontextuality from countertextuality, although their commentary invites such a distinction. Each culture must encounter a different culture, that is, a different (foreign) "system of texts," a system of "different texts" — and only then it is possible that, as Piatigorsky and Lotman put it, "the links are displaced and interchanged" (112). Most logical inaccuracies of the article result from the incorrect expression of countertextuality: "texts $[T_1]$ with emphasized [in C_2] expressions are perceived [in C_2] as ... nontexts [that is, as non-T_2!]" (112). Tolstoy SAW Shakespeare as "too artistic," that is to say, he SAW a text that was DIFFERENT, FOREIGN.

Going back to the table, it should be added that:

1. Piatigorsky and Lotman do not agree that if silence fulfils a cultural function, it is a text of the given culture ("case" 7);

2. they did not adjust the commentary to the table (in "case" 6): the table confirms the textuality (+) of an incomprehensible message, while in the commentary we read that this message "cannot be a text;"

3. the entire paragraph (4.2.2) shows that the authors have no respect for the "intercultural" (and not intracultural) nature of both the table and the questions discussed. They try to conceal it behind synonyms. Their "displaced system" is what we call counterculture, which is not "another case" not included in the table, but rather the case of the countertextuality of "the foreign text," already discussed (Tolstoy's "case").

Finally, the reason for our disagreement with Piatigorsky and Lotman can be revealed and the disagreement itself may come to a conclusion. Contrary to what they say, our opinion is that function and text cannot be separated within a GIVEN culture. Only within ANOTHER culture (in a "displaced system") can the messages of a given culture be subject to

defunctionalisation (or rather: refunctionalisation) or detextualisation (or rather: retextualisation). If C_2 tolerates C_1, then it assigns its own functions to the functions of C_1 in a cooperative manner. If C_2 wars against C_1, then it assigns its own functions to the functions of C_1 in a competitive manner (it builds an anti-text upon a text). If we say that scientific or political texts can be used by a community as religious texts, then we speak of a shift from the scientific (or political) culture to the religious one, in other words, of a "crossing" of cultures (together with their texts and functions), of science (or politics) made religious. Here, we have "the absence of a text when the corresponding function is maintained" (113), "secular texts fulfil sacred functions" (112). This obvious fact is blurred by the authors with their ambiguous — definitive (D) and colloquial ($Coll$) — usage of the word "culture" in the two subsequent sentences: "the description of culture [D] as a set of texts is not always enough for full description. Thus, for example, if, in any culture [$Coll$], one did not find any sacred texts but did discover certain scientific ones" (etc.; 112). For them, however, a text is a text of a corresponding culture: a sacred text is a text of the sacred culture, a scientific text — of the scientific culture etc., "so that to each cultural function there corresponds an adequate type of text" (113). The authors seem to use the word "culture" in another, THIRD sense (T!), an indirect one: when they speak of types of culture as "repertoires" of NUMEROUS functions (113), and it is only here that one could speak of culture being a system, of the various texts of a given culture (every function establishes its own kind of texts, but obviously not its own kind of culture). It is only with $Coll$ or T that one could consider the table as intracultural (but also, of course, intercultural because of D), and the proposed three-level description of culture — as feasible (that is, to recognise the separateness of columns 2 and 3).

A culture (T) which allows for any function to correspond to an adequate kind of text can be referred to as functional, as a culture of the comprehension of the substantial content of messages. A culture (T) which does not allow that (because it assigns scientific or religious functions to political texts or vice versa) can be referred to as dysfunctional, one that does not distinguish a message from an order; indeed, it can be reduced to the D sense and is not a culture of properly fulfilled functions, but a "culture" of functionaries. Thus, again, I cannot agree with Piatigorsky and Lotman.

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