The general semiotics module and slovenská semiotická skupina

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Abstract

The general semiotics module is a research cluster at the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc. The institute adopts a notion of general semiotics out of practical necessity, and we continue to lay down its concrete principles, which pertain more to communication than to signification *per se*. They include: **1)** Cross- inter- multi- and trans-disciplinarity, **2)** Intersectionality and inclusivity, **3)** Multi-species, multi- polarity, linguistic and cultural polyglotism, **4)** Not-for-profit public access, **5)** Self-reference, improvisation and *ad-hoc* modelling. We proceed through some treatment of the basic principles and then focus on the amorphous slovenská semiotická skupina: What would be its logos? Which would be the key themes of a distinctively Slovakian semiotics?

Keywords

Communication, cybersemiotics, information, meaning, modelling, module, principles, semiotics, signification, Slovakian semiotics groups, symbols, systems.

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Figure 1, source : author´s archive

We are here because of my recent appointment as the new Director of the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc. Our task at the ISI is to facilitate communication between the many semiotics affiliations. To that end it is useful for us to proceed with some kind of at least provisional model of general semiotics; principles shared between all the various applications, and this is a purely hypothetical or maybe even *ad hoc* approach, because such model does not yet exist, right? You'll find quite a bit of disagreement across the spectrum about what are the main principles. But so we have to proceed as though it did exist, this general semiotics. The hope would be that these general principles extend also to all the *domains* of semiotics, which includes Slovakia. The title might imply that I was attempting to define the territory of this slovenská semiotická skupina; however, I understand that there's a multiplicity of Slovakian semiotics groups also and so it's more of a loose proposal, and I decided yesterday perhaps I should call the semiotics that we're doing in Slovakia something even more specific, something like *Tatranská Semiotika*, in order perhaps rather to de-territorialize the domain, and I'll also explain why we might choose the Slovakian mountains specifically as a symbol or a logo for our group, and we might also derive certain more specific modeling principles from the mountains themselves, from the local outdoors.

The principles of general semiotics are by no means undisputed. When I say that they pertain to *communication* more than to *signification*, that is to say it's about *groups*. It's about how to facilitate group interactivity and even to maximize or to prolong interactivity in a situation in which, in the digital era, many of the constraints imposed by formerly in-person communication are eliminated or minimized for the sake of efficiency, under an 'information processing paradigm' mentality that says we should be able to completely automate what used to be face-to-face interactions. This is by no means to demonize info- and communication tech, but on the contrary to draw attention to how it shows us many truths about ourselves which were always already the case. So, the principles are: **1)** cross-, inter- multi- and transdisciplinarity, **2)** intersectionality and inclusivity, **3)** multispecies, multipolarity, linguistic and cultural polyglotism, **4)** not-for-profit public access, **5**) self-reference, *ad hoc* modeling and improvisation.

One listener at the Gatherings in Biosemiotics last year in Copenhagen made the comment after my presentation, "Tyler these principles seem a bit *liberal*, don't you think?" Well, yes I suppose that's true. I think her main problem was with number **4**, which previously read *open* access instead of *public* access, where open access (in the sense that it is used in academic publishing) as far as she is concerned, is just another platform for making money, and the whole idea with that 4th principle is just that we should try to minimize financial transaction when it comes to intellectual discourse; but also this intersectionality/inclusivity emphasis is unapologetically 'progressive' I must admit. Some of them are decisively *not* compatible with at least mainstream neoliberalism, such as the all-important principle of *multipolarity,* which refers to the political context: There can be no single dominant world power, but only a plurality of powers, if discourse is to proceed. In any case, we've been rehashing these principles for some time.

Our goal has been to craft scenarios of 'high modeling capacity', in which meaning making may take place. I choose to focus on communication because I think these indeed are the principles which extend to all the branches of semiotics, whereas when it comes to signification (sign definitions and other technicalities), there's almost no agreement between the different

branches about which ones are the common principles. And the communication principles I have elaborated here are the minimum of what I would expect from a group or from a scholar claiming to *do* semiotics. I would expect them at least to show a concern for these principles. We're not going to talk about all these principles today. We're going to focus on principle **5** because I think it's the most relevant for my understanding of Slovakian semiotics.

The notion of self-reference is particularly important for general semiotics because it's unique in the way that it actually provides guidelines for *writing*. Self-reference is particularly well-illuminated by cybersemiotics and thus it's quite useful, perhaps despite their admittedly 'technocratic, solipsistic and unromantic' attitude. In contrast, I think our slovenská semiotická skupina would be somewhat *dis*interested in technology, or at least less interested in questions of technology than cybersemiotics. Such a group would definitely be dedicated to the importance of group work and dialogue as opposed to this solipsistic attitude that's common to cybernetics. And I would say probably also the Slovakian semiotics may entertain a more romantic attitude towards nature, or towards the possibility of reuniting with nature. The Slovakian semiotics in my imagination *is* concerned with the outside, with getting outside, not just with the outdoors but also with the notion of an outside in the metaphysical sense, its accessibility or inaccessibility, like in the Derridean usage of getting outside of the text. Perhaps it would at least remain optimistic about the possibility of such things, and this would put it in contrast with cybersemiotics. Self-reference is an especially important principle for general semiotics because of how it extends to such otherwise disparate branches as these.

This is where the concept of *reentry* comes in. As you might see, Søren Brier in *Cybersemiotics: Why Information is not Enough* (2008) does a huge survey of first- and second-order cybernetics and he's really interested in Heinz von Forester, who provides the best definition of reentry. He writes:

The distinction between the system and its surroundings is the first act of cognition. If this difference is again introduced into the system, a conscious awareness of the observing is created. When this difference is reflected in the system, this is called reentry. (Brier 2008: 2022)

I think reentry as a method may be summarized in the following way: The presence of the outside is only registered as a disruption within descriptive system at hand, or within the 'symbolic'[1] (This feature is also characteristic of much second-generation semiology, as delineated in Bennett 2021, which was due partially due to the influence of cybernetics through

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[1] Here a quote from the founder of the original Cybernetic Culture Research Unit is instructive: "Is qabbalism problematical or mysterious? It seems to participate amphibiously in both domains, proceeding according to rigorously constructible procedures – as attested by the affinity with technicization – yet intrinsically related to an Outsideness through which alone it could derive programmatic sense. If there is no source of an at least partially coherent signal that is radically alien to the entire economy of conventional human interchange, then qabbalism is nothing but a frivolous entertainment or a fundamentally futile practical error. Yet unlike any kind of metaphysical assault on 'the noumenal', qabbalism cannot be definitely critiqued on a purely rational or formal basis, as if its mode of 'error' was that of a logical fallacy. Since qabbalism is a practical programme, rather than a doctrine of any kind, its formal errors – mistakes – are mere calculative irregularities, and correcting these is actually a procedural requirement of (rather than an objection to) its continued development. It is the rational dismissal of 'the' qabbalistic enterprise that is forced to take a metaphysical stance: ruling out on grounds of supposed principle what is in fact no more than a guiding 'hypothesis' (that signal from 'outside the system' is detectable by numerical analysis of codes circulating within the system)." (Land 2019[2012]: 592)

the Prague Linguistic Circle (Gvoždiak 2020). So here we're going from self-reference to solipsism. Brier maintains that the cybernetic approach is also essentially constructivist. Social constructivism often espouses a largely observer-dependent construction of reality, within which we have to assume that we have no access to the external. It's not that they outrightly deny the existence of the external world but simply to say that the situation is such today that we confuse the representation with the reality, and this confusion is the new baseline. In other words the representational situation is so pressing that we have to take extremely solipsistic measures if we're really interested in 'getting outside'. So we may say that for this milieu their solipsism, which supposedly rejects reality, was for them in fact the only way to get back to reality. The influence of these attitudes in social science led to increased discussion of the position of the researcher with regard to the object of investigation, as Brier details.

In the second phase of cybernetic evolution, a serious attempt was made to cope with the epistemological and the methodological propositions that appear if you begin seriously to include the observer in the descriptions of his observations. (Brier 2008: 214)

The most straightforward example of this self-referential technique is in the American postmodern novels which all feature some kind of metatextual play. It's always a book about a book, or there's always some problematization of the relationship between the author and the narrator, and in these 1990s-era postmodern novels there was already some anticipation of the twenty-first century explosion of the trope of the *multiverse*. And of course, many decry postmodernism as a passing stylistic fad, but rather what we see now in the full-blown digital age is that concern for metatext and the regress of descriptive levels and the loss of the original referent, that this thought of postmodernism was actually a pretty keen anticipation of what was coming down on us because of social media, and because of the advent of constant and pervasive *recording*. The Thomas Pynchons and the Don Dilillos and the David Foster Wallaces, that is, the postmodern American novelists, were trying to tell us that the only way to get back to the external, back to nature, back to reality, is to create a short circuit in the symbolic/representational system, invite this regress and collapse of descriptive levels, and then in the rupture we may catch a glimpse of the outside.

This is something cybersemiotics shares with semiology, particularly late semiology or 'second generation semiology' as I think Professor Fujak mentioned in his introduction – Luis Prieto, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida and Julia Kristeva. But also and perhaps more decisively they share an interest in the epistemic shift, in which even the most basic words have to be redefined, words like 'presence'. This was the word that Derrida focused on, and he said that in coming times even words like presence will have to be redefined because to say something like 'I am here' no longer means what it used to mean, in a way that is obvious to us all now, being the Zoomers that we are. It's more obvious to us now than it has ever been that just because someone's physically present in in the room doesn't necessarily mean they're 'present'. These are just keen insights from semiology, cybernetics and postmodernism, especially the latter in the sense that the lessons about personal subjectivity and identity that we are being taught by new info- and communication tech aren't so much *new* truths as they are truths that were always already the case – itself another catchphrase of postmodernism.

I don't know if you are familiar with this philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce, but there is a huge vogue in semiotics today of the Charles Peircean persuasion which is also more often times associated with a scientific/naturalistic approach, and then way on the other side there still

exists semiology, poststructuralism and deconstruction, and rarely do the two meet. Confronting this schism is a major task of the ISI, but I would say that this concern for the epistemic shift, and the depredations that come with it, is a commonality that should be maintained as the most important object of general semiotics.

So ultimately even the disparate branches share a common concern in this representational crisis and how to get around it, or how to mitigate the worst of its consequences. This is where Brier's book is really special, because of his efforts to make a distinction between *information* and *meaning*. I think this is the fundamental distinction, particularly for biosemiotics. Sometimes the definitions of information and meaning blend together, but with the help of the more technical definition of information used by cybernetics we can get a lot closer to specifying what is really meant by meaning. Meaning is more context-dependent and is (more) about communication, which involves sender-receiver relations and channel, whereas signification has to do with system and structure and the (more) formalizable side of things. Brier goes a long way to making the distinction between information and meaning, and he (along with some others) takes it an important step further.

More information does not equal more meaning – this is obvious to us today I think, in the same way that if someone is yelling in your face with the volume turned up, it doesn't mean that their meaning is going to get across to you better, although it can. But this claim (more information does not equal more meaning) is something which is kind of alien, or we could say meaningless, to the analytic philosopher (which is not to make any kind of strawman out of analytic philosophy, so let's say meaningless to the naive analytic philosopher) who wants to put definite limits on the describability of affect and emotions and to assert that we can't speak about these things because they're nonquantifiable.

No one is going to dispute the power computational tools for measuring *quantities* of information. That's another reason I like Brier though because he creates the convenient label of the 'information processing paradigm' for the late industrial way of thinking in which the technocratic and acquisitive mentalities dovetail and accelerate each other. He gives a real persuasive kind of semiotic treatment of it without delving into Marx or postmodernism. But considering the magnitude of the 'depredations' spoken of earlier we must admit that it may not be enough to merely say that 'more information does not equal more meaning'. In fact, we may go even a step further, as Brier and the others have done, to suggest that there maybe even be an inverse ratio or inverted relationship between informational capacity and modeling capacity. And here I introduce the word 'modeling' as if it were the same as 'meaning', which is not really the case, but let's just say for the sake of the argument that they are the same. Some have asserted that modeling capacity or meaning is actually decreased proportionally to informational capacity, and this is a kind of a counterintuitive idea: more information = less meaning or, more information = less modeling. Whatever is this 'modeling' and its distinction from information (this question is very close to the central interest of semiotics) it is not measurable, at least not in terms of quantity. And it can't be described formally; or perhaps we can describe it formally, but we cannot describe it algebraically. That's what I mean by quantities, and that's why we have a measurement problem in general semiotics. You do not yield upscalable results – an interest in this modeling and meaning is not conducive to monetizing outputs, and here of course I'm thinking of the professional academic context where our inability to draw this distinction puts us in a serious bind. It's a different issue – interestingly, this idea about the inverted relationship

between information and meaning also comes from cybernetics; not 'western' cybernetics however, but rather from Soviet cybernetics, and Brier for one does not refer to any of the Soviets.

The book is *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology*. In the article, "Structural typological study of semiotic modeling systems" the argument is that *religious* modeling systems are the ones that have the highest modeling capacity. Here firstly they're drawing attention to the limits of other purely linguistic approaches which, to their to their mentality, are closer to informational structures and thus more formalizable, and hence less meaningful than the religious ones. If you think of religious modeling systems, what do they may mean by that? I think we can at least say that there's certainly something more *theatrical* about the religious modeling situation. A church situation is a multimedia situation definitely. It's certainly a trans- or interpersonal situation. There's a lot of communication happening in that building. It's simultaneously iconic and symbolic. It's transdisciplinary. Of course we can see why the religious 'event' or 'scene' in their view presents a high-modeling capacity situation in comparison with, say, an instructional text. But there's also the fact that their semiotics was influenced by the *resistance* to Soviet Marxism and its prohibition of religion, so why they would want to valorize the religious modeling system particularly could be debated, but either way I think it's an effective example.

The first quote: "Various semiotic systems possess diverse modeling building roles. Moreover, the higher the system's model building function, the harder it is to formalize it" (Ivanov 1965: 36). That quote is from "The role of semiotics in the cybernetic study of man". The second quote is from an infamously difficult article. Up in Tartu in the semiotics MA and PHD everybody had to at least try to read this article but few have managed to say anything conclusive about it, at least in English. Probably there's some translation issue. Anyway, the quote from this article by Zalizniak, Ivanov and Toporov is "the problem of classifying semiotic systems by their degree of modeling capacity can be singled out from this circle of questions" (Zalizniak et. al 1962: 49).

Think of the *nativity manger scene*. Everyone knows what that is, right? There's the baby Jesus. There are some animals, and the Magi, I guess. And there's a star, and a farm. And like… okay, so people create them in their in their yard, right? At their church, or in their family yard. And they build them with plastic, with some Christmas lights, and it's kind of like what we call a *diorama* in primary school. I discussed the diorama with Ľudmila . You all call it *ikebana*. Is she right about this? I guess it's a Japanese word. Following the preceding logic, I might argue that the diorama presents an exceptionally high modeling capacity situation. Why is that? Well, you could say the same things about the diorama as I just said about the religious modeling system. It's multimedia, etcetera. But I would say even a little bit more about the diorama assignment in primary school.

The basis of the diorama assignment is that you have to use what's *at hand*. So again it's *ad hoc* modelling, it's improvisation. Because of this, the teacher learns something about the living situation of the child on the basis of the materials used to create the diorama. And remember of course that when they talked about modelling systems with high capacity usually it was *artistic* modeling systems that old Juri Lotman and the others really wanted to valorize, specifically novels and poems. In an instructional text (more closed, more strictly and explicitly coded) there should be something closer to a one-to-one relationship between sender and receiver in the sense that we want a minimum of ambiguity in the transmission of these kinds of texts. We're hoping

for not much 'translation' to be happening in such transmissions, and to elicit a definite response, to induce a predictable outcome, whereas in the case of the artistic text there's a wider variety of possible responses that might satisfy the 'intent' of the transmission, and you may even say in some cases that the artistic mentality is just *to cede control* over the interpretation to the receiver. And how you go about this opening of the meaning varies widely between artists, and whether or not this release of control is even a necessary part of artistic aesthetics is really a question of what your school is. It happens that the school of aesthetics that was popular at this time was very much about randomization and freeing and supported by the psychoanalytic theory free association developed mostly in Jacques Lacan's public seminars, and relying mostly on *the dream* (and its interpretation) as the primary model of sign, both at the level of communication and signification.

But anyway, within the frame of that aesthetic theory we may say that one condition for a high modeling capacity system is that the answer to the question of *what is being modeled* becomes more ambiguous. In the case of the diorama, part of what is being modeled is indeed the homelife of the child because there is some loss of control between sender and receiver due to certain constraints imposed on the message, as if the space of interpretation were opened and even *included* somehow with the diorama.

So I mentioned religious modelling systems and I've mentioned artistic texts, poetry, etcetera, and I've mentioned the diorama, but now we are coming around eventually to the idea of *maps* as a middle-point on the spectrum of this typology proposed by Zalizniak, that should be ordered on the basis of degrees of modeling capacity. It's impossible to fix such categories as 'religion', 'literature', or 'paintings' for example along any static spectrum due to the very non-formalizable nature of what is being described – nevertheless we may make certain generalizations such as that there's higher modeling capacity in a map than there is in an instructional text, and this is for the same reasons as with the religious modeling systems and with the dioramas. It's the combination of spatiality, visuality and multi-mediality that manages to capture the 'excluded middle' (following Peirce's intuitions about diagrams described in Lacková 2023), or we may call them the 'disjunctive propositions' following Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (2009[1972]) Whatever we call it, something that is excluded by other approaches is supposed to be included to the aforementioned examples. And we can understand in a very simple way, if we think about maps as *diagrams*, that little absences and spaces in every map and diagram are where that freedom is represented.

This is why Frederick Steinfeld refers to all maps as diagrams and talks about the skeletal nature of diagrams, how within every diagram there's a space for you to reinsert some new data, and based upon the transformations of the diagram you procure new, unpredictable results. Frederick is a Danish public figure, columnist, cognitive scientist and semiotician. The book to which I refer here, his first major book based on his habilitation, is called *Diagrammatology: An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology and Semiotics* (Stjernfelt: 2007).

For illustrating the basic iconic logic of the diagram Frederik's best examples are certainly the metro maps; however, the first example he gives is the Pythagorean Theorem, which we know in terms of the algebraic equation but which can be understood diagrammatically as well. And we understand how if we replace the central triangle with triangles of different sizes we yield different results, and thus the manipulability of the diagram, the freedom afforded by the

diagram. Frederik's notion of diagrams is quite broad. He would even refer to propositions themselves as diagrams so it becomes kind of complicated, but the best examples, as I said, are metro maps.

I've been talking about maps a lot recently because well, for whatever reason, I'll come back to it, but my friend, expert in semiology who works alongside us in Olomouc, posed the question quite directly to me: "Okay, in the case of a map then, you think the map is the perfect example of a modeling system? so then what is the *content plane* of the map?" As you know, there are many sign models with different utilities, but I adopt Umberto Eco's early bi-planar model for a number of reasons (not only because it is the most suitable for general semiotics); but so: on the basis of Eco's depiction here
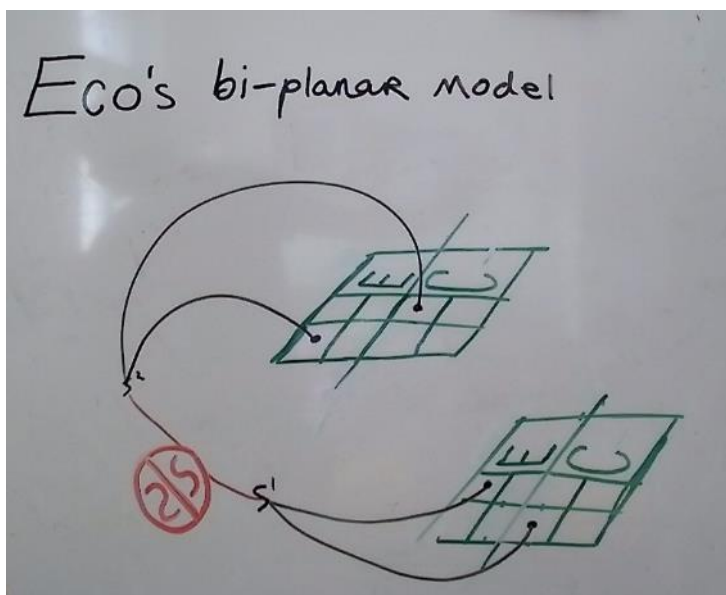

Figure 2, source : author´s archive

we have an expression plane and a content plane, and when they're joined we get a sign. Expression plane becomes the signifier and content plane becomes the signified. Signified is traditionally thought of as word-image or acoustic image, and signified is thought of usually as 'mental' content or perhaps even concept. Expression and content are what they are when separate – they are uniquely *in*separable in a descriptive sense, especially the content plane, especially when it is conceived trans-linguistically. It is the ability to even have such thoughts, which semiology distinctively makes possible, and this (the pluralization of the content plane) is also the source of its intrinsic 'ideology critique' (Chávez-Barreto 2022). Here's a metro map of Copenhagen.
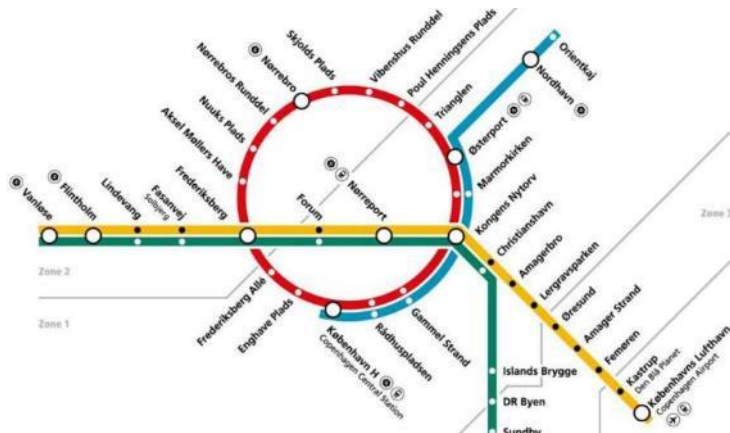
Figure 3, Transportation - Everything Copenhagen

To answer my friend in I started thinking aloud. If we look at the metro map obviously there is a set of conventional signifiers – of course the names of the stops are themselves signifiers. The name "Christianshavn" as a signifier corresponds to Christianshavn as a place. If you've never been to Christianshavn you don't know what it looks like, so your mental representation is somewhat impoverished, but it doesn't really matter. The content plane is going to depend upon the frame; that is, there are all sorts of composite signs happening here, so we can take signifiers in isolation, you know, like these individual words or these little icons that name the tracks. M3 as a signifier here refers to the actual circular track, the red track; however, we are supposed to take these as *composite* signs. Every signifier can be dealt with independently in this way, but it doesn't really yield anything. The *actual* content plane of the metro map (it occurs to me after some thought) is a set of possible *instructions* and answers to certain questions. If I'm at Gammel Strand and I want to go from there to Christianshavn, one thing I learn from the map is a prohibitive lesson: I've got to get off the blue line at Kongens Nytorv and get on the yellow line. Expression and content are joined by means of the creation of a sign. There can be signs in the map which are already created and then there are signs which are yet to be created, and the interpretant from Peirce is an idea that's meant to refer to the creation of new correlations between expression and content (in Umberto Eco's bi-planar model for general semiotics). In maps and diagrams like this there is even a place made for the *potential* correlation. The interpretant is represented within the diagram by means of exclusions and spaces which may be filled out, so to speak, by the synthetic action of the personal phenomenological repertoire, and by diagram transformations. Frederick says this is how maps and diagrams surpass some of the purely linguistic alternatives. We may think of maps as stepping stones toward the kind of controlled hallucination which (like the dream), according to his successor, Eco thought of as the model *par excellence* for semiosis (Paolucci 2022).

Another reason why I was talking about maps so obsessively with my colleague is not because of metro maps, although I do quite like the design of the Copenhagen metro map. It's pretty cool. Yes, that's right, people ask me: Slovakia, what's up with this slovenská semiotická skupina? I tell them the answer is related to the 5th principle of general semiotics which I keep bringing up, about *ad hoc* modeling. For me, Slovakia is simply *at hand*.

Tatranská Semiotika as a project is self-referential in the obvious sense that I've turned the camera upon ourselves inside the Slovakian context and tried to hypostasize the observer-dependency of my own reality, in the hopes that we may achieve the recursive double-mirror effect and some re-entry effect such, as when two mirrors are pointed at each other. In combination with the reproductive tools of the digital, we think it may help us 'get outside' the limitations of the institution, both geographically and conceptually.

Yeah, that's it, and because I like to ski. Use what's available, because by using what's available you impose a constraint upon the array of possible materials for your representation, and through this limitation you hope to make new contact with the external. So in the case of ski maps, there's a lot that's included and a lot which is excluded.
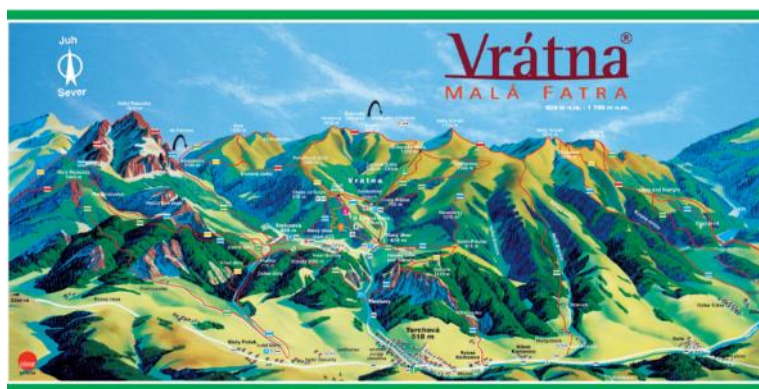

Figure 4, Vrátna - Malá Fatra (vratna.sk)

This is a map of the ski resort Vrátna, in the Malá Fatra mountains, as you can see. Has anyone been there? No? What about to the nearby town of Terchová? Yes? Okay, good. We were there just last weekend. Much is included on this map and much is excluded. This has a lot to do with what they want you to *do* with the map and what they want you *not* to do. We may think of the map as a sort of *icon*. It *looks like* a mountain. This is a similarity relation. It's kind of green. It has some kind of dimensionality; but we must simultaneously talk about the pure conventionality of the signifiers inside the map as well as the conventionality of the map as a whole. The imaginary experience that we have when engaging with this map *is* entirely dependent upon our familiarity with similar maps, that is, with similar locations. In order to have a robust imaginary projection of the map you have to have been there basically, or have been to a number of places that are quite similar. Composite memories aid to fill out the mental projection of the map, so somebody who has never been to the mountains is just not going to see the same thing. Not at all. And in this way it is not purely, but at least largely, conventional. This is the point from Eco's famous critique of the notion of the icon and the index (Eco 1979[1976]; Bennett 2023[2]), which we will not discuss today. I would also say before going on

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[2] See Frederik Stjernfelt's discussion of Eco's critique of iconism. While I for one strongly endorse Umberto Eco's early model and synthesis of Peirce with structural semiology presented already in his first major English language work *A Theory of Semiotics* (improved and perfected in *Semiotics and the Philosophy of*

that we can also talk about *ideological mapping* in connection with exclusion and inclusion. The people who design the map have very specific ideas about what they want you to do and what they do not want you to do. Consider this ski map. This is some pretty respectable terrain. Here are the downhill tracks. This is an intermediate track which you can infer by the fact that it is marked in red. But over here, there's no track. You see, they don't want you to go over here, but if we consult a different mapping application, you know, we find alternative routes. This is an app called FatMap.
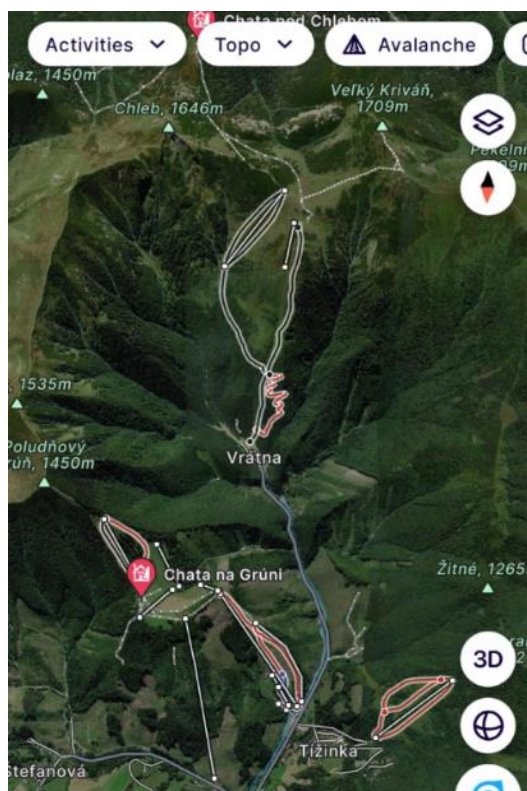

Figure 5, source: author´s archive

They don't want me to hit the dangerous terrain – I'm probably going to anyway, but sometimes we need ideology because avalanches also happen. We include mapping with softness and quietness as themes of Slovakian semiotics, and we add something about the importance of *location*. Communication is always dealing with scenarios and events, and you cannot have a scenario or an event without a location, right? Professor Fujak and myself are very fortunate

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Language (1984) and *The Role of the Reader* 1984[1979], it should be noted that Frederik's reading – which maintains that Eco was wrong about Peirce entirely and that Eco puts forward a conventionalism that is tantamount to 'culturalism' in the sense of bad relativism, dismissing it more or less just as he dismisses second-generation semiology – is the accepted one, and mine a pretty marginal one.

for having had many great teachers over the years, some of whom have set a great example for us for carrying on this tradition of outdoor meetings (P-Orridge 2009[1994]). In this we are thinking firstly of Professor Eero Tarasti, former director of the International Semiotic Institute, whose meetings in Imatra are the stuff of legend. Here we are in Helsinki after we gave some presentations for his meeting of the Finnish Semiotic Society last December (2022).

Figure 6, source: author´s archive

Being the very cordial host that he is, he also took us to an art exhibition of the Finnish artist Axali Gallen Kallela, late 19th century, at the National Museum. I think there are some common interests and we take some cues from the Finns when it comes to developing our own themes. There were numerous skiing-related paintings. I like the softness of snow and particularly the way that it dampens sound. If you're in the backcountry you know how the trees get caked with snow and if you're in an alleyway of trees, it produces the weirdest silence. One emblem of the Finnish semiotics which we probably cannot rightfully appropriate is *the sauna* (there were at least three notable sauna-related paintings); however, the Finns do not have an exclusive proprietary relationship with the sauna as a symbol of their national semiotics because of course they share this particular symbol with the Estonians. Biosemiotics progenitor Kalevi Kull is known as some kind of minimalist faux-Zen master – I mention him mostly because he showed us how effective these outdoor meetings can be.

The Estonian coastline is usually a pretty easygoing kind of place (although in the winter it can be pretty demanding), but in this respect it is not the ideal setting for my Tatranská Semiotika. I will mention here the limits of romanticism. What I'm proposing is that if we are careful about the location of our meeting it can help to maximize the modeling situation and we may have a more meaningful experience as a result. This concern for nature sounds a bit naïve, or I mean it sounds a bit romantic. This kind of naive romanticism is uncritical in the philosophical sense certainly, and thus unsemiotic at least to the extent that semiotics is a critical philosophy, or

derives from critical philosophy starting from Immanuel Kant. And there is nothing intrinsic to this symbolism which might draw our attention to the *limits* of romanticism, and this is why I think we may find some better symbols in the Slovakian setting. I think we may find them in the *Tatras*, because there is something *menacing* about the Tatras. Especially as they are represented here.

Figure 7, source: author´s archive

There are certain dangers of romanticism – ecologically oriented semiotics for instance is hyper-focused on environmental catastrophe and the *impossibility* of reunion with lost nature. The diorama captures the industrial setting of the Tatras. As far as I understand it, the High Tatras themselves are also kind of beset in an industrial context by the factories across the border into Poland as well as the ongoing mining activities in Slovakia. Tichá Dolina, for example – the most well-preserved and oldest natural wildlife in all of Europe – is also beset in this way. Does anyone know where the above picture was taken? It's Slovenské Museum Map! I propose this to be the unofficial headquarters of Tatranská Semiotika. Don't miss it. My presentation has not been intended to define or to demarcate the limits or boundaries of Slovakian semiotics but rather to pluralize them, and to invite you to the next official event of this project.
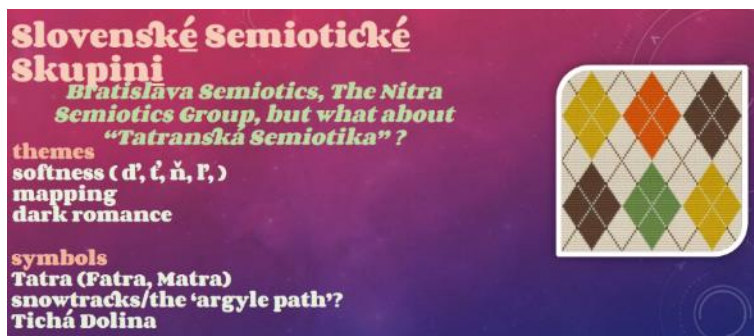
Figure 8, source: author´s archive

These are the themes and symbols that I claim to derive from my Tatranská Semiotika. I think softness is probably the best because as those in the audience already know, one thing that distinguishes the otherwise quite similar Czech language from the Slovakian language is precisely the latter's softness, the abundance of these softened consonants ď, ť, ň. Soft like snow. Soft like the voice of some Slovakians I know. We never get away from linguistics in semiotics, but you can see how this principle of softness also reflects this idea about the inverted relationship between information and meaning. These themes must also consider the deconstruction of 'the local' and 'being present' so as not to regress to any kind of pre-critical realism, *particularly* if it is interested in 'getting outside'. Because cognitive linguistics is so important to our mapping project I must also mention Jamin Pelkey's book *The Semiotics of X: Chiasmus, Cognition and Extreme Body Memory* (2017) and this embodied notational system that he has derived.

Figure 9, source: author´s archive

It describes the movement from tortured isolation (x) within ideological binds (hourglass), to transcendent overcoming of false oppositions (rhombus), and then finally intersubjective union (argyle). This is why we name the "argyle path" as one modelling method appropriate to Tatranská Semiotika. Tomorrow I'll talk to you more about the technocratic vision four Cybersemiotic Culture Research Unit. Ďakujem mnohokrát.

Figure 10, source: author´s archive

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Modul všeobecnej semiotiky a slovenská semiotická skupina

Modul všeobecnej semiotiky je výskumný klaster / skupina Medzinárodného semiotického inštitútu v Olomouci. Inštitút si osvojuje pojem všeobecnej semiotiky z praktickej nevyhnutnosti a pokračuje v stanovovaní jeho konkrétnych princípov, ktoré sa týkajú viac komunikácie ako signifikácie / významu ako takého. Zahŕňajú: 1) Prierezovosť, interdisciplinaritu, multidisciplinaritu a transdisciplinaritu. 2) Intersekcionalitu a inkluzivitu. 3) Viacdruhovosť, multipolaritu, jazykový a kultúrny polyglotizmus. 4) Neziskový verejný prístup. 5) Sebareferenciu, improvizáciu a modeláciu. Následne prechádzame k určitému spracovaniu základných princípov a ďalej sa zameriame na amorfnú / beztvarú slovenskú semiotickú skupinu: Aký by bol jej myšlienkový obsah / náplň? Aké by boli kľúčové témy osobitej slovenskej semiotiky?

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