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SEMANTICS ↔ PRAGMATICS

The Möbius Strip of the Pragmasemantics of Meaning: From Culture through Agency into Nothing and Back

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Abstract—An attempt is made to consider the process of meaning making from the pragmasemantic point of view. This makes it possible to show how the main factors of meaning making—sociocultural practices and agency—interact. Their interaction is not linear. Agency is the result of assimilation of sociocultural experience and accompanying communication in a narrative format. Self-awareness is the result of the socialization of the individual in his/her reflexive self-description. Thus, it forms a "strange loop" (D. Hofstadter), in which the inner closes on the outer, the social on the individual. Thus, the bearer of self-awareness acquires a horizon of vision of the world that goes beyond the scope of physical presence, and with this, the ability not only to respond to situationality but also to potentiate situationality, procreative preadaptive response to the environment. Agency is a flexible entity, ready to be filled with new content, capable of self-change, of becoming different. The main identity of a self-aware person is a self-sufficient sign of himself as a "man without qualities." Human existence is a lack, an absence, a loss, a desire for change. It is like emptiness that does not fit into the signs, a wandering excess that connects the unconnectable. In this regard, special attention is paid to the apophatic nature of meaning making. Pauses, intervals, breaks, spaces make signs signs against the background of nonexistence. Agency acts as a "user of voids" as a metacontext—the source, means, and result of meaning generation. It itself is a gap in existence, as an incomplete entity, ready for additions and reboots. In this regard, agency appears as a universal interface with potentially infinite context relationships. This interface implements the interaction between the real and any other possible world, making it possible to move from a situation of physical reality to an imaginary one and vice versa or even to consider them simultaneously.

Keywords: apophatics, deep semiotics, culture, pragmasemantics, self-awareness, meaning, agency
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Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος
[In the beginning was the Word—*Tr.*]

IN THE BEGINNING OR AT THE BEGINNING: FREGE'S CONCEPT OF MEANING; THE NEED FOR CLARIFICATION

As the greats—Confucius and Plato—taught, any work must begin with the "correction of names," that is, with the clarification of the meaning of the words used—in this case, with the ways of using key terms that set the object of discussion in this text.

First, it is *meaning*, a word used in a variety of contexts—from the meaning of a word and a spoken phrase to the meaning of what is happening and the meaning of life. Meaning is one of the key concepts of logical semantics, linguistics, art history, communication theory, and social psychology. Meaning and meaning making are fundamental phenomena and concepts for research into culture and its dynamics, related to understanding reality, developing social experience in adapting to and changing it. Meaning making is linked to the features of a specific historical experience, the formation of norms, motivation for actions, creativity, and deviation.

This list can go on and on. Such "ambiguity" is due to the nature of this phenomenon and concept. However, over the past century, the development of symbolic logic, logical semantics, artificial intelligence research, theory and philosophy of meaning has generated a critical mass of ideas and developments calling for generalization and systematization. An attempt to outline ways to solve this problem is undertaken in this work. It seems important to return to the "origins," namely, to the first formulated concept of meaning proposed at the end of the 19th century by Gottlob Frege.

Frege's ideas, primarily those presented in his article "On Sense and Reference" [Frege 1892a], as well as some other works (such as "Function and Concept" [Frege 1891], "On Concept and Object" [Frege 1892a], "Thought" [Frege 1918–1919]), played a key role in logical semantics, philosophy of language, analytical philosophy, if not European philosophy as a whole [Kurennoi 2018; Pavlova, Chupakhin 2015]. In the first place, we mean the famous "Frege's triangle," which represents the relationship between a sign (*die Zeichen*) as a designation of a certain objectivity (*die Bedeutung*) and the expression of sense (*der Sinn*). Indicatively, there is no triangle in the work "On Sense and Reference" itself. However, the convenient scheme has long been widely used to illustrate Frege's semantic model.

At first glance, this schematism—a sign denotes something and expresses meaning, understanding of this something—is simple, convenient, and universal. For example, in traditional logic it practically coincides with the distinction between the volume and content of concepts associated with terms. The operation of defining a term specifies the semantic content of a concept, and the relations between concepts are reduced to operations with the volumes of concepts (inclusion, genus and type, intersection, exclusion, generalization, concretization, classification), which clarifies the connection of formal logic with set theory and Boolean algebra.

Frege's merit is also that he applied this schematism not only to the theory of concepts (predicates) but also to the theory of judgments (utterances). In this case, *die Bedeutung* of a statement is associated with its truth value (true/false), and *der Sinn*, with a certain thought. In this regard, it turns out that all judgments can designate only two objects, abstract ones: truth or falsity. However, in such semantics, all judgments and other logical constructions are linked by the possibility of empirical verification of their content—as a correspondence or noncorrespondence to the world as a whole, which opened the way to logical positivism (empiricism), dominant in modern science. Moreover, this made it possible to build logical analysis as a type of functional analysis, where the truth value acts as an argument. This line was continued by Frege's immediate disciple, R. Carnap, in his distinction between extension and intension as the objective and substantive aspects of conceptual structures (descriptions of the state) of the universe of reasoning.

In semiotic terms, Frege's main contribution lies precisely in the introduction of a third (in addition to the signifier and the signified) component of semiosis, meaning, which plays a mediating role between the sign and the signified, as a way of the givenness of this signified. An object is always given, appears in some relation, some angle, a specific perspective or some angle. Since the relations of any object can vary infinitely, an infinite number of meanings can be associated with any object. Meaning making appeared to be the key moment of semiosis, which is not reduced to designation (*Bedeutung*, reference). It is the generation of meaning (meaning/sense) that gives semiosis its fullness, regardless of whether this is a process controlled by a person or occurs on its own.

Meaning is the result of representing objects, things, phenomena—real and imaginary—in the context of their givenness or use. Thus, a sign can have a meaning even if it is devoid of the signified. This is not only the case of centaurs, mermaids, the ring of omnipotence, the magic wand, and other characters and artifacts of fairy tales and fantasies, which have their own nonempty ontology, but also concepts with an empty volume—terms and expressions, the existence of *Bedeutung* of which is in principle impossible ("round square," "salted sugar," etc.). The absence of the existence of reference meanings of such signs not only makes it possible to build judgments like "round squares do not exist" but also to reason in the style of nonsense and absurdity [Tulchinskii 2022b]. Without Frege's semantic concept, the increase in knowledge through new comparisons and metaphorization is incomprehensible. Such an increase occurs regardless of whether we are dealing with the same object that has different meanings or with a situation where the connection of different meanings with the same object is not obvious and can be established later (as was the case with the "Morning Star" and the "Evening Star" as two meanings of the planet Venus).

Frege's idea of meaning as a mode of givenness of an object is one of the most important in European philosophy of the last two centuries. Its role and influence can be traced as a red line in the successive works of such thinkers as E. Husserl, M. Heidegger, H.-G. Gadamer, G. Agamben. The theory of meaning of L. Wittgenstein and B. Latour is based on the mode of givenness and use of a sign.

However, Frege's concept of meaning making has a number of ambiguities. Thus, the referential (extensional) character of the logical analysis developed in Frege's spirit presupposes the nonemptiness of the subject area, which does not fit well with the mediating role of meaning. This gave rise to a nontrivial problem of logical analysis of nonextensional (modal, epistemic, etc.) contexts, the problem of the applicability of standard quantifier logic in modal logic. The justification of logical analysis of such contexts using the semantics of possible worlds (state descriptions) reduced the interpretation of modality operators and epistemic attitudes to quantification by possible worlds.

A certain role was also played by the ambiguous translations of key Fregean terms. Thus, *die Bedeutung* is translated into English either as *reference* (designation, reference meaning) or as *meaning* (semantic meaning). *Der Sinn* (sense) is translated as *meaning* (as meaning in linguistic terms) and as *sense* (meaning in

mental terms). Husserl, a direct disciple of Frege, proposed to call the signified (*Bedeutung*) an *object* and to use the concepts of *sense* and *meaning* as synonyms. There are also other terminological variations of Frege's triad.

Such a discrepancy in terminology and interpretations does not seem accidental. Frege's concept of meaning has a certain fundamental duality. On the one hand, it is about the modes of givenness, that is, objective factors. On the other hand, despite Frege's rigor, the structural clarity of the model of sign semantics, the interpretation of *Bedeutung* as an indicated objectivity (reference), a certain psychologism appears in the interpretation of *Sinn*, something "human, all too human." Meaning is the product of a finite system that tries to comprehend the infinite diversity of the world. It is always forced to do this from a certain position, from a certain perspective, from a certain point of view, with a certain goal; in other words, "in a certain sense." A human being is precisely such a system—a finite being in space and time, endowed with the ability to recognize his position and its choice. In this regard, meaning is a fundamentally human manifestation, a dimension of existence. Outside of a self-aware person, there is no meaning—only determinations, cause-and-effect relationships. Yet how exclusively anthropological is agency?

This article attempts to overcome Frege's duality of the concept of meaning, to trace the commonality, interconnection, and interdependence in meaning making of the factors of social and activity determination and agency.

It seems that the basis for such a generalization can be semiotics, or more precisely, its expansion in the format of deep semiotics, stereometric semantics, and pragmasemantics. Note that it is the pragmasemantic approach that is of particular interest since it makes it possible to find a platform that integrates the necessary generalization.

DEEP SEMIOTICS AND STEREOMETRIC SEMANTICS

The proposed approach can be substantiated by several circumstances. In the first place, as has already been said, meaning is connected with a certain position, which M.M. Bakhtin characterized as the "position of outsidedness" [Bakhtin 1979, p. 79]: to provide the possibility of some generalization of the situation, properties, relations of the object, it must be external to it, bring it into the context of consideration. Thus, the meaning of a word is revealed from a phrase; the meaning of a phrase, from the text; the meaning of a text, from the context of its use. Similarly, the search for the meaning of life takes one beyond the framework of individual existence, immersing one in various "contexts": the birth and upbringing of children, religion, service to a political or scientific idea.

The choice of such a "position of outsidedness" (contextual out) makes meaning intentional and teleological, linking it with expedient sociocultural practices. Hence the "multiple meanings" that are determined by the diversity of cultures and corresponding sociocultural practices.

Therefore, the idea of the intentionality of meaning as a given use of objects and signs can be presented in the contexts of functional systems, orders, frames, patterns [Latour 2014; Goffman 2004; Sokolov 1972] of social practices. A generalization of these approaches was the concept of value-regulatory systems (VRSs), which are determined by values (goals) of activity; norms, rules governing the implementation of activity; resources (cash that ensure the possibility of implementing activity); the way of organizing activity, including communication [Tulchinskii 2019b]. Specific VRSs are forms of employment, leisure, scientific activity, types and genres of art, and everyday life. A specific VRS is language—a social activity implemented for the purpose of communicative service of other VRSs, including itself. The experience of using language in specific VRSs sets the corresponding discursive practices, without mastering which it is impossible to enter communities: national, ethnic, professional, age, etc. In this regard, the national language (speech and writing) turns out to be a guide to the overall VRS system of a particular culture.

As a result, culture appears as a system of generation, selection, preservation, transmission, and reproduction of social experience. As a VRS system, it acts as a "social memory," "historical collective memory," a "supraindividual information system"—it is not by chance that Yu.M. Lotman defined culture as a system of nongenetic inheritance of information about behavior [Lotman 2000, p. 8]. It is through participation in VRSs that the socialization of the individual is carried out, the assimilation of the corresponding programs of social experience, including a stable system of rules, norms, and standards adopted by a particular society to achieve socially significant goals, its own canon of comprehension (logonomy) [Ilyin 2020; Fomin, Ilyin 2019]. Without bearers of culture—socialized individuals—culture is dead. This is on the one hand. On the other hand, culture, reproduced with the help of socialization, "growing" programs of social experience for bearers of this culture, needs individualization, a unique, unrepeatable originality of this assimilation for its development. This uniqueness is embodied in agency, selfhood—the main source of plasticity and dynamics of human civilization, ensuring its procreativity (an excess supply of options, behavior scenarios), and thus the preadaptation of the individual and society, the preemptive nature of the reaction to the circumstances of existence and development [Asmolov, Shekhter, Chernorizov 2018]. Thus, we approached agency—the third, key aspect for this research, the "human-dimensionality of meaning."

The possibility of detailing the concept of meaning and the mechanism of semiosis provides an expansion and supplementation of traditional semiotics—as semiotics (going back to the algebra of relations of C.S. Peirce and American pragmatism) or as semiology (going back to F. de Saussure and French structuralism)—by "deep semiotics," going back to the traditions of hermeneutics; philology of W. Humboldt and K. Vossler; and the ideas and works of G.G. Shpet and Bakhtin, influenced by the *imyaslavie* (onomatoloxy) of S. Bulgakov, P.A. Florenskii, and A.F. Losev, as well as the works of Soviet psychologists L.S. Vygotskii and A.N., A.A., and D.A. Leont'evs. The issue is about distinguishing in the structure of sense (Fregean *Sinn*) a relatively stable social meaning, fixed by the practices of social communication, and variable personal meaning. In turn, in the content of social meaning, one can distinguish between objective and functional meaning, related to the subject and method of specific social activity.

Obviously, the two components of social meaning noted correspond to the scope and content of the concept. The objective social meaning corresponds to the sense of meaning proposed by I.D. Nevvazhai. It is also important that the reference meaning can be both proper (in the case of cultural artifacts, instruments of activity, considered as signs) and improper (for example, in the case of linguistic signs referring to objects, things, artifacts, phenomena).

In turn, in the personal sense, the evaluative attitude of experiencing a certain activity is singled out (where the possibility of its repeatability and rhythm plays an important role). The main thing is that all these components of the semantic structure are connected with the practices of social activity as methods of givenness, contexts of meaning making. The object meaning is connected with the object content, the functional meaning is connected with the mode of activity, and the personal meaning is connected with the evaluative attitude towards it and its direct experience or empathy.

We do not mean just the components of the semantic content of social experience but a system of interconnection and interdependence. The sequential passage from the material form of a sign through the object meaning, functional meaning, evaluative attitude to experience gives an idea of understanding, comprehension, deobjectification, subjectivation of the semantic content of social experience expressed in the sign system. In this regard, the identified components of the semantic structure also appear as levels of hermeneutic comprehension: identification, reference, interpretation, evaluation, and empathy. The opposite passage—from experience through the evaluative attitude, functional and objective social meaning to the material form of a sign—demonstrates the objectification of experience, the process of embodying the semantic content of social experience in semiosis [Tulchinskii 2018; Tulchinskii 2019a; Tulchinskii 2019b].

In a recent publication, Nevvazhai posed the question of the need to move the analysis from the structure of semiotic systems to their dynamics, the key to which is the distribution of the influence of sense on both the meaning and the sign itself. In revealing this influence, Nevvazhai relies on supplementing Frege's semantic model with the meaning of the sign and the meaning of the meaning. Nevvazhai connects the space of semantic dynamics with consciousness and its two characteristics (abilities): intentional and responsive. The former ensures the interpretation of meaning, and the latter, its expression [Nevvazhai, 2023].

These tasks are solved within the framework of deep semiotics, which complements and develops the traditional theory of signs with the personological vector (dimension) of semiosis. Therefore, its concept in its initial formulation, presented above, is quite clearly "human dimensional." However, as will be shown below, it can serve as a bridge to the next level of generalization. It is important, however, that deep semiotics does not distribute but details Frege's syncretic *der Sinn*, revealing the mechanism of the dynamics of the semantic complex and the conjugation in this dynamism of the active role of both social practice and actors and their agency.

In addition, the activity–practical nature of social meaning makes it possible to overcome the referential–extensionalist limitations of the semantics of logical analysis. We mean supplementing the semantic assessment of judgments for compliance with reality (truth/falsity) with compliance with the goals of the activity and the rules for its implementation. Such three-dimensional "stereometric" semantics not only corresponds to the structure of any sociocultural practice that has goals, rules (norms), and implementation resources but also implements the value–normative synthesis of meaningful knowledge, bringing scientific knowledge closer to other forms of knowledge: scientific, technical, political, moral, artistic, educational, economic ideas. In this work, we will not delve into this perspective, especially since it was sufficiently spelled out earlier [Tulchinskii 2019b].

PRAGMASEMANTICS OF MEANING

The three identified "human-dimensional" aspects of meaning—"autisticity" (the need for outsidedness), contextual intentionality (teleologicity, dependence on sociocultural practices), and the role of agency—are fundamentally important for meaning making. The manifestation of the mechanism of their interconnection is the main goal of this work. This connection has already been outlined in this introductory fragment of the work. Further clarification suggests an approach that could provide a certain "common denominator," a conceptual platform for bring-

ing the three identified aspects into a common system of interaction. As such an approach, the concept of "pragmasemantics" is proposed [Zolyan 2021, pp. 247, 248] as a complex and interface of meaning making, linking the analysis of the content and meaning of the text with the context of the sociocultural practice of its use. The prerequisites for this approach were developed by an international team as part of the study of the mechanisms of meaning making and textualization in narrative and performative discourses and practices [*Mezhdu mirom i yazykom* 2022]. The concept of pragmasemantics with a detailed arrangement of the fundamentally important emphases of semiosis is most fully presented by S.T. Zolyan in his publication in *Voprosy Filosofii*, in which the fundamentally important accents of semiosis are very precisely arranged [Zolyan 2023]. Zolyan presents pragmasemantics not simply as a buffer or border zone but as a special area in which semantic structures are created, as a cascade of interfaces representing the relationship between the world, language, and cultural context. Note that pragmatics as such is not associated with an anthropomorphic subject endowed with consciousness. We are talking specifically about contexts of the use of signs and sign systems. This context is embodied, soldered into the material form of the sign. Roughly speaking, a bolt remembers that it is a bolt, and a nut remembers that it is a nut.

Any system has intentionality as the desire of the system to maintain its integrity. This is manifested not only in biosystems (vitality) but also in physical, chemical, cosmic formations. The differences are in the specifics of the systems. Any system with negative feedback that builds its homeostasis gives rise to a quasi-mind (in the terminology of Pierce) as a regulator of intentionality. R. Dennett and A. Damasio call such states a basic, primary form of consciousness, over which increasingly complex forms are built—due to the increasing complexity of systems—up to reflection in the spirit of Hofstadter's mathematically described "strange loop" [Hofstadter 2022].

Pragmasemantics is essentially a game of interfaces of contexts of these practices (patterns, frames). However, the factor of dynamics, change, combination of such contexts poses the problem of a universal interface that implements such dynamics. Only one such universal interface is known thus far—personal agency. The role of such agency is an exceptionally relevant problem in connection with the expansion of digital (formalized, mathematized, algorithmic) communication formats that permeate almost all spheres of modern social life.

Therefore, it is quite logical that Zolyan includes in pragmasemantics the role of agency, fundamental for meaning making, which he relates to the key operator for the pragmasemantic system—the pronoun "I." It not only indicates the speaker relative to whom the remaining coordinates of contextualization (place, time, world) are set; it simultaneously sets the boundary between different semiotic structures, this is already another "I," a semiotic "I," which is a relationship between a certain sign structure and the metastructure describing it [Zolyan 2023a; b]. This is already agency, generating the subject of judgment (utterance). As is known, in logic, the subject is the subject of judgment to which the predicate is attributed. Thus, we are dealing with the self-generation of the author and the subject of semiosis, their coincidence.

Agency is the gluing point of the Möbius strip, Hofstadter's strange loop, the point of entry into the hermeneutic circle of meaning making. It appears as a wandering attractor, a universal interface of meaning making. In this regard, it is surprisingly reminiscent of Husserl's transcendental subject, which in Husserl is not a psychosocial personality but something like a blind spot in the eye, which itself is not observable but without which vision is impossible. Therefore, it "makes sense" to continue further consideration precisely with the factor of agency. It is justified to conduct such consideration, for the sake of greater clarity, in the "human" aspect, bearing in mind the possibility of going beyond this horizon of generalization.

AGENCY AS A FACTOR OF PROCREATIVE MEANING MAKING

The concept of agency, of its manifestations such as self-awareness and free will, determine not only the basic content of humanities-related knowledge, the theory and practice of morality, politics, law, artistic culture, upbringing, education but also, one might say, the core of the anthropological content of our civilization.

Thus, they are also key to the dynamics of meaning making. If meaning opens the entrance to the space of the dynamics of semiosis, then tracing this dynamic requires a certain space of its manifestation. The first thing that comes to mind as an apparatus for describing such a space is the phenomenology of consciousness. Such a phenomenology is not limited to the implementation of Husserl's approach, which itself, in this regard, deserves a new reading, taking semiosis beyond the framework of Husserl's poorly operationalized concepts.

Self-awareness is the awareness of oneself as something special, separate, highlighted in the flow of life, reflection. In combination with the activation of oneself as an actor, it forms selfhood ("I-ness," *die Ichkeit*, I-concept). If I am aware of myself plus my own responsibility for the fact of the existence of my I and for the manifestations of this existence (actions or inactions), then this already constitutes the manifestation of agency—responsible self-awareness of selfhood.

In fact, it is precisely the presence of developed agency that distinguishes man from the animal world, in which one can find manifestations of "protoconsciousness" (protoself as the bios of a living organism) and "basic consciousness" (core self as a sensually expressed bodily distinction in the flow of sensations, reactions from receptors) [Damasio 2010].

In the context of our consideration, it is important that self-awareness arises in the process of socialization, the individual's mastery of sociocultural practices, accompanied by discursive communication, in which parents and teachers tear the individual out of cause-and-effect relationships, closing them on him, making him an actor, *causa sui*, the cause of what is happening. By the age of three years old, the child masters the narration from the first person, which is the textual basis of self-awareness and memory.

Thus, it turns out that, in fact, agency is an epiphenomenon of culture. The main thing in agency is the individual's taking responsibility for what is happening, what has happened, or what may happen (probably, this is what Nevvazhai means when he speaks of the "responsive function" of consciousness). Others initially "burden" one with this responsibility, and agency turns out to be secondary, derivative in relation to this responsibility. In this regard, Bakhtin was deeply and fundamentally right in his reflections on the fact that consciousness and reason are not only secondary in relation to responsibility but are also its instrument, a measure of awareness of one's ability to influence what is happening [Bakhtin 1986]. Freedom is also secondary in relation to responsibility—a "godlike" ability, a preexistent and extraexistent source of being, a sensory organ of the transcendent [Berdyayev 1989]. Freedom is not a "hole in existence" (N.A. Berdyayev, J.P. Sartre) but a shuttle that weaves the fabric of existence. This shuttle is the result of socialization, once again confirming that man is a social being.

Moreover, this epiphenomenon of social acculturation enables its bearer to build a holistic meaningful narrative of self-awareness, a "novel of one's memory," returning to its beginning and rewriting the initial "chapters" [Henrich 2018]. We mean a holistic but unfinished and incomplete system, open to new development, choice of situation and place in it, the possibility of being outside of situations and between them, and therefore to changing contexts, i.e. the transition from one sociocultural practice to another, or even the creation of new practices. Such situational mobility, activity in positioning, the ability to liminality are the main characteristics of agency, which turns out to be a pragmasemantic universal interface that implements the interaction between the individual and the social, the real and the imaginary, the transition from situations of physical reality to the reality of hopes, anxieties, desires—and vice versa.

The course of reasoning brings us back to the mechanism of the dynamics of meaning making in the relationship between social practices and agency as the generation and factor in the development of these practices.

SYNCHRONY AND DIACHRONY OF THE CONNECTION OF SOCIAL AND SUBJECT PLANES OF MEANING MAKING: DEEP SEMIOTICS

The relationship and interrelationships of the social and subjective aspects (factors) of meaning making are not limited to the generation of agency in the process of mastering sociocultural practices, accompanied by the mastery of narrative communication. It is also manifested in the development of these practices themselves, in which the reverse influence has a nontrivial significance.

Structurally and synchronically, this is expressed in the semantic content of the sign systems of culture—as presented in the concept of deep semiotics discussed above. While traditional semiotics and semiology are focused on identifying and analyzing the meaning in "ready," already given sign systems, and D. Halliday's social semiotics is limited to examining social contexts (patterns, frames), deep semiotics makes it possible to move from synchronic analysis to the analysis of diachrony, the dynamics of the development of sign systems, enabling integrating into the interdisciplinary possibilities of such analysis, and, what is especially important, opening the prospect of expanding the analysis of meaning to the processes of its embodiment.

For example, the diachrony of personal meanings and social meanings is manifested in the development of the VRSs of culture, their institutionalization—in the ratio of the semantic and socioorganizational aspects in this process.

This process begins with the emergence of a certain purely personal idea, thought, image, which may remain a fact of personal experience and nothing more. However, a person can share this idea with others, and some common understanding may arise. Everything may stop at this level, but regular informal communication (meetings, correspondence, etc.) may arise on the basis of common understanding. Such communication may develop into a fairly formal, systematized communication (seminars, conferences, clubs); leaders, programs, manifestos, and recruitment of supporters may appear. At some point, such a community has a need for media resources, funding, premises, buildings, etc. Management, economic maintenance, etc. appear.

In this dynamic, the way of understanding and organizing sociocultural practices are inextricably linked and mutually stimulate one another: the dynamics of the development of the VRSs expresses

the stages of institutionalization from ideas and informal communication about them to developed institutions, up to organizations and agencies depending on the regularity and intensity of communication. In this case, the practice of repeating experiences (rhythms, rites, rituals, stable patterns) in the formation and consolidation of semantic structures in social and personal culture deserves special attention.

This makes it possible to consider the dynamics of institutionalization of semantic structures as a transition from personal knowledge to knowledge that is, on the one hand, increasingly distributed, and on the other hand, forming communities of like-minded people, up to social institutions. At the first stages of institutionalization, the semantic aspect plays a leading role, while at the later stages, the social aspect does. Therefore, institutionalized forms of comprehension, routinized in some professions, specialties, and disciplines, represent types of comprehension that have been cast into institutional forms of social organization. From this point of view, as S. Tulmin wrote, each scientific concept is an intellectual embryo of a research institute or laboratory, and the latter are essentially institutionalized concepts [Tulmin 1984]. Similar stages are passed by VRSs in business, politics, religion, and art. Therefore, in principle, the developed approach provides an answer to the main question of institutionalism in the theory of economic sociology and political science [North, Wallis, Weingast 2011]: how social institutions are formed.

In the institutional form, the semantic complexes already clearly distinguish between target, normative, and factual aspects, defined by the corresponding VRS components as a context of meaning making. At the first stages of evaluation, norms and descriptions are still syncretic, weakly reflected. Thus, political, scientific, artistic ideas are simultaneously characteristics of reality, an expression of a value position, and a program of actions for its implementation. Similarly, for a child, his toys, other things are precisely embodied ideas—reality taken in the context of various programs for manipulating them. In these cases, we can talk about the constituent dimensions of the value–normative synthesis of meaningful knowledge and use the apparatus of stereometric semantics [*Mezhdu mirom i yazykom* 2022].

It is important to understand that the key role in this dynamic is played by personal (subjective) understanding with its ability to use deviations, permutations, and the contexts themselves and to change the rules of the game, moving into a position of outsidedness.

AGENCY AND APOPHATICS

The above consideration represents a version of the operational concretization of pragmasemantics as an interface for the textualization of meaning-making contexts. However, the value–normative synthesis of knowledge, the role and dynamics of VRSs in this process represent meaning making "from the third person"—both "at the input" (from the position of the addresser) and "at the output" (from the position of the addressee) of communication.

The proposed approach, however, is limited to the production and reproduction of certain situations, when meaning can appear as a certain situational sociality, modeled to the point of automatism, with a minimal role, if not the elimination, of agency. Meanwhile, the most important and interesting thing in the dynamics of meaning making is precisely the choice of a certain specific situation and place in it, going beyond its framework, changing contexts, i.e. the transition from one sociocultural practice to another, or even the creation of new practices. Such situational mobility, activity in positioning, the ability to liminality are in fact characteristics of agency.

The nature of agency is quite successfully presented by Hofstadter in the model of the strange loop, formed by the self-closure of the system of signifiers during its self-writing in the spirit of the famous paradoxically self-generating engravings of M. Escher [Hofstadter 2022]. This is the transcendental subject—the point of assembly of the subject in which the twisted Mőbius loop of existence is connected. Self-awareness of selfhood, being the result of the socialization of the individual in his reflexive self-description, closes in on itself, turning out to be an interface that implements the interaction between the real and any other possible world, the transition from situations of physical reality to an imaginary one and back, even making it possible to consider them simultaneously. It is not by chance that in Heidegger's expression of human existence as *Dasein* (being-there), the pronoun *da* has two meanings: here and there (as, incidentally, does the ambivalent Russian *vot*) [Heidegger, 2015].

Agency, presented in *Dasein*, is not a subject observing and "reflecting" reality and not the consciousness reflecting it. It is a process realized simultaneously in the internal and external worlds through their unified description based on a single ontological (existential) assumption. It is precisely such ontological commitment, existential assumption about the nonemptiness of the subject area that ensures the possibility of meaningful reasoning in logic. In fact, it is precisely this ontological "let it be" impulse that underlies many practices: from a mother's prayer for her son's return from the front to a scientist conducting an experiment. In both cases, the impulse "let it be so!" is realized, the difference lying in the degree of activity in preparing for the possible implementation of the supposed situation.

In the "strange loop" of self-awareness, the inner is closed on the outer, the social on the individual. Thus, the bearer of self-awareness acquires a horizon of vision of the world that goes beyond the limits of phys-

ical presence, and with this, the ability not only to respond to situationality but also to potentiate situationality, a procreative preadaptive response to one's environment [Asmolov, Shekhter, and Chernorizov 2018; Kiyashchenko 2022]. Thus, agency—this point of assembly of freedom and responsibility—in its constant readiness and even desire to become different, another, acts as a universal interface for generating comprehension and meaning making.

The focus of this loop, like the center of gravity of a torus, is outside any situation, in the emptiness of the out of Bakhtin's outsidedness. In philosophy and aesthetics, the creative role of emptiness has long been noted, "the use of emptiness as a source of energy for imagination" [Shuripa 2021, p. 20], allowing one to see aesthetic objects, ethical gestures, emotional assessments, and other shades of comprehension. This is the basis of the "negative dialectics" of T. Adorno's work, its modern development and expansion on the material of artistic creativity and politics [Magun 2020; Magun 2013].

Emptiness, the unfilled state of agency as a "man without qualities" with his initial "lack" denies the real being, suggesting the filling of this emptiness, creating a nutrient medium for procreativity. This is manifested in a variety of formats from nonsense to revolution. The most obvious example is artistic creativity with its overcoming of the barrier of the existing and transitions from contemplation of the existing only in the imagination (nonexistent, nothingness, calling for implementation) to its embodiment. As Leonardo da Vinci wrote, "Amid the vastness of the things among which we live, the existence of nothingness holds the first place. It ... embraces all the past and future deeds of both nature and animate beings and has nothing of the indivisible present. It does not extend to the essence of anything" [Da Vinci 2010, p. 162]. Without being involved in anything, without revealing the essence of things, nothingness creates a background, a condition for their comprehension.

In this regard, the role of negative statements deserves special attention—not as denying the existence and at the same time affirming the emptiness of the subject area [Brodskii 1973] but as those supplementing the universe of reasoning by carriers of negative predicates [Tulchinskii 2022b]—not yet positively manifested in this world with the loading of some new predicates: not tables (affirmatively), "nontables" are not only other furniture but also all living beings, cosmic bodies, abstract objects, etc.

This is entirely consistent with de Saussure's idea that language is a closed-in structure in which internal differences between signifiers are more important than external connections with signifieds [Saussure 1999, p. 119]. In other words, for de Saussure, the main thing in language is not referentiality (connections between signifiers and signifieds are conditional, being conditioned by the use of language) but the differential nature of signifiers, i.e. gaps, pauses, distances, emptiness. Therefore, even in terms of interpreting meaning from the structure of text organization, in the very construction of meaning-generating text, gaps play a key role [Epstein, 2004], making it possible to build various semantic puzzles. The bearers of such an opportunity are gaps and voids.

It is precisely the pauses and intervals that make signs signs, that make it possible to understand the meaning of a sign, which is always separated from other signs against the background of nonexistence. Such involvement of signs in nonexistence gives the reader, listener, viewer the opportunity to mentally combine them and be transported to other realities without losing themselves but, on the contrary, setting a new point of view, a new angle and position, asserting their agency.

In general, any meaning is preceded by nothingness—it is before and after each *dixi*. Communication is also not limited to the "delivery" of meaning from the source to the addressee or to a simple exchange of meanings. "Excommunication" is also possible [Galloway, Thacker, and Wark 2014]—silence or even refusal to communicate, up to the "canceling" of a potential partner. However, even such an absence of "meaningful exchange" presupposes speculation, filling the void with a content of one's own.

Indicative is A. Badiou's critique of postmodern relativism, according to which truth is rooted in the idea of an empty set, which, without embodiment (image, place), is present between any numbers, however close in the numerical continuum, is represented in any set, allowing its elements to be distinguished. In this regard, Badiou proclaims universalism, but not the positive universalism of the modern period but the universalism of a gap, absence, emptiness, which sets the possibility of any situation [Badiou 2007].

Agency, the Husserlian transcendental subject, whose bearer is every person who possesses self-awareness of the self, acts as such a "user of voids." In this regard, personal agency appears as a metacontext—a source, means, and result of meaning generation. According to V.V. Nalimov, meaning making is analogous to the generation of elementary particles, when energy impulses act on a physical vacuum. Similarly, in meaning generation, we are dealing with a "semantic continuum" in which "there is everything." Specific "unpackings" of meanings are formed when a probabilistic filter of the "μ-function," which Nalimov considers personal individual agency, acts on it [Nalimov 1974; Nalimov 2007].

Agency itself is a gap in existence, it is an unfilled state, an incomplete state, ready for additions and reboots. Human existence is a lack, an absence, a loss, a desire for a "change of fate." The main identity of a self-aware personality is a "man without qualities," a flexible readiness for development, for becoming different. In the spirit of Badiou, agency is like a void

that does not fit into signs, a wandering excess that connects the unconnectable. Being a product of corporeality, socialization, language, agency as a universal interface brings them together, using them as options in meaning making. "I" is a self-signifier without a strictly defined signified, a self-sufficient sign of itself, as a "man without qualities," a flexible entity, ready to be filled with new content, capable of self-change. We can say that agency is nothing creating a meaningful something out of nothing.

As self-awareness of selfhood, agency is a reflexive self-description or self-describing reflexivity, that is, a contradictory system, which is the basis for the emergence and development of logical semantics, starting with B. Russell's theory of types, K. Gödel's theorem, and A. Tarski's concept of logical semantics. Just as folklore is contradictory, giving examples of comprehension of any case in life ("measure thrice and cut once," but "fortune favors the brave"), so the methods of philosophizing that claim systematic universality, like that of Hegel's, begin with a contradiction. J.G. Fichte in his *Foundations of the Science of Knowledge* begins with the "I," creating from nothing. Losev [Losev 1999], who was seriously influenced by Russian *imyaslavie* with its Neoplatonic attitude of generating something from the self-distinction of nothing, begins the development of semiosis with meon (nothing). Just as the blind spot in the eye, which, being itself invisible, is the condition of the phenomenon of vision, agency—the point of assembly of freedom and responsibility—is nothing, creating meaning out of nothing, a signifier without a signified, generating signifieds.

The mechanism of this role of agency has so far acted as "human, all too human." However, the rapid development of self-learning neural networks of artificial intelligence makes it possible to talk about the general semiotic nature of meaning generation. Reference is generated by the self-closure of chains of signifiers in the paradoxically integral loops of Hofstadter, Escher, DNA. Self-closure of causalities, generating the signified *causa sui* (reference, *die Bedeutung*). However, sense, *Sinn* arises as a materialization by others due to copulation in a puzzle. Reference is corporeal in the sense that it is self-referential (genetic code, virus, city). Thus, finite corporealities are packed from infinity and can then unpack an infinite variety of meanings (in the spirit of Nalimov). For reference to recognize itself, it needs to go out, to the position of outsidedness, to the external context. *Absolute Out is God*. The spirit over the abyss of Nothing. And in the beginning was the Word! Perhaps this is the case when we can talk about "image and likeness" in human nature, and this metaphor itself appears as the key to understanding the nature of meaning making. As G.S. Pomerants wrote, existence is rooted in the heart of the human soul. And that (agency formed in verbal communication!) turns out to be the sensory seat of freedom—a transcendental, preexistent, and extraexistent source (potentiator) of existence.

It seems that European thought, which began in the modern period with the cataphatic overcoming of traditional Christian apophaticism, is returning to its origins since the apophatic attitude turns out to be a generalization of the cataphatic one [Tulchinskii 2022a], and positive scientific knowledge begins to develop the constructive content of apophatics. Meaning making appears to be a rather strict algorithm, determined by the context of the corresponding sociocultural practices with the key role of agency as a source of procreative preadaptation of the system of these practices.

ERGO: INSTEAD OF CONCLUSIONS

The conducted consideration of the possibility of the pragmasemantic approach, allowing one to present systematically the integral process of meaning making, opens a nontrivial interdisciplinary potential, important for the development of not only the humanities. The implementation of the pragmasemantic concept of meaning making makes it possible to talk about the foundations of the interdisciplinary synthesis (convergence) of scientific knowledge, opening new perspectives, opportunities of logical–semantic substantiation of practical reasoning, philosophy of an act as a responsible action, metaphysics of freedom and responsibility, value–normative analysis of cultural genesis, the relationship between rationality and efficiency, humanities-based expertise, and sociocultural engineering.

For the modern situation of total digitalization and the prospect of posthumanity, humanities-based expertise is becoming increasingly in demand. Thus, the practical philosophy of meaning in a new quality returns to its source of agency. Humanities-related knowledge is necessary in scientific and technical developments, and traditional technological engineering is expanding into sociocultural engineering. The semantic picture of the world is becoming increasingly operational and measurable, but still dependent on man and his goals.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author of this work declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

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