

that in the Romantic period in Russia there lived a certain Vasily Narezhny who wrote some twenty-five volumes of novels which were 'unnoticed' by his contemporaries until traces of realism were found in them.

So while on the metalevel the picture is one of semiotic unity, on the level of the semiotic reality which is described by the metalevel, all kinds of other tendencies flourish. While the picture of the upper level is painted in a smooth uniform colour, the lower level is bright with colours and many intersecting boundaries. When Charlemagne at the end of the eighth century brought sword and cross to the Saxons, and St Vladimir a hundred years later baptized Kievan Russia, the great barbarian empires of East and West became Christian states. But their Christianity was a self-characterization and as such extended to the political and religious metalevel beneath which flourished pagan traditions and all sorts of real-life compromises with them. It could not have been otherwise considering that the conversions to Christianity were forced on the masses. The terrible bloodshed wrought by Charlemagne on the pagan Saxons at Verdun was hardly likely to foster acceptance of the principles of the Sermon on the Mount among the barbarians.

And yet it would be wrong to suggest that this simple change of nomenclature had no effect on the 'underlying' levels: for Christianization did turn into evangelization, and, even on the level of 'real semiotics', it contributed to the unification of the cultural space of these states. Semantic currents flow not only across the horizontal levels of the semiosphere, but also have their effect in a vertical direction, and promote complex dialogues between the levels.

But the unity of the semiotic space of the semiosphere is brought about not only by metastructural formations: even more crucial is the unifying factor of the boundary, which divides the internal space of the semiosphere from the external, its *inside* from its *outside*.

## The notion of boundary

Paradoxically, the internal space of a semiosphere is at the same time unequal yet unified, asymmetrical yet uniform. Composed as it is of conflicting structures, it none the less is also marked by individuation. Its self-description implies a first person pronoun. One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is 'ours', 'my own', it is 'cultured', 'safe', 'harmoniously organized', and so on. By contrast 'their space' is 'other', 'hostile', 'dangerous', 'chaotic'.

Every culture begins by dividing the world into 'its own' internal space and 'their' external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture. But the actual division is one of the human cultural universals. The boundary may separate the living from the dead, settled peoples from nomadic ones, the town from the plains; it may be a state frontier, or a social, national, confessional, or any other kind of frontier. There is an amazing similarity, even between civilizations which have no contact with each other, in the expressions they use to describe the world beyond the boundary. The eleventh-century Kievan chronicler-monk, describing the life of other eastern Slav tribes who were still pagan, wrote:

The Drevlyans lived like animals, like cattle; they killed each other, ate unclean foods, had no marriage, but abducted girls at the waterside. While the Radimichi, Vyatichi and northern tribes shared the same custom: they lived in the forest like wild beasts, ate unclean food and used foul language in front of fathers and female relatives, and they had no marriages, but held games between villages and gathered at these games for dancing and all kinds of devilish songs.<sup>6</sup>