


RESEARCH ARTICLE

Strategic culture as a meaning-making system: towards a social semiotic account of multimodal cultural constraints in international relations

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Abstract

The article reconsiders the notion of strategic culture using fundamental categories of general and social semiotics, which make it possible to systematise and instrumentalise this concept while preserving its broad scope. The proposed framework suggests a relationist reconceptualisation of strategic culture based on Charles Peirce's semiotic theory, thereby helping to transcend the existing controversy about how culture-as-ideas, culture-as-artefacts, and culture-as-behaviour are related to each other in strategic culture. The suggested approach helps to clarify the problematic aspects of the notion of strategic culture by redefining strategic culture as a logonomic system (a system of rules of meaning-making) that constrains interactions in strategic affairs. Such reconceptualisation helps to study how strategic cultures are reproduced not only through verbal discourse but also through other artefacts and actions. Semiotic categories also make it possible to account for important distinctions between various elements of strategic culture and formulate principles that can guide the studies of this phenomenon. The article provides some examples from the Russian strategic culture to demonstrate how the proposed framework can be applied.

Keywords: strategic culture; logonomic systems; semiotics; social semiotics; political semiotics; semiotics of international relations; logonomic signs; multimodality; Russian strategic culture

The category of strategic culture was originally introduced in the late 1970s and since then has become a popular term that is used in order to refer to the fact that the actions that are performed by international actors in strategic affairs tend to be culturally constrained, in a sense that for each culture those actions follow particular sets of patterns that are relatively stable and distinct from the patterns inherent in other cultures. In contemporary international studies, the notion of strategic culture is often defined in quasi-semiotic ways, with references to 'intersubjective systems of symbols', 'languages', 'metaphors', and so on.¹ However, those conceptualisations turn out to be

¹E.g. Lock 2010, 697; Johnston 1995b, 46.

problematic due to unresolved questions about how culture-as-artefacts, culture-as-ideas, and culture-as-behaviour are related to each other in strategic cultures.

This article seeks to resolve those issues by proposing a novel perspective on strategic culture, utilising the principles of general and social semiotics. The goal of this study is to develop a reconceptualisation of the notion of strategic culture that would allow us to tackle the existing theoretical issues inherent in it, clarify the modes of existence of strategic culture, and theorise how cultural, behavioural, and communicative elements fit into it. I am also seeking to find semiotic categories that can be helpful in guiding the analysis of strategic cultures.

This attempt to semiotically reconceptualise strategic culture primarily leverages my interpretation² of Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress's theory of social semiotics³ regarding logonomic systems,⁴ that is, systems of rules prescribing the conditions of production of signs (e.g. genre rules, etiquette rules, or political institutions). In addition, I apply the sociosemiotic category of multimodality,⁵ that is, the principle of production of signs involving multiple resources for meaning-making (e.g. printed text, audio, video, pictorial, embodied, etc.) I also extensively use Charles Peirce's general theory of semiosis (meaning-making),⁶ in particular instrumentalising his classifications of signs (tone-token-type, icon-index-symbol, rheme-proposition-argument).

I consider strategic culture as a logonomic system and theorise how the distinction of various sociosemiotic resources (modes), as well as Peircean divisions of signs and their effects, can be applied to strategic-cultural signs. I also discuss how the proposed framework is useful for resolving some of the existing definitional and theoretical problems that are inherent in the studies of strategic culture, while still maintaining the broad scope of this concept.

The article consists of seven main sections. In the first of them, I review various conceptual frameworks that exist in the studies of strategic cultures and outline some of the main definitional and theoretical problems that are associated with this notion. In the second section, I demonstrate that the concept of strategic culture is often defined in international studies in a quasi-semiotic way. Then, in the third section, I propose my own, explicitly semiotic, conceptualisation for this term. In the fourth section, I demonstrate how the category of multimodality can be helpful in resolving some of the existing conceptual difficulties inherent in the studies of strategic cultures. In the fifth, I explain how the Peircean systematics of signs can be used in the models of strategic-cultural semiosis (meaning-making). In the sixth

²Fomin 2022.

³In this article, I use both capitalised and non-capitalised versions of the term social semiotics in order to distinguish between the systemic functional tradition of social semiotics (Hodge and Kress 1988) and broader set of studies in social semiotics. In this respect, I generally follow the principle formulated by Bob Hodge (Hodge n.d.): "Social semiotics" without capitals is a broad, heterogeneous orientation within semiotics, straddling many other areas of inquiry concerned, in some way, with the social dimensions of meaning in any media of communication, its production, interpretation and circulation, and its implications in social processes, as cause or effect. "Social Semiotics" with capitals is a distinguishable school in linguistics and semiotics which specifically addresses these issues⁷.

⁴Hodge and Kress 1988, 4.

⁵Kress 2010.

⁶EP 2:272–75, 291–96. (Peirce 1992–1998 is traditionally referenced as EP, followed by volume and page numbers.)

section, I formulate the key tenets of my sociosemiotic approach to strategic culture and discuss how they can be applied. The seventh section provides some examples of how the suggested framework can be used in the analysis of strategic cultures, using some cases from the Russian strategic culture. In the concluding section, I summarise the key points of the proposed framework and discuss it in the context of the progress of social semiotics, political semiotics, and international relations (IR) semiotics.

Problems with strategic culture

The concept of strategic culture was initially developed in the last decades of the Cold War era, and at that moment, it emerged as a significant step forward in the development of international studies. It indicated some of the shortcomings of neorealist theories and gave an opportunity to account for ideational factors that inform strategic political actions. At the same time, however, the notion of strategic culture turned out to be in itself quite problematic. So, as Edward Lock notes, today *strategic culture*, although not deprived of ‘some intuitive appeal’,⁷ ‘remains at best a contested concept and incomprehensible one’. It is theorised as a poorly structured bricolage of multifarious entities, and its ‘semantic monstrosity’⁸ resembles that of the mother-concept of *culture*.

In essence, the conceptual confusion that appears in the studies of strategic culture can largely be attributed to the unresolved questions of ‘where strategic culture may be said to exist’ and how culture-as-ideas, culture-as-artefacts, and culture-as-behaviour are related to each other and which of those elements should be included into the strategic culture.⁹ This question also produces the main methodological divergences in the research of strategic cultures. In particular, as Alastair Iain Johnston demonstrates, there exist several approaches (‘generations’) that quite noticeably differ in how they conceptualise strategic culture and especially in how they theorise the relation between strategic culture, strategic action, and strategic thought.¹⁰

Some of these key conceptual issues that are inherent in the theories of strategic culture are evident even in the very early formulations by Jack Snyder, who coined this term:

Strategic culture can be defined as the sum total of ideas, conditional emotional responses, and patterns of habitual behavior that members of the national strategic community have acquired through instruction or imitation and share with each other with regard to nuclear strategy.¹¹

One can see that Snyder, from the very beginning, tried to construct strategic culture as a composite concept that would simultaneously encompass ideas, emotions (conditioned by particular stimuli), and patterns of behaviour. Moreover,

⁷Lock 2010, 685–86.

⁸Kelley 1996, 101.

⁹Lock 2017; see also Johnston 1995b; Gray 1999; Lock 2010.

¹⁰Johnston 1995b, 37–38.

¹¹Snyder 1977, 8.

Snyder noted that strategic culture includes both elements that are conveyed through instruction and those acquired through imitation.

Even more loose and more confusing definitions were later proposed by other 'first-generation' theorists, such as Ken Booth:

The concept of strategic culture refers to a nation's traditions, values, attitudes, patterns of behaviour, habits, symbols, achievements and particular ways of adapting to the environment and solving problems with respect to the threat or use of force.¹²

So, according to Booth's definition, the scope of strategic culture covers an even larger and more diverse set of components. In addition to ideational ('values', 'attitudes') and behavioural entities ('patterns of behaviour'), it would also include semiotic entities ('symbols') and systems of rules ('habits', 'traditions').

An attempt to somehow hierarchically structure the building blocks of the concept of strategic culture was made by David Jones, who proposed a multi-level model of its constituting elements.¹³ He suggested that 'the nature and geography of the state, the ethnic culture of its founding people, and the latter's subsequent history' are the primary elements of strategic culture, followed by derivative secondary factors, such as the social-economic system, governmental-administrative system, and technological base. Finally, those social-economic and administrative factors inform the military-political institutions of the state, as well as its national goals, style of diplomacy and military strategy.¹⁴ Even though Jones' model did provide at least some structure to the elements of strategic culture, at the same time, it stretched the scope of the concept even further, making the whole framework very unwieldy. Moreover, the sets of factors that appeared on each of the levels distinguished by Jones still were quite heterogeneous.

An alternative approach to conceptualising this notion can be found in so-called 'second-generation' and 'third-generation' studies of strategic culture. Both of them tend to define strategic culture in a stricter way in comparison to the 'first generation'. In particular, the 'second generation' assumes that strategic cultures consist of military institutions and traditions that legitimise the use of violence by the state.¹⁵ Thus, 'second-generation' theorists suggest that strategic culture is distinct from strategic behaviour. However, they do not make it clear whether the strategic culture should be expected to influence strategic behaviour or merely be an instrument used by the elites to legitimise it.¹⁶

As to the 'third generation', the definitions of culture that are used in it are also of a narrower scope than those of the 'first generation'. Similarly to the 'second generation', this approach also assumes that strategic behaviour is not a part of strategic culture. Moreover, this approach explicitly theorises that strategic culture influences strategic behaviour. Specifically, strategic culture is mainly seen as culture-as-ideas

¹²Booth 1990, 121.

¹³Jones 1990.

¹⁴Ibid., 37.

¹⁵Klein 1988, 135–36.

¹⁶Johnston 1995b, 39–40.

and is assumed to impact the behaviour by limiting the range of options that are considered by decision-makers or altering ‘the appearance and efficacy of different choices’.¹⁷

Thus, in essence, one can distinguish two different kinds of conceptualisations of strategic culture. Some of them are sloppy but have a broader scope, while others are more careful but at the same time more limited. Moreover, the divergences between conceptualisations largely have to do with which elements (‘ideas’, ‘habits’, ‘institutions’, ‘symbols’, ‘traditions’, ‘behaviour’, ‘artefacts’, etc.) are included or excluded from the definition.

The framework that I will introduce below is an attempt to use the conceptual apparatus of semiotics to relax the tension between these diverging approaches by resolving some relevant theoretical issues. More specifically, I will try to propose a framework that would provide a sociosemiotic conceptualisation of strategic culture that is *both* orderly and of broad scope. Furthermore, I will try to outline a framework of semiotic analysis of strategic cultures that will allow us to transcend the divergences on *whether* ideas, actions, symbols, or artefacts are parts of strategic culture by developing a tool that would allow us to distinguish different ways of *how* all these diverse elements are plugged into the complex system of strategic culture and *what categories* can be used to analyse it.

Strategic culture as a quasi-semiotic concept

According to the definition of Charles S. Peirce, *semiotics* is a ‘science of signs’ that studies ‘the essential nature and fundamental varieties’ of all possible semiosis (i.e. all possible functioning of signs).¹⁸ With its extremely broad scope, semiotics can be seen not only as a scientific discipline among other disciplines but also as a transdisciplinary methodology that works across the borders of scientific fields, penetrating various domains that involve the functioning of signs.¹⁹ Moreover, many fields of scientific knowledge that have to do with the studies of signs, texts, meanings, and representations can be considered relevant to semiotics even if they are not explicitly associated with it.

My ambition to use semiotic theory to reconsider some of the problematic conceptual issues of the studies of strategic culture might seem like an attempt to revolutionise this field; however, in some sense, it merely aims to systematise implications that derive from some of the ‘quasi-semiotic’ approaches to strategic culture that are, in fact, rather traditional.

For example, David Haglund,²⁰ in his discussion of strategic culture, explicitly refers to the semiotic definition of culture formulated by William Sewell,²¹ according to which *culture* is ‘the semiotic dimension of human social practice in

¹⁷Johnston 1995b, 43.

¹⁸CP 8.343. (Peirce 1931–1958 is traditionally referenced as CP, followed by volume and paragraph numbers.)

¹⁹The scope of contemporary semiotics is not even limited exclusively to *human* semiosis, as it also includes such sub-disciplines as zoösemiotics, biosemiotics, and physiosemiotics. (See Deely 2015 for an overview.)

²⁰Haglund 2004, 485.

²¹Sewell 1999, 48.

general'.²² Furthermore, Alastair Iain Johnston defines strategic culture in an essentially semiotic way as 'a system of symbols', 'languages', and 'metaphors'. According to him, strategic culture is an integrated 'system of symbols (e.g., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors) which acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military force in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious'.²³

In this definition of strategic culture, Johnston explicitly follows the template of Clifford Geertz's definition of *religion*,²⁴ so one can assume that he shares Geertz's understanding of 'symbols' too, that is, sees them as any 'construable signs'²⁵ or as 'perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs'.²⁶ Thus, in essence, Johnston defines strategic culture as a *sign system* that informs strategic preferences.

Similarly, Edward Lock, another prominent expert in the studies of strategic cultures, also defines strategic culture in a quasi-semiotic manner, arguing that strategic culture 'can be thought as an intersubjective system of symbols that makes possible political action related to strategic affairs'.²⁷ Moreover, he emphasises that strategic culture 'constrains and enables the communicative practices that are central to the politics of strategy'.²⁸ It is by 'constraining and enabling' the political communication that strategic cultures constitute certain strategic behaviours and identities as possible and meaningful.²⁹

Thus, some of the existing conceptualisations of strategic culture, in fact, imply that strategic cultures are systems of signs that constrain and enable communication and action related to strategic affairs. Importantly, in this respect, these definitions converge with the conceptualisations of a more general semiotic notion that is the notion of *logonomic system*³⁰ that is theorised as a system of signs that both constrains and enables social semiosis.

Strategic culture as a logonomic system

According to the original definition formulated by Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress,³¹ logonomic systems are sets of 'rules prescribing the conditions of

²²Similarly, in their account of rhetoric in international politics, Krebs and Jackson 2007, 41–42 conceptualise *culture* as 'the always contested and often contradictory intersubjective semiotic practices through which social actors seek to generate meaning'. See also Sundaram 2019, 5–6.

²³Johnston 1995b, 46.

²⁴According to Geertz 1973, 90, 'a religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic'.

²⁵Geertz 1973, 14.

²⁶Ibid., 91.

²⁷Lock 2010, 697.

²⁸Ibid., 697.

²⁹Ibid., 685, 698.

³⁰Hodge and Kress 1988, 4.

³¹Ibid., 4.

production and reception of meanings; which specify who can claim to initiate (produce, communicate) or know (receive, understand) about what topics under what circumstances and with what modalities (how, when, why)'. What makes logonomic systems especially important is that they function as interface structures through which forms of behaviour, forms of semiosis, and forms of cognition are integrated.³²

Since any logonomic system 'is itself a set of messages',³³ I argue that there always exist *logonomic signs*³⁴ through which the logonomic rules are conveyed, actualised, and reproduced. Those signs work as socially devised constraints that restrict the functioning of signs in particular social settings.

So, I suggest that strategic culture can be defined as one of the cases of logonomic systems.³⁵ In essence, *strategic cultures are logonomic systems that constrain social semiosis in strategic affairs*. They emerge as sets of rules that prescribe who can produce and receive what signs under what circumstances. Furthermore, one can distinguish a particular kind of logonomic signs that can be called *strategic-cultural signs*. Those *strategic-cultural signs are logonomic signs that constrain interaction in strategic affairs*.

This explicitly sociosemiotic reconceptualisation of strategic culture is particularly productive as it provides an opportunity to import a set of principles and categories of semiotic theory into the analysis of strategic cultures. These principles and theories can be quite helpful for relaxing, if not resolving, some of those conceptual problems that haunt the studies of strategic culture. In particular, the principle of multimodality that can be borrowed from social semiotics helps to deal with the problem that strategic culture may be said to exist virtually everywhere as well as to make a composite character of strategic culture more manageable. Furthermore, Peircean classification of signs and their effects allows us to theorise different ways in which culture-as-ideas, culture-as-artefacts, culture-as-behaviour relate to each other as elements of strategic culture, without excluding any of them.

In the following sections, I will introduce these capabilities of semiotic theory in more detail and will discuss the dimensions of semiotic analysis that can help to structure, guide, and systematise the analyses of strategic culture.

Multimodality of strategic cultures

So, one of the main aspects in which the apparatus of social semiotics can be useful for the studies of strategic culture is that strategic culture can be defined as a system of logonomic signs that are fundamentally *multimodal*. This means that these signs function in and across multiple semiotic *modes*, that is, through multiple 'socially shaped and culturally given resources' of meaning-making.³⁶ Introducing the distinction of diverse semiotic modes as one of the dimensions of the analysis of strategic cultures both makes it possible to preserve the existing extremely broad scope

³²Ilyin 2020, 16; Fomin 2020, 38; Fomin and Ilyin 2019, 129–30.

³³Hodge and Kress 1988, 4.

³⁴Fomin 2022.

³⁵See also Käpylä and Kennedy 2014 and Peoples 2008 for other examples of how the category of logonomic system can be used in international studies.

³⁶Kress 2010, 79.

of the concept of strategic culture and provides a framework that helps to theorise this multifaceted phenomenon in a more consistent way.

In particular, if understood as a multimodal system, strategic culture can be modelled to encompass all sorts of cultural constraints that in some way prescribe particular forms of social semiosis in strategic affairs, while the forms (sign vehicles) that convey those prescriptions can be systematically analysed into distinct modes.

To a large extent, strategic cultures tend to strongly rely on the modes of written, printed, or otherwise visually displayed sign vehicles of natural languages. In particular, basic doctrinal documents which shape countries' security and foreign policy and contribute to the (re)production of particular strategic-cultural patterns are conveyed primarily in printed textual form (such as national 'security strategies', 'defence strategies', 'security concepts', 'military doctrines', and other similar documents).³⁷ At the same time, the vehicles of strategic culture are by no means limited to these documents, as strategic-cultural constraints can emerge from various other written texts as well. For example, they can also be conveyed through historical military texts³⁸ and mass media reports³⁹ or even through school textbooks⁴⁰ and novels.⁴¹

Spoken text can often be a vehicle of the logonomic signs that constitute strategic cultures too. Moreover, it is not necessarily limited to the speeches delivered by national leaders, foreign ministry, or security officials, as other genres of talk also can be important in this respect. For example, jokes, proverbs, legends, fables, anecdotes, and other orally conveyed narratives⁴² also contribute to the socialisation of the political elites and thereby inform their behaviour in strategic affairs.

Furthermore, texts in various other modes, such as audio, video, pictorial, and performed artefacts, can also be theorised as logonomic signs in strategic cultures. In particular, there can be songs,⁴³ paintings,⁴⁴ maps,⁴⁵ flags,⁴⁶ cinema films,⁴⁷ photographs,⁴⁸ video games,⁴⁹ monumental sculptures,⁵⁰ and holiday celebrations⁵¹ that all produce cultural constraints for strategic actions.

The principle of multimodality can be seen as an extension of the principle of intertextuality, which is rather common in discourse studies. However, multimodality actually goes beyond merely assuming that non-verbal texts should also be

³⁷E.g. Mahnken 2006; Eitelhuber 2009; Norheim-Martinsen 2011; Atmante *et al.* 2019.

³⁸E.g. Johnston 1995a.

³⁹E.g. Meyer 2006, 78–111.

⁴⁰E.g. Qazi 2020.

⁴¹E.g. Hopf 2009.

⁴²E.g. Gerami 2018, 76, 103; Hopf 2009, 286; Johnson and Maines 2018, 43; Svyatets 2018.

⁴³E.g. Ben-Ephraim 2020, 150, 153.

⁴⁴E.g. Evans 2006, 22.

⁴⁵E.g. Smith 2018, 239.

⁴⁶E.g.: Giles 2009, 99.

⁴⁷E.g. Kondrótová 2020; Svyatets 2018.

⁴⁸E.g. Giles 2018, 148; Smith 2018, 239.

⁴⁹E.g. Svyatets 2018.

⁵⁰E.g. Danns 2014, 71–72.

⁵¹E.g. Makarychev 2016.

accounted for in intertextual analysis, as it allows us to analyse artefacts that use several semiotic modes in the same text.

Fundamentally, the multimodal social semiotic account of strategic culture helps to alleviate the tension between the perspectives of strategic-culture-as-ideas and strategic-culture-as-artefacts, as it assumes that strategic culture is a set of logonomic signs, in which particular artefacts function as multimodal sign vehicles that convey and (re)produce particular strategic-cultural ideas as their meanings. In other words, the strategic-cultural ideas are multimodally represented by the strategic-cultural artefacts. Thus, strategic-culture-as-artefacts and strategic-culture-as-ideas can be theorised not as mutually exclusive definitional options and not as unstructured conceptual elements but as semiotically interrelated entities.

The category of multimodality can turn out to be useful for resolving some of the other conceptual problems of the studies of strategic culture as well, as it does not limit in any way a potential range of forms of cultural phenomena that can be considered as forms of existence of strategic culture, while at the same time providing a framework which helps to distinguish between those diverse forms based on the differentiation of social semiotic modes. This framework also has especially important implications for the question of how behaviour as a part of strategic culture relates to its other aspects. In essence, introducing the social semiotic perspective allows us to transcend the dichotomy between strategic-culture-as-artefacts and strategic-culture-as-behaviour by considering the two as just two different semiotic modes. It becomes possible because, from the point of view of semiotics, embodied action is just another semiotic mode, so, in this respect, there is no fundamental difference between actions and artefacts. In semiotics, both are considered signs. Thus, both strategic-cultural artefacts and strategic behaviour are sign vehicles that carry strategic-cultural meanings, instigate strategic-cultural events, and reproduce strategic-cultural habits.

The semiotic model of strategic culture that includes meaningful behaviour as a form of semiosis can be seen as a special case of a more general sociosemiotic approach that theorises meaningful actions as instances of meaning-making. In particular, it resonates with the Tartu-Moscow School's semiotic accounts of regularised behaviour⁵² as well as with Mikhail Ilyin's approach to the multimodal analysis of political performatives.⁵³ Moreover, in a similar way, the convergence between sociological models of intentional acts and semiotic models of meaning-making is theorised in detail in Risto Heiskala's 'semiotic sociology'.⁵⁴

Peircean semiotic triads in strategic-cultural signs

The proposed social semiotic reconceptualisation of strategic culture as a multimodal logonomic system can be better systematised if we add Charles Peirce's

⁵²Pyatigorski and Ouspenski 1967, 28; Lotman 1975, 25–26, 1976, 292–93; Chernov 1967; Zolyan and Chernov 1977; Zolyan 2017, 2018, 2019; Randviir 2004, 40, 56–59, 72.

⁵³Ilyin 2016a, 2016b.

⁵⁴Heiskala 2003, 2014, 2021.

Table 1. Charles Peirce's divisions of signs

Categories	Kinds of signs		
	Based on what sign is in itself	Based on how sign relates to object	Based on how sign relates to its effect
<i>Firstness</i> being an appearance	<i>Tone</i> a quality which is a sign	<i>Icon</i> sign by virtue of a resemblance	<i>Rheme</i> sign indicating a blank form of proposition
<i>Secondness</i> being an actuality	<i>Token</i> an actual existent thing or event which is a sign	<i>Index</i> sign by virtue of an actual connection	<i>Proposition</i> sign indicating an actually declared fact
<i>Thirdness</i> being a law	<i>Type</i> a law which is a sign	<i>Symbol</i> sign by virtue of a law	<i>Argument</i> sign indicating a conclusion

classification of signs (Table 1) to it.⁵⁵ In particular, due to the fact that logonomic signs fundamentally work as any other signs, all the distinctions of Peircean sign systematics can be introduced as dimensions of analysis of strategic-cultural signs.

According to Peirce, a sign can be defined as 'a thing which stands for another thing',⁵⁶ and *semiosis*, that is, functioning of signs, can be seen as 'a cooperation'⁵⁷ of *three* relationally defined entities that are (1) a sign *vehicle*, (2) an *object* to which the sign refers, and (3) an *meaning effect (interpretant)* that the sign produces.⁵⁸ So, for a sign to function as such, it has to appear as a sign *vehicle* that stands for a particular *object* by determining in the interpreter a particular *meaning effect (interpretant)*.

Peirce suggests three ways to distinguish between different kinds of signs, depending on what (a) a sign 'is in itself', (b) what is the relation between the sign vehicle and the object, and (c) how it relates to its effect.

So, firstly, based on what a sign 'is in itself', Peirce distinguishes between (a1) *tones*, which are defined as 'mere qualities of appearance'⁵⁹ that cannot actually function as signs but are analytically distinguishable in any semiosis,⁶⁰ (a2) *tokens*, that is, signs that appear as 'actual existent things or events',⁶¹ and (a3) *types*,⁶² that is, signs as 'general types', 'laws', or 'habits'.⁶³

⁵⁵Due to the fact that the elements of Peirce's doctrine of signs are scattered across the corpus of his writings, which is far from being terminologically and conceptually consistent, the summary of Peircean semiotics that I present here is but one of possible reconstructions of his theory.

⁵⁶CP 7.355.

⁵⁷EP 2:411.

⁵⁸Ibid.; CP 1.339.

⁵⁹CP 8.334.

⁶⁰EP 2:291.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²I am using the terms *tone-token-type* (CP 4.537), instead of nearly synonymous *qualisign-sinsign-legisign* (EP 2:291), as, hopefully. They will sound less cryptic for those readers who are not familiar with Peirce's nomenclature.

⁶³Peirce 1903, [MS 800].

Secondly, the most famous Peircean triad distinguishes signs based on how they relate to their objects: (b1) *icons* are the signs that represent their objects due to resembling them, (b2) *indices* are the signs that function by virtue of an actual connection to their objects, and (b3) *symbols* are the signs that refer to their objects by virtue of a habit, law, or convention.⁶⁴

Thirdly, the Peircean classification of signs that theorises how signs can relate to their meaning effects corresponds to the traditional logical division of term, proposition, and argument. Namely, it suggests that signs can be (c1) *rhemes*, that is, signs that indicate mere 'blank forms of propositions',⁶⁵ (c2) *propositions*, that is, signs that actually 'declare facts',⁶⁶ or (c3) *arguments*, that is, signs that indicate 'conclusions'⁶⁷ as changes in the interpreter's thoughts.⁶⁸

All these Peirce's classifications of signs are isomorphic to the 'cenopythagorean categories' that are central to his phenomenology. Those basic categories are firstness (category of being an *appearance*; 'being of that which is such as it is, positively and without reference to anything else'), secondness (category of being an *actuality*; 'being of that which is such as it is, with respect to a second but regardless of any third'), and thirdness (category of being a *law*; 'being of that which is such as it is, in bringing a second and third into relation to each other').⁶⁹ So, fundamentally, the approach that is proposed here is guided by the idea that the phenomena of strategic culture can be dissected into 'appearances', 'actualities', and 'laws' that emerge in different aspects of meaning-making.

Tone-token-type

More specifically, when it comes to the analysis of strategic-cultural phenomena as logonomic signs, Peirce's systematics can structure it into three dimensions. In particular, it highlights an important division between *strategic-cultural tokens* and *strategic-cultural types*. Thereby it allows us to account for the fact that strategic culture exists not only as a set of actually produced *tokens of strategic culture*, that is, actions and artefacts that work as tokens conveying strategic-cultural rules, but also as a system of habits of strategic-cultural semiosis (*logonomic types of strategic culture*) that are reproduced by strategic-cultural signs. Additionally, strategic-cultural signs can also be, in principle, analysed into *tones*, that is, separate subjective appearances that constitute strategic-cultural phenomena.

We can also use the same triad of tone-token-type dynamically, to describe how signs produce other signs as their *meaning effects*. So, we can distinguish between three kinds of those effects: *tone-effects*, *token-effects*, and *type-effects*.⁷⁰ The

⁶⁴EP 2:460–61; CP 2.307.

⁶⁵CP 4.354.

⁶⁶Peirce 1899/1900, [MS 142:5].

⁶⁷CP 2.95.

⁶⁸CP 4.538.

⁶⁹CP 1.24–26, 8.328.

⁷⁰In Peirce's nomenclature (Peirce 2014, [ILS 285]), these three kinds of effects are called *initial* (*immediate* (CP 4.536)), *dynamical*, and *final* interpretants. However, to make the framework more terminologically parsimonious, I am using here tone-token-type triad for distinguishing both kinds of signs (tone-token-type) and kinds of interpretants (tone-effect-token-effect-type-effect). I.e. I assume that initial interpretants are tones that are produced as sign effects, dynamical interpretants are that are

tone-effects appear as vague mental images invoked by strategic-cultural signs. The *token-effects* are concrete events of (inter)action that happen in strategic affairs as a result of the constraint produced by strategic-cultural signs. The *type-effects* are the *habits* of strategic (inter)action that emerge due to the effect of strategic-cultural signs.

So, as we introduce this triad of meaning effects, it opens an opportunity to fundamentally reconceptualise strategic culture. In particular, it allows moving from the strategic culture that is imagined as a hodgepodge of ideas, artefacts, actions, and habits to a model that theorises it as a complex yet structured semiotic system in which multimodal sign vehicles convey ideas (i.e. produce tone-effects), instigate events (i.e. produce token-effects), and precipitate habits (i.e. type-effects). Moreover, this approach also helps to transcend the existing definitional and theoretical debates about the strategic culture by refocusing the analytical perspective from the rather useless and confusing distinction between *substantially* contrasted 'culture-as-artefacts' and 'culture-as-behaviour' to clearer *relationally* defined distinction of sign vehicles and token-effects.

Importantly, behaviour patterns can work as both sign vehicles and token-effects, depending on what is the case in the specific interaction that is analysed. Similarly, artefacts can function as both sign vehicles and token-effects as well. In other words, both behaviour patterns and artefacts can, in some cases, function as carriers (sign vehicles) of the logonomic meanings, while in other cases, they both can appear as token-effects produced by other strategic-cultural signs.

So, while we can still contrast culture-as-artefacts and culture-as-behaviour as different modes of meaning-making in the semiotics of strategic culture, the relations between them are determined not by what mode is used but by how, in each situation, these entities are built into the network of semiotic relations – whether they appear as a sign vehicle or a token-effect.

Icon-index-symbol

Using another Peircean triad, we can dissect different relationships between strategic-cultural sign vehicles and their objects by distinguishing *strategic-cultural icons*, *strategic-cultural indices*, and *strategic-cultural symbols*. This dimension of semiotic analysis is especially productive as it allows differentiating not only among diverse modes through which the logonomic rules of strategic culture are conveyed but also between different fundamental principles of how a prescribed pattern of behaviour is represented by a vehicle of a strategic-cultural sign. Peircean theory of signs suggests that those prescribed behavioural patterns can be represented iconically (by virtue of similarity between the strategic-cultural sign vehicles and the prescribed behavioural forms), indexically (by virtue of real connection between them), or symbolically (by virtue of convention).

The distinction of iconic, indexical, and symbolic strategic-cultural signs helps to bring back one of the conceptual elements that were present in Snyder's original definition but did not make it to the core of strategic cultural studies. Namely,

tokens produced as sign effects, and final interpretants are types that are produced as sign effects. (For a more detailed account of this interpretation of Peirce's systematics of interpretants see Fomin 2023.)

using these categories we can revisit the question of how strategic-cultural rules are ‘acquired through instruction or imitation’.⁷¹ In essence, the division of icons, indices, and symbols makes it possible to analyse how the transmission and reproduction of strategic-cultural meanings are enabled by similarity (including imitation), physical connection, and convention (including languages and other institutions that enable instruction).

Some types of *iconic* strategic-cultural signs, such as, for example, paintings, were already mentioned above. However, importantly, more complex iconic semiotic entities are also crucial for the functioning of strategic cultures. In particular, in some strategic-cultural signs, verbal historical narratives can be involved in second-level *iconic* semiosis. They function this way due to the fact that all logonomic signs generally function as two-level iconic semiotic structures, similar to Roland Barthes’s *myths*⁷² and Juri Lotman’s *representational verbal signs*.⁷³ Thus, in strategic-cultural signs both verbal and non-verbal signs can appear as sign vehicles for secondary-order iconic semiosis.⁷⁴

It is also important to note that particular instances of meaningful behaviour can themselves also work as vehicles for second-level iconic strategic-cultural signs. In particular, past behaviour in strategic affairs can function as a sign vehicle that iconically represents how one should behave in strategic affairs in the future. Thus, it is largely due to such iconic logonomic semioses that strategic cultures persist. Furthermore, it is not only the self’s patterns of behaviour that can work this way as iconic sign vehicles and thereby be reproduced in strategic cultures but also the patterns of behaviour of the others that can be imitated due to the ‘demonstration effect’.⁷⁵

As to logonomic *indices*, these signs sometimes are probably less obvious in strategic cultures but are nevertheless also very common and impactful. In particular, geographical constraints that inform the patterns of strategic behaviour of international actors often function as indexical signs.⁷⁶ Even though seas, mountains, plains, and rivers are not themselves cultural artefacts, when they appear in the discourse of strategic affairs, they are already culturally semiotised and thus function not only as parts of humans’ *biological* *umwelt* (biologically semiotised environment) but also as indexical constraints that are *culturally* meaningful in a particular community.

Moreover, other examples of indexical semiosis in strategic cultures can be found in cases when a particular thing constrains countries’ behaviour in strategic affairs due to its direct physical effect or geographical proximity. The strategic-cultural signs of this kind are particularly noticeable in situations when the indexical constraints are not combined with symbolic ones. For example, in the cases of disputed international borders, the material barriers, walls, barbed wires, and Czech hedgehogs inform regularities in the strategic behaviour of the actors by actually physically restricting it. Similarly, acts of political violence and other meaningful uses of

⁷¹Snyder 1977, 8.

⁷²Barthes 1970, 183–200.

⁷³Lotman 1977, 1998. See also Lotman 1999, 1990.

⁷⁴E.g. see Lantis 2009, 40–41 and Tomes 2014 on the role of myths in strategic cultures.

⁷⁵See e.g. Kincade 1990, 14.

⁷⁶E.g. Ermarth 2009, 86; Lantis 2009, 40.

force can also function as strategic-cultural signs that are based on indexical semiosis.

Finally, strategic-cultural *symbols* are also very common. In particular, as I mentioned above, various verbal texts, such as national security strategies, military doctrines, and defence policy documents, as well as novels, anecdotes, and poems, symbolically prescribe particular patterns of strategic behaviour, using conventional signs of natural languages. Similarly, international agreements, which exist as verbal semiotic entities, are also signs that inform how states behave by verbally (and thus *symbolically* in Peirce's sense) conveying particular restrictions concerning who can do what under what circumstances.

Rheme–proposition–argument

The last Peircean semiotic triad that we discuss here, the rheme–proposition–argument division, can also be insightful with respect to strategic-cultural signs. This dimension of semiotic analysis explicates that strategic-cultural signs can actually work as such only inasmuch as they function as 'arguments', that is, inasmuch as their meaning effect is a 'conclusion'.⁷⁷ In other words, strategic-cultural signs are necessarily *strategic-cultural arguments* that represent a 'change in thoughts'⁷⁸ about strategic interactions.

However, one can also analyse strategic-cultural signs into *strategic-cultural rhemes*, that is, into blank forms for assertions that are necessary for these arguments to appear. Those strategic-cultural rhemes can be imagined as blank elements of strategic-cultural formulas (e.g. '_____ is a threat', '_____ is our ally', '_____ is our enemy', '_____ is in our sphere of influence', '_____ is a democracy', '_____ must be deterred', '_____ is Latin America', etc.).

From various combinations of those strategic-cultural rhemes emerge *strategic-cultural propositions*, such as actually declared facts (e.g. 'China is a threat', 'democracies are our allies', 'Latin America is in our sphere of influence', 'the Soviet Union must be deterred', 'the US uses force against non-democracies', etc.). Importantly, the analysis of rhemes, propositions, and arguments is possible in application not only to verbal texts but to multimodal artefacts as well. Peirce argued anything that 'is either true or false, but does not directly furnish reasons for its being so'⁷⁹ is a proposition, so, for instance, a portrait with a title 'is strictly a proposition'.⁸⁰ Moreover, any activity (that can be judged as functional or dysfunctional) can also be theorised as a proposition.⁸¹

Semiotic analysis of strategic cultures: tenets and questions

So, overall, the sociosemiotic approach to strategic culture can be condensed into three tenets:

⁷⁷CP 2.95.

⁷⁸CP 4.538.

⁷⁹EP 2:275.

⁸⁰EP 2:282.

⁸¹Stjernfelt 2015, 2014.

- (1) Strategic cultures are logonomic systems that constrain meaning-making in strategic affairs. They exist as sets of strategic-cultural signs, that is, logonomic signs that convey the rules of meaning-making in strategic affairs.
- (2) Strategic-cultural signs are produced in diverse semiotic modes and, thus, should be studied multimodally.
- (3) The study of strategic-cultural signs can be structured as a multimodal semiotic analysis along three dimensions:
 - (a) tone–token–type dimension,
 - (b) icon–index–symbol dimension,
 - (c) rheme–proposition–argument dimension.

This framework can organise our analysis of the phenomenon of strategic culture and help to understand better how the peculiarities of persistent habits of international actors emerge and are reproduced through meaning-making processes.

Importantly, the three-dimensional scheme of the third tenet does not need to be always followed comprehensively. Instead, it can also be used to navigate between different research questions that can appear in the studies of strategic cultures.

For example, those questions can be related to

- (a) the tone–token–type dimension

(e.g. what concrete tokens (texts/artefacts/events) convey strategic-cultural rules? What types (habits) constitute strategic culture? What are the peculiarities of different international actors in terms of what types constitute their strategic cultures? What concrete events/artefacts are produced by a strategic-cultural sign as token-effects? What habits are produced by a strategic-cultural sign as type-effects?)
- (b) the icon–index–symbol dimension

(e.g. how do iconic (similarity-based), indexical (connection-based), and symbolic (convention-based) signs contribute to the transmission of strategic-cultural rules? What iconic signs convey strategic-cultural rules? What indexical signs convey strategic-cultural rules? What symbolic signs help to convey strategic cultural-rules? What are the relations of similarity that enable iconic strategic-cultural signs to function? What are the actual connections that enable indexical strategic-cultural signs to function?)
- (c) the rheme–proposition–argument dimension

(e.g. what elemental concepts (rhemes) constitute a strategic culture? What propositions constitute a strategic culture? How strategic-cultural propositions are structured into arguments? What are the peculiarities of different international actors in terms of what rhemes and propositions constitute their strategic cultures?)

Additionally, some questions can derive from the principle of multimodality itself. For example: how do different semiotic modes interact in strategic-cultural

signs? What are the peculiarities of different international actors in terms of how they use various modes in their strategic-cultural semiosis?

At the end of the day, the semiotic approach to strategic culture hardly suggests any research focus that has not ever been considered in the field before, but what it does is provide a framework that enables us to map any separate manifestation of strategic culture as parts of the bigger network of semiotic relations. Formulating the research questions about strategic cultures through the lens of this overarching semiotic theory makes it more manageable to articulate which aspect of the strategic culture we explore in each case and how these aspects can, in principle, be brought together.

In this respect, the semiotic reconceptualisation of strategic culture inherits the ambition of the 'first-generation' studies of strategic culture to consider all the diverse strategic-cultural phenomena, from symbols, ideas, and historical narratives to geographies, actions, and institutions. At the same time, the semiotic framework can be accommodated to 'third-generation'-style questions, focusing on how brute actions performed by international actors emerge as token-effects of strategic-cultural logonomic signs in other semiotic modes, as well as to 'second-generation'-style questions about how concrete artefacts (tokens) are used to legitimise strategic decisions or how logonomic signs perpetuate elites' habits (types) of producing those legitimations. So, one of the strengths of the suggested framework is that it is useful for bridging those 'intergenerational' divides.

An example: Russian strategic culture across semiotic modes and dimensions

To give an example of how a semiotic analysis of strategic culture can be structured, let us, for instance, consider the strategic culture of Russia. Our multimodal semiotic research can be focused on a diverse corpus of artefacts that contribute to (re)producing Russian strategic-cultural rules across various modes. In particular, the corpus of texts analysed can include not only official verbal texts, like the speeches of Russian leaders (e.g. Putin's 'Munich speech'), Russia's military doctrine, and nuclear deterrent policy, but can also encompass texts of less obvious genres. For example, the ideas about 'the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians'⁸² that inform Russia's use of force today can be found not only in Putin's texts but also in Soviet history textbooks that arguably shaped Putin's ideas about that 'historical unity' in the first place. Moreover, some narratives inherent in Russian strategic culture can be traced to more cryptic sources. For example, the ideas of 'implacable Western hostility toward Russia'⁸³ might be rooted in the lore of the Russian secret services, such as, for instance, the stories about Madeleine Albright's 'pathological hatred of the Slavs' and her annoyance 'by the fact that Russia has the world's largest reserves of minerals', all allegedly 'read' directly from her subconsciousness by the psychics of the Russian Federal Guard Service.⁸⁴

⁸²Putin 2021.

⁸³Sokolsky and Rumer 2020.

⁸⁴Krechetnikov 2015.

The analysis also does not have to be restricted to texts in verbal modes and can include, for example, cinematographic texts that also contribute to conveying the same logonomic rules. In the case of Russian anti-Westernism and anti-Ukrainianism, it can be, for instance, 'Brother 2' film that condenses, foreshadows, and informs the anti-American and anti-Ukrainian imagery of today's Russian foreign policy.⁸⁵ Moreover, in the optics of multimodality, each hostile interaction between Russia and the 'Western' countries itself constitutes just another sign through which the anti-Western ideas are reproduced.

Importantly, the multimodal approach does not just prescribe putting various multifaceted entities in the same basket but also provides a toolkit that allows us to understand how all the different modes contribute to meaning-making. It helps to both dissect them and explore their synergies. For example, the toolkit of multimodal analysis can help to study how shot scales, camera movements, sound, and image contribute to reproducing strategic-cultural meanings in filmic discourse⁸⁶ or how strategic-cultural narratives and concepts are conveyed through shapes, colours, and compositions in pictorial texts.⁸⁷

The three Peircean dimensions of semiotic analysis also enable us to deal effectively with all the diversity of multimodal corpora. In particular, the *tone-token-type dimension* makes it possible to differentiate between numerous concrete artefacts (tokens) that can be constructed across multiple semiotic modes and overarching general habits (types) that are perpetuated by them (and regulate their production). For example, the Russian anti-Westernism or anti-Ukrainianism that pervades all the artefacts (speeches, doctrines, anecdotes, films, etc.) mentioned in the previous paragraphs emerges as a type that is deducible from all those concrete instantiations of logonomic tokens that convey it. Moreover, even if some idea is expressed in a generalised form (i.e. 'the West continued and continues looking for another chance to strike a blow at us, to weaken and break up Russia')⁸⁸ it still constitutes a token from which a habit can emerge only as a type (and as an argument). Thus, the analytical distinction between tokens and types is useful to theorise relations between concrete forms that carry strategic-cultural meanings and habits that are (re)produced by those forms.

In addition, by distinguishing between tone-effects, token-effects, and type-effects we can theorise how concrete strategic-cultural signs first produce mental effects in interpreters, then instigate concrete events, and, finally, enable strategic-cultural habits to emerge. Thus, by exploring this dimension, we can, for instance, analyse 'Brother 2' film in terms of (1) how it produces mental effects (qua tone-effects) in its viewers, (2) instigates concrete events or artefacts (qua its token-effects), for example, Russia's attack on Ukraine or 'Brother 2'-inspired Russian war propaganda,⁸⁹ and (3) reproduces habits of anti-Americanism and anti-Ukrainianism (qua its type-effects).

⁸⁵Lipovetsky 2022.

⁸⁶Bateman *et al.* 2017.

⁸⁷Kress and van Leeuwen 2020.

⁸⁸President of Russia 2022.

⁸⁹Lipovetsky 2022.

The *icon-index-symbol dimension* is helpful here as well. It allows us to distinguish basic principles that make strategic-cultural signs meaningful and help to notice how different semiotic processes (including ‘instruction or imitation’)⁹⁰ contribute to the reproduction of strategic cultures. This is especially relevant for the instances of semiosis that are not based on symbolic (conventional) relations. For example, by focusing on iconic semiosis (semiosis by virtue of similarity), we can better account for pictorial artefacts that inform Russian strategic culture (e.g. Vasily Surikov’s painting ‘Suvorov Crossing the Alps In 1799’).⁹¹

Beyond that, the effects of iconicity in strategic cultures can be explored, for instance, in the fact that Russia’s full-scale military intervention in Ukraine in 2022 can be interpreted not only as a separate event but also as an iconic sign that is connotatively related to other similar ‘operations’, such as the Russian ‘peace enforcement operation’ in Georgia in 2008, Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian intervention in Kazakhstan in January 2022 or even Soviet invasion in Hungary in 1956 and the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Moreover, in Russian political discourse, it was also represented as an event that is similar to the military interventions launched by ‘the West’ in Yugoslavia, Iraq, Libya, and Syria. By taking these iconic associations into account, we can better understand how the habits of Russian strategic culture contributed to the design of Putin’s ‘special military operation’ in Ukraine, including its naming, strategies of justification, and military plans. Moreover, some of the major flaws of the Kremlin’s initial plan of the invasion were arguably informed by these assumed similarities (e.g. by the assumption that the 2022 full-fledged attack on Ukraine ‘would be something not much more serious than the annexation of Crimea’).⁹² So, it is a good example of how the inertia of strategic-cultural habits explains the behaviour of international actors better than neorealist calculations.

Taking indexical semiotic relations into account can also be insightful in many respects. For example, in the case of the Russian strategic culture, the absence of natural geographical barriers between Russia and the rest of Europe can be interpreted as an indexical logonomic sign that contributes to the sense of vulnerability and thereby prescribes seeking strategic depth.⁹³ Moreover, accounting for brute causal relations as semiotic ones allows us to analyse instances of battle contact (as they are meaningful and interpretable) as elements of the strategic culture. So, for instance, the fact that the Ukrainian army forced Russian troops to withdraw from Kherson in November 2022 can itself be considered an indexical logonomic sign that constrains Russia’s actions. (The forced withdrawal itself (as an *indexical* sign) should not be confused with verbal narratives about it (those are enabled by *symbolic* signs).)

As to the *rheme-proposition-argument dimension*, it can also be useful as it allows us to structure our analysis of strategic culture into three levels: the level of rhematic ‘building blocks’, the level of separate concrete assertions/actions, and the level of concluding arguments. This makes it possible to reconstruct how concluding

⁹⁰Snyder 1977, 8.

⁹¹Pintner 2010.

⁹²Zhegulev 2023.

⁹³Sokolsky and Rumer 2020.

prescriptions of strategic culture are constructed from separate propositions and elementary concepts. For example, in contemporary Russian strategic-cultural discourse, there is an argument that can be formulated like ‘the Russian Federation can use force against Ukraine because the Russian Federation should control historical Russia and because the West will not use force against the Russian Federation in response’.

This argument can be analysed into separate propositions, such as ‘the Russian Federation should control historical Russia’, ‘the West will not use force against the Russian Federation’, ‘the Russian Federation can use force against Ukraine’ (or enacted proposition ‘[Russia uses force against Ukraine]’). Moreover, each of these propositions can itself be analysed as a verbalisation of a concluding element of other arguments, which would, in turn, be constituted by other propositions. Those propositions can, for example, be reconstructed as the following: ‘the Russian Federation should not use force if the West can use force against the Russian Federation’, ‘the Russian Federation should control historical Russia’, ‘Ukraine is a part of historical Russia’, ‘Russian Federation is not the West’, ‘Ukraine should not be controlled by the West’, ‘the West is hostile to historical Russia’, ‘the West is hostile to the Russian Federation’, and so on.

Then, all these propositions can be analysed into basic ‘building blocks’ (rhemes), such as ‘the Russian Federation’, ‘historical Russia’, ‘Ukraine’, ‘the West’, ‘___ controls ___’, ‘___ is hostile to ___’, ‘___ uses force against ___’ (or an enacted rheme ‘[___ uses force against ___]’), and so on.

Essentially, the *rheme–proposition–argument dimension* provides a basic toolkit to map the structure of explicit arguments and implicit assumptions that constitute the strategic culture. Moreover, it also allows us to problematise elementary concepts, such as ‘historical Russia’ or ‘the West’. Thus, this framework enables us to account for both the relatively strict logical structure of arguments behind strategic interaction and some fuzzy terms (‘floating signifiers’)⁹⁴ that are built into them. It also helps to formulate various possible propositional combinations of basic strategic-cultural rhemes (e.g. ‘Belarus is a part of historical Russia’, ‘Lithuania is a part of historical Russia’, ‘the West will use force if the Russian Federation uses force against Lithuania’) and consider their relevance and implications.

Conclusion

Summing up, in this study, I attempted to theorise how the semiotic categories of the logonomic system and logonomic sign can be used to reconceptualise the notion of strategic culture. I demonstrated that even though today this notion is quite problematic, the ways in which it is defined hint that it can be fruitfully regarded as a concept that is (quasi)-semiotic. So, I attempted to reconsider this term based on the fundamental categories of general and social semiotics, which allow us to systematise and instrumentalise this concept while preserving its broad scope.

I suggest redefining strategic cultures as *logonomic systems that constrain social semiosis in strategic affairs* and theorising that strategic cultures are conveyed and

⁹⁴Laclau 2005.

reproduced by sets of multimodal *logonomic signs*. Such semiotic reconceptualisation makes it possible to use Peircean semiotic nomenclature and the social semiotic principle of multimodality in the accounts of strategic culture. These categories help to clarify some problematic aspects in the studies of strategic culture, account for important distinctions among various elements and forms of strategic cultures, and discover some principles that can guide the studies of this phenomenon.

The categories provided by the theories of social semiotics and Peirce's general semiotics are useful when it comes to formulating fundamental principles that can guide our analysis of strategic cultures. In particular, the principle of multimodality allows us to analyse strategic-cultural signs into various semiotic modes (printed text, oral speech, embodied action, video, etc.) that are involved in the production of the sign vehicles by which the logonomic rules of strategic culture are conveyed. Moreover, Peirce's semiotics makes it possible to develop an analytical scheme along the lines of which the analysis of multimodal strategic-cultural logonomic signs can be structured.

The scheme includes three distinct dimensions. Firstly, there is the *tone-token-type dimension* that separates general rules (types) that guide how actors communicate and behave in strategic affairs from strategic-cultural tokens (artefacts and actions) by which these rules are conveyed and reproduced. This dimension also allows us to analyse strategic-cultural signs into tones, that is, subjective appearances that work as 'building blocks' of strategic-cultural phenomena. Additionally, we can use the tone-token-type triad to distinguish various kinds of relations between strategic-cultural phenomena by dissecting the effects produced by strategic-cultural signs, such as strategic-cultural meanings that emerge as *tone-effects* of strategic-cultural signs, strategic-cultural events as *token-effects* of those signs, and strategic-cultural habits as their *type-effects*. This allows us to structure strategic culture as a semiotic system in which sign vehicles convey ideas (tone-effects), instigate events (token-effects), and precipitate habits (type-effects).

Secondly, there is the *icon-index-symbol dimension* that helps to distinguish different fundamental principles on which the transmission of prescribed patterns of strategic-cultural semiosis can be based. Specifically, those prescribed patterns can be represented iconically (by virtue of similarity between the strategic-cultural sign vehicles and the prescribed patterns of strategic-cultural interaction), indexically (by virtue of real connection between them), or symbolically (by virtue of convention).

Thirdly, there is the *rheme-proposition-argument dimension* that allows us to analyse strategic-cultural signs into strategic-cultural rhemes (blank forms of strategic-cultural formulas), strategic-cultural propositions (actually asserted strategic-cultural propositions), and strategic-cultural arguments (changes in strategic-cultural thought that emerge as a conclusion from particular strategic-cultural premises).

This framework can guide the analysis of meaning-making processes that enable the reproduction of logonomic rules that constitute strategic affairs. It also helps to link different aspects on which our analysis of strategic cultures can focus through a comprehensive framework. Moreover, one of the main strengths of the proposed approach consists of the fact that it allows us to transcend the existing substantialist controversy about how culture-as-ideas, culture-as-artefacts, and culture-as-behaviour fit into the strategic culture. The relationalist semiotic vision of strategic culture makes it possible to transform this conceptual problem into an empirically

solvable task that consists in analysing how diverse semiotic modes are used in strategic-cultural signs and how those signs produce different kinds of effects.

The proposed framework suggests that strategic-culture-as-artefacts and strategic-culture-as-ideas can be theorised not as mutually exclusive elements and not as an unstructured set of conceptual building blocks but as semiotically inter-related entities. More specifically, it implies that strategic culture is a set of logonomic signs in which artefacts function as multimodal sign vehicles that carry and (re)produce strategic-cultural ideas as their meaning effects.

The tension that appears in the IR debates on whether the strategic culture exists in ideas, artefacts, or behaviour also becomes more relaxed due to the fact that semiotics does not substantively contrast ideas, artefacts, and behaviour but rather assumes that both artefacts and behaviour patterns are vehicles that carry ideas. Moreover, things and behaviour patterns can be considered as artefacts and actions only inasmuch as they do carry the ideas (mental meaning effects). Conversely, ideas are rarely considered in semiotics as something detached from vehicles that carry them. So, ultimately, the extremely broad scope of the category of strategic culture, as well as its heterogeneity that sometimes seem problematic in the context of international studies, can be transformed into a potent methodological asset when seen through the lens of semiotics.

Importantly, this framework does not contradict the existing conceptualisations of strategic culture but rather makes this category more powerful and consistent. I leverage the abstract categories of general semiotics in order to clarify more concrete IR categories that implicitly refer to some basic quasi-semiotic notions but do not systematically consider them as such. In other words, the potency of the semiotic account of strategic culture is based not so much on suggesting new assumptions about strategic culture but rather on systematically developing the existing yet implicit ones.

What makes this attempt to introduce semiotics in the studies of strategic cultures particularly significant is that generally the projects that seek to systematically develop an integrated framework that would bridge political studies and semiotics (especially Peircean semiotics) are quite rare.⁹⁵ For the most part, when (quasi)-semiotic conceptions do appear in international studies, they tend to either allude to (post)-structuralist *sémiologie*, discourse analysis, and post-modernist writings⁹⁶ or emerge in the assumptions of other theories, such as *constructivism* (which draws from symbolic interactionism)⁹⁷ or *actor-network theory*⁹⁸ (which borrows some conceptual elements from Algirdas Greimas's⁹⁹ narrative semiotics).¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵Drechsler 2009, 73–74.

⁹⁶E.g. Hurwitz 1989; Fortin 1989; Gregory 1989; Luke 1989; Rubenstein 1989; Shapiro 1989; Aistrophe 2020; Hansen 2017; Chilton 2004; Fairclough 2003; Fairclough and Fairclough 2012; van Dijk 1997; Wodak 2009.

⁹⁷Alexander Wendt (Wendt 2003, 143) develops his constructivist 'social theory of international politics' by explicitly referring to symbolic interactionism that can be seen as a special version of 'sociological semiotics' that emerged in American social science (Maccannell 1976, 99).

⁹⁸Latour 2005, 54–55; Nexon and Pouliot 2013; Austin 2017.

⁹⁹Greimas 1977; Greimas and Courtés 1982.

¹⁰⁰There are also some rare cases in which the instruments of social semiotics and multimodality are used (e.g. Guillaume *et al.* 2016).

A notable exception in this respect is the work of Alena Drieschova, who specifically discussed how the potential of Peircean semiotics could be used to establish the ‘interconnectivity between material reality and the ideational realm’ and thereby to help in transcending the material-ideational divide in the studies of IR.¹⁰¹ In a way, the semiotic analysis of strategic cultures develops the same line of argument on the potential of semiotic theory in IR. Moreover, the suggested approach also resonates with the ambition of Peeter Selg and Andreas Ventsel to turn political semiotics into a theoretical toolkit that would make *relationalist* political analysis possible.¹⁰²

The proposed semiotic account of strategic culture is also important for semiotics itself, as it develops, complements, and specifies Tartu-Moscow School’s ideas about the semiotics of regularised behaviour,¹⁰³ Mikhail Ilyin’s approach to the analysis of multimodal political performatives,¹⁰⁴ and Risto Heiskala’s arguments on the affinity between sociological models of intentional acts and semiotic models of meaning-making.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, the framework that is developed in this article demonstrates that the categories of *logonomic system* and *logonomic sign* are not only helpful as effective instruments of social semiotic analysis but are also important as potent elements of interdisciplinary conceptual interfaces that integrate the toolkits of general semiotics, social semiotics, and IR semiotics.

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¹⁰¹Drieschova 2017, 60.

¹⁰²Selg and Ventsel 2020.

¹⁰³Pyatigorski and Ouspenski 1967, 28; Lotman 1975, 25–26, 1976, 292–93; Chernov 1967; Zolyan and Chernov 1977; Zolyan 2017, 2018, 2019; Randviir 2004, 40, 56–59, 72.

¹⁰⁴Ilyin 2016a, 2016b.

¹⁰⁵Heiskala 2003, 2014.

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