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Cultural Forms and Artefacts in Contemporary Scholarly Discourse: Interpretation and Reinterpretation

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Abstract. The article presents a theoretical examination of the concepts of cultural form and artefact within contemporary humanities discourse. The relevance of this topic stems from the pervasive digitalisation of the contemporary sociocultural environment, which exacerbates an existing tendency characteristic of consumer society: the increasing saturation of everyday life with simulations and simulacra. The authors' research interest centres on developing a methodological approach that promotes a spiritualisation of cultural forms and cultural artefacts, thereby enabling productive resistance to the encroachment of simulations and simulacra upon individual conscious existence. Against this background, interpretation and reinterpretation are identified as principal strategies for deepening an understanding—and facilitating a rethinking—of cultural forms and cultural artefacts. The article sets out the following objectives, whose fulfilment determines the novelty of the present study: to consider language as a model of culture; to define the place of the rhetorical canon in contemporary communication studies; to examine the corporeality of the artefact and the role of emotions in the digital age; and to propose criteria for distinguishing authentic culture from its pseudo-cultural counterparts. The conclusion argues that cultural authenticity can be achieved only through the coexistence of cognitive and ethical principles, which enable the linguistic personality to make a conscious choice in favour of service as a mode of professional activity.

Keywords: cultural form, artefact, language, individual information system, individual conceptual system, reinterpretation, simulacrum, corporeality of culture, cultural ontology, postformalism

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Культурные формы и артефакты в проблемном поле современной научной парадигмы: интерпретация и реинтерпретация

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена теоретическому осмыслению понятий культурной формы и артефакта в контексте современной научной парадигмы. Актуальность темы обусловлена тотальной цифровизацией сложившейся к настоящему времени социокультурной ситуации, что усугубляет характерный для общества потребления процесс засилья повседневного бытия симуляциями и симулякрами. Исследовательский интерес авторов сосредоточен на выработке такой методологической установки, которая способствует одухотворению культурных форм и артефактов культуры, обусловливая продуктивность опыта противостояния симулятивности существования индивидуального сознания. При этом базовыми стратегиями, призванными инициировать процесс осмысления и переосмысления культурных форм и артефактов культуры, названы интерпретация и реинтерпретация. В статье ставятся следующие задачи, решение которых определяет новизну настоящей работы: рассмотреть язык в качестве модели культуры; обозначить место риторического канона в современной коммуникологии; изучить телесность артефакта и роль эмоций в цифровую эпоху; предложить критерии, позволяющие отличить подлинную культуру от её псевдокультурных подобий. В заключении констатируется, что аутентичность культуры достигается только при сосуществовании когнитивных и этических принципов, опираясь на которые языковая личность оказывается в состоянии осуществить осознанный выбор в пользу служения как способа профессиональной деятельности.

Ключевые слова: культурная форма, артефакт, язык, индивидуальная информационная система, индивидуальная концептуальная система, реинтерпретация, симулякр, телесность культуры, культурная онтология, постформализм

Introduction

As succinctly observed by Andrei Flier, the concepts of cultural form and artefact are inextricably linked. According to Flier's conception, "a cultural artefact is an interpretation of a particular cultural form embodied in a specific material product, work of art, informational message, behavioural act or evaluative judgement…" [1] Thus, the concepts of cultural form and cultural artefact encompass not only "the material products of human activity, … but also the products of spiritual (symbolic) production." [Ibid.]

In this context, the following point acquires a fundamental character. Whereas an artefact formerly denoted "something introduced into the object under study by the research process itself and not characteristic of the object in its normal state prior to contact with research activity," "more recently <…> artefact has come to mean

any cultural creation: objects (ideal and material), processes, relations, norms, ideals, and so on." [2, p. 16] Similarly, the fact that a cultural form is an "objectification of the spirit" or otherwise—"subjectivation, 'humanisation' of nature" [Ibid., pp. 16–17] does not always correspond to the actual state of affairs.

Discussing the ambiguous ontological status of a cultural artefact, Dale Jacquette emphasises that the world contains not only natural objects (stones, plants, etc.), but also objects that would not exist in this form or with such properties if it were not for human intervention. Artefacts appear in this context as "products of human thought, touched by human hands and transformed by them in various ways." [3, p. 14] Thus, the category of artefact includes expressions of thought in language and art, as well as all the results of human invention, production and technology. Although animals also create rudimentary artefacts (e.g. nests, dams and burrows), only human culture is characterised by a reflexive attitude towards its own artefactuality.

Contemporary philosophy of culture offers a more nuanced perspective on this issue. For example, a fundamental question is raised within the framework of neoclassical discourse about the ontological foundations of the very possibility of cultural forms and artefacts. Gennady Menchikov and Anton Krasnov's problematisation of the traditional understanding of culture as a "second nature" points to the methodological error of conflating cultural phenomena and society. From their point of view, the identification of culture (a) with any form of social production, (b) with any creativity, (c) with the totality of any values, (d) with civilisation, (e) with art, or (f) with the understanding of culture outside of man and superhuman inevitably sends "the attitude towards real essential culture <…> down the wrong path." [4, p. 79] This is precisely what leads to such paradoxical combinations as "war culture," "criminal culture" or even "culture of dehumanisation," which calls into question the very legitimacy of classifying such phenomena as cultural forms. From an ontological point of view, culture appears not so much as a storehouse of ready-made values or the result of some human actions, but as a special way of being that requires constant recreation.

It therefore seems entirely justified to follow Baizhol Karipbaev and Alibek Sharipov in viewing the contemporary cultural situation through the lens of a constructivist ontology, conceived as an alternative to the traditional understanding of philosophy as a form of "deferred self-evidence." Insisting on a fundamental replacement of the descriptive (passive-contemplative) approach with a projective (active-creative) attitude, they interpret postmodern philosophy not as a denial, but as a "hyper-reflexivity of modernity," that is, overcoming traditional structures of rationality with the aim of forming more complex (sophisticated) types of reflexive thinking. From this perspective, truth lies "in a zone of equilibrium between extremes, taking into account the full range of cognitive experience" associated with both. [5, p. 57] With regard to cultural forms, this means that their authenticity lies neither in adherence to ready-made models nor in the complete rejection of tradition, but rather in the productive tension between these extremes.

To assess how well founded these doubts are, we shall now consider language as a system characterised by a dual nature. This move seems to be justified for a number of reasons:

– firstly, initially every cultural form, like language as Energeia (Wilhelm von Humboldt), is the result of creative activity (in other words, "the generation of every cultural form is by definition innovative" [6, p. 43]);

– secondly, in its "ontological and semantic parameters" the cultural form "is

essentially analogous to a phrase (utterance) in natural language"[1];

– thirdly, acting as a cultural form, it is language that "sets patterns of social interaction and intercultural communication, while at the personal level, it normalises the intellectual and creative actions of a person."[2]

Finally, alongside the authoritative view of the methodologist Georgy Shchedrovitsky, who regards social activity as an original universal whole of which language proper is a particular form, [7] we may invoke Iosif Levin's position as a summarising argument. According to the author, it is in language that "the combination of active and passive, individual (personal) and collective principles characteristic of culture as a whole is embodied." [8, p. 79]

Language as a Model of Culture: Ergon and Energeia

According to research in the philosophy of language, language functions at the level of the individual information system as a natural mechanism "embedded" in the structure of the brain. The formation of the designated system occurs based on non-verbal elements, which both actually and logically precede verbal elements (for more details see: [9]). The latter are of a secondary nature, arising from the need to encode non-verbal experience in order to optimise it through the manipulation of verbal elements. Later, however, verbal language, which initially arose in the service of non-verbal experience, acquires a self-sufficient character, since code is a "deliberately deadened context." [10, p. 352]

The essential function of an individual information system consists in accumulating, processing and retaining information that enables its bearer to adapt to the environment. Scholars further argue that such an information system is present in every living organism, with the sole qualification that, whereas in humans this naturally inherent mechanism is realised through verbal means, information exchange is carried out in other biological organisms through squeaking (female mosquito), buzzing (horsefly), smell (green shield bug, commonly known as a stink bug), barking (fox, dog), lowing (calf), howling (jackal), neighing (horse), bleating (ram), meowing (cat), and so on (for more details see: [11; 12; 13]).

This is precisely why the act of speaking as such does not guarantee the unconditional transition of an individual from the natural world to the social world. In other words, mastery of language at the level of the information system does not in itself confer human status upon the individual, if only because adaptation to the environment—or, in other words, "adaptability to conditions… cannot serve as a basis for evaluating a personality in the way that it serves as a basis for evaluating an organism." [8, p. 119] Accordingly:

1. For as long as an individual is subject to an impersonal natural mechanism, he or she cannot develop into a fully realised personality.

2. When development occurs exclusively within the framework of the individual information system as part of a naturally determined process, such an individual is condemned to serve his or her innate instincts and thus remain a slave to nature. Among the primary instincts determined by natural expediency, we will name:

– instinct of self-preservation;

– feeding instinct;

– reproductive instinct;

[1] Flier A.Ya. Cultural form. *Culturology. 20th century Encyclopedia*. Moscow, 1996. URL: https://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc_culture/722/FORMA (accessed: 30.03.2026).

[2] German O.G. Cultural form as a system of characteristics of a socio-cultural phenomenon. *Philosophical and cultural studies*. 2021, no. 9. URL: https://fki.lgaki.info/2021/07/01/культурная-форма-как-система-характе/ (accessed: 30.03.2026).

– parental instinct;

– herd instinct;

– an orienting instinct, whose main sign is innate curiosity.

3. As a rule, the satisfaction of the designated instincts occurs according to the law of natural selection.

Since human society developed in part to protect the weak, it is clear that an individual formed through language functioning merely as an information system can correspond only outwardly to our conception of a fully realised personality. In this case it would be more appropriate to speak of a two-legged, speaking animal for whom language functions as a kind of response to an external stimulus. Wilhelm von Humboldt positioned such a language as *Ergon*—that is, a once-accomplished fact—associating it with a "bare," abstract articulatory sense.

The latter acts as a correlate of objective meaning, the operation of which occurs without its awareness—or, in other words, "automatically." As George Herbert Mead observes, "awareness or consciousness is not necessary to the presence of meaning in the process of social experience," since the mechanism of meaning is "present in the social act *before* the emergence of consciousness or awareness of meaning occurs" (Cit. ex: [14, p. 251]).

Conversely, the development of what is truly human in a person occurs thanks to *the individual conceptual system*. Unlike an information system, which is initially present, a conceptual system is never given and requires its creator in the person of a linguistic personality. Whereas, within the information system, language takes the form of a ready-made product (Ergon), the conceptual system cannot be realised without linguistic creativity. Noting that "language is a continuous work of the spirit directed towards making articulated sound suitable for the expression of thought," [15, p. 70] Humboldt associated such continuously created language with *Energeia*. It is noteworthy that the actualisation of the individual conceptual system simultaneously restores the original primacy of non-verbal experience, albeit at a different level from that associated with the information system. What is meant here is a situation in which natural automatism gives way to the specifically human activity of thought. In other words, it concerns the essential "awareness of meaning."

The process of thought activity is most fully exemplified by Mikhail Bakhtin's opposition between the *given* (*cognitive*) and the *created* (*ethical*). Here, the given consists in the givenness of the information system, which processes, accumulates and retains new knowledge so as to optimise the individual's adaptation to the environment in keeping with the maxim "knowledge is power." The created, in turn, correlates with the conceptual system born within the information system. The latter is responsible for the emergence of freedom, absent from the repertoire of natural instincts, as the fundamental condition of the moral choice exercised by the linguistic personality. The significance of this development lies directly in the fact that knowledge does not make us happy.

On the basis of the etymology of the Russian word *счастье* [schast'e, "happiness"], it becomes clear that what is meant is a situation in which the individual becomes part of something greater than himself or herself and is prepared, for its sake, to renounce personal well-being, experiencing spiritual joy in the conviction that this is the only truly human course of action. From this point of view, the example that Iosif Levin gives in his book is quite illustrative: "The Decalogue does not prescribe care for children or a spouse—for both are guaranteed by a natural instinct corresponding to biological expediency, but biologically useless, and therefore unnatural care for parents—that is, for the elderly—is prescribed. And although there are human societies where, due to the extreme scarcity of food resources, the unadapted are condemned to death by starvation or suicide

(as well as societies where 'extra' newborn girls were killed), we do not know of any animal societies where such care would be shown even in the presence of abundance." [8, p. 160]

In general, the discrepancy between an individual conceptual system and an information system is revealed through the following characteristics. If an individual information system, which is a natural phenomenon, is always relevant, initially given to serve the instincts of a specific individual, who acts as its (the system's) passive carrier, then an individual conceptual system appears as a purely cultural phenomenon. The latter is marked by:

– virtuality;

– its dependence on the information system, since it emerges within that system through human activity (thought activity);

– aimed at the formation of higher feelings, in the first place, freedom and morality.

It is significant that the indicated discrepancies allow us to identify the following analogy: just as the natural principle in a person is manifested by an individual information system, so the human itself is manifested by a conceptual system. Ultimately, the task faced by each individual resides in cultivating their own nature, which fully corresponds to the concept of culture (from the Latin "I cultivate"). The difficulty of such a task lies in the fact that nature is primary and therefore strong in its essence, while man is secondary and unnatural—that is, an artificial being. It is no coincidence that every natural creature (even a fruit fly or an earthworm larva) does only what is necessary to sustain its life, whereas only a human being is capable of devoting himself or herself—sometimes to the point of complete self-forgetfulness—to something that has no connection whatsoever with physiology.

Taking into account the heterogeneity of nature and culture—or, as Levin puts it, their "heteroemanationality" [8, p. 136]—we may propose that to construct one's life as a sociocultural phenomenon means continually enacting the co-being of the given (cognitive) and the created (ethical), while sustaining the unity of the discrete, that is, the finite, and the continuous, that is, the infinite. This is fundamental not only for language as a particular form of social activity, but also for culture, since its formation is impossible where development proper is replaced by the operation of ready-made forms—or, in other words, is built on the basis of accomplished facts that rhyme with Humboldt's Ergon.

The foregoing provides grounds for asserting that an understanding of culture as a distinct sphere of social life, objectified in cultural forms and artefacts, corresponds to the actual state of affairs only when language is viewed as an individual conceptual system. In this case, any professional activity will become not so much work as *service* to one's fellow human beings in a freely and consciously chosen vocation.[3] This refers to those representatives of humanity who "do not simply 'consume culture,' but live by it and in it (regardless of the type of their main occupation)—and moreover, at some deeper level of perception, experience, understanding and thinking." [Ibid., p. 23]

[3] Merab Mamardashvili reflects on this in this way: "For example, a person may choose a profession not because it is prestigious or, say, brings in a lot of money, but due to choosing it as one's life work, which requires one's full participation and dedication. In other words, a person is not enticed by something external, by some promise of reward, but freely chooses an activity from within, on the basis of his or her own being. Socrates' practice of philosophy may be regarded as an exemplary case of such an existential choice: while it brought him no personal advantage, he refused to abandon it even under threat of punishment." For more details on this question, see: *Anthropological catastrophe: M. Mamardashvili on why a person ceases to be a person*. URL: https://monocler.ru/antropologicheskaya-katastrofa-mamardashvili/ (accessed: 04.04.2026).

Simulacra and Pseudo-Cultural Forms

The focus on actualising an individual conceptual system may seem problematic in the era of consumer society, when cultural forms and artefacts rapidly degenerate into simulations and simulacra, marking the phenomenon discovered by Jean Baudrillard. [16] In this context, the society examined by the French scholar offers a brilliant portrait of a stage in human development in which human interaction is governed by pragmatic considerations. Conversely, the defining feature of culture, as consistently discernible in such interaction, is pneumatics. As Levin writes, "the basis of civilisation (in the narrow sense) is the struggle with external nature for the sake of ensuring the physical existence of man; the basis of culture is <…> the struggle with the natural principle within man, expressed primarily in the subordination of all thoughts and interests to the tasks of this physical existence, considered as an end in itself." [8, pp. 86–87]

Accordingly, when spirit loses self-awareness within culture, culture itself is deprived of its soul. The clearest evidence of this can be found in today's highly popular entertainment industry, under whose influence the cultural forms and artefacts it produces amount to little more than imitations of authentic culture. We may suggest that such pseudo-cultural phenomena partly resonate with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of practical sense as "social necessity turned into nature and transformed into motor schemes and bodily automatisms…" [17, p. 135]

The fact that Bourdieu also presents "practical sense" as "practical meaning" or "practical logic" does not make it conceptually equivalent to the process of thought activity. Let us especially emphasise: thought activity, as well as the meaning it initiates, are phenomena that exclude automatism. The stated attitude conditions the recognition of the truth of the position according to which "man is, obviously, the only creature in the world..., existing in a state of constant rebirth...,"[4] as a result of which he is never a given, but always a task.

Conversely, in clarifying the concept he employs, Bourdieu writes of a "*transfer of schemes* carried out…on the basis of already established equivalences, facilitating the interchangeability of different responses and allowing a kind of practical generalisation across analogous problems that may arise in new situations." [17, p. 184] On this basis, practical sense may be regarded as a correlate of common sense.

Let us recall that, according to the Great Russian Encyclopedia, we are talking about "a spontaneously formed historically accumulated set of generally accepted knowledge in the everyday experience of people," designed to provide the individual with the opportunity to "adequately navigate established life circumstances."[5] One more argument that allows us to identify points of contact between practical meaning and cultural forms or artefacts that have degenerated into simulations and simulacra: the responses on the part of the individual formed by means of common sense appear, according to Bourdieu, "adapted in advance to all objective conditions, identical or homologous to the past conditions of their formation…" [Ibid., p. 127]

Despite the possible analogies between pseudo-cultural phenomena and practical sense, a distinction between cultural forms

[4] Mamardashvili Merab Konstantinovich: A Possible Person. *Humanitarian Portal*. URL: https://gtmarket.ru/library/articles/5480 (accessed: 10.04.2026).

[5] Naidysh V.M. Common Sense. *Great Russian Encyclopedia*. URL: https://bigenc.ru/c/zdravyi-smysl-7e3cac (accessed: 10.04.2026).

and cultural artefacts, on the one hand, and their repetitions, on the other, requires a more thorough examination of the concepts under consideration. In particular, starting from the positioning of cultural forms at the level of "many stereotypical acts of human behaviour—greetings, farewells, congratulations, regrets, etc." [1]—we realise that a stereotype itself is "a pre-formed mental assessment of something by a person, which can be reflected in stereotypical behaviour."[6]

However, in reality, the stereotypical behaviour of an individual is often based only on the blind copying of behaviour demonstrated by one or another authority—that is, outside of any formed thought. Here we may express solidarity with Tatiana Chernigovskaya, who asserts: "… most people don't think at all. Thinking—is a terrible work, incredibly difficult, a strain on the whole personality."[7] Nevertheless, while gestures (non-verbal communication) may, with certain qualifications, be described in terms of stereotypes, the assessment of speech behaviour requires an awareness of the system within which it operates. If a conversation unfolds at the level of the individual information system, within which the speakers operate with neutral meanings, then speech behaviour realised within the individual conceptual system is grounded in personal meaning—or, in other words, "meaning for me." (Aleksei Leontiev)

Let's illustrate this situation with an example: when meeting an acquaintance, it is customary to ask: "How are you (business, mood, etc.)?", often accompanying the question with the so-called "duty smile." However, in reality, the questioner often has neither the time to listen to the answer, nor a genuine interest in the other person's life. Perhaps that is why it usually does not occur to the latter to go into detail about his or her affairs. Accordingly, the stock response "OK," "everything is fine" or "things are great" serve only to maintain a conversation that is of no use to either of them.

Given that contemporary communication studies increasingly focus on the so-called "dark sides" [18, p. 58] of communication, and that Russian and international scholars characterise such interaction as non-ecological communication, [19] this situation can hardly be regarded as a cultural form that objectifies the spirit. In fact, what we are dealing with here is a pseudo-cultural form. Isn't that why, unlike speech, which is associated with "silver," silence is "golden"?

It seems that the main reason for the total simulation of speech, which initiates the problematic nature of the ecological interaction of actors, is connected with the ignoring by one of the parties (or both parties) of the so-called rhetorical canon. This refers to the key categories of rhetoric, isomorphic to the stages of invention, arrangement and expression of speech, through which thought activity is carried out by *Homo verbo agens*. Here we are referring to Ethos, Logos and Pathos. The following point becomes fundamental for understanding the importance of these categories in the communication process. "In the ancient Greek language, both "morals," related to the subsystem of ethos, and "ethos" itself were designated by one word—"pathos." [20, p. 37] As Viktor Marov writes, their correlation through "morals" "is just right here," since "pathos" "cannot have its own (self-sufficient) goal" that is induced from the "ethos" subsystem. [21, p. 204]

[6] Stereotype. *Ruwiki: Internet Encyclopedia*. URL: https://ru.ruwiki.ru/wiki/%D0%A1%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%80%D0%B5%D0%BE%D1%82%D0%B8%D0%BF (accessed: 13.04.2026).

[7] Tatiana Chernigovskaya: "I see apocalyptic features from all sides, but I don't see progress." *Sobaka.ru*. URL: https://www.sobaka.ru/krd/city/science/126840?%20ysclid=ml81-fftvwx657092938 (accessed: 13.04.2026).

If we recall that, in his writings on ethics, Aristotle emphasised the dual nature of virtue, which manifests itself both as a contemplative principle encompassing a person's generalised knowledge of what is morally good and as an active principle embodying that moral good in lived reality, then the former may hypothetically be correlated with verbal code as an element of the individual information system (code being, as Mikhail Bakhtin observes, "only a technical means of information," [10, p. 352] and possessing no creative potential in itself). The indicated analogy seems acceptable due to the fact that non-verbal experience is not perceived by the carrier of an individual information system as purely personal.

Conversely, the latter correlates with an element of the individual conceptual system as an indivisible unity of the non-verbal and the verbal. In Bakhtin's terminology, the noted unity is considered at the level of the co-being of an act—"(an act-thought, an act-deed, an act-feeling, etc.) in its living accomplishment from within the acting consciousness itself." [22, p. 287] In other words, it is precisely Ethos, actualised "through empathy or affective identification and co-evaluation, but by no means through theoretical interpretation," [Ibid.] that provides the basis for the creation of a personally meaningful utterance.

It is significant that the existing prohibition on uncreative speech in rhetoric essentially excludes the possibility of speaking without relying on Ethos, regardless of the topic being touched upon by the speaker, including those devoted to moral issues. In this context, the formally coercive moral imperative associated with the sphere of causal reasoning is outweighed by personal motivation in all its infinitely varied nuances, a situation that fully accords with Bakhtin's account. According to Bakhtin's position, unlike the code, which cannot be incomplete, "the context is potentially unfinalisable," [10, p. 352] which creates the conditions for speech creation.

As a result, one cannot help but admit that communication marked by the totality of the verbal code serves to multiply total simulation, thus contributing to the degeneration of cultural forms and cultural artefacts. Such a state of affairs, in turn, leads to the individual's spiritual impairment, just as the degradation of his or her spirit results in the corresponding de-spiritualisation of cultural forms and artefacts. Significantly, spiritual infirmity among the majority, though less visible—or even entirely invisible—than physical impairment, is more likely to lead the human community towards destruction, including even those of its members who have managed to avoid moral decline. It is therefore no coincidence that scholars identify three evils that threaten culture: (1) adverse material conditions leading to hunger and poverty; (2) adverse political conditions under which dissent is persecuted; and (3) adverse moral conditions manifested in licentiousness, moral decay, frustration, and so on. [8, p. 18] The catastrophic character of the present moment is further exacerbated by the accelerating pace of digitalisation, which entirely disregards the fact that "culture as a social phenomenon is founded on influence passing from person to person, from group to group, from generation to generation, from nation to nation," and that "isolation is impossible here at any level." [Ibid., p. 30]

The Corporeality of the Artefact and Emotions in the Digital Age

The current situation appears particularly acute against the backdrop of contemporary research into cultural artefacts, which is carried out in the context of their corporeality and material existence. In particular, Aleksei Shorkin suggests distinguishing between broad and narrow versions of cultural understanding. In a broad sense, culture is traditionally understood as all artificially created "second nature." In the narrow version that currently dominates, the subject of cultural studies is the mental (ideational) aspects of culture, while "the corporeality of artefacts…

is pushed to the periphery of research search." [23, p. 322] Shorkin sees the prospects of cultural studies precisely in the advantages of a broad interpretation, proposing a model of cultural morphology that includes the frontier, discursive practices, and key values.

For describing cultural dynamics, Shorkin sees particular promise in the synergetic concepts of constant and transformational attractors. Under conditions of constant attractors, cultures adapt ever more subtly to their usual external challenges. A sudden change in challenges pushes a culture toward one of two transformational attractors, where it either dies or gets a chance to become a civilisation. This model allows us to rethink the fate of cultural forms in the digital age: what happens to the physical state of an artefact when it moves into a digital environment? Does this not lead to a "thinning of corporeality," whereby the material medium loses its significance and the cultural form exists only as a pure model, reproducible without loss but also without any increase in meaning?

It is no less problematic to give an unambiguous assessment of cultural artefacts. In constructing a system of argumentation, let us turn to the case that happened to one of our colleagues, the art teacher Natalia Martynenko. After participating in the waste paper collection with her students, the teacher tidied up the room where the paper brought by the students was weighed. While picking up sheets of paper that had fallen out of stacks tied with threads from the floor, Natalia discovered several government-issued documents dated 1908–1917. Some of them were associated with the name *Anastasiya Maksymyuk*,[8] others with that of *Elena Baum*.[9]

Amazed by what she had read, Natalia shared this story with her husband, the artist Pavel Martynenko. Together they tried to imagine the appearance of these women, to imagine how they could have met and perhaps become friends, how their communication ended, etc. Ultimately, they succeeded in giving form to all their imaginings in an *artist's book*,[10] whose pages bring together the Martynenkos' fictional reconstructions and drawings, handwritten copies of musical notation (a flute part) likewise found among the waste paper, and documentary traces of the previous century: a salary certificate, a certificate confirming completion of nursing courses, and so on. An article about this book was subsequently published in a prestigious scientific journal. We can agree that the randomly found sheets

[8] From these papers it became known that "on December 9, 1908, when Anastasiya turned 19, she became a teacher at a parish school, having passed the test at the Zhirovitsky Theological School; November 15, 1909. She was awarded a silver medal by Gorodnitskii Uyezd, suspended from the combined Vladimir and Alexander ribbon 'In Commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of Parish Schools'; on 26 January 1911, she was transferred to the Verelius Boys' Parish School in Sokolka Uyezd of the Grodno Diocese; and a document dated 9 August 1915 authorised free railway travel." For more details on this issue see: [24, pp. 219–220].

[9] "From 09.01.1898 to 12.01.1914, "Elena...worked as a home teacher of Russian and mathematics continuously; from 10.10.1914 to 20.08.1917, she voluntarily worked in the Petrograd hospital without pay; from 02.09.1915 to 20.08.2017, she lived in Tsarskoye Selo, where she was evacuated and continued to work in the hospital, which she left for family reasons." For more details on this issue see: [24, p. 220].

[10] An artist's book is a phenomenon that is "executed from beginning to end according to the author's vision of the final result, representing its content and embodiment, using a wide variety of techniques. These include the technique of original paper casting, digital printing techniques tested on a wide variety of materials, original printed graphics, and other small-run techniques. Moreover, as a rule, the circulation of such a book may be limited to one or several copies." [24, p. 216] The uniqueness of such a book is determined by its "versatility, born at the intersection of different artistic directions—hand-made books, installations, performances, media art, etc." [25, p. 127]

of paper acquired the status of an artefact solely within the framework of the artist's book and the aforementioned article. Outside of this, the fragments of the once-living cultural history of the Russian homeland were simply garbage collected for disposal.

Returning to the interpretation of cultural forms as stereotypical acts of human behaviour, which include "congratulations, regrets, etc." [1]—that is, emotionally charged actions—we emphasise the special significance of emotions in the era of digitalisation. It is precisely today, when the younger generation of Russians is experiencing problems with the "second part of intelligence," which Tatiana Chernigovskaya associates with "sensitivity,"[11] that emotions appear at the centre of such academic fields as philosophy, sociology, and art history. The representatives of this school are convinced that "the status of the human emotional sphere has changed dramatically: from a peripheral and dangerous 'enemy of reason' it has turned into a fundamental basis of consciousness, cognition and sociality." [26, p. 8]

In other words, if "regret" itself refers to a cultural form, then here the emotion "turns out to be fused with thought and volitional processes and, ultimately, with a worldview," [27, p. 54] which excludes its stereotypical nature. In particular, arguing that "emotions, being historically and culturally mediated, do not act as an obstacle to knowledge, but as a necessary cognitive condition and a cultural-historical a priori (in the spirit of Ernst Cassirer)," [26, p. 80] Yulia Lobanova actualises a new context for understanding Bakhtin's participatory thinking.

Let us recall that the thinker approached this in "the categories of actual participation—that is, of the act"—understood as "a participatory-active experience of the concrete uniqueness of the world," [28, p. 20] which is impossible without a person's conscious readiness to regard himself or herself as "the primary cause of the entire chain of life circumstances"[12] and to accept responsibility for the choice he or she has made. No less valuable here is the notion that "feeling scripts are not external patterns, but internal cognitive schemes that structure an individual's experience, assessment of events, and self-understanding. Consequently, the emotional mode sets the epistemological horizon of the era, determining what and how can be known," [26, p. 80] which is embodied in the life activity of each specific subject.

The relevance of research carried out in the mainstream of emotiology as an interdisciplinary field of humanities knowledge focused on human emotions and their manifestation in various types of activity (thought activity) is not in doubt in view of the increasing intervention of artificial intelligence in human life. In addition to the undoubtedly positive influence of artificial intelligence in fields such as medicine, nanotechnology, etc., its "ability" to compose music, poetry, and paint pictures is alarming, since it turns out to be quite difficult to distinguish genuine creativity from its imitation by artificial intelligence.

It is clear that only the development of subjectivity and subject-consciousness can enable humanity to retain its primacy in its confrontation with AI: the more fully developed the personality, the more irreducibly individual—that is, unique—it becomes. However, the opposite scenario is also possible, in which the influence of AI causes us to lose

[11] Tatiana Chernigovskaya: "I see apocalyptic features from all sides, but I don't see progress." *Sobaka.ru.* URL: https://www.sobaka.ru/krd/city/science/126840?%20ysclid=ml81-fftvwx657092938 (accessed: 13.04.2026).

[12] When does a person cease to be human? A gloomy forecast by M. Mamardashvili. URL: https://monocler.ru/antropologicheskaya-katastrofa-mamardashvili/https://monocler.ru/antropologicheskaya-katastrofa-mamardashvili/ (accessed: 13.04.2026).

our distinctiveness and dissolve into the mass. Against the background of the proposition that "belief in the universality of emotions, while analytically false, is nevertheless functional, since it serves the purposes of intercultural communication, social integration and the legitimation of humanistic ideologies, yet at the same time may conceal ethnocentrism and serve as an instrument of symbolic power," [Ibid., p. 69] either scenario is entirely plausible.

And here the point is not that "the existence of any cultural form represents a complex dynamic of its generation, social functioning and change under the influence of a complex of various social circumstances," [6, p. 5] It should be acknowledged that social circumstances of one kind or another are ultimately shaped by people and the choices they make. Clearly, a commitment to serving one's natural programme, with language functioning within the individual information system, will lead the individual towards barbarism, whereas an attempt to master the conceptual system will allow him or her to participate in a culture of thought and, in especially fortunate moments, attain spiritual heights.

Reinterpretation as Spiritualisation: Postformalism and the Diachrony of Culture

Since renouncing one's own nature is far more painful than obediently following the instincts latent within it, choice itself is nothing other than a volitional principle in culture. Therefore, we consider it necessary to supplement the strategy of interpretation, on the duration of which, along with practical reproduction, depends "the lifespan (social relevance) of any cultural form," [Ibid., p. 4] with a strategy of reinterpretation. Its significance is determined by the following circumstance. In contrast to interpretation as a secondary activity dealing with ready-made forms, the operation of which occurs under the sign of an individual information system, reinterpretation has the status of a primary activity. [29, pp. 35–36] Here, we are talking about the thought activity of a linguistic personality, realised under the sign of an individual conceptual system. The prefix *re* here simultaneously signifies a return to what has already been and a rejection of it; a repetition of what previously existed along with its rethinking.

At the same time, the opposition of interpretation–reinterpretation correlates with the opposition of the given (cognitive) and the created (ethical), since the dialogical nature of reinterpretation is seen in the inevitable reconciliation of contradictions between the "old" and the "new," with the aim of achieving their harmonious coexistence. The fact that the reinterpretation of cultural forms and cultural artefacts can contribute to their spiritualisation is confirmed by the appeal to reinterpretation in creativity:

– composers (Ludwig van Beethoven *Moonlight Sonata*—Viktor Ekimovsky *Moonlight Sonata*);

– artists (Eugene Delacroix *Women of Algiers*—Pablo Picasso *Women of Algiers*);

– directors (Kira Muratova *Three Stories*, where *Ophelia* is a reinterpretation of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare, *Boiler Room No. 6*—*Ward No. 6* by Anton Chekhov; *The Girl and Death*—*Girls and Death* by Maxim Gorky);

– poets and writers (*Monument* by Alexander Pushkin—*I erected another monument to myself* by Joseph Brodsky; *The Queen of Spades* by Alexander Pushkin—*The Queen of Spades* by Lyudmila Ulitskaya) and the like.

In other words, reinterpretation creates a precedent for the acquisition of style, as Valery Podoroga understands it, that is,

"an aesthetic form of thought."[13] "Style," the philosopher clarifies, "is an additional (aesthetic) dimension that gives thought an individual form, distinguishing it from every other form of thought and making it unique and singular. Style itself is the will-to-expression, or what G.Shch. [Georgy Shchedrovitsky] called the will to self-realisation and M.M. [Merab Mamardashvili] an act of freedom. Thus, style is a sensually embodied, corporeal, aesthetically experienced form of thought."[14]

Our point of view is based on the fact that the reinterpretation strategy underpins the actualisation of the individual conceptual system as an experience of reflection. Researchers consider the following to be its main characteristics:

1) "stop";

2) "looking back" (for more details see: [30]).

The placement of stress on the third syllable of the [Russian] word "refleksiya" is regarded as fundamental to the experience under consideration, since the formation of the individual conceptual system precludes reliance on natural reflexes, as occurs in the case of the individual information system. From this point of view, *stopping* means abandoning natural automatism in the process of speech-thinking activity, while *looking back* refers to a decoding of the verbal element of the information system and return to the system's original non-verbality, followed by the coding of non-verbal elements.

Let us somewhat simplify the described algorithm and note the importance of the following point. Since the process of decoding a verbal sign through the analysis of dictionary definitions inevitably destabilises the determinacy of its objective meaning, a situation arises of the kind described by Janusz Reykowski. [31] The vaguer the semantic field of the verbal element of the system becomes, the more intensely the process in question is influenced by emotions, which, in turn, provides access to the non-verbal elements of the system, or otherwise access to non-verbalised personal meaning (Vitis Vilyunas). Accordingly, subsequent coding of non-verbal experience ensures the actualisation of verbalised personal meaning. In essence, and in full accordance with nature, the linguistic personality makes a conscious effort to:

1) return to non-verbality as the point of departure in the formation of the individual information system;

2) subject non-verbality to verbalisation in order to objectify it.

What is meant here is a rejection of the natural activity responsible for the *self-organisation* of the individual information system, so that the conceptual system may instead be *organised* on that basis. The significance of this thought activity lies in the fact that the *organisation* of the individual conceptual system ultimately results in the *self-organisation*—or, in other words, the *self-consciousness*—of the linguistic personality, who attains authentic freedom through such activity. As Iosif Levin writes, "I am free only if I am myself; moreover, only if—and to the extent that—I have created, 'made,' myself, rather than being the product of biological or social factors beyond my control." [8, p. 121]

An indirect indication of real freedom, whose acquisition occurs in the process of actualisation of the individual conceptual system, is the following circumstance. In contrast to objective, or "indifferent," meaning (Aleksey Leontev), which the individual employs arbitrarily and thereby subjectivises to the point of alienation,

[13] Podoroga V. Project and experience. G. Shchedrovitsky and M. Mamardashvili: Comparative analysis of thinking styles. *Intelros.ru. Project and experience*. URL: http://www.intelros.org/lib/statyi/podoroga1.htm (accessed: 19.04.2026).

[14] Ibid.

verbalised personal meaning, emerging from the collectively constituted sphere of non-verbality, is inherently intersubjective. It was presumably in this sense that Humboldt insisted on the need to view language from the perspective of the spirit of the people. Here we are talking about the dual unity of non-verbal and verbal elements that manifests language as an individual conceptual system. Their difference from the previously mentioned "bare," abstract articulatory feeling lies in the fact that the verbal elements are filled with personal experience, which demonstrates the indivisibility of verbality and non-verbality, rationality and irrationality (emotionality), cognitive and ethical.

In view of the foregoing, the aesthetics of postformalism developed by Jakub Stejskal appears to offer a promising framework for understanding cultural forms and cultural artefacts. [32] The concept of format, which lies at the centre of this approach, provides a means of overcoming the limitations of traditional concepts of form, design and medium. Stejskal examines how art historians, anthropologists and archaeologists engaged in the aesthetic analysis of artefacts, while positioning themselves as "remote observers," become part of a broader project concerned with "identifying the causes underlying the emergence of artefacts." [Ibid.] This is particularly important when it comes to artefacts from contexts distant in time and culture (Cycladic marble figures, Papuan headhunter shields, late Gothic monochrome wooden sculptures). The question of whether we can ascribe aesthetic status to such objects, or deny such a status, is directly related to the problem of interpretation and reinterpretation raised in this article. According to Stejskal's conception, format is what preserves the unity between the artefact's sensuous appearance and the cultural codes through which it becomes "readable" to the contemporary researcher.

In turn, Basil Zimmermann's *Waves and Forms* project [33] proposes viewing culture through the prism of materiality, understood in terms of specific traces of self-expression, artefacts and actions. This approach, which combines the relativistic perspective of the social and human sciences with a positivistic but non-essentialist view of materiality based on classical physics, permits the dynamics of culture to be analysed as a process of creation, dissemination, or dispersion of forms among people, objects, and (especially) digital media. This opens up the possibility of empirically studying how cultural forms gain or lose their effectiveness in specific material embodiments, whether these involve electronic music devices, computer encodings or the design of digital interfaces.

Finally, in her analysis of the transition from contemporary culture to globalised modernity, Keti Chukhrov (Ketevan Chukhrukidze) proposes viewing culture not as a "thesaurus of valuable artefacts," but as a diachronic mode of universality which, even when rejected—as in modernism or the avant-garde—enables an artistic movement to acquire a meta-dimension and take its place in history. Culture in this sense is parallel to the concepts of humanism and humanitarian knowledge. In the context of contemporary semiocapitalism, technoscientific and posthuman studies acquire particular significance, since they tend to neutralise the historical genealogy of culture. [34]

Consequently, the paradigmatic context of global modernity must be defined not only through the practices that embody it, but also through the experience that is drawn from it. This brings us back to the original idea of this article: the authenticity of a cultural form is measured not by its conformity to ready-made models, but rather by its capacity to be an event of thought and action, which is rooted in the living fabric of human communication and at the same time open to transcending its own boundaries. Against this background, the criterion of cultural authenticity is associated with the experience of conscious service

as realised within the individual conceptual system through the triune unity of Ethos, Logos and Pathos.

Conclusion

In summary, the integration of philosophical, cultural-studies and linguistic concepts relevant to the contemporary humanities paradigm has broadened the understanding of cultural forms and cultural artefacts, substantiated the need to rethink the fundamental mechanism of their spiritualisation, and prompted a reconsideration of the concept of culture itself. Culture is understood as a continuous process of transition from the given to the created, from natural automatism to free action, and from simulation to authenticity—a process impossible without personal effort and responsible choice.

At the same time, applying ideas developed within the philosophy of language to the sphere of cultural forms and cultural artefacts has brought their dual character into clearer focus. Its essence may be stated as follows: whereas operating with ready-made cultural forms and artefacts leads to cultural stagnation and consequent degradation, their re-creation leads to cultural flourishing marked by new cultural achievements.

Taking into account the isomorphism of language and culture, we have considered it necessary to accord the rhetorical canon the status of a communicative universal, on the basis of which the linguistic personality can attain integrity by eliminating any disjunction between thought, word and deed.

From such an ontological perspective, the corporeality of an artefact is not a simple material shell, but a necessary condition for its semantic completeness. The thinning of corporeality in the digital age deprives the cultural form of its capacity to constitute an encounter between the human being and the world. The restoration of corporeality, therefore, is achieved not through archaicisation, but through an act of reinterpretation that restores the artefact's unique texture, handmade character and temporal depth. The materiality of the artefact becomes not a passive carrier, but an active mediator of memory and experience, linking the givenness of the past with the createdness of the present. Within this framework, emotionality (irrationality) thus becomes not merely a "by-product" of cognition, but its cognitive foundation. In the present cultural situation, marked by the increasing capacity of AI to imitate human creativity, it is emotional uniqueness—the exclusivity of lived experience—that preserves the primacy of the human over the algorithmic. Thus, corporeality and emotionality constitute two facets of restoring authenticity to culture. The corporeality of the artefact guarantees its rootedness in history, while emotion endows it with personal meaning and an ethical dimension.

Finally, the linguistic personality's attainment of spiritual self-consciousness through the co-being of the given (cognitive) and the created (ethical), which manifests itself most clearly in the sphere of morality, provides grounds for the following conclusion: authentic culture differs from the pseudo-cultural forms that imitate it insofar as it is subordinated to ethics.

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