

ANNA A. NOVIKOVA AND VARVARA P. CHUMAKOVA

National Research University Higher School of Economics

Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics as a contribution to media ecology

ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the scientific legacy of a famous Soviet literary and culture scholar and semiotician, Yuri Lotman. Authors consider that many of Lotman's ideas bring him together with the field of media ecology. Lotman's cultural semiotics approach could in general be reduced to the formula 'the medium is the text'. According to his studies the whole culture could be seen as a text that has interdependent ideas and structures. Lotman's concept of the semiosphere, or dynamic inhomogeneous semiotic space, the cause and the result of culture, is analysed in the final part of the article. The main semiosphere features, which include two types of the text structure (binary and ternary) and two types of the cultural dynamics (progress and explosion), are depicted. We consider that the concept of the semiosphere is fruitful for further research of complicated and multilevel media environment.

KEYWORDS

Yuri Lotman
cultural semiotics
semiosphere
binary structure
ternary structure
explosion of culture

Tartu University Professor, Yuri¹ Lotman (1922–1993), was a Soviet literary and cultural scholar and semiotician. The hegemony of the communist ideology created difficulties for the humanities in the USSR, but he managed to establish the Tartu-Moscow semiotic school and became the initiator of the discipline of cultural semiotics. Lotman and his colleagues overcame the restrictions and prohibitions set by the Soviet authorities and studied various

1. Lotman's name 'Юрий' is also written 'Jurij' or 'Juri' in English publications. Yuri is translation from Russian into English; Jurij is transliteration from Russian into

English; Juri is Estonian form of this name. We prefer Yuri.

2. Petrograd is the name of Saint-Petersburg in 1914–1924; after 1924 until 1991 – Leningrad.

phenomena of culture from the perspective of structuralism and semiotics. Significantly for this article, Lotman and his colleagues' studies are allied to the field of media ecology. On the one hand, Lotman absorbed the traditions of Russian book culture with its humanism and deep reflection on philosophical issues. On the other, Lotman's thinking was shaped by the necessity of understanding why communist ideology appeared to be so effective in Russian culture.

In post-Soviet countries, Lotman is a key figure in cultural studies. Outside post-Soviet countries, Lotman's research is only partially acknowledged. At the moment, among more than 800 of Lotman's works, approximately one hundred have been translated into English (Kull 2011). In the May 2014, *International Journal of Communication* published the article, 'Remembering and reinventing Juri Lotman for the digital age', written by Indrek Ilbrus and Peeter Torop, who are Estonian followers of Lotman's studies. They claim Lotman's heritage to be actual in contemporary cultural studies, and we want to develop this thesis and show how Lotman's ideas could be used in studying media environment.

Walter Ong in *Orality and Literacy* writes, 'Adapting a term used for slightly different purposes by Jurij Lotman, we can style writing a "secondary modeling system", dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language' (2012: 8). Ong refers to Lotman's key book on structural linguistics, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, published in English in 1977. It is interesting that John Hartley in 'After Ongism. The evolution of networked intelligence', published in the 30th anniversary edition of Ong *Orality and Literacy*, writes about Lotman's ideas of technology's influence on consciousness (2012: 219), which appeared in Lotman's key book on cultural dynamics, *Culture and Explosion* (1992), which was only translated into English in 2009. Maybe there are some other references to Lotman in media ecology texts, but we did not meet them. Actually, Marshall McLuhan nor Neil Postman mentioned Lotman in their works. Marcel Danesi in his article, 'The medium is the sign: Was McLuhan a semiotician?', showed links between McLuhan and semiotic studies (Danesi 2008). He did not compare McLuhan with Lotman, but it is interesting that Danesi himself is in the editorial board of the journal, *Sign Systems Studies* (σημειωτική), which was launched by Lotman in 1964. Carlos Scolari in his article, 'Media ecology. Map of the theoretical niche', uses Lotman's concept of the semiosphere to analyse 'classical' texts in media ecology (Scolari 2010: 17) but does not connect Lotman's approach with media ecology itself. We also did not find Lotman's ideas in description of media ecology field made by Lance Strate (2014). Therefore, it is time to do so.

YURI LOTMAN'S BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Yuri Lotman was born in Petrograd² in a family of Jewish intelligentsia. He entered the Philology Faculty of Leningrad University in 1939, where he met a lot of significant Soviet philologists (Grigory Gukovsky, Aleksandr Riftin, Mark Azadovsky, Vladimir Propp) and began to study the folklore (Lotman 2003). But Lotman was enlisted in the army in 1940 and participated in World War II. He served as a radio operator in the artillery, became a commander of the liaison office and was awarded several orders and medals for his combat

achievements. Lotman's thinking paid attention to the linguistics already in the army. In *Anti-memoirs*, he made an analysis of the military language semantics, the role of obscene lexis in communication and the special military taboo words (Lotman 2003). In 1946, Lotman returned to the university and after graduating in 1950 started teaching at the Tartu Educational Institute, Estonia. Later in 1954 he moved to the Tartu University, where he spent most of his life. Estonia was the seaside province that Joseph Brodsky considered to be the best place for living in the Empire:

If your homeland is an empire, none too peaceful,
Life is safer in a far-flung, seaside province.
Far from many an unfortunate encounter,
Caesar's pleasers and, you know, the need to bother;
All the governors take bribes, you'll counter?
Better bribes than lives, is how I see it, brother.

(Brodsky 1972)

It was really difficult for a Jew to make a career (e.g., to become a head of Department) at the university in Leningrad, the metropolis of the Soviet Empire. However, Lotman defended dissertations³ at Leningrad University: 'Aleksandr Radishev in the struggle with sociopolitical ideas and aristocratic aesthetic of Nikolay Karamzin' (1952) and 'The ways of development of Russian literature in the pre-Decembrist period' (1961), and gained the status of professor of the Tartu University in 1962. He headed the Russian Literature Department from 1960 till 1977 and managed to create a unique environment for the deep study of Russian culture by 'intelligent and decent people' (Kiseleva 2003). He considered the role of a literary and cultural teacher to be a teacher of ethics at the same time (Kiseleva 2003).

The opinion struggle, the role of the author in the artistic text, comparative studies of the structure of ideas, and differences between folklore and literal texts brought Lotman step-by-step to study structural linguistics in 1960s. One can find articles that built a bridge between literary studies and linguistics in Lotman's bibliography (Kiseleva 2004) – for example, 'Ideas structure of The Captain's Daughter' (1962), and by at least 1963 Lotman's text, 'On differentiation of linguistic and literary concepts of structure', was published. At the beginning of his semiotics studies Lotman developed the structural linguistics traditions of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. The Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School launched the journal, *Sign Systems Studies* (Σημειωτική), with Lotman as the editor-in-chief in 1964,⁴ where his significant texts could be found: 'Lectures on structural poetics' (1964), 'On the problem of values in secondary modeling systems' (1965), 'On the problem of culture's typology' (1967), 'About typological description of culture metalanguage' (1969), etc. In 1970, the book, *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, was published, in which the majority of Lotman's thinking on text was formulated (Leuta 2009: 296).

In 1970s, Lotman came up with idea that 'you need to adequately understand a semiotic object not just as a single character, but as a text that exists in a culture' (Stolovich 2012). According to Umberto Eco, Lotman was the scholar who 'started from a structuralist approach to the phenomena of signification and communication, and indeed retains much of this method, but who does not remain bound by it' (Lotman 2001: ix). The turn to cultural context enhanced the variety of the objects studied by Lotman: Russian life-style, folklore, lubki,⁵ theatre, painting, cinema and cartoons. *Semiotics of*

3. Soviet scholars traditionally wrote two dissertations to get the status of Doctor and to be employed as Professor.
4. Journal is still published by Tartu University Press, from 1998 – in English. Here is website <http://www.ut.ee/SOSE/sss/index.htm>.
5. 'Lubki (singular lubok) are the woodblock prints which served as folk literature and graphic art in Russia until 1917' (Roatcap 2004).

6. 'Ilya Prigogine received the Nobel Prize in Chemistry in 1977 for "his contributions to non-equilibrium thermodynamics, particularly the theories of dissipative structures" <http://www.osti.gov/accomplishments/prigogine.html>.

the cinema and cinema's aesthetics (1973) is one of the fundamental works of cinema language.

It is important that in the USSR semiotics used to hide behind the cybernetics, which was returned to poll of the faithful communist sciences in 1960s (Pocheptsov 2006). Thus, Lotman was able to provide a multidisciplinary study of culture, which included the idea of communication process. Analysis of myth plays an important role in Lotman's research and according to it determines communication in oral cultures. This problem is discussed in 'Myth – name – culture' (1973), 'On two models of communication in culture' (1973), etc. It helps Lotman to achieve a high abstract level of cultural understanding, which included the idea of culture complexity. *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Cultures (as Applied to Slavic Texts)*, published by Lotman and his four colleagues (Boris Uspenskij, Vyacheslav Ivanov; Vladimir Toporov and Aleksandr Pjatigorskij) in 1973, appeared to be 'the manifesto of semiotics of culture' and, what is significant for English-speaking readers of our article, 'the very first text by Juri Lotman in English' (Kull 2011: 345).

He began to be acknowledged outside the USSR and became a member of several academies: British (1977), Norwegian (1987), Swedish (1989), Estonian (1991). Lotman received a lot of invitations to leave the USSR but there were a few reasons he did not. First, he was restricted to travel abroad by Soviet authorities. Second, he claimed that he did not want to. His friend, Leonid Stolovich, remembers Lotman's jokey answer to the question about his emigration plans:

You see, I am studying Russian culture, so my place is here. The place of a sanitary doctor is in the barrack. It may be more pleasant to be among the flowerbeds, but his place is in the barrack. If a guard is put to watch over the storage, he needs to stand by it. It does not matter what is in the storage. It may be ammunition or it may be bullshit. But if you are put in this place, you need to stand there.

(Stolovich 2012)

In the 1980s, Lotman was interested in history's patterns and laws. Inspired by Ilya Prigogine's idea of explosion,⁶ Lotman tried to implicate it to culture (2001). The book, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, which gathered Lotman's reflections on semiosphere and explosion, was first published in English with the introduction by Umberto Eco in 1990. In Russian it was published posthumously only in 1996.

At the end of his life, Yuri Lotman suffered from serious disease exacerbated by the loss of his sight. In spite of these tragic circumstances, he dictated his ideas to his students and wife, Zara Mints. The book, *Culture and Explosion* (1992), in which Lotman's insights on the peculiarities of a cultural transformation are gathered, was written. He passed away in 1993. A monument dedicated to Lotman was erected in front of the Tartu University Library in 2007.

DEVELOPING YURI LOTMAN: 'THE MEDIUM IS THE TEXT'

Lotman did not use the term 'media' in his studies. However, we consider Lotman to be a media scholar because he studied concepts that are considered to be media in the field of media ecology – artefacts and technologies created by humankind, both of hardware and software nature (McLuhan and

McLuhan 1992: 3). According to Lotman, every human artefact that includes signs or even human personality and fate could be seen as text (Leuta 2009: 297).

Culture in general could be seen as text. But it is extremely important to emphasize that culture is a complexly organized text which disintegrates into hierarchies of 'texts within texts' and forms a compound interlacing of texts.

(Lotman 1998: 436)

Scholars studying Lotman have noted that the word 'text' is the most frequent concept in his work (Leuta 2009: 296). If we develop the idea of naming media from McLuhan's 'the medium is the message' and Postman's 'the medium is the metaphor' we could say that for Lotman, 'the medium is the text' including texts, paratexts and contexts, etc.

In general, Lotman understood text to be a binding part of communication. Communication for Lotman is the process of translation of the text from the language of one person to another. The idea of communication as translation is very close but not the same as what McLuhan said in *Understanding Media*, in which he calls media 'translators' (2003: 62). According to McLuhan, media translates our inner thoughts and feelings into words, letters and images – all those things that could be received by other people. Media determines the rules of translation. According to Lotman, a text is the thing that is translated and the language is the thing that translates. Then, why did we say the 'the medium is the text' but not 'the medium is the language' for Lotman? The answer lies in Lotman's understanding of the connection between text and language.

Lotman mentions two basic approaches of understanding language-text relations (Lotman 1998). The first approach is used mostly by linguists who believe that language is manifested in the text. This means, as Lotman explains, that language is a closed system and coding precedes the appearance of text. In this approach language determines the rules of translation. The second approach is used mostly in literary and cultural studies, and considers text to be a closed system with a 'specific immanent structure' that creates its own language or coding, and therefore determines the rules of translation (Lotman 1998). Lotman himself developed the second approach in his studies pointing out the mismatch between the addresser and the addressee based on different languages (Pocheptsov 2006: 59). Everyone uses their own language because of their different life experiences; there could be some crossovers but never an entire overlap. Lotman agreed with Roman Jakobson that language is a code, but added that it is 'a code with history' (Pocheptsov 2006: 59). Lotman considered a text to be the creator of the rules of translation, not language.

As a structuralist, Lotman distinguished between the 'idea' and 'structure' of the text, which are always interdependent. Changing the structure of the text will change the idea (Lotman 1977). This idea of 'idea-structure interdependence' seems to be entirely linked to media ecology if we consider that 'the medium is the text'.

Lance Strate mentions oppositions by different media ecologists: for example, mechanical and organical ideologies (Mumford), light and heavy mediums, and time-biased and space-biased cultures (Innis), hot and cool mediums (McLuhan), oral and literal cultures (Ong), etc. (Strate 2014: 59).

Robert Logan considered the opposition between acoustic and visual space as one of the most fruitful of McLuhan's ideas (Logan 2013). As well as the mentioned scholars, Lotman designated two fundamentally opposing types of texts: cyclic and linear. A cyclic text cannot be described through a lexicon that is understandable to literate people. A cyclic text has no beginning and no end; it is static because there is no narrative and plot development in cyclic texts, and its aim is to classify, stratify and order social life. Cyclic texts are a product of myth and they reinforce regularities and stable patterns of culture (Lotman 1992: 225). A linear text with plot and narrative appears when society decides to fix single events, anomalies and discrete events that are different from mythological traditions. 'Myths always speak about me', but linear texts narrate about others (Lotman 1992: 227). This idea is very close to McLuhan's definition of acoustic and visual spaces but differs in some respects. In McLuhanesque perspective, a cyclic text is a medium for constructing acoustic space, and linear constructs the visual. The difference is that McLuhan considers acoustic space to be chaotic and disorientated, whereas visual space is strictly organized (McLuhan and McLuhan 1992: 21). However, Lotman claims that cyclic text has a specific order too.

As Strate wrote, usage of one or the other of such oppositions 'much depends on the level of analysis that is employed' (2014: 59). In this case we consider Lotman's model to be appropriate to examine the influence of the electronic epoch on oral cultures. Media ecologists claim that electricity brought 'second orality' to written societies (Ong 2012). But the influence of the electric technologies on cool cultures differs from its influence on hot (McLuhan and Fiore 1968). For Lotman, contemporary texts in culture are the result of a translation of mythological texts into a discrete-linear form. The mythological singularity of identities dissolved into a variety of different characters (Lotman 1992: 227). Lotman's 'second orality' is inverted but it conforms to McLuhan's idea of clichés that circulate in the 'global theatre' (McLuhan and Watson 1970).

Developing the idea of a special order constituted by oral cultures through cyclical mythological texts, Lotman comes to the consideration of how reality could be constructed. He identifies two types of the structures that can describe the text of art, culture and life in general. They are binary and ternary structures. Binary structure refers to the separation, 'great divide', of all things in the world into two oppositions. Ternary structure suggests that in addition to the worlds of good and evil the neutral world exists. This world 'has no unambiguous moral evaluation, and is characterized by signs of existence. It is justified by the fact of its being' (Lotman 1992).

For Lotman, Russian culture has included slices of the binary structure since the Middle Ages. They were formed by the orthodoxy and developed in 'high' book culture. Poems and novels by Mikhail Lermontov, Nikolay Gogol and Fedor Dostoevsky are examples of the good-evil antithesis. In their plots the evil is the necessary element to turn hero to the good. Ternary model in the western culture is the product of Renaissance, the printing press, Protestantism and other cultural developments of humanism. When the western ternary model is adapted in Russian culture it is often translated into binary model. But there are ternary structures inherent to Russian culture. They are based on Slavic paganism with its vitality, fertility cult and joyfulness. In contrast with the West, paganism as a lifestyle is still alive in the Russian culture, and the twentieth century showed the renaissance of ternary structures in the USSR (Lotman 1992).

THE ORIGIN OF YURI LOTMAN'S THINKING

The majority of Lotman's ideas that bring him into the field of media ecology were developed in isolation from the North American intellectual tradition. However, many of them are consonant with ideas of McLuhan and Postman, who explored media and culture in another world beyond The Iron Curtain. The explanation of this consilience is partly in coincidences we found between the origins of their thinking.

The more you clarify the epoch, the more you are convinced that the images that are considered to be created by the poet are taken from others and almost unchanged. All work of poetical schools consists of accumulating and identifying new methods of location and processing of verbal materials. In particular, works more often consists of location of images than of creation.

(Shklovsky 1925: 8)

Victor Shklovsky, the representative of The Russian Formal School, wrote in the above cited manifesto, 'Art as method' (1917), about this idea that is very close to 'New Criticism'. The literary origin of McLuhan's and Lotman's approaches to studying culture is one of the sustainable points in their similarity. In spite of critical differences in interpretations of Emmanuel Kant, New Criticism and Russian Formalism stressed 'dependence of thought on language' (Thompson 1971: 7) and interpreted text 'as a self-sufficient verbal artifact' (Searle 2005: 691). This idea influenced both Lotman (Lotman 1977) and McLuhan (Lamberti 2012), and helped them to develop their attitudes towards the communication process.

Interest in history and the struggle between different powers is the second important thing for understanding the origin of Lotman's thinking. Lotman wrote about his teacher, Nickolay Mordovchenko, the historian of literary criticism:

The main seemingly technical prerequisite approach of Mordovchenko to studying documents was the belief that no text reveals its deeper meaning from itself – text is a part of a historical movement of culture, it is a response, feedback, cue in a dispute, polemical or sympathetic inclusion in the struggle of opinions and cannot be understood outside this struggle.

(Lotman 2003: 69)

Harold Innis submitted to the media ecology field the very similar understanding of the process of history as the struggle between three monopolies (power, wealth, knowledge) in which media plays the role of catalyst or inhibitor (Innis 1951).

Studying neurology is the third thing that extended Lotman's research and made it multidisciplinary. In the 1980s, Lotman participated in activities set by a group of Soviet scientists who discussed the problems of a consciousness. The story we are going to tell about this group is based on the interview with Gasan Gusejnov, the participant of the aforementioned school-seminars, a young scholar at that moment and now the professor of Philology Faculty at the HSE. It was an interesting institution – Interdepartmental Academic Council on the problem of 'Consciousness', under the auspices of The Academy of Sciences of

the USSR. The council was chaired by Eugene Velikhov, Ph.D. in Physics, and gathered 'physics and lyrics' as sciences were facetiously separated in USSR: physicists, physiologists, mathematicians, philosophers, philologists, cultural scholars. For example, Merab Mamardashvili, a famous Soviet philosopher who developed the rational theory of perception, was a member of the council. The council organized all-union school-seminars that often occurred in Georgia where 'physics and lyrics' expanded their consciousness with picturesque mountain views and Georgian wine, and discussed the different problems of consciousness taken very broadly. For example, as participant, Julius Shreider, remembers one of such schools, the Buddhist concept of 'dharma' or phenomenon of zombies were some of the topics of discussion (1988). In the early 1980s, ideas of McLuhan leaked through The Iron Curtain and appeared to be the subject of discussions on the topic of consciousness. We are not sure that Lotman and his colleagues became acquainted with *Laus of Media*, in which the difference between right and left hemispheres according to their response for the opposite types of the realities construction is discussed (McLuhan and McLuhan 1992). Probably, it was *Understanding Media*. Actually, the only translation of McLuhan in Russian in the USSR was the chapter from this book – 'Television. A timid giant' (Maklue 1987). Lotman's *Culture and Explosion* (1992) includes among other things his reflections on McLuhan's ideas, as Gusejnov told us. This book is perceived in different – even polar – ways by other scholars, as we can see in couloir talks. Some of them consider this book to be the ravings of a madman (because it was dictated by a dying person); some of them perceive it to be the revelations of a genius. We consider it to be a collection of fragmentary essays that include a number of deep insights important for further understandings and developments.

THE USSR AS THE CONTEXT OF LOTMAN'S RESEARCH

The significant difference between Lotman and North American media ecologists could be reduced to the difference between the media environments in the USSR and North America. To say it briefly, North America experienced *A Brave New World* (Neil Postman, 1985), but the USSR a light version of 1984 with some deflections. Plea for exploring TV, 'a timid giant', and its influence on children was one of the 'locomotives' for McLuhan's writing *Understanding Media* (Prins and Bishop 2002). But Lotman was not so interested in studying TV. We consider that the brilliant depiction of the Soviet mainstream media was given by the underground rock-singer and poet Aleksandr Bashlachov:

The skates have been ringing in the screen from morning...
The real men are playing hockey.
Radio sings that there is no reason for the melancholy,
And it is the main reason for it.

(Bashlachev 1984, our translation)

Lotman preferred cinema because, actually, Soviet official media were rather dull to analyse. According to the political situation, cinema appeared to be more suitable for free expression by the artists in the USSR. The cinema's text is more difficult to interpret and understand, and thus sometimes Soviet censors missed allusions and metaphors that criticized the authorities or discussed forbidden topics. Soviet films often had complex structures where some meanings were inserted to hide them from the censors. In other words,

there were a lot of media viruses (Rushkoff 1996) in the Soviet films that inspired Lotman to create his semiotic theory with idea of 'text within text'.

In general, the complex relations of the arts and authorities in the USSR provided that culture was seen as a complex system with a lot of warring and conflicting elements. One more consilience is that Rushkoff's depiction of 'the infosphere' with its complexity (Rushkoff 1996) is very close to the concept of 'the semiosphere' we are going to discuss.

THE SEMIOSPHERE AND TYPOLOGY OF CULTURE

The Lotman concept of the semiosphere is introduced as an implication of the biosphere and noosphere to sign systems. The semiosphere is a semiotic space, in other words the space of messages and codes shaped by them.

Let us imagine a museum hall as a uniform world taken in synchronous slices. There are exhibits from various epochs, inscriptions on known and unknown languages, instructions for decoding, explanatory texts for exhibitions composed by methodists, schemes of excursion's routes and rules for visitors behavior in different showcases. Let's perceive all of this as united mechanism. We shall get the image of semiosphere. At the same moment do not lose sight of the fact that all the elements of semiosphere are not static but in a dynamic condition. They change their formula of relation to each other permanently.

(Lotman 2000: 254)

Lotman understood media environment 'in perpetual interplay' and considered the transformation to be the inherent feature of it. McLuhan's laws of media depict the process of environment transformation using the model of tetrad – four stages that every medium survives during its development. There are four types of tetrads: simple, more complex, alternate versions, chains and clusters (McLuhan and McLuhan 1992: 130). If we unite idea of the tetrads and idea of the semiosphere we can get more complex and detailed models of the media environment's development. This model can explain how differently biased media are related to each other in one system. Lotman emphasizes that the semiosphere has multistructure. 'One of the semiosphere's features is its inhomogeneity. There are subsystems which move with different speeds of cyclical movement on the one time axis' (Lotman 2000: 102).

Lotman claimed there are two basic types of semiosphere's changes: progressive changes and explosions. They could be seen as opposite parts of the whole process of history (Lotman 2000: 18). Explosion is unpredictable transformation that reverses the understanding of situation, culture, etc. (Lotman 2000: 30). He considers that cultural dynamics differ according to binary and ternary structure: explosion does not reverse the whole ternary structure but reverses the whole binary structure (Lotman 2000: 143).

Culture, according to Lotman, is 'the aggregate of non-hereditary information – shared memory of mankind or any narrower communities' (Lotman 2000: 400). Lotman claimed that 'the semiosphere is simultaneously the cause of culture and the result of culture' (Lotman 2000: 252). The culture includes codes and there is a dominant coding system in culture. Lotman said that dominant coding system is the thing that shapes, determines and simulates the culture. He developed the typology of Russian culture that depended on the presence of existential and axiological principles.

Semantic meaning	Syntactic meaning
I(+) II (-)	I(-) II (+)
I (-) II (-)	I(+) II (+)

Table 1: Typology of Russian culture according to dominant coding system (Lotman 2000: 402).

First is semantic (or ‘symbolic’) type of culture. The core idea of reality construction in this type is that ‘world is word’. All meanings are varieties of the one thing. This type appeared in the Middle Ages and made pragmatic part of the life non-existing because it was not empowered with value (Lotman 2000: 404). Syntactic type of culture appeared during the reign of Peter the First when secularization was first conducted. At that time, ‘to be’ meant ‘to be the part of something’. It provided the variety of world where person could live (Lotman 2000: 409). Asemantic and asyntactic types appear during periods of oppression in culture. At this time, ‘to be’ meant ‘to be the separate unite’ (Lotman 2000: 414). Semantic-syntactic type is the highest development of culture where ‘the world is language’ (Lotman 2000: 417). It is a very brief depiction of a very important Lotman idea and we suggest that this typology could be extrapolated on other cultures.

DISCUSSION AND IDEAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Lotman’s ideas deserve more detailed and extended considerations than we have made in this article. Our aim was to briefly introduce the enormity of Lotman’s heritage with a focus on the media ecology. To summarize the portrait of Lotman’s study, there is the central concept – the semiosphere. The semiosphere is the semiotic space created from an artefact’s signs and rules of decoding. There are eight basic features of the semiosphere:

1. All elements of the semiosphere could be seen as texts with interdependent structure and idea.
2. All elements of the semiosphere are in permanent transformation.
3. The semiosphere has complex and nonlinear hierarchy; some elements include others.
4. The semiosphere is inhomogeneous.
5. The elements could be seen as cyclic or linear texts.
6. The structure of elements could be binary or ternary.
7. The dynamic of elements could be progressive or explosive.
8. The semiosphere is cause and result of culture; there are four basic types of cultures according to dominant coding system: semantic, syntactic, asemantic and asyntactic, and semantic-syntactic.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The results of the project ‘RS-54’, carried out within the framework of the Basic Research Program at the National Research University Higher School of Economics (HSE) in 2015, are presented in this work.

REFERENCES

- Bashlachev, A. (1984), ‘Podvig razvedchika’/‘The Feat of Scout’, http://www.booksite.ru/bashlatchev/2_1.html#29. Accessed 31 October 2014.

- Brodsky, J. (1972), 'Letters to a Roman friend', March, <http://midthings.wordpress.com/letters-to-a-friend-in-rome-reading-martial/>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Danesi, M. (2008), The medium is the sign: Was McLuhan a semiotician?, *Media Tropes eJournal*, 1, pp. 113–126.
- Egorov, B. (1995), 'Lichnost' i tvorchestvo Ju. M. Lotmana'/'Personality and oeuvre of Yu. Lotman', in Yu Lotman (ed.), *Pushkin*, Saint-Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPb, <http://www.ruthenia.ru/lotman/txt/egorov95.html>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- 'Ilya Prigogine, Chaos, and dissipative structures', <http://www.osti.gov/accomplishments/prigogine.html>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Innis, H. (1951), *The Bias of Communication*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Kiseleva L. (2003), 'Ju. M. Lotman – zaveduyushij kafedroj Russkoj Literatury'/'Yu. Lotman – the head of Russian Literature Department', in *Lotmaniana Tartuensia*, Tartu: Ruthenia, <http://www.ruthenia.ru/lotman/txt/kiseleva03a.html>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- (2004), 'Spisok trudov Yu.M.Lotmana'/'The list of Lotman's publications' (electronic extended version), in Borovikova, M., Leibov, R., Salupere, S., Fraiman, I. (eds), *Lotmaniana Tartuensia*, Tartu: Ruthenia <http://www.ruthenia.ru/lotman/biblio.html>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Kull, K. (2011), 'Juri Lotman in English: Bibliography', *Sign Systems Studies*, 39:2/4, pp. 343–56, https://www.ut.ee/SOSE/sss/pdf/Kull_392.pdf. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Lamberti, E. (2012), *Marshall McLuhan's Mosaic: Probing the Literary Origins of Media Studies*, Kindle ed., Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Leuta, O. (2009), 'Ju. M. Lotman o treh funkciyah teksta'/'Lotman about three functions of the text', in V. Kantor (ed.), *Jurij Mihajlovich Lotman*, Moscow: ROSSPJeN, http://ec-dejavu.ru/l-2/Yuri_Lotman_text.html. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Logan, R. (2013), *McLuhan Misunderstood: Setting the Record Straight*, Kindle ed., The Toronto: Key Publishing House Inc.
- Lotman, Yu (1977), *The Structure of The Artistic Text*, USA: University of Michigan, <http://ru.scribd.com/doc/23504789/Lotman-Structure-Art-Text>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- (1992), *Stat'i po semiotike i topologii kul'tury*/'Articles about semiotics and topology of culture', Tallin: "Aleksandra".
- (1998), 'Tekst v Tekste'/'Text within text', in Lotman Yu (ed.), *Ob iskusstve*, Saint-Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPb. pp. 423–436.
- (2000), *Semiosfera*/'The semiosphere', Saint-Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPb.
- (2001), *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, UK: Indiana University Press.
- (2003), *Vospitanie dushi*/'The development of soul', Saint-Petersburg: Iskusstvo-SPb.
- Maklun, M. (1987), 'Televidenie. Robkij gigant'/'Television: A timid giant', in *Televidenie: vchera, segodnya, zavtra/ TV: Yesterday, today, tomorrow*, Moscow: Iskusstvo. pp. 169–170.
- McLuhan, M. and Fiore, Q. (1968), *War and Peace in the Global Village*, New York: Bantam.
- McLuhan, M. and McLuhan, E. (1992), *Laws of Media: The New Science*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- (2003), *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, NY: Gingko Press.
- McLuhan, M. and Watson, W. (1970), *From Cliché to Archetype*, NY: Viking.

- Ong, W. (2012), *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word (with Additional Chapters by John Hartley)*, 30th Anniversary ed., NY: Routledge.
- Pocheptsov, G. (2006), *Teoriya kommunikatsii*/'The communication theory', 2 ed., Moscow: Refl-buk Vakler.
- Postman, N. (1985), *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, New York: Penguin.
- Prigogine, Ilya, 'Chaos, and dissipative structures', <http://www.osti.gov/accomplishments/prigogine.html>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Prins, H. and Bishop, J. (2002), 'Edmund carpenter: Explorations in media & anthropology', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 17:2, pp. 110–40.
- Roatcap, A. (2004), 'Lubki: The wood engravings of Old Russia', *Parenthesis*, 10:1, http://www.fpba.com/parenthesis/select-articles/p10_lubki.html. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Rushkoff, D. (1996), *Media Virus! Hidden Agendas in Popular Culture*, NY: Ballantine Books.
- Scolari, C. (2010), 'Media ecology: Map of the theoretical niche', *Quaderns del CAC*, 34: vol. XIII (1), June, pp. 17–25.
- Searle, L. (2005), 'New criticism', in M. Groden, M. Kreiswirth and I. Szeman (eds), *The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed., Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Shklovsky, V. (1925), 'Iskusstvo kak priem''/'The art as method', in V. Shklovsky, *O teorii prozy*, Moscow: Krug. pp. 7–20.
- Shreider, Yu (1988), 'V poiskah soznaniya''/'In the search of consciousness', *Znanie-sila*, 11, pp. 50–54.
- Stolovich, L. (2012), 'Vospominaniya o Jurii Mihajloviche Lotmane: Strukturalizm s chelovecheskim licom''/'Memoirs about Yuri Lotman: The structuralism with human face' (Sem' iskusstv), 1, January, <http://7iskusstv.com/2012/Nomer1/Stolovich1.php>. Accessed 31 October 2014.
- Strate, L. (2014), *Amazing Ourselves to Death: Neil Postman's Brave New World Revisited*, NY: Peter Lang.
- Thompson, E. (1971), *Russian Formalism and Anglo-American New Criticism: A Comparative Study (de Proprietatibus Litterarum. Series Maior)*, Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton.

SUGGESTED CITATION

- Novikova, A. A. and Chumakova, V. P. (2015), 'Yuri Lotman's cultural semiotics as a contribution to media ecology', *Explorations in Media Ecology* 14: 1+2, pp. 73–85, doi: [10.1386/eme.14.1-2.73_1](https://doi.org/10.1386/eme.14.1-2.73_1)

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Anna A. Novikova (Ph.D. in Art Studies, Ph.D. in Cultural Studies from State Institute of Art Studies, Moscow) is Professor at the Department of Media, Faculty of Communication, Media and Design and Leading Researcher at the Laboratory of Media Research (National Research University Higher School of Economics). Her research interests include cultural anthropology, history and theory of media, history and theory of screen arts. Her book, *Television Reality: Screen Interpretations of Everyday Life* (in Russian) is devoted to the problems of coding and decoding of Russian TV messages. Published papers in English on this topic: 'Infotainment on Russian TV as a tool of desacralization of Soviet myths and creation of a myth about the future' (IC Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación, 2014, 11) and 'Myths about Soviet

values and contemporary Russian television' (*Russian Journal of Communication*, 2010, 3/4).

Contact: Department of Media, Faculty of Communication, Media and Design, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Khitrovsky Lane, House 2/8, Building 5, Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: a.a.novikova@gmail.com

Varvara P. Chumakova is a teacher at the Department of Media, Faculty of Communication, Media and Design and Junior Researcher at the Laboratory of Media Research (National Research University Higher School of Economics). In October 2015 she defended her dissertation in Cultural Studies, 'The conception of Herbert Marshall McLuhan: Media in social and cultural dynamics' at the State Institute of Art Studies (Moscow). Her research interests include cultural anthropology and semiotics, history and theory of media, effects of electronic and digital media, and Internet folklore. Her paper, 'Oral culture in media practices of contemporary Russian rural settlers' (*Etnograficheskoe obozrenie* journal, 2015, 4) is devoted to the role of TV and mobile phones in the construction of reality and pictures of the world.

Contact: Department of Media, Faculty of Communication, Media and Design, National Research University Higher School of Economics, Khitrovsky Lane, House 2/8, Building 5, Moscow, Russia.
E-mail: vchumakova@hse.ru

Anna A. Novikova and Varvara P. Chumakova have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the authors of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.



intellect

www.intellectbooks.com

publishers
of original
thinking

International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics

ISSN 1740-8296 | Online ISSN 2040-0918
3 issues per volume | Volume 9, 2013

Aims and Scope

The *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics* addresses cultural politics in their local, international and global dimensions, recognising equally the importance of issues defined by their specific cultural geography, and those which traverse cultures and nations. *MCP* promotes critical, in depth, engaged writing on the intersections of media and culture research, politics, cultural geography and other areas in social sciences and the humanities.

Call for Papers

We welcome contributions that are concerned with any area of media and cultural politics. Both 'culture' and 'politics' are interpreted broadly, and work on both new and established media is welcome as described above. We are interested in contributions that engage with current world affairs and push the boundaries of media and culture research.



Editors

Katharine Sarikakis
University of Leeds
k.sarikakis@leeds.ac.uk

Neil Blain
University of Stirling
n.a.blain@stir.ac.uk

Charles Ess
Professor MSO
Aarhus University
imvce@hum.au.dk