

Lotman in the Anglophone world: General trends, two new anthologies and a *Companion*

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Abstract. This article reconstructs the main foci and changes in the reception of Juri Lotman's work and Lotman-related scholarship in the Anglophone world. The first part of the article presents a brief critical overview of the history of the translations of Juri Lotman's works into English and of Anglophone scholarship on Lotman from 1973 to the present. The second part of the article considers more closely three volumes entirely dedicated to Lotman's work which have most recently been published in English: the anthologies of translated texts by Lotman *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics* (2019, ed. Marek Tamm) and *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux. An Anthology of Major and Lesser-Known Works by Juri Lotman* (2020, ed. Andreas Schönle) as well as *The Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (2022, eds. Marek Tamm and Peeter Torop).

Keywords: Juri Lotman; semiotics of culture; translation; Lotman studies; reception of Lotman in English

The present article focuses on the three volumes entirely dedicated to Juri Lotman's work which have most recently been published in English. These publications comprise two anthologies of Lotman's translated essays, and a companion to Lotman's thought. The anthologies are *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics* (2019) edited by Marek Tamm for Palgrave Macmillan, and *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux. An Anthology of Major and Lesser-Known Works by Juri Lotman* (2020), edited by Andreas Schönle for Academic Series Press. The third volume is *The Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, edited by Marek Tamm and Peeter Torop and published in 2022 by Bloomsbury. In order to contextualize these publications, I will first provide a brief critical overview of the history of the translations of Juri Lotman's works into English and of Anglophone scholarship on Lotman.

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Translation of Lotman's work

The translation, reception and study of Juri Lotman's work in English has a diverse, fifty-year history characterized by explosive moments as well as gradual development and, at some points, periods of standstill. The first bibliography of Lotman's translations into English was published by Kalevi Kull in *Sign Systems Studies* in 2011 and was updated and integrated with new data three years later (Kull, Gramigna 2014). Kull introduces the 2011 bibliography with an analytical overview, which leads him to the following conclusion: "Much of Lotman's writing is not yet translated into English. This concerns particularly his studies on Russian culture [...], but also his numerous theoretical works. Some of the existing translations have appeared in the periodicals that have turned into bibliographic rarities" (Kull 2011: 346). The most exhaustive bibliography, recently published by Remo Gramigna (2022), includes, in addition to the English translations of Lotman's works from 1973 to 2020, a list of Anglophone scholarship on Lotman with a total of 405 entries.

The bibliography shows a slight belatedness in translating Lotman's works into English in comparison with French, Italian and Spanish that saw translation of his work already in the second half of the 1960s.² The first essay translated into English is the manifesto of the semiotics of culture and of the Tartu-Moscow School "Theses on the semiotic study of cultures", that was published in English in 1973, the same year as the original Russian publication. The initiative came from Dutch Slavists Jan van der Eng and Mojmír Grygar, who decided to open the curious miscellaneous and multilingual (English, French and, mainly, Russian) edited volume titled *Structure of Texts and Semiotics of Culture* with the English translation of the "Theses". Another article in the same volume reviews Lotman's book *The Structure of the Artistic Text*, a work that would appear in English four years later (Lotman 1977), at which time it was already the third of Lotman's monographs to be published in English.³

The publication of the "Theses" was thus followed by what we can call as the first big wave of English translations of Lotman's works. It amounted to a total of approximately 50 titles in the second half of the 1970s with 1976–1977 as the peak years and the journal *Soviet Studies in Literature: A Journal of Translations* as the

² In France, for instance, Julia Kristeva edited a special issue on contemporary Soviet semiotics for the leading avant-garde literary magazine *Tel Quel* in 1968.

³ *Analysis of the Poetic Text* and *Semiotics of Cinema* appeared in English in 1976. All three books were published by the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures at the University of Michigan, testifying to the rapidly growing interest in Lotman's work in Anglophone Slavic studies in the middle of the 1970s.

most prolific outlet. A look at the other publishing venues shows that already from the very beginning the Anglophone Lotman lived a double life: on the one hand, in specialized journals/volumes in the field of Soviet, Russian and Slavic Studies, and on the other hand, in journals/volumes in the field of semiotics, with some incursions into prestigious literary studies outlets such as *Poetics* and *New Literary History*. The publication balance is rather more inclined toward North America than Europe, as is shown, in addition to the already mentioned book translations, by two anthologies centred on Soviet semiotics, with Lotman in a pre-eminent position – *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union* (Baran 1976) and *Soviet Semiotics* (Lucid 1977), both published by US-based academic presses.

In the 1980s, published English translations of Lotman's works fail to keep up with the previous five years, with a total of slightly less than 50 publications appearing in the entire decade, including all the essays republished in the new edition of the Johns Hopkins University Press's 1977 *Soviet Semiotics* (Lucid 1988[1977]). US universities continued to be at the forefront in the publication of monographs and edited volumes, with the focus shifting from the structuralist method and semiotic theory to Russian culture and Russian cultural history, as illustrated by Lotman's and Uspenskij's *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (1984), edited and translated in the Michigan Slavic Contributions Series, and *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History: Essays by Iurii Lotman, Lidiia Ia. Ginsburg, Boris A. Uspenskii* (Nakhimovsky, Nakhimovsky 1985) published by Cornell University Press. A strong focus on Russian cultural history is also evident in the choice of single articles by Lotman appearing in translation in Anglophone journals and collective volumes of the 1980s.

Towards the end of the decade a series of more theoretical essays about the typology of texts and cultures were published, which led to the translation of two milestone works, the article "The semiosphere", published in 1989 by the journal *Soviet Psychology* (Lotman 1989), and the volume *The Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (Lotman 1990), published by I. B. Tauris & Co. based in New York. While the presently recognized ground-breaking importance of these two texts in Lotman studies should have triggered a new interest in Lotman's work, we are rather witnesses to a drastic decrease in the number of Lotman's English translations in the following decade, with a total of only ten titles, including a new edition of the "Theses" (Ivanov *et al.* 1998) in the Tartu Semiotics Library series, appearing in the period 1990–1999. We can only speculate on the reasons for this. On the one hand, we can point a finger at the eventual decline of semiotics and structuralism within the humanities in a context in which the perception of Lotman continued to be strongly related with the structuralist approach developed

in his texts of the 1960s and 1970s. While the article on the semiosphere and the essays contained in *Universe of the Mind* could have changed this perception, the target readership of the publishing venues in which the two works were released – a journal in the field of psychology and a publisher mainly specializing in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies – severely limited their impact on academia. The missing English translation of Lotman's last manuscript *Culture and Explosion*, which was published in Italian and Spanish in 1993 and 1999, respectively, also hindered scholarly access to the new concepts and topics that informed the last period of Lotman's thought and resonated more closely with the central debates in the humanities and social science after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the forced intellectual isolation of Eastern Europe.

The new millennium opened with an attempt to overcome some of these limitations, with *Universe of the Mind* republished in 2000, this time by Indiana University Press, while a new translation of "The semiosphere" was published in *Sign Systems Studies* in 2005. The English translation of *Culture and Explosion* (Lotman 2009) finally appeared in the series *Semiotics, Communication and Cognition* issued by Mouton. While the overall number of published translations for the first decade of the new century (10) did not show signs of improvement, the accessibility of Lotman's later works in English provided the basis for a renewed interest in his work, which is evident in the remarkable increase in the number of translations (over 35) in the following decade (2010–2019). This was mainly due to the textological work on Juri Lotman's and Zara Mints's archives at Tallinn University, with the English translation of *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* published by Tallinn University Press (Lotman 2013); the systematic efforts by *Sign Systems Studies* to publish Lotman's essays not previously available in English; and, in the last two years of the decade, the two anthologies of Lotman's essays that I will consider more closely in what follows.

Scholarship on Lotman

The bibliography of the research on Lotman does not always coincide with trends in the bibliography of Lotman's English translations. The coincidences and discrepancies between the two interestingly reveal the intertwined but non-synchronic character of the relations between the translation of a given scholarly corpus, its reception, and the new scholarship that the translations generate.

In the 1970s and the 1980s the amount of scholarship more closely resembles the trends already observed in translation. That the second half of the 1970s can be considered the golden age of Lotman studies is confirmed by the high

numbers (almost 50) of publications on Lotman, with six special issues of journals devoted to the analysis, interpretation and application of his ideas and Soviet semiotics between 1975 and 1978. The keywords in the titles of the special issues – ‘structuralism’, ‘Soviet semiotics’, ‘semiotics of culture’, ‘literary criticism’ – reflect the kinds of topic that were perceived as associated with Lotman’s works in Anglophone scholarship of the 1970s. The first monograph on Lotman, *Literature and Semiotics: A Study of the Writings of Yu. M. Lotman* (1977), was authored by Ann Shukman, who had a key role in the earlier reception of Lotman in the Anglophone world.

Lotman scholarship saw a drastic drop in the 1980s, with fewer than 20 publications and no special issues or collective volumes on him for the whole decade. The topics are various, with a few attempts at ‘surveys’ and ‘(historical) overviews’ of Soviet or cultural semiotics, the most comprehensive of which can be considered Irene Winner’s monograph *Semiotics of Culture: The State of the Art* (1982).

Research on Lotman intensified in the following decade, although the numbers remain well below those of the 1970s, with fewer than 40 publications on Lotman for the period 1990–1999 and a double special issue as well as conference proceedings edited by the same scholars (Polukhina, Andrew, Reid 1993; Andrew, Polukhina, Reid 1994a, 1994b) and focusing on Russian literature and culture. From the beginning of the decade, the concept of the semiosphere progressively moves to the centre of Lotman studies. The interest of scholars in Lotmanian dialogism is also worth noting, with a whole series of works comparing Lotman and Bakhtin, the most pre-eminent of which can be considered Allan Reid’s monograph *Literature as Communication and Cognition in Bakhtin and Lotman* (1990).

The first two decades of the 21st century mark a little explosion in Lotman scholarship with over 50 titles for the period of 2000–2009 and over 75 for the years 2010–2020. This could be simply explained with the general quantitative growth of publication venues and scholarship that the new millennium witnessed in the field of the humanities. There are, however, reasons to argue that the belated publication of English translations of Lotman’s later essays and monographs attracted the interest of scholars from different disciplines, boosting the number of publications engaging with Lotman’s works. Another explanation can be found in the development of the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu which, with its international MA and PhD programmes, has become an international leader in the field, attracting dozens of young scholars every year with an evident positive effect on Lotman scholarship.

As for the topics, in the first decade of the 21st century, the notion of the semiosphere continued to dominate in writings on Lotman, while the attempt to set

Lotman's cultural semiotics in dialogue with other fields of semiotic (pre-eminently biosemiotics) and other disciplines in the humanities and social sciences became more and more evident. In this respect, Edna Andrews' monograph *Conversations with Lotman: Cultural Semiotics in Language, Literature and Cognition* (2001) and the volume *Lotman and Cultural Studies: Encounters and Extensions* (2007) edited by Andreas Schönle, both published by North American university presses, are worthy of separate mention. The first attempt at a monograph-length reconstruction of the history of the Tartu-Moscow School by Maxim Waldstein was published in Germany under the title *The Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics* (2008), while separate attention was dedicated to the history of the reception of Lotman's ideas in the West (Winner 2002).

In the second decade of the 21st century interdisciplinary views on Lotman's legacy extended to cover new fields, in particular digital technologies and media studies, with a series of attempts to conceptualize our "digital condition" in Lotmanian terms, most preeminently in the book *On the Digital Semiosphere: Culture, Media and Science for the Anthropocene* by John Hartley, Indrek Ibrus and Maarja Ojamaa (2020). Even if the semiosphere continued to be a central notion in many publications on Lotman in this decade as well, scholarship would increasingly more engage with other central concepts in Lotman's later works such as history, memory, explosion, unpredictability, translation. The special issue of the journal *Bakhtiniana: Revista de Estudos do Discurso* titled *Between Turbulences and Unpredictability of Historical Time: The Semiotics of Yuri Lotman* (Machado, Barei 2019) is a good example of this. Different aspects of Lotman's later thought were also mobilized in relation to political theory, for instance in Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk's book *Lotman's Cultural Semiotics and the Political* (2017). Today, Aleksei Semenenko's *The Texture of Culture: An Introduction to Yuri Lotman's Semiotic Theory* (2012) remains the most up-to-date compendium to Lotman's thought written by a single author, advancing a comprehensive and consistent interpretative framework to Lotman's thought.

Two new anthologies

The 100th anniversary of Lotman's birth, which has been celebrated all over the world this year, has brought about dozens of academic and public events and publications and will most probably contribute to the consolidation of interest in his legacy, already evident in the quantitative rise of Lotman scholarship over the last two decades. A quick look at the titles of the most significant academic events and publications related to the centenary shows us three main foci of attention:

(1) Lotman's later conceptual arsenal from the semiosphere to explosion and unpredictability; (2) Lotman and art; (3) revisiting of Lotman's ideas from an interdisciplinary perspective.⁴

Among the publishing initiatives more or less closely related to the Lotmanian centenary, two anthologies of Lotman's essays and *The Companion to Juri Lotman* will probably have the widest and most enduring effect on Lotman scholarship, hopefully functioning as a further bridge between Lotman's semiotics and other disciplines. This is why, without forgetting all the other special issues and single articles published this year, at this point it is worth considering the three volumes mentioned above in more detail, with a particular focus on the way in which they construct Lotman for academic consumption.

Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics (2019) includes eleven essays by Lotman that appear in English translation for the first time and three new translations of previously published texts. It is noteworthy that the editor of the volume, Marek Tamm, does not belong to any of the categories of scholars who are most pre-eminently represented in Lotman scholarship: Slavic Studies scholars, semioticians and literary scholars. Tamm is a cultural historian with an in-depth knowledge of the Lotmanian textual corpus and its reception, the context of the formation of the Tartu-Moscow School and its place in the history of ideas. His selection of Lotman's articles for the anthology has a clear target which is explained in the very first lines of the editor's introduction, where Tamm (2019b: 1) states that the volume aims "to introduce the work of Juri Lotman (1922–1993) into contemporary debates on cultural history and cultural memory studies". This selection criterion implies a predominant focus on Lotman's later works – of the fourteen essays translated for the volume, only one was originally published before 1980 and only three before 1986. The introduction to the volume excellently contextualizes Lotman's thought and its evolution for scholars who are not already familiar with it. The selection of the articles positions the texts that more specifically address cultural history, historical theory and memory (in the second and third sections of the volume, titled "Memory" and "History", respectively) against a background of Lotman's general semiotics of culture, introduced through the texts gathered in the first section of the anthology, titled "Culture".

Explaining the rationale for the articulation of the volume, Tamm advances his own reconstruction of the development of the notions of culture, memory and history in Lotman's works, conditionally identifying the year 1970 and the volume *Studies in the Typology of Culture*, together with the subsequent essay "On

⁴ For an overview of the various initiatives, see the centenary webpage [jurilotman100](https://jurilotman100.ee/en/) (<https://jurilotman.ee/en/>).

the semiotic mechanism of culture” (1971, co-authored with Boris Uspenskij) and the *Theses* of 1973 as the turning point after which the “theoretical analysis of culture becomes the main focus of his [Lotman’s] research” (Tamm 2019b: 5). Importantly, Tamm stresses the fact that even if Lotman’s model of culture is deeply spatial, it is grounded from the very beginning on dynamic notions of interaction, translation and the complex tension between identity and change, homogeneity and heterogeneity in culture (Tamm 2019b: 16). The introduction to the volume thus shows that even if the topics of memory and history become more preeminent in the later phase of Lotman’s thought, closely related issues were already detectable as scattered observations in his earlier works. In Lotmanian terms, we can speak of an interplay between the centre and the periphery of his theoretical attention, where peripheral elements keep moving to a central position, while central ones are relegated to the periphery without being completely discarded. It is, in other words, more a matter of shifts in the dominants of his theoretical thinking than of what are usually defined as ‘turns’ in the history of ideas. A good example of this are the opening and closing articles of the “Culture” section of the anthology: “The phenomenon of culture” originally published in 1978 (the oldest in the volume), and “On the dynamics of culture” that was originally published in 1992 and remains among the last texts written by Lotman. Both texts ask how the creation of novelty is possible in culture and start with a description of monolingual mythological/ritual circular structures set against polyglot linear structures. While the idea is the same, the terminology has changed – what is referred to as “random” and “exceptional” in the earlier text has become “unpredictable” in the later one in which references to the notions of “memory” and “history” have become ubiquitous.

The anthology situates the issue of memory against a background of Lotman’s definition of the three functions of culture in the opening article of the first section of the volume, mentioned above: memory is culture as “storing/transmitting information”, *vis-à-vis* culture as transforming existing information, and culture as creating new information. More specifically, Lotman’s and Uspenskij’s characterization of culture as “the nonhereditary memory of the community” and the role of autocommunication in culture are emphasized. In the middle of the 1980s Lotman elaborated his own concept of ‘cultural memory’, which is made accessible to the Anglophone reader through the first translations of Lotman’s articles “Memory in a culturological perspective” (1985) and “Cultural memory” (1986) included in the anthology. In his introduction, Tamm (2019b: 10–15) traces the genealogy and transformation of the notion in Lotman’s earlier texts and compares Lotman’s understanding with the classics of Western ‘cultural memory’ Jan and Aleida Assmann. The genealogical reconstructions and the comparative perspective

constitute one of the volume's most valuable contributions to Lotman scholarship.

Lotman's understanding of history is probably the best example of the tension between continuity/stability and change/novelty that runs through the entire Lotmanian conceptual network from 'language' and 'text' to 'culture' and the 'semiosphere'. One can argue that Lotman was aware of this tension in his first, seminal works of the 1960s, but that it acquired an increasingly central position in his later thought when something like (a sketch of) a theory of history took shape in works such as *Culture and Explosion*, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* and the essays in the "Cultural memory, history and semiotics" section of *Universe of the Mind*. The "joining of history and semiotics", as Lotman described his theoretical effort in 1992 (Lotman 1992: 4), first of all evolved into an epistemological reflection on the nature of historical knowledge. From this perspective, semiotics becomes a privileged tool for making sense of the retrospective and textual nature of history. However, this is probably Lotman's less original contribution, as the reflection on history triggered by the linguistic turn in the humanities and social science (for example Hayden White) has amply focused on the textuality of historical discourse, showing how the construction of historical 'facts' into a narrative (a text) always emerges from a retrospective move that has its root in the historian's present.

More original and topical today are Lotman's thoughts on the role of chance, unpredictability, "explosive" events in history, and the way in which both the people directly involved as well as the historians make sense of them. For Lotman, this becomes the terrain on which to rethink the fundamental notions of freedom and choice in history. It is not by chance that Lotman's essays "Clio at the crossroads" (1988) and "A divine pronouncement or a game of chance? The law-governed and the accidental in the historical process" (1992) – which open the anthology's section on history with a focus on the issues just mentioned – are chronologically framed by the beginning and the end of the collapse of the USSR and the process of Estonia's regaining of independence. The urgency of developing a reflection that would connect unpredictability and change with choice and freedom was provoked by the historical context of Lotman's later thought. Another article translated in the "History" section of the anthology, "The time of troubles as a cultural mechanism: Toward a typology of Russian cultural history" (1992), to a remarkable degree resonates with the crises of our present times.

Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics is exactly the kind of intellectual operation that we probably most need in order to revive Lotman's legacy and propose it to a target audience outside the presently somewhat narrow boundaries of semiotics. Even if the selection criterion adopted in the collection may lead to some debatable conclusions, such as, for instance, the suggestion

that “Lotman’s major contribution to the development of semiotics consists in highlighting the mnemonic function of culture” (Tamm 2019b: 6), the volume shows the way for other possible selection criteria and volumes around specifically Lotmanian concepts, such as ‘translation’, ‘dialogue’, ‘semiosphere’ – just to mention some.

The second anthology, titled *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux. An Anthology of Major and Lesser-Known Works by Yuri Lotman*, was published a year later, in 2020, and adopts a different approach to Lotman’s textual corpus. While Tamm started his introduction by identifying a specific line in the research on Lotman, the editor of *Culture and Communication* Andreas Schönle, who represents Russian Studies by discipline and has a long record in Lotman scholarship, starts his introduction with a description of Lotman’s multifarious fields of research. He defines Lotman’s greatest asset as “the ability to underpin history with theory and substantiate theory with history, casting a new light on everything he touched” (Schönle 2020b: xiv). Schönle positions the volume against a background of the international reception of Lotman’s work, lamenting, on the one hand, the challenges that the Russian-centredness of Lotman’s empirical material poses to scholars outside of Slavic Studies, and, on the other hand, the above-mentioned scarce attention to Lotman’s work in the Anglophone world due to the lack of translations. For Schönle, the belated translation of Lotman’s later work in particular limits the English-language perception of Lotman with the structuralism of the 1960s and 1970s. Schönle rather identifies Lotman’s “attractive and unique dimensions” (Schönle 2020b: xviii) today in the complex and dynamic understanding of culture developed through the notion of the semiosphere, the conceptualization of change and innovation developed through the notion of explosion, and the analysis of literature as a way of disseminating “codes of behaviour” and “models of feelings”.

This understanding of Lotman’s topicality influences the choice of his texts gathered in Schönle’s anthology. Like *Culture, Memory and History*, also *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux* includes mainly essays and book chapters from Lotman’s later period, which Schönle defines as “post-structuralist” and “more attuned to contemporary concerns” (Schönle 2020b: xx). However, according to the principle of gathering together “major and lesser-known works” by Lotman, some earlier and influential texts have also been included. Contrary to the collection edited by Tamm, most of the texts gathered in Schönle’s anthology had already been published in English earlier, although in these cases new translations are provided. The re-translation of previously translated and published texts is an interesting feature that the two anthologies share. Even if the editors and translators of the anthologies present slightly different explanations for this choice, what they agree

on is the need for consistency of terminology and style across different texts as a key to enabling an adequate understanding of Lotman's scholarly legacy. Talking with Lotman scholars, one easily gets the impression of a widespread dissatisfaction with many existing English translations of Lotman's work. Anthologies such as Tamm's and Schönle's may contribute, among many other things, to the replacement of old and inadequate translations with new and more adequate ones. It is, at any rate, interesting that both anthologies explicitly thematize the issue of translation – *Culture, Memory and History* in a separate translator's preface by the translation scholar Brian James Baer, *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux* in a short translator's note by the translator Benjamin Paloff, and at more length in a series of remarks made in Andreas Schönle's introduction.

In contrast with Tamm's focused approach, Schönle (2020b: xx) describes the aim of his anthology as providing "handy access to a broad range" of Lotman's scholarly contributions, and "a fuller view of his [Lotman's] intellectual development". The result is a "stand-alone primer" (Schönle 2020b: xx) of Lotman's work, which is aimed at an audience of English-speaking undergraduate and graduate students from different disciplines, thus implying a selection of texts accessible to people lacking a background in Russian culture. On the scholarly side, Schönle shares Tamm's effort to break out of the narrow boundaries of semiotics and Russian studies, although, contrary to Tamm, he does not have a specific target group in mind, mentioning the relevance of the anthology for "debates such as gender, memory, performance, world literature, and urban studies" (Schönle 2020b: xxi), but leaving the list potentially open to other disciplines.

Schönle's anthology is divided in two sections titled "Semiotics" and "Cultural history", the former mainly consisting of new translations of chapters from three Lotman monographs already published in English, *Universe of the Mind*, *The Structure of the Artistic Text* and *Culture and Explosion*. While Tamm emphasizes the mnemonic role of culture, Schönle's choice rather puts to the fore "the production of new ideas and information, as opposed to the actualization of meanings already encoded" in culture, with a particular focus on heterogeneity, dynamism, openness and change (Schönle 2020a: 3). The strategic placement of passages from *The Structure of the Artistic Text* (originally published in 1970) between the two later monographs (originally published in 1990 and 1992, respectively) directs the attention of the reader to the dynamic and interactional aspects already present in Lotman's theory of the text in the "structuralist" period. The "Semiotics" section of the anthology also contains Lotman's article "Memory in a culturological light", which in Tamm's anthology is translated as "Memory in a culturological perspective".

The “Cultural history” section of Schönle’s anthology centres on Russian cultural history, with articles on the symbolism of St Petersburg and the role of the duel and women’s culture in Russian high society of the 18th and early 19th centuries. The section is opened by “The role of dual models in the dynamics of Russian culture”, originally published by Lotman in 1977 and setting up the binary framework for the interpretation of Russian culture that Lotman would apply in all his following work, *Culture and Explosion* included. Schönle introduces the article with a critique of the excessive rigidity and serious limits of Lotman’s binaristic approach to the study of Russian cultural history. One of the few articles that is translated for the first time in the volume is the ground-breaking “A woman’s world” from *Conversations on Russian Culture* (1994), in which Lotman describes the place and role of women in Russian high society and culture in the 18th and early 19th centuries. This offers the editor of the volume the opportunity to discuss in his introduction the ambivalences of Lotman’s view on gender, which is a mix of constructivistic and essentialistic elements, and, more generally, to highlight Lotman’s position as a ground-breaking and far-sighted intellectual, yet at the same time a man of his times, deeply embedded in (and limited by) the Russian cultural tradition.

Summing up, it can be said that Tamm’s anthology has the advantage of a focused approach, advancing a contextualizing and coherent interpretative framework to Lotman’s later thought on history and memory, and mainly offering first translations of Lotman’s articles that were not previously available in English. Schönle’s anthology is much more “generic” and mainly made up of new translations of Lotman’s texts that were already available in previous English translations. While Tamm’s approach is thoroughly positive in the attempt to highlight the aspects of Lotman’s theory that resonate with current debates in the field of (cultural) history and memory studies, Schönle’s approach is more critical and prone to present shortcomings of Lotman’s work together with its potential, giving space to the voices of critical scholars in the introduction of the volume and in the short prefaces to the single translated essays.

The Companion to Juri Lotman

The first *Companion to Juri Lotman* can be considered as one of the (if not *the*) most important contribution(s) to the interdisciplinary and international dissemination of Juri Lotman’s thought so far. While the secondary title of the companion, *A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, refers to Lotman’s original disciplinary

domain, its different chapters actually engage with a long series of disciplines in the humanities, social as well as natural sciences, in a successful effort to explicate the potentiality, versatility and topicality of Lotman's conceptual arsenals for many different research fields and approaches today. The editors of the volume skilfully managed to coordinate the work of the forty-three authors who contributed to the volume and represent the complexity and extension of Lotman's scholarship today very well. A first group of authors includes direct students of Juri Lotman; a second group coincides with the flourishing and international network of scholars who received their academic training at the Department of Semiotics of the University of Tartu over the last two decades; and a third, large, group of authors are scholars with no direct academic affiliation with Lotman nor Tartu, who have independently found their way to Lotman and applied his ideas in a wide variety of different studies and disciplines.

The aim of the companion as stated by the editors in their introduction is "to provide a collective, systematic and interdisciplinary approach to Lotman's intellectual legacy" (Tamm, Torop 2022b: 2). This aim is achieved through the articulation of the volume in three sections that introduce, respectively, the context of Lotman's thought, the concepts he employs, and the disciplines with which Lotman himself initiated a dialogue or which themselves entered, or might potentially enter, into a dialogue with Lotman. The result is, to use a concept dear to Lotman, a stereoscopic view of Lotman's intellectual legacy that explores his theoretical contributions and historical research from many different disciplinary perspectives, translating it into different languages for different uses. The editors implicitly frame this as the only possible approach to Lotman's legacy, which they define as an 'open work' in Umberto Eco's sense, lacking a systematic and overarching theoretical construction and terminology, but always open to the changes that the analysis of new empirical material requires. This is why, for Tamm and Torop, Lotman's legacy permits "an infinite number of interpretations" (Tamm, Torop 2022b: 9), and this is mirrored in their attempt to keep the framework of the companion as open as possible.

In addition to the transdisciplinary and open character of Lotman's research, *The Companion* also stresses the "translinguistic, transnational, transinstitutional" setting of Lotman's work, the Tartu-Moscow School and cultural semiotics. In the chapter "Lotman in transnational context", Igor Pilshchikov (2022: 107) aptly refers to Mary Louise Pratt's and Stephen Greenblatt's notion of 'contact zone' in order to describe the regime of intercultural contacts that characterized Lotman's work in Tartu and very importantly shaped central concepts of his thought such as polyglotism, dialogue and translation.

A look at the topics of the chapters in the three sections of *The Companion* presents any Lotman scholar with elements of both recognition and of surprise, the latter possibly being the source for the most interesting discoveries. For me, for instance, it came as a surprise to find a very interesting chapter on Lotman and Bakhtin in the “Context” section of *The Companion* alongside the more obviously required chapters on Saussure, Russian formalism, Jakobson and the Tartu-Moscow School. I had not previously considered Bakhtin’s work such a strong theoretical context for Lotman as the other ones, but the chapter on Bakhtin in the “Context” section in a way compensates for the lack of a ‘dialogue’ (or ‘translation’) chapter in the “Concepts” section. Except for the constellation of polyglotism/dialogue/translation – which in addition to the chapter on Bakhtin is also introduced in the chapters “Communication” and “Semiosphere” – the “Concepts” section of *The Companion* contains all the notions that one would expect in a systematic approach to Lotman’s thought: ‘language’, ‘text’, ‘culture’, ‘modelling’, ‘space’, ‘biography’, ‘memory’, ‘explosion’. Interesting additions include the concept of ‘power’, which has been explored in recent years by scholars who have applied Lotman’s semiotics to political theory, and the concept of ‘symbol’ which, as it is treated in the chapter, acquires a new heuristic function as a junction at which different threads of Lotman’s thought intertwine. The chapter on the concept of ‘image’ also proposes an interesting synthesis that brings together different strands of Lotman’s thought on visual culture (iconic signs/texts, the semiotics of cinema, “visual narratology”, etc.).

The section “Lotman in dialogue” is less conventional for the genre of companion, and at the same time a more accurate mirror of the philosophy which sustains this specific companion – as illustrated through the statement that the “dialogical potential represents probably the most valuable feature of Lotman’s intellectual inheritance and is very much the main reason d’être of this *Companion*” (Tamm, Torop 2022b: 9). In addition, it is also its main objective, because “The last part [the “Lotman in dialogue” section, D. M.] of *The Companion* shows that most of Lotman’s dialogic potential is still largely unexplored, and we hope very much to contribute with this collective effort to changing this situation” (Tamm, Torop 2022b.: 10). Thus, as the editors explain, the section on the one hand contains dialogues that, even if sometimes difficult or unilateral, were actually developed by Lotman in his work or by representatives of other strands of thought who used and use Lotman in their work. This is, for instance, the case for post-structuralism, new historicism, cultural and memory studies and, more recently, (trans)media studies and biosemiotics. On the other hand, *The Companion* proposes dialogues that have just started, for instance those with digital and social media studies, for which Lotman’s semiotics seems to offer flexible and useful theoretical tools.

The definition of Lotman's legacy as an open work means that the list of dialogue partners for *The Companion* cannot possibly be exhaustive. For instance, neither translation studies nor anthropology are included in the "Lotman in dialogue" section; in the future it would be interesting to explore what Lotman's notion of translation has said/has to say to translation scholars, and what Lotman's cultural typologies and analysis of everyday life have said/have to say to anthropologists.

We could finally ask whether an understanding of Lotman's legacy as open to infinite interpretations does not risk overflowing into some kind of epistemological anarchism, eventually diluting Lotman's thought into a *passpartout* without any specific content and bendable to any kind of use and misuse. In this respect, Umberto Eco theorized not only the 'open work' but also the need to distinguish between legitimate interpretations and overinterpretations or misuses of the text (Eco 2010). I do not think we should worry about this in Lotman case. I am convinced that rather protective and "philological" readings of Lotman expose his work to a greater risk, as they transform a living organism into a museum exhibit for niche scholarly exercises. In this respect the existence of a "school", loose as it might have been, has partially limited the free development of the potential of Lotman's thought. The comparison with Bakhtin, whose concepts were quickly and freely appropriated after his death by a number of scholars in different disciplines, who then fruitfully developed them in very heterodox ways, is telling proof of the advantages of the lack of a "scholastic" framework around a scholar's work.

Another related and interesting issue is the co-existence of different, even opposing interpretations of Lotman's legacy in scholarship. While Tamm and Torop present such co-existence in a peaceful and productively ecumenic perspective, in the introduction to his Lotmanian anthology Schönle speaks in a more antagonistic way when stating that the Tartu-Moscow School has become "a contested site, with various participants making contradictory claims about its emergence and development" (Schönle 2020: xvi). Moreover, Schönle describes an original split between the theoretical/semiotic side and the Russian cultural history side of Lotman's work, which after his death were developed separately at the University of Tartu's Department of Semiotics and Department of Slavic Studies, respectively: "This division reflected a breakdown of the unique synthesis between history and theory Lotman had attempted," Schönle concludes (2020: xv). This is a strong and, possibly, contestable claim. Yet at Lotman-related academic events and in similar publications a certain degree of separateness can indeed be sensed between Anglophone and Russophone Lotman scholarship, of course with many distinguished exceptions and bridging personalities.

In this respect, one cannot help but notice the fact that Russian cultural history or, more broadly, Russian studies are not separately thematized in the "Context"

or “Dialogue” sections of *The Companion*, with the exception of the chapter on Russian formalism, which focuses on theory. While *The Companion* was published before the Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022, the process of critical exposure and deconstruction of the colonial and imperialistic foundations of Slavic Studies triggered by the war is making Russian cultural history a kind of Stone Guest in Lotman studies. Does Lotman’s semiotic theory and, more specifically, Lotman’s work on Russian cultural history offer us instruments for a more critical approach to the imperialistic and colonial aspects of Russian culture and for a revision of the scope, objects and methods of Slavic Studies today? Let us consider, for instance, Lotman’s controversial distinction between binary and ternary systems: does this not assume a new and topical meaning in the current confrontation between Russia and the West?

These are all questions that need to be explored in the context of the renewed interest in Lotman’s thought that the centenary as well as the publishing initiatives considered in this article have contributed to boosting. It is our task to maintain and facilitate this interest, interpreting and using Lotman in ways that are relevant in the present and for the future.

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Lotman in inglese.

Tendenze generali, due nuove antologie e un Companion

Il presente articolo ricostruisce i temi e cambiamenti principali nella ricezione dell'opera di Lotman e negli studi lotmaniani in lingua inglese. La prima parte dell'articolo propone un breve panorama critico della storia della traduzione delle opere di Lotman in inglese e degli studi su Lotman pubblicati in inglese dal 1973 ad oggi. La seconda parte dell'articolo considera più da vicino tre recenti volumi completamente dedicati all'opera di Lotman: le antologie di traduzioni inglesi dei lavori lotmaniani *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics* (2019, a cura di Marek Tamm) e *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux. An Anthology of Major and Lesser-Known Works by Juri Lotman* (2020, a cura di Andreas Schönle) e il *Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (2022, a cura di Marek Tamm e Peeter Torop).

Lotman ingliskeelses maailmas: üldised suunad, kaks uut antoloogiat ja *Companion*

Artikkel esitab ülevaate Juri Lotmani tööde vastuvõtust ja Lotmaniga seonduvate teadustööde peamised huvipunktid. Artikli esimeses osas visandatakse lühidalt kriitiline ülevaade Lotmani teoste tõlkimisest inglise keelde ja tema kohta avaldatud teadustöödest alates 1973. aastast tänapäevani. Artikli teine osa käsitleb lähemalt kolme hiljuti avaldatud köidet, mis on täielikult pühendatud Lotmani töödele: Lotmani tõlkeid sisaldavaid antoloogiaid *Culture, Memory and History: Essays in Cultural Semiotics* (2019, toim Marek Tamm) ja *Culture and Communication: Signs in Flux. An Anthology of Major and Lesser-Known Works by Juri Lotman* (2020, toim Andreas Schönle) ning Bloomsbury kirjastuses välja antud käsiraamatut *The Companion to Juri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (2022, toim Marek Tamm ja Peeter Torop).