Reflections on religion and the status of 'the outside' in the Lotmanian understanding of culture

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Abstract: The article explores the question whether the way in which Juri Lotman uses the categories of semiotic explosion and unpredictability enables and necessitates the need to give space not only to different descriptions, but also to various self-descriptions (auto-communications) of religion in culture. In other words, the question is posed whether his concept of the semiosphere aids in making sense of the synchronic and diachronic contradictions and controversies in religion – both within what is perceived as a religion and between what are understood to be religions. The focus lies especially on whether Lotman's semiotic theory of culture has a potential of advancing mutual recognition and supportive respect, that is – solidaristic tolerance between different religious and non-religious ways of being human. The claim is made that this is indeed the case as he models the human situation so that the 'outside of the system' is not understood only as a continuation of reality, but visualizes and includes within the system a space for a radical intrusion of possibility – for the truly unpredictable – on the level of culture, humanity, as well as the individual. Therefore, Lotman's theory of culture could be developed further, in the direction of a translation device between different cultures (of religion), opening up new perspectives for dealing with the challenging semiotic situation in which we all find ourselves living in today.

Keywords: semiosphere; boundary; explosion; unpredictability; autocommunication; dialogue; religion; theology

1. Introduction

The Companion to Yuri Lotman: A Semiotic Theory of Culture (Tamm, Torop 2022a), published to mark the 100th anniversary of the semiotician's birth, is a

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major collective achievement. This highly helpful guidebook first places Lotman's cultural semiotics in context, then introduces its key concepts, and finally describes it in dialogue with a wide range of research directions, approaches and disciplines.[2] According to the editors of *The Companion*, Lotman's "dialogical potential is probably the most valuable feature of [his] intellectual legacy" (Tamm, Torop 2022b: 9). However, the third part of the *The Companion* also allows us to see that "most of Lotman's dialogical potential is still largely unexplored" (Tamm, Torop 2022b: 10).

One of the topics that the handbook does not explicitly engage with is religion. There are no chapters on this topic, nor can the term be found in the index. A similar observation can be made about another important collective work dedicated to Lotman's centenary, the voluminous special issue of the semiotics journal *Lexia*, entitled *Re-Thinking Juri Lotman in the Twenty-First Century* (Gherlone, Gramigna, Leone 2022).

On the one hand, this state of affairs is surprising. For example, in the journal *Sign Systems Studies*, which Lotman founded in 1964 and edited until 1992, and which played an important role in the formation and development of both Lotman's semiotic thinking and the Tartu-Moscow School more broadly, the number of articles by authors from different disciplinary backgrounds in one way or another devoted to religion is astonishing.[3] This is particularly true of the decade 1965–1975. In 1969–1975, the very first section of the journal was entitled "Myth, folklore, religion as modelling systems". Thereafter, religion disappeared from the journal altogether for a while (it is more than likely that this happened for external reasons, linked to the Soviet regime and its official ideology).

On the other hand, it is true that in Lotman's own writings religion appears quite frequently, but usually in an ancillary and illustrative role rather than being the focus of attention. However, it can be argued that there are some important exceptions to this (Lotman, Uspenski 1978[1973]; Lotman 2019a[1981]; Lotman, Mints 1981).

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[2]   When characterizing Lotman, the editors of *The Companion* note that "his work is open to a wide variety of readings and uses. [...] [W]e do not have a single Juri Lotman with a clear scholarly profile, but rather a large number of Lotmans interpreted and shaped in very different ways in different disciplines." (Tamm, Torop 2021: 9b).

[3]   There are articles on myths and mythology, rituals, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam (Sufism), Eastern Christianity (Russian Orthodoxy), etc. All issues are freely accessible on the *Sign Systems Studies* website under "Older content". From the beginning, the tables of contents of the issues (located at the end of each issue) are in Russian, English and Estonian. There also exists an overall index based on author names from 1964 to 2022 (Kull, Puumeister 2022).

The relationship between semiotics and the study of religion[4] – as well as both sides of this relationship themselves – has changed significantly since the 1960s and 1970s.[5] On the broad landscape of the semiotics of religion the engagement with Lotman's theoretical and analytical legacy – and especially with his later works – has been rather marginal. This means that the aforementioned "dialogical potential" of Lotmanian semiotics in relation to religion is still largely unexplored. A critical and creative dialogue between philosophy of religion, theology and other academic ways of studying religion on the one hand, and cultural semiotics on the other hand, is a highly topical task – especially in today's world as will be explained shortly. As the early issues of *Sign Systems Studies* show, it is not impossible that such a dialogue – the study of religion in the semiosphere – may also enliven, inspire and eventually transform theoretical developments in the field of (general) semiotics.

In the present article, I will not deal with Lotman studies or exegesis in the strict sense, but aim to contribute to this dialogue and bridge-building. In doing so, my own disciplinary background is religious studies broadly conceived, more specifically philosophy of religion and Christian theology. More generally, my focus lies on exploring the question whether the way in which Lotman uses the category of explosion enables and necessitates us to give space not only to different descriptions, but also to various self-descriptions of religion in culture. In other words: the question is whether his concept of the semiosphere enables us to make sense of the synchronic and diachronic contradictions and controversies in religion, both within what is perceived as a religion and between what are understood to be religions. Could Lotman's understanding of culture help us take seriously the differences within religion and differences between religion, a-religion, non-religion or anti-religion?

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[4]   Broadly perceived, the study of religion encompasses all academic disciplines dealing with religion. In a narrow sense, the study of religion or the religious studies may emphasize that theology and philosophy of religion lie beyond its boundaries (cf. Põder 2021b: 43–47, "Theosemiotics and the task of an ongoing dialogue between disciplines studying religions").

[5]   For an introduction to new directions in semiotic methodologies for the study of religion, that begins with historical remarks on older trends, see Põder 2021a (there are also further references to the literature). See also Leone 2022 (and Leone 2016 for an earlier version of the article in French); Leone 2019; Yelle 2013: 1–22, and Yelle 2016. The contemporary multifacetedness and vitality of the semiotics of religion is illustrated by e.g. Bartlett 2020; Janowitz 2022; Krech 2020 and 2021; Linde 2013; Pietropaolo 2021; Raposa 2020; Wildgen 2021; Bründl, Laubach, Lindner 2021; Kopytowska, Gałkowski, Leone 2022; Yelle, Ponzo 2021.

My special interest lies in the question whether Lotman's semiotic theory of culture has a potential of advancing mutual recognition and supportive respect (I call such disposition 'solidaristic tolerance'; see Põder 2016: 473–474, 2018: 529–533) between different religious and non-religious ways of being human. I will argue that his theory of culture indeed does so by modelling the human situation in a way that the 'outside of the system' is not understood only as a continuation of reality but visualizes and includes within the system a space for radical intrusion of possibility – for true unpredictability – in culture, in humanity, and within the individual. Therefore, Lotman's theory of culture can be developed further in the direction of a translation mechanism between different cultures (of religion) that may open new perspectives for dealing with the semiotic situation in which we all live.

The body of the article consists of three consecutive reflective steps: (2) 'the outside' and 'explosion' in Lotman's understanding of culture; (3) description and self-description of religion; (4) the varieties of religion and its distinguishability. The article ends with (5) a general conclusion.

2. 'The outside' and 'explosion' in Lotman's understanding of culture

I start with more general considerations. Lotman begins his last book *Culture and Explosion* (2009[1992]) with posing two questions he considers most important and difficult as regards the description of any semiotic system. The first question concerns the system's relation to the outside of the system – to the world outside or beyond its boundaries –, while the second is about the system's dynamics, about its development while maintaining its identity (cf. Lotman 2009[1992]: 1).

Lotman had been grappling with these questions over the years at the levels of literary analysis of the works of great writers and poets and of investigating and specifying the general characteristics of an artistic text, as well as at the levels of analysing Russian cultural history and its various manifestations and of general theory of sign systems. He used his work as a literary scholar to understand the general workings of culture, and his semiotic theory of culture contributed to the way he approached artistic texts and discussed cultural history.

In an earlier article "The dynamic model of semiotic system" Lotman (1977[1974]) explicates the interrelation between these two questions in the following way: the interrelation involves inclusion of elements from outside the system into the system, accompanied by the extrusion of the systemic into the outside. This process is a primary source of dynamics in semiotic structures, mechanisms or systems. If the extra-systemic is ignored in the description of a

system and the outside of the system is blocked out, the source of the system's dynamism gets lost.[6]

A few years later Lotman elaborated on the same issue with the help of a semiotic text-concept (Lotman 1994[1981]): text as a mechanism of meaning creation needs for its functioning that something outside the text enters it. According to Lotman this external element may be another text or a reader or a cultural context. However, both the reader and culture may also be understood as texts, that is, as meaning-making units or mechanisms delimited by their borders. Any kind of text, in order to function as a text – that is, as a thinking structure, as culture or as a unit of significance – needs a conversation partner. (This is how a text becomes text and means something to someone.) Text, culture and consciousness are intrinsically dialogical (Lotman 1994[1981]: 378).[7] Lotman describes the (self-)development of culture as an act of communication. It always presupposes the 'other' (Lotman 2019c[1983]: 76) and an inflow of texts from the outside: "The introduction of such a text sharply increases the inner unpredictability of the entire system, lending volatility to its next stage of development." (Lotman 2019b[1983]: 80)

In a later essay Lotman (2019b[1989]: 85) writes in a similar manner: meaning-making or the emergence of meaning "assumes the introduction of texts from outside the system and their specific, unpredictable transformation [...]. Systems of this type – ranging from minimal semiotic entities to global ones of the type "culture as a self-sufficient universe" – acquire structural isomorphism".[8] He

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6   It is true that in and through the descriptive process the extra-systemic unavoidably becomes an element of the system, but the task of considering the outside is not impossible, because extra- and intra-systemic are complementary and interdependent concepts (cf. Lotman 1977[1974]: 196; Lotman *et al.* 2013[1973]: 106–108; Lotman 2019c[1983]: 78–79). Lotman discusses different types of the extra-systemic: self-description (via metalanguage), non-existence (from the perspective of inner-systemic) and another system or the differently systemic (Lotman 1977[1974]: 197–198). In order to lessen the level of abstraction I recall that the social function of the sign system lies in communication, in mediating something of significance: primarily informing us about something and informing about the other perspective or viewpoint on something 'I' know (cf. Lotman 1977[1974]: 206–207). The deficit in information can be compensated only by a stereoscopic view (cf. Lotman 1977[1974]: 206).

7   The extent of the transformation of the entered text is unpredictable. The whole semiotic situation in the text world into which the other text enters, changes. The intrusion of foreign semiosis brings a text/culture out of its semiotic balance and stimulates its development that can have unpredictable consequences (cf. Lotman 1994[1981]: 378–379, 2009[1992]: 77).

8   "The invariant model of a meaning-making entity assumes […] its definitive delineation and self-sufficiency, and the presence of a border between it and the semiotic space outside it." (Lotman 2019b[1989]: 85) "[E]very meaning-making machine can work only when texts are introduced from the outside, that is, in contact with extra-semiotic reality." (Lotman 2019b[1989]: 91)

continues: "For every culture the existence of an extra-cultural space is a necessary condition for its existence and at the same time a first step in its self-definition. […] [A]s soon as an outside world is presented, it is already named, that is, at least superficially semioticized" (Lotman 2019b[1989]: 91–92). This is the translation of the untranslatable. Semiosphere encounters the outside inside.

Within the limits of this article, it is not necessary to dwell upon the development and complexities of Lotman's semiotic theory of culture that in my understanding turns out to be helpful in many ways in approaching religion in culture. I have only highlighted Lotman's fundamentally dialogic understanding of culture: a signifying system, a semiotic structure or mechanism – that is, a text, human being or culture – presuppose in a similar manner a beyond of their borders. The condition of possibility of their functioning, of a living semiosis, is a dialogic transaction or translation between the system and its outside. This process nurtures the dynamics of the system. In his last two books, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (2013) and *Culture and Explosion* (2009[1992]), Lotman focuses on the dynamics of culture and attempts to deepen our understanding of culture as a dynamic semiotic whole uniting the opposing gradual and explosive processes. In explosive moments the incompatible becomes adequate, the untranslatable becomes translatable (cf. Lotman 2009[1992]: 23), new possibilities take shape. Lotman (2009[1992]: 69) writes: "one becomes conscious of another reality"; "it is a moment of dislocation".

I have recently (cf. Põder 2021b: esp. 39–43) suggested that in the Lotmanian framework religions can be modelled as semiotic mechanisms humans use to determine the indeterminacy of the semiosphere and to relate to its unpredictability. Religions are cultural mechanisms variously enabling orientation in culture and transforming culture, that is, humans and their world. They emerge as something novel in moments of semiotic explosion – of unpredictable intrusion of the outside the system – but cannot, of course, be anything but a possible human or, in other words, cultural response to this dialectic.[9] The extra-semiotic becomes accessible and present only as the semiotic, reorganizing and transforming both the system and its outside.

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9   I have suggested that the workings of religion be considered as a paradigmatic and irreducible source for understanding creativity in and of culture. History of religion could be re-read as a history of creativity (cf. Põder 2021b: 39–40). There are two levels on which novelty appears: novelty on the level of history or humanity and novelty on the level of individual biography. One's personal life as well as history can be interpreted and analysed as a continuous translation process involving interruptions and explosions. It is a re-formation process of the self and selves: a constant communication between I and not-I, I and I, etc.

3. Description and self-description of 'religion'

The basic insight of Lotman's I referred to in the previous part of the article implies that the whole sphere of culture is fundamentally relational at all its levels. It presupposes, and depends on, the other or the outside of culture and semiosis, although the outside can only become a topic as semioticized. The possibility of discerning something as religion – of becoming aware of the semiotic difference it makes in culture – presupposes "its definitive delineation and self-sufficiency, and the presence of a border between it and the semiotic space outside it" (Lotman 2019b[1989]: 85). In other words: religion emerges as an awareness of difference between religion and non-religion, religion and the outside-of-religion, religion and the against-religion and so forth. Religion emerges as a genesis of the semiotic 'I' (an organizing centre) of a religious system.[10] A perception of something or a translation of some system (or text, person, community, culture) as religion and as religiously significant presupposes a perception of oneself as religion, or perceiving and communicating oneself as religion. In short: a description of religion ultimately has its roots in the self-description of religion. Acknowledging this does not, of course, exclude at all that religion and religious significance can be – and should be – meaningfully studied, analysed and described from the viewpoints of various observers.

What is interpreted as religion can of course be very different in terms of epistemic content or the so-called beliefs. Correspondingly, the same goes for its implied orientational derivatives like non-religion, a-religion, anti-religion, other religion, false religion, true religion, bad religion, good religion, and so forth. Lotman (2005[1984]: 213) writes: "What from an internal perspective appears as non-semiotic outer world, may from the viewpoint of external observer appear as a semiotic periphery of the same culture." This is also true of religion in culture. What appears as the outside from the internal perspective of a religion as a cultural meaning-making mechanism, may appear as periphery of the same culture from the viewpoint of an external observer. What counts as religion necessarily varies because of the differences in the positions between the semiotic 'I' and the semiotic observer. Religion varies and changes in different cultural contexts, in different times and places.

In European modernity, religion has often been defined via reference to a transcendent, supernatural, or perfect being. A religious person is someone

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[10] The religious sign system should not be reduced to a system of beliefs or doctrine but analysed as encompassing perception, action and reasoning, as semiotic or inferential, and as being intrinsically embodied and therefore always also material and social.

who affirms the existence of God or knows that there is God.[11] This approach is certainly a way to distinguish religion from what is not religion. It opens a space for further orientational distinctions: between religion, a-religion, non-religion or anti-religion. However, this is, of course, a culturally conditioned way of defining religion. It is an attempt to specify criteria that make it possible to identify religion and its varieties in and across cultures and societies. In retrospect, this criterion may turn out to have been problematically restrictive, and in some respect it may hinder or distort our orientation in our contemporary surroundings. New attempts are constantly being made from different outside- and inside-perspectives to organize semiotically the internally complex field perceived, lived and/or theorized as religion.[12]

The sign 'religion' itself does not belong to the inner circle of the auto-communication of religion: it does not belong, so to say, to the language of the heart of a religion. To give an example, in the case of Christianity you very likely will not encounter this sign in the context of public worships or private prayers. You do not find it in the Scriptures considered holy by Christians. Nevertheless, in the course of history it has moved closer to the centre of the semiotic space of Christianity and is nowadays widely used in the context of a self-description of Christianity – although there have been some who strongly oppose to that. A very prominent opponent to this in the 20th century was Karl Barth (cf. Ralston 2019).

4. Varieties of religion and its distinguishability

Religion is a distinguishable semiotic system or a working mode of culture. In this respect, religion is, for example, similar to art. The fact that religion is distinguishable in culture does not imply that there is or can be a singular universal description of religion. This is impossible because communicating about religion and communicating something as religion presuppose religion as communicated in the I-perspective. This is crucial: religion is irreducibly a mode of auto-communication of culture. It is a mode of being human (both together with others and in and with nature). Seen from a semiotic perspective, religion relates to the semiotic explosion in culture. Religion is rooted, as I propose, in an asymmetric intrusion of the outside of culture. The birth of religion is an unpredictable

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[11]   According to this view, religion appears as a system of sacred knowledge with a super-natural epistemic source.

[12]   Religion exists only in constant communication or translation, as a tool in navigating in the world by making distinctions. What is considered to be religion changes in history and society, as well as individually.

and non-repeatable event. It is not a necessity, but a cultural possibility. What a religion means cannot be reduced to beliefs about transcendent being(s) beyond our culture or outside our human system. Even if a religion semioticizes (a) transcendent being(s), it does so only in simultaneously reorganizing the cultural 'I' and the world. It generates a new meaning to the 'I' and its world, by relating them to the outside.

The statement that religion as a cultural system is related to the outside may sound trivial. Every cultural system, every unit of meaning, presupposes the outside. Yet what certainly is not trivial is the imagination triggered by religion (cf. Põder 2022; Dahl, Henriksen, Mjaaland 2021). Religion creates various orders of significance for finding one's way in the world – in the semiosphere radically determined by its indeterminacy. The nontriviality of religion is the reason why we nowadays are likely to agree that religion belongs to the distinguishable workings of culture. This is the case even in countries like Estonia, where many or most people today understand themselves as being in the outside position, and consider themselves to be sympathetic, neutral, or even hostile observers.[13]

The ways in which religions imagine the human being and the world in relation to the outside vary. Even within one religion, e.g. Christianity, the varieties are truly very significant. Christianity is a dynamic system both synchronically and diachronically. The semiotic 'I' of Christianity is not monocentric, but polycentric – and it has been so right from the beginning. The four gospels in the New Testament exemplify this well: the access to the one gospel of Jesus Christ is mediated in different ways, according to Matthew, Luke, Mark, and John, all of which are in fact considered as canonical or legitimate.

The controversy about the sign and significance of religion will never end. Because religion is linked to auto-communication in pluriform ways, every religion reveals something unique about the outside, about the significance of insignificance. Different readings of religion from external perspectives can serve different important functions. The situation is even more complex, as internal perspectives are in fact intrinsically related to external ones and the other way round. There are borders between different viewpoints, but these are never hermetic or absolute.

From an internal perspective I will again give the example of Christian religion. One's self and one's world are interpreted via communication with God, based on God's communication with humans and the world. God is not transcendent

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[13] As highlighted above, the boundaries depend on positions but are never hermetic and, as Lotman (2005[1984]: 213) puts it, "the crossing point of the boundary of a given culture depends upon the position of the observer".

in the sense of a superbeing beyond space and history, but present and active in history as every present stands in the presence of God. The relation to God is a semiotic relation expressed metaphorically as a conversation between God and the human. Even more, Godself is semioticized as a conversation between Father, Son and Spirit (cf. Schwöbel 2003: 62–65). This semiotic, sign-mediated relationship is the source of significance and orientation in life as well as of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. It is one example of how to explicate and think further on the perspective of the auto-communication of Christian religion. Every religion is a sign of orientation and transformation (cf. Henriksen 2017: 18–49, 2019: 42–58, 2020: 1–31, 175–196; Dalferth 2003: esp. 463–470; Stegmaier 2019: 183–184, 198–204), that is, it constitutes an orientational schema for living as human (cf. Dalferth 2016: esp. 179–180, 2021: 2–22).

In situations where we are living together as people – inclusive of the religious and non-religious alike – we cannot but recognize that religion can mean a gift not only in the traditional sense of the English language, but also in German. '*Gift*' (a neutral noun) is the German word for poison. Religion can really turn out to be a poison; and this can happen with every religion. Therefore, we can and should ask: what kind of a gift, what kind of an orientation and transformation does a religion promise? And how and why has this promise become distorted in some cases? It is important to ask how the differences are semioticized within a religion, between religions, between religion and non-religion, religion and a-religion, religion and anti-religion etc. The art of making distinctions, that is, the critique of religion, is a practical and urgent necessity in today's globalized world.

In light of the above, it is important to recognize that only such critique of religion can succeed and contribute to conviviality – to the art of living together – that takes seriously religions as cultural auto-communicative systems based on semiotic explosions. Therefore, a constructive critique of religion must attempt to identify and integrate the resources of a particular religion in its practice of critique. It will more than likely prove counter-productive if critique is exercised exclusively from various external perspectives. This insight means nothing else than that theology, that is, a reasoning rooted in the I-perspective of a particular religion, has a role to play in public discussion of religions in so-called secular[14] democratic societies. Theologies are primary vehicles of translation between the religious 'I' and 'non-I'.

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14   This is yet another orientational derivative of religion.

5. Conclusion

I conclude by formulating the above in more general terms. In my opinion, Lotman's cultural theory is realistic and helpful in highlighting the importance of boundaries between the internal and the external as a structural condition of meaning-making and -perceiving, and thereby – at first implicitly and later explicitly – turning the focus of attention on the semiosphere as the common, and ultimately singular, space of significance and interaction for the religious and non-religious alike. The semiosphere implies its outside. For a Peircean mind, this might sound close to a neglected abductive argument for the reality of God and as a step towards a semiotic metaphysics (Peirce 1998[1908]). In my view, Lotman's theory of culture intends to be not a metaphysical object-language, but a semiotic metalanguage depending on and attempting to do justice to the unpredictable workings of culture. Via this route, via taking seriously religion in its lived difference, good reasons might appear for cultural semiotics to revisit the sign 'God' and to pay careful and critical attention to its occurrences and uses.

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Überlegungen zur Religion und zum Status des ‚Äußeren‘ im lotmanischen Verständnis von Kultur

Der Artikel geht der Frage nach, ob die Art und Weise, wie Lotman die Kategorien der semiotischen Explosion und der Unvorhersehbarkeit verwendet, es ermöglicht und notwendig macht, nicht nur verschiedenen Beschreibungen, sondern auch verschiedenen Selbstbeschreibungen (Autokommunikationen) von Religion in der Kultur Raum zu geben. Mit anderen Worten: ob sein Konzept der Semiosphäre hilft, den synchronen und diachronen Widersprüchen und Kontroversen in der Religion – sowohl innerhalb als auch zwischen dem, was gemeinhin als Religion anerkannt wird – einen Sinn zu geben. Der Fokus liegt insbesondere auf der Frage, ob Lotmans semiotische Kulturtheorie das Potential hat, gegenseitige Anerkennung und unterstützenden Respekt, d.h. solidarische Toleranz, zwischen unterschiedlichen religiösen und nicht-religiösen Formen des Menschseins zu fördern. Es wird behauptet, dass dies tatsächlich der Fall ist, da Lotman die menschliche Situation so modelliert, dass das ‚außerhalb des Systems‘ nicht nur als eine Fortsetzung der Wirklichkeit verstanden wird, sondern einen Raum für ein radikales Eindringen von Möglichkeiten vorsieht und einschließt. Für das wahrhaft ‚Unvorhersehbare‘, auf der Ebene der Kultur, der Menschheit, wie auch des Individuums. Lotmans Theorie der Kultur könnte daher in Richtung einer Übersetzungseinrichtung zwischen verschiedenen Kulturen (der Religion) weiterentwickelt werden und damit neue Perspektiven für den Umgang mit der herausfordernden semiotischen Situation eröffnen, in der wir uns heute alle befinden.

Arutlus religiooni ja ,välise' staatuse üle lotmanlikus kultuurikäsituses

Artiklis uuritakse küsimust, kas viis, kuidas Lotman kasutab semiootilise plahvatuse ja ettearvamatuse kategooriaid, võimaldab ja tingib vajaduse anda ruumi mitte ainult religiooni erinevatele kirjeldustele, vaid ka religiooni erinevatele enesekirjeldustele (autokommunikatsioonile) kultuuris. Teisisõnu: kas semiosfääri mõiste aitab mõtestada religiooni sünkroonilisi ja diakroonilisi vastuolusid ja vaidlusi nii religiooni sees kui ka tavaliselt religiooniks tunnistatavate nähtuste vahel. Eelkõige keskendutakse küsimusele, kas Lotmani semiootilisel kultuuriteoorial on potentsiaali edendada vastastikust tunnustamist ja toetavat austust, s.t solidaarset tolerantsust, erinevate religioossete ja mittereligioossete inimeseks olemise viiside vahel. Väidetakse, et see tõepoolest on nii, sest Lotman modelleerib inimlikku olukorda viisil, kus ,süsteemiväline' ei ole mõistetav üksnes tegelikkuse jätkuna, vaid näeb ette ja hõlmab ruumi võimalikkuse radikaalseks sissetungiks – tõeliselt ,ettearvamatu' jaoks, nii kultuuri, inimkonna kui ka üksikisiku tasandil. Seetõttu võiks Lotmani kultuuriteooriat arendada edasi erinevate (religiooni) kultuuride vahelise tõlkimisvahendi suunas, mis avab uusi perspektiive käsitlemaks keerulist semiootilist olukorda, milles me kõik tänapäeval elame.