

Lotmanian explosion: From peripheral space to dislocated time

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Abstract. The problem of the “shift” in Lotmanian thought in his last period (the so-called Lotmanian explosion) still remains a subject of controversy for those who are interested in the scholarly heritage of Lotman. Besides explanations pointing out the “circumstantial” factors (for example, the historical context or influence from other thinkers) which brought about changes in Lotman’s views, it is important to identify a dimension of substantial “internal” changes which took place in the theoretical system itself. Regarding the essential changes relating to the concept of explosion as a movement from a ‘spatial’, more specifically ‘*centre-periphery*’ model to a ‘temporal’, namely ‘*dislocated time*’ model, the present article will focus on revealing the theoretical implication of this movement. The concept of explosion as an exceptional moment of ‘*time out of joint*’ was an active alternative to a theoretical breakthrough which was introduced in the process of overcoming the limitations of a previous ‘spatial’ model.

Keywords: Lotman, centre-periphery model, metadescription, dialogue, time out of joint, explosion

1. Lotmanian explosion: Continuity and discontinuity

The last stage of every thinker’s life is interesting in itself in that it enables one to ascertain the final point the thinker has reached and at the same time provides an opportunity to guess to what extent he would have been able to develop further, had he lived longer. In 1989, during his research stay in Germany, Lotman unexpectedly had a stroke. His wife, Zara Mints, who nursed him devotedly during the long and painful convalescence, suddenly died a year later. When the single-volume work *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* was published in the United

States in 1990, it was received as the final settlement of Lotman's lengthy exploration. In a situation when he was suffering from a period of brain damage (which was accompanied by memory loss) following a cerebral hemorrhage, it was natural to expect that this book would be Lotman's final work.

Contrary to everyone's expectations, however, Lotman produced yet another single-volume work in 1992, a year before his death. Unable to use his hands due to paralysis, he dictated nearly the whole of his last book. Bearing the unusual title *Culture and Explosion*, this work was shocking because it was new in content as well as regards its narrative style. Although Lotman seemed to be starting a new story in this book, the direction of that newness was not easy to grasp. Having launched the unusual concept of explosion, was the final Lotman indeed a "new" Lotman?

The problem of the so-called *Lotmanian explosion* or the question regarding the "shift" that occurred in Lotman's thought in *Culture and Explosion* seems to sidestep agreed-on answers. Some researchers find continuity with Lotman's previous works in *Culture and Explosion*, whereas others see an "image of rupture."¹ The question of what has been maintained and what has been changed, then, is a question about continuity and discontinuity in Lotman's thoughts.

The position that acknowledges the shift in Lotman's thought can broadly be divided into two. The first position points out the particularity of the historical circumstances themselves in which Lotman found himself at the end of his life. According to this position, his work that is related to the concept of explosion is his own theoretical response to the drastic social change (in other words, an "explosive moment") that Soviet Russia underwent from the latter half of the 1980s to the early 1990s. "Explosion", the key concept throughout the book, designates a state of revolutionary rupture leading the system to unpredictable change. In this concept, it is impossible not to feel the reality itself which stands behind the concept, the vivid and dramatic cataclysm that Soviet Russia was experiencing at the time: "Keenly feeling that he was living an 'explosive moment' in Russian history and world culture, he hurried to respond to it during his allotted time of life" (Ivanov 1996: vii).

The other position, however, cites influence from other thinkers, particularly the direct influence of the physicist Ilya Prigogine as an occasion for the shift. According to Prigogine's dissipative structure theory, all structures in this world are

¹ For example, Amy Mandelker sees in Lotman's final work an "inverted" viewpoint of the typology of culture, finding in Lotman's turn toward images of rupture a growing distrust of conventional representation through signs, even a distrust of language itself: "She makes a strong case for Lotman's demonization of the contract-ridden West, doomed to reproduce itself and its prejudices, in favor of the more sacrificial Eastern Orthodox model. In her view his later moves oblige us to reconfigure the Russia-versus-the-West paradigm that the younger Lotman had imposed [...]" (Emerson 2006: 102–103).

divided into equilibrium and dissipative structures. While equilibrium is a reversible structure, as static and stable as a machine, dissipative structures are irreversible structures that change amidst instability. Unlike reversible processes, which proceed smoothly according to the law of causality, in irreversible processes, which follow uneven development processes, a point is bound to appear “whose subsequent movement can proceed in two (or more) directions with the same possibility so that which direction it will follow is impossible to predict” (Lotman 2000d: 644). Such a point is called a “bifurcation point”. In other words, according to this position, the concept of explosion corresponds to Prigogine’s concept of the bifurcation point, Lotman’s later thoughts on the historical process are claimed to have been shaped under Prigogine’s decisive influence.

Each of the two positions presented is valid in its own way. However, what is important in addition to pointing out the “external” factors that caused the shift is to identify the occasion for an essential change from *within* the theoretical system. If Lotman’s theoretical transformation was not a leap that he would suddenly make nor a one-sided outcome of a specific external influence, then when and how was the occasion for that shift prepared and realized? Seeing the movement from the spatial model to the temporal model as the crucial internal change related to the key concept of explosion, in his article I will endeavor to examine the theoretical implications of such a movement. What are the inducements within the system that led Lotman’s thoughts invariably to move from the spatial model to the temporal model? What kinds of attempts did that movement accompany and what kinds of results did it produce?

To answer these questions, I will first examine the characteristics and limitations of Lotman’s spatial model, particularly his centre-periphery model, and the ways in which temporality was introduced into the process of overcoming such limitations. What is of importance here is not the movement from space to time itself but an understanding of the theoretical implications of this change, in other words, answering the question: from what kind of spatiality to what kind of temporality? In the process of elucidating the key problem in regard to the generation of new meaning, Lotman moved from the model of *peripheral spatiality* to the model of *dislocated temporality*. I will endeavor to prove that this change was an attempt at simultaneous extension and overcoming, or that Lotman’s final concept of explosion was the theoretical breakthrough that he attempted in his own way.

2. The centre-periphery model

The pronounced orientation toward spatial categories throughout Lotman's thought is well known. Concern with the spatial model or, more precisely, the language of spatial relations [*язык пространственных отношений*], is among the key problematics of Lotman (and, broadly, the Tartu-Moscow School).

The spatial orientation in Lotman's semiotic theory constitutes not only a dominant but also a comprehensive as well as consistent tendency, a crucial feature confirmed throughout his theoretical evolution in its entirety. From the early 'spatial modelling' to the later 'semiosphere', the majority of Lotman's crucial concepts have been constructed under the category of space.² In a personal letter to L. L. Fialkova, Lotman, while comparing his position vis-à-vis space to Bakhtin's, wrote as follows: "There exist two completely different understandings of space in contemporary semiotics. [...] Drawing on an idea from physics (that is, theory of relativity), Bakhtin regards space and time as phenomena of the singular series (this view dates back to Kant). We begin from a mathematical (topological) concept of space. Here the set of objects (or points) which has the relationship of continuity among them is called space. [...] From this perspective, space becomes the universal language of modeling. While we articulate temporal categories through the language of space in ordinary talk, it is impossible to express spatial concepts through temporal language" (Lotman 1997: 719–720).³

Although this topic originally emerged in terms of a "meta-language of a typological description of culture" (1968), it led to a problematic of the "dynamic model of semiotic system" (1974).

The theoretical task that Lotman faced in the 1970s following his conviction of the "polyglotism" of culture, or the inevitability of the coexistence and interaction of at least two or more different languages, was to innovate the static model of the so-called structural description. The task of devising of a new model that could reflect the reality and entirety of the symbolic system emerged as the problem of the dynamic model. The heart of the problem was the meta-language of the system, or, in his words, the fact that the process of "self-description [*самоописание*]" was

² For a detailed analysis of changes in spatial concepts and the modes of their development in the process of theoretical evolution, see Kim 2004: 848–857.

³ As regards a comparison of Bakhtin and Lotman through temporal and spatial categories, see Kim 2001: 87–88. Despite Bakhtin's emphasis on the inseparability of temporal and spatial dimensions, in principle, the basic structural element in Bakhtin's concept of "chronotope" is in fact Time. Space is manifested as a kind of derivative and dependent element of the genre continuum. According to Bakhtin, "chronotope in literature has an essential generic meaning. Certainly, what determines genre and generic diversity is chronotope, and the leading principle [*ведущее начало*] of chronotope in literature is Time" (Bakhtin 1975: 235).

invariably accompanied by exclusion: “In the course of further ordering, a certain part of the material is shifted into an extrasystematic position and ceases to exist when viewed through the prism of such self-description” (Lotman 2000c: 547). If so, then where do those things deemed unnecessary from the viewpoint of self-description and cast away go? According to Lotman, the stones cast away by the static model of structuralism are stocked around the system as “structural reserve”. In other words, they become “cornerstones” for the next stage of the system: “A stone that the builders of a formed and stabilized system reject for being, from their point of view, superfluous and unnecessary, turns out to be the cornerstone [краеугольным] of the subsequent system” (Lotman 2000c: 546).

What is noteworthy is that, in the process of thinking about the problem of the dynamics of the system, the spatial model becomes mobilized. The spatial metaphor for the switching of the centre and the periphery becomes a key means for modelling the renewal of the system. However, here is one theoretical precedent that must be recalled. It is none other than the project of Russian Formalism, which sought to introduce the centre-periphery model into literary evolution.

As is well known, the specification of the literary language strategy, which characterizes early formalist literary theory, underwent a decisive transformation during the mid-1920s. Commonly understood as a shift from the “Shklovskian” way to the “Tynyanovian” way, such a transformation can be summarized as the shift of theoretical interest from the concept of “literariness” as an unchanging (transhistorical) feature to the dynamic interaction between the “literary” system and “non-literary” (extra-literary) systems. According to Tynyanov (1977: 258), “in periods when a specific genre declines, it changes its position from the centre to the periphery. And, in its place, from the trivia of literature, from the backyard of literature, and from the lower part, new phenomena rush into the centre (this is nothing else but what Shklovsky termed the “phenomenon of the canonization of minor genres”).”

Faced with a period in which the so-called “literary fact” was to undergo a serious transformation (i. e., a situation where a “firm definition of literature was becoming increasingly difficult” and one could not help but realize that “phenomenon that was not a literary fact yesterday is now a literary fact” (Tynyanov 1977: 257), one could not help but acknowledge the power and influence of the periphery on literary evolution. Moreover, one had to accept the fact that, along with Dostoyevskij, vulgar popular novels, along with Chekhov, cheap magazine styles, and, along with Blok, gypsy romance themes were infiltrating the centre of literature (Eihenbaum 1987: 404), and the fact that such infiltration by the periphery was forming new literature and genres. In this attempt to model the literary evolution as a process not of “gradual succession” but of a “sudden switch”, the periphery is summoned to switch the centre. Peripheral genres and forms amount to new energy

thrown into restoring the already outdated centre (the functions of the centre, to be precise); in other words, they amount to fresh blood that will revive an aged body.

Lotman's thoughts on the dynamic model of the symbol system inherit this important insight of formalism: the thought that the occasion on which the excluded peripheries come to demand their share is invariably interlocked with a situation that demands change in the self-sufficient system. In other words, all systems invariably face the problem of the periphery before the necessity of explaining their changes (dynamics).

If so, what is the area in which this model, that stipulates the renewal of the system through the switching of the centre and the periphery, can be verified most clearly? Needless to say, it is the analysis of the development process of Russian cultural history, or Lotman's typology of culture. What, then, is the typology of culture? It is a field that deals with the self-description of culture or, more precisely, the typology of that technique. It adopts the method of tracing the diachronic changes of a particular culture while paying attention to the ways in which that culture describes itself. Here, the development of cultural history refers to the process through which the dominant code and meta-language that arose in one period are switched to another code and meta-language in a different period.

What is interesting, however, is that the code and meta-language of the following period that arise anew are derived, from the viewpoint of the preceding period, from peripheral areas that were seen as not organized, or not important, and therefore excluded. In other words, the culture of the following period is not a previously nonexistent, new culture but "non-culture" (or "anti-culture") excluded from the viewpoint of the preceding period. If so, the dynamic development process of cultural history turns out to be none other than the periodic switching of culture and non-(or anti-)culture. Needless to say, such an approach amounts to the "expansion of Tynyanov's methodology, which is the evolution of the literary system through the switching of the dominant, throughout the cultural system" (Gasparov 1985: 21).

Lotman's model of cultural history can be considered the most typical case of applying the paradigm of centre-periphery switch to analysis of concrete historical texts. Paradoxically, it is also at that very point, however, that a fatal problem of this paradigm is found. As is well known, Lotman presents the binary model as the deep structure running through the entire history of Russian culture. However, what is the actual impression left, by this model, which is characterized by radical severance and switch? It is a certain kind of repetition that is firmly maintained (despite all superficial changes). In fact, all of Lotman's analyses are devoted to proving only a single proposition: it is the fact that Russian cultural history, "represented by radical 'severance', in fact has been constructed according to an 'inverted' structural model of the old culture, or that a subjective orientation toward the 'new' paradoxically

has played the role of a generator of the 'old'." In other words, according to Lotman's analysis, the development process of Russian cultural history is but the transformed infinite repetition of the initial archetypal model (of the dichotomy of orthodox vs. heresy).⁵

This point, at which doubts are raised concerning whether the process of the dynamic switching of the centre and the periphery is not in fact but a repetition (of the deep structure), presents a serious problem in relation to the theoretical actuality of the centre-periphery model. What is problematic above all is the danger of repetition inherent in the centre-periphery model. Although it is true that through this model the potential of the periphery to switch places with the centre is underscored, seen from a different angle this can also be seen as a mere repetition, or more seriously, the overthrow of the existing hierarchy through the shifting of the hegemony. For example, what if that switching process is a mechanism of "reterritorialization" (as Deleuze put it) that reabsorbs the potential of "deterritorialization" into the system again?

In the end, the key lies in whether the switch of the centre and the periphery can proceed to true creation that transcends a simple switching of places. For example,

⁴ For example, when Medieval Russian culture is examined, by reviving the pagan culture of the past in the form of a kind of anti-culture, Medieval Russian culture, following its acceptance of Christianity, ended up reviving the old. Likewise, by modelling the Europe-oriented culture of the Enlightenment as Russia's second baptism, the new culture of reforms by Peter the Great ended up reviving the very tradition that it sought to reject. "More detailed observations confirm the fact that modern culture since Peter the Great has been far more 'traditional' than perceived by the public (even though this new culture subjectively experienced itself as 'Western', the objective facts differed)" (Lotman 2002: 107).

⁵ What is at stake here is the case in which Lotman's binary model, specified as the centre-periphery model, is applied to Russian cultural history, that is, the problem of binary structure of Russian culture itself. There exists a problematic related to the binary model as a theoretical model of semiotics itself. Namely, "one of the most controversial issues relates to the primacy of binary or triadic sign relations" (Andrews 2003: 21). According to Andrews (2003: 22–23), Jakobson, who (especially in his later works) undoubtedly worked under the influence of Peirce as the originator of the triadic model "has had profound impact on the theoretical works of Lotman, especially on Lotman's theoretical works concerning human language, communication acts, definition of the different factors and functions of speech acts, and the use of mathematics in conceptualizing semiotic space and texts". Nonetheless, "Lotman's usage tends to be more binarized than Jakobson's. This is clearest in those instances when the index (of the icon/index/symbol triad) is omitted from Lotman's analyses and applications, as they often are" (Andrews 2003: 24). As Andrews herself implies, however, the problematic of binary or triadic model is related to the issue of change in Lotman's theoretical stance, and further, his view on the essential characteristics of Russian culture, let alone the problem of influence by Peirce and Jakobson. Lotman's "explosion" is ineluctably related to the change of this viewpoint.

can such a switch create something that, from the internal viewpoint of the existing system, is utterly unpredictable (and therefore seen as something impossible), entirely new? Later, Lotman (1992a: 472) was to describe such a realization that the centre-periphery model is inadequate for explaining the process of the so-called irreversible creation in the following words:

Despite its clear productivity, when this model [i. e., centre-periphery model] is compared with actual historical-literary evolutionary processes, a series of questions arise. Why do the centre and the periphery of the system not only switch places but also create a series of completely new artistic forms amidst such processes of exchange?

According to Lotman (1992: 472), this is related to more general questions:

The evolution of literary facts combines in a complex manner repetitive (i. e., reversible) processes and irreversible, namely, historical processes that take on temporal nature, within itself. In superficial research, the center-periphery model only explains cyclical processes, standing in opposition to the existence of irreversible things.

Here, “cyclical processes” refer to what is repetitive and reversible and therefore easily transformable into topological concepts. On the contrary, “irreversible processes”, which take on a clearly temporal nature, invariably presuppose emergent occasions that cannot be explained within the centre-periphery switch model. To explain processes of creative transformation and generation that cannot be reduced to algorithms of repetition, a different, new model is necessary. In other words, a new viewpoint that can conceptualize the fundamental difference, not repetition, is demanded.

Such a realization that the centre-periphery model was inadequate for explaining the process of the so-called “irreversible process of creation” served as an important occasion for Lotman’s thought to move toward a new breakthrough. This breakthrough occurred largely in two directions. If the first consisted of a new understanding of the mechanism of the “peripheral boundary”, the second was the pursuit of a category of new possibility that went beyond the framework of the centre-periphery model itself, or the pursuit of “dislocated temporality”.

3. Peripheral boundary: The mechanism of the “bilingual belt”

The first method for thinking about the dynamics of the centre-periphery model as an occasion for creation that transcended repetition was to reestablish anew the concept of the “boundary” dividing the inside and the outside of the system. As is well known, Lotman’s typological model of culture is based on the “oppositional separation” of the inside and the outside of cultural spaces. All cultures are structured based on a fundamental principle of opposition, of inclusion and exclusion. If the feature regarding the boundary of inside and outside is relative as appearing differently according to the type of each culture – for instance, it can be the antithesis of real religion and profanity, of enlightenment and ignorance, of belonging to a certain ethnic group or not belonging to it, and the like – then the opposing rule of inclusion and exclusion will be a universal basic principle of culture in general: “Every culture begins by dividing the world into ‘its own’ internal space and ‘their’ external space. How this binary division is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture, but the actual division is one of the human cultural universals” (Lotman 1990: 131). Internal space by division is characterized as ‘ours’, ‘my own’, ‘cultured’, ‘safe’, and ‘harmoniously organized’; in contrast, ‘their’ space is featured as ‘hostile’, ‘other’, ‘dangerous’, and ‘chaotic’.

However, such a way of understanding is typical rather than new in the apparent patterns of thought. The act of separating the inside and the outside of a specific object through the boundary exhibits not only a logic of *identification*, which, by distinguishing between the self and the other as an opposition, seeks to establish the former as a completed form and a balanced structure, but also a typical form of *exclusion*, which excludes heterogeneity and alterity by projecting them onto the “outside” of the system. There, the lists of spaces outside culture excluded from the normal world of ‘us’ are serialized into diverse lists including ‘infants’, ‘other races’, ‘unconscious’, and ‘pathological world’.

What is noteworthy here is the fact that the mechanism of the boundary, which thus divides, is no different from the concept of the ‘self-description’ of the system examined above. Self-description refers to the procedure of internalization, making a system a ‘first person pronoun’: “[S]elf-description implies a first person pronoun. One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form” (Lotman 1990: 131). It is self-description of meta-language which enables a system to represent itself as a homogeneous structural unity. Every semiotic system necessarily undertakes the procedural stages of self-description in the process for the organization of its own internal space. It is precisely in this stage that the “grammar” of the system

is described and also customs and laws are codified: “Whether we have in mind language, politics or culture, the mechanism is the same: one part of the semiosphere [...] in the process of self-description creates its own grammar [...] Then, it strives to extend these norms over the whole semiosphere” (Lotman 1990: 128). The meta-language which strives to describe the ideal model of the whole system tends to construct a “mythological image” or an “ideological self-portrait” of the culture.

However, as has been examined above, such a mechanism of self-description is bound inevitably to exclude a part of the system as something that does *not* exist. In addition, a perspective that regards the development of cultural history as a process through which the “self-descriptive” model of the system is switched cannot be free from the charge of repetition, of the switching of the places of the centre (self-description of system) and the periphery (which is excluded by that). The crux of the problem lies in whether the periphery of the system can be newly determined as a dynamic site for a genuinely new creation, going beyond the role of simply being a structural reserve for the next stage.

At this point, Lotman proposes a concept of the boundary that, instead of separating the inside and the outside of the system, is a kind of “bilingual belt” that stands *between* and connects the two realms. Combining rather than separating, this boundary can never be drawn in a single, clear-cut line. That boundary is rather a complex and multidimensional space and, being the hottest spot in the semiotic process, cannot but take on the nature of a “bilingual belt”. The boundary of a semiosphere always belongs to two cultures with connected frontiers, to two adjacent semiospheres, and, in this respect, is essentially “bilingual and multilingual” (Lotman 1990: 137).

To use an analogy of mathematics, the boundary of the semiosphere is similar to the “mathematical” meaning of a boundary to which a set of points are internal as well as external. To use an analogy of biology, it is similar to a “biological filtering membrane” which transforms the outer stimulus of an organism into an appropriate biochemical form by means of the choice-and-reject mechanism (Lotman 1992d: 14). In a word, this is a bilingual mechanism which *translates* outer information by the inner language of the semiosphere or vice versa.

What is important is that such a mechanism of translation, which operates in the *in-between* areas of the system, as a matter of course cannot be a (possibility of) perfect translation through a metastructure. Rather, it is “translation of the untranslatable”, or the process of creating arduous and inaccurate translations, which cannot but presuppose remnants of untranslated surpluses. As this is the case, semiotic actions that are generated in such a bilingual belt, in principle, cannot but be “oxymoronic”. The borderland as a bilingual belt is a space of exceptional duality that simultaneously is me (mine) and others (others’), yet perhaps is neither. In the end,

what is generated there is “a search for a common language, a *koine*, and of creolized semiotic systems comes into being” (Lotman 1990: 142).⁶ In other words, “the border of the semiosphere is a zone of an increased semiotic activity where numerous mechanisms of the *metaphorical translation* operate, *pumping over* the accordingly transformed texts in both directions. It is here where new texts are actively generated” (Lotman 2000d: 647).

If so, then what is the site where such a bilingual mechanism of translation occurs most actively, the locus of its generation? It is, of course and inevitably, the periphery of the semiosphere, or peripheral borderlands. Another characteristic that, together with “delimitation” determines the semiosphere is “asymmetry”. The degree of organization is never arranged equally in the semiotic space. The strictness of organization cannot but “weaken” as one moves from the centre to the periphery, and the sphere of renewal and creation, where a “new” language comes into being, cannot but be this periphery. The periphery is not simply a future surplus that will replace the centre. The periphery is “the place where discourses clash, where improvisation and innovation take place, where alien discourses trickling in from contiguous semiospheres exert an impact” (Schönle 2006:192). What characterizes the periphery is multiplicity, heterogeneity, disorder, disjuncture, and chance. In the system’s periphery where the language of the centre subsides, particular discourses supplant the master plot assigned by the centre.

In order to refer to this complex pulsating semiotic process, operating in the periphery of the system, Lotman introduced a special term, a ‘dialogue’. What is requisite for grasping the essential feature of dialogue is to understand the deep meaning of Lotman’s statement: “dialogue precedes and gives rise to language [...] the ensemble of semiotic formations precedes (not heuristically but functionally) the singular isolated language and becomes a condition for the existence of the latter. Without the semiosphere, language not only does not function, it does not exist” (Lotman 1992d: 19–20).

In actuality, this is related to his unique theoretical stance viewing culture as a type of “semiotic personality [*семиотическая личность*]”: the inseparable entirety of the internal and external processes, that is, the ontological inevitability of being

⁶ As an example of such luminal existence, Lotman cites the nomadic tribe who settled on the borderlands of the Russian territory in Kievan Russia (Lotman 1990:137). These people settled along the Russian border and became farmers, later to form alliances with Russian lords or to participate in military actions against other fellow nomadic peoples. The name for them at the time was the oxymoronic “our pogany” (pogany means ‘pagan’ as well as ‘foreign’, ‘incorrect’, ‘unclean’). These ambivalent “in-between” people are unclean and incorrect foreigners but at the same time they are ‘ours’. This oxymoron (our pogany) epitomizes the situation of the boundary-connector.

immersed in some semiotic continuum, is the distinct characteristic of both culture and a personality. For both there is an absolute need to make contact and interact with the external world, with the Other. This view is well displayed in the following quote, illustrating his principal approach to the problem of cultural exchange.

The main concern for academics up to now has been the conditions that endow the *possibility* for a text to have influence over another. What catches our attention is something different: why and through what cultural conditions does an unfamiliar/alien/strange/foreign text become *indispensable*. This question can be restated in the following way. When and under what conditions does a foreign text become something that is indispensable to the creative development of one's own? When and under what conditions is this contact with this other unavoidable to the creative development of self/consciousness? (Lotman 2000b: 605; original emphasis).

For example, following this stance, we are triggered to ask the question “Why cannot the individual live without communicating with the Other?”, instead of asking “How does each individual go about communicating with the Other?” Such a principal discrepancy in ways of approaching the problem of communication is as wide as that between Jürgen Habermas’ queries into the formal conditions of the possibility of communication (“communicative rationality”) and Mikhail Bakhtin’s emphasis on the ontological inevitability of dialogue (“to exist is to engage in dialogue”). The premise for this type of approach is that “the inner development of culture is impossible without an incessant inflow of an external/outer-text”. Such “externality” that involves a foreign/alien/strange text introduced from the tradition of a different nation or other culture is essential to culture. “As in the case of the act of creative consciousness, development of culture is also always an act of exchange and communication; it presupposes therefore the Other as the partner of performing the act” (Lotman 2000b: 610).⁷

But, alongside with this ontological inevitability, there is one more thing we should have in mind. For Lotman, the concept of dialogue is not limited to a place where all the possible articulations of identities take place; it is simultaneously the place where they are all constantly put into question. Likewise, as in the case of the

⁷ Of course, it does not necessarily mean that Lotman completely assimilated Bakhtin’s position. The undeniable influence of Bakhtin on Lotman’s later thought notwithstanding, any attempt at comparing Lotman and Bakhtin must be made with utmost care. Without presupposing potential distinctions between the two, all attempts at binding their theoretical underpinnings together, can hardly be more than hypothetical presuppositions. To speak in Bakhtin’s words, ‘the legacy of Bakhtin’ for Lotman is never an ‘arbitration tribunal’ in which ‘perfect truth’ is presupposed. Rather, it was a ‘witness’ as *Other*, one whom I had to be reflected against and pass, in order to recognize myself, that is, to ‘proceed to *I for myself*. As to a variety of issues regarding comparison between Lotman and Bakhtin, see Egorov 1999: 243–258 and Kim 2003: 119–130.

periphery above, dialogic periphery, in which the encounter with the other occurs, is the place where the proper always turns out to be already improper and vice versa, where ‘our language’ becomes ‘someone else’s language’, and ‘someone else’s language’ our own. What is shared in dialogue is not a code or a language⁸, but a space of unstructured potentialities, and most importantly, this means that what we share in dialogue is what makes each of us (potentially) different from what we are, something in the way of ‘improper’, but at the same time ‘common’ (Monticelli 2012: 51).

Of course, the thought on the creative mechanism of the peripheral borderlands hitherto examined is worth being seen as an important advance transcending the spatial model of the past, which was limited to the opposition between and replacement of the centre and the periphery. However, this thought is actually an attempt, while still remaining in the framework of the spatial model, to remodel it into a more flexible one open to creativity. Consequently, the essential questions raised above in relation to the temporal nature of the historical process continue to be valid. “Why do the centre and the periphery of the system not simply switch places but, in such a process of exchange, create a series of completely new artistic forms?” This question, which links the problem of repetition due to the exchange of the systems to the task of irreversible creation, was the most important problematic to crown the last stage of Lotman’s late thought. Together with this very question, Lotman came to move toward a more fundamental change of direction, or from the concept of “dialogue” to that of “explosion”.

4. Time of explosion: Dislocated temporality

What must be pointed out first of all in relation to Lotman’s concept of explosion is that this, in principle, is a concept related not to the category of *space* but to that of *time*. If the concept of the ‘(bilingual) boundary’ examined above refers to a space of ‘indeterminacy’ that exists *between* the centre and the periphery, explosion signifies an interval of a kind of ‘unpredictability’ that spreads out *between* the past and the future. Also, just as the concept of the boundary had to secure an occasion for generation that transcended simple repetition (through replacement) by suspending, however momentarily, the action force of the centralizing power, the time of explosion

⁸ It must be added that Lotman in his later years did not recognize ‘language’ and ‘code’ as identical. According to him, “the substitution of the term ‘language’ by the term ‘code’ is not as harmless as it seems. The term ‘code’ carries with it the idea of an artificial, newly created structure, introduced by instantaneous agreement. A code does not imply history, that is, psychologically it orients us towards artificial language, which is also, in general, assumed to be an ideal model of language [...] Language – is a code plus its history. Such an understanding of communication includes within itself some fundamental principles” (Lotman 2009: 4).

must secure the possibility of ‘dislocation,’ which deviates, however momentarily, from the chain of historical causality linked from the past to the future.

As Lotman approached the latter half of his life, he turned his attention increasingly to history, and not to culture. Nearly all of the last seminars that he organized at the University of Tartu were devoted to considerations of the relationship between history and semiotics. The results were to be published partially in Part 3 of *Universe of the Mind* and thoroughly in *Culture and Explosion*.

What, then, were the results of such changes in the object of interest? According to Sergei Zenkin, the result of this change can be summarized with the expression of the “ontologicalization of epistemology”. In other words, if the Lotman of the past focused on semiotic explanations of the objective principles and processes of culture, his epistemological concepts (representatively, the dichotomy of discreteness vs. continuity) now came to “serve research on actual history, which can never be converged to culture” (Zenkin 2009: 60).⁹ In short, those concepts were now being used as means to elucidate currently occurring political processes, or the historical reality of the contemporary era.

Of course, such a view, which explains the problem of shift in Lotman’s later thought through the circumstantial background (the ontologicalization of theoretical concepts), can be said to have its own validity. In that it not only is one way of explaining changes in Lotman’s later thought, but also reveals an aspect of Lotman as an intellectual speaking before historical reality, and is even productive.¹⁰ However, what such a circumstantial explanation decisively misses is the dimension of the essential changes that occurred *within* the theoretical system. It leads one to overlook the fact that such shifts were the logical results that originated within the theoretical system and developed through their own processes.

For example, something that must be mentioned in relation to this is the concept of “randomness [*случайности*].” The problem of randomness, or the problem regarding the role of random factors that intervene in the historical process, is one of the key themes that Lotman devoted himself to in his last years. In relation to this theme in particular, Prigogine’s concept of the “bifurcation point” mentioned above provided Lotman with productive insight. As is well known, Prigogine argued

⁹ Zenkin states that this is well demonstrated by the fact that, in the conceptual structure in *Culture and Explosion*, culture only occupies a considerably limited position in comparison with explosion, its counterpart. On the other hand, as for an opinion critical of such ontologicalization of theory, see Amelin, Pil’schikov 1998, and Piatigorsky 1994.

¹⁰ In fact, in his last years, Lotman transcended the limitations of academic researchers and actively engaged in action. For example, in the years before his death he became a topic of conversation by giving television lectures on 18th-century Russian culture. The fact that he sought to affect the development process of contemporary reality in official ways is confirmed in numerous cases.

that in a situation of the bifurcation point, where the direction of the development of the future cannot be predicted, the role of a secondary factor that can affect the future process, or randomness, increases considerably. On the other hand, according to Lotman (2000a: 22–23), in the moment of explosion, “the dominant element, which [...] determines future movement, can come from any element of the system or may even be an element of another system, *randomly* pulled by the explosion into the web of possibilities of future movement”. In terms of the maximization of non-predictability through the intervention of randomness, the concepts of the bifurcation point and explosion correspond to each other precisely.

However, even more important than such an apparent correspondence between the two concepts is the meaningful distance between them. The essential difference that lies between the movement of the physical world and the historical process of humanity is that, in the case of the latter, conscious acts by humans, or free choices of thinking beings, intervene. In other words, “in the case of objects possessing intellectual abilities, acts at the bifurcation point take on the nature not of simple randomness but of conscious choice” (Lotman 2000d: 645). Faced with a situation of unpredictability, one comes to turn ‘randomness’ into ‘freedom’ by freely choosing one’s own acts. Precisely because of this, individuals’ acts based on free choice have as much ethical weight as they are unpredictable. According to Lotman, “This is the historical process, and brings in the participants’ personal *responsibility* and moments of *ethical acts*. On the other hand, historical beings, while approximating the world of creation, also approximate the concept of *morality*, which is inseparably related to the freedom of choice” (Lotman 1992a: 479; emphasis mine).¹¹

Such a distinct effort considerably to humanize Prigogine’s physical concept deservedly gives rise to another question: where did such thoughts on choice and freedom originate? They were derived from an extension of the exploration of an important problematic that had captivated Lotman (from well before his encounter with Prigogine), or the concept of “semiotic personality” (or “semiotic monad”). As is well known, one of the important theoretical themes that Lotman focused on from the 1980s onwards was the question “How can components of structures (or systems) be imbued with the ability for individual *behaviour* in addition to the ability *to think*?” It was in pursuit of this very problematic that Lotman in his last years attempted to elucidate the true meaning of the writer Pushkin’s choice, or his free choice of entrusting his life to randomness (duel).¹²

¹¹ Such statements by Lotman which stress the responsibility and ethics of acts undoubtedly reverberate with the voice of M. Bakhtin. For more details regarding this aspect, see Kim 2003: 133–135.

¹² Regarding Lotman’s discussion of Pushkin’s duel, see Lotman 1992b. On the creative (poetic) use of duel’s codes by Pushkin, see Bethea 1996.

I must stress once again that Lotman's shift in relation to the concept of explosion must be elucidated within the developmental process of his theory. This is not only to verify the continuity that underlies superficial severance (discontinuity) but also, more importantly, to ponder on the theoretical implication of that shift. If Lotman moved from culture to history, from spatiality to temporality, precisely what kind of history and what kind of temporality are they? The decisive limitation of the so-called circumstantial explanations lies in that they cannot answer this crucial question.

For example, what is the most common misunderstanding of Lotman's concept of explosion? It is to understand explosion as the occurrence of a certain kind of single revolutionary event. Rather than referring to the occurrence of sudden severance that dramatically changes the existing situation, explosion signifies the (sudden) initiation of certain conditions that make such an occurrence possible. The essence of this concept lies in the fact that, at the moment of explosion, the general flow of history as a single linear process is (temporally) stopped and that, as a result, the law of causality that oversees the flow can no longer be applied (that is, suspended). Therein lies the reason that explosion must be understood not as the occurrence of a revolutionary event but as the sudden opening of certain conditions for unpredictable events.

The essence of the concept of explosion lies, so to speak, not in the stoppage of the continuous flow of time, but in its sudden rupture, more precisely its escape from it, or in a word, dislocation. The temporality of explosion is none other than dislocated temporality. According to Lotman, "the moment [of explosion] is experienced *outside* of time, even if, in reality, it stretches across a very wide temporal space" (Lotman 2000a: 136).

What shows such "dislocated temporality" of explosion better than any other is Lotman's explanation of "inspiration" (which can be seen as the moment of a kind of explosion; inspiration is the theme of Chapter 4 of *Culture and Explosion*). According to him, inspiration can be defined as "conjunction of the incompatible under the influence of a certain creative tension" (Lotman 2000a: 27). This moment of inspiration, which corresponds to the state of maximum tension in creation, "removes all boundaries of untranslatability and unites the incompatible". In other words, it is the moment of unpredictable explosion, which "renders the incompatible adequate and the untranslatable translatable" (Lotman 2000a: 29). To explain the moment of inspiration, Lotman quotes from Alexander Blok's poem *Artist*. He explains the word "moment", used in the poem, thus:

In actual fact it refers not to a contraction of time but rather to a moment *out of time*; a leap in the passage of time from the "past" to the "future". The entire content of the poem represents a description of semantic explosion, the passage through the boundary of unpredictability. (Lotman 2009a: 29)

Then why is it so crucial to understand such extra-temporal nature of explosion? It is because none other than this model of dislocated temporality serves as the final breakthrough for overcoming the theoretical deadlock that Lotman faced early on: how to overcome the danger of repetition inherent in the topological model, or the danger of simply switching places through the subversion of the hierarchy?

Of course, this breakthrough emerged with the introduction of the temporal model, which replaced the spatial model. However, here we remember that the topological model of the past also was a model of history that represented the diachronic flow of time through the metaphor of spatial structures (switching of the centre-periphery). After all, Lotman's famous binary model of Russian culture was nothing else than the model of 'history' which realized itself in the form of periodical switching of centre (meta-culture) and periphery (non-culture). Furthermore, one of the most characteristic features of that process was sudden severance from the preceding codes.

Consequently, reading Lotman's concept of explosion as similar to the binary model that characterizes Russian cultural history (for example, the case of Amy Mandelker) could potentially be misleading as to the core point at stake here. The heart of dislocated temporality lies not in bringing the excluded periphery into the centre but in opening up moments of exceptional indeterminacy for the advent of true otherness that is utterly unpredictable (and therefore seen as impossible) from the viewpoint of the previous period. It is a concept that refers to the desire to overcome the infamous binary model that runs throughout the history of Russian culture, to an orientation toward the experience of an entirely heterogeneous temporality, different from the dominant temporality leading from the past to the future.

In a situation of explosion, the future appears as a set of still undetermined possibilities instead of being placed in the flow of a continuous process as a chain of chronologically ordered moments: "At these moments the movement of history should be pictured not as a trajectory but as a continuum that is potentially capable of resolving itself into any number of variants. These nodal points with diminished predictability are times of revolution or other dramatic historical shifts" (Lotman 1990: 233). In other words, it can be seen as a state in which it is impossible to assign an already determined meaning to things that are taking place at present and will take place in the future. Here, there is no norm, code, or principle that can determine the meaning and meaninglessness of an event in advance. In other words, it belongs to a dimension that *differs* from the continuous process that develops in time. Since it is inappropriate for the continuity of the historical process, it cannot be represented in its entirety within the temporality of continuous processes. In this very respect, the most appropriate expression for the temporality of explosion is "dislocated temporality", or temporality that has become disjointed from the general flow of time.

Only when Lotman's concept of explosion is understood in this way can it be related to diverse contemporary philosophical insights directed at new temporality. These are nothing else but contemporary discussions on the so-called "time out of joint". This problem of dislocated temporality, which is also a phrase from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is, as is well known, one of the main themes of contemporary philosophy. For example, pondering on the essence of "time-images" in (contemporary) cinema, Deleuze has seen it as thought on the destruction of continuity, or on the severed "gap (or interval)" revealed by temporality freed from the hinges.¹³ In addition, in 1994, a year after Lotman's death, Derrida started with that phrase from *Hamlet*, laying stress on dislocated temporality,¹⁴ or "messianic time", in which occurrences confirmed by all to be impossible could be made to happen. To him, preserving the spectre of K. Marx today was no different from pondering on time "a disjointed or disadjusted now, 'out of joint', a disjointed now that always risks maintaining nothing together in the assured conjunction of some context whose border would still be determinable" (Derrida 1994: 3). It was pondered on, as in Lotman's case, as an occasion for unpredictable things, or for fundamental openness to pure events that cannot be dominated by existing discourses.¹⁵

What is interesting is that, as Derrida's expression "the messiah without messianism" well shows, such a spectral circumstance can always be "reduced" to historically specific and philosophically extant forms (messianism) – in other words, the messiah appears through the current form of messianism. When this is rephrased in a Lotmanian way, the space of indeterminate semantic functions opened up by explosion is invariably bound to "close" again. Or, perhaps the "selection" made in a situation of unpredictability in itself already brings about such closures. In other words, it indicates the introduction of causality at the next stage: "The present – this is the outbreak of the not yet developed spaces of meaning. It includes within itself the potential of all possible future paths of development. It is important to emphasize that the selection of any one of these is determined by neither the laws of causality nor those of probability: at the moment of explosion these mechanisms are wholly inactive. Future choice comes about by chance. That is why it possesses a very high

¹³ "Here, *time became out of joint* and reversed its dependent relation to movement: temporality showed itself as it really was for the first time, but in the form of a coexistence of large regions to be explored" (Deleuze 1989: 105).

¹⁴ Instead of the word "dislocated" Derrida uses the more sophisticated word "disadjustment": "Now, when does Hamlet name in this way the dis-joining of time, but also of history and of the world, the disjoining of things as they are nowadays, the disadjustment of *our* time, each time ours? And how is one to translate "The time is out of joint"?" (Derrida 1994: 20).

¹⁵ As is well known, Derrida's thoughts on *time out of joint* are successors to Walter Benjamin's thoughts on *Jetztzeit* as stopped time. Regarding this, see Ware 2004. On the other hand, this problematic once again leads to Giorgio Agamben's thoughts on *Kairos* as the *time that remains*.

level of informativity. At the same time, the moment of selection is also a moment at which paths considered only potentially possible are *cut off*, or at which the laws of cause-effect once again *recover* their strength” (emphasis mine; Lotman 2000a: 22).

The moment in which the explosion is exhausted represents the *turning point* of the process. In the sphere of history this is the place of self-knowledge, as well as the originating moment of future development: the mechanism of history which must for them explain what has occurred is (re)started. And this process “seems to take us back to the original point of explosion, which already exists in our consciousness. What has occurred takes on a new form of existence, being reflected in the ideas of the observer. Here radical transformation of event occurs: that which occurred, as we have seen, by chance now appears to be the only possibility. The element of unpredictability is substituted in the mind of the observer by an element of regularity” (Lotman 2000a: 22).

Thus opened at the moment of explosion, the space of unpredictability was invariably bound to close again and to be represented in the name of regularity. If so, then what, in the end, did Lotman and Derrida wish to say through the concept of “dislocated temporality”, of explosion and spectres? That must have been nothing else than an active orientation toward and support for the “level of indeterminacy”. What had to be supported and revealed in order to open reality to yet another possibility that, though clearly non-existent and invisible in that it is seen as non-existent from the historian’s perspective, was unpredictable – that was the indeterminate level of *time out of joint*.

On the other hand, the “messianic apprehension” that Derrida speaks of is very appropriate in relation to the attitude of the subject experiencing explosion. According to Derrida, “I” can neither calculate and predict everything nor program the future in general (and therefore am apprehensive). However, to finite beings, those very limitations become the conditions for praxis, decision, action, and responsibility. “Such entrustment of events that may or may not arrive cannot be separated from the promise and order to participate instead of waiting, truly not to avoid the events [...]. This is also the most specific and revolutionary urgency. By no means utopian, messianism interrupts the usual paths of events, time, and history here and now. It is inseparable from the affirmation of alterity and justice” (Derrida 1999: 249).

The subsequent fate of the system depends not on random events only, but also on conscious choice, which entails responsibility. As pointed out above, the problem of personal responsibility and ethics before the bifurcation point mentioned by Lotman can be linked to Derrida’s messianic apprehension. In other words, the ethical responsibility entailed by choice, the maximum of its weight is an invariable share entailed by the space and time of unpredictable indeterminateness.

What is noteworthy here is that, through the occasion of explosion, we can ponder on the occasion of the “subject (or agent)”, which was implicitly omitted from the topological concept of the past, a conceptualization of the dynamic developmental process of the system. In the binary model of Russian cultural history, the subjective will of the subject (“orientation toward the new”) actually swerved away from the objective progress of the system itself (“regeneration of the old”) and ran idle. On the contrary, at the time of explosion, in that situation of indeterminacy, the subject’s resolution and participation loom as ethical commands. It is not only the decisive factor to bring about the later situation of the unpredictable system but also the only way of living out the situation of explosion.

5. Existential landscape: *Clio* at the crossroads

I have hitherto traced changes within Lotman’s thought system. Starting with the concept of topological space centring on the centre-periphery model, Lotman moved to dislocated temporality in the process of pursuing the possibility of indeterminate meaning that was truly unpredictable. Lotman encountered the problem of “dislocated temporality” at the last stage of his theoretical evolution and had to overcome the spatial framework of the centre-periphery model itself.

What one finally recalls at the end of such explorations is the existential landscape in which Lotman was placed in his last years. In his final years, Lotman was living in *de facto* isolation in the city of Tartu. In a situation where, during the transition of the socio-political system, most colleagues from past academic schools had migrated elsewhere, he stayed there until the end. Perhaps, Lotman wished to face in its entirety the explosive reality of the contemporary era that he was witnessing, that moment of precious indeterminateness? An orientation to affirm as much as possible that exceptional moment of opening in the face of contemporary reality and thoroughly to live out the occurrence of that explosion – what the concept of explosion evokes is none other than such an existential scene.

The image of one who, feeling the heavy responsibility entailed by free choice, steps forward on the stage of indeterminateness, where nothing whatsoever has been predetermined – what Lotman’s last acts recall is just such an image of the goddess *Clio* standing at the crossroads of history. In the end, perhaps Lotman’s explosion was yet another name for such an existential landscape:

Already in Sanskrit, crossroads signified choice, destiny, and human origin. They were none other than reason and conscience. Crossroads present choices to those who tread on them. *Clio* has reached the crossroads. (Lotman 1992c: 471)¹⁶

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Лотмановский «взрыв»: от периферийного пространства к смещенному времени

Проблема смещения, сдвига (*shift*) в лотмановской мысли последнего периода (так наз. «лотмановский взрыв») до сих пор остается спорным вопросом для тех, кто интересуется научным наследием Лотмана. Помимо объяснений, указывающих на факторы «обстоятельств» (например, на исторический контекст или на влияние других мыслителей), которые привнесли изменения во взгляды Лотмана, важно определить план сущностных внутренних изменений, происшедших в самой теоретической системе. Рассматривая принципиальные изменения, связанные с концепцией взрыва как движение «пространственной» модели (точнее – «центро-периферийной») к временной, а именно – к модели «смещенного» времени, автор данной статьи фокусирует свое внимание на обнаружении теоретического значения этого движения. Концепция «взрыва» как экстраординарного момента «вывихнутого времени» явилась действенной альтернативой теоретическому прорыву, который произошел в процессе преодоления ограничений предыдущей «пространственной» модели.

Lotmanlik plahvatus: perifeersest ruumist teisaldatud ajani

Küsimus “nihkest” Lotmani mõtteviisis tema viimasel loomeperioodil (niinimetatud lotmanlikust plahvatusest) on tema teaduslikust pärandist huvitatute jaoks jätkuvalt vastuolude allikas. Lisaks selgitustele, mis osutavad “oludest lähtuvatele” teguritele (näiteks ajaloolisele kontekstile või teiste mõtlejate mõjule), mis töid kaasa muutusi Lotmani seisukohtades, on oluline tuvatada teoreetilises süsteemis eneses aset leidnud oluliste “sisemiste” muudatuste mõõde. Mis puutub olemuslikesse muudatustesse, mis on seotud plahvatuse mõistega kui liikumisega “ruumiliselt”, täpsemalt “*keskme-perifeeria*” mudelilt ajalise, nimelt “*teisaldatud aja*” mudeli juurde, keskendub käesolev artikkel selle liikumise teoreetilise tähenduse esiletoomisele. Plahvatuse kui “liigestest lahti aja” erakordse hetke mõiste oli aktiivseks alternatiiviks teoreetilisele läbimurdele, mis toimus varasema “ruumilise” mudeli piiratud ülesaamise käigus.