

Barthes and Lotman: Ideology vs culture

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Abstract. Despite both being great names in semiotics, Roland Barthes and Juri Lotman have more differences than they share similarities – not only because of their different political and historico-cultural environments, but also because they do not have the same object of study: it is ‘ideology’ for Barthes, and ‘culture’ for Lotman. Thus, there is no intellectual common ground between them, yet comparing them can lead us to a more important question: what is semiotics, and what has structuralism to do with it?

Keywords: structuralism; Marxism; myth; semiotics

Introduction

Comparison is a mode of knowledge capable of bringing new facts to light, just as cross lighting can reveal objects which would be invisible in direct lighting. Seen from this perspective, reading Roland Barthes and Juri Lotman in contrast with each other is bound to reveal some specific features which would remain unclear in a monographic perspective.

Yet comparing them will lead us to a problem indicative of deeper issues: if both claim to be semioticians, what, then, is semiotics? And what has structuralism to do with it? Eventually, the paper will highlight the difference between intellectual life in France and in the Soviet Union at a time which now seems remote: the 1960s and 1970s. The scope of this paper is therefore limited, as it is a first step in the comparison of two different attitudes towards semiotics.

Barthes and Lotman seem to have had a lot in common. Both were on the margins of the official mainstream: Barthes never managed to enter university, while Lotman was a professor in a small provincial town. Nevertheless, both strove to be leaders of a new way of thinking about literature and social sciences, both were models for an intelligentsia that did not recognize itself in the official culture. They had the same recurring keywords: ‘structuralism’ and ‘semiotics’, which at first sight obviously seem to have the *same meaning*.

Nonetheless, they had more differences than similarities. Barthes and Lotman never met in person, nor did they meet intellectually. This paper is devoted to arguing this thesis.

As the scope of the question is considerable, I shall concentrate here on a single point: the opposition of their objects of knowledge, i.e. Barthes's 'ideology' vs Lotman's 'culture', and this only during one period, in the 1960s and 1970s, a time when they could have met, a time of hope and despair.

1. The objects of knowledge

1.1. The intellectual atmosphere: Left or Right?

Scientific ideas, especially in social sciences and humanities, never appear in a vacuum. Their history relies heavily on a *context* which can be called social, ideological, cultural, political, national, but, be as it may, a *here and now* which forms a background relevant for understanding those ideas.

Marxism

Both in France and in the Soviet Union, the year 1968 was a fundamental turning point, but for totally opposite reasons. In France it was a cheerful episode, a liberation of speech, of behaviour, of thought, an artistic utopia based on a revolutionary terminology, while marking in fact also a deep misunderstanding between the educated left-wing elite and the working class.

In the Soviet Union, 1968 was definitely the end of the thaw, the destruction of "socialism with a human face" in Prague under Soviet tanks, the beginning of the so-called "Brezhnev stagnation". Yet in 1968 Barthes was a sub-editor of the far left-wing journal *Tel Quel*, which at that time held strong Marxist-Leninist views. Barthes, professing Marxism in a capitalist country, did not risk anything (which, incidentally, is a proof that bourgeois ideology is less vulnerable than Marxism-Leninism), while Lotman, who was following a subtle dialectical line, had his flat searched by the KGB on several occasions.

Barthes maintained a discourse of liberation from alienation, whereas Lotman had no interest in alienation, and totally embraced the idea of an elitist culture.

This contrast is striking, and needs to be underlined. Very few people in France at that time had the slightest idea that in the Soviet Union, the '*liriki*' and the '*fiziki*' (the humanities *or* social sciences and hard science specialists to whom the Tartu-Moscow semioticians attempted to belong), despite their conflict regarding structuralism, had a common enemy: the political establishment, which relied upon an extremely dogmatic version of an absolute Marxist truth, even in scientific questions. This version was called 'ideology' by its Soviet opponents.

Barthes, who came from a bourgeois family, although a modest one, evolved from existentialism to Marxism, but his political engagement did not go beyond written statements. Contrary to Sartre or Foucault, he did not participate in protest demonstrations, even refusing to sign a petition against the war in Algeria.

In his paper “Lotman and Marxism”, Mihail Gasparov (Gasparov 1996) explains that Soviet Marxism was both a method (historical and dialectical materialism) and an “ideology” (a long list of self-confident and self-congratulatory nonsensical propagandistic declarations). Lotman took the Marxist method seriously, but despised its “ideology”. Therefore, the *‘shestidesyatniki’* (‘men of the Sixties’) in the Soviet Union came from a context very different from that of the French extreme left-wing *‘soixante-huitards’* (‘sixty-eighters’).

Society

Barthes and Lotman lived at the same time but in different “societies”. What did society consist in for them?

For Barthes it was obvious that *his* society (France in the “glorious thirty years” after the Second World War) was divided into two antagonistic groups: the ruling class, or “bourgeoisie”, and a group with no name, which can be understood only negatively: a sort of highly idealized “people” (*‘peuple’*), e. g. those who are not the “bourgeoisie”. Barthes was not a revolutionary, he had no programme for transforming his “society”, and his main interest in the 1950–60s was to unmask the *signs* by which the ruling class deceives the exploited (in his *Mythologies* he does not use the word *‘prolétariat’*, and the word *‘peuple’* is used only for the Romans in films). Nevertheless, it is not clear at all what ‘bourgeoisie’ meant for Barthes: when he makes fun of wrestling matches as a “theatrical performance”, his target cannot be the ruling upper-class bourgeoisie, who never attends this kind of barbarian show, but precisely the *‘petit peuple’* (‘common people’), whom the highbrow Barthes, in fact, deeply despised. The *‘petite bourgeoisie’* was the victim, and not the beneficiary of the “bourgeois ideology”.

Lotman never spoke of the Soviet Union as a “society”, which is perfectly understandable in Brezhnev’s time, marked by a very severe censorship. Yet he had no interest in the different sociolects of the Russian language. Lotman was not Pierre Bourdieu: only the “Russian literary language” had enough dignity to be studied by semiotic means, and any deviant usage, be it *mat* (vulgar, obscene vocabulary) or even *prostorechiè* (common parlance), was simply denied existence. His society was entirely homogeneous and unanimous, built up on *high culture*, and the apparatchiks’ “ideology” was pure parasitic nonsense, which did not affect real Russian culture at all. Thus, while Julia Kristeva spoke of the “social concerns” of the “Soviet semioticians”, the meaning of the word “social” should be closely scrutinized: for the left-wing French intellectuals it referred to a divided society, whereas for Lotman it had the Romantic flavour of a cultural entirety based on a common literary language and literature.

1.2. The subject: dead or alive?

In the 1960s a catchphrase had become commonplace among left-wing French intellectuals: not only the author, but even the subject was *dead*. The situation was the exact opposite for the Tartu–Moscow semioticians. The notion of the subject was indeed one of the main points of disagreement, even if largely implicit, between French and Soviet intellectuals.

In fact, the very few French researchers who had some knowledge of Lotman's works remarked on the absence of a theory of the subject in his semiotics (Meschonnic 1973: 11), and, in general, a total neglect, disregard and ignorance of the psychoanalytic understanding of the unconscious (Kristeva 1969: 200; see also Laferriere 1978 in the US).

If for Barthes “the author is dead” (which means it is just a place or a function in the literary process), for Lotman, on the contrary, the author *is alive*: he has an ‘intention’ (*zamyssel*), and one of the aims of literary semiotics is to reveal, study and analyse this intention:

Against the background of Derzhavin's poetry, Karamzin's lyrics would give the impression of being impoverished. But here also the reader can easily be convinced that this deliberate “poverty” was part of the author's intention (*zamyssel*), it corresponded to his aesthetic requirements. (Lotman 1966: 31; my translation, P.S.)

Barthes follows a post-modern attitude in that the reception of a text is as important, or even more so, than its production; therefore it is clear that the notion of the author is only a function, a role, but does not refer to a real person. “The death of the author” makes meaningless the search for the objective meaning of the text, this ideal of positivist science. On the contrary, Lotman's interest is focused on *author*, *man* (*chelovek*) and *person* (*lichnost'*, cf. Lotman 1973b). What is a result in Barthes is a point of departure in Lotman. One outcome of this person-oriented semiotics is a fascination with the “structure of the archaic consciousness as a whole” (Lotman 1973a: 484), the study of what he considered to be one of the most positive achievements of the Marrist school. But *why* did the reconstruction (or ‘modelling’) of the “structure of the archaic consciousness as a whole” interest Lotman so much is still an unanswered question. In any event, Lotman does not seem to have had any doubt about the mere existence of this “archaic consciousness”, even if he never gives any definitions of the place of the psychological notion of consciousness inside a work on semiotics. All that we know is that myth is a “phenomenon of consciousness” (Lotman, Uspenskij 1973: 283), and that one of the positive features of the Marrist school is that they studied “consciousness as a system” (Lotman 1973a: 483). Assuredly, consciousness was a very long way from Barthes's idea of the “split subject”, which he borrowed from Jacques Lacan. And here we face the typical “organic/mechanic” conflict: for Lotman, “the archaic elements in contemporary culture [...] are not unfortunate or

useless fragments, but organic forms which safeguard the wholeness of human culture as a whole” (Lotman 1973: 485). Barthes would have been horrified by the idea of wholeness.

1.3. Deconstruction vs reconstruction

Barthes and Lotman do have something in common: the detestable stupidity of their adversaries (Picart for Barthes, Kozhinov for Lotman), who similarly reproached them for dehumanization and desubstantialization. However, they face it in very different ways. Barthes dreamed of a “zero degree” of writing, a place of absolute freedom, void of any constraint or determination, while Lotman strove to rebuild a thorough contextualization of literary, or “cultural” texts. In other words, *Barthes sought to deconstruct, while Lotman sought to reconstruct*. Barthes unmask, denounces, uses semiotics to translate from false into true; Lotman translates from vague and unfathomable into clear and understandable. To attain their objectives, both rely heavily on the notion of ‘myth’, but here again with very different problematics.

What is a myth?

Another notion they have in common is ‘myth’. But both ‘myths’ have nothing in common with each other.

For Barthes, a myth is a set of false, fictitious, unproven or illusory ideas or representations; for Lotman it is a reservoir of unknown truths. Barthes debunks the fact that we accept as being “natural” or “obvious” what is in fact an illusory reality constructed in order to mask the real structures of power which rule our society. Lotman thinks that myth contains some hidden truth to be revealed about human nature and human culture. Neither seems to imagine that the word ‘myth’ can be used in another meaning than his own: disclosure of a general model of knowledge for Lotman, questioning the obvious for Barthes. For Barthes, deconstructing a myth is not a hermeneutics: in unmasking the real under the appearances he does not propose any positive programme apart from a very vague idea of counter-culture, pure criticism satisfies his semiotic endeavour. Lotman, on the contrary, does have a positive programme: to build a *model* of cultural artefacts in order to propose a typology of culture.

Let us however pay attention to the fact that translations can obscure some notions which in themselves are already difficult to grasp. For instance, in “*Le mythe aujourd’hui*” (“Myth today”) Barthes writes “*Le mythe est une parole*”, which has been translated into Russian either as “*Mif – eto slovo*” (“Myth is a word”) or “*Mif – eto vyskazyvanie*” (“Myth is an utterance”). Both translations are a hindrance to a clear understanding of what Barthes had in mind.

Form and content

Barthes and Lotman directly oppose each other on one issue: for Barthes (in *Le mythe aujourd'hui*, 1957) “semiology is a science of forms, since it studies the meanings irrespective of their content”, “semiology can have unity only at the level of forms, not of content”. On the contrary, for Lotman,

Structural studies of the content in language and literature, of ideological constructions of various types, is of great scientific importance. It allows one to understand the question: Is structural method linked with formalistic ignoring of the content? In fact, there is a tendency to a similar interpretation of structural methods of analysis in reactionary literary studies in the West. However, the most thoughtful scholars in the West, not to mention the Soviet scientists, rely on the guiding assumption that the very concept of language (or any other structural phenomena) as a sign system inevitably raises the question of meaning. (Lotman 1963: 44)

So, we now know that “the structural method studies the semantics of literature, of folklore, of myth” (Lotman 1973a: 483), that we can and must make a link between the semiotic-structural method and the Marrist school, which “studied historical semantics” (Lotman 1973a: 483), but one still wants to understand what exactly is a “structural method”. One thing is sure: it is not at all the same structuralism as the one Barthes tried to promote in the 1960–70s.

Culture vs ideology

‘Myth’, as Barthes uses it in *Mythologies*, functions as a synonym of ‘ideology’, which is a simplified meaning this notion has in *The German Ideology* by Marx and Engels (1846): a *false consciousness* (*eine falsche Bewusstseins*). In this sense, ‘ideology’ refers to the body of beliefs and representations that sustain and legitimate current power relationships. Ideology promotes the values and interests of dominant groups in society. It is the meaning that ‘ideology’ has for Western left-wing thinkers. Here is a clear definition:

A dominant power may legitimate itself by *promoting* beliefs and values congenial to it; *naturalizing* and *universalizing* such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; *denigrating* ideas which might challenge it; *excluding* rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and *obscuring* social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such ‘mystification’, as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking or suppressing social conflicts, from which arises the conception of ideology as an imaginary resolution of real contradictions. (Eagleton 1991: 5–6)

The work of a semiotician, for Barthes, is thus to make explicit what remained implicit, or taken for granted. It is a study of the ways in which mass culture, controlled by the *petite bourgeoisie*, constructs a mythological reality and encourages conformity to its own values.

Although Barthes worked in communist Rumania, he never wrote anything about “real socialism” in Eastern Europe. He worked in Egypt and Morocco, but it is clear that he was interested only in the Western type of society, *i.e.* essentially France, which he considered as a “bourgeois society”.

In his unmasking of ideology, Barthes at times speaks of *culture*, but his culture is a void:

there is an evil, a social, ideological evil, attached to the sign systems that do not admit frankly that they are sign systems. Instead of recognizing that culture is an unmotivated system of meanings, bourgeois society always gives signs as justified by nature or reason. (Barthes 1981: 67)

On the contrary, for Lotman, culture, which can be either particular (Russian, French) or universal, human, culture, is a universe of meaning. The fact that a culture can be national makes it possible to build a *typology*, that is to say a *comparison* between different cultures, most often between Russia and Western European cultures. But a culture can never be a void. Neither can it be split into antagonistic groups (although in his works Russian culture is sometimes unitary, and sometimes composed of aristocratic and peasant sub-cultures). His *culturology* has some remote links with North-American *cultural studies*: both have common ancestors in Frobenius’ cultural morphology and Cassirer’s theory of symbolic forms. All those references would have sounded incongruous to Barthes, let alone the numerous allusions to the Marxist school in Lotman.

In both Barthes and Lotman, we see a hesitation between the Marxist dogma of superstructure and Dilthey’s *Geisteswissenschaften*: they focus on what is not pure material production, but what is in our minds. Yet if we rely on Dilthey’s opposition between ‘*erklären*’ (the aim of natural sciences is to *explain*) and ‘*verstehen*’ (the aim of human sciences is to *understand*), it seems clear that Barthes tries to explain, while Lotman, though claiming to follow an exact, scientific method, strives to understand. Lotman stands on the side of what he studies, Barthes stands against it.

1.4. France and the Soviet Union

Unfortunately for human and social sciences, unlike for “hard” sciences, the words we use do not necessarily have the same meanings for all. So is the case for apparently common and obvious terms like ‘ideology’, ‘avant-garde’, or even ‘sign’. The fact is that the historical, political and intellectual situations in France and in the Soviet Union were very different.¹

What did the two men know about each other?

¹ Cf. Landolt 2012, who shows that French and Soviet semiotics “cannot be translated into their respective languages” (Landolt 2012 : 129).

Barthes never quoted Lotman, he did not speak foreign languages except some English, he was not interested in foreign countries apart from a largely imaginary Japan. In the 1960–70s France, however, Julia Kristeva was a convinced advocate of a Marxist interpretation of everything coming from the Soviet Union. So, after having introduced Bakhtin in France as a forerunner of discourse analysis, she presented Lotman as conducting “subversive labours” with “undermining effects”, which she assimilated into her “concept of intertextuality” (Kristeva 1994).

On the contrary, Lotman had a good knowledge of French semiotics and structuralism. In a letter to Natalya Avtonomova (February 23, 1978) he wrote:

It seems to me that you put on the same footing [...] Levi-Strauss, Foucault, Barthes and Kristeva. In fact, Levi-Strauss is the greatest explorer on a concrete plan (which is always the most valuable), Foucault – a sharp and gifted philosopher, in the French sense of the word, and Barthes and Kristeva (God forgive me, I am but a sinner) are of little interest. They are writers and essayists, and not on a very large scale. (Avtonomova 2009: 469)

In his book on the history of the Tartu-Moscow semiotic school, Maxim Waldstein quotes a letter from Lotman to Vyacheslav Ivanov (Waldstein 2008: 100):

I fully agree with you that *Tel Quel* irritates (‘the pastime of adult naughty boys’ but, unfortunately, in quite serious circumstances). Maybe we should give them a flick on the nose (*poschelkat’*) in the fifth volume [of *Sign Systems Studies*]? To be honest, I do not feel much pathos, it is too alien and unnecessary. (Lotman to Ivanov, 1970; see Lotman 1997: 658)

Waldstein also quotes Lotman’s interview with Vladimir Toporov:

I do not see any necessary scholars for me in the French School. They often commit a sin of frivolity. It is a pleasure to read, though. (quoted in Waldstein 2008: 100)

2. The methods and the means

2.1. What is a sign?

Barthes and Lotman use similar terms, but nothing proves that they share a similar meaning. Comparison is a way of tackling this source of misunderstandings.

Barthes thinks that everything can be a sign, Lotman thinks that everything is a sign, but both adopt a very classic definition of a sign: *something that stands for something else*. It was said very long ago by Saint Augustine (354–430): *aliquid stat pro aliquo*. Or in *The Port-Royal Logic* (1861[1662], I, 4):

Thus the sign contains two ideas, one of the thing which represents, the other of the thing represented, and its nature consists in exciting the second by means of the first.

Barthes often claimed that he wanted to challenge the “innocence” and “naturalness” of cultural texts and practices which were capable of producing all sorts of supplementary meanings, or *connotations*. It is these sorts of secondary meanings or connotations that Barthes was interested in uncovering in *Mythologies*. Here, in a very metaphoric use of Saussure’s terminology, the linguistic sign becomes the signifier, or a double, of the signified of the new, “mythological” sign:

1. signifier 2. signified	
3. Sign I. SIGNIFIER	II. SIGNIFIED
III. SIGN	

Language

Barthes and Lotman have totally opposing attitudes toward language.

For Barthes, as we know, “language is fascist”:

Language [*la langue*], as a performance of any language [*langage*], is neither reactionary nor progressive; it is simply fascist; for fascism does not consist in preventing to say, but in obliging to say. (Barthes 1977: 14)

But it is not clear if he deals here with the French language as a linguistic concept, with language in general as an instrument of oppression, or with the bourgeois discourse. Already in 1953, in *Le degré zero de l’écriture (Writing Degree Zero)*, he dreamed of a writing (*écriture*) which could be totally free of any external determination. But this liberated writing is extremely distant from what Pierre Bourdieu called ‘*le franc parler*’, the free speech of the proletarians among themselves (Bourdieu 1982). In fact, it does not exist, even in avant-garde literature...

Strangely, Lotman also has a sort of nostalgia for an idealized language, but if Barthes felt distrust towards language in general, Lotman, on the contrary, found in it a means to support a collective identity: the Russian (literary) language was a way to achieve the (high) Russian culture, represented not by marginal, avant-garde, but by trustworthy, reliable authors. It is even possible to find in Lotman some features of neo-Humboldtianism. In his comment on I. Frank-Kameneckij, a researcher in Semitic studies, who was associated with the Marrist school, Lotman (1973a: 484) writes:

Identifying mythological, scientific, logical, poetic and mundane consciousness, the author comes close to issues which concern contemporary cultural studies. It is interesting that the term which he finds to determine the implementation of these systems: “world picture”, turned out to be convenient for modern typological constructions. If in the conventional Marxist constructions complete identification of language and thought eliminates the problem of modelling the impact of the first on the second, in this paper I. Frank-Kameneckij, in solidarity with Cassirer, emphasizes the role of language as a forming and organizing principle by which a one-dimensional stream of impressions first acquires a certain shape, turning into a coherent, internally organized world.

Structuralism

In both cases structuralism was more than a scientific trend, it had something to do with subversion of admitted, conservative values, both in science and in academic scholarship. But what did it consist in?

We have seen that Lotman’s and Barthes’ notion of sign had only an appearance of similarity with Saussure’s. If, for the latter, a sign is the conjunction of a signifier and a signified, both of which cannot *exist before* their intimate relationship, for our heroes a sign is, classically, *anything which refers to something else*. Therefore, what in Saussure was a part of the sign (*i.e.* the *signified*) becomes for them exterior to the sign (the *referent*, or thing to which the sign refers).

But there is more: for Saussure, in a precise anti-ontological approach to the sign, signs are defined by their *value*: “*Leur plus exacte caractéristique est d’être ce que les autres ne sont pas*” [Their most exact characteristic is *to be what the others are not*] (Saussure 1967[1916]: 162). This negative ontology of the notion of *value* is the path-breaking contribution of Saussure’s *Cours*. Therefore, in this book, the relations between phenomena are more important than the phenomena in relation.

True, Barthes’s and Lotman’s texts are full of allusion to this structural approach. In 1967 Lotman wrote:

The structural approach teaches to see the world and our model of the world as a system of relationships and connections. (Lotman 1967: 92; my translation, P. S.)

The researcher does not enumerate ‘features’, but builds a model of relations. (Lotman 1967: 93)

Strangely, what is known as ‘antinomies’ in Saussure is translated as ‘dialectics’ in Lotman:

The methodological basis of structuralism is dialectics. (Lotman 1967: 93; my translation, P. S.)

Structural study aims at removing the dichotomy of modern literary criticism: on the one hand, it sees in literature art, a specific form of social consciousness, and is strongly opposed to the primitive “dissolution” in the history of social theories. On the other hand, it aims at revealing the idea of the literary work as a unity of meaningful elements. With respect to each element of the artistic structure a question arises: what is its meaning, what semantic load does it carry? The relationship of the artistic idea to the construction of the literary work evokes the relationship of life to the biological structure of the cell. In biology, there is no longer any vitalist who would study life outside the organization of the real matter, which is its bearer. In literary criticism, they are still sometimes to be seen. But the nomenclature enumeration of the material ‘inventory’ of living tissue does not reveal the secret of life: the cell appears to us as a complex self-organizing functioning system. The realization of its functions is life. A work of art is also a complex self-organizing system (albeit of a different type). The idea is the life of the work, and it is equally impossible in the body dismembered by the anatomist and outside of the body. Mechanicism of the first approach and idealism of the second must give way to the dialectic of functional analysis. (Lotman 1967: 96; my translation, P. S.)

But more and more often the word ‘structure’ in Lotman slips towards ‘system’, and then to ‘organization’. It becomes a synonym of the Russian word ‘*stroj*’, which is a calque of German ‘*Bau*’ (‘framework in building’). For instance, a genre possesses a ‘structure’, as does the archaic consciousness. The negative ontology of the elements of a structure has vanished. As Daniel Laferriere (1977: 33) writes:

The outer-directedness of the Soviet semioticians less frequently leads, moreover, to the kind of methodological mumbo-jumbo that one so often finds in ‘what passes for structuralism on the left-bank’ (to quote from a lecture by Victor Erlich to the 1976 Modern Language Association Meeting).

Let us remember that for Saussure a structure can function only thanks to a void, to a disequilibrium; it is the reverse of a totality, a wholeness or an entirety (in Russian ‘*tselostnost*’, a calque of the German ‘*Ganzheit*’). Here, Lotman is closer to Humboldt than to Saussure.

Conclusion

Many other themes could have been addressed, like, for instance, the relationship of Barthes and Lotman to Russian Formalism of the 1920s or to positivism, or to the notions of type and typology. But let us summarize the main points of our limited argumentation.

In comparing Roland Barthes’s and Juri Lotman’s works of the 1960–70s, it is clear that the misunderstandings and disagreements are more significant than the consensus.

Both focused on a semiotics of hermeneutics, but Barthes committed himself to deconstructing, criticizing, unmasking a *petit-bourgeois* world, while Lotman, on the contrary, devoted himself to reconstructing and protecting high culture.

Both are deeply marked by their belonging to a particular cultural *milieu*: Francocentrism (by ignoring the Other) vs Russocentrism (by a fascination with the Other, whom one wants to be different from).

We are faced with two semiotics in a relative mutual ignoring, without interaction, without any interest in common. Barthes does not know Lotman, Lotman distrusts Barthes.

Neither Barthes nor Lotman can be considered as structuralists, least structuralism be viewed as a set of related (pre-existing) objects.

But first and foremost, they have different concerns. For Lotman, 'culture' is a collective memory to be preserved, while for Barthes 'ideology' is a false consciousness to be unmasked and destroyed.

If Lotman generated so little interest in France, it is because he represented an intellectual world poorly known in that country. Lotman's world had more to do with Frobenius' cultural morphology of Goethe's idea of totality than with Althusser's Marxism. We do not learn much about what *is*, indeed, structuralism, in either. Still, we have brought to light an important opposition between French and Soviet semioticians in the 1960–70s: Barthes worked on words as *discourse*, whereas Lotman worked on texts as *things*. One thought in epistemology, the other in ontology.

Here, I will offer a final remark: if anyone thinks that semiotics is the general science which explains everything, the science of the whole, or of entireties, it risks being an illusion. The key opening all doors does not exist.

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Барт и Лотман: идеология vs культура

Несмотря на то, что оба ученых являются выдающимися семиотиками, у Барта и Лотмана мы находим больше различий, чем сходств. Не только потому, что они работали в разном политическом и историко-культурном контексте. Также важно различие в объекте изучения: для Барта объектом являлась «идеология», для Лотмана – «культура». Таким образом, у них отсутствует общая интеллектуальная база, однако сравнение их наследия может привести нас к более важному вопросу – что такое семиотика и как она соотносится со структуриализмом?

Barthes ja Lotman: ideoloogia vs kultuur

Hoolimata sellest, et mõlemad olid semiootika suurkujud, on Barthes'il ja Lotmanil rohkem erinevusi kui sarnasusi – mitte üksnes nende erinevate poliitiliste ja ajaloolis-kultuuriliste keskkondade tõttu, vaid ka seepärast, et nende uurimisobjekt polnud sama: Barthes'i jaoks oli see 'ideoloogia', Lotmani jaoks 'kultuur'. Seega puudub neil intellektuaalne ühisosa, kuid nende kõrvutamise võib meid viia veelgi olulisema küsimuse juurde: mis on semiootika ja mis on sel tegemist strukturalismiga?