

**THE UNPREDICTABLE
WORKINGS OF CULTURE**

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Juri M. Lotman

THE UNPREDICTABLE WORKINGS OF CULTURE

Preface by Vyacheslav V. Ivanov

Afterword by Mihhail Lotman

Translated from the Russian by Brian James Baer

Edited by Igor Pilshchikov and Silvi Salupere

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The Unpredictable Workings of Culture

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PREFACE TO THE RUSSIAN EDITION

Vyacheslav V. Ivanov

The present book belongs among Juri Lotman's final, summative works completed not long before his death. Together with other works of this late period, it forms a part of Lotman's last will and testament, containing his views on history and art. At the same time this book is an outstanding example of Lotman's style. Here Lotman expresses his most cherished thoughts with a clarity and in a form that make them accessible to a wide audience, offering, as illustration, rare and fascinating examples taken from the works of Russian writers and Dante, and from a host of historical sources.

Although I mentioned the term 'last will and testament,' which is typically used when an individual is engaged in a one-on-one battle with death and death is about to emerge the victor, in one of the final chapters of this book Lotman speaks of something else, of that moment when in the midst of this battle the individual is able to rise above and to pass on to the future what is most important, something achieved at the price of personal physical mortality. And so, in the spirit of Lotman's thoughts on history, an unexpected epilogue has emerged, one that suddenly alters the usual causal connection between ends and beginnings. I am speaking of the afterlife of the present book, which

failed to reach a wide readership at the time of its completion.

This book is a reflection of the time when it was written. Lotman assumed then that we would find ourselves still in that period marked by the fall of the Russian empire, a period that began in the first decades of the last century. Lotman assumed as he wrote this book (almost twenty years ago) that we would be nearing the end of that period. Some of his thinking on the nature of historical processes was shaped by the sudden changes that were occurring then. Lotman believed that we had to make the right choice in the short amount of time history had allotted us for the task. At such moments the study of the past, of its meaning, and of the very nature of historical processes ceases to be an idle academic pastime. The future of mankind—its fate—hinges on this field of knowledge. Lotman teaches us historical responsibility. The most important aspect of Lotman's conception of history is the idea that there exists a bundle of possible sequels at the moment before an explosion. History can develop along two alternate paths. One path is that of slow, gradual development, which promises no substantial changes. In this book, however, as in *Culture and Explosion*, which was written immediately after this one and is familiar to many readers, Lotman offers a detailed exploration of explosion as the fundamental process bringing change to society, culture, art, and science.

I would underscore the significance of the unpredictability underlying the choice of one of these equally

probable (according to Lotman) paths. With his interest in linear as opposed to cyclical movement, Lotman was a consummate European thinker. He felt little interest in the cyclical conception of development with its endless repetition of the same, which is so important in many eastern teachings. This seems especially interesting to me insofar as the chief object of Lotman's life's work was Russian culture and Russian history, in relation to which the proposition that there is almost nothing new and that we shouldn't expect anything new had become a commonplace. Here the same things are supposed to keep happening over and over again. This popular and, therefore, vulgar notion—which was for Lotman erroneous—can to some extent actually encourage that form of repetition: It was like this once, so let's retrace this worn out figure again. Why waste our time thinking of something new?

Such thinking was foreign to Lotman, as was the mythical idea of the eternal return, which became so popular in the twentieth century and in its current form dates back to Nietzsche. Lotman thought of science as a single whole that did not recognise fundamental boundaries between the humanities and the exact knowledge. (As a former artillery sergeant, he was very familiar with the exact sciences, which inspired his encyclopaedic reading in the post-war years.) He always kept in mind Ilya Prigogine's general theory, which was closest to his own. Lotman's central idea can be reformulated in the spirit of Information Theory. In history and in the movement of cultures Lotman was

most interested in those processes during which a maximal increase in the amount of information occurs. This directly explains the unpredictability of the processes Lotman describes as explosive. According to Claude Shannon, one of the experimental means for determining the entropy of a process involves guessing. And so any process that sees a significant increase in the amount of received and transmitted information will be unpredictable. This is one of the major differences between Lotman's thinking and recent widespread theories that attribute to some of the disciplines in the humanities features similar to ancient eastern fortune telling. For Lotman the future is directed toward an increase in information and so is unpredictable.

This book contains not only an explanation of the essence of Lotman's scholarly views but also a short summary of the work of his predecessors. He pays special attention to the work of the Russian formalists. Among their achievements Lotman singles out a discovery especially important for his work that within diachrony a newer direction can gain ascendancy, that is, a phenomenon that is believed to exist outside a culture's borders or on its lowest rung is suddenly transformed into something truly significant. This is how the formalists explained, for example, the fate of the gypsy song, which Aleksandr Blok transformed into a major lyric genre (thus following in the footsteps of Apollon Grigoriev whose poetry Blok discovered for his contemporaries). Lotman placed this insight, along with a series of others, among the achievements of the formalists.

Explosive movements lead to the lifting of many taboos and setting of some others. Lotman provided a specific example of this from the history of Russian literature in the volume he edited for the *Biblioteka poeta* [Poet's Library] series dedicated to little known and completely obscure poets of the period immediately preceding the appearance of Pushkin. As with every great writer, Pushkin not only created new models that were followed by his many followers and disciples but also put a halt to the adoption of many other models that had appeared in Russian literature before him.

Lotman did not agree with those who preferred the formalists' negation of or lack of interest in the meaning of a work under study. Essential for Lotman was research that analysed the semantics of a work. (Incidentally, in support of the thesis regarding the formalists, he quoted not Boris Eichenbaum but Lev Tolstoy as cited by Eichenbaum.) Lotman's position was distinguished by its originality. In one chapter of this book he examines the self-sufficiency of art as a special language. If we accept his well-reasoned argument, then all debates surrounding the other functions of art become less important and to some extent lose their meaning. Among the scholars with whom Lotman had the opportunity to study in his youth, such as Grigory Gukovsky, who died following his arrest in the final years of the post-war Stalinist terror, Lotman analyses those who attempted to understand the relationship between the content of literature (ideas) and its unique artistic form (images). On one axis there is Gukovsky,

who derived the latter from the former. On the other axis there is Nikolai Piksarov, a member of the older literary school, who completely disconnected the two and made a scrupulous attempt to write a history of literature without authors. Lotman found his own solution in contemporary semiotics, in the development of which he played a direct role. He conceived the history of semiotics as the blending of Saussurean linguistics and the study of literature as practised by the Petersburg formalists, who were closest to Lotman in terms of scholarly orientation. (Many of us at the time were less interested in the logical approach, which stemmed from the work of Peirce.) In the contemporary version of semiotics which he helped to create, Lotman found a similar connection between the linguistic approach of the young Moscow semioticians, which he admired, and the line of research that continued in a formalist orientation, to which he attributed the very foundations of his own scholarly work. But Lotman saw the linguistic terms, such as the designation of cultural phenomena as languages and of their mutual relationship as diglossia, or bilingualism, as perhaps more important for the emerging discipline than his colleagues, who treated linguistic terms with the caution of specialists, were willing to admit.

In order to differentiate languages from one another, Lotman formulated the concept of the antinomy of “us” and “them,” of the collective and the individual, which was fundamental to his understanding of culture. Lotman described in semiotic terms the opposition of creative

individuality to the herd instinct, which he assimilated from European romanticism and from its continuation in avant-garde movements. Cultural development became possible due to the existence of languages that allowed one to speak of one's own as the foreign and of the foreign as one's own. Lotman reconceived the Other (the Stranger, the Neighbour), which was central to the philosophy of language of all the great thinkers of the twentieth century, as the opposing participant in a common semiotic dialogue. Lotman studied the encroachment of the herd and of leaders, a subject that incited powerful negative emotions in him, as someone who had been a participant in and a victim of the Russian intellectuals' struggle for freedom of cultural self-determination. It is likely that the unique features of Russian intellectual history slowed the development of the individual's consciousness of him or herself as being separate from the other members of the collective. In a series of studies dedicated to this problem, the talented linguist Viktor Vinogradov attempted to prove that there was no word for "individual" in Old Russian and in the system of semantic values it expressed. The scholar's conclusion is antithetical to the verse line by the great poet Osip Mandelstam, who wrote in reference to Russian history: "We were once people (*liudi*), but now we are a horde (*liud'e*)."¹ (Ironically, the latter term is a mass noun derived from other Indo-European words meaning 'free'.)

Lotman tried to understand how his treatment of history and that of other members of the Tartu-Moscow

School of Semiotics differed from that of the French group of historians that included Fernand Braudel and Jacques Le Goff, whose work became very popular in their time in Russia thanks in part to the many publications of Aaron Gurevich. For Lotman, the work of this group of historians was in a certain sense directly opposed to the main preoccupations of the Tartu-Moscow School, which was interested first and foremost in art and its unique, unpredictable, and explosive nature. Those gradual changes that attracted the scholars of the Annals School focused on completely different things.

For me, one of the most theoretically correct and practically important chapters of this book is the one dedicated to the relationship of science and technology. Lotman here takes a stand against banal, marketable truths. While the idea that science and technology are interconnected is a commonplace, Lotman speaks convincingly of their fundamental difference. Technology develops gradually, and every subsequent step in its development is predictable. Great scientific discoveries, on the other hand, are born from unpredictable explosions. It appears as no simple coincidence to me that Lotman illustrates this idea with the history of Chinese technology, focusing in particular on the discovery of gunpowder, which—in contrast to its subsequent fate in Europe—occurred on the cultural periphery. The voluminous research of Joseph Needham and of other historians of ancient Chinese technology has revealed an exceptionally high level of technological advancement,

which led to the early and short-lived take-off of Chinese capitalism during the Song dynasty. The development of the natural sciences, however, lagged significantly behind. The level of technological advancement in and of itself says nothing about the advancement of science. Among contemporary examples of the potential opposition of science to technology, one can point to the proliferation of certain technological innovations behind which the science remains unexplained. In a recent book the noted English astrophysicist and cosmologist Martin Rees discusses the current vogue for nanotechnology as an example of the unilateral development of technology, which can have dangerous, even catastrophic consequences. The absence of serious scientific research capable of explaining the nature of the potential applications and the potential danger (or lack thereof) posed by those applications, makes this technological fad, combined with short-sighted policies, potentially very harmful.

The chapter dedicated to fashion and dress was written with the same magical spark that had astonished me before in Lotman's commentary on Pushkin's *Evgeny Onegin*. Lotman describes the sudden shifts in Russian fashion from the eighteenth century to the Stalinist period with a stylistic power and clarity that make it a true masterpiece of historical prose.

In this book Juri Lotman does not simply lay out his ideas about those novel, unpredictable, and explosive aspects of culture that define its dynamic nature. The book

itself is an example of just such an explosive discovery. It is a joy to have the opportunity to introduce this wonderful book to a wide circle of readers.

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Brian James Baer

For Juri Lotman, translation was absolutely central to the workings of culture. Lotman followed Roman Jakobson in understanding translation in broad semiotic terms as interpretation between sign systems.¹ As Edna Andrews points out, “For Lotman (as is true with Peirce), all communication and all intellectual and cultural acts are *semiotic* and therefore require some form of *translation* between signs where there are *at least two* distinct sign systems involved. The most basic level of translation is guaranteed in the claim that there is no singular communication act, but *at least* a doublet at its inception” (2003: 35). Elsewhere Lotman describes translation as the process of transforming the “foreign” into “one’s own.”² But, Lotman insists,

¹ For more on the relationship between semiotics and translation, see: Umberto Eco’s *Experiences of Translation* (2000), Peeter Torop’s *Total’nyi perevod* [Total Translation] (1995), and Dinda L. Gorrée’s *Semiotics and the Problem of Translation* (1994).

² Lotman’s view of translation forces us to re-think the opposition of foreignisation and domestication insofar as the truly “foreign” cannot be translated. Once the process of translation is initiated, the foreign is transformed into terms accessible to the target audience; it is placed in dialogue with the target culture. That transformation may occur on the very borders of acceptability, but it cannot be “foreign.” The truly foreign is only that which exists outside translation.

there is nothing predictable about the nature of that process—or whether that process will take place at all.³

The profound unpredictability of translation, in Lotman's semiotic understanding of the term, is evident when we compare the “gradual” reception of Lotman's work in the Anglo-American world to the more “explosive” reception of the work of Lotman's near-contemporary Mikhail Bakhtin. Despite profound similarities in their work—a focus on dialogue as a fundamental process in understanding artistic works, to name but one—the unpredictable paths taken by these two authors in translation were quite different.⁴ Outlining those paths will help to situate the present translation of Lotman's final published work.

Bakhtin was fortunate to have been introduced into the West in the 1960s by the Bulgarian literary theorist Tzvetan Todorov, who had emigrated to France and would serve as one of Bakhtin's first translators, in both the literal and figurative sense of the term. Todorov successfully “translated” Bakhtin's work into the language of contemporary French literary theory, which was then dominated by

³ Todd describes the early reception of Lotman in the West as a relationship marked by a lack of dialogue: “Lotman himself did not initiate such dialogues, and his Western readers, primarily Slavists, did not conduct them for him” (Todd 2006: 347).

⁴ Surprisingly few scholars have studied the relationship between these two important theoreticians of culture although there are some notable exceptions, such as Allan Reid's monograph *Literature as Communication and Cognition in Bakhtin and Lotman* (1990) and Carol Emerson's article “Jurij Lotman's Last Book and Filiations with Baxtin” (2003).

structuralism, the philosophy of language, and psychoanalysis. The first book-length English translation of a work by Bakhtin appeared in 1968. This was followed over the next two decades by other book-length translations, a major biography, several volumes of critical essays, and even a Bakhtin reader.⁵

One of the things that facilitated the reception of Bakhtin's work in the West, and in the Anglo-American West in particular, was undoubtedly his choice of authors to study: Dostoevsky, who occupies a central place in the Anglo-American canon of Russian literature, and Rabelais, whose works treat what Bakhtin referred to as "the lower bodily strata," something that spoke directly to Western scholars working in the humanities in the 1970s and 80s. Lotman, on the other hand, studied the "untranslatable"

⁵ An English translation of *Rabelais and His World* by Hélène Iswolsky appeared first in 1968 (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press) and then republished in 1984 (Indiana University Press). The first English translation of *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, by Caryl Emerson, was published in 1984 (University of Minnesota Press). That same year also saw the publication of the first scholarly biography of Bakhtin, entitled *Mikhail Bakhtin*, by Michael Holquist and Katerina Clark (Belknap Press of Harvard University). *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* by Bakhtin appeared in 1986 (University of Texas Press), *Art and Answerability. Early Philosophical Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* in 1990 (University of Texas Press), and *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, and Voloshinov* in 1994 (E. Arnold). In addition, several edited volumes have come out in English since the mid-1980s dedicated to Bakhtin's work and the applicability of his theoretical concepts to a variety of disciplines.

Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin and his lesser-known contemporaries. And so, it was easier for Western scholars in the 1980s to “translate” Bakhtin’s study of Rabelais and Dostoevsky into “their own” than it was for them to translate Lotman’s studies of Pushkin and the Decembrists. At the same time, however, during the heyday of Bakhtin studies in the West, Bakhtin exerted far less of an influence on academic circles in Russia than did Lotman. Following the Thaw of the 1960s, “the name of Bakhtin [in Russia] was negatively associated with revolutionary ideology” (Popova 2001: 133).⁶ While the packaging of Bakhtin as a dissident served him well in the West, it made him largely unpublishable in his native land until Perestroika.

Lotman’s work followed a rather different trajectory from Bakhtin’s, both at home and abroad.⁷ During the period when French literary theory was dominant and Bakhtin was the darling of French and Anglo-American academics from a variety of disciplines, interest in Lotman’s work was largely restricted to semiotic circles, “first in Italy, owing to the efforts of Remo Faccani and Umberto Eco, then, increasingly in the 1970s, in Great Britain and the United States, by way of scattered translations of entire books and of compendia of shorter pieces” (Sebeok 1988: vii). Moreover, English translations of Lotman’s essays were

⁶ The first *Russian* biography of Bakhtin appeared only after the fall of the Soviet Union, in 1993 (see Konkin and Konkina 1993).

⁷ For more on the reception of Lotman in the West, see: Blaim 1998, Winner 2002, Todd 2006, Terentowicz-Fotyga 2007, and Kull 2011.

often placed in volumes dedicated to “Soviet” approaches to the study of art and culture, marginalising them from the very beginning and preventing true dialogue with Western scholars who were not Slavists.⁸ And so, except in Italy, where semiotics was a well-developed science, Umberto Eco was an effective spokesman, and Lotman’s writings on Dante found a receptive audience, Lotman’s work in the West was not fully integrated into either sign system studies or French literary theory. As Natalia Avtonomova explains: “The application of linguistic methods to other domains in the humanities was perceived [in France] as a constraint, while in Russia it was a way of breaking free at one and the same time from the subjectivity and dogmatism that reigned in the social sciences” (2001: 120–121).⁹

⁸ The packaging of Lotman’s work as “Soviet” is evident in the fact that many early translations were published in journals, such as *Soviet Studies in Literature*, *The Soviet Review*, and *Soviet Psychology*, and in collections, such as: *Semiotics and Structuralism: Readings from the Soviet Union* (Baran 1976), *Soviet Semiotics: An Anthology* (Lucid 1977), and the special issue of the journal *New Literary History* entitled *Soviet Semiotics and Criticism: An Anthology* (1978). His work was also marginalised by suggesting its applicability to Russian culture alone, as with the collections: *The Semiotics of Russian Culture* (Shukman 1984), and the *Semiotics of Russian Cultural History* (Nakhimovsky and Nakhimovsky 1988) (Kull 2011: 345). Bakhtin’s work, on the other hand, was rarely labeled as Soviet.

⁹ Lotman’s rejection of psychoanalysis may also have played a role in his reception in France insofar as French literary theory of the time relied heavily on the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, Jean Laplanche and others (Avtonomova 2001: 125). As a result, “The few works of Lotman that appeared in France after this made barely a ripple. No new translation has been published over the last ten years” (ibid.: 121).

The enormous influence of French literary theory on the American academy in the 1970s and 80s, with its roots in psychoanalysis and revisionist Marxism, undoubtedly exerted a decisive influence on Lotman's reception in the Anglo-American world.

Moreover, because semiotics was situated in the Soviet Union within the seemingly "ideology-free" applied disciplines of "machine translation, automatic information processing, and mathematical linguistics, and is distinguished by the importance it attaches to cybernetics" (Lucid 1988: 7), it seemed to many Western scholars to be apolitical, whereas Bakhtin's overt persecution by the Soviet regime encouraged Western scholars to see political implications in his work. And so, while Andreas Schönle and Jeremy Shine are correct to point out that, "the Soviet semiotician could not theorise power explicitly" (2006: 3), it would be incorrect to conclude that his work was somehow "apolitical."¹⁰ Western scholars working within the restrictive binaries of the Cold War for the most part failed to grasp the "political" relevance of Lotman's work and

¹⁰ The idea that Soviet semiotics was somehow "apolitical" was underscored by Kalevi Kull, who wrote recently that while cultural studies in the West "defined itself quite clearly as a neo-marxist approach," semiotics of culture was "exclusively a scientific approach since its beginning" (2011: 344-345). I think Lotman himself would have bawked at the idea of an "exclusively" scientific approach, given his interest in the interrelationship of science and culture. More sophisticated treatments of the politics of semiotics appear in Schönle 2006 and in Maxim Waldstein's *Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics* (2008).

were easily taken in by the presentation of semiotics in the Soviet Union as an applied science. At a time when power had become a central concern across the humanities in the West under the influence of Foucault, among others, this had a crucial effect on Lotman's reception.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, however, scholars in the West have come to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of Soviet cultural and academic politics, in general, and of the politics of the Tartu School, in particular, as evidenced most notably by Maxim Waldstein's 2008 monograph *Soviet Empire of Signs: A History of the Tartu School of Semiotics*. As one reviewer points out, Waldstein "replaces the conception of power built on a narrow and rigid, asymmetrical opposition (power-subordination) with a symmetrical conception of power, proceeding primarily from the works of Bourdieu, Latour, Foucault and others (Ventsel 2011: 360). It is now seems obvious that the study of signs could not *not* have had a political dimension in a society that, as Helena Goscilo notes, "maximised *znakovost'* [semioticisation], facilitating the population's recourse to an unambiguous storehouse of signifiers" (2006: 251–252). As evidence of how far western scholars have come in appreciating the political—in the broadest sense of the term—implications of Lotman's work, Schönle and Shine declare "Lotman's concept of power" to be "one of the central themes" of their volume (2006: 3), which is one of the first English-language volumes dedicated entirely to Lotman's writings.

Looking back at Lotman today from this scholarly vantage point, it is difficult to understand how he—or the science of semiotics—had ever been interpreted as apolitical. After all, Lotman's favourite subjects from Russian cultural history—Pushkin and the Decembrists—were politically-charged. While for the Soviet regime, the Decembrists were Russia's first revolutionaries and so were a perfectly "acceptable" object of research, for many members of Russia's educated elite, they were the founders of Russia's oppositional intelligentsia. The same holds true of Pushkin, who was revered by the regime and by the intelligentsia alike, but for different reasons, which created the conditions for a perhaps uniquely Soviet form of resistance, one that "hid in plain sight." In fact, the regime was often unwilling to draw a connection between tsarist autocracy and Soviet repression—it was simply unthinkable to compare the two, in the same way it was unthinkable to interpret Evgeny Shvarts's critique of Nazi tyranny as a commentary on Stalinist terror—but nothing prevented Russian readers from doing so.

Dante, another of Lotman's favourites, was also a cultural figure whose life and work had great political relevance for Russian writers and thinkers since at least the early nineteenth century—Pushkin, for example, praised Dante and Byron as "holy exiles." Viewed as a political exile who spoke truth to power, the Florentine poet achieved new relevance in Soviet Russia. The poet Anna Akhmatova dedicated two poems to Dante in which she emphasised "his role as the archetypal poet in exile, playing the same role as Ovid did

in Pushkin's work" (Reeder 1994: 238). Dante was also a central figure for the poet Osip Mandelshtam, who penned his now famous *Conversation about Dante* shortly before his arrest, in which he addressed the question of authority in art; he carried a pocket edition of *Inferno* with him to the Gulag, where he died. Dante's inferno came to serve in intellectual circles as a metaphor for life in the Soviet Union. Solzhenitsyn references Dante's *Inferno* in the title of his novel *First Circle*; Evgenia Ginzburg makes repeated references to Dante in her Gulag memoirs, *Journey into the Whirlwind*; and in the late 1960s, the writer and translator Yuly Daniel mentions Dante several times in his prison letters and in his poem "But at That Time...": "It's a sign that the price has been paid / For a knowledge Dante never dreamed of" (Daniel' 2000: 692). So, while Lotman's interest in Dante might seem "safe" to Western scholars, it had an undeniable political resonance in the Soviet context.

As Western scholars developed a more nuanced understanding of the workings of culture in Soviet society and as the ascendancy of French literary theory began to wane, challenged first by the movement known as New Historicism and eventually replaced in the Anglo-American academic world by the eclectic, interdisciplinary movement known as Cultural Studies, the reception of Lotman in the West began to change in some fundamental ways. Whereas before 2000 most translations "were published in the context of slavistics [...], after 2000 Lotman's work starts to appear in the anthologies of general semiotics" (Kull 2011:

343). In 2003, Edna Andrews published a book-length study on Lotman's work, and in 2006 Schönle's edited volume entitled, *Lotman and Cultural Studies: Encounters and Extensions* came out. Both works were aimed at integrating Lotman's work more fully and broadly into the landscape of contemporary American scholarship—beyond the confines of semiotics per se. An English translation of *Culture and Explosion* appeared in 2009 (Mouton de Gruyter).

This "transformation" of Lotman, however, is not entirely a product of changes in the receiving culture. After all, Lotman himself was constantly evolving as a scholar and a theorist. In the late 1980s, Lotman began to alter his approach, abandoning the strict objectivity of the archivalist and speaking more directly to his own historical moment. As Avtonomova puts it, "Lotman here abandons the neutrality of expression that was the rule in his previous works" (2001: 131). Both the present work, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*, and *Culture and Explosion* were written in the turbulent years surrounding the fall of communism. Although historians would soon construct a logical chain of inevitable events leading to the end of the communist state, Lotman and his fellow Soviet citizens experienced it as an unexpected explosion that promised to alter their world in unpredictable ways. These books, written by a cultural historian from within the moment of explosion, are, therefore, unique in Lotman's oeuvre. In them, Lotman addresses with particular urgency a key problem in semiotics, and in virtually all forms of structuralism: how to synthesise