

On Issues of Unpredictability in Culture: Lotman's Legacy for the Comprehension of the Mechanisms of Cultural Semiosis and its Works/ *Sobre questões de imprevisibilidade na cultura: o legado de Lótman para a compreensão dos mecanismos e trabalhos de semioses culturais*

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ABSTRACT

This article reflects upon for the concept of *unpredictability* based on the translation into Portuguese of *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*, Yuri Lotman's last published book. More than a complete and definitive explanation of the meanings of the unpredictable works of culture, this article outlines the fundamentals that interest the constitution of semiotic processes that concerns us. Thus, unpredictable relationships in processes related to science and technology, art and the foreign figure are presented for the analysis.

KEYWORDS: Unpredictability; Science; Art; Foreigner

RESUMO

O presente artigo apresenta reflexões sobre o conceito de “imprevisibilidade” advindas a partir do exercício de tradução para a língua portuguesa da obra Os mecanismos culturais imprevisíveis, último livro publicado por Iuri Lótman. Mais do que uma explicação completa e definitiva das acepções sobre os trabalhos imprevisíveis da cultura, esboçamos nestes escritos fundamentos de interesse para a constituição de processos semióticos de nossas particulares preocupações. Dessa forma, apresentam-se para as análises relações imprevisíveis em processos relacionados à ciência e à tecnologia, à arte e à figura do estrangeiro.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: *Imprevisibilidade; Ciência; Arte; Estrangeiro*

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Introduction

One of the undisputable characteristics of the signs in the universe of culture is the contingency that conducts the creation of new signs that, over time, converts semiosis into a constituent mechanism of the unstoppable development of codes and languages. Semiotics in itself is not a static system, enclosed within itself. In its synchronous constitution, the emergence of new concepts, based on the works of its authors, has contributed to the constitution of a solid field of knowledge. As with all science, Semiotics is also evolving. It ought to be said that Semiotics is also in semiosis and it rests upon its research area to establish commitment and bond with its advance. Based on the reading and translation of *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* by Yuri Lotman¹, we, the authors of this article, along with the other members of our research group,² lunged at the discovery of new concepts and debates left by the author in his last book, a privilege whose initial exercises we outline in this text under some aspects.

Translation, while performing the work of metalinguistic construction for access, broadens the possibilities of an original and authorial thought to new readers, which implies the dissemination of knowledge and the increase in the dissemination of the considerations and the theoretical bases found in Lotman's work. In this process, we recognize the implicit necessity for a thought to be constituted in another code, our mother tongue, in order to promote a research-based guide to the semiotic problems investigated by the group. Although the translation activity seeks to fall within maximal proximity in relation to the accessible originals, it does not ignore its noises, with inevitable losses and gains in the process of transforming certain writing from a

¹ LOTMAN, J. *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*. Translated from the Russian by Brian James Baer and edited by Igor Pilshchikov and Silvi Salupere. Tallinn: TLU Press, 2013.

² Since 2013 the Semiotics of Communication Research Group, from the Directory of Research Groups of the CNPq / School of Communications and Arts from USP - Brazil, has been dedicated to reading the book *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* [Непредсказуемые механизмы культуры, 2010], a set of texts that assembles the latest formulations of Yuri Lotman in a volume which was published by the Tallinn University in 2010 in Russian, Estonian and English. Initially, our expectations were to broaden the notions provided in previous works, especially *Universe of the Mind* (1990) and *Culture and Explosion* (2009). With the collection of 2010, *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* made the expansion of our discussion possible and, consequently, inspired the work of a comparative translation between the English and Russian versions into Portuguese. In this sense, the article adopted the English language version as a reference for the quotes of the excerpts translated into Portuguese.

linguistic and cultural code system into another. This is something that cannot be qualified as positive or negative, but it becomes an inherent condition to the process.

In view of the adventure and the challenge of performing a book translation as an activity in a research group formed by scholars in different stages of literacy in the field of Semiotics of Culture, we chose the particular path of linguistic translation accompanied by a theoretical and critical training. Therefore, meetings for critical and collective reading were held in parallel with the work of translation, which naturally led to research carried out individually, inducing each participant to form their own hypotheses starting from the distinct objects of research under investigation. Thus, we exchanged ideas and concrete observations based on the translation in view of empirical causes.

The search for clarification of the book quotes, of fragments of literary works, of concepts of the Russian theories, of works of analysis in the fields of arts and cinema and of the theories created by authors from Eastern Europe was another exercise that led to the work of metalinguistic construction for different contexts. Through these practices, we carried out a long and, from our point of view, an extremely rich translation process, not only in the technical sense, but also in the conceptual one. One that we believe it is a true (inter)semiotic translation process.

The readings did not only show contributions to the intellectual repository of the Semiotics of Culture, following concepts and terminologies already known and present in our research field but also broadened our view toward new meanings, new research problems, new considerations and contributions to this semiotic methodology.

A study that realigns and systematizes such a diverse set of conceptual formulations in order to meet the demand for understanding the semiotic functioning of culture is carried out at a significant moment, considering that it unites demand, understanding and experience of the contemporary culture sign systems. In this sense, as Lotman's conceptual legacy are dimensioned and revised in the light of the unpredictability of culture, familiar formulations, such as "dialogues in different languages," "explosive processes," "thinking structure," "modeling systems of art," "work of unpredictability," among others, are given new shades as they explain new properties when confronting the semiotic problems of culture. If, on the one hand, we seek to elucidate the diversity of such analytical ways in the examination of specific

research objects, on the other, we see the possibility of drawing the movement of the theoretical ideas according to the way they were organized in the book, which served as the object of our study. The following sections will, therefore, outline the legacy that shaped us in the research field of the semiotics of culture and of the analysis of its semiotic problems. These are founding steps of an activity that can only be carried out through the exercise of the critical and analytic metalanguage of the investigation.

1 Semiotic Gradualness in Unpredictable Exchanges

With regard to the translation activity as being a relevant revision process and legacy of theoretical bases for the advance of various academic and scientific papers that use Semiotics as a method and reference, thus contributing with the evolution of their field, we went back to a past of translation practices that provided the Brazilian scholars with a broad access to the Soviet Semiotics, modestly building a connection link with a historical tradition of translation practices. Boris Schnaiderman, founding reference of Russian studies in Brazil, whether in the theoretical, art, or literary fields, to name only the core of his academic work, introduced some of the fundamental texts in the semiotic studies in the 1980s. In the book *Semiótica Russa [Russian Semiotics]* (1979), in addition to a grammar of this semiotic school, one of the earliest soviet overviews on theories of signs in culture, Schnaiderman (1979) refers to essays and “theses” of authors such as Lotman, Toporov, Ivanov, Uspenski, among others, as being those researchers who, according to him, developed “a semiotic awareness” (p.11)³ even before the emergence of their consecrated semioticians. This notion was originated from the contact between the thought about language and culture issues developed by Russian formalists.

Through the creation of a structural basis of literary criticism and analysis, expressed in detailed conceptualizations, such as Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale*, or in Jakobson’s linguistic theory, the Russian formalism has, in a way or another, influenced the formulations of various authors. Mikhail Bakhtin and Yuri Lotman are no exception to this coexistence of intense debate. However, this movement which had

³ In Portuguese: “uma consciência semiótica.”

been developed in a very rich artistic context, such as the constructivism of the fine arts and the enigmatic film productions, became an inheritance which is in a state of tension and questioning for the Semiotics of culture.

In this context, the principles of information theories and of a new literary criticism (which inserted the concepts of code and message in Linguistics) emerge alongside the relevant artistic manifestations; such changes contributed in such a way that the semiotic thought was marked by the understanding of the typology of culture as data and information records. “It is essential to emphasize, [...] the principle that culture is information,” Lotman argued (1988, p.213).⁴ Thus, concern with structure is shown not only as an inheritance, but as a starting point to think about issues related to culture. The hierarchy of codes leads to the typology of the cultures (LOTMAN, 1988, p.214).

This explanation dates back to the capacity of Semiotics to be included as a science which is suitable to approach different cultural objects. In his book, published in 2013, Lotman sustains that it is up to Semiotics to be the connecting link between what seemed to be independent fields of knowledge, based on a way of thinking that is defined as a science of information and also of nature, thus creating a relation between the life of signs and of communication in interaction.

The idea of exchange between interactive messages and texts created a particularization for the field and semiotic method when it comes to considering culture through constructed texts – if not through the codes of constituted languages, at least through the processes of semiotic modeling. Thanks to the comprehension that, from the cultural point of view, all manifestations are organized in sign systems – and not necessarily with language as their center –, culture semioticians start to work with the most different modeling processes, namely, with subtle sign systems and the wide semiotic manifestation of iconic systems. Culture semiotics operates under the complex comparative model of languages and semiotic systems in constant change and generation of new cultural texts. This general theory of the structures is the basis for the unveiling of the forms of world organization, from the physical to the cultural phenomenon.

⁴ LOTMAN, J. Problems in the Typology of Culture. In: LUCID, D. (ed.). *Soviet Semiotics*. Edited, translated and with an introduction by Daniel P. Lucid. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988, pp.213-221.

Following the example of this appropriate comprehension mechanism of cultural texts through the comparative mode, in *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture*, Lotman provides us with a particularly timely consideration on the relations between science and technology in an effort to explain how cultural transformations are as much a consequence of the historical course of events as they are an opening to that which is totally unpredictable. Hence, according to the author, science and technology could not be considered in isolation, but in their mutual relationships. Or as he states, “Moreover, they are combined in our consciousness into a single indivisible phrase” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.88).⁵ Lotman explains that science and technology, however, are connected not because they are synonymous, but because they are antithetical – given the fact that in the general process of culture, science and technology operate differently. According to him, technology is connected to gradual processes: it is not a surprise, therefore, that the technological advance can be expected. “Science, on the other hand, is associated with the periods of explosion. A scientific discovery is always unexpected” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.88).⁶

Gradualness and explosiveness are phenomena that can occur in the same cultural spectrum. Changeover processes in the sign order may arise in keeping with stability phenomena. According to Lotman (2009, p.7), “all explosive dynamic processes occur via a dynamically complex dialogue with stabilising mechanisms.”⁷ By understanding that gradual and explosive processes reside in a logic of statics and dynamics, Lotman also observes that the relations between system and extra-system are present in the operations of the whole semiotic system. In the same way, he reveals that symmetries and asymmetries in the system are established as processes of generation of meaning.

As asymmetry, dynamics and relations at the border are basic conditions for the unity of the cultural texts, it is not surprising that the relationships between science and technology are inextricably linked and, at the same time, on opposite ends. For Lotman, technical inventions and culture development flow organically through a single idea of progress. He claims that “[t]he optimal evolution of progress requires a

⁵ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁶ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁷ LOTMAN, J. *Culture and Explosion*. Edited by Marina Grishakova; translated by Wilma Clarck. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009.

harmonious relationship between science and technology” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.95).⁸ However, Lotman warns about the dissimilar relations between these two spheres, where conflicting interests may appear, making the harmonious relations between science and technology in the current progress of human culture uncommon. Hence, the relations between science and technology often take opposite directions in society:

The shifting of society’s attention onto the achievements of technology, which occurred in the twentieth century, has acted as a brake on science because only those aspects of science that are useful to technology from society’s point of view stand out (LOTMAN, 2013, p.95).⁹

Technology, therefore, is required because of the immediacy of the gradual advances necessary for the social expectations, while the innovative science advances by the aspects of the logic of explosion. More than variants in their evolution processes, science and technology can present beneficial or destructive development signs according to the way in which they are used. By appropriating most of the practical, financial and governmental resources, as it currently does, technology penetrates the very foundation of life and culture, becoming a dangerously aggressive phenomenon. By that logic, in a society which is permeated by a computational technologic network, as the one in which we live, we should always be in a state of alertness. However, a phenomenon capable of generating unpredictable and explosive processes such as computing technology, similar to those responsible for creating new interaction and evolution during the civilization transitions (for example the alphabet, the printing press and other social organization forms based on communication – after all, we are indeed standing before a type of writing through new codes), it becomes, in present times, such an intrinsic lifestyle device that, due to its frequency and presence, often falls in line with trivialities or even with an invisible state. It is from the highly transformative power and, at the same time, its stasis in common use that digital technologies show their unpredictability. When dealing with issues of unpredictability, Lotman recognizes the dual character of this concept, linking unpredictability to an explosive moment which depends on the spectator’s position.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 1.

⁹ For reference, see footnote 1.

It is clear that unpredictability is in direct opposition to predictability. Lotman explains that gradual and cyclical processes do not create unpredictable situations and cannot originate something fundamentally new:

In the usual sense of the word, novelty is the result of an essentially unpredictable situation. An unpredictable situation is not an event that is excluded from known cause and effect relationships; predictability is defined by the level of our observations. That which appears, in a given situation, to be fundamentally impossible is clearly excluded from the sphere of predictability. We view as predictable that bundle of probable events each possessing the same probability of being realized in the future. The moment of explosion breaks the chain of cause and effect, causing an entire area to rise up and a collection of identically probable events to come into view. Following from the logic of the preceding developments, it is essentially impossible to predict which of those events will actually occur (LOTMAN, 2013, p.64).¹⁰

When explaining the complex nature of unpredictability, Lotman foresees the articulation of this phenomenon next to a set of “cultural mechanisms”: it is dependent on the arrangements of the systems, codes and languages of culture the gradual or explosive future of the events in their spheres of accomplishment. Culture is, quintessentially, this place of power of interchangeability in its borders and latency of unpredictable and explosive processes. In these conditions, we will ponder on the unpredictability pointed out by Lotman, through its cultural mechanisms in certain expressions, based on cultural systems and texts whose reach is presented in individual works of research, whether in the circuits of computational technology, as it is now outlined, in arts or in language *mestizaje*. In some of these cases, the analysis of cultural texts is carried out on the basis of the idea of unpredictability.

2 Unpredictability in Art

The translation process of Lotman’s work offers contact with the update of readings and thoughts that generate channels of connection and new ways of considering distinct issues of culture. Because it is at the intersection of two or more

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 1.

languages, as Lotman proposes, translation functions as a process that stems from obstacles. However, the obstacles that emerge in an unpredictable manner are the very things that enable the mechanism of producing something new. This way, we are introduced to a constantly transforming cultural universe – artistic, scientific – in a text that questions disturbances and tendencies, on its way to the power of the unpredictable and explosive aspects of culture.

However, Lotman argues that art is the system of culture which manifests itself with all the potency of an explosive process. Although his analytical domain had been primarily literary studies, many of Lotman's formulations go beyond these limits and relate to other cultural texts, even those he did not get to know in the development of his thinking, as it is the case with digital arts. His main argument to that effect is made in the approaches between “art” and “science.” As explained earlier, Lotman distinguishes technology from science based on their respective constitutive processes. While technology is based on gradual processes, science operates through explosive processes.

We turn to Julio Plaza (2003, p.40) according to whom both science and art produce knowledge. However, although their material and methods are very different, both art and science operate according to the action of the same reasoning sphere: abduction. Thus, both approach a common conduct based on the formulations of hypotheses, problems and images. Nonetheless, performance results in distinct activities that are distant; after all, there are different forms of knowledge and know-how. Not only is the intelligible a way of knowing, but the sensible is as well. The demonstration in scientific activity has nothing in common with art presentation: while the artist seeks to constitute his esthetic object by exploring new ways and methods for his creations, the scientist seeks to build new experiments to prove his premises. Both work to build new knowledge (TAVARES, 2016, p.73); however, that which presents itself as an explosion can never be the fruit of an *apriority*. If that were the case, the emergence of unpredictability would never happen.

In Lotman's view, unpredictability dominates science and art when they move away from the immediate empirical world in order to reach the “second reality” and integrate it into the world of an already known reality. According to him, when establishing this other reality, “[a]rt never tires of finding new modes of relating to

reality, from total separation to total merging” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.199)¹¹ in different degrees and with different forces, but never in complete fusion or separation. “In the space between these poles there is a virtually unlimited variety of transitional forms” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.199).¹²

The art mechanism does not represent the empirical reality, nor does it simplify it; on the contrary, it makes it more complex, serving as model and human construction of another reality. “The freedom of artistic modeling is guaranteed by the fact that works of art are always a breakthrough into the new, into a sphere of artistic language that was until that point non-existent” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.200).¹³ The artistic process is a textual construction and a translation process, since “understanding always involves the translation of an unknown object into the language of well-known concepts” (LOTMAN, 2013, pp.200-1).¹⁴ Works that provide reinterpretations that are always contextual in the aesthetical and representative aspects of distinct periods of time carry this potential. That which guarantees the explosive latency of the texts over the years is their complexity and variety of interpretation regardless of their time, as it is in *Don Quixote*, the example used by Lotman. Dealing with the aesthetic circumstances of these new paths produced through Art in its distinct forms – painting, literary writing, play-writing, sound composition, audiovisual – makes possible new relations not only with that which comes from outside, in art, but also with the way we sensitively and cognitively process these languages.

Also, according to Lotman’s thought, daily reality often seems too ordinary for the perception of the new. At the same time, it ceases to be in any way perceptible and interesting, which means the decrease of its existence for our senses and consciousness. This world of exclusively immediate reality, of banal and everyday life, would have the opportunity to gain new perspectives in art. Artistic activity transforms the usual in uncommon and the uncommon in usual, and this process “revives our consciousness, our experience of the world, twice over as if recreating in us the intellectual and emotional curiosity of Adam seeing the world for the first time” (LOTMAN, 2013,

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹² For reference, see footnote 1.

¹³ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹⁴ For reference, see footnote 1.

p.202).¹⁵ This escape would be beneficial in terms of the recognition of our aesthetic, philosophical and representative conditions in the world and in the redefinition of the being.

In a scene of Liev Tolstoi, Lotman finds an example of an explosive moment in the act of artistic creation and, therefore, completely unpredictable. This is the scene in which a character, while drawing the figure of a man who was in a fit of rage, drops some stearin – a mixture of essential oils – on the figure. From what emerges with the stain, the artist discovers a new way of looking at it and new interpretative possibilities in his own drawing. The scene is reproduced in the following excerpt:

The spot of tallow had given the man a new pose. He had sketched this new pose, when all at once he recalled the face of a shopkeeper of whom he had bought cigars, a vigorous face with a prominent chin, and he sketched this very face, this chin on to the figure of the man. He laughed aloud with delight. The figure from a lifeless imagined thing had become living, and such that it could never be changed. That figure lived, and was clearly and unmistakably defined. The sketch might be corrected in accordance with the requirements of the figure, the legs, indeed, could and must be put differently, and the position of the left hand must be quite altered; the hair too might be thrown back. But in making these corrections he was not altering the figure but simply getting rid of what concealed the figure. He was, as it were, stripping off the wrappings which hindered it from being distinctly seen. Each new feature only brought out the whole figure in all its force and vigor, as it had suddenly come to him from the spot of tallow (TOLSTOI, 2005, p.821).¹⁶

From a banal act emerges not only an unpredictable process, but also a great explosiveness since it causes an unexpected reaction in the artist. This process leads Lotman to infer that “a creative ‘explosion’ can be expressed just as well in an unpredictable shift from the everyday to the fantastic as it can in a redoubled variant: the unpredictability of an unpredictable shift” (LOTMAN, 2013, p.208).¹⁷

Art is also developed by Lotman as a universal means for the expression of other systems and dismembered as a powerful organism of language and information, presenting their differences between verbal and non-verbal arts. While the non-verbal

¹⁵ For reference, see footnote 1.

¹⁶ TOLSTOI, L. *Anna Karenina*. Translated by Constance Garnett. Online: Planet eBook, 2005. Available at: <https://www.planetebook.com/anna-karenina>. Access on: 24 Mar, 2019.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 1.

ones carry traces of universalization, typical of the iconic languages manifested in continuous signs, as the fine-arts, verbal arts oscillate between two axes, given the fact that its nature of a discrete sign and its character of a national language attribute tend toward predictability. None of this prevents its organization from manifesting a radically explosive arrangement of iconic nature.

In contemporary times, when there are censure and protests to the different exhibitions, the fear of aesthetic unpredictability and explosive movements of culture is revealed as an attempt to impose more conservative positions by social groups to ensure a degree of domestication of sensitive, political and even religious actions. Recent events involving the censure of works of art can be found in the acts of protest and even the closure of exhibitions as in the case of the *Queermuseu: cartographies of the difference in the Brazilian art* exhibition;¹⁸ the *La Bête* performance¹⁹ at the Museum of Modern Art in São Paulo, and the play *Jesus, the Queen of Heaven*²⁰ – all occurred in 2018. In one of his comparisons, Lotman understands the importance of art to society and compares it to an injection that provides immunity to an organism - to some extent, the injection may even be uncomfortable, but its importance to the delimitation of new ways is of utmost importance for the society.

In an act of “taking us by the hand” and proposing new associations and new languages, Lotman help us to see life and thoughts outside of the environments that are limited to a single world or path by everyday life, banality and monotony. He shows the possibility of explosive powers that open the new ways of looking at things, from the state of movement and opening to that which is new and approaches a secondary reality, full of unpredictability, called art: it is full of sensibility, revives our perception, revitalizes our consciousness, and shows us new paths.

¹⁸ The “Queermuseu: cartographies of the difference in the Brazilian art” was canceled in Porto Alegre and reopened amid protests in the Lage Park, in Rio de Janeiro. Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2018/08/exposicao-queermuseu-abre-no-rio-com-protestos-de-movimentos-religiosos.shtml>. Access on: 16 Aug. 2018.

¹⁹ Available at: <https://g1.globo.com/sao-paulo/noticia/novo-protesto-em-frente-ao-mam-contra-performance-com-homem-nu-tem-agressao-fisica-e-vira-caso-de-policia.ghtml>. Access on: 16 Aug. 2018.

²⁰ Available at: <https://www1.folha.uol.com.br/ilustrada/2017/09/1919033-peca-com-transexual-em-papel-de-jesus-e-cancelada-apos-decisao-judicial.shtml>. Access on: 16 Aug. 2018.

3 Predictable and Unpredictable in the “Foreigner”

Affirming that human condition is organized according to an existence of dialogical nature is no novelty. The exchanges happen in direct communication between individuals, systems, species, collectives, in verbal form, in the form of texts, in gestural, behavioral and implicit forms. The capacity for exchange between beings and systems necessarily implies the existence of two or more individuals/systems, which may have greater or fewer levels of similarities between them. These encounters or dialogues are the *raison d'être* of cultural systems and their source of evolution, which leads Lotman to state that in the “real” world one lives on the permanent confrontation with the presence of the other.

In the book *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (LOTMAN, 2013),²¹ the complex of dialogical relations thus conceived guides a whole understanding of the very conception of “other” and “foreigner” as fundamental agents of the interactions between individuals and behaviors that maintain the most diversified cultural encounters in cultures. The term “foreigner,” in its most basic sense, indicates something that does not belong to that environment, to the stranger, to the outsider. The “other” is the one out there, outside the individual, the system, beliefs, community and affections – out of sight and beyond the reach of life. From the semiotic point of view, the field of study to which Lotman’s semiotic thinking belongs, however, the foreigner is a spokesperson of a dialogical condition not only because the “self” addresses “the other,” but also because these positions are marked by transverse views; that is, they are mutually interchangeable.

For Lotman, the unknown forces that penetrate in an unpredictable and constant way in culture are the ones that are foreign. The intrusion of the non-systemic into a system is, in this sense, one of the most important sources of cultural transformation. It is, to some extent, what makes a system dynamic. If it remains static, it will die. In *Culture and Explosion*, Lotman (2009)²² already pointed to the fact that the operation of a minimal structure should always have two languages, for example, and to the inability of these languages to encompass, by themselves, the world outside them. To him, this

²¹ For reference, see footnote 1.

²² For reference, see footnote 7.

incapacity was not an obstacle, a deficiency, “but rather a condition of existence, as it dictates the necessity of the other (another person, another language, another culture)” (LOTMAN, 2009, p.2).²³

Without the “other,” culture could not be consolidated, because the supposed “identities,” the “own,” the “common” are only perceived in the light of the confrontation with the outsider. The idea of “foreigner” is a creation of the very system – by understanding the self as someone who is not the person who is “out there.” By understanding that which is not his own as peculiar and singular, Lotman observes that it is not by coincidence that the first descriptions of the singularities of this or that culture are produced by foreigners. The position of “other” describes the natural as unique, translating a cultural historical behavior that refers to the context of the Roman empire (LOTMAN, 2013, p.57).²⁴ For Rome, everything and everyone beyond its “borders” were considered barbarians, excluded from the domain of culture or simply “outsiders.” However, the perception of this segregation as an identity constituent was only possible because of the expansionist character of the empire that subjected the “Romans” to the clash with the “other,” forcing them to move outside themselves so as to be able to reach their own uniqueness compared to the oddities of the other.

In a broader sense, the foreigner is also understood as a “state of mind” predisposed to otherness and displacement, even of the self. To be a foreigner under such conditions is to assume the position of a pilgrim, the one who translates the journey, the state of being in transit, into a condition of enrichment that, in the context of cultures, contributes to the construction of memory and reserves of circulating information in culture. Lotman concludes that without the encounter between “self” and “foreign,” the increase of information simply does not occur. As an example of reflection, he cites the case of rebel writer Vladimir S. Pecherin (1807-1885) (LOTMAN, 2013, p.59 on).²⁵

A controversial and iconic Russian figure of the nineteenth century, Pecherin embodies the condition of “wanderer” and “traveler” – an authentic embodiment of the Russian *Zeitgeist* of the 1860s-1870s. A priest, politician, writer, raised according to the

²³ For reference, see footnote 7.

²⁴ For reference, see footnote 1.

²⁵ For reference, see footnote 1.

teachings of the Russian Orthodox Church, he was interested in the moral and religious ideology of utopian socialism. After studying classical languages at Moscow University, he completed his studies abroad. Back to Russia, he took over the teaching of Greek, but later abandoned it to pursue ideals of a political radicalism abroad, becoming one of the first political emigrants in Russia. In his spiritual exile, he treaded the arduous path that led him against Catholicism. He died in Ireland, separated from everything that had ever been considered his.

Pecherin's conflict – which also defines the semiotic question studied by Lotman – focuses on the fact that throughout his life he was afflicted with permanent disillusionment, characterized by painful detachment and, more importantly, by the renunciation of everything that belonged to him. If during his childhood he was intimately directed toward that which is foreign, in adulthood he escapes from everything that seemed familiar to him. Thus, he lives a life of ruptures and constant reinventions – a life of transit, a life as a foreigner. However, his biggest contribution is not related to the amount of achievements in this journey, but to what he kept leaving behind. In other words, if he was able to abandon himself, taking on the foreign condition and making him [the foreigner] into something that was his own, he ended up transforming his life into a complex repository of translations of different semiosis. By cutting the ties with the “commonplace,” he constructs his antithesis that becomes his reality. The constant change between “self” and “foreign” and “foreign” and “self” is one of the most fundamental mechanisms in the evolution of cultures (LOTMAN, 2013, p.61).²⁶ Although this alternation has, in fact, a predictable character, it is experienced by a strangeness that participates in it as unpredictable. For Lotman, “it may be a catastrophe, the unexpected intrusion of previously unknown forces, a miraculous event, or anything that cannot be predicted within the limits of a given system” (LOTMAN, 2013, p56).²⁷ The figure of the “foreigner” participates in the unpredictability of his encounters and of the results of these encounters, of the evolutionary movements of culture on the two possible levels, the gradual and the explosive.

The occurrence observed by Lotman in a biographical event can also be evaluated from the perspective of culture. In this sense, the presence of the foreigner can

²⁶ For reference, see footnote 1.

²⁷ For reference, see footnote 1.

be explosively transformative and contribute to cultural changes through gradual forms of more subtle movements. The Romans can be evoked again – now situating the success of the expansionist project that moved to a large extent thanks to the explosive clashes of territorial domination and marginalization of the different – with respect to the subtle and gradual cultural absorption exercised by the inevitable coexistence between dominated individuals and their conquerors.

A similar process has been observed in our research when examining events of colonization and socio-cultural formation in Latin America. They are a result of violent colonizing explosions, but are subtle spaces in gradual evolution of an assertion of plural and, consequently, mestizo identities.

We could say that, based on Lotman, mestizo societies are oriented towards the foreigner, which guarantees the formation of equally mestizo places, accustomed to *mestizaje*. The notion of foreigner, extended to the notion of “mestizo,” formulated by authors such as Laplantine and Nouss (2002) and Pinheiro (1994), reinforces the “mestizo condition” as a state of travel, mobility, invention, born of the encounter. It also marks the birth of multiple “identities” and possible identities since the mestizo condition dispenses with any vestige of predictability. The result of their encounters cannot be previously measured – likewise being “foreign” in a culture. It means living in the in-betweenness, where all that is possible resides; therefore, it means living in the zone of the unpredictable. Lotman (2013) considers that the continuous detachment from the “self” in order to admit the other in a new “I” is a tormenting exercise. For Laplantine and Nouss (2002), the mestizo condition is often painful. It breaks with the triumphalist logic of “owning,” of “being the owner.” For the three authors, first of all, “becoming a foreigner”/“miscegenating” is an experience of expropriation, absence, and uncertainty that may arise from the encounter. Laplantine and Nouss (2002, p.53) argue that “freedom of spirit calls for freedom of form.”²⁸ Thus, it is similar to art, in which free form is exercised and the exercise of transformation through the confrontation with “others” is constantly encouraged.

To declare the self a traveler, a foreigner, to declare his/her own mestizo condition, to be prepared for the constant exercise of detachment, reassessment, acceptance, adaptation, and abandonment is indispensable to cultural systems. This

²⁸ In Portuguese: “a liberdade de espírito convida à da forma.”

leads Lotman to believe that cultures that are constantly oriented towards the foreign are richer, evolve more, move larger reserves of information. Mestizo cultures, which are oriented towards the multitude of possible forms of being and affirm plurality, are – equally – more complex; therefore, they enjoy more freedom.

Being a foreigner is to remain in the transit territory, always sensitive to the encounter, always at the mercy of the unpredictable, always playing the lead role of painful detachment of the self, always being the “I” in the other and allowing the “other” to be in the “I.” At different passages in his text, Lotman reaffirms the need to nurture the predisposition to otherness because there is always a multiplicity of different systems around. Some are relatively close to that which the individual considers his, common, ordinary. Therefore, they are more gradually absorbed by him and transform culture in the long term. Other systems are so contrary that the encounter is violent, and transformation is catastrophic and immediate. In any case, the mechanism that gives culture its dynamism is exactly the saturation of these possibilities and the predisposition to encounters, creating a system of enormous internal variation and, consequently, of immense reserves of information.

Ultimately, being a foreigner becomes an essential condition to the abundant production of information, in which all relations of cause and effect and of probability become (temporarily) inactive. There, where anything is possible, nothing is predictable; hybridizations become fertile producers of new cultural expressions.

Conclusion

The article aimed to examine the legacy of Lotman’s formulations for the understanding of the cultural semiosis focused on the process of unpredictability as a fundamental mechanism of culture. The emerging cultural constructions in interactive spaces of different forms are unpredictable, given that, in all of them, there are explosive charges of information to be explored. If art was considered a privileged place for such emergence, it is because all peoples, in all the circumstances of their life, experience creative processes that challenge not only their living environment but also their feelings, perceptions, and knowledge itself. This challenge is posed in every

experience of otherness, whether it is lived individually but in communities, or it is composed of topographic displacements that are not merely geographic, but are socio-cultural, artistic, aesthetic and, ultimately, sensorial.

In this sense, Lotman's formulations about the triad discussed here – science, art, foreign – constitute a fundamental nucleus of theoretical ideas, in which unpredictable movements are constituted in the trajectory of the most evident gradualness. Understanding the mechanism of such a relationship as a manifestation of the dialogical relations of the socio-cultural context was seen by our group of researchers as the synthesis of Lotman's legacy, which directs many reflections on the functioning of culture in our cultural history marked by the contemporaneity of transversal relationships – displacements and conflicts of all kinds.

We can only say that the study of the text from the linguistic translation perspective placed us in contact with ideas about the translation process that had never been experienced as an exercise of possibilities. Of course, we learned from Boris Schnaiderman that translation subverts the notion of its unique literal possibility, thus approaching the perspectives of an intersemiotic translation. Schnaiderman, in a way, carries out his work in a sphere of thought that faces many of Lotman's formulations about the cultural translation conceived from the perspective of linguistic translation. Considering that Lotman did not perform his task in the same way Schnaiderman did – although both lived as foreigners in the country that welcomed them in circumstances of political conflicts – it was very encouraging to find, in the translator who adopted the Brazilian nationality, experiences that support the semiotic concepts understood as mechanisms of a whole cultural dynamics. When Schnaiderman proposes that “boldness, daring, flights of the imagination, are as necessary in translation as is fidelity to the original; or rather, the true fidelity is only achieved with this amount of freedom in dealing with the texts” (2015, p.18),²⁹ we see a work that is full of challenges not very different from those faced by the artist and the scientist. As a common challenge, they have the task of operating unknown codes and untranslatable texts.

²⁹ In the original: “o arrojo, a ousadia, os vãos da imaginação, são tão necessários na tradução quanto a fidelidade ao original; ou melhor, a verdadeira fidelidade só se obtém com esta dose de liberdade no trato com os textos.”

Among his remarks about this subject in his work *Tradução, Ato Desmedido* [*Translation, Unreasonable Act*] (2015), in which Schnaiderman dialogues with readings of other researchers and translators who share the dynamics and mutability of the translation process, he presents us a path for this work, which Lotman calls metalanguage. Rather than seeking correspondences between terms, translation treads the path towards the unknown. When in need of challenging the code and unveiling texts, the translator becomes an investigator of possibilities and theoretically contributes to the speculative field of the trade when he/she writes with the necessary depth and subject knowledge about the work of the author to be translated (SCHNAIDERMAN, 2015, p.108).

As researchers of the Semiotics of culture, we also lunged ourselves at the exercise of metalanguage followed by theoretical reflection on the act of translating in order to extract theoretical foundations and analytical paths for our own investigations. We practiced a little of what Schneiderman defined as translation: a free and “unlimited” exercise in the confrontation of words, ideas, hypotheses, concepts, texts and cultural objects of our empirical analysis in the field of arts and of contemporary audiovisual communications.

We have also encountered the “tradition of translation,” especially the Russian and Eastern European texts, which the works of Lotman, of semioticists of culture, and of Schnaiderman offer us as an incredible force and a legitimate stimulus to give encouragement, recognition and space to the thoughts that gravitate not only around the translation of *The Unpredictable Workings of Culture* (LOTMAN, 2013)³⁰ but also in the research on objects that are, above all, marked by the unpredictability of culture.

In many of the cases presented, it is worth mentioning that we found a unity in relation to the role and function of the unpredictable phenomenon: in art, in techniques and in the figure of the foreigner, unpredictability is a verifiable gradient and indispensable function. Endowed with these perceptions that emerged from the concept of unpredictability, we investigated the systems that we studied and realized, from the point of view of forces, changes, and other possibilities, that in each system there is hope for unpredictable and explosive phenomena that generate novelty. We invite those who share the same interests to do this reading with us.

³⁰ For reference, see footnote 1.

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Statement of authorship and responsibility for published content

We (the authors) inform that we had access to the research *corpus*, we had an active participation in the discussion concerning the results, and we conducted the review and approval of the final version of this paper.

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