

**The Fool and the Madman. Notes on the Contemporary Cultural Scene / *El tonto y el loco. Notas sobre la escena cultural contemporánea / O tonto e o louco. Notas sobre a cena cultural contemporânea***

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**ABSTRACT**

In his book *Culture and Explosion*, Lotman studies the dynamics of culture using *the fool* and *the madman* as paradigm characters incarnating social change. Immersed in the space of a semiosphere, human acts gain meaning only in the context of the particular universe they take place in, when understood as a whole. Lotman invites us to consider the ternary structure fool/smart/crazy as a continuum where we can gauge individual and collective adequacy to the norm. Here, I summarize Lotman's multifaceted description through my own lens with the aid of some examples centered on the notion of *the fool* and *the madman* in some representative spaces. I am particularly interested in finding paradigm changes through the reading of contemporary texts, or better said, through some complex manifestations of madness and stupidity, which are difficult to translate accurately without a subjective assessment.

**KEYWORDS:** Lotman; Madman; Fool; Norm; Social change; Contemporary culture

**RESUMEN**

*En el libro Cultura y explosión, en el que Lotman analiza la dinámica cultural, emplea las figuras del "tonto" y del "loco" como paradigmas que encarnan las formas del cambio social. Inmersos en el espacio de una semiosfera, los actos cobran significación en relación con la totalidad de ese universo. Propone considerar la estructura ternaria tonto/inteligente/loco en tanto continuum que permite visibilizar grados de adecuación a la norma en lo individual y en lo colectivo. Sintetizaré la múltiple descripción de Lotman añadiendo mis comentarios y algunos ejemplos, en especial de la figura del tonto y del loco en diferentes espacios representativos. Me interesa plantear la posibilidad de encontrar ciertos cambios de paradigma leyendo textos de la cultura contemporánea o mejor dicho, ciertas manifestaciones complejas de la locura y la estupidez, que hacen difícil para mí su traducción sin que ella sea a menudo el resultado de un juicio de valor.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Lotman; Loco; Tonto; Norma; Cambio social; Cultura contemporánea

**RESUMO**

*Em seu livro Cultura e explosão, no qual analisa a dinâmica cultural, Lotman utiliza as figuras do "tonto" e do "louco" como termos paradigmáticos de atitudes humanas que encarnam as formas de mudança social. Imersos no espaço de uma semiosfera, os*

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atos humanos ganham significado em relação à totalidade desse universo. O autor propõe considerar a estrutura ternária tonto/inteligente/louco como um continuum que permite visualizar graus de adequação individual e coletiva à norma. Neste texto, sintetizarei a múltipla descrição de Lotman a ela acrescentando meus comentários e alguns exemplos, em especial da figura do tonto e do louco em diferentes espaços representativos. Estou particularmente interessada em defender a possibilidade de encontrar certas mudanças de paradigma por meio da leitura de textos da cultura contemporânea, ou melhor, certas manifestações complexas da loucura e da estupidez, cuja tradução se torna difícil para mim, sem que seja frequentemente o resultado de um juízo de valor.

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** Lotman; Louco; Tonto; Norma; Mudança social; Cultura contemporânea

In his book *Culture and Explosion* (2009[1992]),<sup>1 2</sup> which is devoted to the analysis of cultural dynamics, Lotman uses the figures of the *fool* and the *madman* as paradigmatic terms of human attitudes that embody the forms of social change. He proposes considering the ternary structure of fool / wiseman / madman, not in a medical sense, but as a continuum that makes it possible to visualize degrees of adaptation to the cultural norm, both individually and collectively, since such attitudes are part of systems in circulation.<sup>3</sup> These figures have been taken to literature, and in the texts that Lotman rescues, he discovers that what was considered as perfection in other times, may be judged as vulgar or ridiculous behaviours now:

When human experience becomes culture, it establishes rules that define “programs” of behavior for man. These programs allow you to translate the experience into texts and register them in one of the languages of the memorizing mechanisms to turn them into events of

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<sup>1</sup> The fool and the madman is Chapter 8, pp.38-64, of Lotman’s *Culture and Explosion*. The book appeared in 1992, months before Lotman died (*Kul'tura i vzryv*, Moscow: Gnosis, 270 pp.). We quote the English version herein.

<sup>2</sup> LOTMAN, J. *Culture and Explosion*. Edited by Marina Grishakova; translated by Wilma Clark. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 2009[1992].

<sup>3</sup> I think it is interesting to note that P. Torop points out the affinity of the Lotmanian proposal of reading a behavior as a cultural text, with the theory of C. Geertz in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), even though there was no direct contact between the two thinkers. Torop quotes Geertz: “[...] ‘doing ethnography’ must mean an attempt to read a strange, figurative and incoherent manuscript in which the graphic signs of ordinary language are replaced by behavioral examples. And within the framework of this conception, the culture described itself becomes an ‘acting document’ (acted document) that can be interpreted by communicating with it” (TOROP, 2009/2010, p.7). Text in Spanish: “[...] ‘hacer etnografía’ debe significar un intento de leer un manuscrito extraño, figurativo e incoherente en el que los signos gráficos del lenguaje ordinario son reemplazados por ejemplos conductuales. Y en el marco de esta concepción, la cultura descrita misma se convierte en un ‘documento actuante’ (acted document) que puede ser interpretado al comunicarse con él.”

the culture of a given period (ARAN; BAREI, 2002, p.131; our translation).<sup>4</sup>

However, it is not a question of thinking about homogeneous phenomena, since they can be embodied in individual or collective subjects or in different social groups, and understood in a varied range of nuances or semiotic manifestations, such as extravagant fashion or the rules of female courtship. Immersed in the space of a semiosphere, particular acts take significance in relation to the totality of that universe, and they can be read as texts that carry information: constant in one case, innovative in another. I say they can be read, or better, they can be translated by the cultural codes of an era in a diverse and non-univocal way. We ask ourselves: if the text as a semiotic space interacts with other texts of culture, how do the figures of the fool and the madman interact today with texts of culture? How to translate them since, by definition, they are figures of the frontiers of the rule?

In Lotman, fool and madman are structurally opposing terms insofar as the one appears in predictable behaviors in relation to the prevailing norm (legal, moral, social or psychological) while the other, by not allowing foresight, increases the informativity of the system and opens unknown possibilities. Both effects are what determine the mobility of the cultural system, as it is signalled by the subtitle of the work<sup>5</sup>: The predictable and unpredictable in the processes of social change. That is to say, they give meaning to fractal microuniverses of a whole and, in one case, allow thinking in phases of repetition and stability, and in the other, in an explosive and innovative state. These phases can happen synchronously or even intersectly, because they are part of the structural contradictions:

Culture, whilst it is a complex whole, is created from elements which develop at different rates, so that any one of its synchronic sections reveals the simultaneous presence of these different stages. Explosions in some layers may be combined with gradual development in others. This, however, does not preclude the interdependence of these layers (LOTMAN, 2009 [1992], p.12).<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In original: “Cuando la experiencia humana se vuelve cultura, establece reglas que definen para el hombre “programas” de comportamiento. Esos programas permiten traducir la experiencia a textos y registrarlos en alguna de las lenguas de los mecanismos memorizantes para convertirlos en acontecimientos de la cultura de una época dada.”

<sup>5</sup> This subtitle is included in the Spanish translation, edited by Gedisa, Barcelona, in 1999 [Translator’s note].

<sup>6</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

The fool is the subject that, in front of situations in which he must act seems to be always *out of place* as we usually say, does not respond to conventions because he does not know or cannot do it. In reiterating systematically this behavior, he becomes predictable and also, in my interpretation, harmless and invisible in the social scene. The wiseman is predictable too because he adapts his behavior to the law and the norm in use, and he thinks as it is expected to think, even if it is only a social hypocrisy. And, according to Lotman, the madman is the one who exercises the faculty of the free choice of his conduct, making it extreme and unpredictable. This quality is, in itself, destructive, but in certain troubled situations can show its effectiveness. It is interesting to think that an act that violates reason will be heroic madness if it succeeds or idiocy if it fails. Hollywood cinema has always used these artifices, especially in war movies or sports exploits in which, against all odds, an action triumphs upon a powerful enemy. In other words, this is the stereotype of all the films in which the protagonist is target of mockery and has to go through the hero's tests, but he finally wins thanks to his courage or his cunning.

Considered as basic modalities,<sup>7</sup> Lotman describes different structural variants of eras (especially, in the Middle Ages), situations and typologies, illustrating them with literary or historical examples. It can be a hero that takes his potential to the limit and embodies the imaginary of an entire community: "A hero of this type, in order to remain always victorious, must be skillful in the most common type of activity but in hypertrophied form" (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.38).<sup>8</sup> It is the world of giants. In our days, it is the superhero, such as Batman, Spiderman or Superman (mostly male) that delights children's imaginations and merchandising. Rather than physical hypertrophy of the legendary hero, this kind of superhero exhibits a power endowed by technology, usually associated with nature (solar energy, spider, bat) or some genetic mutation. And

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<sup>7</sup> Both social roles involve a series of semantic and idiomatic nuances in everyday use. They can change the names of the fool such as: "stupid," "idiot," or even more disqualifying or discriminatory, such as "abnormal" and "moron." Or in the case of the crazy: "extravagant," "outrageous," "extreme" (there are "extreme sports" that are fashionable), "gifted," "genius," "wonderful" or "incredible." Each one involves an assessment of who qualifies or sanctions: thus the tenderness of those "locos bajitos" ["crazy short"] of Serrat (1995) or the defense of the mother of *Forrest Gump* (1994), "stupid is what stupid does." You can multiply the examples and each language has its own; some are ephemeral and fashionable and others are specific to certain social groups. But I understand that Lotman prefers more neutral terms to avoid the emphasis on value, since he is interested in the cultural model that they reveal.

<sup>8</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

although its clothing is functional and he is not always a humanoid, he still bears a morally regulated planetary mandate.

Another heroic ideal of folklore is the triumph of the weak, who replaces the lack of strength with astuteness and intelligence, and which remembers the scene of Ulysses and the Cyclops. In closer times, a Colombian film, *The Strategy of the Snail* [*La Estrategia del Caracol*] (CABRERA, 1993) rescues the collective ingenuity that is set in motion: in front of the abusive eviction, humble people leave the house in order to comply with the law, but at the end they move silently the house and leave only the outside. It is worth remembering the reflections of M. de Certeau (1996) about tactics of the weak as forms of resistance to the strategies of power, in the same way that Bakhtin (1984)<sup>9</sup> referred to the popular comic culture that reverses the hierarchy and the order imposed by the feudal society. Big or small, ingenuity is an unpredictable and transgressive mode of social transformation, which is “effective because they dislodge the enemy from his usual situations” (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.39).<sup>10</sup>

But the opposite can also happen that is to say, the almost irrational freedom of the individual or a group of them is exploited by disorienting the enemy. Although the bewildering violence of “combat folly” is often compared with animal behavior, according to Lotman this is a wrong interpretation, since unpredictable animal behaviors are very limited and even less in dangerous situations. Instead the mad behavior of the human is a powerful weapon which “is based on the general psychological rule of creating a situation in which the enemy loses its orientation” (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.40). Nowadays, we can mention the sad examples of unexpected massacres carried out individually by a young gunman in schools or universities or, on the other extreme, suicide attacks in public places by fanatical members of fundamentalist organizations. They are forms of folly combat in our contemporary scenario whose effects go far beyond the immediate and they are translated into fear, suspicion and the closing of borders to everything that may seem culturally alien or different. Processes of dehumanization programmed by dominant religious, economic or political systems that show the paradox of a rational madness,

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<sup>9</sup> BAKHTIN, M. *Rabelais and his World*. Translated by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

<sup>10</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

but not stupid (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.41)<sup>11</sup> and, therefore, signs of the functioning of a system in the semiotic space.

The difficulties that characterize an act as mad or stupid do not escape his sagacity. For example, the literary theme of the madness of Don Quixote, who is incomprehensible to the eyes of Sancho because he assumes a sacrifice without having been disregarded by Dulcinea, for the only fact that chivalric love is a ladder to perfection. Sancho uses common sense and everyday logic and, in his simplicity, he sees that the madness of his master is pure imitation of what happens in cavalry novels: “Literature does not reproduce life, but rather it is life that attempts to recreate literature,” and hence the absurdity of the knight's behavior as a norm of everyday life (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.47).<sup>12</sup> But, unlike Sancho, nowadays we find it more difficult to separate fictions from everyday realities, immersed in the space of virtual globality.

Lotman thinks that when the absurd acts of a character, such as Don Quixote's, make their way into everyday life and become naturalized, they become pure imitation – they cease to be explosive in order to become “a fact of mass culture.” And for this reason he states:

The norm has no distinctive features. It is a singular space located between the fool and the madman. Explosion, too, has no distinctive features, or to be more exact, possesses a whole range of possible features. In the case of individual behaviour, it distances itself from the norm and in such a case represents itself as folly; translated into mass culture, it becomes a form of stupidity (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.45).<sup>13</sup>

Another interesting example is Nero, whose life, narrated by Suetonius, shows how he tried to imitate himself in theatrical montages, turning Rome into part of the spectacle and giving free rein to his excesses and moral perversities, as Ivan The Fearsome would also do.

This issue gives Lotman the opportunity to display an interesting reflection on the relationship between life and theater: for example, the theater as an imitation constitutes, in Tolstoy's works, a kind of madness, since the actors simulate not see the

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<sup>11</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>12</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>13</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

spectators of their time. As we know, in our time this border between living and acting, and showing the self publicly, has almost disappeared. Even in the theatrical phenomena, the spectacle has become widespread and has invaded all social spaces. “The general public prefers to see actors and not characters,” says Molinari referring to the state of the independent theater in Córdoba because, rather than going to see a work, it is preferred to see the fashionable actor (MOLINARI, 2018, our translation).<sup>14</sup> It is enough to think about the acting role that the image of the politician has acquired and how his speech broadcast on television, and also the media profiles that shape the advisors where all details had been taken care of, such as makeup, clothes, gestures, words and silences. Filming with a selfie and posting it on the networks allows the minute of the performance, which is available by technology. And regarding the massive adoption of the eccentric or extravagant behavior of some socially notable individual (such as sportsman, musician, singer or entertainment character), the fact transforms into stupidity, which was transgressive in Lotmanian terms. Today, as we know, any stupidity “goes viral” on social networks.

Another medieval ideal of behavior pointed out by Lotman was regulated by the ideas of *honor* and *glory*. The first is a material sign that gave social place and could be dispensed or removed (*El Cid*, for example), while glory is a verbal sign that is heard, transmitted, disseminated and measured by its duration. This double value assigned to behavior has endured with variants in our culture. Thus, we can say “eternal glory to the Malvinas heroes,” reinforcing not only the concept of unlimited duration of these young deaths but adding a nuance of religiosity and eternal life.<sup>15</sup> Also, our Argentine National Anthem, “let us swear to die with glory,”<sup>16</sup> in which glory is won and defended with freedom, or even school songs that evoke paradigms of civility (“Glory and praise, it constantly honors [...] father of the classroom, immortal Sarmiento”),<sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> in which honor and glory are forms of collective memory.

Returning to literature, Lotman argues that while the break of the norm is usual in the romantic model, the scope of the norm (which is the absolute value of the hero,

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<sup>14</sup> In original: “El gran público prefiere ver actores y no personajes.”

<sup>15</sup> TN. “Gloria eterna a los héroes de Malvinas” is a common phrase used by Argentinean community in the resulting context of the South Atlantic conflict between Argentina and the United Kingdom, known as the Malvinas War or Falklands War.

<sup>16</sup> In original: “coronados de gloria vivamos o juremos con gloria morir.”

<sup>17</sup> TN. Argentine intellectual and the seventh President of Argentina in 19th century.

<sup>18</sup> In original: “Gloria y loor, honra sin par, [...] padre del aula, Sarmiento inmortal.”

the saint or the knight) is the model almost unattainable in the Middle Ages. That is to say, a model that is only fulfilled in the literary invention as an ideal form, and that Cervantes ridicules because only a madman may want to fulfill it. And Lotman makes an interesting methodological observation: it is not enough to investigate the norm in real texts of the Middle Ages, but it must be discovered in other social structures, where it is formulated as a metatext in the form of rules, teachings or theoretical treatises.

In this sense, we must ask ourselves about the origin of the norm: the crowd in the romantic (which is why it disdains it) and the sovereign or God in the Middle Ages (which is why it is unattainable). I usually perceive that in the cultural space where I live, the social norm is written or dictated by the state, school, family or common law. But the unwritten or unsaid norm (of uncertain origin and usually not an innocent one) generates entropic situations and a permanent unstable balance between knowledge and practice. As the theory of Lotman proposes, we must look for the norm in other transversal spaces: for example, in our case, in the structures where information is generated and circulated. It is an incessant metatext of global reach that, in different translations, produces fissures in the desirable or inherited cultural model, and also prints another rhythm or another direction to changes in the predictable behavior.

Concomitantly, the norm today is also dictated by the market and, in that sense, nothing is unattainable, even if it is not reasonable or humanly valuable. I risk the idea that this will generate forms of resistance and memory in cultural “backpack,” which have begun to think about the recovery of the biological aspects in human species as a collective model to achieve. And this logic could be an imitation of ancient cultures that are governed by the dynamics of natural cycles, like a magma for new explosion phases. Can the predictable not generate entropy? Was this aspect not what Bakhtin interpreted in carnival rituals when the celebration of the cycles was generating new information, dynamic captured creatively by the work of Rabelais?

Nowadays, the rite of celebration of the winter solstice (something almost forgotten or only present in small ethnic communities) has had many followers in several countries and regions of Latin America. And while the unpredictability of the technoinformatics explosion is sought creatively in many planetary areas, recovering the cyclical as a principle of the production of new information is another possibility that encodes old texts and gives them another meaning in new contexts of interaction. And I



wonder: Is this not associated with the Western movement of women's empowerment, a model that has always been naturalized in cultural terms and which now seeks to "create a kind of window in the semiotic layer"? (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.24).<sup>19</sup> For me, it is necessary to quote an extensive paragraph by Lotman that inspires my reflections:

If we abstain from evaluative statements, then what we have before us are the two sides of one process, mutually dependent and constantly replacing each other in the unity of dynamic development. The contradictory complexity of the historical process subsequently activates first one, then the other form. At the present moment, European civilisation (including America and Russia) is experiencing a period of general discreditation of the very idea of explosion. Humanity lived through a period between the 18th and 20th centuries which may be described as the realisation of the explosive metaphor wherein the image of explosion in popular consciousness came to be associated with gunpowder, dynamite and the nucleus of the atom rather than its potential as a philosophical construct. To the contemporary man, explosion as a phenomenon of physics, transferable to other processes only in the metaphorical sense has come to be associated with ideas of devastation and has turned into a symbol of destruction. But if, at the core of our contemporary representations, there lay the kind of associations that existed during periods of great openness such as the Renaissance or in art in general then our understanding of the concept of explosion would evoke in us such phenomena as the birth of a new living creature or any other creative transformation of the structure of life (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], pp.9-10).<sup>20</sup>

This deep question allows me to consider the problematic of temporality in Lotman, associated with the study of history. It is a philosophical question that will reveal it in the last stage of its production and to which, in another opportunity, I dedicated a long work in which I characterized as *Cultural metamorphosis*, in order to associate this idea with the matrix figure of fantastic literature, since art is the great chronotopic condenser (ARÁN, 2014). In the last years of his theoretical production, Lotman adds the notion of temporality to his spatial notion of semiosphere (which synthesizes a whole period of search). It is important to state that this temporality was never totally absent from his theory, either in the concept of memory or in the development of the cultural typologies. However, towards the end of his life, this issue

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<sup>19</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>20</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

will take a direction more oriented to the processes of historical change and to the political forms adopted by the contemporary Russian culture.

The idea of explosion is linked to unpredictability and this is related to chance or casualty. In his conception, it inherits the historical logic of Hegel, which only attend to events that actually happened without noticing the innumerable possibilities that unleashes an explosive event and without asking about what has not happened, as if the linear cause-and-effect logic were the only possibility. Why not think that every concrete moment was surrounded by others that did not happen? And why not think that the concrete moment was the work of chance and the unexpected source of other transformations?

In a multidimensional universe (and here it is notorious the influence of Prigogine), the possible directions should not be excluded: they should be sought contrastively in other cultural forms that the same process can adopt in different semiospheres, as it happens with variants of Romanticism or in the stages that follow the Renaissance. Or instead, we can compare a work of art with an economic process (which although are untranslatable to each other) in order to show reciprocal influences. This means that this issue must be open up not only to an idea of a non-deterministic future, but also to new traces to read the past.

Each historical process can be read in two dimensions, both predictability and unpredictability. In this sense, madman and fool are relational terms, rather than oppositional ones with absolute meanings:

[...] the two wheels of the bicycle of history.  
We have already said that the person who lives according to the laws of customs and traditions was, from the point of view of the enterprising hero of the explosive epoch, foolish, and that in the same way, the latter from the point of view of his opponent was considered to be insidious and dishonourable. Now we will try to consider these disputing characters as links in a united chain (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], p.60).<sup>21</sup>

And then we can understand how the processes of cultural development models the behaviors that are embodied in art and literature, an idea that it is approached to the work of Bakhtin on the hero in the education novel (1982) (although, in Bakhtin the

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<sup>21</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

conception, the role of man in history was accentuated ideologically rather than anthropologically).

The modeling of behaviors that take shape in literature allows me to enter a raw novel that we could call as a “social observatory” of our time, in order to see how the actantial roles of the madman and the fool work in a microsystem. It should be remembered that Lotman believes that art always seeks new languages to translate the languages of reality, with the consequent tensions that it provokes. *Fuera de lugar*, the novel by Argentine writer Martín Kohan (2016), proposes a modeling of the adult world in a plot that is related with hard-boiled genre. However, the rest of the formal and semantic components tends to constantly produce the significance of friction between the deviation of the norm in different border areas which refer to everything that, from a certain observer, is “out of place,” while it does not seem to be to another. The discomfort of contradiction.

Basically, it is a group of people who take the business of taking pictures of preadolescent boys, helpless and housed in hospices. They make them play naked without any harassment or bodily access, like a natural scene, in order to sell packages of photos to the Easter countries and counting on the exoticism of those children with dark hair. The artistic achievement of verbal descriptions, repeated in minimal progression, transforms the innocence of children’s bodies playing naked into something repulsive to the reader, placed in a voyeur situation. The history and the network of the business (which must change its routine with the arrival of digital photos and the Internet) is spatially branching across the territory in an enigmatic manner and generating new victims and victimizers, whose apparent suicides leave an unsolvable plot open.

One of the children recruited by his uncle has a rare development problem: he seems “gone,” but his story (in appearance incoherent) contains clues to what is happening, although no one hears it.<sup>22</sup> And on the other hand, the strange suicide of the uncle produces the uncertain end of the young member of the family who decides (madly, heroically or innocently) to investigate the enigma on his own. A fool and a

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<sup>22</sup> Undoubtedly, it is possible to read here a tribute to the famous story of Ricardo Piglia, *La loca y el relato del crimen* [The crazy woman and the story of the crime] (2017[1975]). And, in the same way, in the partner who has a lot of money and commits suicide, it is possible to read an intertext with the notes of Chekhov about short stories: the man who wins a large sum in the casino and comes home and commits suicide, narrated by Piglia in *Formas breves* (1999).

madman: the one subdued; the other, free and trusting who finds death as he seeks the truth. I wonder: What is the stupidity or the madness of the characters in this novel immersed in that network? With what rules can it be measured? What is the dominant norm and what is the underlying one? What is the scope of freedom in their behaviors?

In this kind of world, the social modeling of adult and free behavior, expressed as values to be achieved, does not recognize stable paradigms. It is displaced to borders and put into question. It is quasi-enigmatic, as a constant reason for debates and, for that reason, the *ethos* is solved in a subjective way more than social. For example, in the case of photos: those who take them as a business (but also as an artistic act), those who distribute them, those who buy them to look at them, without appearing to have explicit sexual offense or pornography, except for a (clandestine) business set up to supply a massive demand. In this capitalist society, we can see what Marx called “the commodity fetishism”: that is to say, the almost ghostly figure of the product, separated from the action of the producers and working almost autonomously in the market, without social sanction.

There is a strong semantic effect in this mismatch of values: the ambiguity of evil, or social, spatial and mental borders, subsumed in the great Internet space: the place where everything can be seen without being seen. It is the refusal to recognize perversion or complicity in our acts, and also to underline the innocence of the gaze, which is the strategy of journalistic photos. But it is not a novel of denunciation, but rather a stark and brutal description of a social state. I believe that, if there is interpellation to the reader, it operates by deviation and shift in responsibility of what each one does, always transferring it to another subject. The author says, “In this novel [...] those who do perverse things, they do it from a position of absolute certainty with respect to the correct, and in some cases they are even moralists” (RAPACIOLI, 2016, our translation).<sup>23</sup>

But there is also the disturbance as a sense effect that appears when we read it in relation to other texts in the space of social meaning, in which it questions the issue of abuses, child pornography, the uses of the social networks and the experience filled with fears and threats of our contemporary society, even more when it seems that we are

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<sup>23</sup> In Spanish: “En esta novela [...] los que hacen cosas perversas las hacen desde una posición de absoluta certeza con respecto a lo correcto, y en algunos casos, son hasta moralistas.”

making use of all freedom. It is an ethically opaque society that challenges us daily in its multiple manifestations.

Every semiosphere models its fools and its madmen, its others and its normals, and this is variable according to the cycle of the dynamics in which it is immersed. Where I live, there are two expressions that seem significant to me: the one is *hacerse el tonto* [playing dumb] and the other is *hacerse el loco* [playing crazy]. Both involve hypocrisy or cunning to evade a responsibility, passively in one case and actively in the other, by means of action or omission. And, concomitantly, we say, *se volvió loco* [he went crazy] or *se volvió estúpido* [he became stupid], when we want to emphasize that, unexpectedly, someone with normal behavior passes a border and commits a rationally and incomprehensible act, as a momentary or temporary state.

Not even in the news on what happens in the international scene do we reach to discern the differences. Observing the behavior programs of a global semiosphere imposed by political actors and naturalized by the media, Who plays the fool? Who went mad? We are also immersed in the network and we read the news every day, asking ourselves, Are we fools, or are we mad? Who is crazier? The one who makes a wall or the one who tries to cross it? The one who sells arms or the one who murders a lot of people? Those who cross the sea in a fragile boat to escape the horror, or those who close the ports in order to reject them?

Where to find the freedom of mankind and what is the point of exercising it? And, if it is true that in the future war will be fought between robots, where will we place ourselves to see the pictures?

In face of what we feel in our daily experience as opacity or entropy, Lotman argues that states of high semiotic saturation have to be thought of as possibilities that open new and unexpected paths. Only the matrix of a linear (or cyclical) historical model takes us to an eschatological ending or to the repetition of the same. He states that binary models only lead to frustration, which are often political devices and they deny the importance of memory fragments that are transferred to the center of the system in order to generate new information. Mankind tends to reduce explosive and disordered temporalities to known dynamics, without considering a third possibility, in

an extra-temporal and unpredictable point. In this testamentary book,<sup>24</sup> *Culture and Explosion*<sup>25</sup> (which we have only glimpsed through one of its access routes), Lotman maintains firmly and beautifully his conviction, not only in the many paths that emerge from the freedom of man, but also in the possibilities of art as a transformation of the experience of reality into unlimited semiosis:

Instead of this model we propose another, in which the unpredictability of the extra-temporal explosion is constantly transformed in human consciousness into the predictability of the dynamics it generates and vice versa. Metaphorically speaking, the first model may present God as the great teacher who demonstrates with extraordinary skill a process previously known to him. The second may be illustrated by the image of a creator-experimenter, who is involved in a grand experiment, the results of which are unknown to him and therefore unpredictable. From this point of view, the universe is transformed into an inexhaustible source of information, like the Psyche, in which dwells the inherent self-growing Logos about which Heraclitus spoke.

In its search for a new language, art cannot be exhausted, just as the reality it seeks to exploit cannot be exhausted (LOTMAN, 2009[1992], pp.158-159).<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “In his last two books, *La cultura e la esplosione* [Culture and Explosion], translated into Italian by Caterina Valentino (Feltrinelli, 1993) and *Cercare la strada*, in Italian translation by Nicoleta Marcialis (Marsilio, 1994), Lotman has abandoned himself to invention rather than his previous works, almost as if he were urged by the fear of not being able to communicate all of his ideas. We can consider these works as a testament” (SEGRE, 2004, p.52, our translation). In original: “En sus dos últimos libros *La cultura e la esplosione*, traducido al italiano por Caterina Valentino (Feltrinelli, 1993) y *Cercare la strada*, en traducción italiana de Nicoleta Marcialis (Marsilio, 1994), Lotman se ha abandonado a la invención más que en sus trabajos anteriores, casi como si le instara el temor a no poder comunicarnos todas sus ideas. Podemos considerarlos como un testament.”

<sup>25</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

<sup>26</sup> For reference, see footnote 2.

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