

The Concept of Border in Yuri Lotman's Semiotics / *O conceito de fronteira na semiótica de Iúri Lotman*

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ABSTRACT

This article¹ aims to introduce the concept of semiotic border in the oeuvre of the Russian semiotician Yuri Lotman (1922-1993) as well as the process of assimilation of foreign texts that occurs precisely in the border area. Based on this theoretical approach, we analyze cultural interrelations, such as the presence of the French language in Leo Tolstoy's novel *War and Peace* and the impact of jeans in Soviet culture.

KEYWORDS: Yuri Lotman; Semiotics of Culture; Semiosphere; Border

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem por objetivo apresentar o conceito de fronteira na obra do semiótico russo Iúri Lotman (1922-1993), bem como o esquema de assimilação de textos alheios que ocorre justamente na zona fronteira. Com base nessas colocações teóricas abordamos as inter-relações culturais, como a presença da língua francesa no romance Guerra e paz de Liev Tolstói e o impacto da calça jeans na cultura soviética.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Iúri Lotman; Semiótica da cultura; Semiosfera; Fronteira

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¹ The present article is based on the lecture Multilingualism in Iúri Lotman's Semiosphere, given during the 2nd Conference of LABPEC (Laboratório de Pesquisa em Estudos de Contato Linguístico [Laboratory of Research in Contact Language Studies]). The Conference, entitled *B/Orders in motion: práticas e migrações* [*B/Orders in motion: practices and migrations*], was held at Universidade Federal Fluminense [Fluminense Federal University] from 12 to 14 November 2015.

Introduction

Lotman's semiotics of culture was established in the context of teaching and research at the University of Tartu (Estonia). Lotman was the leader, although not officially, of the Tartu–Moscow Semiotic School, the main context in which studies on it were conducted. One of the main features of the School was its bicentrality, which reflects its own name. The presence of two centers, in fact, is characteristic of the Russian culture. The coexistence of Kiev and Novgorod in Ancient Russia and of Moscow and Saint Petersburg (Petrograd, Leningrad) during Russian Empire and in Modern Russia is a good example of it. As to language and literary studies, it is possible to mention the concomitant existence of the Moscow Linguistic Circle (1915-1924) and OPOIAZ [Society for the Study of Poetic Language] (1916-1926) in Petrograd. In the context of the Semiotic School, the center in Tartu was represented by Lotman, his wife Zara Mints, a researcher of Russian Symbolism, and Borís Egórov, the author of Lotman's posthumous biography. The center in Moscow, on the other hand, was composed of a considerably larger group of people, among whom were young and beginning researchers who became renown later on. Indologist Alexander Piatigorsky, linguist and philologist Vladimir Toporov, brothers Boris and Vladimir Uspensky (the latter was also a mathematician), philologist Mikhail Gasparov, linguist Vyacheslav Ivanov, mythologist Yeleazar Meletinsky, folklorist Sergei Nekliudov (the latter three have been to Brazil) are some of them. Thus, the second important feature of the School is the interdisciplinarity of the studies they conducted.

The third guiding feature of the School is its explicitly apolitical nature. Similar to the other participants of the School, Lotman belonged to *intelliguênstia* [intelligentsia], a stratum of Russian society made up of intellectuals, whose rigorous model of ethical and moral conduct sharply diverged from the Soviet ideology. Unable to express their true views, the Russian semioticians avoided political issues, which in a way is also a form of resistance. However, they prompted reflections on the Soviet regime through their research, constituting it as a type of Aesopian language. Thus, when it is necessary to define Lotman's and the School's historical and national affiliation, a terminological problem inevitably arises: although historically belonging to the Soviet period, neither the School nor Lotman can be called "Soviet" (MACHADO, 2015). Besides, as Lotman's family was Jewish, calling him a "Russian" semiotician would not be totally accurate.

Therefore, the most plausible solution to this issue is to closely connect him to Russia's historical and cultural context.

In general, it is possible to state that, in its first stage (mainly from the 1960s to the 1970s), Lotman's Semiotics of Culture is still in early development and under a great influence of the School. At that time, in the 1960s, the main concepts were formulated, and semiotics was defined as a new science. In the next two decades, as the School's activities were almost over, Lotman's semiotics took an independent course. The concept of "text" is no longer applied solely to make a difference between "linguistic text" and "literary text" (as in *The Structure of the Artistic Text*);² it is broadened so as to include the manifold manifestations of human culture, resulting in the consolidation of the notion of "text of culture." It is exactly during this period of his work that he develops the core concept of his Semiotics, viz., semiosphere. In it, border plays a fundamental role.

1 The Semiotic Borders

Lotman suggests calling the semiotic space semiosphere. The concept stems from the notions of biosphere and noosphere, the latter being used for the first time in the work of philosopher, biologist and geologist Vladimir Vernadsky (1863-1945). According to Vernadsky, noosphere encompasses the universe of human thinking, which represents an increasingly powerful "geological force" that can transform the planet and even the universe (VERNÁDSKI, 1993, pp.188-303). As to Lotman's concept of semiosphere, it encompasses the whole universe of senses and is brought close to the notion of culture:

[...] culture organizes itself in the form of a special "space-time" and cannot exist without it. This organization is realized in the form of the semiosphere and at the same time comes into being with the help of the semiosphere (2009, p.133).³

² LOTMAN, Y. *The Structure of the Artistic Text*. Translated by Gail Lenhoff and Ronald Vroon. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1977.

³ LOTMAN, Y. The Notion of Boundary. In: _____. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Translated by Ann Shukman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp.131-142.

Another significant precursor of Lotman's semiosphere is Voloshinov's concept of "ideological sign" (MACHADO, 2007, p.282), whose existence is only made possible if individuals are socially organized.

For Lotman, "all semiotic space may be regarded as a unified mechanism (if not organism)"; thus, "[t]he concept of semiosphere is linked to a definite semiotic homogeneity and individuality" (2005, p.208).⁴ At the same time, semiotic space is heterogeneous, i.e., comprised of conflicting structures (LOTMAN, 2009, p.131).⁵ Further on, important ramifications of this paradox will be shown.

The homogeneous and original nature of semiosphere allows it to be defined as such and to be differentiated from other semiospheres. This homogeneous space borders on other semiospheres, regarded by Lotman's semiosphere as cultures, non-cultures, or even anti-cultures. Every culture (semiosphere) needs another culture to define its essence and limits. It will be possible to note that this line of thinking clearly leads to Bakhtin's notion of otherness:

Treading upon the path consolidated by Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) studies on dialogism and chronotope, Lotman exerted his understanding of the dynamics of cultural encounters. Thus, he explained how two cultures meet, what type of dialogue they are engaged in, and how they create experiences that can reconfigure the field of cultural forces (MACHADO, 2007, p.16).⁶

The margins of the semiosphere become, thus, a space of extreme importance. It is within this context that Lotman's notion of border (*granítsa*) comes into existence. Obviously, it is an abstract and imaginary divider that makes the exchange of information between the semiosphere and the space around it possible:

The border of semiotic space is the most important functional and structural position, giving substance to its semiotic mechanism. The border is a bilingual mechanism, translating external communications into the internal language of the semiosphere and vice versa. Thus, only with the help of the boundary is the semiosphere able to establish

⁴ LOTMAN, J. On the Semiosphere. Translated by Wilma Clark. *Sign Systems Studies*, v. 33, n.1, pp.205-229, 2005. Available at: [https://www.ut.ee/SOSE/sss/Lotman_331.pdf]. Access on: 30 March 2016.

⁵ For reference, see footnote 3.

⁶ Text in Portuguese: "Trilhando o caminho já consolidado por Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) em seus estudos sobre o dialogismo e sobre o cronotopo, Lotman investiu na compreensão da dinâmica dos encontros culturais no sentido de explicar como duas culturas se encontram, que tipo de diálogo eles travam entre si e como elas criam experiências capazes de reconfigurar o campo das forças culturais."

contact with non-semiotic and extra-semiotic spaces (LOTMAN, 2005, p.210).⁷

The process of receiving new information, coming from the extra-semiotic space, is called ‘translation’ by Lotman:

In this way, the border points of the semiosphere may be likened to sensory receptors, which transfer external stimuli into the language of our nervous system, or a unit of translation, which adapts the external actor to a given semiotic sphere (2005, p.209).⁸

In this process, information is recoded into codes that are accepted in the semiosphere under consideration. Moreover, it is a bilateral process, for it occurs when a text from the semiosphere goes out of its limits and is assimilated by other semiospheres. Therefore, border is an ambiguous phenomenon, for not only does it separate a semiosphere from other semiospheres, but it also unites them. Thus, it belongs to both spaces. However, border is also a moving phenomenon, so it really depends on the point of view of the observer: if it is seen from the outside, probably some border elements, understood by their own semiosphere as alien, will be considered part of it.

Within the semiosphere, border has the following functions: firstly, it has to limit the uncontrollable invasion of “alien” elements; secondly, it has to select, filter and adapt (or translate) some “alien” elements to the language of the semiosphere under consideration.

The concept of semiosphere and the notion of border stem from fundamental oppositions of human culture: the separation of the world into “our world” and the “alien world,” into “cosmos” and “chaos.” This is discussed, for example, in Mircea Eliade’s work (1992). If the culturalized space of the semiosphere is perceived by it as ordered, organized and safe, the outside space is perceived as disorganized and chaotic. It may even be defined as a non-culture. The differences between “our” and “alien” are usually and curiously in a mirror-like relationship: that which is not allowed in a space is allowed in another (LOTMAN, 2009, p.132).⁹

⁷ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁸ For reference, see footnote 4.

⁹ For reference, see footnote 3.

In some cases, semiotic borders become similar to geographical borders: for example, it is possible to define the Russian or Brazilian semiosphere of culture. In other instances, borders may be historical and, as such, the Russian semiosphere of culture of the 19th century is different from the Russian semiosphere of today. It is even possible to define semiosphere in temporal terms: the day (the time of daily and habitual activities) is skirted by the night, which is transformed into an anti-time, characterized by an anti-behavior (such as sorcerers' or bandits') (LOTMAN, 2001, pp.140-141).¹⁰

On the physical plane, the composition of semiosphere is parallel to the way settlements and cities were traditionally built:

The isomorphism between different kinds of human settlement – from archaic ones to Renaissance and Enlightenment plans for ideal cities – and ideas about the structure of the cosmos has often been remarked on. Hence, the appeal of the centre for the most important cultic and administrative buildings. Less valued social groups are settled on the periphery. Those who are below any social value are settled in the frontier of the outskirts (the etymology of the Russian word for outskirts [*predmest'e*] means 'before the place' [*pered mestom*] i.e. before the city, on its boundaries), by the city gate, in the suburbs. If we think of this on a vertical scale then these 'outskirts' will be lofts and cellars, and in modern cities the metro (LOTMAN, 2009, p.140).¹¹

However, today the contrast between semiosphere and the urban space has to be corrected. In modern cities, the outskirts are not necessarily in the boundaries: there are poor districts in city centers and rich districts in the outskirts. However, by correcting this datum, we are brought closer to the concept of semiosphere, a space permeated by countless borders.

If we compare semiosphere to a country, its bordering area used to be regarded as inhabited by barbarians, "primitive" tribes, and so forth. According to Lotman (2009, p.142),¹² when this marginalized space comes to an end, it will be reinvented, for semiosphere needs "barbarians" and "chaos" in order to keep its vitality.

There is a meaningful difference between the center and the periphery of the semiosphere, next to its borders: the center, the core of the semiosphere is inactive, unable to evolve; the periphery, on the other hand, is extremely dynamic due to its ongoing

¹⁰ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹¹ For reference, see footnote 3.

¹² For reference, see footnote 3.

exchange of information with the extrasemiotic space. For Lotman, the contact with the extrasemiotic space is a process that enriches and renews the semiosphere and, for that reason, its bordering areas become essential for new senses to be produced.

This process includes two components. First of all, although the semiosphere is understood as a homogeneous unit, it is comprised of several texts that interact through culture's different languages (music, painting, literature, etc.). A minimum condition for the existence of the semiosphere is internal heterogeneity, about which Lotman writes in different works. The excerpt below is an example of it:

No culture can be limited to one language. The minimum system is composed of a number of parallel languages, such as verbal and plastic languages. Further on, the dynamics of any culture includes the multiplication of the number of semiotic communications (LOTMAN, 2001, p.563; our translation).¹³

However, semiosphere is not stable; on the contrary, it is extremely dynamic. Languages and cultural texts are constantly in dialogue. They multiply and fight for a central position. As we have discussed, the processes that occur on the periphery (next to the border) of the semiosphere are more dynamic than those that occur in the center (core), which are more stable. Periphery texts are in contact with alien space and represent a catalyst of culture, producing new senses and new texts. As they are more dynamic, with time they tend to occupy the center of the semiosphere; thus, "central" texts become periphery texts, a result of the shift of the center-periphery opposition.

2 The Process of Assimilation (Reception)¹⁴

In the essay *Dialogue Mechanisms*, Lotman describes the process of linguistic assimilation (reception) of the texts that are borrowed by the receiving culture (2009, pp.146-147):¹⁵

¹³ Text in Portuguese: "Nenhuma cultura é capaz de limitar-se a apenas uma linguagem. O sistema mínimo é formado pelo conjunto de duas linguagens paralelas, por exemplo, a verbal e a plástica. Posteriormente, a dinâmica de qualquer cultura passa a incluir a multiplicação do conjunto das comunicações semióticas."

¹⁴ TN. Ann Shukman, the translator of the essay *Dialogue Mechanisms*, uses "reception" instead of "assimilation," used by the author of this article.

¹⁵ LOTMAN, Y. *Dialogue Mechanisms*. In: _____. *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*. Translated by Ann Shukman. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2009, pp.143-150.

1. Firstly, the texts that have just crossed the border of the semiosphere are received as strange, alien. They hold a high position in the scale of values of the receiving culture. Knowing the language of the foreign culture means belonging to the elite. The texts written in the language of the receiving culture, on the other hand, are regarded as secondary and inferior.
2. There occurs a mutual adaptation between the imported texts and the receiving culture, resulting in translations and adaptations.
3. An idea begins to develop: these texts are not truly realized in the culture that relayed them; they will find their true realization in the culture that receives them. In this context, there is a growing enmity to the culture that relayed the texts.
4. The new (imported) texts are entirely dissolved in the receiving culture, which starts to produce its own texts based on the cultural codes of the assimilated texts.
5. The receiving culture issues forth its own texts, directed to peripheral areas of the semiosphere. These texts, in turn, will probably be exported to other semiospheres.

However, Lotman draws our attention to the fact that this cycle has merely been outlined schematically. Thus, the process of assimilation is not always fully realized. For that to happen there must be “mutual attraction” and favorable historical conditions (LOTMAN, 2009, p.147).¹⁶

One example that illustrates this sequence clearly is the relationship between Russian and French cultures. In the 18th century, as a consequence of the reforms done by Peter the Great, the process of Europeanization of Russia started. Russia was under great influence of the French Enlightenment and especially of Rousseau’s ideas. Russian nobles mastered the French language and became foreigners in their own country. They forgot “their own native language, their Orthodox faith, national dress and Russian culture” (LOTMAN, 2009, p.149).¹⁷ This corresponds to stages 1 and 2 of Lotman’s process of assimilation.

However, after the war against Napoleon in 1812, this situation changed: France became the enemy, the incarnation of the fatal civilization, which was criticized by Rousseau. Moreover, not only was the “natural man” identified with the Russian peasant,

¹⁶ For reference, see footnote 14.

¹⁷ For reference, see footnote 14.

but the Russian language also became the ideal language, given by Nature (3rd stage of the process of assimilation).

All these changes may be noted in the epic novel *War and Peace*, which was devoted to that time period. As it is known, there are countless pages in this work that are written in French, presenting *salon* conversations of the Russian nobility. The novel even begins with a monologue in French by Anna Pávlovna Scherer, a maid of honor and a favorite of the empress. Even when the characters attempt to speak in Russian, it seems that the sentences follow more rules of French syntax than Russian's:

There is no doubt that in the dialogues in Russian between characters of high society Tolstoy reinforces the colorfulness of the French language on purpose and thus unveils the process of copying sentences from French. In some cases, the author even comments on these copies. One good example is Pierre's words (our translation):¹⁸ “‘You're a scoundrel and a villain, and I don't know what restrains me from the pleasure of smashing your head with this,’ said Pierre, expressing himself so artificially because he was speaking in French” (VINOGRÁDOV, 1939, p.127).

This inability to express in his/her native language becomes even more evident when, in the novel, the French army invades Moscow, and speaking in French becomes a *mauvais ton*. As a result, the coexistence of the two languages creates a third, hybrid language, comprised of Russian words that are chosen and ordered according to French grammar rules. Besides, as recent research points out (KOLIÉSNIK, 2003), it is not by chance that French is usually used by main characters in frivolous *salon* conversations. However, when they want to talk about true feelings and passions, they always use Russian. Due to that, in the novel French is associated to artificiality and theatricality whereas Russian is presented as true and natural.

Generally speaking, it is possible to conclude that in the second half of the 19th century Russia stopped receiving alien texts (European and, especially, French) in order to become the emitter of texts: Tolstoy's and Dostoevsky's works began to be read worldwide. This corresponds to stages 4 and 5 of Lotman's process of assimilation.

¹⁸ Text in Portuguese: “Não resta dúvida de que nos diálogos russos dos personagens da alta sociedade Tolstói reforça de propósito o colorido francês da linguagem, desnudando o procedimento de copiar as frases francesas. Em alguns casos o autor até comenta essas cópias. Por exemplo, na fala de Pierre.”

However, in the mid-20th century the process started again: culture (Soviet, this time) becomes the receiver of alien texts from the West again.

3 The Revolution of Jeans

As an example of the center-periphery shift that occurs in the process of assimilating alien texts, Lotman mentions jeans (2009, p.141):¹⁹ originally worn by people doing physical labor, they pleased the American youth, who rebelled against the official culture. Thus, they identified with peripheral culture and wore jeans as a symbol of rebellion. In this manner, the American anti-culture movement modeled the clothes of rural workers from the West. After being modeled, they spread over the world, bringing about new modelings. This process shows endless possibilities to broaden the concept of border. Little by little, jeans stopped challenging cultural rules and became neutral and common, worn by everyone in formal and informal settings. Thus, from the cultural periphery, jeans were transferred to the center.

Although Lotman refers to jeans only in the West, it is very likely that using them as an example stemmed from his own story in the Soviet Union. In the Soviet context, their impact may be compared to a real revolution or, as Lotman would say, an “explosion.” The simplicity and objectivity of Soviet fashion aimed to contrast the diverse consumerism of capitalist countries:

The official regulations fossilized the look of poverty and proletarian clothes, going back to the first decade of Soviet regime. Much like the sumptuary laws, which operated in medieval and early modern Europe, the rules were designed to keep down the potential social climbers and keep all the existing social groups in their sartorial place. The sharp criticism was directed against the habits of dressing up, and the “style of excess” was taken as an attempt at bourgeois chic. A unitary aesthetic originating in the ideology of collectivism codified social behavior, concepts of propriety and thoroughly normative notions about beauty (VAINSHTEIN, 2009).

Therefore, jeans were directly associated with American culture and, thus, to capitalism. This situation began to change slowly during the post-Stalin thaw and the

¹⁹ For reference, see footnote 3.

country's liberalization, thanks to which Soviet fashion became closer to Western fashion (LEBIÉDINA, 2015). The “invasion” of jeans, alongside *rock 'n' roll*, occurred during the World Festival of Youth and Students in the Soviet Union in 1975 and was revolutionary. After all, more than 30,000 foreigners came to the Festival, and it was impossible to control any unwanted influence. Even so, most Soviet people had no access to jeans: only the few people who were allowed to travel abroad could buy them. Inaccessibility transformed them into an object of desire, almost a myth. Besides, as they were imported and sold illegally, they became a symbol of dissidence. The Russian intellectuals (*intelliguentsia*) were recognized by the clothing they wore, and jeans were a compulsory trait. In this vein, it is curious to note that although Lotman did not wear jeans (he was from an earlier generation), he stood out from the Soviet uniformity due to his uncommon appearance and elegance. According to Serguei Ziénkin (2012),²⁰ “objecting to the monotony of Soviet models of style and behavior was one of his parameters.”²¹ Apparently, this is the reason for his interest in the world of fashion, expressed in different works, such as *Rússki dendizm* [Russian Dandism] (LOTMAN, 1994).



Figure 1. Caricature from the magazine *Krokodil*, n. 30, p.4, 1978 (a drawing by Uboriévitsh-Boróvski).

²⁰ Text in Russian: “Это был один из тех параметров, по которым он противостоял однообразию советских моделей внешности и моделей поведения.”

²¹ Text in Portuguese: “era um dos parâmetros em que ele se opunha à monotonia dos modelos soviéticos de estilo e conduta.”

The English word *jeans* (*джинсы* in Russian) started to be used around the 1960s and was perceived as a foreign word. Similar to fashion, the Soviet language was coded, inflexible, and conservative. Thus, the “foreign” origin of the word was accentuated.

An interesting way of studying the process of assimilation of jeans is by analyzing the caricatures in the main satirical magazine in the Soviet Union, called *Krokodil* (1922-2000). Three times a month, it published 6.5 million copies. In general, in Soviet magazines caricatures were commonly used to criticize everything – especially politics – that was against the Soviet and capitalist universes. When caricatures were about deviations in society, such as alcoholism and idleness, they were portrayed as individual (not general) flaws that needed to be corrected. This was in full compliance with the spirit of Socialist realism.

The opposition to it can be observed in Figure 1, in which the traits of the capitalist world are demonized: a caricature in *Krokodil* in which a serpent seduces the Soviet Adam and Eve with jeans. Jeans become similar to the forbidden fruit. Taking the fruit (the jeans) results in the expulsion from the Socialist garden. However, if we consider that the Soviet state was explicitly secular, the appeal to the biblical symbolism loses its strength and adopts a lighter and more ironic tone.

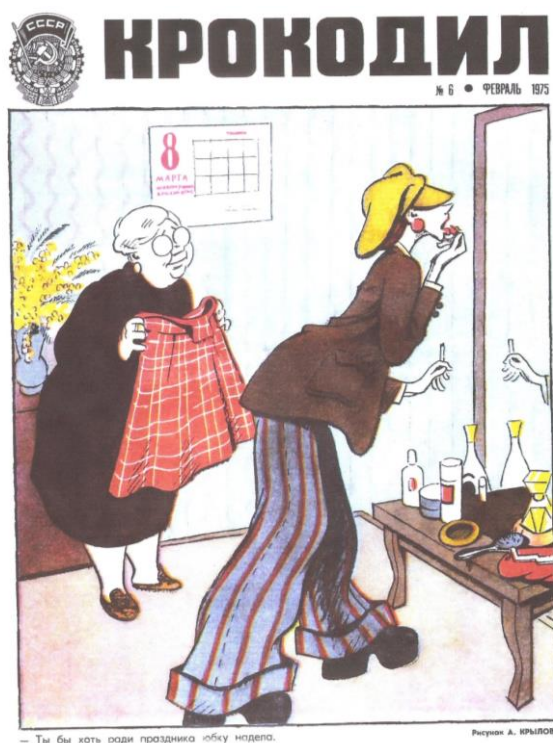


Figure 2. Cover of *Krokodil*, n 6, February of 1975 (a drawing by Andrey Krylov).

In another issue of the magazine (Figure 2), a young woman is wearing colorful jeans and a cap. The calendar on the wall shows that she is getting ready to go out on March 8th, one of the main Soviet festive dates: International Women's Day. The young woman's colorful clothes clash with the brown dress of her grandmother, whose face is intentionally colorless. Besides, the predominance of the colors gray, brown and black in Soviet clothing is seen in different video chronicles and photographs. Therefore, the whole set of clothes and accessories chosen by the young woman clashes Soviet fashion and relates to the "foreign" way of dressing. Similar to the Russian nobility in the 18th and 19th centuries, Soviet youth were regarded as foreigners (aliens) in their own country.

In Figure 2, we find the grandmother's words below the picture: "You could at least wear a dress to pay tribute to the holiday." Here we find another important feature of Soviet fashion: in the mid-20th century Soviet fashion followed the international trend to progressively become unisex. However, for earlier generations wearing pants to a festive event seems inappropriate to women, especially because they were jeans. Matching jeans with a cap highlights the masculinized nature of the selected style and alludes to the influence of the French cinema. Despite censorship, the Soviet public saw some French movies (although they were edited).

However, depending on how the reader looks at it, the caricature can be understood either as critique against the young woman, who blindly follows foreign fashion, or as a satire of the earlier generation that does not follow the changes happening in the country and in the world. Thus, the magazine cover also brings out the never-ending conflict of generations, pointed out by Lotman (2009, p.141)²² as an example of the process of shift between center and periphery: the rebellious young people who identified with a marginal culture before become "normal" and respected people little by little. For example, the generation of young Russians who experienced the liberalization of society in the 1960s was in great part responsible for the democratization of the country during *perestroika* and after the fall of the Soviet Union. It is not by chance that during this period, i.e., the end of the 1980s, the first Soviet jeans started to be manufactured, for they were not regarded as an "alien" element anymore.

It is still necessary to observe that the use of caricatures could only be the result of a relaxation of the regime: not only did they criticize a deviation from the Soviet way

²² For reference, see footnote 3.

of living, but they also recognized the existence of the jeans phenomenon. Besides, both drawings represent a type of Aesopian language: after all, everything depends on the point of view of the reader; thus, the lady in jeans can be either condemned or admired.

The example of the story of jeans in the Soviet Union clearly shows how complex the concept of semiosphere in Lotman's semiotics is. It is about the crossing of countless borders (between Soviet and Western cultures, masculine and feminine fashion, between generations, languages, etc.). The center-periphery inversion occurs in multiple planes.

Final Remarks

Lotman's concept of border is a fundamental element of semiosphere, for it is responsible for its renovation. This concept may be applied to different cultures and artistic languages. Every artist and every culture long for the "other" to be defined. When the other does not exist, he/she needs to be invented. This happens in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Stalker* (1979), in which the Zone is precisely that which Lotman calls anti-culture, non-culture, chaos. The Zone represents a sphere of beyondness where the rules of our world are inverted, and "the direct path is not always the shortest." Similar to the borders of semiosphere, the boundaries of the Zone are well-defined: they are barbed-wire fences. What does it mean to travel to the Zone throughout the movie? In the beginning, when the writer is asked why he wants to visit it, he says that he looks for inspiration.

In Russian culture, the role of the Other was played by France and the West. It seems that Brazil underwent the same process. When Oswald de Andrade defines anthropophagy as the digestion of a culture by another (JOBIM, 2015), is it not exactly the same as Lotman's process of assimilating alien texts?

However, the Other is not necessarily an "outsider." For example, Wassily Kandinsky looked for inspiration for his work in Russian popular art. The other semiosphere may be in the past, in the history of the country. Thus, when Russian futurists in their manifesto *A Slap in the Face of Public Taste* (1912) suggested throwing Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and others overboard from the Ship of Modernity, they concomitantly found support for their new art in these authors and in Russian classical literature as a whole.

As we can see, Lotman's idea of border as a source of renovation can be applied both at the individual level (an artist in search for inspiration) and at the level of intercultural contacts (Russia and Europe, Brazil and Europe). Finally, it does not seem that the concept of semiosphere and its borders came to be developed within the Soviet context by chance, i.e., when the country was politically, economically and culturally isolated from the rest of the world.

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Received January 01,2016

Accepted May 07,2016