

These texts continue the Anglophone reception of the Moscow-Tartu school of literary and cultural structuralism. It is puzzling as well as unfortunate that all but one of the Cornell articles were already published in the Michigan Slavic Contributions. Moreover, considering that the only exception to this overlap is a chapter from the "forthcoming" Princeton translation of Ginsburg’s *On Psychological Prose*, one must conclude that the Cornell editors produced—with the support of three learned committees—an almost wholly redundant book.

Michigan’s volume, containing thirteen articles dating from from 1973 to 1981, is divided into three parts: three joint papers by Lotman and Uspenskii; seven articles by Lotman; and three by Uspenskii. The studies deal with “cultural models” and “behavioral typology” from early Russia to the 1840s. The authors base their approach on Saussure’s concept of semiotics, i.e., they consider the various spheres of culture (mythology, religion, etiquette, literature, painting, and so on) as “sign systems” and call them “languages.” Accordingly, “culture” consists in the dynamic totality of sign systems which “regulate behavior” and “determine worldview.” Lotman and Uspenskii see Russian history dominated by a fundamental tension between native and foreign (Byzantine and Western) ideas, a tension that produced many “semiotic conflicts and situations of mutual misunderstanding.” Despite its focus on Russia, the authors expect their work to be of broad methodological interest to semioticians and cultural historians at large.

The book begins with “Dual Models in the Dynamics of Culture,” an outline of historical stages from Christianization to Europeanization. A series of successive ideological contrasts (Christianity : paganism / Russia : Byzantium / Russia : the West / Nikonians : Old Believers / culture : nature / enlightenment : ignorance) is seen to share the “deep structure” of a continual opposition of the “new” versus the “old.” On the one hand this bipolarity could produce contradictory identifications (Catholicism with paganism, Westernism with harems) and axiological inversions; on the other hand, the repeated “breaks with the past” invariably reactivated it (now as positive, now as negative example) within the frame of a cultural dualism which—unlike Western world models—did not admit of any axiologically “neutral” zone. The second article offers a vital critique of Likhachev’s and Panchenko's *The “World of Laughter” in Early Russia* (1976). Lotman and Uspenskii propose basic redefinitions: (1) in the early Russian “world of laughter,” “pious merriment” stood in contrast to “blasphemous guffawing,” both of which had to be clearly distinguished from Bakhtin’s “culture of laughter” as applied to the Western “carnival” tradition; (2) the very concept of “comic play/behavior” required considerable semiotic differentiation. The third joint article, “Echoes of the Notion ‘Moscow as the Third Rome’ in Peter the Great’s Ideology,” further illuminates the pattern of cultural revolution reactivating historical models: Peter’s Russia was to be both radically “new” and at the same time heir to Rome’s imperial grandeur. In the context of a historical-semiotic exploration of “Moscow,” “Rome,” and “Constantinople,” the authors reconstruct the symbolic aspects of Petersburg as the “Neo-Roman Anti-Moscow” and point to various literary reflections of the city.
Part Two moves into the nineteenth century with “The Decembrist in Everyday Life.” Operating with the concept of “socially significant group behavior,” Lotman develops a typology that focuses on the opposition of “freethinkers” versus “revolutionaries.” He shows how classic and romantic literature “semioticized” certain group behavior and attributes the Decembrists’ profound cultural influence to their “poetic-Heroic” transfer of ideal values into life and their projection of a new Russian character type. Next, in “‘Agreement’ and ‘Self-Giving’ as Archetypal Models of Culture,” Lotman performs a remarkable tour de force. He starts with the fundamental difference between “magic” and “religion,” derives from it a Western “contractual” versus Russian “absolutist” mentality and traces this opposition from Roman times to early nineteenth-century Russia with regard to types of government, axiological systems, behavioral codes, and the roles of “signs” versus “symbols.” Third, “The Theater and Theatricality as Components of Early Nineteenth-Century Culture” describes how, under the influence of romantic individualism, heroic character models of classical literature were transferred into life as “high/historic” behavior. Lotman’s discussion of the “theatricalization” of life and the range of upper class behavioral patterns is followed by a cogent examination of the theatrical aspects of “battle” versus “parade” during the Napoleonic era. Closely connected with this subject is “The Stage and Painting as Code Mechanisms in the Early Nineteenth Century.” Here Lotman links the origin of theatrical behavior to the dominant scenic-pictorial perception of the period and demonstrates the epochal unity of art systems, i.e., the cultural circle theater = behavior (pose/aphorism) ⇒ painting/tableau vivant ⇒ theater. There follow generalizations regarding the unifying tendency and possible kinds of relationships between cultural sign systems and the abstracting process of “cultural self-description.” “Gogol’s Chlestakov: the Pragmatics of a Literary Character” first provides a historical analysis of group psychology which reconstructs the authorial intention underlying Khlestakov as the central figure of the Government Inspector. Lotman then turns to the methodology of studying text-pragmatics and proceeds to two case studies with confirm “Khlestakovism” as a historical phenomenon. He concludes with priceless observations on the mechanism of “misinformation” in the police state of Nicholas I. The relation between character motivation and cultural type is also the subject of “Gogol’s ‘Tale of Captain Kopejkin’.” Lotman identifies the source of this episodic persona of Dead Souls, sees his function in a “parodic debasement” of the literary “gentleman-robber” hero, and relates him to the Gogolian tradition of antiheroes. The last article of Part Two, “The Poetics of Everyday Behavior in Russian Eighteenth-Century Culture,” expands the scope of the “theatricalization” of life. Lotman gives an overview of the semiotization of upper class behavior: the adoption of Western norms resulted in a theatrical perception of “normal” conduct and a spatially and socially determined set of alternative behavioral patterns. This esthetization of life prompted, among certain groups, imitations of antique character models and, ultimately, a view of life as “heroic plot.”

Part Three opens with a study of the religious and psychological roots of “Royal Imposture as a Cultural-Historical Phenomenon.” Uspenskii explores the subject in the context of “sacred autocracy,” the legend of “Tsar-Deliverer,” the “game of tsar,” and the semiotics of tsarist (Ivan and Peter) political and religious parody. These matters are then related to the opposition “norm” versus “antibehavior,” the basis of the dualistic world model outlined in the first article. Next comes a one-page article that corrects previous attempts to explain scattered religious references to the “Devil’s knowledge of Syriac.” Lastly, Uspenskii’s “On the Origins of Russian Obscenities” deals with *jebati as “linguistic antibehavior” and ties modern Soviet linguistic taboos to traditional religious censure of paganistic fertility rites and sexual nature mythology.

This seminal work pursues the aims formulated by the Moscow-Tartu school in 1970: to establish the essential set of cultural sign systems, study their “interrelated unity,”