

s 19 . . . po 19 . . . god. Thus under the suffix *-nu-* we find P. S. Sigalov's summary of Tedesco's important 1948 study in *Language* but not the article itself. Under *-anu-* we find a 1963 article by Sigalov but not Stender-Petersen's 1931 article in *Zeitschrift für slavische Philologie*. The two-page article by Š. Korbe listed on page 66 turns out to be an abstract of an eight-page article by Charles Corbet published in volume 34 of *Revue des études slaves*.

Some may have preferred the shorter, critical bibliography containing Worth's personal assurance that the items listed actually exist and may be worth a librarian's effort to obtain. Nevertheless, the work before us is an impressive compilation. It lists ninety-nine *Uchenye zapiski!*

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SEMIOTICS OF CINÉMA. By *Jurij Lotman*. Translated from the Russian and with a foreword by *Mark E. Suino*. Michigan Slavic Contributions, 5. Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, University of Michigan, 1976. x, 106 pp. Paper.

Jurii Lotman's *Semiotics of Cinéma* is a graceful, deft, and essential primer—but not for the study of movies so much as for the systematic analysis of how meaning is made in movies. For some the study of how pictorial and verbal signs are used in a medium so entertaining, self-presentational, and experiential as film is destined to be abstruse; and the abrasive controversy that still surrounds the applicability of film semiotics to teaching or criticism reveals the suspicion that a “linguistics” of cinema is but another means of inflating and academizing what should, after all, remain “the movies,” and not become another “discipline.”

But movies are made of images, and images are “stand-ins” for whatever they represent. In semiotics, images that carry meaning are termed signs, and to say that such signs are pictorial and therefore obvious in meaning is not to say that they are unstructured and uncoded. In fact, in film circles, we have known since Kuleshov and Eisenstein that the signs in film images are both heavily (and often unconsciously) structured and coded. But as Lotman now points out more precisely, film images (shots) gain their meaning in two ways. First, film meaning can be termed *positional*, since film shots are never seen and understood in isolation but always adjacent to other shots. An image, for example, of a little girl playing with a ball followed by an image of an approaching car, as Kuleshov discovered, would produce the implication in a film that the child is endangered by the car, though danger would not otherwise be attributable to either shot. This, put simply, is the key to the inherent structure of what is called montage. But as we now know, film shots are also meaningful in their *associational* relationships, which is to say that any sign—say, the image of the car—gains specific meaning, or is “read,” because it is a member of a mental set of “vehicles” and of a subset of “cars.” Clearly, if the car were “readable” on the screen as a hot rod, it would be because viewers not only understand the image for what it is—a souped-up car made for speed—but also for what it is not, namely, a member of the mental set (or paradigm) of “remaining” cars which stand in “opposition” to the hot rod and hence give it meaning. From the standpoint of semiotics, it is in this way that films are made *and* understood, consciously or otherwise, as texts.

Needless to say, there is, despite its modest brevity, much more material in Lotman's book that is immediately useful in teaching and criticism for Slavicists interested in the modern period and for film scholars or enthusiasts. The original was published in Estonia in 1973 as *Semiotika kino i problemy kinoestetiki*; Mark Suino's complete, faithful, and competent translation and foreword (despite such neologisms as “irreal”

and almost English words as “stomped”) now present another “standard” text in the growing literature, in English, of Slavic structuralist and semiotic studies. Of course this now fashionable (soon to be unfashionable) modality of thought and criticism has deep roots in the Russian Formalist and Czech Structuralist movements and their antecedents. One might say that the questions raised by the Formalists in the Russia of the 1920s (for example, the idea that art and literature function to deform as well as to form and, in either case, to model our sense of reality) were and remain so powerful and full of dreadful implications that they have had to be “contained” by the ruling order (there as elsewhere) ever since. This “containment” is taken to be part of the general control of human semiotics, the general control of culture through the specific structuring, both formally and informally, of human information; that is, the control of cultural codes, in part achieved through the influence of the movies, and in part through the educational system.

Looking piously at Lotman’s unimpeachably sensible little book from the invidious perspective of the “Free World,” one might wonder why it had to be published in Tallinn and not in Moscow. What is worse, one might never bring oneself to wonder what is so threatening or radical about structuralism and semiology to the West. I would say the problem is that three central premises shared by both activities are personally, as well as societally, revolutionary—that is, unhinging—to rigid establishmentarians anywhere: First, language, literature, and similar systems of expression such as film are seen to have preceded and hence to have determined human perception and thought. Second, the most essential and primary task in the study of art, literature, and cinema is here understood to be the analysis of how human texts are *made*, that is, what structural repetitions, contradictions, and patterns they reveal. And third, a liberated and truly disinterested—that is, scientific—criticism is seen necessarily to begin with a morphology of art, literature, or cinema capable of describing their conventions and expressive features before it undertakes to ascertain whether a given work is beautiful or how it is symbolically complex. This is what Tzvetan Todorov would call a poetics.

Against the quarrelsome and uneven field of contemporary semiotic studies, Lotman’s book is extremely readable, calm, up-to-date, and thoroughly scrupulous in its representations of what semiotic studies have disclosed and what is worth knowing (although Hjelmslev’s valuable contributions are curiously omitted). Lotman judiciously avoids the tedious debate over whether film is indeed a language or merely a language-like system (composed of signs capable of messages without codes) by resorting to Jakobson’s pragmatic model for human communication and to the study of the *message* in information theory. That is, Lotman is most interested in the *transmission* of information in screen messages and in *how*, not *whether*, they are coded and structured. What is ultimately best of all, he actually tells us.

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