

The Semiotic Monad as a Prefiguration of the Window: Trajectories of Theoretical Imagi- nation in Juri Lotman's Semiotics of Culture

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Summary. The article addresses the problem of whether the figurative expressions appearing unexpectedly in Juri Lotman's metalanguage should be seen as integral to his theoretical system rather than incidental. To explore this issue, the study examines two seemingly unrelated descriptions of meaning mechanisms from Lotman's late period – the semiotic monad (1989) and the window (1992) – which are relatively minor, brief, and appear in his texts from different years. In seeking a meaningful connection between these descriptions, the article aims to conceptualize the semiotic monad from the perspective of figurativity, interpreting its “entrance” and “exit” mechanisms as a prefiguration of the window. The interpretation proceeds in three steps: (1) presenting the structure of the semiotic monad; (2) clarifying the connection between the aforementioned descriptions and situating it within the broader context of Lotman's spatial mode of thought; (3) discussing how the interpretation of the semiotic monad engages with Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz's philosophical concept of the “windowless” monad. The study reveals a trajectory of Lotman's theoretical imagination that moves from abstract reflection on complex semiotic processes toward a more tangible and visually articulated form.

Keywords: Lotman, Leibniz, monad, window, figure, semiotics of culture, metalanguage.

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Introduction

The idea for this study emerged after reading Juri Lotman's late work *Culture and Explosion* and observing that, in order to convey a theoretical insight, Lotman often uses figurative language, more precisely, the figurative expression of a theoretical concept. In other words, the semiotic description is determined by the chosen mode of language, as he tends to visualize, or rather, poeticize the metalinguistic description. Drawing attention to this figurative aspect of Lotman's semiotic discourse, Laura Gherlone (2022: 282) argues that his reliance on metaphors and "explosive" insights reflects the very nature of his scientific thought, which "is inseparable from his aesthetic sensibility and, in general, from *real life* understood as ongoing creativity." Winfried Nöth (2006: 249) claims that Juri Lotman's texts are filled with "images of closed territories separated by boundaries, spaces enclosed within spaces like a matryoshka, a Russian puppet in a puppet, or spaces reflecting other spaces within themselves like mirrors." The frequent use of figurative expressions such as matryoshka, kaleidoscope, organism, mirror, or spiral leads to the following questions: what kinds of conceptual contents do they represent, and are these figures themselves connected by structural relations that reinforce the network of Lotman's semiotic description? Building upon these observations, this article examines two expressions of a meaning mechanism that appear in Lotman's metalinguistic description of the semiotics of culture: the figure of the window and the semiotic monad. The interest lies not only in their semantic weight within Lotman's theoretical framework but also in the possibility of tracing a connection between them, perhaps as a continuous segment of the trajectory of his theoretical thought.

The figure of the window appears in several passages of Lotman's *Culture and Explosion*. One of the chapters is titled "Dream – a semiotic window" (Lotman 2009: 142–146). In another chapter, "Semantic intersection as the explosion of meanings. Inspiration" (Lotman 2009: 19–24), the window is described as the point where

the space of semiosis encounters the extra-semiotic world. For the dynamic semiotic system that Lotman constructs, the permeable point expressed through the figure of the window is vital, as it enables the continuous filtration of meaning between the semiotic space ("the world of semiosis") and its creatively productive exterior. One of the key conditions for the formation of such a window is the tension between translatability and untranslatability:

But the relationships between the translatable and the untranslatable are so complex that possibilities for a breakthrough into the space beyond the limits are created. This function is also fulfilled by moments of explosion, which can create a kind of window in the semiotic layer. Thus, the world of semiosis is not fatally locked in on itself: it forms a complex structure, which always 'plays' with the space external to it. (Lotman 2009: 24)

Since the description of the window as an intersemiotic site essential for the production of new meanings in the chapter "Semantic intersection as the explosion of meanings. Inspiration" resonated, in my view, with Lotman's earlier description of the semiotic monad¹, I decided to use it as a key reference point in the present study. However, Lotman's description of the window remains peripheral, as he does not develop it into a conceptual model of meaning-making. In this context, "peripheral" refers to a description that is not systematically elaborated, appears only within a specific text, and functions more as an attempt at formulation than as a consistent exposition of Lotman's conception of semiosis.

The idea of linking the descriptions of the semiotic monad and the window arose from the observation that there is a lack of scholarship addressing why Lotman introduced the concept of the semiotic monad yet did not further develop it in his later works. It is known that Lotman adopted the notion of the monad from Gott-

¹ Lotman devotes an entire article to the semiotic monad in 1989, entitled "Culture as a Subject and Its Own Object" (2019b).

fried Wilhelm Leibniz, yet “the general absence of previous and following references to Leibniz makes it very hard to understand what is the role of Leibnizian concepts in the general development of Lotman’s ideas” (Restaneo 2018: 315). The disappearance of the notion of the monad could perhaps be related to Lotman’s general metalinguistic tendency, which developed over time, toward a simpler and less specialized terminology (M. Lotman 2022: 148). However, the explicit disappearance of the term “monad” does not mean that the very idea of the model of meaning-making vanished from Lotman’s intellectual world along with the withdrawal of the term itself. For example, Silvi Salupere (2015: 68), who has analyzed the systematic use of the terms “mechanism” and “ustrojstvo” in Lotman’s metalanguage, notes that the term “ustrojstvo,” consistently used by Lotman in his earlier works, does not disappear from his metalanguage even in his later period, and in *Culture and Explosion*, acquires a metaphorical substitute in the image of the “thinking reed.” The image of the “thinking reed” originates from the philosopher Blaise Pascal (2013: 11). Salupere’s observation suggests that even when certain terms seem to vanish from Lotman’s terminology, they may persist in transformed, figurative forms. Following this logic, one might suppose, admittedly speculatively, that the semiotic monad, which appeared earlier in Lotman’s theoretical repertoire than the window, reemerged in his later metalanguage in a figuratively refined form, namely, as the window. On this basis, the central hypothesis of the study was formulated: the Lotmanian semiotic monad can be regarded as a prefiguration of the window as a semiotic concept.

Lotman’s notion of the semiotic monad remains rather intriguing, posing significant challenges to the imagination, especially due to its complex relationship with the Leibnizian monad. In presenting his model of the semiotic monad, Lotman employs the very term “monad” and explicitly mentions Leibniz, yet he does not engage in any sustained reflection on how these two notions might be compared. This raises a question: what could a metaphysical point, as Leibniz’s philosophical monad is understood, possibly

have in common with Lotman's semiotic monad, described as the invariant model of a meaning-making entity? Researchers attempt to interpret the enigmatic functioning of the semiotic monad and to explain its relation to the Leibnizian monad, which is not apparent. Restaneo (2018: 315) argues that "the peculiar use of the term 'monad' by Lotman <...> appears to be very different from Leibniz's actual use, and may bring the reader to think that Lotman had, at the very least, misunderstood the meaning of the concept." Similarly, Inga Vidugiryte (2022: 217) observes that, at first glance, Lotman seems to disregard Leibniz's emphasis on the absolute closure of monads, even though he borrows the very notion from him. In Restaneo's most recent book (2025), which dedicates an entire chapter to the semiotic monad and seeks to deepen the examination of the intellectual ties between Lotman and Leibniz, the broader Russian intellectual traditions that inevitably shaped Lotman's thought are brought into analytical focus.

Although it is important to recognize the tensions arising from the divergences in the content of Lotman's and Leibniz's concepts of the monad, my study, which focuses on Lotman's theoretical imagination, seeks rather to shift attention from the question of content to the mode of expression, which has not been examined thus far. Such an approach allows us to consider whether Lotman's inclination toward figurative language might have been influenced by Leibniz's way of explaining monads and his theoretical language. Therefore, my study takes into account research on Lotman's theoretical-scientific language as well as his views on an ideal theoretical or scientific language. For instance, Nöth (2006, 2014) reminds us that Lotman's theoretical thought is characterized by spatial metaphors, which he employs to describe complex semiotic and cultural phenomena, such as the semiosphere. Meanwhile, Gherlone (2013b: 398) investigates the tendency of Lotman's semiotics toward interdisciplinary dialogue, which seeks to inform our understanding of reality from multiple perspectives, similarly to the way Leibniz's monads function. This Lotmanian inclination toward interdisciplinary dialogue also shapes the nature of his

theoretical imagination, in which concepts from various other disciplines, such as cybernetics, biology, physics, and beyond, are incorporated through the principle of analogy (Gherlone 2013a). From a methodological point of view, my research might be related to studies that analyze the more general development and internal logic of Lotman's metalanguage. In this regard, Salupere's works are relevant, although she does not devote separate attention to figurativity in Lotman's metalanguage. She argues that, despite assumptions about the lack of systematicity and terminological clarity in Lotman's thought, certain consistent lines of reasoning in his texts should not be overlooked (Salupere 2015: 80). Relevant arguments are further developed in her doctoral dissertation: Lotman tends to rewrite and transform his own earlier ideas, especially those related to translation, generating variations rather than ruptures (Salupere 2017: 102). This tendency for the generation of variations is important for understanding the relationship between the monad and the window in my analysis.

This article aims to conceptualize Lotman's semiotic monad from the perspective of figurativity, interpreting its "entrance" and "exit" mechanisms as a prefiguration of the window. The first part introduces the concept of the semiotic monad as developed in Lotman's article "Culture as a Subject and Its Own Object" (2019b), with particular attention to the aspects that later allow for establishing a connection between the semiotic monad and the window.

The second part substantiates this connection in three steps. First, the "entrance" and "exit" of the semiotic monad are conceptualized by drawing on the description of the window as an object of the natural world. Second, the relationship between Lotman's two theoretical descriptions is examined by connecting significant aspects of the semiotic monad to Lotman's insights on the window in the aforementioned chapter from *Culture and Explosion*. Third, I discuss how this conceptualization may resonate with Lotman's spatial mode of thinking.

Finally, the third part opens onto a broader historical-philosophical context for this hypothesis by addressing the observation that

the Leibnizian monad, which Lotman draws upon, is traditionally conceived as “windowless.”

1. The semiotic monad: a laboratory of meaning-making

Lotman (2019b: 83–84) employs the monadic model as a means of overcoming the subject–object divide that has become entrenched within the European intellectual tradition, a distinction he regards as inadequate for describing cultural processes. Lotman (2019b: 85) defines the semiotic monad as an invariant model of meaning-making that operates on all levels of the cultural universe: a specific text, an entire culture, or even an individual personality can be regarded as a monad, since new meaning is generated across all these levels.

According to Lotman's description of the semiotic monad's functioning, one can distinguish between processes that take place within the monad and those occurring outside it. Although this internal–external distinction is not explicitly elaborated in Lotman's (2019b) own article, it can be identified. For instance, Restaneo (2018: 327–329) dedicates separate sections to describing the “activity of the monad” and its “relationship with other monads”, while Vidugirytė (2022: 214) refers to the “inner and outer aspects of the monadic existence.”

The monad's internal activity, understood as its meaning-making process, is enabled by the binary system and the metaphor-generating apparatus (Lotman 2019b: 86) embedded within it, which I will discuss in more detail shortly. Its external activity, on the other hand, concerns the monad's existence within the semiosphere, in proximity to other monads with which it interacts. This interaction creates a hierarchy of monads that allows culture to be conceived as an “organism of organisms,” that is, as a monad composed of smaller monads arranged in levels (Lotman 2019b: 89). External, intermonadic actions are defined as the intersection, combination, and incorporation of two or more monads (Lotman

2019b: 89). This differentiation between the internal and external functioning of the semiotic monad could perhaps be supported by the fact that Lotman, even in earlier texts, wrote about two contradictory processes in culture: the splitting and multiplication of languages, on the one hand, and their integration into larger structures, on the other². Internal monadic activity, one could argue, encompasses precisely this splitting: under the influence of the binary mechanism and the metaphor-generating apparatus, an initial text, for example, a landscape, becomes a landscape articulated in the language of poetry and in the language of painting (Lotman 2019b: 86); thus, languages proliferate and diversify. External monadic activity, in contrast, would involve the merging of monads into larger structures within the semiosphere. However, these reflections on the distinction between internal and external functions could be examined in greater depth in a separate study.

Within the scope of this article, the focus is on the internal activity of the monad as a kind of meaning-making laboratory that encompasses the key mechanisms required for the filtration and transformation of meaning, namely its “entrance” and “exit.” Lotman’s description reveals the following internal structure of the monad:

a binary system consisting (minimally) of two semiotic mechanisms (languages) located in a relationship of mutual untranslatability and, at the same time, resembling each other, to the extent that each with its own means models the same extra-semiotic reality. In this way, a text entering from the outside acquires at least two mutually untranslatable semiotic projections. The minimal structure consists of a third element: a block of relative equivalences, a metaphor-genera-

² In his 1978 article “The Phenomenon of Culture,” Lotman wrote: “In this way, one can observe within the thickness of culture two contradictory processes. When the mechanism of duality is activated, it leads to the constant splitting of every culturally active language into two, the result of which is that the total number of cultural languages increases exponentially. <...> At the same time, however, an opposing process is underway: pairs of languages are integrated into unified semiotic formations” (Lotman 2019a: 42).

ting apparatus, which makes possible the operation of translation in situations of untranslatability. As a result of these 'translations,' the text is subjected to irreversible transformation, and the act of generating a new text takes place (Lotman 2019b: 86).

Thus, the semiotic monad is a universal schema of meaning-making, composed of elements that each fulfill specific functions:

- 1) A binary system, or in other words, at least two mutually untranslatable languages that model (or project) the same extra-semiotic reality. These languages are equivalent in terms of the object they model, but differ in the way they model it; this difference is precisely what renders them untranslatable into each other. For instance, painting and poetry are two distinct, mutually untranslatable modeling systems (languages), yet they can be regarded as equivalent if, for example, they both depict or poetically evoke the same landscape (Lotman 2019b: 93).
- 2) A metaphor-generating apparatus, which enables translation in cases of untranslatability, that is, a kind of creative translation. Referring back to the example of the two untranslatable languages, painting and poetry, one could suggest that the metaphor-generating apparatus facilitates the translation from the language of painting into poetic language (or vice versa). This apparatus functions as a bridge within the binary system; it mediates between fixed oppositions by means of analogy and association, operating through inexact translation, in other words, through the creation of metaphors in the broadest sense.

These two components that constitute the internal anatomy of the semiotic monad may be said to mark only the middle segment of the entire pathway of meaning-making. The beginning and end of this process are framed by the monad's "entrance" and "exit":

The 'isolation' (within certain limits) of such a monad assumes not only the presence of a border and of a latent structure but also of an 'entrance' and an 'exit.' <...> In the process of being 'used,' the text is subjected to transformation, leading to the generation of a new text upon exiting (Lotman 2019b: 85).

Meaning-making is defined as the creation of new, unpredictable, and irreversible texts³. The extra-semiotic reality beyond the boundary of the monad, serving as the initial text, enters the system through the monad's "entrance," because "the semiosphere cannot come into contact with anything but texts" (Lotman 2019b: 91). Subsequently, under the conditions of the binary system and a metaphor-generating apparatus, this initial text undergoes transformation and reaches the "exit" as a new text.

Thus, on the one hand, the semiotic monad's "entrance" can be understood as the starting point of the meaning-making chain, and the "exit" as its end point. In this case, "entrance" and "exit" are temporal aspects, marking the sequential course of meaning production. On the other hand, the "entrance" and "exit" of the semiotic monad can be conceived as permeable points on the monad's boundary that allow the text to move from extra-semiotic reality into the semiotic monad and back again. I will examine this aspect in more detail shortly.

2. From the boundary point to the window: figuring the semiotic monad's "entrance" and "exit"

A close examination of the structure of the semiotic monad, as described by Lotman, led to further conceptual considerations that link the seemingly abstract mechanism of the semiotic monad's "entrance" and "exit" with the figure of a window. Before address-

³ It should be noted that in the description of the semiotic monad model, the concept of the text is complex in its indeterminacy. For example, it is known that another monad may itself be regarded as a text, yet Lotman does not address the identity between the concepts of text and monad, nor the interpretative difficulties arising from it. The article makes it clear that texts produced through meaning-making must meet the criteria of novelty, irreversibility, and unpredictability. Lotman's (2019b: 85–86) statement that the initial text never disappears before its transformation could also imply the possibility of textual doubling: the initial version of the text settles in the semiosphere as a unit of memory, while another undergoes monadic transformation.

ing these connections on a conceptual level, it is worth considering why the window figure proved especially productive for Lotman as a cultural theorist. In one of his texts intended for a non-academic audience, Lotman (2024: 336) states that in order “to understand one’s neighbour not as an enemy requires a different psychology, one that places oneself not on the other side of a fence but at an open window. <...> Open systems are dynamic.” By opposing the fence as a figure of closure and immutability to the window as a figure of openness and dynamism, Lotman figuratively describes the logic of his dynamic model: dialogue becomes possible only when the cultural subject (culture as a monad) shifts from defensive preservation of the self (the fence) to dialogue-receptive stance (the window).

The window, as a figure of the natural world, has an optical dimension, as without changing one’s position, the gaze can encompass everything that lies beyond it. Such a definition of the figure of the window implies a moment of subjectivity: the window does not guarantee an objective view of the world but delineates the trajectory of the gaze of a subject situated in a particular position, as well as what specifically appears to that subject beyond the window. This corresponds to Lotman’s idea that any cultural communication begins with the “I,” with my gaze toward the other: “Very often concepts <...> that are projected onto an outside world both before and outside semiotization [are] developed in the depths of the *given* culture” (Lotman 2019b: 92).

The window might also resemble a door, a break in the continuous structure through which movement occurs not only by sight but also physically, allowing passage between spaces. In Lotman’s description of the semiotic monad, “entrance” and “exit” likewise semantically mark not only a boundary but also the possibility of moving from one space into another, that is, from the semiotic into the extra-semiotic space or vice versa. Thus, the “entrance” and “exit” of the semiotic monad, one might say, acquire certain aspects of the window:

- 1) Transparency, established by the projections of the binary system (languages mutually untranslatable) within the monad. This bilingual (or multilingual) mechanism, located inside the monad, “receives” the external text entering the monad by mapping onto it at least two mutually untranslatable semiotic projections: “[A] text entering from the outside acquires at least two mutually untranslatable semiotic projections” (Lotman 2019b: 86). From this perspective, the “entrance” of the semiotic monad functions as a kind of window-screen onto extra-semiotic reality. One could say that the aspect of transparency in the creative chain of meaning-making marks the very moment of semiotization: a unit of extra-semiotic reality, still devoid of meaning, here acquires meaning.
- 2) Permeability, established by the act of translation that takes place inside the monad. The text, having undergone transformation within the monad, moves toward the monad’s “exit” (Lotman 2019b: 85). Thus, the permeability aspect of the monad’s “window” is tied to the circulation of the text into and out of the monad.

These characteristics attributed to the “entrance” and “exit” of the semiotic monad, resembling those of a window, help to visualize and concretize the process of meaning-making taking place within the monad. This description may also serve as an introduction to the further argumentation, in which I draw on Lotman’s insights about the window presented in his book *Culture and Explosion*. Without aiming to synthesize all the arguments intended for comparison and leaving this question partly open for discussion, I will share several insights that, in my view, are particularly significant for establishing the connection between the descriptions of the semiotic monad and the window.

First, as already mentioned, the window in the “semiotic layer” emerges from the complex relation between untranslatability and translatability (Lotman 2009: 24), as that which separates two spheres between which meanings circulate. The functioning of the semiotic monad, which has a permeable point at its bound-

ary, called the "entrance" and the "exit," is likewise grounded in the relation between translatability and untranslatability. Here, as already mentioned, operating under the conditions of a metaphor-generating apparatus, translation takes place between two mutually untranslatable languages, resulting in the creation of a new text: "As a result of these 'translations,' the text is subjected to irreversible transformation, and the act of generating a new text takes place" (Lotman 2019b: 86).

Second, in both the description of the semiotic monad and that of the window, the fundamental components of the entire process are mentioned: texts and languages. In the description of the semiotic monad, texts, which may themselves also be regarded as semiotic monads, arrive from the extra-semiotic space external to the monad and interact with the languages within it (Lotman 2019b: 86). In the description of the window, meanwhile, it is stated that the semiotic, that is, cultural, layer is composed of two hierarchically interconnected "layers" of languages and texts:

Semiotic space appears before us as the multi-layered intersection of various texts, which are woven together in a specific layer characterised by complex internal relationships and variable degrees of translatability and spaces of untranslatability. The layer of 'reality' is located underneath this textual layer – the kind of reality that is organised by a multiplicity of languages and has a hierarchical relationship with them (Lotman 2009: 23–24).

Thus, culture is composed of a tangled network of texts and languages. This image recalls Lotman's (2019b: 90–91) depiction of the semiosphere as a complex hierarchy of monads, an organism of organisms: "[The semiosphere] represents a special construct, at one and the same time an organizing hierarchy of structures and an enormous number of closed semiotic worlds ('individuals,' texts), freely swimming in semiotic space."

Perhaps the most crucial aspect is that both the window of the "semiotic layer" and the monad's "entrance" and "exit" open onto extra-semiotic reality or world, which is the source of new meanings. In the description of the semiotic monad, it is written

that “texts enter the semiosphere from the outside, and that we see in them an ‘extra-semiotic reality’” (Lotman 2019b: 92). In the description of the window, by contrast, reference is made to the play of the semiotic world with the external space⁴, while the very notion of extra-semiotic reality is expanded by drawing on Kantian terminology:

The word ‘reality’ denotes two different phenomena. On the one hand, this reality is phenomenal, in the Kantian sense, i.e. it is that reality which correlates to culture, either resisting it, or merging with it. On the other, there is the noumenal sense (in Kantian terminology) in which we may refer to reality as a space which is forever beyond the limits of culture (Lotman 2009: 24).

According to Lotman, phenomenal reality is that which reveals itself to culture and is accessible to understanding. Meanwhile, noumenal reality becomes a space beyond culture as the “semiotic layer.” Without aiming to identify or explain all of Lotman’s highly idiosyncratic interpretations of Kantian ideas, I will highlight an aspect particularly relevant to my research. It seems that Lotman employs the philosophical concept of the noumenon, which traditionally denotes what is inaccessible to cognition, but he interprets it rather freely, departing from its original context by assigning it a spatial logic: “noumenal sense <...> in which we may refer to reality as a space” (Lotman 2009: 24). This move toward the spatialization of an abstract concept is not accidental in Lotman’s semiotics of culture. It has been noted that even before introducing the concept of the semiosphere, Lotman tended to associate various abstract notions, such as culture, language, and the unconscious, with the spatial construct of a “sphere” (Semenenko 2012: 114). The philosophical concept of the monad is also, in a sense, spatialized. Lotman employs it as a spatial entity within which the semiotic process of meaning-making can be positioned (Vidugiryte 2022:

⁴ “Thus, the world of semiosis is not fatally locked in on itself: it forms a complex structure, which always ‘plays’ with the space external to it” (Lotman 2009: 24).

213–214). Moreover, Lotman's description of the monad as a spatial entity further initiates other spatial images, such as the semiosphere as "an enormous organism made up of organisms" (Vidugirytė 2022: 209–210). In contrast, Leibniz's monad is neither a physical nor a spatial construct; quite the opposite, as simple substances, monads lack any spatial properties (Leibniz 2014: §3). Lotman's description of the semiotic monad, therefore, reflects a broader tendency in his theoretical imagination, namely to model cultural processes through spatial logic. This tendency is evident not only in his frequent use of terms like "sphere" or "space" (e.g., linguistic space, semiotic space) but also in his systematic integration of spatial characteristics, such as periphery, center, boundary, interior, exterior, into his theoretical language (Nöth 2014: 12). When introducing the well-known concept of the semiosphere, followed by his later descriptions of the monad and the window, Lotman rejected the metaphorical nature of the semiosphere, since he regarded it not as a metaphor but as a model (Nöth 2014: 13). He considered this spatial model the most productive way to explain how meanings are created, how cultures interact, and how other dynamic semiotic processes unfold. This shows that spatial modeling for Lotman is a methodological necessity, perhaps even an epistemological stance. However, there are further arguments as to why Lotman's theoretical thought is so inseparable from spatial imagination. First, Lotman himself has observed that human thinking is, by its very nature, inclined toward spatial structures, and that even abstract concepts in human consciousness are often perceived spatially (Nöth 2014: 14). Second, by constructing topographic models of meaning, Lotman's semiotics of culture anticipates the spatial turn that later occurred in cultural studies (Nöth 2014: 12). This anticipation is connected to the fact that structuralist binary oppositions were no longer sufficient for describing complex cultural processes. Thus, the boundary of the semiosphere was no longer merely a dividing line; understood as a bilingual translation mechanism, it acquired the status of a third space (Nöth 2014: 20), since it is precisely there that the circulation and transformation of meanings take place.

Lotman's description of the semiotic monad incorporates the concepts of both the semiosphere and the boundary, already present in his earlier works⁵. The function of the boundary, as Lotman (2019b: 92) himself observes, serves as the connecting link between the descriptions of the semiosphere and the semiotic monad: "The same work takes place here as at the border between differently constructed parts of a monad and at any other border inside the semiosphere." Such an understanding of the boundary as a space significantly complements my interpretation, in which the permeable points of the semiotic monad's boundary ("entrance" and "exit") are conceptualized as the spatial figure of the window. Taken together, these arguments suggest that spatial modeling in Lotman's semiotics appears not merely illustrative but as an important means of conceptualizing the very possibility of meaning processes, a tendency into which the present interpretation inscribes itself and may further develop.

3. A window in the "windowless" monad: tracing a trajectory of figurativity and paradox

The linking of Lotman's semiotic monad "entrance" and "exit" with the figure of the window inevitably raises the question of how such an interpretation aligns with Leibniz's thesis that monads are closed, "windowless." In Leibniz's *Monadology* (2014: §3), monads as simple substances are indivisible, immaterial "atoms of nature," devoid of spatial properties and inaccessible to sensory experience. As they have no physical parts, the active force preprogrammed within them determines their entire development without any causal influence (Rescher 1991b: 59). Hence Leibniz (2014: §7) as-

⁵ Since the focus of this study is the relationship between the semiotic monad and the window rather than the relationship between the semiotic monad and the semiosphere, this latter connection will not be examined in detail here. The similarity between the models of the semiotic monad and the semiosphere, both of which share a tripartite structure, is discussed by Restaneo (2025: 163–164).

serts: "Monads have no windows through which anything could enter them or depart from them." Therefore, Lotman, in stating that semiotic monads possess "entrances" and "exits," performs a rather bold and at the same time paradoxical interpretative move. The semiotic monad is partially closed, in the sense that it possesses its own boundary separating it from the space beyond (Lotman 2019b: 85). However, it is precisely the "entrance" and "exit," as channels through which meanings are filtered, that render the semiotic monad open to the outside, i.e., to extra-semiotic reality, as a system. It is worth recalling that in his non-academic reflections on interactions of cultures, Lotman (2024: 336) prioritized the figure of the window over the fence, highlighting its role in enabling cultural dialogue. Such openness constitutes the most evident difference from Leibniz's description of the monad, in which its closure is emphasized as its fundamental property: "[A monad] has 'no outside' and therefore, 'coming from outside' or 'passing outside from it' is inconceivable" (Datta 1936: 14). Admittedly, Lotman's (2019b: 83) own remark that his insights into the monad have no philosophical significance at least partly explains why his interpretation departs from Leibniz's formulation.

Despite the closure and "windowlessness" of Leibniz's monads, they are "living" mirrors, reflecting not themselves as isolated units but the entire universe from their unique point of view (Leibniz 2014: §56). Leibniz's thesis (2014: §7) on the "windowlessness" of monads is meant to demonstrate that there is no causal influence among them; however, their closure does not prevent monads from becoming mirrors of the universe. Thus, here we encounter a fundamental paradox of Leibniz's philosophy: monads lack causal relations with one another, yet collectively they constitute the whole of reality (Čerapaitė 2024: 13). Leibniz addresses this paradox by means of the doctrine of pre-established harmony, which "resolves the apparent paradox of monads mirroring one another despite their lack of direct interaction" (Čerapaitė 2024: 14). There is reason to assume that it was precisely this property of the Leibnizian monad, its ability to represent reality from multiple

different points of view, that may have appeared conceptually productive to Lotman, when he attributed to the monad an “entrance” and an “exit” into reality, which in the semiotic context he termed “extra-semiotic reality” (Lotman 2019b: 86). To substantiate this claim, Čerapaite’s (2024: 17) interpretation of the paintings by the Lithuanian neo-expressionist artist Henrikas Čerapas (b. 1952) may serve as an illustrative example, in which each abstract work of art, like a Leibnizian monad, reflects the same landscape of reality in a different way. Here the concept employed is that of the Leibnizian, rather than the Lotmanian, monad; yet the principle itself, that is, the ability to represent one reality from different perspectives, is close to the description of the semiotic monad. As has been examined, the latter highlights that the different languages constituting the semiotic monad project the same extra-semiotic reality, for instance, the languages of painting and poetry project the same landscape (Lotman 2019b: 86). I have termed this possibility of projection in the second chapter as the aspect of the transparency of the window. Thus, the linking of Lotman’s semiotic monad with the figure of the window does not contradict Leibniz’s thesis of “windowlessness” but rather underscores a similar mechanism of representation: closed monads still reflect the whole universe, and it is precisely this capacity that Lotman articulates as the semiotic system’s openness to extra-semiotic reality. Therefore, future analysis could extend to another figure shared by Leibniz and Lotman, namely the mirror, which may reveal an additional trajectory of figurativity possibly linking the two thinkers.

Even if the transfer of the philosophical concept of the monad into the semiotic context introduces certain ambiguities, these emerge within a broader metalinguistic background where such ambiguities are characteristic rather than accidental. It is well known that Lotman’s scientific language is by no means devoid of paradoxicality and a poetic dimension: “His images are not without poetic qualities; some of them imply inconsistencies, lead to catachreses, or result in enigmatic logical paradoxes” (Nöth 2006: 249). Besides, Lotman’s scientific language is frequently described as

lacking a stable and clearly defined terminology. Although Lotman himself repeatedly stressed the importance of precision in scholarly discourse, in practice his own metalanguage does not always reveal strict consistency (Salupere 2015: 63). Some researchers of Lotman's metalanguage note that the apparent non-systematic character and terminological inaccuracy of his writings may stem from his continual effort to draw attention to new problem fields and to act as a generator of ideas (Salupere 2017: 18–19). From this perspective, Lotman's terminological looseness and non-systematicity may reflect the generative dynamics of his thought rather than a flaw. He wrote that scientific, like artistic, consciousness is characterized by the opposition between the logical and rhetorical domains (Lotman 1990: 45). The logical domain eliminates internal contradictions, tests hypotheses, and formulates conclusions, while the rhetorical domain provides analogies, brings together and advances unexpected statements, and constitutes an essential part of scientific consciousness. Reflecting on the peculiarity of scientific imagination, in which distinct and unrelated semantic spheres are boldly and provocatively juxtaposed, Lotman (1990: 37) noted that "just as in poetry, so in science, an 'illegitimate' juxtaposition often provokes the formulation of a new law." Lotman's scientific thought abounds in such imprecise juxtapositions or analogies, which ensure the infinite production of meaning and "stand out as a fundamental gnoseologic tool, creating relationships, by similitude of very different realities" (Gherlone 2013b: 399). Lotman frequently articulated the ideas of semiotic theory through analogies, thereby creating a semiotic metalanguage capable of reconciling different forms of perceiving reality, for example, different scientific disciplines (Gherlone 2013b: 401). Therefore, the description of the semiotic monad may be interpreted as a kind of analogy to the philosophical monad in the semiotic context, that is, an analogy aimed not at reproducing an exact theoretical construct but at establishing an interdisciplinary dialogue with philosophy. Research on Lotman's reception of Leibniz shows that his analogical mode of thinking is evident even in the marginal notes of his personal copy of Kuno Fischer's book

on Leibniz's philosophy, where Lotman equates Leibniz's conception of the soul-body relationship with the semiotic relationship between meaning and text (Restaneo 2025: 160).

Including a broader context than Lotman's scientific imagination, we may observe that Leibniz's *Monadology* also constitutes a distinctive system of analogies: "In fact, virtually the whole of Leibniz's discussion here is a complex fabric of such analogies" (Rescher 1991a: 37). As Rescher notes, Leibniz frequently develops his arguments proportionally by comparing the relation of X to X' with that of Y to Y'. One of the most prominent examples is the aforementioned mirror analogy, whereby each monad, though closed and "windowless," nevertheless reflects the universe from its own unique perspective, thus becoming a "perpetual living mirror of the universe" (Leibniz 2014: §56). The city analogy conveys the same idea: just as a city appears differently when viewed from different vantage points, so too the infinite multitude of monads produces diverse perspectives within a single universe (Leibniz 2014: §57). Another example is the garden analogy, where each part of matter is conceived as a garden full of plants, or a pond full of fish, and within each of these parts there exist similar worlds again, illustrating the dialectic of microcosm and macrocosm that structures Leibniz's vision of infinite complexity ordered into harmony (Leibniz 2014: §67). Leibniz's system of analogies can be thematically classified into the domains of art, politics, and science (Rescher 1991b: 207). These analogies render abstract metaphysical claims vivid, multidimensional, and accessible. It is noticeable that Leibniz was concerned that his metaphysics would not be fully understood by the contemporary audience, committed as it was to a sense-based theory of knowledge and unwilling to grasp matters comprehensible only through pure reason (Whipple 2015: 4). Consequently, Leibniz was compelled to employ exoteric strategies by deploying sensory analogies or vivid metaphors in order to make the abstract content of metaphysics more intelligible to the readership of his time. This rhetorical aspect is crucial for interpreting the thesis on "windowless" monads, relevant to this study. As mentioned, this formulation

is intended to emphasize the absence of causal interaction between monads, yet it is itself paradoxical: if monads lack spatial extension and figures, as Leibniz repeatedly asserts, why is there any need to mention windows, even in the form of negation? The very reference to windows inevitably presupposes a spatial dimension: "The spatial character of the monad was already presumed by Leibniz, who claimed that monads 'have no windows, by which anything could come in or go out'" (Vidugiryte 2022: 214). Thus, the figure meant to negate spatiality paradoxically reintroduces it, creating a tension between the non-spatial ontology of the monad and its figurative presentation. This figurative metalanguage of monadic description may also have influenced Lotman, whether directly or indirectly, as he granted the semiotic monad an "entrance" and an "exit," and tended to model semiotic processes within spatial schemata. As already noted, Lotman was similarly drawn to the image of the "thinking reed" introduced by the philosopher Pascal (2013: 11), which Lotman used to replace the earlier concept "ustrojstvo" (Salupere 2015: 68). This parallel suggests that what attracted Lotman to philosophical texts was perhaps not only their ideas but also the poetic quality of their expression, that is, the figurative mode through which these ideas were conveyed. In this sense, Lotman's spatialization of the semiotic monad continues, rather than departs from, Leibniz's own figurative paradox, in which the denial of windows paradoxically relies on spatial imagery.

Final reflections on the poetical trajectories of theoretical imagination

This study was inspired by the rich yet enigmatic theoretical imagination of Lotman, which becomes perceptible when reading the extensive legacy of his writings. Moving through these pathways of theoretical imagination, from one text to another, across different periods, one can at times feel "lost," since Lotman's thought may be characterized by a certain inconsistency and paradoxicality. The same ideas are sometimes reformulated in new terms, concepts

borrowed from other disciplines are often interpreted quite freely and paradoxically, and figures unexpectedly emerge in the meta-language, raising questions as to their function. The structure of this study was thus conceived as an attempt to trace and present one trajectory of Lotman's fertile yet somewhat labyrinthine thought, a small strand encompassing two of his texts from different periods.

This article explored a trajectory of Lotman's theoretical imagination connecting two seemingly unrelated expressions: the semiotic monad, presented as a quite conceptually elaborated model of meaning-making, and the window, a peripheral and non-conceptual description, perhaps better understood as an attempt at formulation. The analysis drew only on the description of the window found in one chapter of Lotman's *Culture and Explosion*, the one that displays structural affinities with the semiotic monad. For this reason, another significant mention of the window, which connects the figures of dream and window, as well as the second condition for the emergence of the window (explosion), lies beyond the scope of this article. Future research could therefore explore how other figurative elements in Lotman's writings, such as the dream, the explosion, or the mirror, intersect with the semiotic monad and the window, thereby revealing additional trajectories of his rich and enigmatic theoretical imagination.

The approach of interpreting the semiotic monad as a prefiguration of the window makes it possible, at least fragmentarily, to outline a trajectory of Lotman's theoretical imagination which shows how a conceptual, more abstract model of meaning might be reinterpreted, refined, and visualized through a figurative and more sensuously tangible form of theoretical description. Given that the semiotic monad and the window appear in Lotman's works at different times, and that their connection is grounded in similar features, such as the internal structure of two mutually untranslatable languages, the opening toward extra-semiotic reality, and so on, this suggests a new way of reading the complex and abstract model of semiotic monad. Additional analytical force is provided by conceptualizing the permeable boundary points of the monad

("entrance" and "exit") through the description of the window as an object of the natural world. This conceptualization highlights how aspects of figurativity, namely the transparency and permeability of the "entrance" and "exit," help to articulate complex processes of meaning-making. This article further suggested that such a figurative and spatial (since the window is a spatial figure) reading of the monad resonates with and continues Lotman's spatial mode of thought, in which the articulation of semiotic processes is inseparable from spatial schemata. From this perspective, the boundary of the semiotic monad, which includes the "entrance" and "exit" as a prefiguration of the window, resonates with Lotman's earlier notion of the boundary, which had already acquired the status of a space.

In response to the observation that the Leibnizian monad, which Lotman transposes into the semiotic context, is closed and "windowless," the study included a broader perspective on the hypothesis, requiring a reconsideration of the problematic relationship between the two thinkers, Leibniz and Lotman. This article did not aim to exhaust all the similarities and differences between their respective concepts of the monad, focusing instead on figurativity of its descriptions and on the problem of monadic openness and closure. Although Leibniz emphasized the closure and "windowlessness" of monads as a way of denying causal interactions between them, the very inclusion of the figure of the window, even in the form of negation, paradoxically implies a spatial image. Therefore, to claim that the present interpretation, which links the "entrance" and "exit" of the semiotic monad to the figure of the window, is incorrect merely because Leibniz's monads are "windowless" would be to oversimplify the entire discussion. Leibniz's *Monadology*, as a point of origin for the project of the semiotic monad, is itself rich in figurative explanations. Lotman's step of granting the semiotic monad an "entrance" and an "exit" diverges from the philosophical content of the monad, but in its own way, whether consciously or not, continues the thread of figurative and paradoxical thinking already present in Leibniz's philosophical language of *Monadology*.

In this article, Lotman's rather free interpretation of the Leibnizian monad was linked to the broader character of his theoretical expression. The trajectory from the "windowless" monad to the window illustrates the generative potential of figurativity in theoretical imagination, where figurativity and the paradox that often accompanies it should be seen not as a lack of consistency but as a source of new conceptual possibilities.

Finally, in the course of this study, a wide spectrum of understandings of the figure has emerged: the figure as a recognizable object of the world, Lotman's theory of metaphor, the figure as metaphor, analogy, and more. This article did not aim to resolve the tensions arising between these different notions of the figure, nor to compare systematically the ways in which concepts of the figure appear in the languages of Lotman and Leibniz. For the purposes of this study, the figure was understood simply as that which is recognizable in the sensory world. Future research could also include a systematic comparison of the functions of figurativity in the texts of both theorists, asking, for instance, whether Lotman employs figures with the same purpose as Leibniz.

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