

# Lotman and play: For a theory of playfulness based on semiotics of culture

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**Abstract.** The aim of the article is to introduce an approach to play based on semiotics of culture and, in particular, grounded in the works and ideas of Juri Lotman. On the one hand, it provides an overview of Lotman's works dedicated to play and games, starting from his article on art among other modelling systems, in which the phenomenon of play is treated deeply, and mentioning Lotman's articles dedicated to various forms of play forms, such as involving dolls and playing cards. On the other hand, it applies a few Lotmanian theories and ideas to playfulness in order to shed some light on this highly debated, as well as intriguing, anthropic activity. Thus, the paper approaches some of the core questions for a play theory, such as the definition of play, the cultural role of toys and playthings, the importance of unpredictability, the position held by playfulness in the semiosphere and, finally, the differences and commonalities between play and art. Lotman's theories and works, often integrated by other existing semiotic or ludologic perspectives offer an extremely insightful and fresh take on play and illustrate the great heuristic potential of semiotics of culture.

**Keywords:** Lotman; play; toys; unpredictability; culture; art

## 1. Introduction

In the last couple of decades scholars from many different disciplines have made joint efforts in order to define an academic approach to digital games. The result has been the foundation of *game studies*, a variegated new branch of humanities dedicated to