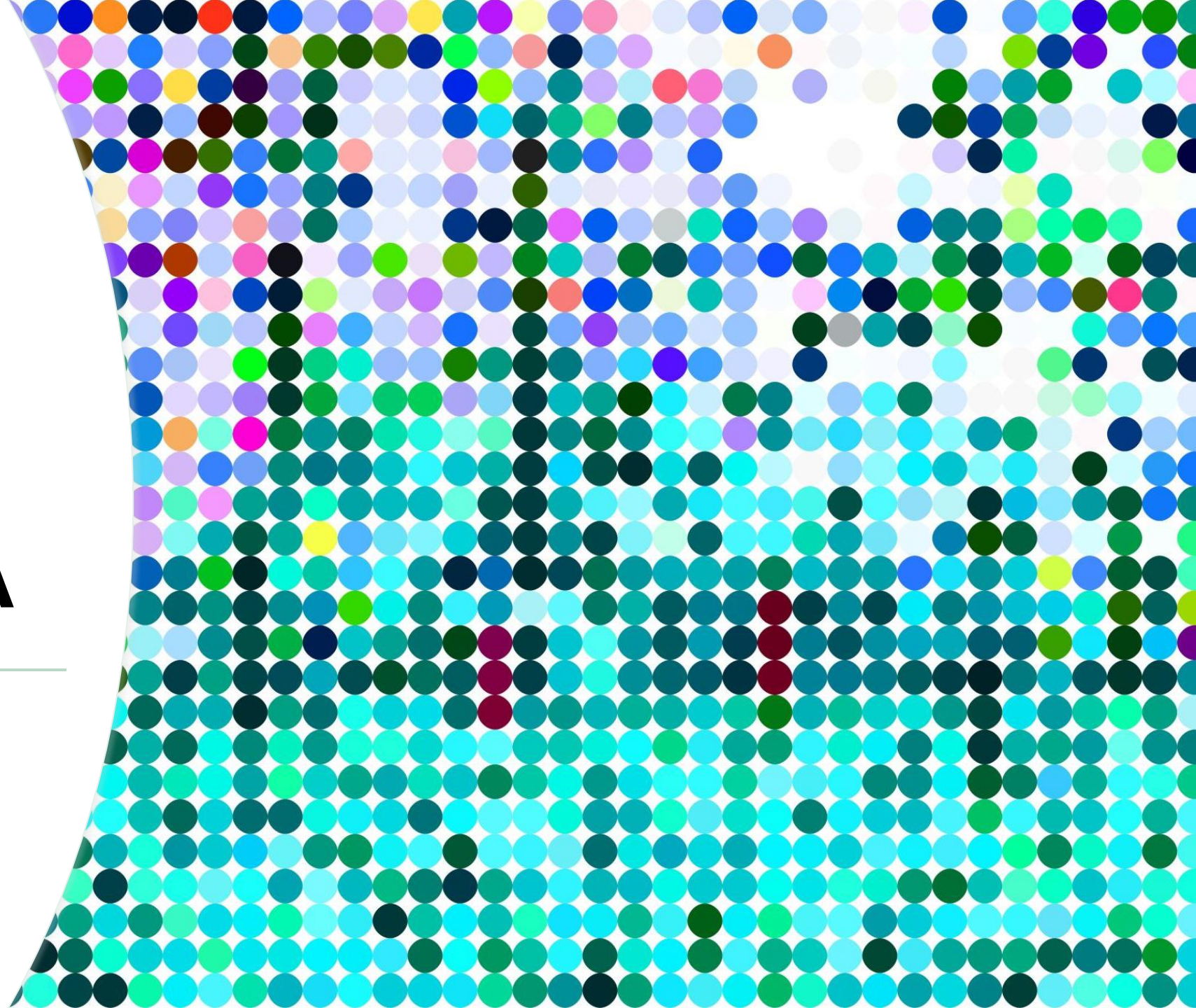# A CRITICAL READER OF "NEW" MEDIA

06. where we currently stand/the problem of interaction

In this class

- Reviewing concepts we are using

- What is interaction?

- Why is it a problem?

Where do we stand?

- As we move through multiple, sometimes very different concepts, we need to take stock of our theoretical ammo so far!

What is meaning?

- Meaning. A tricky word. What do we mean by meaning?

- When we talk semantics, we talk *some form* of meaning

- What is semantics? What is a theory of meaning?

Meaning, semantics, content

Theory of meaning

- What are the facts that make content possible at all?

Semantics and content

- How is content assigned in linguistic expressions?

But this distinction is not enough!

What is content?

Is there something *inside* our cultural objects?

What is a medium?

- A technology that opens up a new way of communication

- A technological support for some content

- A message

- An encompassing container that defines the boundaries of representations expressed through it

Why caring about art specifically?

- When we consider the current place of our concept of art, it gives us a good example of communication where medium and content are both of high value

- It allows us to observe how we push the boundaries of notions such as medium and content!

What is culture?

- Culture, in general, is the whole of meaning-making practices historically and locally situated, ever-changing and interacting by way of human action through modeling

- We use a semiotic approach to culture in order to formalize our unit of analysis

- By using a Lotmanian approach, we can understand culture as a *dynamic system*

What is a semiosphere?

- A representation of a dynamic semiotic system where texts circulate across its different areas
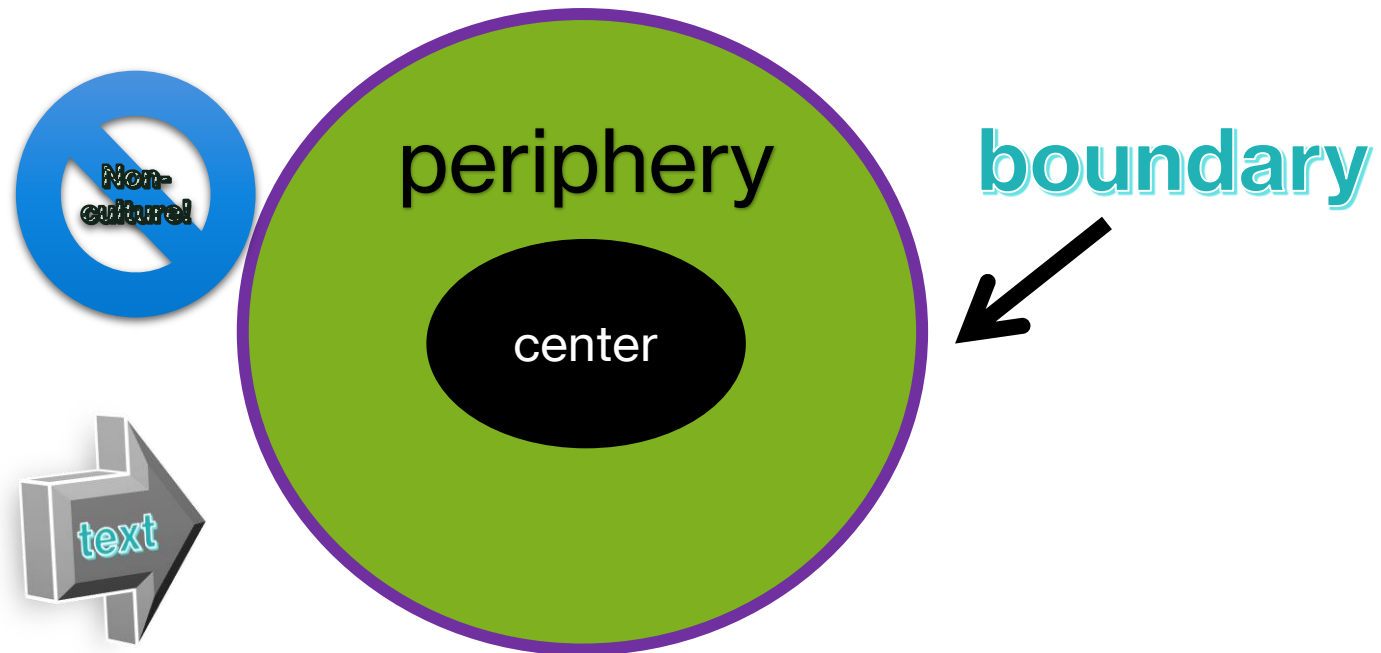
What is a text?

- A unit of analysis of Lotmanian semiotics

- Any "carrier of integral […] meaning – to a ceremony, a work of the fine arts, or a piece of music" (Lotman 1973: 58)

- Texts can be *discrete* and *indiscrete*: Discrete texts are clearly composed of specific signs, whereas indiscrete texts have no discernible specific, individualized signs

- In order to approach media that do not fit solely in conventional categories, we need to be mindful of their semiotic dimension: As cultural objects with multiple avenues to carry meaning

What is narrativity?

- Why do some cultural objects have a sense of narration?

- We have a temporal axis to our cultural objects, but their sign composition does not *require* narration

- But cognitively speaking, we put narration in cultural objects as a way to structure them

- And this leads us to a different question: How do we interact with different texts?

How do we interact with texts?

Place yourself here: It's the year 842 in Oviedo. The king of Asturias is dead.

Setting the scene

- You, a random peasant, head to the finally finished church at Mount Naranco, some 3 kms away from town

- You have seen churches before, of course. It's the year 842, after all!

- King Alfonso II, who led the war efforts and propaganda against the Emirate of Córdoba, is dead

- Ramiro I, had first ordered this construction earlier… setting himself up for a promotion!

Embodying the situation

- The façade stares at you, the lower floor moves you

- You are in awe not only of the moment, but of how a divine hand may have also guided the conception of this church

- Your knowledge of the world, its history, your religion, they all make you *feel* things and *understand* things

HOW DO WE INTERACT WITH TEXTS?

Do we embody them? Do we approach them?

What is interaction?

- One of the things we want to work with is the way we approach, use, understand and embody cultural texts

- As a text is, in a way, a message, it is usually framed in the sender-receiver dynamics

- If we're not crafting the text, then we're on the receiving side

- What does that mean?

Why is interaction a problem?

- There's basically two ways in which we interact with things: actively and passively

- The way we approach cultural texts, at least in the most relevant sense, seems to place us squarely on the passive side of things

- When it comes to artistic objects, interaction poses a problem in what the place of the so-called message is

- Moreover, how do we actually define what counts as "active" interaction? Think of social rituals and videogames