

# Introduction: Semiotics and history revisited

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**Abstract:** The introductory article proposes to offer a general frame for the special issue, discussing the emergence of semiotics of history as a new discipline or approach in the humanities. It presents an overview on the attempts of joining the history and semiotics in the Western world since the early 1980s, with a special focus on the United States, and examines the contribution of the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics to the semiotic study of history, paying the main attention to the work of Juri Lotman and Boris Uspenskij. Finally, a survey of the articles that make up the special issue dedicated to the 80th anniversary of Boris Uspenskij is presented.

**Keywords:** Juri Lotman; Boris Uspenskij; Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics; semiotics of history; historical semiotics

*Historia sub specie semioticae* is the title of a paper given by Boris Uspenskij at the First All-Soviet-Union Symposium on Secondary Modelling Systems organized by Juri Lotman in Tartu in early February 1974. In the same year it was published in the proceedings of the symposium, a rotaprint booklet with a small print run (Uspenskij 1974). Two years later, a slightly modified version appeared in the collective volume *Kul'turnoe nasledie Drevnej Rusi* [Cultural Heritage of Old Rus'], published in Moscow on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of Dmitrij Lihachev (for more details, see the articles of Taras Boyko and Mikhail Trunin in this issue). In many respects, the publication of Uspenskij's text marks the beginning of a new approach, if not of a new discipline in the humanities – 'historical semiotics' or 'semiotics of history'. More than forty years later, and with an intention to celebrate the 80th anniversary of Boris Uspenskij, this special issue of *Sign Systems Studies* aims to take stock of the current situation in the study of history *sub specie semioticae*, but also to analyse more specifically the contribution of the Tartu-Moscow Semiotic School to semiotics of history.