

## Oleg Sobchuk, PhD

MPI for Evolutionary Anthropology  
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**Nationality:** Ukrainian

**Born:** 23.05.1990

**Languages spoken:** Ukrainian (native), English (fluent), German (intermediate), Polish (intermediate), Russian (fluent)

**Research interests:** art history; cultural evolution, literary theory and narratology, network science, human behavioral ecology, cognitive science

**Skills:** text mining, big data analysis, topic modeling, embeddings, zero-shot learning, stylometry

**Programming:** R, Python, bash, cluster computing with Slurm

### Professional & educational history

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2022–today: **Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology** (Germany) – researcher at the Department of Human Behavior, Ecology and Culture

2018–2022: **Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History** (Germany) – postdoctoral researcher at the Minds and Traditions research group

2015, spring: **Stanford University** (U.S.A.) – internship at the Stanford Literary Lab

2013–2018: **University of Tartu** (Estonia) – Ph.D. in Comparative Literature (2013–2018). Thesis: *Charting Artistic Evolution: An Essay in Theory*. Advisors: Prof. Franco Moretti (Stanford University), Prof. Arne Merilai (University of Tartu)

2011–2013: **University of Tartu** (Estonia) – M.A. in Semiotics

2007–2011: **Kyiv-Mohyla Academy** (Ukraine) – B.A. in Philology

### Publications

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#### Book

- 1) Sobchuk O (forthcoming), *Stories Evolve: A Theory of Historical Change for Computational Humanities*. Oxford University Press.

#### Research papers & book chapters

- 2) Lee H, Anglada-Tort M, Sobchuk O, van Rijn P, Schönwiesner M, Tchernichovski O, Park M, Jacoby N (forthcoming) Global music discoveries reveal cultural shifts during the war in Ukraine. Preprint: <https://osf.io/preprints/psyarxiv/7b98u>
- 3) Dubourg E, Thouzeau V, et al. (forthcoming) The cognitive foundations of fictional stories (under review in *Psychology Review*). Preprint: <https://osf.io/preprints/osf/me6bz>

- 4) Sobchuk O, Youngblood M, Morin O (2024) First-mover advantage in music. *EPJ Data Science* 13: 37.
- 5) Sobchuk O, Šela A (2024) Computational thematics: Comparing algorithms for clustering the genres of literary fiction. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* 11: 438.
- 6) Sobchuk O (accepted), Evolution of modern literature and film. In: *Oxford Handbook of Cultural Evolution*, edited by R. Kendal, J. Tehrani, and J. Kendal.
- 7) Morin O, Sobchuk O (2023) Why monsters are dangerous. *Poetics Today* 44(4): 647–664.
- 8) Sobchuk O (2022) How granular should our explanations of fantastic fiction be? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 45: e300.
- 9) Morin O, Sobchuk O (2021) The shortlist effect: Nestedness contributions as a tool to explain cultural success, *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 3: e51.
- 10) Tinitis P, Sobchuk O (2020) Open-ended cumulative cultural evolution of Hollywood film crews, *Evolutionary Human Sciences* 2: e26.
- 11) Sobchuk O, Tinitis P (2020) Cultural attraction in film evolution: The case of anachronies, *Journal of Cognition and Culture* 20(3-4): 218–237.
- 12) Morin O, Acerbi A, Sobchuk O (2019) Why people die in novels: Testing the Ordeal Simulation Hypothesis, *Palgrave Communications* 5: 62.
  - (a) Italian translation, 2022: Perché si muore nei romanzi: l'ipotesi della simulazione dell'ordalia, in *La narrazione come incontro* (eds. F. Ciotti & C. Morabito). Firenze University Press.
- 13) Moretti F, Sobchuk O (2019) Hidden in plain sight: Data visualization in the humanities, *New Left Review* 118: 86–115.
  - (a) Italian translation, 2020: Vedere e non vedere. Sulla visualizzazione dei dati nelle discipline umanistiche. *Acoma* 18.
  - (b) German translation, 2022: Moretti F. *Falsche Bewegung: Die digitale Wende in den Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaften*. Konstanz University Press.
- 14) Sobchuk O, Shelya A (2018) [in Russian] (Distant) reading and (cultural) evolution, *New Literary Observer* 150: 88–93.
- 15) Shelya A, Sobchuk O (2017) The shortest species: How the length of Russian poetry changed (1750–1921), *Studia Metrica et Poetica* 4: 66–84.
- 16) Kanatova M, Milyakina A, Pilipovec T, Shelya A, Sobchuk O\*, Tinitis P (2017) Broken time, continued evolution: Anachronies in contemporary films, *Stanford Literary Lab*, Pamphlet 14 (\*primary author, order alphabetical). <https://litlab.stanford.edu/LiteraryLabPamphlet14.pdf>
  - (a) Italian translation, 2019: Il tempo a pezzi. Anacronie nel cinema contemporaneo, in *La letteratura in laboratorio* (ed. G. Episcopo), Napoli: FedOAPress.
- 17) Sobchuk O (2016) The evolution of dialogues: A quantitative study of Russian novels (1830–1900), *Poetics Today* 37: 137–154.
- 18) Sobchuk O (2015) [in Russian] Nomothetic literary studies: A dotted outline, *New Literary Observer* 132: 102–114.
- 19) Sobchuk O (2014) Multilevel accentuation and its role in the memorization of narrative, in *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> Workshop on Computational Models of Narrative* (eds. M.A. Finlayson et al.), pp. 192–208.

## Review papers (selected)

- 20) Sobchuk O (2021) Cultural theory, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 5(2): 139–142.
- 21) Sobchuk O (2021) Cultural theory, *Evolutionary Studies in Imaginative Culture* 5(1): 117–120.

- 22) Sobchuk O (2021) Review of: Acerbi A. *Cultural Evolution in the Digital Age*. Oxford University Press, *Journal of Communication*: jqaa038.
- 23) Sobchuk O (2016) Theoretical schools in the humanities: Different perspectives, *Poetics Today* 37: 687–690.
- 24) Sobchuk O (2014) Interweaving narratology and experimental psychology, *Cognitive Semiotics* 7: 138–143.
- 25) Sobchuk O (2013) Yuri Lotman's semiotic theory for beginners, *Poetics Today* 34: 611–613.
- 26) Sobchuk O (2013), [in Ukrainian] In the shade of phylogenetic trees, *Ukrainian Humanities Review* 18: 51–61.

## Grants as principal investigator

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**Phylogenies of Literature** (£17,774) – a project funded by the Cultural Evolution Society's Transformation Fund in 2023. Project team: Angela Chira, Artjoms Šeļa, Mason Youngblood, Olivier Morin, Ted Underwood. See <https://ces-transformationfund.org/our-projects/phylogenies-of-literature/>

## Invited talks

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- 2024: *Generational turnover and literary history* (Digital Humanities Network, University of Potsdam, Germany).
- 2024: *Cultural analytics and the arts* (Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Italy).
- 2023: *From text mining to phylogeny* ("From Evolution to Cognition to Fiction" workshop, École normale supérieure, Paris, France).
- 2023: *Computational thematics: Towards a map of literary evolution* ("Big Data, Small Literatures" conference, Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Ljubljana, Slovenia).
- 2023: *Evolution of fiction* (Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Italy).
- 2023: *Studying cultural evolution with large data* (Centre for Digital Humanities and the Information Society, University of Tartu, Estonia).
- 2022 (**keynote**): *Cultural evolution and computational literary studies* ("Distant Reading" conference, Kraków, Poland).
- 2022: *Cultural evolution of narratives* (École normale supérieure, Paris, France).
- 2022: *From stylometry to phylogeny: Towards a large-scale model of book evolution* (Department of Human Behavior, Ecology and Culture, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany).
- 2022: *First-mover advantage in music* (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, Frankfurt, Germany).
- 2021: *From stylometry to phylogeny: Towards a large-scale history of genres* (Computational Stylistics Lab, Polish Academy of Sciences, Karków, Poland).
- 2021: *On literary evolution* (Department of European, American and Intercultural Studies, Sapienza University of Rome, Italy).

- 2021: *Quantitative studies of literature and film* (Department of Stylistics and Language Communication, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, Ukraine).
- 2021: *Cultural evolution of the arts: The case of films* (Institut Jean Nicod, École normale supérieure, Paris, France).
- 2021: *Computational thematics: Towards a phylogeny of literature* (Department of Linguistic and Cultural Evolution, Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology, Leipzig, Germany).
- 2019: *Digital humanities and humanities* (University of Bergamo, Italy).
- 2018: *Cultural evolution of literature* (École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne, Switzerland).

## Teaching

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- The Neverending Story: Cultural Evolution and Narratives** (2019, online). Co-developed with Dr. Joseph Stubbersfield and Prof. Jamie Tehrani. A series of online lectures and assignments on the theory of cultural evolution applied to narratives: folktales, urban legends, novels, and films. See [https://learn.culturevolutionsociety.org/narratives\\_module/](https://learn.culturevolutionsociety.org/narratives_module/)
- Introduction to Digital Humanities** (2017, University of Tartu). Co-developed with Artjoms Šela. Upper-level course from Digital Humanities module, covering digital archives and editions, data preservation, distant reading, corpora. Included workshops on Transkribus, stylo, and Gephi.
- Cultural Evolution Seminar** (2017, University of Tartu). Co-developed with Peeter Tinitis and Artjoms Šela. Upper-level elective seminar for graduate and postgraduate students. Introduced main concepts in cultural evolution, evolution in various domains (art, technology, folklore).
- Frontiers of Europe: Ukraine** (2015, University of Tartu). Co-developed with Taras Boyko. Elective course for graduate and undergraduate students, introducing them to Ukrainian culture and history. Prepared lectures, readings, and test assignments for each lecture.
- Introduction to Narrative Studies** (2014, University of Tartu). Developed by self. Elective course for graduate and undergraduate students, presenting a wide spectrum of approaches: from structuralism to cognitive narratology. Additionally, used and supervised web-platform NarrNetz.

## Events organized

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- Head organizer of the workshop **Cultural Evolution of the Arts** (November 14–16, 2023) at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology (Leipzig, Germany).
- Head organizer of the workshop **Cultural Evolution and Computational Humanities: Building a Bridge** (forthcoming on June 29 – July 1, 2022) at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History (Jena, Germany).
- Head organizer of the conference **Applications in Cultural Evolution: Arts, Languages, Technologies** (June 6–8, 2018) at the University of Tartu. See <https://cultevol.ut.ee/>
- Head organizer of the **Cultural Evolution Seminar** at the University of Tartu (see <https://evocultures.wordpress.com/>): a series of informal seminars on cultural evolution and digital humanities (autumn 2015 – spring 2017), which later became a university course.

## Reviewer and editorial service

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- **Reviewer for:** European Research Council, *Science*, *Science Advances*, *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, *Journal of Language Evolution*, *Empirical Studies of the Arts*, *Proceedings of Computational Humanities Research*.
- **Guest editor** of the special issue "Cultural Evolution of the Arts" for the journal *Evolutionary Human Sciences* (Cambridge University Press) [forthcoming].
- **Editorial board** member of the journal *Computational Humanities Research* (Cambridge University Press)