Acta Semiotica Estica XII

Tartu 2015

ABSTRACTS

REIN VEIDEMANN. On the significance of the Estonian Song Festival

The article focuses on the analysis of the meaning and the significance of the Estonian Song Festival, utilizing the concepts of Tartu–Moscow School of cultural semiotics (mainly Juri Lotman). The analysis is conducted within the context of the song festival's history. The following segments of analysis are distinguished: the development of primary significations in the field of differing influences; repertoire as a text; song festival as a ritual; the dichotomy of the inner and external form of the song festivals. It is asserted that the Estonian Song Festivals are a challenge posed by the periphery to the centre: the tradition of choral songs (*Liedertafel*) operative in Western Germany spread to the Baltic provinces in the 19th century. Under the leadership of J. V. Jannsen, the format of Baltic song festivals was transmitted onto the first Estonian Song Festival in 1869. The interrelatedness of cultural periphery and centre is also evident in the Moravian Church movement which spread into Estonian territory in the latter half of the 18th century – their ideological pattern becomes both the signifier of the national awakening and of the song festival („the singing congregation"). During the first years of the song festival, its authenticity in relation to Estonian culture constantly posed problems. Although the song festival is a cultural transfer, it is given significance as „our very own", on the one hand, by Estonian culture's fundamental transitivity (Estonian culture as a border culture), and on the other hand, by the religious function of the Song Festival. To put it figuratively: Estonians have, at least up to this point, been a people of the Song Festival Religion.

Keywords: *centre and periphery, text within text, bipolarity of Estonian semiosphere, markedness-unmarkedness, inner and exterior form, text and function, religiosity of the Song Festival*

KRISTIN ORAV. The role of visualizing failure in Estonian art, 1987-1999: The winners' generation

The article focuses on exploring the conditions, possibilities, and meanings of the concept winners' generation in Estonian art in the 1990s. The term described young people in their midtwenties, who had succeeded in becoming well-off during the ideological transition in the course of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Some of the

artists who were labeled by this name had their triumph in the freedom to express ideas that did not serve the dominant discourse, that is, discourse that captured only the interests of those who had won from the period of change. The study combines Ferdinand de Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole* with the principles of external exclusion by Michel Foucault. By treating ideology as an analogue of langue that has its own internal structure and semantic rules, this article claims that the new social order was constructed in the light of severe oppositions. The Soviet censorship lost its validity and got replaced by the principle of freedom. This situation presented itself as an opportunity for artists belonging to the winners' generation to become successful via visualizing failure, thus bringing out, but also questioning, the variations within the „victorious" discourse. Their approach helped to disarticulate what had been considered natural in the society as well as propose new insight into one of the most rapturous decades in Estonia's recent history.

Keywords: *winners' generation, Estonian art in the 1990s, discourse, ideology, failure*

HELENA HALLER. Mediating history in a pseudo-documentary film „Disco and Atomic War"

Historical reality can be reached through textual constructs. Reality is thus distorted, no matter how slightly. In addition, every period of time interprets texts in a way that suits best with current understandings and beliefs, admitting something and forgetting something else. Estonian pseudo-documentary film „Disco and Atomic War" (Jaak Kilmi and Kiur Aarma, 2009) is an example of an audiovisual text mediating the past. Some texts are considered as more reliable versions of history than others, as reconstructions of the actual historical world rather than constructions of just some fictional world. So the question of the credibility and reliability of the text emerges. In the film this question emerges through the usage of means of expressions that conduct the story. All the elements normally constructing credibility and reliability in a docu-mentary are here used to mix reality with conditionality. The means of expression used in the film and the ways they are combined build up three levels. Each of these offers a different viewpoint to the depicted period. Together they tell a very personal and memory based version of the Soviet period in Estonia. It is important that all the

different means of expression combined in the film are remediated into a documentary space. Within the whole the elements can change their modality.

Keywords: *mediating history, historical film, „Disco and Atomic War", pseudo-documentary, credibility of a text*

ELIS SAAR. Fear of the familiar: a journey to uncanny valley

Noticing a familiar humanlike image might leave one feeling strangely scared and restless. This occurrence is called the uncanny valley. Originally from Japan, this concept is starting to regain its popularity after decades of being in the shadows. Despite the recent increase in its use world-wide, the meaning and nature of this concept has found little feedback among Estonian researchers. The focus of this article is mainly on introducing the term uncanny valley as it was proposed by Masahiro Mori. This will be supported by discussing different translations, historical context and a light introduction into the research done so far. Since the uncanny valley operates first and foremost on visual information, introduction into the concept will be illustrated with examples from modern robotics and 3D animations. In addition, this article aims to introduce the position of the uncanny valley on the scientific field by discussing which disciplines have dealt with this concept and how they have tried to explain it. Having been researched in robotics, psychology, biology and other fields, I will try to place the uncanny valley in the context of cultural semiotics.

Keywords: *uncanny valley, Masahiro Mori, robotics, 3D graphics, cultural semiotics, self and other*

LAURA KIIROJA. Popularizing nature by the biosemiotic approach and literary techniques in the example of Fred Jüssi's „Jäälõhkuja"

One of the aspects of biosemiotics that has not yet been covered in scientific literature is the advantages it offers in popularizing nature. One of the examples in Estonian nature literature where one could recognize an implicit biosemiotic approach is Fred Jüssi's „Jäälõhkuja". The goal of this article is to illustrate the possibilities of applying the

biosemiotic approach and literary techniques to popularizing nature with the example of „Jäälõhkuja". As a secondary aim, the article provides constructive feedback for Fred Jüssi's work in an Estonian cultural context.

The biosemiotic approach helps emphasize the communicative nature of plants and animals, encouraging the reader to pay more attention to the sign processes existing in nature. Considering all living organisms as subjects and attempting to perceive the world from the perspective of their *Umwelt* enables the reader to better comprehend the value of every single element of the ecosystem. The biosemiotic approach contributes to several literary techniques, such as personification and playing with perspectives, that support the author's effort in animating nature and inducing empathy in the reader. In order to peculiarize the ordinary and make the perception process more intensive, Jüssi has used techniques like slow writing, adding contrasts and oppositions, chronological shifting, and anecdotal and perception-based writing style. The article highlights even more literary techniques that help the author discretly present his subjective worldview and criticism on society.

Keywords: *biosemiotics, Umwelt-construction, estrangement, intensive perception, Fred Jüssi*

RAO PÄRNPUU. Describing power's influence: subjective and objective interests in latent conflicts

The aim of this article is to expand and improve Steven Lukes' theory of three dimensional power. This is mainly done through concepts and methods from cultural semiotics. Lukes' theory has many problems. He leaves many key concepts (like interests, the subject and the formulation of interests) either ambiguous or gives unacceptable and vague descriptions. He also does not give a clear method for how alternative interests of subjects should be formulated. The goal is to overcome these difficulties and create a modified and more complete model that can be used effectively in analysing various phenomena.

For these purposes, firstly, the subject is defined as a semiotic subject, capable of both being influenced by outside forces and also acting on itself. Through understanding the semiotic subject we can also understand Lukes' differentiation between objective and subjective interests. These can be understood through the concepts of reality and

semiotic reality where the first is defined as the maximal possibility of understanding (through the concept of *Umwelt*) and the latter as the field of meaning within which the subject operates (through the concept of the semiosphere). The process of shaping interests can be described through the process of autocommunication. Secondly, different possibilities of defining the relevant counterfactuals are explored. For this I present two possibilities: the first is Heyman's concept of counter-ideals and the second Gramsci's and Lukes' concept of the difference between thought and action. The concept of translation is used in order to create a step by step process through which an effective counterfactual, grounded in the cultural reality of the subjects, can be established.