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CONCEPTS FOR SEMIOTICS

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Preface: Tartu, tomorrow

That semiotics is a multifaceted endeavor is a known fact. Putting its pieces together, however, has been a hard task to address, for the distinctive perspective of semiotics is as particular as it is fragmented. Yet, the big picture of the semiotic approach is held together both institutionally and intentionally in Estonia by the educational structures that have allowed semiotics to thrive as its own field. And this comes as a result of the understanding that it deserves constitution as a field of its own.

The Tartu school in its different iterations, such as Tartu–Moscow and Tartu–Copenhagen, has seen a regular change in its concepts within academic research. This is because semiotics is a field that has been given to change in its applications, dynamics and philosophical underpinnings. This book is an attempt to give a brief survey of the topics of interest for researchers currently embedded in Tartu semiotics in the framework of the doctoral seminar on general semiotics and its concepts organized by Kalevi Kull and Mihhail Lotman in Spring of 2015. The book has been a collaborative project involving students as editors and participants of the review process, and the professors who conceived and organized both the course and the current publication. The papers in this collection have been peer-reviewed in the most literal sense: The doctoral research group and professors have been involved in feedback and criticism throughout the process in an attempt to bridge the gaps between our different areas of interest within the context of general semiotics.

The interest in moving towards a general semiotics from a perspective that is centered around the identity of Tartu semiotics is nothing new. Multiple anthologies have brought together works by emblematic figures of the Tartu–Moscow school, centered around specific interests, be they the interaction of social systems, specific cultural codes or the understanding of semiotic theory from the arts, but the uniting thread has usually been their leading towards a general semiotic theory, a type of scientific description of the world of meaning from the specific terminology developed by semiotics. This collection is no different. In trying to understand what it takes for semiotic theories to be relevant for certain aspects of knowledge, we try to give descriptions of the concepts we use and understand their validity within the construct of institutionalized semiotics. That is, in the constant development and change of semiotic theories, addressing and reformulating concepts is always a reason for disciplinary movement. The way semiotics has developed over the years can only drive us to constantly reexamine

our positions, for the semiotic approach is a web that keeps expanding with every new development in the field.

The Tartu school as it currently stands is certainly derived from the Tartu–Moscow school of the past, but it is also a product of both incoming ideas from other related fields—philosophy, biology, sociology, and so on—and from the different backgrounds of the researchers that have taken part in the efforts to continue with a distinctive ‘Tartu semiotics’.

This collection of articles is organized into three sections: **Aesthetics: the reality of relations**; **Ethics: the plurality of meaning**; and **Logic: the inevitability of modeling**. It is well known that pioneer of semiotics Charles Sanders Peirce divided the normative sciences in this way.¹ By no means are all the included works about Peirce, nor even directly influenced by his thought. There is, however, some deep wisdom in this, one of his many infamous trichotomies for the (re)organization of the philosophy of science, and there are reasons to consider semiotics to be *the* normative science. Traditionally, positive sciences presuppose no judgments about the field of inquiry, whereas normative science approaches its field with certain explicit presuppositions. In other words, positive science presumes higher objectivity, being uninfluenced by the sensibilities, values or reasons that motivate normative inquiry. Of course, the place of logic in normative science is problematic, but Peirce had a different sort of idea of what logic meant, which was broad enough to include kinds of inference that are moved by the perceptual proclivities of individuals in specific contexts. In any case, there are sciences which presume to be completely impartial and those whose areas of interest preclude the possibility of true impartiality, where subjectivity, embodiedness, and sensibility, are not compromising factors but the very target of inquiry itself. Semiotics does in fact bring certain assumptions to the table, such as the plurality of meaning, the reality of relations and the inevitability of modeling. Because these assumptions are valid for all of Peirce’s three divisions, it might be said that semiotics is the inter-discipline that brings a general systematicity to these, the normative sciences.

In the **Aesthetics** section of the book, **Gleb Netchvolodov** analyzes the current status of the field of Artificial Pictographic Languages and proposes a minimal unit for identifying signification in pictures, in his paper “Reduced pictorial architecture: on doodles and simplified images”. **Lyudmyla Zaporozhtseva** specifies the distinction between mythologeme and mytheme and assesses their applicability in “Mythologemes and mythemes: semiotic markers of myth in contemporary mass culture”. **Krista Simson**, in “Drawn by the light versus drawn by hand”, refers to iconicity in order to discuss how pictorial art has a different structure than what we find in works of art based on the capture of light, such as photographs, leading to a primary consideration of iconicity in photography that cannot be applied to works of art drawn by hand. **Kristin**

¹ CP 1.191, 1903.

Vaik moves from the pictorial side to literature in “Literary histories as self-constructing metatexts”, exploring the narratives of the literary past as they have already been framed by different historical perspectives, with a specifically Lotmanian approach. **Tatjana Pilipoveca** discusses one of Juri Lotman’s most important ideas in “Auto-communication: rethinking its relation to the artistic text” considering its function in the work of art. Finally, **Federico Bellentani** addresses human geography and a textual understanding of human environments from a semiotic perspective in “Landscape as text”.

The **Ethics** section of the book starts with **Jonathan Griffin**’s paper, “Accountability from a semiotic perspective”, where he addresses a special notion of the concept applied to the understanding of a semiotic truth. **Kristina Pai** dissects the concept of library in her article, “Library and library space”, asking what changes have affected the institution of the library after the expansion of the virtual world. **Ott Puumeister** asks, “Why does ‘normalization’ matter to political semiotics?”, reviewing normative activity from the perspective of Michel Foucault in the context of biopower. **Kaie Kotov** and **Rasmus Pedanik**’s “Social innovation as rehabiting” considers social innovation and practice through John Dewey’s pragmatic concept of habit. Lastly, **Tiina Põllu** treats the concept of censorship, focusing on its usage in a totalitarian political system, in “The concept of (self-) censorship from the semiotic perspective”.

The final section of the book, **Logic**, starts with **Andres Kurismaa**’s paper on “Anticipation”, an overview of the theoretical framework for the concept and its value for biosemiotic biology. Next is **Remo Gramigna**’s paper, “On the concept of ostension: a survey of contemporary semiotics”, which provides a critical overview of the concept with special attention to Roman Jakobson, Umberto Eco and Ivo Osolsobě. **Mari-Liis Madisson**’s article, “Self-description”, considers how the concept is used in cultural semiotics with an emphasis on Lotman’s view and how it can be applied to Estonian cultural phenomena. **Tyler James Bennett** treats the concept of ground from a Peircean perspective in “On the semiotic concept of ground”, dealing with its explanatory value for semiotic investigations. **Claudio Julio Rodríguez Higuera** writes on “Minimal models and minimal objects” about the role of parsimony in modeling and the extent of applicability of semiotic models.

In preparing this collection we have taken into account the wide variety of perspectives offered by this rich field with the hope of encouraging continued cooperation under the banner of Tartu semiotics.

Tyler James Bennett
Claudio Julio Rodríguez Higuera

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