

ishment of independence.

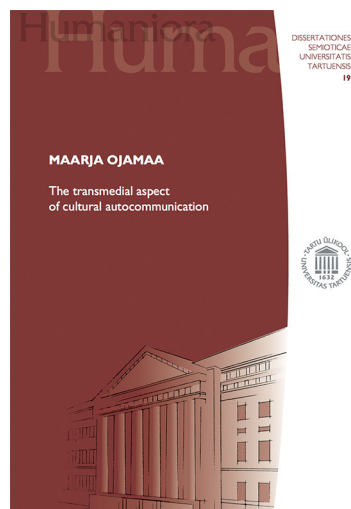
The book ends by presenting visions for new films and short 'greeting cards' from the Nordic countries. The cooperation between Baltic and Nordic countries might not be overwhelming, but certainly more common than between the Baltic countries themselves. The relations between the Nordic and Baltic region are not as special as 25 years ago when both sides were rediscovering their historical and cultural ties. However, Finland and Estonia have reached a new level of film coproduction with works like *Purge* (*Puhdistus*/*Puhastus*, directed by Antti J. Jokinen, Estonia/Finland, 2012) and *Fencer* (*Miekkailija/Vehkleja*/*ENDEL – Der Fechter*, Finland/Estonia/Germany, directed by Klaus Härö, 2015), both of them Finnish majority co-productions focusing on Estonian history.

*Stork Flying over Pinewood* provides an insight into the Nordic dimension of the Baltic film industries. It not only reflects on, but also recreates, the concept of Baltic cinema. In the national languages there is hardly any discussion about the Baltic dimension of the national film industries apart from the evident need for cooperation. Jan Erik Holst's focused vision renders the deeper shared structures of Baltic cinemas visible, based on historical experiences as well as similar understandings of the concept of nationalism and culture. As probably the first book on Baltic film culture to be written in English, it serves its purpose well. The fragmented structure of the book, which constantly requires assistance, explanation and additional interpretation from the editor, reflects the nature of Baltic cinema itself.

The question of the meaning of 'Baltic' in the cinemas of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia remains a question about shared identity. Perhaps this identity is

as fragmented as the film histories of the three countries – with friendly personal relations, clear similarities, evident gaps and few co-productions. This shared identity is like a boat that we have suddenly found ourselves in, but which we initially did not intend to board.

## Book Review



### Transmediality and Cultural Semiotics

**Maarja Ojamaa, *The Trans-medial Aspect of Cultural Autocommunication*, Dissertationes Semioticae Universitatis Tartuensis 19, Tartu: Tartu University Press, 2015, ISBN: 978-99-493280-4-8, 173 pp.**

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In May 2015 I was invited to the University of Tartu by Prof. Peeter Torop and the Department of Semiotics. I was asked to discuss a thesis by Maarja Ojamaa titled *The Transmedial Aspect of Cultural Autocommunication* for a PhD in Semiotics and Cultural Studies. Let me quote from Ojamaa's summary where she explains that her thesis publication consists of five papers and a survey article, which outlines three possible complementary approaches to transmedia:

First, a viewpoint of media studies is presented in which transmedia is regarded mostly as an innovative strategy of communication. Secondly, a narratological perspective is outlined, where the term transmedia refers to an analytical approach for studying previously existing narratives in a variety of media and asks questions about the relations between a narrative and its medium. Thirdly, a cultural semiotic viewpoint is proposed as an approach integrating the first two by explaining transmediality as a constitutive characteristic of culture as such. Finally, the survey paper adds some perspectives for possible future studies on the ways that transmedia research could be put into practice in educational contexts in a contemporary convergence culture. (Ojamaa 2015: 9–14)

Ojamaa's work offers a coherent path through the main problems of 'transmediality' and 'intermediality', exploring the current debate on the issues of 'transmedia storytelling' and 'transmedial narratology' using a cultural semiotic perspective devoted to Juri Lotman's theory (Lotman [1990] 2001). Explaining the general mechanism of the 'transmediality of culture' is certainly an ambitious target. It is primarily achieved by following the semiotic reflections of Torop (2000, 2008b, 2012) through a detailed discussion of the dynamic textual relations existing in a semiosphere, and considering aspects of translation, repetition and innovation.

Secondly the researcher considers issues of cultural memory and identity; and finally she explores the pedagogical utility of a transmedial perspective. Let me recall the usefulness of Lotman's concept of 'semiosphere' in analysing our digital era:

The semiosphere is presented by Lotman as an infinitely heterogeneous reservoir of dynamic processes with explosive potential. He emphasises the importance of space, interconnectivity and the multidimensionality of sign systems, as well as foregrounding the relational and interactional elements of culture. It is exactly these foci that offer interesting potential in terms of the application of Lotman's work to the global modern culture in general, and the culture of digital networked media in particular. (Ibrus, Torop 2015: 4)

My opinions of Ojamaa's work are based both on the long and detailed 'Introductory Chapter' and on the two submitted publications in English with a more theoretical focus co-written with Peeter Torop (see Saldre, Torop 2012; Ojamaa, Torop 2015). The three other papers are written in Estonian (Saldre 2010, 2012; Ojamaa 2013), but one article related to the more empirical and historical parts of the work regarding the intermedia relations based on the novel *Empty Beach. A Love Story* by Mati Unt and its cinematic and theatrical versions (Saldre 2010), was made comprehensible for me by an English translation by Maarja Ojamaa.

Following the academic guidelines for the evaluation of a

thesis, I would say the presentation has a rational structure that continues through the empirical, historical and theoretical focus, and the Cultural Semiotics approach and methodology are persuasively explained as a way to upgrade previous work in media studies and narratology.

Nonetheless, I will try to discuss some more problematical aspects of her work below.

In the 'Introductory Chapter', the contemporary issues of 'transmedia storytelling' by Henry Jenkins (2006, 2011) and other scholars are fluidly discussed. Ojamaa starts from the well-known definition by Jenkins:

A transmedia story unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole. In the ideal form of transmedia storytelling, each medium does what it does best. (Jenkins 2006: 97–98)

Then she moves on to exploring aspects of production (from *Doctor Who* to *Lost*, from comics to video games); aspects of reception (the 'growing trend of collective reading' by consumers, with practices such as shareability, collaboration and social interaction); and aspects of self-description. 'In the blogosphere,' Ojamaa states, the 'lack of temporal distance also means that the spheres of theory and practice are intertwined: the practitioners of transmedia storytelling are looking for the language of self-description themselves ... and the theorist take in the word of the practitioners' (Ojamaa 2015: 21).

While Marsha Kinder stated in 1991 that the TV cartoon series evolving into video games, films, and comic books are

'transmedia supersystems of mass entertainment ... generally built around a (hero) figure or figures from pop culture' (Ojamaa 2015: 17), nowadays it is worth noting that 'transmedia storytelling is a practice that is more concerned with world building than with an actual story or a single narrative element (e.g. a character or something else)' (*ibid.*).

In the 'Transmedial narratology' section of the 'Introductory Chapter', Ojamaa proposes the cognitive perspective of David Herman (2004, 2013), who maintains that 'differences between narrative media are gradient (more or less) rather than binary (either...or)' and therefore, 'the operative assumption is that the semiotic properties of the source and target media determine how fully a story told in one format can be recast in another' (Herman 2013: 107–108).

Herman also insists 'that in more cases stories have "gists" that are fairly persistent through most transformations (i.e. recognizable after intersemiotic translation)' (Ojamaa 2015: 24). Ojamaa explains that two papers in her thesis follow this approach:

One of them (Saldre 2010) studies purely fictional narratives, a novel and its adaptations to theatre and film, and the other one (Ojamaa 2013) treats texts that mediate a historical event in the sign systems of literature, film and painting. In both of the articles the motif of the seashore is chosen as the main empirical gist and the papers explicate its variative or medium-specific aspects and invariant aspects that can be traced in each of

the three texts. (Ojamaa 2015: 25)

In my opinion Herman's perspective could be fruitfully compared with some post-structural theories of invariants in intertextual relations. In effect, the 'gists' he is talking about could be merely 'figurative' (i.e. iconic), or 'cognitive', or even more abstract as 'values' and 'figural' tensions. And I also think of the 'deep figurativity' and 'plastic features' theorised by Algirdas Greimas (1984) and Jean-Marie Floch (2000); the 'tensives patterns' as Jean-Marie Fontanille (2006) calls them, or even of the more dynamic and figural 'diagrammatic forces' by Gilles Deleuze (1981). We could say that even Ojamaa's study of space in the article '*Empty Beach* in Estonian Cultural Memory' (Saldre 2010) not only deals with a figurative (iconic) space, but rather with elements and contrasts that are not simply iconic but recall Herman's reference used by Ojamaa to bond 'transmedial narratology' to Lotmanian cultural semiotics. What about the 'medium-specific coding principles' that can cause a situation of non-translatability (quoting Lotman [1990] 2001)? We could probably compare them with Christian Metz's film semiotics exploring and leaving textual and extratextual codes and subcodes (Metz 1974). Besides, in the presence of either a series of film remakes or the spin-off of a TV series, that is a medium reinterpreting and 'retranslating' the same medium (Dusi 2012), it seems difficult to deal with medium-specific problems.

Furthermore, if sign systems differ when it comes to 'conventionality/iconicity, discreteness/continuity, linear/spatiality – causing the impossibility of exact translations', as stated by Lotman (Ojamaa 2015: 162–163) – these are not the only differ-

ences among old and new media according to Lev Manovich (2001), who is quoted quite often in the work.

Let me go back to the 'Introductory Chapter'. Talking about 'intermediality' in contemporary media studies, Ojamaa quotes Werner Wolf (2004) and Irina Rajewsky (2005) who regard transmediality as medium-independent and describe it as a subcategory of intermediality (an intermedial transposition). In this way, 'it is possible to distinguish between the source (text, medium, genre) and the target' (Ojamaa 2015: 27). Actually, talking about intermediality also means rethinking mediality, intended at the same time as the material channel, the technological device, and the set of cultural conventions and practices that are forms of semiotic communication (see Aumont 1989, Maraniello 2008, Müller 2010).

In the third section of the introduction Ojamaa finally explains how to consider the 'transmediality of culture' using a Lotmanian perspective, as a consequence of the isomorphism of text and semiosphere.

According to her, semiotics of culture 'helps to bring transmediality into a wider context. For example, the question of the relations and the possibility of intersemiotic translation between visual and verbal sign systems is not only the problem of textual creation but also concerns culture as a whole' (Ojamaa 2015: 28). Quoting Lotman's proposals about semiosphere's internal space, which is 'at the same time unequal yet unified, asymmetrical yet uniform. Composed as it is of conflicting structures, it is none the less also marked by individuation' (Lotman [1990] 2001: 131), Ojamaa explains that this idea

also applies to transmedia texts composed of

sign systems of diverse material and organised by conflicting principles, yet mediating a coherent story (world), i.e. evolving without losing one's identity. [...] Consequently, while every language needs to draw separating boundaries to define its individual identity, its medium-specificity, the opposite process, a centrifugal search for elements of transfer is equally active in cultural communication. Transmedia texts offer eloquent material for analysing these two simultaneous processes, especially tellingly in the perspective of comparative case studies. (Ojamaa 2015: 28)

Talking about subtexts of diverse materials and textual boundaries, and about frames and texts, transmediality in Lotman's perspective allows the researcher to refer to 'different levels of self-description' (Lotman [1984] 2005) inside a semiosphere, in a particular dialogic relationship between medium-specific parts and the cultural whole. A trans-medial text becomes, in this way,

a structure as well as a process conditioned by the reservoir of meaningful growth immanent in any culture text, realising itself in contacts with other texts, texts from another semiosphere or another chronological layer of culture. Addition of a new text into the system reinterprets and transforms the previous whole which in turn appears as a part. (Ojamaa 2015: 29)

These cultural communicational issues are notably theorised by Lotman ([1984] 2005, [1993] 2009), and by Torop (2000), in their complex proposals of cultures as dynamic systems running in a 'total translation'. In fact, Ojamaa recalls Torop's (2008a) definition of transmediality as 'the mental aspect of a text's existence in culture', that is the 'mental whole in the cultural (as well individual) memory' given by 'all the different medial versions of a text, however distant from each other in time'; this mental text 'possesses an internal hierarchy which is in accordance with the hierarchy of sign systems in the culture' (Torop 2008a: 725; Ojamaa 2015: 29). Ojamaa also compares Torop's proposal of transmediality as a mental whole to Manfred Jahn's cognitive narratological 'internal narratives' (Jahn 2003) and, talking about '[a]spects of translation and innovation', she describes some 'centripetal and centrifugal forces' in a trans-medial process: '[A]n important moment from the perspective of semiotics is the assumption that every medium-specific part of the transmedial whole is on another level a multilingual whole itself. In other words, the potential dialogue between subtexts is facilitated by the inner polyglotism of any text' (Ojamaa 2015: 30). Then she rapidly discusses 'mixed media' in W. J. T. Mitchell (2005) and intermediality as a problem of the integration of different perceptual information in a plurality of semiotic channels (Arvidson et al. 2007, Clüver 2007, Elleström 2010). However, to improve the theoretical discussion of this section, these definitions could have been also compared to the diverse notions of 'transtextuality' by Gérard Genette (1982) in the transmedial interpretation given by Robert Stam et al. (1992). And it could be useful

to refer to the more Lotmanian notion of 'polysystem' proposed in the translation studies by Itamar Even-Zohar (1990) and, for the cinematic adaptations, by Patrick Cattrysse (1992).

Via Torop's semiotic of translation Ojamaa finally quotes Roman Jakobson, stating that 'intersemiotic translation is the building principle of transmedia' (Ojamaa 2015: 31), and she consequently concludes by saying the following about the 'aspects of cultural memory and identity':

The more translations there are across the boundaries of media, the more coherently is the mental text memorised. At the same time, such intersemiotic translations bear a self-organising function, bridge time and potentially enhance coherence on the level of the whole culture and this is especially important from the viewpoint of canonical texts. Texts that have functioned as nodal points of the formation of national and cultural identities are nowadays very often first met not in the original version but via reading a metatextual version of them. [...] In the process of transmedial repetition of a canonical text, not only is the text transformed but the cultural system itself is restructured by providing oneself with new ways of self-description. Transmediality is thus a mechanism of culture's autocommunication. (Ojamaa 2015: 33)

Stepping forward with these ideas in her closing section on 'Transmedia and education',

Ojamaa states that transmedia-tion techniques are not simply repetition, but repetition with variation that leads to innovation (Eco 1997), remixing and challenging with new meanings and new functions as well as our learning methods.

Ojamaa's work is surely excellent. Nevertheless (and quite obviously), there are some aspects that are not thoroughly discussed in her work. For example, in contemporary media studies with a semiotic perspective the 'medial experience' of production and reception is well analysed. To improve the work in this direction would mean considering the range of possibilities provided by non-traditional (i.e. not closed and linear) textual strategies: experiences bond to textually 'open' devices and practices as those based on 'network', 'flow' or 'environment' (see Eugeni 2010, 2011). Moreover, I have to regret that Roman Jakobson's definition of an 'intersemiotic translation' as 'an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs from non-verbal sign systems' (Jakobson 1959: 233) is never discussed in Ojamaa's work. Umberto Eco's book *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (2003) reworks the definition starting from Jakobson's choice of the word 'interpretation', and a totally new taxonomy arises from this. That discussion is also bound to Louis Hjelmslev (1954) notion of a 'semiotic system', which implies facing notions as purports, substances and forms of content and expression, when talking about intersemiotic translation or interpretation (see Eco 2001). But I can understand the oversight: 'intersemiotic translation' is here explained through Peeter Torop's rich and detailed theory (Torop 2000); furthermore, Ojamaa's work is not focused on 'intertextual' translations but rather on intermedial and trans-

medial ones. That is probably why 'equivalence' in translation is another aspect not thoroughly discussed in the work. Ojamaa recalls Lotman's idea of 'untranslatability', that 'implies significant alterations of meaning' (Lotman [1990] 2001: 36–38), but it does not explain how a character, a motif, a plot, can remain similar and recognisable in the translation-transposition from one medium to another. In my opinion this could be a problem related to the gradual overlapping of sign systems (in a Lotmanian perspective) or of a graduality in the equivalence bound to (inter)textual layers (see Popović 1976, Topon 1995, Dusi 2003).

Besides, talking about transmedia storytelling from a semiotic perspective, Carlos Alberto Scolari's proposition of narrative as 'the primary modelling system' (Scolari 2009) should be better explored considering the interesting transformation of Lotman's model. Moreover, this idea is specified in Scolari as coming from the Italian semiotician Guido Ferraro (2000), but it is actually a sort of recycling of one of the main issues of Algirdas Greimas's narrative semiotic (Greimas 1983).

Let me now briefly discuss the two other theoretical articles, co-written with Peeter Torop, which Ojamaa summarises as follows in the article 'Transmedia Space' (Saldre, Torop 2012):

The paper approaches the emergent phenomenon of transmedia storytelling via the notion of space. First, an overview is provided of the ways that different authors have attempted to define and describe transmedia storytelling using spatial metaphors.

Proceeding from this, the phenomenon is discussed from three complementary aspects: the space of text, the space of media and the space of culture. An empirical analysis applying the theoretical concepts is performed on the online environment Pottermore. In conclusion, transmedial space is simultaneously invariant and variative, reflecting the general mechanism of storing knowledge in cultural memory. (Ojamaa 2015: 13)

In this article, space becomes a complex notion useful for researching 'both the textual and medial aspects of transmediality'. I totally agree with the use of Nelson Goodman's idea that every creation is a recreation and with his world-making description (Goodman 1976) compared with the theory of the world of an artistic text by Lotman (Ojamaa 2015, III: 4). And it is interesting that 'storyworld becomes a topological invariant of all the subtexts of the transmedia whole' (*ibid.*: 3). I also appreciate the use of a 'multi-layered perspective of any artistic text' to explain the power of transmedia texts to explicate the diversity of perspective and point of view (*ibid.*: 5). And the Lotmanian idea that both texts are meaningfully transformed in the process of translation is very well explained. I just wonder if the notion by Umberto Eco (1979) of 'intertextual frames or scripts' would have been convenient, when Ojamaa talks about 'the reader's communication with the text and simultaneous metacommunication of the text with other texts' (Ojamaa 2015, III: 6), knowing where and what is going to happen according

to the story. Furthermore, what about the 'memory of the reader where the coherent transmedia text is formed' (*ibid.*)? How are these readers described? Are they a textual (implicit) strategy as for Eco (1979)? It is not clear if these readers are treated as textual constructions or as sociological/empirical ones with the power to react and produce cultural objects as in Jenkins (2006). Finally, it seems to me quite inadequate to reduce the space of media to the switch 'between discrete (e.g. novel) and continuous (e.g. picture) language' (Ojamaa 2015, III: 7). But I agree with the 'wider cultural perspective' that means translating not only a given text but a given system (*ibid.*: 8). And I really appreciate the final synthesis of the article:

Narrative texts that exist simultaneously in several media appear in cultural experience as a topological invariant or a storyworld as well as typological, medium-specific variations. Transmedial space is thus simultaneously invariant and variative, reflecting the general mechanism of storing knowledge in cultural memory. (Ojamaa 2015: 13)

I quote from Ojamaa's abstract of the article on 'Transmediality of Cultural Autocommunication' (Ojamaa, Torop 2015):

Transmediality is ... located in the wider context of cultural autocommunication, a key concept for Lotmanian semiotics, related to both mnemonic and creative functions. For explaining the aspects of transmediality and

autocommunicativity within a given textual example, an analysis of an educational transmedia project *Inanimate Alice* is provided. The paper thus explicates the movement between old cultural experience and new technological environment corresponding to the dynamics between the implicit and explicit forms of transmediality in culture. (Ojamaa 2015: 13)

Here the authors discuss the Lotmanian principle of repetition inside an artistic text, then they state, 'in the context of transmedia storytelling ... we should cease to concentrate only on the differences or on what exactly each medium does best, but also understand the similarities, allowing the transfers and repetitions of meaning from one medium to another' (Ojamaa 2015, IV: 14). I wonder if this internal recurrence is comparable to Greimassian textual 'isotopy' (Greimas, Courtés 1979; Eco 1979), and if it could become an intertextual and intermedial bridge. Accordingly, isotopies would be a way to understand intertextual relations of coherence and the repetition of similar (or equivalent) elements: narrative ones but also motives, values, iconic (figurative) ones, and so on (Dusi 2015).

Let me quickly reopen the issue of the difference between 'adaptation' and 'transmediality' as given in Ojamaa and Torop's article (2015) by quoting Elizabeth Evans (2011: 27): 'Transmedia elements do not involve the telling of the same events on different platforms; they involve the telling of new events from the same storyworld.' Evans, here, recalls Jenkins' definitions: 'Basically, an *adaptation* takes the same story from one

medium and retells it in another. An *extension* seeks to add something to the existing story as it moves from one medium to another' (Jenkins 2011; my emphasis). This is a discussion that Jenkins has improved, quoting Christy Dena (2009) and admitting that adaptation is not simply an operation of 'retelling' the same story, but an 'interpretation' that 'may be highly literal or deeply transformative' (Jenkins 2011). Moreover, translating from a novel to a movie means to significantly expand and extend the story in the process of cinematic representation, and provide new experiences to the viewer. Jenkins (adopting Dena's perspective) seems in this way quite close to Eco's suggestion of adaptation as an 'intersystemic interpretation' where there is 'a decided step from purport to purport of the expression' (Eco 2001: 118). Every interpretation is a result of local textual negotiations and adapting always means 'showing things left unsaid' by the novel (Eco 2001: 121).

Finally, I want to dwell on the relations among transmediality, adaptation and intersemiotic translation. Where is the *source text* to be translated in a transmedial storyworld? You could answer that it is a problem of processual, dynamic relations between texts, or that somehow a 'Bible' written by the screenwriters and the directors of a TV series is a written text, that has to be translated or adapted in the various medial platforms. Or you could say that a TV series like *Lost* is no longer a 'simple' universe where a variety of texts are tied to a common genesis (Scolari 2013). More than the good idea to work on the interactive online reading environment *Pottermore* compared to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and the *Philosopher's Stone* and its adaptations to cinema (Saldre,

Torop 2012), I want to point out the innovative example provided by Ojamaa and Torop (2015: 71–75) analysing the digital novel *Inanimate Alice* (an interactive website and crossmedial immersive game, a video serial narrative that can be enriched by users with other video, comics, etc.). Nowadays TV series are also designed as 'expanded medial ecosystems' (Innocenti, Pescatore 2011), still coherent but polycentric and widely open, in constant expansion through time and new seasons, and also through proliferations, wiki, online discussions and encyclopaedias, and so on. It would probably be easier to admit that translations and re-interpretations co-exist, but that they do not always overlap, as proven by the increasing varieties of prosumers' practices of remix and mash-up (see Dusi, Spaziante 2006; Tryon 2009; Manovich 2013).

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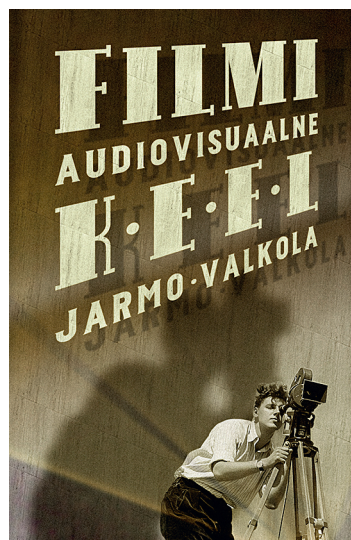
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## Book Review



**Jarmo Valkola, *Filmi audiovisuaalne keel [Audiovisual Language of Cinema]*, Tallinn: Varrak, 2015, ISBN: 978-9985-3-1938-3, 487 pp.**

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Jarmo Valkola's work on the audiovisual language of film is a mosaic of diverse takes on the continuously spellbinding phenomenon of film. The study – several chapters of which have been published previously – comprises philosophical, historical and psychological approaches. In his preface to the Estonian translation, the author states that his main aim for writing the book would be fulfilled if the reader would share his excitement about the theoretical problems that the work deals with. And this aim is most probably filled – the volume offers manifold ideas that can potentially provoke dialogue and stimulate further reflections by any true cinephile. However, the lack