

Acta Semiotica Estica

Silvi Salupere¹

Abstract. *Acta Semiotica Estica* is an annually published peer-reviewed Estonian-language journal of semiotics based in Tartu, that has been published since 2001. This article gives a brief overview of the history and development of the journal.

Keywords: Estonian semiotics; history of semiotics; Tartu–Moscow School

Acta Semiotica Estica was founded in 2001 as a publication of the Estonian Semiotics Association (ESA), with the primary goal of distributing semiotic research conducted in Estonian. The editors of the first issue were Anti Randviir (also the chair of the ESA at the time) and Andres Kõnno. In their foreword they write that in addition to communication and information exchange, one of the functions of the ESA is to enable “semiotic discussion, which would engage representatives of different fields and which should – as one of its goals – keep Estonian intellectuals up to date with events in global semiotics and regulate Estonian semiotic terminology” (Toimetuselt 2001: 7). Constructing a comprehensive and coherent semiotic discourse was, at first, the mission for the planned series – and the Estonian language played an integral role in this. Further, it was understood that *Acta* should aid in “structuring the general reflective thought of Estonian culture”, since “it is the public discourse describing culture that influences the ways in which it is possible to advance or ensure the comprehension and continuity in the socio-cultural (and why not national) identity discourse” (Toimetuselt 2001: 10). Generally speaking, these principles have remained the priority of *Acta* until this day.

The publication of the next issue would, however, have to wait for four years. There were changes in the editorial staff (Elin Sütiste and Silvi Salupere took charge of the journal), cover design (by Rauno Thomas Moss) and the structure of the publication. From then on, it was decided to publish the journal annually and to add two new sections. “Notes” [*Märkamisi*] was meant for recording diverse eye-

¹ Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Jakobi 2, 51005 Tartu, Estonia; e-mail: silvi.salupere@ut.ee.

catching observations and eye-opening reflections in a free form and genre. Thus, in that issue, Professor Myrdene Anderson from Purdue University reflected on the importance and multifarious ways of teaching and studying semiotics (Anderson 2005). The second new section was the “Chronicle” [*Kroonika*], which presented – and still presents – an overview of the previous year’s events both in Estonia and abroad, in which the ESA members had participated. The second issue also listed, for the first time, the MA and PhD theses defended at the Tartu Semiotics Department in the previous year.

The publication of the third issue in 2006 presented another important change, namely the addition of an editorial board. Moreover, from that point on, all the published articles would be peer reviewed. Creating an international editorial board and turning *Acta* into a peer-reviewed journal could be said to have been a purely pragmatic decision taking into account the demands of contemporary academic publishing. Still, at the same time the editors underlined the potential and value of this change with regard to the content: it would deepen the cohesion of the academic sphere and would encourage the communication between authors from different fields. Since then, most of the research articles have been authored by young graduate students, and several articles introduce previously underexplored or completely new topics to Estonian semiotic literature.

Acta has published two special issues under the guidance of guest editors. Issue number nine, “Political semiotics” [*Poliitilisuse semiootika*], was edited by Andreas Ventsel, Peeter Selg, Mari-Liis Madisson and Ott Puumeister, while issue number eleven, “On the semiotics of nomination” [*Nominatsiooni semiootikast*] was edited by Ülle Pärli and Tanel Pern.

The next significant change was made in 2015, when *Acta*’s twelfth issue came out with a new cover design, authored by Mehmet Emir Uslu, enabling a visual semiotic interpretation of the journal itself. In the meantime, the number of research articles published per issue has decreased a little compared to the first issues, which contained a dozen or more articles. Now there usually are six to eight research articles per issue, while the scope and significance of the “Notes” section has increased. The publication of the twelfth issue also marked a change in the editorial staff as Ott Puumeister replaced Elin Sütiste.



Figure 1. The cover designs for the first (2001, Anti Randviir), eleventh (2014, Rauno Thomas Moss) and sixteenth (2019, Mehmet Emir Uslu) issues of *Acta Semiotica Estica*.

Over the years, *Acta* has published a number of texts that have significantly enriched the humanities discourse in Estonian. The authors include both experienced scientists as well as bachelor's students – when considering articles for publication, the editors take into account only the quality of the text, not the author's CV. Among remarkable contributions, an article by Maria-Kristiina Lotman, Mihhail Lotman and Rebekka Lotman that can be compared with a small monograph deserves a special mention. It is entitled “Autometadescription in Estonian poetry” [“*Autometakirjeldus eesti luules*”] and appeared in four consecutive issues (M.-K. Lotman, M. Lotman, R. Lotman 2008–2011).

Interviews have always played an important role in *Acta* ever since the programmatic interview with Thomas A. Sebeok entitled “What is semiotics, really?” [“*Mis on semiootika, tõepoolest?*”] opened the first issue (Sebeok 2001). This conversation relates to another interview with Sebeok, conducted around the same time, but published only in 2020 (Aleksand, Lindström 2020). The second issue contained an interview with Myrdene Anderson on teaching semiotics, conducted by Kadri Tüür (Anderson 2005). The 18th issue published Kalevi Kull's extensive and thorough interview with Thure von Uexküll that had been written down already in 1995 (Kull 2021). As of today, this series includes nine interviews; Kalevi Kull's and Ekaterina Velmezova's interviews with Estonian scholars on semiotics and Juri Lotman are especially noteworthy among these.

Since advancing Estonian semiotics and regulating Estonian-language terminology are among the missions of *Acta*, it has published several translations of the classics of semiotics. A major part of the translations derives from Russian-

language originals by the members of the Tartu–Moscow School, since Lotman’s school is especially important for us and since there are ever fewer Russian speakers among the Estonian readership (often, these texts have not been translated into English either). Juri Lotman is the most translated author in *Acta*, but Vladimir Toporov, Vyacheslav Ivanov, Aleksandr Pyatigorskij, Boris Gasparov, Yuri Levin, Olga Freidenberg and Yuri Knorozov are represented as well. Other translated authors include, e.g. Julia Kristeva, Roman Jakobson, Gregory Bateson, Tim Ingold, Robert Godel and Susanne K. Langer.

For the foreseeable future, *Acta* will continue to be published annually, so that it can go on introducing novel perspectives into Estonian semiotics, embracing new territories, innovative topics and fresh voices.

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Acta Semiotica Estica on Tartossa kerran vuodessa ilmestyyvä vironkielinen semiotiikan tiedelehti, jota on julkaistu vuodesta 2001 alkaen. Artikkelissa annetaan lyhyt yleiskatsaus tämän tiedejulkaisun historiasta ja kehityksestä.

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Acta Semiotica Estica on kord aastas Tartus ilmuv eestikeelne semiootikaajakiri, mida avaldatakse alates 2001. aastast. Käesolev artikkel annab lühiülevaate ajakirja ajaloost ja arengust.