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Towards semiotic theory  
of hegemony



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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

|  |    |
|--|----|
| INTRODUCTION .....   | 6  |
| 1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY .....  | 6  |
| 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PRIMARY THEORETICAL<br>CONCEPTS FOR APPROACHING POWER .....                                | 9  |
| 2.1. Politics and power .....  | 9  |
| 2.2. Discourse and power .....   | 10 |
| 3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS .....  | 13 |
| 3.1. The French tradition in discourse analysis .....  | 14 |
| 3.2. The problem .....   | 16 |
| 4. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TEXT .....  | 17 |
| 4.1. From text to intertext .....  | 17 |
| 5. TEXT/DISCOURSE FROM POINT OF VIEW OF SEMIOTICS OF<br>CULTURE BY "TMS" AND THEORY OF HEGEMONY BY ESSEX<br>SCHOOL ..... | 23 |
| 5.1. Text/discourse as a bounded totality .....  | 23 |
| 5.2. The semiotic theory of hegemony as an interdisciplinary approach ...  | 25 |
| 6. SUMMARIES OF PAPERS .....   | 28 |
| 6.1. Paper I .....   | 29 |
| 6.2. Paper II .....  | 30 |
| 6.3. Paper III .....   | 32 |
| 6.4. Paper IV .....  | 33 |
| 6.5. Paper V .....   | 34 |
| 7. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE SCIENTIFIC<br>WORK .....  | 36 |
| 7.1. Conclusions .....   | 36 |
| 7.2. Problems and possible future developments .....   | 37 |
| REFERENCES .....   | 40 |
| SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN .....  | 43 |
| PUBLICATIONS .....   | 53 |

# INTRODUCTION

## I. THE STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This dissertation consists of an introductory chapter and five papers (three of which have been published and two that have been accepted for publication within a year, cf. years of publications). The component papers comprise the main part of the author's research during his doctoral studies in 2005–2009. They are primarily focused on establishing political semiotics as a specific discipline, which would give researchers better means for analysing the field of politics. Thus, it has been necessary to reinterpret the key concepts that traditionally define political discourse – power relations, identity, choice, etc. – from a semiotic point of view and to complement them with semiotic terminology.

The primary material for analysis for this dissertation is the contemporary history of Estonia, mainly the phenomena that shaped the society's identity during the Soviet era before and after Estonia regained independence; there are also explanatory digressions into the earlier period (when analysing the tradition of the Song Festivals in article III). This is due to two complementary goals: first, to reflectively observe the processes that this author thinks have affected ongoing tendencies and trends in Estonian life, and second, to share with a wider foreign audience Estonia's contemporary history that offers very interesting and contrasting but at the same time tragic material (several occupying regimes with contradictory totalitarian ideologies). These presumptions have been the basis of my studies at the University of Tartu since 1998. In my bachelor's thesis (2002) I discussed the power shift in ideology and regime in 1940 from a pragmatic and influence-psychological aspect; in my master's thesis (2005) I analysed the way 'we', i.e. the category of the people, was constructed in the public communication space in 1940–1953 when, within a short period of time, Estonia was occupied by two ideologically opposite totalitarian occupying regimes (Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany).

Before briefly describing the structure of this dissertation, I would like to add one clarifying note on the object and the material of the analysis. The objective of this dissertation is first and foremost to improve the theoretical arsenal and research methods, which is the reason for focusing on a successful integration of the semiotics of culture of the Tartu-Moscow School (hereafter "TMS"), and the theory of hegemony of the Essex School. Thus, this dissertation is highly theoretical and its objective is, by presenting different analogies between concepts by way of their functional juxtaposition, to create a unified conceptual framework that would consider the positive contributions of both approaches and, at the same time, would pay attention to the theoretical deficiencies that have made this integration necessary in the first place. On the other hand, I have always been of the opinion that theoretical concepts should not remain in still life on paper, but that they should be put into practice for analysing empirical material. Therefore this integration has been supported with

analyses of various phenomena that should confirm the results. But as can be guessed from my objective, the emphasis is primarily on creating a theoretical framework that would help to conduct more specific and voluminous analyses in the future.

The main scientific objectives of this dissertation are as follows:

1. To outline a theoretical framework of political semiotics that would help to better understand and analyse the inner logic of the signifying processes.
2. To present an overview of previous research traditions and point out the deficiencies appearing in approaches that bypass the cultural factor when examining real political processes.
3. To bring a cultural-semiotic approach into the study of politics that would help to overcome the deficiencies indicated in the previous point and vice versa: to amend, through the theory of hegemony, the cultural-semiotic approach with the research arsenal of power relations.
4. To develop, in accordance with the conceptual framework, the means for analysing various signifying practices, both verbal and visual.
5. To test the suitability of these means of analysis on material drawn from the contemporary history of Estonia; this, at the same time, would help to reflectively interpret local social processes.
6. To present new possibilities and questions that may have risen during the writing of these papers.

The five papers that comprise this dissertation have been sorted according to the organisational logic of the subject itself and reflect the transition from the statement of the problem to the possible solutions. Thus the problematic situation of the analysis of power relations (although in a rather preliminary way) is drafted in paper I. This paper primarily focuses on applying one alternative approach to the research of political power relations by studying, through the analysis of the pronouns (deictics) used, the way power relations are expressed in political speeches. The papers that follow (II, III, IV and V) are focused on developing and enhancing the framework for the semiotic theory of hegemony. Papers II and III (co-written with Peeter Selg) elaborate the model of this theoretical approach, using the discourse of the Bronze Night and the Singing Revolution as the analysis material. Proceeding from the theoretical basis created in the previous papers, paper IV tries to distinguish some of the signification practices of the visualisation of power by examining the hegemonic signifying strategies that were used in creating “the people” in the public picture-producing regime during the Stalinist era. In addition to the aforementioned approaches, the paper also makes use of Barthes’ semiotic and visual rhetoric views on photography. Paper V tries to explicate, within the created framework, the phenomenon of totalitarian language of the Soviet era. All the papers are briefly described in subchapter 6 of this introduction. The papers that comprise this dissertation are presented in English and have been peer reviewed. Although one of these papers (paper IV) has been accepted for publication by an Estonian journal *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi* (*Studies on Art*

*and Architecture*), this dissertation includes an English-language version of this paper. This is done in order to provide the dissertation with a unitary language that would allow for a non-Estonian reviewer.

The five papers that comprise this dissertation analyse a relatively compact object, so this introductory chapter, a sort of “umbrella paper” for the rest, is substantially motivated by the deficiencies in the papers that comprise the dissertation, which, in turn, is caused by the estimated expectations of the readers and the limited volume of the published papers that did not allow to include all the necessary information for understanding their general background. The introduction itself is comprised of 7 subchapters. The main theoretical concepts of this dissertation are power, discourse and text. The second part of the introduction attempts to elaborate on how power has been conceptualised in the present dissertation. This is followed by a short overview of the problems accompanying the research tradition on the concepts of text and discourse that are relevant for this dissertation, and by an attempt to show the theoretical limitations of both traditions (part 3 and 4), which in my opinion allows us to proceed fruitfully towards further developments by fusing the conception of the hegemonic empty signifier of the Essex School with the notion of text of the TMS; the latter was replaced, however, during the development of Lotman’s ideas, with the concept of semiosphere (part 5). At the end of part 5 I will try to determine the interdisciplinary relations between semiotics of culture and the theory of hegemony for political semiotics. All five articles included in the thesis will be briefly summarised, and their main aims and results will be discussed in the sixth chapter of dissertation. The introductory chapter ends with a summary of conclusions and a brief draft for future work (part 7), which is not sufficiently reflected in the component papers but which the author still finds absolutely necessary.



## **2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND PRIMARY THEORETICAL CONCEPTS FOR APPROACHING POWER**

This introductory chapter provides an overview of some of the concepts that are relevant to the general framework of the dissertation. The first subchapter attempts to thematise the problems of power, politics, and discourse and to provide an overview of the relations between these concepts as understood in this dissertation.

### **2.1. Politics and power**

The primary purpose for attempting to develop a semiotic theory of hegemony is to acquire more diverse means of analysis for researching power relations in political discourse. This sort of goal already needs additional explanatory comments. What do we mean when we say “political discourse”? How do we understand power and how is it related to politics? How are discourse and hegemony connected? etc.

For the present approach, it is necessary to emphasize (which is also done in the component papers) that the narrow definition of politics has been abandoned – for example, this subject is not limited to classical political theory. Also, it does not refer only to the thematic field of what the politicians do in the parliaments, or in the rhetoric of the pre-election debates, or in other words, to all that we can see in the political sections of daily newspapers. Why? First, because in many cultural spaces the word “politics” has, for certain reasons, acquired a negative connotation and thus many discursive practices hide their true political character (identity). And second, because this dissertation primarily deals with analysing the logic of certain signification processes that do not only appear in political discourse, but also in other fields that constitute social life.

Thus, in this framework, politics can be conceptualised as a practice for creating, reproducing and transforming social relations that cannot themselves be located at the level of the social, “as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonism” (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 153). It can thus always be understood as an expression of the power of discourses.

This brings us directly to the need to conceptualise the relations between power and politics. In searching for an answer, this approach consciously moves away from the essentialist approaches to power (the best-known of which would be liberalism and Marxism), that define power as a certain “thing” and see their biggest problem in the normative “justification” (liberalism) or “critique” (Marxism) of this “reification of power”. The basis for this work is instead the tradition that has developed through Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and Michel Foucault’s approach to “discourse” and “power”.

For Gramsci, hegemony is not something that could be described by the characteristics of power, coercion or domination (*dominio*). It is dependent, instead, on the spontaneous willingness of subjected subjects of agreeing with the ideas produced by the intellectuals (Gramsci 1975). It should be emphasized that Gramsci does not think of the legitimisation of hegemonic formations as a consequence of propaganda or brainwash, nor explainable merely as a calculation of rational interests, but rather that all these factors have a part in forming that unity.

As we know, Foucault does not consider power to be only an instrument of repression – rather, power is what makes things and talking about things possible. Power does not only say “no” but it produces things, induces pleasure, forms knowledge, and produces discourses (Foucault 1980: 37). For the most part, the mechanisms of the functioning of power are not based on justice, law and the threat of punishment, but rather on techniques, ideals that express normality and various mechanisms of control (Foucault 1990: 89–90).

“Power must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies (Foucault 1990: 92–93)

In light of the above, the old questions, such as “Who has power?” or “Who are repressed by power?” lose their former acuity. The described approach draws attention to analysing hidden power relations, especially the power of discourse, as opposed to the previous object of analysis of the social scientists – the relations between the state and its administrative apparatus, and the people. Hegemony becomes the central concept for defining political discourse.

## **2.2. Discourse and power**

From an anti-essentialist perspective that this dissertation is based on, power relations are not something pre-given; instead, they are constructed through social and cultural meanings. This means that all power relations are discursive relations and “objectivity” as such is constructed specifically in discourse (Laclau 2005: 68). It is important that the field of application of the concept of discourse is not only limited to writing or speech, but that it refers to any complex of elements where relations play a constitutive role (Ibid.). For Laclau, the question of social and political reality thus boils down to the question of the constitution of discourse. According to Laclau, hegemony should be interpreted only on top of discourse: a hegemonic relationship is nothing other than an

articulation of meanings, a particular logic of the signification process. Since the component papers discuss this logic throughout, it will not be analysed here any further. However, some additional general remarks on the relations between discourse and power are in order.

The well-known discourse theoretician Norman Fairclough distinguishes analytically the following relation complexes for discursive power (Fairclough 1992: 64):

- 1) Power of discourse
- 2) Power in discourse
- 3) Power over discourse

Power of discourse: this refers to a meaning similar to Foucault's; discourses constitute reality and determine human existence. It is a power that produces that which exists; a power that systems of signification have over our thinking and acting, although we do not usually let ourselves know of it; a power that accounts for a large part of the stability and predictability of our actions. "As a rule, dominant discourses are institutionalised and their position is regarded as self-evident: they determine the things we consider normal, acceptable, self-explanatory, right and good." (Raik 2003: 25). The power of discourse is usually invisible and that is exactly what its success is based on.

Power in discourse: indicates the power of (dominant) discourses to determine the positions of subjects in social relations and thus constitute power relations. Systems of meaning authorise certain actors to speak and act on behalf of others and to create and represent shared values and truths, while others are left in passive, subjugated positions.

Power over discourse: the critique of the two previous notions has created a theoretical framework for including *this* concept. The problem is that both the power of discourse and the power in discourse primarily deal with reproduction and the way different signification systems manipulate with people. The problem is that the subject has been left with no freedom whatsoever – the reproduction of discourse dominates over change, contest, and subjectivity. This problem – the disappearance of the so-called subject as an agent – has been haunting both Foucault and the structuralists (Althusser). Instead of viewing reality as something determined by discourse, the notion of "power over discourse" leads us to ask *who* produces dominant discourses, and *who* tries to challenge and transform them. "As meanings are not fixed, the process of constructing and reproducing discourses is not automatic or inevitable, but involves choice. On the other hand, those placed in a subordinated position often develop counter discourses as forms of resistance in order to bring the dominant system of meaning into question and change it." (Raik 2003: 26). (Re)production of dominant meanings can take the form of the exercise of or struggle for power; "discourse is the power which is to be a sized" (Foucault 1981: 52–53).

From the purposes of this paper, it is important to clarify that hegemonic discourse does not only consider the discourses of those in power. Thus paper III discusses the discourse of the Singing Revolution which, back at the end of the

1980s, united people who were both politically and socioculturally without power. In *On Populist Reason* Laclau describes the construction of people and its populist origin. According to him, populism is one of the ways that hegemonic logic of signification may occur and is not at all a stranger to the democratic social organization and free media (Laclau 2005). This means that opposing discourses that are alternative to power could have the same logic of signification.

The same applies to totalitarianism – this dissertation does not define totalitarian or democratic logics of signification; this would presume that we already have a positive concept of totalitarianism or democracy beforehand, which could then be used for deductively deriving the relevant properties of the processes of signification. On the contrary, only the study of the logic of signification has been thematised. To study the reasons (e.g. technical, economical, cultural, social factors) why any logic of signification is prevalent in one or the other political regime, already presumes a different approach to political discourse. The axiology of the widespread political concepts – democracy (good) versus totalitarianism (evil) – should be de-demonised first, after which one could inquire whether the practices of signification of those regimes are essentially any different from each other, and if not, then what would be the effects of this understanding on contemporary political thought as a whole.

Neither does this dissertation claim that discourses determine subjects, as is stated in Foucault's discourse theory. Above all, it asks what kind of logic of signification the community members use for their practices of signification. Societies are constituted by different discourses by way of which the members of the society coordinate their understanding of "reality". In the context of this dissertation, political struggle is to be understood as a "discursive struggle" where rivaling groups attempt to define the meaning of the central notions of the struggle. "The "winners" of the discursive fight formulate new signifying systems that are institutionalised and become dominant" (Raik 2003: 27). Nevertheless, this does not eliminate struggle and contingency: "hegemonic practices that try to conquer their opponents and to give a meaning to contingent elements, find fighting with antipathetic forces and the existence of contingent elements necessary" (Ibid.). Hegemonic signifying process can never completely converge to a single empty signifier, because this process itself is a temporary "balance" between the logic of equivalence/difference (Laclau) or continuous/discrete coding language (Lotman) (see also papers II and III). In other words, no discourse can ever have a total determining power over a subject, and to study the levels of influence that those discourses have on a subject, one needs different methodological devices. I have discussed this topic in some of my previous papers (Ventsel 2006a, 2006b) and in my master's thesis, where I approached the question through Émile Benveniste's approach to the pronoun "we" through the first-person pronoun "I", and the discourse theories of semiotics of culture and the Essex School. The circle of problems of the subject in this context surely needs more attention, but for now it will remain a topic for future research.

The next chapter will survey the development of the tradition of discourse analysis, the starting point of this dissertation.

### 3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The word “discourse” is so overloaded semantically – its different translations from French (*discourse*) into English (*discourse*) and then in turn into Estonian (*diskursus*) do not take the original French meaning into account – so an explanatory introduction is in order. Here are some of the definitions of “discourse” as used in the humanities that help to understand and have an overview of this diversity of its meanings:

- 1) “Speech” in the sense of Ferdinand de Saussure, i.e. every specific parole (1966).
- 2) A unit higher than phrases, an utterance in a global sense. Understood as an object of study for the “grammar of the text”, it marks the succession and regularity of different utterances;
- 3) In speech act theory and pragmatics, discourse is defined as an effect of an utterance on the receiver, and the conditions of expressing this utterance. The best-known representative of this approach is Jürgen Habermas, who in his work *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981) considers mutual understanding and reaching a consensus as the main objectives of communicative action, which both in economy and politics takes place through rationalist-instrumental calculation. Thus Habermas does not attach rationality to subjects (as in the Kantian tradition) but uses it to characterise the structure of interpersonal linguistic communication.
- 4) A conversation, which is observed as a main speech situation.
- 5) Émile Benveniste (1996) refers to discourse as a speech ascribed to the speaker, as opposed to “story”, that proceeds without an explicit presence of the speaker in speech.
- 6) At times, language and speech/discourse are considered as opposites; on the one hand, as a system of virtual meanings which are relatively undifferentiated and stable, and on the other hand, as a deviation from it, caused by the diversity ways of using a unit of language. Thus studying an element in language and in speech are distinguished (Seriot 1999: 26).
- 7) Discourse is also used in a specifying sense, as a function for assembling an indeterminate amount of utterances into a totality, by way of which the diversity of utterances is gathered into the unity of a social or ideological discourse. Thus for example we can talk about feminist discourse as a whole, not just within the frame of a specific work that alone forms but a part of one whole feminist discourse. This is one of the most common definitions of discourse in ordinary and scientific language.
- 8) Utterance and discourse are distinguished. The former refers to the succession of phrases that are semantically bounded within a speech unit in communication. The latter is an utterance that is observed from the standpoint of discourse mechanism that determines the former (Guespin 1971: 10). From this point of view, discourse is not the first or the empirical object in an analysis. Rather, a theoretical (constructed) object is considered that refers to the relations between language and ideology, the real object of analysis.

The last two (7–8) definitions are still to be found in, and have affected Ernesto Laclau's approach to discourse. It is also easy to find in them an intersection with some of the semiotic approaches to text. As discourse analysis in general (see paper III) and the concept of discourse in the Essex School have both been adequately analysed in various component papers, they will not be discussed here any further. Nevertheless, a short overview is provided of the tradition that is relevant for Laclau's approach discourse theory.

### **3.1. The French tradition in discourse analysis**

The French tradition in discourse analysis emerged in the 1960s, primarily as an attempt to overcome the theoretical shortcomings inherited from content analysis, which, back then, was dominant in the humanities, especially in America. Content analysis mainly concentrated on analysing the external level of verbal expressions, with special attention paid to transformation operations that in the course of the analysis, makes it possible to infer, based on purely distributive features, the internal unity of syntactic structures that may initially seem different. This way, a literal view of text was superseded (Berelson 1952). Unlike in content analysis where verbal material is viewed simply as means for the transmission of information, discourse analysis refers to this material as *text* (Sériot 1999: 17). This incurs a significant shift: for the transmitter, text is no longer a message that presents his ideas transparently and has been constructed in consideration of the transmitter's objective; instead, the boundaries of the text fade and begin to function alongside other discourses that constitute it. Here we can see the biggest difference between content analysis and discourse analysis: the former attempted to establish second level methods of analysis for social sciences, whereas the latter strove to become the true discipline for textual analysis (Sériot: Ibid.).

For the French discourse theoreticians, the primary objects of analysis were texts that had a strong limiting effect on concrete speech acts and that determined their historical, cultural and intellectual orientation, i.e. texts that are important from the point of view of a group's self-determination. They were not observed in isolation, but rather as a body of texts that set the conditions for speech acts of a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic region (Foucault 1990: 55–60). This unity of discourse was determined by the unity of function rather than formal criteria. The unity of political discourse is not secured by the fact that it is done in parliaments, but by the degree that different texts are connected for presenting a particular power relation. The primary issue is the position in the general discursive formation which, according to Foucault, could be filled with anybody or anything (Foucault 1990: 49–50). Thus, a constitution of political discourse may comprise both a legal act accepted by the Parliament and work regulations in a factory. Both construct power relations in different ways.

The most important approaches in the humanities that influenced French discourse analysis were linguistics, Marxist/historical materialism and the psychoanalytic tradition. Motivated by the works of Benveniste, Barthes and Genette, the traditional relations between text, intertext and the author as the subject of the utterance, were put into question. Discourse as a collection of quotes, repetition of someone else's speech and its novel meaning in new circumstances, both explicit and implicit argumentation strategies, the status of a subject as the utterer of an utterance, etc. – those are just some of the topics that cast doubt on the usage of a traditional linguistic methods for analysing speech activities.

Another important influence was Louis Althusser, especially his understanding of ideology as “‘constituting’ concrete individuals as subjects” (Althusser 1970). The common understanding of ideology until Marx and Engels’ *The German ideology* placed ideology into the field of consciousness as structures of conscious ideas. Althusser, however, turns this relationship around, claiming that “ideology has very little to do with “consciousness”, even supposing this notion to have an unambiguous meaning. It is profoundly unconscious, even when it presents itself in a reflected form (as in pre-Marxist “philosophy”) (Althusser 1969: 239). If ideology secures people’s imagined relation with their reality precisely by moulding them into subjects, then the belief that we master our speech is an ideological illusion. A researcher should consider the ideological structures that cause the speech to occur as much more important than direct speech. In his book *Les verités de la Palice* (1975) Pêcheux translates Althusser’s thoughts into discourse theoretical vocabulary and claims that discourse is always formed at the boundaries of previous discourses (interdiscursivity) and thus always precedes the speaking subject and is independent of its will. This distinction is based on Pêcheux’s separation of signification and value. The former belongs to the subject and characterises particular utterances in the Saussurean sense; the latter is a part of language and thus, as for Saussure, independent from the will of the subject. Taking into account that ideological formations consist of various discursive formations that determine what can and must said according to the position and the circumstances, then it can be said that Pêcheux complements Althusser’s mechanism of ideological reproduction by presenting various discursive formations with the constituting role of speech. Ideology appears as subconscious content, discourse as a subconscious form for expressing this content.

Here we can already see the connections with the third major flow that has influenced discourse analysis – psychoanalysis. To discover another text in a text – ideology or discourse, i.e. the thing we are actually looking for – one must put oneself into the role of a psychoanalyst and search the consciousness for subconscious causes. Whether we talk about the urges of subconscious desire or the interests of a certain group, the main object of research for the analyst is still the process by which the illusions are formed.

### 3.2. The problem

This approach raises several questions for a researcher methodologically. Thus, for example, it is necessary to reinterpret the ontological status of discourse as a bounded totality. Although distinguishing between separate discursive formations is the final result of analysis for Foucault, Pêcheux, Maldider, etc., what becomes even more relevant are not discursive formations as such but the analysis of the boundaries of this process of formation – the identification of a discursive formation does not take place by discovering an object and comparing it with other analogous objects (discourses); instead, its constitution itself is the result of constant limiting acts. Thus the identity of an utterance is not limited by the purposeful intention of an utterer, but rather by unstable social and historical conditions that secure this temporary unity and separate it from other discourses. Speech and discourse are not separate in the sense that there is a pre-existing ideal discourse that generates speech, but that speech also produces discourse – the influence is reciprocal. In consequence, this imaginary unit – discourse – is not to be perceived as an abiding and stable unit in the communicative space, but rather that this unity itself is always unstable and temporary, and bound by the fields of language and interdiscursivity.

The unity of discursive formations is established by the rules of formation that, rather than defining the identity of the object, style, conceptual system or topics, but instead makes possible these utterances that belong to the same discursive formation. In fact, it can be argued that what lies outside of discourse (interdiscursivity) has primacy over discourse itself, because one discursive formation is separated from the others through that what “cannot be said”, what cannot be delivered by an utterance. This kind of analysis does not try to find total meanings in order to study their inner structure: “it would not try to suspect and to reveal latent conflicts; it would study forms of division [...] instead of drawing up tables of differences (as the linguists do), it would describe systems of dispersion” (Foucault 2002: 41).

We cannot fail to look past the problems associated with the psychoanalytic method, either. For generating the real meaning of text, subconscious postulation may, rhetorically, cover up the difficulties that content analysis had, but this is hardly an analytical solution but instead nothing but a declarative postulation of an initial reason.

These methodological problems are relatively similar to theories of text. At times, both traditions even use the same vocabulary (desire, urge, the fluidity of text/discourse, unboundedness) and it may appear at first that the primary differences derive from the analysed material that formed the basis for producing theoretical concepts – theories of text dealt primarily with artistic (literary) texts, whereas discourse analysis focused on social-political material (newspapers, TV shows, everyday speech, school textbooks). The next chapter briefly describes the tradition that may be thought of as the semiotic approach to text.



## 4. DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO TEXT

The roots of the word “text” as it is used today date back to the Enlightenment and the rationalistic mentality. As a counterbalance to the view that the Holy Scripture is not a text among others but is a word of God, a new conception of an abstract text as such came into being, mainly from the early democratic understanding that was based on the rejection of all tradition-bound hierarchies and assumed everything to be on a level (Tool 1997: 265–266). From that time onward, the concept of text has, more and more, begun to excite interest in the humanities, which is why by now, but especially since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, a variety of different concepts and meta-languages have come into being that explicate the content of this concept. In different conceptions, we are not just dealing with different meanings of the same concept. Text can be understood best at the intersection of intra-textual and extra-textual relations, where all its fragments get their meaning according to their position in the structure of the text and in the dictionary of the particular language, and also by to their relationships with other texts, the era, and the author (Torop 2000: 27). For this reason the definition of text is supplemented by several analytic sub-concepts that broaden the concept of text: micro and macro text, subtext, architext, prototext, intext, intertext, etc. that, in turn, are nowhere near of being unambiguous. To avoid possible confusion arising from the overexploitation of the concept of text, I will try to organize the conceptual field relevant for the concept of text as used in this dissertation.

### 4.1. From text to intertext

From the perspective of classical linguistics, text could be defined as a manifestation of a system preceding the text, as a concrete expression of an abstract system of language – as fixed speech. This assumes that those who form the text and those whom it is potentially addressed to, share this common system and are thereby able to understand the text adequately. Another hidden assumption is added: text is a limited, isolated, a stable and small-scale unit of signification.

The first apologists of hermeneutics as the study of the principles of interpretation also proceeded from similar premises. By focusing on the problem of cultural competence instead of linguistic competence, they claimed that the primary task of textual analysis is to discover the truth uttered into it – for this purpose, one first needs to discover the “obscure” (*obscuritas*) places in the text and then clean them from false beliefs (caused by culture). What one had in mind by the truth hidden in the text was dependent on particular traditions. Thus the universal hermeneutists (Johann Martin Chladenius, Georg Friedrich Meier) of the Age of Enlightenment considered their primary task to be the discovery of human truths that are invisible to the ordinary eye but can be seen in the light

of the rationalist principles of reason (*ratio*). Thus, according to Chladenius, a speech or a piece of writing can only be understood completely if one thinks exactly the things that people's words can awaken in them in accordance with the rules of reason and their soul (Szondi 1988: 44–45). Since the truth of a text can be identified with *ratio* and is therefore universal, it may happen that the author itself was blinded by his "idols" and did not realise precisely what he was writing, and thus the truth was finally revealed by the *ratio* of the hermeneutist. It may be said that the hermeneutists of the Age of Enlightenment did not think of the work as the expression of the author's personality, but rather as the author's explanation of something third – the thing being discussed – which was presumed to have a specific place in the rational structure of the totality of being (Tool 1997: 273).

The works of the Romantic scholars of interpretation (Ast, Schleiermacher) were born of an entirely different pathos. Influenced by the aesthetics of Immanuel Kant and the historicist approach to history that was common to German mentality at the time, according to which reason evolves in time and thus changes constantly, in their approach to the hermeneutics of text they emphasized the primacy of the unity between the spirit of the creators and the spirit of their time. Primacy was accorded to understanding authors as creators in their particular individuality. The task of the hermeneutist is to understand the text, the work primarily as the author's total self-expression, instead of interpreting individual *obscuritas*'es. Thus with text Schleiermacher does not refer merely to the works already created, but also to speech as such, which the speaker uses to express his spirit to the listener (Schleiermacher 1997: 11–12). On the one hand, the speaker is just a location "in which a given language forms itself in an individual manner, on the other their discourse can only be understood via the totality of the language. But then the person is also a spirit which continually develops, and their discourse is only one act of this spirit of connection with the other acts" (Schleiermacher 1997: 13). For Georg Anton Ast, a contemporary of Schleiermacher, the texts of individual authors are to be interpreted, at the end, according to the spirit (*Geist*) of their own era, whereas Schleiermacher himself saw a hermeneutic circle forming from the author's texts and the totality of his life connections that the listener/reader could adequately and veraciously relate to and embrace psychologically, through intuition. What is important, though, is the fact that the starting point for both is a certain existent, static totality, which that Truth uses for manifesting itself through understanding.

Thus we could say that earlier definitions of text emphasized the unitary nature of texts as signs, the inseparable unity of its functions in a cultural context, or other characteristics of text, and what was meant, either explicitly or implicitly, was that text is an expression in a *single* language (Lotman 2002: 158). The situation is profoundly changed when we consider that text itself is part of the totality of human culture, which itself is comprised of different languages – mythology, ideology, art, etc. as secondary modelling systems based on natural languages, which are not presumed to be paradigmatically

unified and related to each other. All texts – whether they be something that goes down in art history as a “classic” or a conversational remark –

“reflects a unique intersection of circumstances in the course of which and in relation to which it was created and accepted: the communicative intentions of the author (often ambivalent and contradictory and never completely clear even to himself); the relations between the author and the addressee (or several different potential addressees); various “conditions”, large or small, inescapably important or random, univocal or intimate, which appear in the given text, one way or another; the general ideological characteristics and the stylistic “climate” of an era as a whole, including the particular group whom the text is directed to; categorical and stylistic characteristics of the text itself, and of the communicative environment which the text connects to; and finally – a variety of associations with other texts...” (Gasparov 1994: 275)

As may be concluded from this long quote, a text is never identical to itself, because the conditions in which it was created and received never recur and are always unique, even if only because of the fact that after its first appearance, a text falls among the conditions that determine the conditions for its meaning (Lotman 2002: 161), this even for the author, who, according to Barthes, becomes a part of the text, “a paper author” (Barthes 1980: 161).

As text turned primarily into a process, a textual creation, it made it necessary for the humanities to coin the notions of intertext/intertextuality. This approach contrasted with the immanent textual analysis described above and posed a question about the relations between extra-textual and intertextual spheres. The extra-textual sphere itself becomes an object of theoretical attention.

In an attempt to break the general understanding of a monolithic signifier that was prevalent at the time, in the *Séméiotiké* (1969) the Bulgarian-French theoretician Julia Kristeva draws a distinction between phenotext and genotext. According to Kristeva, we have to proceed further from the structural analysis of a language to the pre- and non-structural levels of a language, from meanings to the process of signification; in short, from consciousness to the subconscious. Phenotext refers to the text as a material form, its manifestation, and this presents the text in a communicative function, whereas genotext is the primary level of any process of signification. This is the abstract level of the text’s linguistic functioning that precedes phrasal structures and definitions of all kinds, and makes a stand against finished structure. Genotext absorbs all semiotic processes, distributed impulses, those interruptions that they cause in the continuity of the social system. Genotext is the hidden cause for both the totality of meaning and its collapse because it is the only carrier of the impulses of physical energy in which the subject has still not lost its unity. Although it can be identified in language, genotext remains unattainable for linguistics. For this purpose, Kristeva adapted the concept of semioanalysis that consists of linguistics, semiotics and psychoanalysis.

Genotext has diffused boundaries and no structure; phenotext follows the communicative norms set out in a culture and the valid restrictions set to the sender-receiver relation. Various restrictions and rules (primarily social and political) stop the unified flow of the genotext at places, block it and force it into a particular structure, fixing an endless process into a stable symbolic form. This results in a ready-made semiotic signified that has been constructed in accordance with era-specific cultural and ideological codes. Every text is a connection of these two aspects and is essentially equivocal (Kristeva 1974: 248)<sup>1</sup>. Unfortunately, Kristeva lacks the relevant methodology for analysing the relations between these two levels (Torop 1999: 30).

Kristeva's works have greatly influenced Barthes' distinction of text and work, which he presented in his paper *From Work to Text* (1971). Whereas the latter is something tangible, a material fragment, such as a book in the reader's hand, the former refers to a methodological field in which whatever has been written in the book allows itself to be perceived as meaningful (Barthes 1980: 156–157). On the other hand, the category of work also includes unilingually coded systems where the signification of a work boils down to a single signified: from a linguistic point of view this would be a transparent relation between the signifier and the signified; for hermeneutics (at the age of Romanticism, Dilthey) the discovery of the hidden, single, true meaning. According to Barthes, text is characterised by a principled dissimilarity – reading a text is always one-time and interlaced with various quotations, references, echoes: “These are cultural languages (and what language is not?), past or present, that traverse the text from one end to the other in a vast stereophony” (Barthes 1980: 159). All texts are intertexts for another text, but this intertextuality should not be confused with the origin of the text, as this would again lead to an attempt to re-establish the original meaning of the text, to the so-called genealogical myth. We can see that in principle, Barthes repeats Kristeva. Both try to avoid source-critical connotations when talking about text. For Kristeva, the concept of genotext refers to an unparsed and unstructured intertextuality as a text's principal directedness to other texts, while Barthes considers it necessary to emphasize this difference explicitly. Intertextuality, for him, is the anonymous space comprised of texts, quotations, paragraphs, names, etc. in which the origin of the elements that comprise it can no longer be identified. Thus we can no longer say that a text is comprised of an enumerable amount of intertexts for which the act of “the first christening”, as it were, can be identified. Text is a network that extends itself by a combinatory systematic; no organic totality should be presumed (Barthes 1980: 161). This claim also opposes the understanding of the hermeneutic circle as a movement from the whole to the singular and vice versa that would generate such an organic totality.

These examples present a significant theoretical shift – in the analysis of the creation of texts that is based on other texts, the internal meaning of the text and

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<sup>1</sup> Equivocalness is important, especially if we consider how Lotman uses the concepts ‘discrete’ and ‘continuous’ to understand equivocalness, or rather bilingualism.

its new reader become more important than stating the usage of other texts and their influences (something which also presumes and claims to identify the “correct” original signification of a foreign text) (Torop 1999: 30). In both Kristeva’s and Barthes’ approaches it is necessary to emphasize that those significations of intertexts still remain (although the status of the origin of the original significations has become problematic) but the emphasis is put on the new text and its signification, coded through them in the eyes of the new reader. This means that the signification of intertexts is not quite up to the reader. The text is combined in the field of intertextuality, but how, according to the text itself, the meaning of the extra-textual is retrospectively constructed both for the intertext and the text, has remained undertheorised. The approach to text in Barthes’ *From Work to Text* turns out to be difficult to use as a means for analysis, what is described here is primarily the process of reading.

The myth of a particular original meaning of a previous text is definitively demolished at the beginning and in the middle of the 1970s. In his *Conflit des interpretations. Essais d’herméneutique* (*The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*) (1969) and the compilation of his earlier essays, *Du texte à l’action. Essais d’herméneutique* (*From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics*) (1986), Paul Ricœur continues the hermeneutic tradition and includes increasingly more complicated and multi-layered extra-textual material into the conceptual structure of the text, thereby increasingly emphasizing the importance of the reader, the understander of the text as someone being-in-the-world in creating the meaning of the text. According to Ricœur, the task of philosophical hermeneutics is to open up discourse to life, thus distinguishing him from linguistics and the previous language-centric structuralist approaches to text. The latter, according to Ricœur, close off meaning into the mutual relations of dependence that will, according to Ricoeur, exclude understanding that has its root in the author and the reader as inhabiting the same world. But the latter is just one – explanatory – aspect in the approach to text. For Ricœur, it is important to emphasize that language has – unlike the structuralist view of a language as a closed system – an ability to reveal the world outside language. Language as a system of meanings is essentially inseparable from its usage in the form of parole. Language appearing as parole always takes place with someone in a certain time and space, which is thus always an event preceding language, an extra-linguistic situation. The task of hermeneutics would be to interpret; that is, to explain the way of being in the world that was open *before* the text (Ricœur 1986: 127). The world of text (*monde du texte*) consists of a totality of non-ostensive references, based on the work, placed between the objective relations characterising the structure of the text, and the readers, and which invites the reader to discover and bring out the world that is fictive yet connects to the readers’ previous experiences (Karmo 2009: 443).

At this stage, we cannot look past the reception of Bakhtin’s notion of dialogicality in the West. Bakhtin was discovered and re-read in the post-structuralist situation that understood dialogicality not as a mechanism for describing the relations between intertextual structures, but primarily as a

mechanism for explaining extra-textual connections (Torop 1999: 29; Gasparov 1993: 282). The end of the 1970s and the early 1980s mark the imaginary boundary when, in reference to text, researchers declaratively started to make use of that negative strategy that may, in a nutshell, be called deconstructionism: the main task of the humanities, especially literary studies, was to demonstrate the interruptions in the tissue of text, the devices and inconsistencies that break its presumed totality. (Gasparov 1993: Ibid; Itkonen 1987).

## **5. TEXT/DISCOURSE FROM POINT OF VIEW OF SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE BY “TMS” AND THEORY OF HEGEMONY BY ESSEX SCHOOL**

In the conception of text outlined above – which naturally does not cover the entire extent of theoretical thinking in this direction – the development of theoretical thinking proceeds by including increasingly diverse, open and unstructured information in textual analyses – until this process abolishes all definitions of text as a concept for a phenomenon, or is purposefully reduced to all-inclusive principles of unification and interference that constantly permeate the entire culture. “The “structure of the text”, which includes the “context”, is washed away or demolished by the various factors functioning in the mental environment that surrounds the text” (Gasparov 1993: 282).

Such a development will eventually exceed the critical limit of analyzability – with the final collapse of all boundaries, the object itself will crumble to dust. The tradition of discourse analysis that preceded Laclau was, in principle, faced with the very problem that characterized textual analysis before the TMS semiotics of culture. In both cases, the description cast aside the primary surface of the text and focused on the phenomena that exist before the text and outside of it; text is perceived not as a primary phenomenon that consists of qualities peculiar only to itself, but instead as a secondary product of certain general mechanisms – cultural codes, discourse formation, psychological mechanisms – in other words, of the work under analysis. In addition, many of the authors who were part of the aforementioned lines of development in the humanities associated their patterns of thought in the final instance with sub-conscious energies and impulses that are familiar from psychoanalysis. This may be suitable for analyses of literary texts, but is difficult to reconcile with contemporary thought in social sciences and with conducting credible and practicable empirical analyses.

### **5.1. Text/discourse as a bounded totality**

In order to rectify this situation, one needs to approach text/discourse as a paradoxical phenomenon. It is, on the one hand, a unity, a closed totality with a clear outline – otherwise it would not even be perceptible as a text/discourse – but it is also a totality that is born out of an open, uncountable multitude of heterogeneous and multi-faceted components. Possibilities for its interpretation cannot be forced into pre-given structures because of the inexhaustible potentialities of the interactions between the components and sources that comprise it.

Such an approach to text and discourse is indeed provided by the treatment of text by the TMS and Laclau’s hegemonic empty signifier, both of which consider text/discourse as a certain kind of unity, a bounded and closed totality.

According to semiotics of culture, “text is a carrier of total meaning and total function (if we distinguish between the viewpoints of the researcher and the bearer of culture, the text is the bearer of total function for the former and the bearer of total meaning for the latter). Regarded in this manner, it can be treated as the basic element (unit) of culture” (Theses on the semiotic study of cultures (as applied to the Slavic texts) 1998: 3.0.0). In his later works, Lotman replaces the concept of text with that of the semiosphere, which better highlights the dynamic aspects of culture – every semiosphere can be studied as a separate totality, but now there is an explicit methodological principle that every totality in culture that can be analysed is simultaneously part of a larger totality (Torop 2003: 335–336). This results in a seamless dialogue between parts and wholes, and in the dynamics of the total dimension. Nevertheless, for the semiotics of culture text has remained the central concept, since as a concept it can refer to both a concrete artefact and an invisible abstract totality (as a mental text in the consciousness or sub-consciousness) (Torop 2009: 35).

Similarly to the treatment of text in the semiotics of culture, Laclau and the Essex school approach discourse as a delineated, significant totality. This closing up into a significant totality should be understood as a temporary equilibrium between the logic of difference and equivalence in the process of signification (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112). This closing off, albeit temporary, is nevertheless inevitable, since otherwise there would be no process of signification and thus no meaning (Laclau 1996). In addition to several functional similarities between Lotman’s and Laclau’s theoretical positions – between the equivalent logic of signification and continuous coding, text and discourse, asymmetry and heterogeneity, but also the treatment of the concept of boundary – the present author feels that Laclau’s theory of hegemony pays undue tribute to the psychoanalytic tradition, especially to its Lacanian version. Falling into the convolutions of psychoanalysis may be considered as the primary weakness of Laclau’s theory of hegemony, as it bars off concrete empirical analyses of political discourse.

Another issue lies in the fact that, according to Laclau, any movement from one hegemonic formation to another is always though a radical break, as a creation *ex nihilo*. Not that all the elements of the discourse will be entirely new ones, but that the name of the discourse, the “empty signifier” around which the new formation is reconstructed, does not derive its central role from any logic that was already in operation in the previous situation (Laclau 2005: 228). As a result, no theoretical attention is paid to the fact that the space outside of text is itself hierarchical and participates actively in the process of textual generation, revealed especially in the fact that certain ideological systems can connect the germ that generates the culture precisely to something external, the non-organized sphere, opposing to it the internal, ordered field as a culturally lifeless one (Theses on the semiotic study of cultures (as applied to the Slavic texts) 1998: 1.3.0). I do not mean to claim that translation from one formation to the other is determined by some pre-given structural transformation, but neverthe-



less some relations of equivalence and some names of discourse are more probable than others.

By replacing psychoanalysis as the final authority with the concepts of text as bilingual and of translation (transference) derived from Lotman's and the TMS's semiotics of culture, and by supplementing the theory of hegemony with different typologies of strategies for translating (recoding, transferring<sup>2</sup>) the relations both within and without text, also derived from the semiotics of culture, we may be able to provide more diverse research tools for empirical analyses, and to provide new and fruitful perspectives for both approaches.

## **5.2. The semiotic theory of hegemony as an interdisciplinary approach**

An interdisciplinary connection between discourse theory and semiotics of culture raises itself some general issues, primarily associated with the mutual relations between different disciplines, their hierarchy, and the identity of the object of research. Here I would like to highlight two primary questions, 1) in what way does the object of research correlate with the method of research, i.e. to what extent do research methods not only explain, but also constitute and construct the object being studied, and 2) in the situation where the boundaries between different disciplines have become indistinct, to what degree does the identity of the disciplines themselves persist? Especially if we consider the fact that the primary source of interdisciplinary approaches is the powerlessness of older scientific languages in coming to grips with explaining the diversity of the world, rather than a mere unification of different disciplines (Barthes 1980).

The present approach is well aware of these difficulties and acknowledges that in essence this is an *ad hoc* approach, a creation of a synthesized research language. Both discourse theory and semiotics of culture have acknowledged programmatically that both are involved in creating an *ad hoc* research method (Wodak; Meyer 2001; Theses on the semiotic study of cultures (as applied to the Slavic texts) 1998). This means that the researcher is aware of the correlation between cultural diversity and the diversity of the disciplinary and hybrid meta-languages that attempt to describe it.

On the other hand, the present work is not by far the first interdisciplinary attempt to associate semiotics with other disciplines and to treat "reality" as a text. The American anthropologist Clifford Geertz laid the foundation to the interpretive or symbolic school of anthropology with his seminal 1973 work *The Interpretation of Culture*, according to which cultural phenomena should be considered as systems of signification, as texts, with the help of which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge of and regard towards life. And it is the goal of anthropology to read and interpret these texts. This approach also drew attention to the interpretive and dialogical processes going

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<sup>2</sup> For the concepts of translation and recoding in Lotman's oeuvre, cf Salupere 2008.

on both in social activity and in ethnographic fieldwork and writing, which can thus be analysed with methods that are similar to those used for textual analysis in literary studies.

Richard H. Brown has made use of the metaphor of experience and knowledge as language and text – the entire human experience, as well as social reality that he describes, is a rhetorical enterprise (Brown 1987). In his later works he uses the metaphor of textuality, which according to Brown has two sources: structural semiotics and the hermeneutics of meaning. The first would specialize on the syntax and grammar of knowledge and society, the rules and limitations of those communicative practices that constitute society, whereas the latter would concentrate on semantics and pragmatics, on meanings that are manifested through activities on a particular background. Politics, institutions and identities are constructed, negotiated or altered by acts of persuasion, which can be understood in rhetorical terms (Brown 1994: 44–45). The present approach does not share the widespread conception of semiotic text as an aggregate of self-contained codes. Let Lotman's definition of new information stand as an affirmation of this position: he calls such messages new messages that are not generated as a result of unambiguous transformations and which thus cannot result *automatically* from a particular original text based on pre-given rules of transformation (Lotman 2004a: 568). Thus novelty consists of “non-regular” texts that are “incorrect” according to already existing rules.

For the interdisciplinary approach that is developed in the present dissertation, it is relevant that both semiotics of culture and the theory of hegemony of the Essex school are derived, to a certain extent, from the linguistic tradition of Saussure, and thus view signification as a system of differences. Semiotics of culture has developed from the semiotics of language by way of the semiotics of text into today's semiotics of the semiosphere (Portis-Winner 1999; Torop 2003, 2009). Similarly, many discourse theorists have acknowledged the linguistic origin of their theoretic conceptions, primarily by way of the tradition stemming from the linguistic theories of Benveniste and Saussure that has later developed into different approaches in discourse analysis (Wodak; Meyer 2001; Seriot 1999; Laclau 1985).

Both approaches view signification on the basis of a total system. Nevertheless, while being aware of the inevitable closure of this imaginary totality, both TMK semiotics of culture and the Essex discourse theory are simultaneously aware that this significant totality is never closed off entirely, but only represents the researcher's temporary operational construction in an endless semiosis. This means that for the semiotics of culture as well as for the theory of hegemony, untranslatability is a constitutive condition of meaning and thus of social communication. Laclau approaches this point with the concepts of antagonism and the logic of difference/equivalence, for Lotman it is the result of the inevitable dichotomy between continuous and discrete coding systems (cf. paper III). For this reason, politics is not, for the purposes of the approach developed in this work, some regional category in cultural processes, but is in some sense present (even if only latently) in every structure of signification in

the form of an antagonism. In the same manner, “culture” does not refer only forms of art – to so-called high culture. From the perspective of the semiotics of culture, restricting culture in such a manner would be meaningless, since (minimally) two semiotic mechanisms (languages) is the principle of construction for any semiotic phenomenon; similarly, for a non-administrative model of politics, reducing politics to that region of society that consists of governmental activities would be limiting to the extreme.

The difficulties that have been referred to here – the failure to consider cultural factors in identity creation, the inappropriateness of psychoanalysis for an *empirical* social scientific paradigm, the lack of interest in semiotics for theoretically interpreting power relations – are precisely the reasons that justify the interdisciplinary approach, since they help to better understand the contemporary society that surrounds us all. Hopefully I have managed to demonstrate in my papers the functional similarity between the basic concepts of the theory of hegemony and the semiotics of culture (cf. Papers II and III) and thereby offered a fruitful integration for further analyses.

## 6. SUMMARIES OF PAPERS

The dissertation consists of 5 papers, published between 2007 and 2009. The first and second papers have been published in a semiotics-based journal *Sign Systems Studies* 35.½ (2007) and *Sign Systems Studies* 36.1 (2008). The third paper is due to be published in *Semiotica* (2010). The fourth paper is due to be published in the journal *Kunstiteaduslikke Uurimusi* (*Studies in Art and Architecture*). The last paper, analysing the reasons for the formation of the Soviet totalitarian language, has been published in *Russian Journal of Communication* Vol. II, No. ½ (2009) – a journal that primarily deals with the study of Russian communicative space and which is published by the Washington University in association with the Russian Academy of Sciences. All papers have been peer-reviewed. Papers II and III have been co-written by Peeter Selg from the University of Tallinn.

The format of a dissertation that is based on a collection of papers is different from a monograph. Due to the diversity of the readers, some papers required summaries of the general framework of the semiotic theory of hegemony, and as a result there may be small repetitions between the papers. Limitations on the length of submissions set by the journals also restricted the writing of these papers, for which reason only the very central topics were addressed and in several cases I was forced to omit some of the context that would have introduced the topics more fully. I have attempted to remedy this shortcoming in the introduction, where I have added chapters dealing with the tradition of theories of text and discourse analysis relevant for the present work, which should explain the reasons for relying on these particular authors in this work. Of course, one could have focussed on different authors, or dwelt on the chosen authors more fully. But choices had to be made and everything not directly relevant or anything that is even briefly dealt with in the component papers was left out of the introduction.

The examples presented in the dissertation about the strategies of signification processes have been derived from contemporary Estonian history. This is justified by the author's better grasp of local material, as well as by the desire to interpret important societal processes in contemporary Estonian history based on the theoretical framework outlined here.

In what follows I will provide a brief overview of the papers that form the dissertation: I will present the problem that the paper deals with, add the theoretical framework used for solving the problem and provide the conclusions that were reached. In cases where there are certain repetitions in the papers, I will note them here, but will not add them again to the summary.

## 6.1. Paper I

Ventsel, Andreas (2007). The construction of the 'we'-category: Political rhetoric in Soviet Estonia from June 1940 to July 1941. *Sign System Studies* 35. ½, 249–267

The occupation of the Republic of Estonia by the Soviet Union in June 1940 became as a shock to the people. Prior meanings that had constituted the society and were relevant for the people's mentality were turned into negatives and were replaced with the Soviet ideological world-view. This paper analyses the ways in which the ideology that supported the events of 1940 was expressed in the speeches of the new people in power. What makes the analysis interesting is the aspect that the ideological construction of political reality is also one of the factors that specifies a person's identity. The material for the analysis consisted of past issues of the then-largest daily newspapers *Päevaleht* (1938, 1939 and 1940 publications), and the issues of *Rahva Hää* published from 1940 to 1941. Material was drawn primarily from the politicians' speeches published in these papers, and from the editorial columns. The reasons for choosing journalistic publications for the analysis can be justified in several ways: the press (especially the publications that deal with daily issues) reflect the world-view, ideology and value orientations of the collective body (Lauk, Maimik 1998: 80).

The specific target of this study was the construction of the category 'we' in political discourse. In the framework of this paper, several semantically parallel key expressions, to be found in political rhetoric, were also used, such as *the will of the people*, *the people*, etc., or in other words those in whose name politics speaks. The concept of 'discourse' "as developed in some contemporary approaches to political analysis, has its distant roots in what can be called the transcendental turn in modern philosophy – i.e. a type of analysis primarily addressed not to *facts* but to their *conditions of possibility*" (Laclau 1993: 431). One such condition of possibility by which power relations are constructed is the use of deixis. This paper primarily drew on the analysis of deixis by Émile Benveniste and Karl Bühler.

Primary conclusions:

1. The first Soviet occupation of Estonia (1940–1941) may be divided into two periods. The first period can be dated from 21 June to the "June elections" of 1940. Political rhetoric attempted to create a monolithic subject. The unity between the powers that be and the people were described in speeches in the categories of activity, creativity and freedom.
2. From the "acceptance" of the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic into the Soviet Union on 6 August 1940 onward, there was an important shift in the self-description as 'we' by the ones in power. The local "people" were relegated to the role of passive recipients who were subjected to the Marxist-Leninist ideology, to the dictate and will of Stalin and his Party. Different

rhetorical means were used for this purpose (use of deixis, passive forms of verbs, etc.).

3. Soviet ideology is close to the type of culture (if we were to treat ideology as a synonym for culture in the present context) that Lotman characterizes as a collection of texts and which is opposed to the type of culture that creates collections of texts (Lotman, Uspenski 1994: 245). In this type of culture, with respect to the self-understanding of culture, the content of culture is given in advance; it consists of a complex of normalized “correct” texts: for Soviet ideology, these were the works of the classics of Marxism-Leninism, and during the Stalinist period Stalin’s own works. In this type of culture, subject of speech as the generator of reality (content) through utterances only has relative value. Everything novel is in fact predictable and known for those in the know – to the real subjects (Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin).

## 6.2. Paper II

Ventsel, Andreas; Selg, Peeter (2008). Towards a semiotic theory of hegemony: Naming as hegemonic operation in Lotman and Laclau. *Sign System Studies* 36.1, 167–183

Among social scientists, the concept of “political semiotics” has become increasingly prevalent in recent years. Admittedly, its application is usually limited to the description of signs, symbols and images that circulate in political discourse, without asking whether semiotics would have something fruitful to offer for understanding the logic of the construction of political processes themselves. This paper takes a modest step towards political semiotics as a discipline, based on the theory of hegemony by one of the more recognized political theoreticians Ernesto Laclau, and Yuri Lotman’s semiotics of culture. Despite some differences in terminology, there is a deep affinity in the content between the two authors, both being part of the Saussurean tradition.

The fundamental question of political theory is how to conceptualize political power. The present approach proceeds from the tradition that has been developed from Carl Schmitt’s concept of “the Political”, Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and Michel Foucault’s treatment of “discourse” and “power”.

In our understanding, Ernesto Laclau represents one of the most promising and the most theoretically accomplished perspectives in this tradition, especially with his conception of the “empty signifier” as a central category for defining hegemonic relationships. Laclau’s ontological background is, as already mentioned, Saussurean, and one of the central theses of this tradition is that any system of signifiers (discourse) is a system of *differences*. According to Laclau, hegemony – as a particular kind of power relation – should be considered only at the level of discourse: a hegemonic relationship is nothing but an articulation of meanings. This articulation presumes that a particular difference will lose its

particularity and will become the universal embodiment of the system of signifiers as a whole, providing the system with inevitably necessary closure and completion. This particular signifier – the ‘empty signifier’ in Laclau’s terminology – will thereby acquire a dominant position in the system of signifiers, or discourse, subordinating to a greater or lesser extent all other members of the discourse by letting them appear as *equivalent* and by undermining their mutual differences. Paradoxically, this process of undermining results in a certain unity or transparency (systematicity). But since this unity does not result from a metaphysical foundation, but is an effect of *naming*. As Laclau indicates in his later works, the *name* becomes the basis for the thing, i.e. for discourse. Thus a question arises: what are the *forces* behind these activities that allow naming to lay the foundation of discourse? Laclau derives his answer from psychoanalysis, especially from its Lacanian version. This paper makes an attempt to replace it with the conceptions of bilinguality and translation (transference) derived from Lotman’s semiotics of culture, which in the opinion of the present author may open up new and fruitful perspectives for both approaches.

According to Lotman, the basic condition for meaning to be born is bilingual, i.e. discrete and continuous coding. These two languages, however, are mutually completely untranslatable. First and foremost, this incapacity of translating texts from discrete languages to non-discrete/continuous languages determined by their fundamentally different make-up: in discrete linguistic systems, the text takes a secondary role with respect to the sign, i.e. it is clearly separable into signs; thus there is no difficulty in distinguishing the sign as a particular kind of elementary unit. Here a sign is associated with other signs; texts of this kind are characterised by sequences, causes, chronological and logical relationships, typical of narrative texts and experimental sciences. In continuous languages, primacy falls on the text, which cannot be decomposed into signs, but is itself a sign. Thus a question arises: how is it even possible for some sort of a unitary meaning to arise from this opposed yet necessary structure? For Lotman, such a minimal system contains a third component: a block of contingent metaphoric equivalences that makes operations of translation possible in conditions of untranslatability. Let us recall that Laclau’s “empty signifier” finds itself performing the same function – it collects the differences of the signifiers into a chain of equivalence. To put it in Lotman’s terms: in political discourse-text, the non-discrete translation strategy is in operation, i.e. discrete and clearly distinguishable signs are translated into a non-discrete totality. This strategy of equating allows the perception of a *Singular* phenomenon within the different phenomena of the real world, and a *Unitary Object* in the diversity of a class of objects.

However, the strategic function of equating remains unclear until we determine what does this closing off of meaningful discourse – that is, metaphoric translation – take place though? This act is naming. Although by its nature names are discrete, metaphoric naming functions as the name of the totality, and it would be more appropriate to say that only naming will generate

it as a meaningful totality. Paradoxically, in political discourse this is rather similar to mythological acts of naming, which grow out of the lack of distinction between things and names. In order to substantiate the above claims, we present an example from the events of April 2007 in Tallinn. The prevalent (hegemonic) name for these events is the “bronze night” (which by itself is absurd, as it lacks an object). Nevertheless, this name assembles into a chain of equivalence, that is, into a meaningful totality originally completely discrete (separate) events: in addition to the riots, it includes the topic of integration, Russian internal policies, historical memories of the events in June 1940 and the attack of Toompea by the Intermovement in the spring of 1991, etc. They all comprise *one* articulated total discourse-text. If we were to call the events that took place in these April nights “Tallinn Spring” or “public unrest in April”, we would get a chain of equivalence that would consist of entirely different value judgements and events.

The following preliminary conclusions were drawn:

1. Continuous translation strategy dominates the construction of hegemonic political discourse;
2. The primary constitutive act in this case is naming;
3. Political struggle takes place in order to secure meanings to these names;
4. The psychoanalytic concept of *affect* that is presumed to lie behind naming may be replaced with Lotman’s conception of translation without contradicting the theoretical framework.

### 6.3. Paper III

Selg, Peeter; Ventsel, Andreas (2009). An outline for a semiotic theory of hegemony. *Semiotica*, xx–xx. [forthcoming]

This paper represents an attempt to further develop the dialogue between two theoretical approaches – the theory of hegemony by Ernesto Laclau, one of the leading figures of contemporary political theory, and Yuri Lotman’s semiotics of culture – the more distant purpose of which is to develop a conceptual toolkit for better analysing the relationships between social reality and power. Despite their terminological differences, there are important substantial and functional similarities between these authors – the concept of boundary, antagonism, naming, etc. This paper focuses on different strategies for constructing political reality. We offer to replace some of Laclau’s principal theoretical categories with categories drawn from Lotman’s semiotics of culture, in particular with his concept of translation or re-coding. In the previous paper, we demonstrated possibly fruitful analogies in the concept of naming, and provided a brief overview of the coincidence between continuous/discrete coding and the logic of difference/equivalence in the works of these two authors. This paper moves on from there and provides a more in-depth analysis of other theoretical similarities between the two approaches: parallels are drawn between their



treatment of boundaries that close discourse or text (semiosphere) into an imaginary significant totality, the antagonism of excluding boundaries, etc.

We have already drawn attention to the main limitation of Laclau's approach: the inclusion of psychoanalysis. Another weakness is a lack of specific analytical tools, and the under-theorization of everything external to discourse, which allows him to claim that the name underlying discourse is a pure coincidence. By complementing Laclau's approach with different strategies of translation drawn from Lotman's semiotics of culture, it allowed us to conduct a better empirical study of the construction of social reality. The discourse of the *Singing Revolution* is taken as an example.

Primary conclusions:

1. The *Singing Revolution* as the name of a discourse is not pure coincidence;
2. The capacity of this name to assemble the discourse into a totality and to fix itself in the consciousness of the people as the name of this totality has certain explanations in the framework of the semiotics of culture;
3. The reasons for the above can be analysed through various strategies of translation – internal re-coding, external re-coding, multiple external re-coding, etc.;
4. The political falls decisively within culture and is in no way isolated from it.

## 6.4. Paper IV

Ventsel, Andreas (2009). Hegemooniline tähistamisprotsess fotograafias [Hegemonic process of signification in photograph]. *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi*. XX–XX [forthcoming]

This paper tackles the questions that can be briefly formulated as follows: 1) how to visualise power? and 2) does semiotics have anything to offer to research on the visualisation processes of power? One of the means by which power relations are established and reproduced in societies is photographs.

The first part of the paper provides a brief outline of the theoretical framework of political semiotics, primarily based on the ideas of Lotman and Laclau. Then the following question is analysed: how is the hegemonic process of signification expressed in photographs? The analysis provides a typology of distinctions between different representations of “the people” as a homogenous imaginary totality. Examples are provided by photographs published by the press (daily newspapers and magazines) in the Stalinist-era Soviet Estonia. The second part of the paper attempts to complement this brief theoretical outline with other theoretical positions that have been developed especially for analysing visual representations (Barthes's *punctum*, the *iconic photograph* of visual rhetoric, etc.).

Primary conclusions:

1. Certain hegemonic coding strategies were prevalent in the public communicative space (e.g. photographs in newspapers) of the Stalinist era that determined how “the people” should be represented in photography;
2. On the one hand, these were photographs that had acquired the status of an icon in the public space; on the other, there were also internal principles for constructing these very “iconic” photographs, of which the following were distinguished:
  - a. Dominant text as the dominant element of the process of signification depicted in the photograph;
  - b. Code-text as the principle for organizing the elements represented in the photograph and
  - c. Dominant language as the coding system that subordinates all other possible coding languages;
3. Here, too, we may come to the conclusion (cf. Paper I) that the Soviet public *scopic* regime is characteristic of the type of culture that Lotman characterises as a collection of texts, as opposed to the type of culture that creates the collection of texts.

## 6.5. Paper V

Ventsel, Andreas (2009). The role of political rhetoric in the development of Soviet totalitarian language. *Russian Journal of Communication*, Vol. II, No. 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2009), 9–26

This paper analyses the political discourse of the Stalinist era, based on the phenomenon of totalitarian language that was used for the indoctrination of the identity and world-view of Soviet citizens. The issues analysed in this paper are also derived from the phenomenon of totalitarian language. As is well known, the Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology defined itself as a strictly objective, scientific world-view. Scientific discourse is characterised by attempts to minimise the ambiguity of the lexicon, which should ideally halt the drift of signifiers in relation to the signified. One would thus assume that the scientific nature of the reconstruction of society would have an impact on communication and natural language. The characteristics developed by the Russian scientist Nina Kupina, who has dealt extensively with the Soviet totalitarian language, reveal, however, that it is not in fact describable by a rigid connection between the signifiers and the signified, and that the semantic distinctiveness of words in the communicative function is compensated by the precise determination of their location in the axiological good – bad axis.

According to my initial hypothesis, the reasons for this are to be found in the politico-rhetorical origin of totalitarian language, in light of which totalitarian language is to be perceived as a manifestation of power in a rhetorical form.

From this it follows that the function and significance of political rhetoric in the general communicative space of the society has a considerable impact on the normative nature of natural language, especially on the semantic level. In order to demonstrate this, I proceeded from the theoretical framework outlined above, to which I added the view on symbol in the semiotics of culture, according to which symbols can be thought of as a particular type of empty signifier. This allows one to consider the functioning of different types of sign that would especially characterise the practice of signification in political discourse.

1. In political discourse, symbols carry a hegemonizing function;
2. The greater the impact of political rhetoric on constructing the society in general, the greater the impact of the nature of the construction of political discourse on language (including normative, e.g. dictionaries) as a whole;
3. The more totalitarian the society, the greater the role played by ambivalent linguistic elements in the construction of its socio-political reality;
4. The transparency and clarity of verbal contents might have undermined, on the linguistic-discursive level, the most important thesis of a totalitarian society: the Party is always right!

## 7. CONCLUSIONS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR FUTURE SCIENTIFIC WORK

In the component papers of my dissertation, I tried to fulfil those objectives that I had set to myself when commencing this work, as well as those that inevitably arose over the course of writing. Together with this introductory chapter, the dissertation outlines a framework for a semiotic theory of hegemony, and I also demonstrate its applicability for analysing certain social processes. Alas, the logical consequence of this work was to reaffirm the old truism that “the more I know, the less I know”, meaning that as the theoretical framework became ever clearer, the domain of which this dissertation is a part kept on widening. To put it in Lotmanian terms: my semiosphere is part of an ever larger semiosphere and their mutual dialogical relationships need further elaboration.

In what follows I will summarise briefly and point by point all the major conclusions that the dissertation presents, after which I will sketch those further developments that these conclusions point toward for future work.

### 7.1. Conclusions

It is my hope that I managed to demonstrate in my papers that the interdisciplinary approach through the theory of hegemony by the Essex school and the Tartu-Moscow semiotics of culture allows for a more complex analysis of power relations. The source of both can be found in Saussure’s theory of language, in which meaning is seen as resulting from a system of differences. Accordingly, discourse/text, special case of speech, lies in between language and speech. Unlike classical structuralism, however, it is no mere reflection of the absolute world of language, since such a viewpoint has here been abandoned. The value of the structural elements of discourse/text is determined by their function in the totality, and the generation of discourse/text is not an automatic realization of the possibilities of language as it is thought of in structuralism, but a *translation (coding)*.

Perceiving similarities and analogies between these two theories, and the translation of one theory’s lexicon into that of the other is no mere terminological glass bead game, however. Seeing functional similarities between the primary concepts that form the theories allows these theories to engage in mutually complementary dialogue. The following are some of the more important conclusions that were reached in this dissertation:

1. The contribution of semiotics of culture to the theory of hegemony is to provide better methods in the form of different ways of translating and coding. Within the Essex school, discussions on the constitution of discourse are limited only to the general explication of the logic of equivalence and difference within processes of signification. Semiotics of culture supplements this with a number of other relationships of equivalence that are

- relevant for the generation of discourse/text as a significant and delineated totality.
2. Mapping different relationships of equivalence form the basis for a typology of various hegemonic signification processes.
  3. Semiotics of culture avoids introducing psychoanalysis as a final arbiter of its theories and as a “guarantee of truth”, since it remains entirely on the level of signifiers and treats communication as a pre-existing given. Thus semiotics of culture necessarily avoids falling into speculative metaphysics that accompanies any attempt to seek foundational reasons to when and why did (human) communication originate and why does it still function. Nevertheless, the logic of signification of Laclau’s theory of hegemony does not lose its scientific value by letting go of psychoanalysis.
  4. The theory of hegemony brings semiotics of culture into the field of power relations and politics, something which has unjustifiably gone unstudied within this field up until now. This may be due to the subject-matter (art, literature, etc.) on the basis of which the ideas of the semiotics of culture were initially developed.
  5. The theory of hegemony contributes theoretically the question of naming.
  6. By combining semiotics of culture with the theory of hegemony, it is possible to study the constitution of various hegemonic practices of signification in more specific domains, e.g. to analyse only visual discourse (paper IV) and to distinguish different hegemonic means of coding the process of signification.

## **7.2. Problems and possible future developments**

There are plans for developing the component papers of this dissertation into a full-length monograph (co-authored by Peeter Selg), where the ideas presented here are further developed and placed into a wider theoretical context. The present work intersects disciplinarily with semiotics, discourse analysis, but more widely with social and political theories, necessitating a closer dialogue with these disciplines.

My own contribution in this field would be to undermine the positivist attitude still prevalent in social theories today. Positivism as applied to social sciences searches lawlike (probable) explanations in terms of causes and effects. It is clear that this sort of a quantitative method, founded on empirical and statistical measurement of reality, allows for precise mapping and description of many social processes. But by disregarding history and tradition, it addresses socio-political “problems” in light of a technologic-instrumental paradigm and presumes that for every problem there is a “solution” (Bledstein 1976: 34). Apparently, such an approach can sustain itself only on a couple of fundamental premises: 1) rigid causes and effects are the only explanatory relationship between phenomena; 2) there are unambiguously definable phenomena between which this relationship can hold; 3) these phenomena, these facts are something

permanent and stable; 4) such an explanatory framework alone is deemed sufficient for understanding social processes. All of these points consider the influence of language, values, memory, or more generally all cultural factors as irrelevant for studying these processes. It is for these reasons that questions such as: what is meaning? How does it arise in communication? What are its consequences for the general constitution of society? etc. are even today – with few exceptions – undertheorized in the context of social theories.

Once we proceed from the framework presented in here, however, we must approach facts as meaningful units from an entirely different perspective. It does not suffice to say that every fact is always loaded with theory – this would only touch upon the relationship between scientific meta-language and object-language. The watershed is more fundamental – no meaning can ever become completely stabilised due to its bilingual constitution.

My further academic vision would be to integrate Lotman's and Laclau's characteristics of culture and discourse, such as asymmetry and entropy; explosion; the unsolvable tension between organization and non-organization, regularity and non-regularity; antagonism, etc., into a wider social sciences paradigm. By and large, for the social sciences these characteristics describe random and peripheral events and phenomena that are not thought of as substantial parts of social structure. For Lotman and Laclau, however, it is precisely these characteristics that are the primary conditions for cultural development and dynamics. Brought over to social sciences, they would necessitate the rethinking of norm and deviation from the norm; they would also begin to undermine social determinism as a central category in social sciences. In social theoretical thought, they would better highlight political, cultural and other interest group conflicts and antagonisms that play a decisive role in the meaningful constitution of society. This has to do with the relations between the present work and the more general theoretical background.

Proceeding from the framework that has been outlined here, research in the near future could proceed towards more concrete development of the methods of analysis. The further course of empirical research could be thematized as follows:

1) What is the relationship between hegemonic practices of signification and political regimes? For example, how do the totalitarian, authoritarian and democratic hegemonic logic of signification differ? In paper III, this preliminary distinction has been formulated, but it would require a more detailed framework. In the papers that comprise this dissertation, I have for the most part analysed phenomena that are part of the discourse of either totalitarian societies or transition periods, and this makes it possible to claim that in such societies there is a tendency in public communicative space towards the prevalence continuous/equivalent hegemonic practices of signification. Although it may appear that the opposing democratic practice ought to be constituted by a discrete coding system, where the demands of each interest group are perceived separately in their differences from other similar groups and demands, and that these interests should be rationally transparent and communicable towards an

unanimous consensus in the habermasian sense, this nevertheless cannot be taken at face value and as deducible simply from the idea of democracy itself. Such a presumption would hinder any analysis of signification practices in actual social processes. Hegemonic practices of signification should precisely be perceived as lacking any connotations that are born by our current concepts, such as democracy, totalitarianism, authoritarianism, etc. Failing which we will confuse the normative and the epistemological level when establishing the purposes of our research and the choice of method.

2) A second line of further research could focus on that inevitable opposing number of the construction of the identity of “we” – the construction of “the other”. According to semiotics of culture, there is a corresponding “chaos” type for every type of culture, which is not primordial, uniform and always equal to itself, but represents equally active creativity of human beings, i.e. to each historically present type of culture there corresponds a unique type of non-culture (Kultuurisemiootika teesid 1973). Thus the following questions are of interest: a) how is the image of the enemy constructed in politics, and b) what is the logic of signification that characterises exclusion as legitimating pre-existing discourse.

There is more material for further analysis to be found in the current history of Estonia, with which to develop this conceptual framework further and to make it empirically more “waterproof”, than was recounted in the component papers. Contemporary Estonian history provides excellent material for analysis of the transformation of totalitarian power into an authoritarian one (starting from the Khrushchev thaw of the late 1950s), until the final collapse of the Soviet regime in the late 1980s. It was not just the violent suppression of alternative counter-discourses by the Soviet repressive and ideological state apparatuses that ceased, but socio-cultural value judgments were also replaced – the liberal ideology with its cult of the individual became opposed to collectivist ideology more in accordance with Soviet ideology. The times that followed the Singing revolution as a period of transition would allow one to analyse the rise and crystallization of democratic institutions, which should hypothetically be reflected in the transformation of the logic of signification processes.

In conclusion, the primary goals would be: 1) to integrate the present approach to the empirical social sciences paradigm, and 2) to study public communication more generally and to provide a typology of political forms of communication, based on the distinction between discrete and continuous coding strategies, and to study their rhetorical expressions.

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## SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

### Semiootilise hegemooniateooria suunas

Käesolev dissertatsioon koosneb sissejuhatavast peatükist ja viiest artiklist (3 on publitseeritud, kaks on aktsepteeritud ja ilmuvad lähima aasta jooksul, vt ilmumisanimeid). Lisatud artiklid moodustavad põhiosa teadustööst, mida olen teinud doktoriõppe käigus aastatel 2005–2009. Need keskenduvad peamiselt poliitilise semiootika kui spetsiifilise teadusdistsipliini välja töötamisele, mis annaks uurijale paremad vahendid poliitika valdkonna analüüsimiseks. Selle raames osutus vajalikuks traditsiooniliselt poliitilist diskursust määratlevate võtmemõistete – võimusuhe, identiteet, valik jne – ümbermõtestamine semiootilisest vaatevinklist ja täiendamine semiootikast pärit mõistetega. Teoreetilises plaanis püüdsin antud ülesandele läheneda ennekõike Tartu-Moskva kultuuri-semiootika ja Essexi koolkonna hegemooniateooria vaatepunktist.

Käsitledes semiootikat ja poliitikateadust laiemalt sotsiaalteaduslikku paradigmat kuuluvatena, näeksin dissertatsiooni ühe kaugema eesmärgina tänaseni veel sotsiaalteooriates laialt levinud positivistliku arusaama õõnestamist. Positivistlik lähenemine rakendatuna sotsiaalteadustele otsib seaduspäraseid (tõenäolisi) seletusi põhjus-tagajärje mõistetes. On selge, et niisugune, paljuski empiirilisel ja statistiliselt mõõdetavale reaalsuse käsitlusele ülesehitatud kvantitatiivne meetod lubab paljusid ühiskonna protsesse üpris täpselt kaardistada ja kirjeldada. Eirates ajalugu ja traditsiooni, käsitleb ta sotsiaalpoliitilisi “probleeme” tehnilis-instrumentaalse paradigma valguses ja eeldab et igale probleemile on ka “lahendus” (Bledstein 1976: 34). Kuid tundub, et niisugune lähenemine saab ise püsida paaril-kolmel fundamentaalsel eeldusel: 1) jäik põhjus-tagajärje on ainuke seletav suhe nähtuste vahel; 2) on olemas üheselt määratletud nähtused, faktid, millede vahel see suhe saaks toimida; 3) need nähtused, faktid on midagi püsivat ja stabiilset; 4) niisugune seletusskeem arvatakse olevat piisav mõistmaks ühiskonnas toimuvaid protsesse. Need loetletud eeldused peavad ebaoluliseks keele, väärtuste, mälu ehk üldisemalt kultuuriliste tegurite mõju nende protsesside uurimisel. Seetõttu on küsimused, nagu: mis on tähendus?; kuidas see tekib kommunikatsioonis?; mis on selle tagajärje ühiskonna üldises konstitutsioonis? jne., senini – väljaarvatud mõni üksik erand – sotsiaalteooriate kontekstis alateoretiseeritud. Kui lähtume siin töös esitatud raamistikust, siis peame näiteks fakte kui tähenduslikule ühikule lähenema hoopis teistsugusest vaatenurgast. Ei piisa, kui öelda, et iga fakt on alati teooriast koormatud – see puudutaks peamiselt teadusliku metakeele ja objektkeele suhet. Veelahe on siin fundamentaalsem – ükski tähendus ei saagi lõplikult stabiliseeruda oma (minimaalselt) kakskeelse konstitutsiooni tõttu.

Käesolevas dissertatsioonis (ja ka oma edasistes akadeemilistes uurimistes) olen püüdnud integreerida Lotmani ja Laclau kultuuri ja diskursusekarakteristikuid nagu asümmeetria ja entroopia; plahvatus; ületamatu pinge organiseerituse ja mitte-organiseerituse, regulaarsuste ja ebaregulaarsuste vahel; anta-

gonism jne laiemasse sotsiaalteaduste paradigmasse. Enamasti iseloomustatakse sotsiaalteadustes äsjanimetatud tunnustega juhuslikke ja perifeerseid sündmusi ning nähtusi, mis sotsiaalsesse struktuuri olemuslikult ei kuulu. Lotmanil ja Laclaul on need aga justnimelt kultuuri enese konstitutsioonis – on kultuurilise arengu ja dünaamika esmasteks tingimusteks. Sotsiaalteadustesse ülekantuna vajaks sellisel juhul uues valguses ümbermõtestamist normi ja normist hälbimise vahekord. Samuti eeldab see sotsiaalse determinismi kui sotsiaalteaduste keskse kategooria õõnestamist ehk kõige selle küsitavaks seadmist, mida ülal sai silmas peetud sotsiaalteaduste positivistliku lähenemise all. Siis saavad sotsiaalteoreetilises mõtlemises enam kaardile toodud ka poliitilised, kultuurilised ja muud huvide konfliktid ja antagonismid, mis etendavad otsustavat rolli ühiskonna tähenduslikus konstitutsioonis.

Peamise analüüsimaterjalina olen oma uurimustöös kasutatud Eesti lähiajalugu, peamiselt Nõukogude perioodil ja Eesti taasiseseisvumise eelsel ja järgsel ajal ühiskonna identiteeti kujundanud fenomene käsitledes, kuid tehes selgitavaid vahelepõikeid ka varasemasse perioodi (nt. Laulupidude traditsiooni analüüsimisel artiklis III). See on kantud kahest üksteist täiendavast soovist: esiteks, reflekteerivalt vaadata neid protsesse, mis peaksid olema siinkirjutaja arvates mõju avaldanud ka käimasolevatele suundumustele Eesti ühiskondlikus elus; teiseks, pakub eesti lähiajalugu sedavõrd huvitavat ja kontrastset, paraku ka traagilist materjali, mis peaks olema kindlasti huvipakkuvad ka laiemale publikule võõrsil. Olen nendest eeldustest lähtunud juba oma Tartu Ülikooli studiumi käigus alates 1998 aastast. Nii olen bakalaureusetöös (2002) käsitlenud 1940 aastal toimunud ideoloogilist ja režiimilist võimuvahetust pragmaatilisest ja mõjutuspühholoogilisest aspektist, magistrیتöös (2005) analüüsisin, kuidas konstrueeriti avalikus kommunikatsiooniruumis “meie” ehk rahva kategooria 1940–1953. aastatel ehk perioodil, mil lühikese aja jooksul okupeeris Eestit kaks üksteisele ideoloogiliselt vastanduvat totalitaarset okupatsioonirežiimi – stalinistlik Venemaa ja hitlerlik Saksamaa.

Enne kui kirjeldan lühidalt, milline on käesoleva töö struktuur, üks täpsustav märkus analüüsi objekti ja analüüsi materjali kohta. Töö eesmärk, nagu juba öeldud, on ennekõike teoreetiline, kus erinevate kultuurisemiootiliste ja hegemooniateoreetiliste mõistetevaheliste analoogiate välja toomisega, nende funktsionaalse kõrvutamise kaudu, tahetakse luua ühtne kontseptuaalne raamistik, mis arvestaks mõlema lähenemise positiivsete panustega ning samas osutaks ka teoreetilistele puudujääkidele, mis selle integreerumise on üldse vajalikus teinud. Teisalt olen olnud alati seda meelt, et teoreetilised kontseptsioonid ei tohi jääda vaikiollu paberile, vaid et need leiaksid ka reaalsel rakedust empiirilise materjali analüüsides. Sestap on seda integreerivat tegevust toetatud erinevate fenomenide analüüsides, mis neid tulemusi peaks kinnitama. Kuid nagu eesmärgist võib arvata, on rõhuasetus siiski ennekõike teoreetilise raamistiku loomisel, millega saaks edaspidi konkreetsemaid ja mahukamaid analüüse ette võtta.

Käesoleva dissertatsiooni 5 komponentartiklit on reastatud teema arengu enda loogikast lähtuvalt ning peegeldavad probleemipüstitusest üleminekut

võimalikele lahendustele. Nii visandatakse I artiklis võimusuhte analüüsi (tõsi, veel suhteliselt implitsiitsel kujul) probleemsituatsioon. Ennekõike piirdatakse siin ühe alternatiivse lähenemise rakendamisega poliitiliste võimusuhte uurimisel, uurides võimusuhte väljendumist poliitilistes kõnedes kasutatud asendade (deiktikute) analüüsimise kaudu. Järgnevad artiklid (II, III, IV ja V) keskenduvad aga juba nimetatud semiootilise hegemooniateooria raamistiku välja töötamisele ja edasiarendustele. Artiklites II ja III (kaasautor Peeter Selg) visandatakse üksikasjalikult selle teoreetilise lähenemise mudel, kasutades analüüsimaterjalina Pronksiöö ja Laulva revolutsiooni diskursust. Artiklis IV püütakse eelnevates artiklites loodud teoreetilisest baasist lähtudes eristada mõningaid võimu visualiseerimise tähistamispraktikaid, uurides milliste hegemooniliste tähistamisstrateegiate kaudu loodi Stalini-ajastu avalikus pilditootmisrežiimis fotodel “rahvas”. Siin on lisaks eelpool nimetatud lähenemistele kasutatud veel Roland Barthes’i fotograafiaalaseid semiootilisi ja visuaalretoorika seisukohti. Artiklis V aga püüan nõukogude totalitaarsele fenomeni seletada üldnimetatud artiklites loodud raamistikust. Kõik need viis artiklid saavad sissejuhatavas osas (alapeatükk 5) ka lühidalt kirjeldatud. Artiklid on esitatud dissertatsioonis inglise keelsetena ja on läbinud pime-eelretsenseeringu. Kuigi üks nendest (artikkel IV) on avaldamiseks vastu võetud eesti keelses ajakirjas *Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi*, on autor dissertatsiooni lisanud artikli inglise keelse versiooni. See on põhjendatav dissetratsiooni ükskeelsuse taotlusega, mis annaks võimaluse kasutada eesti keelt mitte oskavat oponenti.

Dissertatsiooni kuuluvad viis artiklit käsitlevad suhteliselt kompaktset objekti, mistõttu minu sissejuhatav peatükk ehk nende artiklite nõ. katusartikkel, on ennekõike oma sisus motiveeritud dissertatsiooni moodustavate artiklite puudujääkidest. Viimane on omakorda enamjaolt põhjustatud avaldatud artiklite auditoriumi eeldavatest ootustest ja artiklite mahulistest piirangutest, mis ei lubanud kõike, mis üldise tausta mõistmiseks vajalik oleks olnud, artiklitesse sisse kirjutada. Sissejuhatus koosneb ise 7 erinevast alapeatükist. Käesoleva töö peamisteks teoreetilisteks mõisteteks on võim, diskursus ja tekst. Sissejuhatuse teises osas püüan täpsustada seisukohta, kuidas antud töös võimu kontseptualiseeritakse. Seejärel annan lühikese ülevaate antud töö kontekstis relevantse teksti ja diskursuse uurimise traditsiooni ja nende mõistetega kaasnenud problemaatikasse ning püüan näidata mõlema traditsiooni teoreetilisi piire (osa 3 ja 4), millelt viljakat edasi mõtlemist võimaldavad siinkirjutaja arvates Essexi koolkonna kontseptsioon hegemoonilisest tühjast tähistajast ja TMK teksti (semiosfääri) käsitus (osa 5). Viienda osa lõpus püüan lühidalt positsioneerida kultuurisemiootika ja hegemooniateooria omavahelise interdistsiplinaarse suhte poliitilise semiootika vaatevinklist lähtudes. Kuuendas osas teen lühikesed kokkuvõtted dissertatsiooni kuuluvatest komponentartiklitest. Sissejuhatava peatüki lõpetavad kokkuvõtvad järeldused ja ennekõike teatud visand eelseisvaks tööks (7 osa), mis küll siin artiklites pole piisavalt kajastust leidnud, kuid mille vajalikkuses ei kahtle autor mitte.

Loodetavasti suutsin artiklites veenvalt näidata, et Essexi koolkonna hegemooniateooria ja Tartu-Moskva kultuurisemiootika interdistsiplinaarne

käsitlus võimaldab komplekssemalt uurida võimusuhteid. Mõlema lähenemise alglatteid võib leida Saussure'i keeleteoorias, kus tähendust vaadeldakse pelgalt erinevuste süsteemi tagajärjena. Diskursus/tekst kuulub selle järgi keele ja kõne vahepeale kui kõne erijuht. Erinevalt klassikalisest struktualismist ei ole see lihtne peegeldus keele absoluutsest maailmast, sest sellisest eeldusest on siin loobutud. Diskursuse/teksti struktuuri elementide väärtuse määrab ära nende funktsioon tervikus ja diskursuse/teksti genereerimine pole antud keelevõimaluste automaatne realiseerimine nagu struktualismis, vaid *tõlge (kodeerimine)*.

Seejuures pole nende kahe teooriavaheliste sarnasuste ja analoogiate nägemine ja ühe teooria sõnavara tõlkimine teise teooria keelde pelk terminitevaheline klaaspärlimäng. Peamiste teooriat moodustavate mõistete vahel funktsionaalsete sarnasuste nägemine võimaldab astuda neil teooriatel omavahel üksteist täiendavasse dialoogi. Järgnevalt loetlengi mõned olulisemad järeldused, milleni dissertatsioonis jõuti:

1. Kultuurisemiootika panus hegemooniateooriale oleks erinevate tõlke ehk kodeerimisviiside näol parema metodoloogia võimaldamine. Essexi koolkonnas on piirdutud diskursuse konstitutsioonist rääkides üksnes samaväärsus(ekvivalentsus)loogika ja erinevusloogika üldise toimimise esitamisega tähistamisprotsessides. Kultuurisemiootika lisab siia rea teisi ekvivalentsusuheteid, mis on diskursuse/teksti kui tähendusliku ja piiritletud terviku moodustamisel relevantset.
2. Erinevate ekvivalentsussuhete kaardistamine on aluseks erinevate hegemooniliste tähistamisprotsesside tüpoloogiale.
3. Kultuurisemiootika väldib psühhoanalüüsi sissetoomist oma teooria lõpp-instantsiks ja "tõegarandiks", kuna jääb üksnes tähistajate tasandile ja võtab kommunikatsiooni kui olemasolevat antust. Sellega väldib kultuurisemiootika paratamatult spekulatiivsesse metafüüsikasse kaldumist, mis kaasneb, kui otsitakse algpõhjusti kuna ja miks (inim)kommunikatsioon ja ühes sellega tähendus tekkis ning miks see ikkagi veel toimib. Seejuures ei kaota Laclau hegemooniateooria tähistamisprotsessi loogika psühhoanalüüsist loobumisel oma teadusliku väärtust.
4. Hegemooniateooria toob kultuurisemiootika võimusuhte ja poliitika uurimise väljale, kus ta varem õigustamatult on tähelepanuta jäänud. Viimane asjaolu võib olla tingitud materjalist (kunst, kirjandus jne), mille peal kultuurisemiootilised ideed on välja arendatud.
5. Hegemooniateooria lisab teoreetilise panuse nimetamise problemaatikale.
6. Ühendades kultuurisemiootika hegemooniateooriaga, võimaldab see uurida erinevate hegemooniliste tähistuspraktikate konstitutsiooni spetsiifilisemate objektvaldkondade peal, nt analüüsida üksnes visuaalset diskursust (artikkel IV) ja eristada seal tähistusprotsessi erinevad hegemoonilised kodeerimisviisid.

Alljärgnevalt refereerin lühidalt dissertatsiooni komponentartiklite sisu ja tulemusi.

## Artikkel I

Ventsel, Andreas (2007). The construction of the 'we'- category: Political rhetoric in Soviet Estonia from June 1940 to July 1941 ['Meie'- kategooria konstrueerimine Nõukogude Eesti poliitilises retoorikas juunist 1940.a. – juuli 1941. A. ]. Sign System Studies 35. ½, 249–267

Eesti Vabariigi okupeerimine Nõukogude Liidu poolt 1940. aasta juunis mõjus inimestele šokina. Endised ühiskonda konstrueerivad ja inimeste mõttemaailma jaoks olulised tähendused muudeti miinuskärgiliseks ja asendati nõukogude ideoloogilise maailmapildiga. Käesolev artikkel analüüsiski, kuidas 1940. aastal aset leidnud sündmusi toetav ideoloogia leidis väljenduse uute võimumeeste kõnedes. Huviväärseks muutis analüüsi asjaolu, et poliitilise reaalsuse ideoloogiline konstrueerimine on ühtlasi üheks inimese identiteeti määratlevaks faktoriks. Analüüsi materjaliks oli tollaste suurimate päevalehtede *Päevalehe* 1938., 1939. ja 1940. aastakäigu ning 1940.–1941. aastal ilmunud *Rahva Hääle* numbrid. Põhilise osa allikatest moodustasid ajakirjanduses ilmunud poliitikute sõnavõttud ja päevalehtede juhtkirjad. Ajakirjanduse valimine empiirilise uurimise objektiks oli põhjendatav mitmeti: ajakirjanduses (eriti päevasündmusi kajastavates väljaannetes) peegelduvad sootsiumi maailmapilt, ideoloogia ja väärtusorientatsioonid (Lauk, Maimik 1998 : 80).

Käesoleva uurimuse konkreetseks objektiks oli valitud *meie*-kategooria konstrueerimine poliitilises diskursuses. Semantiliselt paralleelselt oli siinse artikli raames kasutusel poliitilises retoorikas käibivad võtmesõnad nagu *rahva tahe*, *rahvas* jne, ehk see, kelle nimel poliitikas räägitakse. "Diskursuse" mõiste, nagu seda on arendanud mõned "kaasaegsed lähenemised poliitilisele analüüsile, evib kaugeid juuri nn moodsa filosoofia transtsendentaalses pöördes – see tähendab, analüüsitüübis, mille põhitähelepanu pole suunatud mitte *faktidele*, vaid nende *võimalikkuse tingimustele*" (Laclau 1993: 431). Üks neid võimalikkuse tingimusi, mille kaudu võimu suhe konstrueerub, on deiktiku kasutamine. Siin töös lähtuti ennekõike Emile Benveniste ja Karl Bühleri deiktikute käsitlelustest.

Peamised järeldused:

1. Esimest nõukogude võimu aega (1940–1941) Eestis võib jagada kaheks perioodiks. Esimest perioodi võiks tinglikult dateerida 21 juunist kuni "juulivalimisteni" 1940 aastal. Poliitilises retoorikas üritati luua ühtne monoliitne subjekt. Ühtsust võimu ja rahva vahel kirjeldati kõnedes aktiivsuse, loovuse ja vabaduse kategooriates.
2. Alates Eesti Nõukogude Vabariigi "vastuvõtmisest" Nõukogude Liitu 6. augustil 1940. aastal toimus võimudepooles "meie" enesekirjelduses oluline nihe. Kohalik "rahvas" oli taandatud passiivse vastuvõtja rolli, kus ta allutati marksistlik-leninlik ideoloogiale, Stalin ja tema Partei diktaadile ja tahtele. Selleks kasutati erinevaid retoorilisi vahendeid (deiktikute kasutamine, tegusõnade passiivsed vormid jne).
3. Nõukogude ideoloogia sarnaneb kultuuritüübiga (kui käsitleme ideoloogiat siin kontekstis kultuuri sünonüümina), mida Lotman iseloomustab kui

tekstide kogumikku ja mis vastandub kultuuritüübile, mis tekstikogumit loob (Lotman, Uspenski 1994: 245). Kultuuri sisu on kultuuri enesemõistmise seisukohast selles kultuuritüübis etteantud, see koosneb normeeritud «õigete» tekstide summast: nõukogude ideoloogias olid nendeks marksism-leninismi klassikute teosed, Stalini-ajastul aga eelkõige Stalini enda teosed. Sellises kultuuritüübis on kõne subjektidel kui lausungis tegelikkuse (sisu) loojal suhteline väärtus. Kõik uus on tegelikult etteennustatav ja teadjatele – tõelistele subjektidele (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin) – teada.

## Artikkel II

Ventsel, Andreas; Selg, Peeter (2008). Towards a semiotic theory of hegemony: Naming as hegemonic operation in Lotman and Laclau [Semiootilise hegemooniateooria suunas: nimetamine kui hegemooniline operatsioon Lotmanil ja Laclaul]. *Sign System Studies* 36.1, 167–183

Sotsiaalteadlaste hulgas on termin „poliitiline semiootika” viimastel aastatel üha enam kõlanud. Tõsi, enamjaolt piirdub see poliitilises diskursuses ringlevate märkide, sümbolite, kujundite kirjeldamisega, esitamata küsimust, kas semiootikal oleks midagi panustada ka poliitiliste protsesside konstrueerimise loogika enese uurimisse. Alljärgnev artikkel oli poliitilise semiootika kui distsipliini suunas tehtud tagasihoidlik samm, mis lähtus kaasaja ühe tunnustatuma poliitikateoreetiku Ernesto Laclau hegemooniateooriast ja Juri Lotmani kultuurisemiootilistest ideedest. Hoolimata metakeelte terminoloogilisest erinevusest, näeme nende autorite käsitlustes olulisi sisulisi ja funktsionaalseid lõikumispunkte – piiri mõiste, antagonism, nimetamine jne. Pealegi kuuluvad mõlemad, loomulikult teatud reservatsioonidega, saussure’likku traditsiooni.

Poliitilise teooria fundamentaalne küsimus on, kuidas kontseptualiseerida poliitilist võimu. Siinne lähenemine lähtub traditsioonist, mis on kujunenud läbi Carl Schmitti „poliitilisuse” mõiste, Antonio Gramsci hegemooniateooria ja Michel Foucault’ „diskursuse” ja „võimu” käsitluse.

Meie arusaamise kohaselt esindab Ernesto Laclau üht kõige paljulubavamat perspektiivi selles teoreetilises traditsioonis, iseäranis oma kontseptsiooniga „tühjast tähistajast”, kui hegemoonse suhte määratlemise kesksest kategooriast. Laclau ontoloogiline taust on, nagu öeldud, saussure’lik: viimase üks kesksemaid teese on, et mis tahes tähistussüsteem (diskursus) on *erinevuste* süsteem. Laclau järgi tuleks hegemooniat mõtestada üksnes diskursuse pinnal: hegemoonne suhe pole midagi muud kui tähenduste liigendus. See liigendus eeldab, et mingi partikulaarne erinevus kaotab oma partikulaarsuse ning saab tähistamissüsteemi kui terviku universaalseks kehastajaks, pakkudes süsteemile vältimatult vajalikku suletust ja terviklikkust. See partikulaarne tähistaja – Laclau terminoloogias „tühi tähistaja”, – omandab sel viisil tähistamissüsteemis ehk diskursuses domineeriva positsiooni, allutades enesele rohkemal või vähemal määral kõik muud diskursuse liikmed, lastes neil paista *samaväärsetena* ning õõnestades nende omavahelist erinevust. Paradoksaalsel moel



saavutatakse sellise õõnestamise kaudu teatud ühtsus või läbipaistvus (süsteemsus). Kuid see ühtsus ei tulene mingisugusest metafüüsilisest alusest, vaid on *nimetamise* efekt. Nagu Laclau osutab oma hilisemates töödes, *nimi* saab aluseks asjale, st diskursusele. Ning siin kerkib üles küsimus: mis on need *jõud* nonde toimingute taga, mis võimaldavad nimetamisel olla diskursuse aluseks. Laclau ammutab oma vastuse psühhoanalüüsist, eriti selle lacanlikust varian-dist. Käesolev artikkel püüdis seda asendada Lotmani kultuurisemiootikast pärit teksti kakskeelsuse ja tõlke (siirde) kontseptsiooniga, mis autorite arvates võib avada mõlema lähenemise jaoks uusi ja viljakaid perspektiive.

Lotmani järgi on mis tahes tähendustekke elementaartingimuseks kaks-keelne, s.o diskreetne ja kontinuaalne kodeerimine. Seejuures on need keeled vastastikku täielikult tõlkimatud. Ennekoike on võimatus täpselt tõlkida tekste diskreetsetest keeltest mittediskreetsetesse-kontinuaalsetesse ja tagasi tingitud nende põhimõtteliselt erinevast ehitusest: diskreetsetes keelelistes süsteemides on tekst märgi suhtes sekundaarne, s.t jaguneb selgelt märkideks. Ei ole raske eristada märki kui teatud algset elementaarset ühikut. Märk seostub siin märgiga ning seda tüüpi tekste iseloomustavad järjestused, kausaalsed, krono-loogilised ja loogilised seosed, mis on iseloomulikud jutustavatele tekstidele ja eksperimentaalteadustele. Kontinuaalsetes keeltes on esmane tekst, mis ei lagune märkideks, vaid on ise märk. Tekib küsimus: kuidas on sellises vastand-likus, kuid paratamatus struktuuris mingi tervikliku tähenduse tekkimine üldse võimalik? Lotmani järgi kätkeb selline minimaalne struktuur ka kolmandat osist: tinglike metafoorsete ekvivalentsuste plokki, mis võimaldab tõlke-operatsioone tõlkimatuse tingimustes. Meenutagem, et samas funktsioonis asub Laclau „tühi tähistaja” – ta koondab tähistajate erinevused – samaväärsus-ahelasse. Kasutades Lotmani terminoloogiat: poliitilises diskursuses-tekstis prevaleerib mitte-diskreetne tõlkimisstrateegia, s.t diskreetsed ja üksteisest selgesti eristuvad märgid tõlgitakse mitte-diskreetseks tervikuks. See samas-tamise strateegia laseb reaalse maailma erinevates nähtustes näha *Ühe* nähtuse märke ja ühe klassi objektide mitmekesisuses *Ühtset Objekti*.

Samastamise strateegiline funktsioon jääb aga ebaselgeks, kuni on vasta-mata, mille läbi saab teoks see tähendusliku diskursuse sulgemine ehk siis metafoorne tõlge. See toinguakt on nimetamine. Kuigi oma loomult on nimi diskreetne, funktsioneerib metafoorne nimetamine kogu tähendusliku terviku nimena ning õigem oleks öelda, et alles loob selle kui tähendusliku terviku. Poliitilises diskursuses sarnaneb see paradoksaalsel kombel mütoloogilise nimetamisega, mis kasvab välja asja ja nime eristamatusest. Laclau sõnul poleks siin tegemist mitte nime ja objekti ekvivalentsusega, vaid identsusega. Toome eelneva kinnituseks näite 2007. aasta aprillisündmustest Tallinnas. Prevaleeriv (hegemoonne) nimi nendele sündmustele on „pronksiöö” (mis iseenesest on absurdne, kuna puudub objekt). Ometigi koondab see nimi samaväärsusahelasse ehk tähenduslikku tervikusse algupäraselt täiesti diskreet-sed (eraldi seisvad) sündmused: lisaks märulile veel ka integratsiooni-temaa-tika, Venemaa sisepoliitika, ajaloomälust lisaks 1940. aasta juunisündmused ning Interrinde rünnaku Toompeale 1991. aasta kevadel jne. Nad kõik

moodustavad *Ühe* liigendatud tervikliku diskursuse-teksti. Kui nüüd nimetada neid aprilliööde sündmusi näiteks „Tallinna Kevadeks” või „aprilli rahvarahutusteks”, saaksime hoopis teistsugustest hinnangutest ja sündmustest moodustunud samaväärsusahela.

Kokkuvõttes võime teha esialgsed järeldused:

1. hegemoonse poliitilise diskursuse konstrueerimises valitseb kontinuaalne tähistamisstrateegia.
2. Peamine konstitutiivne toiming on siin nimetamine.
3. Poliitiline võitlus käib nende nimede tähenduste loomise eest.
4. Nimetamise tagaasetseva psühhoanalüütilise *affekti* mõiste võime teoreetilise raamistikuga vastuollu sattumata asendada Lotmani tõlkimise kontseptsiooniga.

### Artikkel III

Selg, Peeter; Ventsel, Andreas (2009). An outline for a semiotic theory of hegemony [Visandusi semiootilisele hegemooniateooriale]. *Semiotica*, xx–xx. [ilmu-mas]

Käesolev artikkel oli katse edasi arendada dialoogi kahe teoreetilise käsitluse vahel – need on nüüdisaegse poliitilise teooria ühe juhtfiguuri Ernesto Laclau hegemooniateooria ning Juri Lotmani kultuurisemiootiline lähenemine – mille kaugem eesmärk oleks välja töötada kontseptuaalsed vahendid, hõlmamaks selgemini sotsiaalse reaalsuse ja võimu vahekordi. Siinses artiklis keskendutakse erinevatele strateegiatele poliitilise reaalsuse konstrueerimisel. Me pakume välja võimaluse asendada mõned Laclau peamised teoreetilised kategooriad Lotmani kultuurisemiootika kategooriatega, eriti tema tõlke ehk ümberkodeerimise mõistega. Eelmises artiklis näitasime võimalikke viljakaid analoogiaid nimetamise mõistega ja esitasime põgusalt kontinuaalse/diskreetse kodeerimise ja samaväärsusloogika/erinevusloogika funktsionaalsetele kokkulangevustele nende autorite teooriates. Käesolev artikkel liigub siit edasi ja toob süvendatult esile teised teoreetilised sarnasused nende kahe lähenemise vahel: analüüsivalt kõrvutatakse mõlema autori piiri käsitlust, mis sulgeb diskursuse või teksti (semiosfääri) mõtteliseks tähenduslikuks tervikuks, välistavate piiride anatagonismi jne.

Laclau lähenemise puudustena oleme maininud juba psühhoanalüütilise käsitluse sissetoomist. Teiseks nõrkuseks on konkreetsete analüüsivahendite puudumine ja diskursusevälise alateoretiseeritus, mis lubab tal väita, et diskursuse aluseks olev nimi on puhas sattumuslikkus. Täiendades Laclau lähenemist Lotmani kultuurisemiootikast pärit erinevate tõlkestrateegiatega võimaldas see paremini uurida empiirilisel sotsiaalse reaalsuse konstrueerimist. Näiteks oli valitud *Laulva revolutsiooni* diskursus.

Peamised järeldused:

1. *Laulev revolutsioon* diskursuse nimena ei ole puhas sattumuslikkus.
2. Selle nime võime koondada diskursus ühtsusse ja kinnitada rahva teadvuses kui selle totaalsuse nimi evib teatud kultuurisemiootilisi seletusi.
3. Nende põhjusi saab analüüsida erinevate tõlkestrateegiate – sisemine ümberkodeering, väline ümberkodeering, mitmene väline ümberkodeering jne – kaudu.
4. Poliitilisus on otsustaval moel kultuuri osa ja ei asetse kuidagi sellest isoleerituna.

#### Artikkel IV

Ventsel, Andreas (2009). Hegemooniline tähistamisprotsess fotograafias. Kunstiteaduslikke uurimusi. XX–XX

Käesolev artikkel tegeles küsimustega, mida võib lühidalt sõnastada järgnevalt: 1) kuidas visualiseerida võimu? ja 2) kas semiootikal oleks midagi pakkuda võimu visualiseerimisprotsesside uurimisele? Üks neid vahendeid, mille kaudu ühiskonnas võimusuhet kehtestatakse ja taastoodetakse, on fotod

Artikli esimeses osas visandatakse lühidalt poliitika semiootika teoreetiline raamistik, mis tugineb peamiselt Lotmani ja Laclau ideedele. Ning seejärel tematiseeritakse küsimus: kuidas hegemooniline tähistamisprotsess võiks väljenduda fotodel. Analüüsi objektiks oli valitud “rahva” kui homogeense mõttelise terviku kujutamise tüpoloogiatega eristus. Näite materjalina kasutati Stalini-aegses Nõukogude Eesti ajakirjanduses (päevalehed ja ajakirjad) avaldatud fotosid. Töö teises osas püüdsin visandatud teoreetilist baasi täiendada teiste spetsiaalselt visuaalsetele representatsioonidele analüüsile keskendunud teoreetiliste seisukohtadega (Barthes'i punctum, visuaalretoorika *iconic photograph* jne).

Peamised järeldused:

1. Stalini-ajastu avalikus kommunikatsiooniruumis (fotod ajalehtedes) prevaleerisid teatud hegemoonilised kodeerimisstrateegiad, mis määrasid kuidas fotodel kujutada „rahvast“.
2. Nendeks olid üheltpoolt fotod, mis olid avalikus ruumis saanud niiõelda ikooni staatuse; teisalt aga nende samade „ikooniliste“ fotode enda sisemised konstrueerimise printsiibid, milles sai eristatud järgnevad kodeerimisvõtted:
  - a) dominanttekst kui fotol kujutatud tähistamisprotsessi dominantne element;
  - b) koodtekst kui fotol kujutatud elementide omavaheliste suhete organiseerimise printsiip ning
  - c) dominantkeel kui kodeeriv süsteem, mis allutab tähistamisprotsessis teised võimalikud kodeerivad keeled.
3. Ka siin võis teha järelduse (vt artikkel I), et nõukogude avalik *skoopiline* režiim on iseloomulik kultuuritüübile, mida Lotman iseloomustab kui tekstide kogumikku ja mis vastandub kultuuritüübile, mis tekstikogumit loob

## Artikkel V

Ventsel, Andreas. (2009). The role of political rhetoric in the development of Soviet totalitarian language [Poliitilise retoorika ja nõukogude totalitaarkeel]. Russian Journal of Communication, x–x. [ilmumas]

Artiklis analüüsisin Stalini-ajastu poliitilist diskursust läbi totalitaarkeele fenomeni, mille vahendusel indoktrineeriti nõukogude inimese identiteet ja maailmavaade. Totalitaarkeele fenomenist tõukus ka artikli probleemipüstitus. Teadupärast määratles nõukogude marksistlik-leninistlik ideoloogia ennast rangelt objektiivse teadusliku maailmavaatena. Teaduskeelt iseloomustab püüdlus minimiseerida sõnavara mitmetimõistetavus ning ideaalis peaks see peatama tähistajate triivi tähistatavate suhtes. Võiks arvata, et ühiskonna ümberehitamise teaduslikkus avaldab mõju ka kommunikatsioonile ja loomulikule keelele. Nõukogude totalitaarkeelega põhjalikumalt tegelenud vene teadlase Nina Kupina välja töötud karakteristikutest selgub aga, et seda ei iseloomusta kaugeltki tähistajate ja tähistavate jäik side ning sõnade semantilist distinktiivsust kommunikatiivses funktsioonis kompenseerib nende asukoha täpne määratlemine aksioloogilisel hea – halb teljel.

Minu algse hüpoteesi järgi tuli selle põhjusi otsida totalitaarkeele poliitilis-retoorilisest algupärast, mille valguses võib totalitaarkeelt näha võimu avaldumise retoorilise vormina. See tähendab aga, et poliitilise retoorika funktsioon ja tähtsus ühiskonna üldises kommunikatsiooniruumis mõjutab oluliselt loomuliku keele normatiivsust, eriti semantikat. Selle näitamiseks lähtusin eelpool visandatud teoreetilisest raamistikust, millele lisasin kultuurisemiootilise sümboli käsitle, mille valguses võib sümbolit pidada eri liiki tühjaks tähistajaks. Siit edasi võiks mõelda eri märgiliikide funktsioneerimisele, mis iseloomustaks ennekõike poliitilise diskursuse tähistuspraktikat.

1. Sümbol esineb poliitilises diskursuses hegemoniseerivas funktsioonis
2. Mida suurem on poliitilise retoorika mõju ühiskondlikkuse konstrueerimisel tervikuna, seda suuremat mõju avaldab poliitilise diskursuse konstrueerimise eripära keelele (ka normatiivsele, nt sõnaraamatud) tervikuna.
3. Mida totalitaarsem on ühiskond, seda suuremat rolli mängivad selle sotsio-poliitilise reaalsuse konstrueerimisel sisult ambivalentsed keele elemendid.
4. Sõnade sisuline läbipaistvus ja selgus oleks keelelis-diskursiivsel tasandil võinud õõnestada totalitaarse ühiskonna tähtsaimat teesi: Parteil on alati õigus!

## **PUBLICATIONS**





Ventsel, Andreas (2007).  
The construction of the 'we'-category: Political rhetoric  
in Soviet Estonia from June 1940 to July 1941.  
*Sign System Studies* 35. ½, 249–267



## **The construction of the ‘we’-category: Political rhetoric in Soviet Estonia from June 1940 to July 1941**

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**Abstract.** The article asks, how one of the basic notions of cultural-political identity — *we* — is constructed in mass media, viz. which kind of semiotic and linguistic facilities are used in constructing a political unity. The approach used in this article is based on Lotman’s semiotic theory of culture and on the analysis of pronouns in political texts, using Emil Benvenist’s theory of deixis. Our case study concentrates on the years 1940–1941 which mark one of the most crucial periods in Estonian nearest history. The source material of the analysis consists of speeches of new political elite in power, all of which were published in major daily newspapers at the time. In outline, first year of soviet power in Estonia can be divided in two periods. First period would be from June 21 to “July elections” in 1940. In political rhetoric, new political elite tried to create a monolithic subject, the unity between themselves and people (*people’s will*) by emphasizing activity and freedom of self-determination. Nevertheless, starting from “elections”, especially from the period after “accepting” Soviet Republic of Estonia as a full member of Soviet Union, a transition of *we*-concept from an active subject to mere passive recipient can be detected. From that time on, *people’s will* was envisaged as entirely determined by marxist-leninist ideology and “the Party”.

The occupation of Estonia by the Soviet Union in June 1940 had a shocking effect on Estonian people. The former meanings that had constructed society and were crucial to human understanding were turned into being something with a minus sign and substituted with

the Soviet ideological worldview.<sup>1</sup> The following article analyses, therefore, how the ideology supporting the events of the 1940s found expression in the speeches of the new men of power. Among other things the analysis might be deemed interesting due to the fact that ideological construction of political reality is one of the constituting factors of human identity.

Defining 'ideology' has turned to a sort of glass bead game among scientists. Thus the well known author of several textbooks on political science Andrew Heywood defines ideology as a system of beliefs, the truth or falsity of which cannot be "proved in any scientific sense", but which nonetheless helps to structure our understanding of the world (Heywood 1990: 2). In the framework of this article I consider necessary to delimit ideology as a programmatic and rhetorical application of a grand philosophical system which agitates people to political action and can provide strategic guidelines for such activity (Hagopian 1978). Accordingly, ideology functions as a justification of political power, as a factor mobilizing the people and creates a mental order in the customary disorder of political life, providing the "ground principles"<sup>2</sup> so to speak, by which the ideology perceives the surrounding world. Since politics had the subordinating role *par excellence* according to the self-reflection of the Soviet ideology, the political identity had also to shape the socio-cultural identity of human beings.

The concrete object of study is the category of *we*. Semantically the keywords used in the framework of this article are the ones established in the political rhetoric such as *the will of the people, the people* etc., i. e. these referring to on whose behalf it is being spoken in politics.

The analyzed material is composed of the largest daily newspapers *Päevaleht* (issues from 1938, 1939 and 1940) and *Rahva Hää* (issues

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<sup>1</sup> The determining factors of the public ideological discourse in the pre-War Republic of Estonia (1918–1940) were the valuing of fatherland and family, the participation in patriotic unions, the celebration of national anniversaries. The sacral status was ascribed to the ancient time and Lembitu, Päts and Jakobson, Laidoner and the war of independence, patriotic poetry and folklore, which all together shaped the essence of the national whole.

<sup>2</sup> "The Marxist-Leninist theory is the science of societal development, the science of workers' movement, the science of proletarian revolution, the science of building the communist society" (*The History of the Union-wide Communist (bolshevist) Party: A Crash-Course* — Lühikursus 1951 [1938]: 321).

from 1940 to 1941).<sup>3</sup> The essential part of the sources is formed of speeches of the politicians published in the press and of the editorials of the daily newspapers. Choosing media as the empirical object of study can be justified mainly by the fact that the media (especially the editions that cover daily news) reflects the worldview, ideology and value-orientations of a community (Lauk, Maimik 1998: 80).

### **1. The two dimensions of the *we*-category**

As indicated above the political discourse is in this article approached mainly through the speeches of politicians. For many scientists the verbal communication is the most important constituent of discourse (Dijk 1998). The importance of political rhetoric is also expressed in the fact that it is through that that the *official* political position and intellectual framework is fixed — a framework that is the basis not only for describing and cognizing the surrounding world but also for *altering* it (Hertzler 1965: 3–4).

The discourse analysis approach emphasizes that the discourses are inseparable from power — their impersonal all-encompassing power to construct reality, but also the power exercised by subjects in (re)producing meanings.

The notion of “discourse”, as developed in some contemporary approaches to political analysis, has its distant roots in what can be called the transcendental turn in modern philosophy — i. e. a type of analysis primarily addressed not to *facts* but to their *conditions of possibility*. (Laclau 1993: 431)

At the same time this relationship between power and discourse should not be understood in the traditional framework for conceptualizing power and politics in which power is seen in terms of legal means (and ontologically as an “object” or “thing”) to protect private property in the name of public good (the liberal tradition from John Locke to John Rawls). The relationship between power and politics has also been described in terms of economic competition for votes in order to gain power (Joseph Shumpeter) *and* politics has been

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<sup>3</sup> After the coup in 1940 the newspaper *Päevaleht* was closed down. The newspaper *Rahva Hää* [literally *People's Voice*] that was founded in June 1940 instead of newspaper *Uus Eesti* [literally *New Estonia*] formed one of the main official voices of the Communist Party of Estonia.

connected with interactions governed by public ethical *norms* (Jürgen Habermas). These approaches however leave unanswered the main question: how is *a* power relation established?

The focus of studying political power moves away from the sovereign forms of power like state or administrative apparatuses and the hitherto systematically concealed forms of power enter the center of attention in the social sciences. In this framework politics can be conceptualised as “a practice of creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations” (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 153) that can always be seen as an expression of the powers of discourse. One of the possibilities for constructing a power relation is through the use of deictics.

It is true that the tradition of describing deixis has a long history reaching back to the Stoics. But since Karl Bühler’s *Sprachtheorie* (1934) the deixis has a well-established place in scientific linguistic studies. The deixis analysis has also extended its theoretical basis: devices for analysis have been borrowed from analytic philosophy (e. g., Kripke 1990; Evans 1985, etc.), semiotics (e. g., Greimas, Courtes 1993 [1978]) as well as from cognitive science (e.g., Lyons 1977; Fillmore 1982; Brown, Yule 1983). While other elements of language in political discourse have attracted attention well enough<sup>4</sup> the role of deixis in constructing power relations has largely been underestimated (cf. Weintraub 1989). The following could be regarded as a small contribution to filling that gap by using a concrete empirical material.

The deixis, as is well known, encodes in the utterances the person of the speaker, his/her subjectivity and spatiotemporal context and it is formed of corresponding orientational vocabulary and grammatical means. The deixis’s rules of use enable the addressee to decode the utterance according to its context and to determine the extra-linguistic factors eliciting the content.

In the case of *we* the *I* and *you* form a unified subject that at a certain phase of the speech feels, thinks, speaks and acts unitedly but can be changed again latter — expanded, disintegrated, generalized or replaced. But, as Émile Benveniste explains the *we* is a very special kind of union that is based on the non-equivalence of the members: the *we* does not consist in a mechanical aggregation of different *I*-s but in the *we* there is always a dominant *I* (the subject of the utterance) and this *I* due to its transcendence subjects to itself a *not-I* which

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<sup>4</sup> E. g., metaphor (see Lakoff 1992; 1996); lexis (see Lasswell *et al.* 1949, etc).

means that only through stepping out of itself it creates that *we* and thus determines the *not-I* (Benveniste 1966: 236–237). There are few words that are so ideologically and socially charged as the pronoun *we*. Through speaker's emphases the social relations, statuses, power and ideology are expressed through it and the addressee manipulated (Dijk 1998: 201–203). By analyzing the use of the personal pronouns in the political discourse (like the *we* in the speeches of the politicians) it is possible to study the rhetoric mechanism by which the membership of the in-group signified, the distancing it from its out-group or is marked, and the denigration of the out-group, the activism or passivity of the social agents and many other functions of the speech. It would be even more apt to say that the speaker constructs, creates the *subject* present in the utterance, the one on whose behalf he/she speaks.

Conceived this way the subject's characteristics can be expanded to larger imaginary communitarian wholes. Thus for instance the social classes are subjects, whose unity is constituted by interests that are determined by their position in the relations of production. Similarly a nation is an integral subject that is united by an identity based on language, culture, religion, history or other factors. The concept of *we* (*us*) that is accompanied by an opposition with *them* can be considered semiotically as the main characteristic of culture. Therefore, this opposition determines and delimits the type of the relation between culture's self-description (organized space) and other culture (unorganized space). Hence for every culture corresponds a type of its "chaos" that is not necessarily homogenous and always identical with itself but consist in an active human creation as the domain of the cultural organization (Ivanov *et al.* 1998: 33)

According to Juri Lotman the national-cultural specificity is at the primary stage grasped by outlanders (Lotman 1999: 45). Thus it is understandable that for instance at the ideational bearers of the first phase of the Estonian national awakening were mainly intellectuals of German origin.<sup>5</sup> We have here rather a question: who are they

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<sup>5</sup> The "national awakening" is a stipulative term coined in the Estonian historical literature in the first decades of the 20th century. It refers to the period when against the background of economic and social change in the second half of the 19th century the acknowledgement of nationality began in the Estonian literary communication and the awakening of the national self-consciousness and national movement started to emerge.

(Estonians as a social group that has not yet uniformly determined identity) that are not us (Germans as a nation with full-fledged identity). At the next phase when a culture that had thus far been only an object of description, reaches at the level of self-description, it takes “an exterior viewpoint towards itself and describes itself as unique” (Lotman 1999: 46). Estonians are counted in the so-called “nations without history”. Therefore the first ideologies of Estonianism relied on ethnic traditions and folkloric myths. In constructing the national narrative and history the experiences of other nations were followed and linked with ideas popular at the time (Annus 2000: 89). A special role in the shaping of the spiritual life (as for all of the Eastern-European small nations) was played by the ideas of Johan Gottfried Herder (Undusk 1995: 581). A positive and integral self-identification thus answers to the question: who are we? And through simultaneously opposing itself to the *other* — the *not-we* (for example to other nations) — the nation or class at the same time identifies itself negatively: we are not what are the others. At this phase an ideology is formed in which the self is conceived as sovereign.

The concept of the subject correlates to that of the object. The drive to self-organization depends on the mode of the relations in society. The mode of these relations determines whether the human being cognizes itself as the subject or object of the creation of culture. In this article the word *we* in addition to its meaning as a deictic pronoun refers exactly to such a category defined as a unified whole.

Two aspects of the *we*-category will be focused in the analysis:

- (1) How it was constructed as a subject-object relation in the Soviet propaganda.
  - (a) During the span from the “coup of June” to the July “elections”.<sup>6</sup>
  - (b) The period from July 1940 to the German occupation in July 1941.
- (2) How was the “*we*” positioned deictically in texts?

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<sup>6</sup> In July 14–15 1940, general elections of the State’s Council were held which was a spectacle conducted according to the directives from Moscow. The clique that had carried on the “Coup of June” aggregated around the electoral block of Estonia’s Working People’s Union (EWPU), who, having the position of power, cancelled out any nomination of candidates from the opposition. As a result the EWPU got 92.8% of votes from the “election”.

## **2. Historical introduction**

June 1940 Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were occupied by the Soviet troops. In the public-political discourse it was presented as the institution of the power of the people. In August the 6th Estonian Republic was incorporated into the Soviet Union, which, in turn, was called "joining the USSR on voluntary basis".

In actuality, the Soviet Union had already on the 23rd of August 1939 entered into pact with the German *Reich*, the secret protocols of which established the Baltic States as part of the Soviet's sphere of influence. In September the same year the Soviet Union began to realize its aggressive foreign politics. On the 28th of September in Moscow under the pressure of the Soviet Union the contract of mutual aid was signed with Estonia, by the terms of which Estonia had to allow the building of the military basis of the Red Army to Saaremaa, Hiiumaa and Paldiski. In the early summer of 1940, when the whole world's attention was focused on the successful action of Wehrmacht in France, the Soviet government decided to realize conclusively the agreements of the secret protocols of the Hitler–Stalin pact. On the 16th of June 1940 the Soviet Union delivered an ultimatum to Estonia, accusing Estonia of military cooperation with Latvia and Lithuania, which supposedly threatened the national security of the Soviet Union. A response to the ultimatum which stipulated the establishment of a new government and a free access to the additional military forces of the Soviet Union was to be given on the same day. In case of refusal the units of the Red Army were to move to Estonia by force. The government of Estonia, considering the political situation of that day Europe, decided to accept the terms of the ultimatum and on 17th to 18th of June the Soviet troops occupied the Republic of Estonia. On the demands of Moscow, a new and clearly Soviet-oriented government was appointed, the head of which became Johannes Vares-Barbarus. The Coup of June was accomplished.

## 2.1. The deictic constitution of the *we*-category in the speeches of the politicians

Johannes Vares-Barbarus begins his first speech in the 25th of June issue of the *Rahva Hää* as follows:<sup>7</sup>

A Miracle has happened — *we*<sup>8</sup> have won. *Our* day of victory has become the day of freedom. *We* all are patriots and love country and people. (Vares-Barbarus 1940a)

Here a question arises: whom does Vares-Barbarus mean by *we*? Should the addressee of the communication be distinguished from that *we* on whose behalf it was spoken? And what do the words “*we all*” mean in the last sentence? The speech by Vares-Barbarus allows to claim that at first by the “*we all*” it was meant a part of a whole. Further in his speech Vares-Barbarus stresses the conclusiveness of the events of June the 22nd but adds that even

the most magnanimous of wills and human capacities have limits, *we* already have done more but to gain even more it takes organized work and pains, therefore my hope is on the assistance of *all* the citizens. (Vares-Barbarus 1940a)

Hence it is clear that the *we* of the addresser does not indicate speaking on behalf of the whole people because the last part of the sentence (“the assistance of *all* the citizens”) allows conceiving people as something external. The *we* of the addressee and the *we* of the speaker (the speaker and the other communists on whose behalf it was spoken) exist separately in this speech. This separation is also detectable in the pre-election speech of Hans Kruus on the July 10th issue of the *Rahva Hää*:<sup>9</sup>

All the votes to Estonia’s Working People’s Union. No votes to the adversaries of *our* demands and platforms. [...] Every human being possessing even

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<sup>7</sup> Johannes Vares-Barbarus was the prime minister of the “people’s government” (the Moscow-minded government) since June 1940. After the incorporation of the Republic of Estonia to the Soviet Union in august 1940 Vares-Barbarus became the chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Council of the Estonian SSR.

<sup>8</sup> Here and hereafter all the italics are added by me — *A. V.*

<sup>9</sup> Hans Kruus was the minister of education and the deputy of the prime minister of the “people’s government”.



the least of attentiveness and knowledge has been able to witness the great changes that have taken place in *our* state and social life after the June 21st. (Kruus 1940a)<sup>10</sup>

The gap between the addresser and the addressee of the speech is still to be overcome. The intra-textual opposition between the parties of the communication disappears during the period following the "election". Vares-Barbarus confirms in a speech on July the 15th after the triumphant "electoral" victory (92.8% of votes to EWPU):

My esteemed fellow strugglers and comrades! Chinese walls of different kinds have been torn down between *us* [meie]. Torn down is the wall between *us* and the Soviet peoples.<sup>11</sup> Secondly that Chinese wall between the people and the ruler collapsed with the accompanying cheers of the working people and without the Jericho horns. [...] *No* force can hold *us* back from giving hand to each other for *common* struggle for freedom. There is no step backward. The die is cast! (Vares-Barbarus 1940b)

In the second sentence Barbarus specifies the position of the *we*-category through its belonging to a larger semantic whole — the so-called "family of the Soviet peoples". From the point of view of the interior unity the most important aspect is the disappearance of the gap between the ruler and the people in the third sentence. A unified subject is created in the utterance. The speaker identifies the public or people with itself or as Benveniste would put it: the *I* subjects the *non-I* so that both now belong semantically to the same grammatical and semantic whole. At the same time the grandness of the break is emphasized by the figure of the Chinese wall and the attitude towards the preceding period as something conclusively past and overcome is marked by the deictic *that*.

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<sup>10</sup> In Estonian there is certain ambivalence in the word "*meie*" in this quotation that has some rhetorical charge: it means both the normal meaning "*our*" and grammatically it could also mean the more technical construction "of the *we*" where "*we*" is seen as a subject not merely a demonstrative pronoun. The grammatical reason for this is that the nominative and the possessive case for the word "*meie*" (*we*) are identical.

<sup>11</sup> Here again the rhetorical charge derives from the grammatical peculiarities of Estonian language: the phrase can semantically be read both as "between *us* and the Soviet peoples" as well as "between the *we* and the Soviet peoples".

## 2.2. The formation of the subjectivity of the *we*-category in the speeches by the politicians

The period from the coup of June to the election in July can be seen as the first phase of the formation of the subjectivity of the *we*-category. During that period a transition took place from the addresser-addressee opposition (expressed in the separation between them) to their unity, i.e. the speakers (local communists) spoke on behalf of both themselves and the spoken-to. In the first speech by Vares-Barbarus the subject is above all the *we* of the speaker, i.e. the local communists who had carried out the coup. In addition it implies ascribing activism and causality. Those who were addressed were passive receivers. They did not have their own face yet in the framework of the new ideological paradigm, in other words their identity (as a certain system of meanings) was “out of joint”. But in the following speeches there is a traceable development towards eliminating the opposition between addresser and the addressee and the elaboration of soviet identity unifying both counterparts. The speaker turns into an anonymous medium at the expression of the will of the people. In the speeches a category of *we* (*the people*) was constructed that was simultaneously the speaker and the spoken-to and that expressed the will of itself: “the real *will of the people* has emerged in the elections” (Säre 1940a).<sup>12</sup>

## 3. The changes in the *we*-category from the July “election” in 1940 to July 1941

On July 14–15, an “election” was held according to the directives from Moscow in order to “legitimate” the soviet coup in Estonia. After the July “election” the nascent State’s Council decided to change the name of the Republic of Estonia into Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic and to submit an application for ESSR’s accession to the Soviet Union. On the 6th of August 1940 in Moscow the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union decided to fulfill the request of the Estonian SSR. The annexation in accordance with the scenario of Moscow had been accomplished completely.

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<sup>12</sup> Karl Säre was the first Secretary of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party in 1940–1941.

In what follows I will analyze the ways in which the construction of the *we*-category in the speeches of the statesmen was altered in the new situation after the parliament elections. The afore presented speech by Vares-Barbarus on the July 15 (Vares-Barbarus 1940b) could be held as a communicational turning point in the parties' formation of the *we*-category. For the first time in any statesman's speech we can witness the greetings addressed to the Red Army, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and their representatives — Stalin for most of the occasions.<sup>13</sup> The canonical sequence of greetings, so to speak, can for the first time be detected at the end of the speech by Estonian Communist Party's representative Karl Säre on the July 16 issue of the *Rahva Hääl* :

Long live the friendship between Estonia and the powerful Soviet Union;  
Long live the heroic and undefeatable Red Army; Long live the tried out  
leader for the Estonian proletariat and for the entire working people: the  
Estonian Communist Party; Long live our teacher , friend and leader, the  
great Stalin! (Säre 1940a)

The purpose of the obligatory greeting addresses is not to contact or enter a dialogue with the immediate audience of the addresser, but the communication with the "third" party. According to Mikhail Bakhtin there is a third party in every dialogue who does not formally participate in the process, but in relation to whom the real communicants order their positions: for instance: God's judgment, the eye of history, consciousness etc. (Bakhtin 1979: 149–150). In the Soviet situation the third party is formed of the Communist Party headed by Stalin. In the analyzed actual situations of communication between the local statesmen and the public, Stalin as a third party concealed in the text becomes the real addressee of the message. It is precisely the latter in relation to whom the addresser may not be in error when building up the discourse. The speeches passed a strict Moscow-minded censorship through which even the least of deviations from the speech canon approved by Moscow were eliminated. If we consider the tradition of Estonian political rhetoric that had preceded the Soviet Occupation it can be said that the speeches suffered a pragmatic deficiency for the local audience. Of no small importance in this connection is the fact

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<sup>13</sup> In the first issue of the *Rahva Hääl* (June 22, 1940) there was a coverage of the people's reaction that found its expression in a "powerful hurricane of greetings to the Red Army, to comrades Stalin, Molotov, Vorošilov, Timošenko!"

that there was no activeness on the proper-name level among the local party board.

Functionally the greetings had a role of constituting the hierarchical, centralized structure characteristic to the soviet ideology. In view of this feature the whole spiritual culture is describable as a pyramid<sup>14</sup> on whose top lie the politico-ideological values. As Lenin have said: “We have now become an organized party, and that means creating the power, turning the authority of ideas into the authority of power, the subjugation of the lower instances of the party to the higher ones” (Lenin 1946: 339). And this alters significantly the deictic use of the *we*-category. The changes that had taken place in the speeches of the politicians did not involve exclusively the formal greetings directed to the “third party”. In a speech by Vares-Barbarus on the 1st of August the unity of the *we*-category is first emphasized:

*We* shattered the old retrograde regime. We declared the land the property of the people, we declared the industry nationalized to end the exploitation of the human being by a human being. From now on the workers, the peasants and the working intelligentsia are the plenipotentiary masters of the land. (Vares-Barbarus 1940c)

The increasingly battleful emphasizing of the coup sets the former power (that has been overcome at the *now*-point) as one that is old and retrograde behind the back of the *we*-subject on the linear time axis, at the same time indicating the inhumanity of old regime (the end of the exploitation of the human being). The structural form characteristic to the Soviet ideology is filled with the purely ideological content — the power of the proletariat, the nationalization, the end of exploitation. And in the last sentence the result of the activeness of the *we* is presented. But it is important to notice that in here this activeness determines the whole causal chain of the events. The *now*-deictic signifying the substitution of power is like a zero-point marking the beginning of time, from which the position of the subject

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<sup>14</sup> This centralized hierarchy did not show itself not only in the authority of the central party over the local ones but was also expressed in the entire sociocultural environment. Thus Kaginski identifies as the main characteristic of the soviet space the strict structurality and the dependence of that structure on the vertical, hierarchical and power-related dominants (Kaginski 2001: 157). A sharp hierarchy among nations showed itself in the speeches of the politicians after the famous toast in honor of the Russian people by Stalin after the Second World War.

is defined. In fact it means the positioning of the *we* to an entirely new notion of time and history. Having their starting point in the German romanticism and Herderian conception of culture in which the idea of history had become the idea of the nation and its historically unique self-fulfillment or an idea of national culture is what distinguishes the Estonian notion of history from that of the Marxist one. In the Marxist social theory the culture is reduced to the superstructure of the economic formation and is dependent on the latter. The development of the economic formation and hence the development of history depends on the dialectic of the development of the mode of production constituting the social organization. Such determinism however refers to a world history or general history which cancels out the independence of someone's *own* history, so to speak. The modification is clearly present in the speech by the first secretary of the Central Committee of the Estonian Communist Party K. Säre who explicitly refers to the Stalinist constitution as a great sign-post in the *world history*:<sup>15</sup> “the III five-year plan in which the *world-historical* mission will be accomplished: the transition from socialism to communism” (Säre 1940b). But in the subsequent speech by Vares-Barbarus the integral and active *we*-category moves into a new position:

*We* have an enormous work ahead of us that has already been done by *you*. [...] Under the *sun* of the Stalinist constitution *we bring* the country to prosperity<sup>16</sup>. [...] *Our* sun rises from the east now, the west remains behind our back as a cardinal point from which nothing rises. (Vares-Barbarus 1940c)

In the first sentence the *we*-category is opposed by a new case of second person plural — *you*. And at the same time changes the position of the *we*-category in relation to the political reality pictured in the text. A hierarchy forms among the agents presented in the utterance — a hierarchy in which the speaking *we* (a unitary „people“ created by the Estonian politicians) is underneath the speech and the enormity of *our* “undone work” and the indication to the deficiency of the speaking subject (the Estonian nation) increases the

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<sup>15</sup> In a special study on this issue the author has never observed any attempt in the speeches by politicians of the Estonian Republic to connect the Estonians to the world history and messianic world-cognition.

<sup>16</sup> The tying of the Stalinist constitution with the symbol of the sun as a life enabling source found its expression also in the coat of arms of the Soviet Estonia (*Rahva Hääl*, October 10, 1940).

power position of the *you*-category even more. The spatial and verb-deictics (*behind*, *rise*) define the *we*-category's socio-cultural belonging to the *locus* of the East (the Soviet Russia). The *we*-category that had previously signified the unity between the addresser and the addressee and had become an active subject (Vares-Barbarus 1940b) looses in this speech its sovereignty and also its subjectivity. The possibility of the *we* is based on and justified by an other — in the given speech by the sun of the Stalinist constitution. I shall add some other examples of the transformation of the *we*-category in the speeches from the active subject to object. Hans Kruus says in his speech on the 9th of August 1940: "The Stalinist constitution gives an irrefutable basis and firm framework" (Kruus 1940b). By the Stalinist constitution it is meant here a principle enabling the "right" being and at the same time the constituting condition for reality. That is corroborated by the successive utterance of Kruus: "The Stalin's constitution shall be a document that testifies that what is accomplished in the USSR can also be accomplished completely in other countries." And finally: "*We* have no doubt that the *new order* will bring principled and actual growth of and unprecedented human dignity".<sup>17</sup> Basically the same point is made by Säre in his speech on the anniversary of the Great Socialist October Revolution on the 5th of November 1940:

Through self-denying struggle the Russian proletariat has gained the place of the *people's leader*. [...] The proletariat is led by the brave and farseeing bolshevist party [...] as has been said by comrade Stalin [...] and all this is corroborated by clear facts. (Säre 1940b)

Although the conclusiveness of the coup of June is apparent in the earlier speeches by Vares-Barbarus and other party figures, the previously described period of the formation of the *we*-category is concentrated on the abolishment and "destruction" of the old regime. Thus the activity is meant rather as a negative activeness.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> I add here a quotation from a brochure characterizing the Soviet Estonia (Sovetskaja Estonija): "The heroic warriors of the Red Army were not just seen as the representatives of the big and friendly Soviet Union by the Estonian people but also as the bearers of a higher socialist culture, representatives of the new order" (Jefimov 1940: 43).

<sup>18</sup> Jaan Undusk has observed similar tendencies in the history writing discourse of the Soviet Estonia, characterizing the ways Estonians were pictured as a "only

The cognition enabling the new reality arrives at the speeches only after the “joining” the Soviet Union and is connected to the party’s subordinating role towards the possibilities of cognition. The activity of the *we* is reduced now to the receiving and mediating of the objectifying activity of the new subject of the speech — the party or rather Stalin. The transition from the activeness to passivity, from the unconditioned to the conditioned takes place. Thus the *we* that had previously attained its unity in the utterance loses its independence, turning into an object for the party, and especially for Stalin to whom exclusively the position to be a subject was reserved in the public Soviet political discourse at that time. Stalin was the one who gave meaning to the *we* or “the soviet people” in the speeches. Behind this there was of course a simple *Realpolitik*: from the “soviet people” were excluded those who disagreed with the politics of Stalin. The Stalinist slogan “Cadres will decide everything” and the accompanying “self-criticism of the party” are actually one of the ideological concealments of this “game of exclusion”. Thus it can be said that the “soviet people” created by Stalin was identical to the “we” that was created by his “I”. In consequence it can be said that the soviet ideology resembles to the cultural type (if we understand in this context ideology as synonymous to culture) that was characterized by Lotman as an aggregation of texts that opposes to cultural type that creates the aggregation of texts (Lotman, Uspenski 1994: 245). In this cultural type the content of the culture is pre-given from the standpoint of the self-understanding of this culture; it consists of prescriptive sum of the “right” texts: in the Soviet ideology they were formed of the works of the Marxist-Leninist classics and in the Stalinist era mostly the works of Stalin himself.<sup>19</sup> In such a cultural type the subject of the speech as a creator of the reality (content) in the utterance has only relative value. Everything new is actually predictable and known to the knowers — the real subjects (Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin). Paraphrasing Benveniste it could be said that the *I*

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then” and “already at that time” syndromes that characterized Estonians as hopelessly behindhand and suppressed compared to Russians (Undusk 2003: 53–54).

<sup>19</sup> In fact the chrestomatic canonization of Marx’s and Lenin’s works depended on Stalin’s concrete needs and it was not uniform and invariable (Vaiskopf 2002).

subjected the non-I completely or the *I* created the *we* completely according to its arbitrary will.<sup>20, 21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> In a strictly hierarhized society the Party was not a unified subject either despite its being sometimes presented as one in texts. The Party was led by Stalin, God's (Lenin's) vicar on earth who exclusively possessed an *I*.

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### **Конструирование категории «мы»: советская политическая риторика в Эстонии с июня 1940 до июля 1941**

Одним из поворотных пунктов в новой истории Эстонии были 1940–1941 гг. В статье автор ищет ответ на вопрос: каким образом было сконструировано в публичных СМИ понятие «мы» — одна из основных категорий культурно-политического идентитета. В качестве источников используются речи политической элиты (Варес-Барбарус, Лауристин, Круус и мн. др.), опубликованных в основных газетах того времени. Начальное время советской власти в Эстонии можно разделить на два периода: первый условно датируется с 21 июня до «июльских выборов» в 1940 году, когда в политической риторике стремились к созданию единого монолитного субъекта и единство народа и власти описывали в категориях активности, творчества и свободы. Но начиная с «приема» Эстонской Советской Республики в Советский Союз 6 августа 1940 года в самоописании «мы» произошел существенный сдвиг. Местный «народ» был отодвинут на роль пассивного получателя, его подчинили марксистско-ленинской идеологии, диктату и воле Сталина и его партии. Для этого были использованы разные риторические средства — дейктики, пассивные формы глагола и т.п.

### **“Meie” kategooria konstrueerimine: nõukogude poliitiline retoorika Eestis juunist 1940 kuni juulini 1941**

Aastad 1940–1941 märgivad üht pöördelisemat perioodi Eesti lähiajaloos. Artiklis otsib autor vastust küsimusele: kuidas kultuurilis-poliitilise identiteedi üks põhikategooriaid “meie” konstrueeriti avalikus meedias. Uuritakse, milliseid semiootilisi vahendeid kasutati niisuguse poliitilise ühtsuse konstrueerimisel tekstides. Käesolevas artiklis lähenetakse püstitatud ülesandele Lotmani kultuurisemiootikast lähtuvalt ja asesõnade analüüsi kaudu. Analüüsi allikmaterjalidena kasutatakse poliitilise eliidi (Vares-Barbarus, Lauristin, Kruus jpt.) kõnesid, mis avaldati peamistes tolleaegsetes meediaväljaannetes. Nõukogude võimu algusaega Eestis

võib jagada kaheks perioodiks. Esimest perioodi võiks tinglikult dateerida 21. juunist kuni “juulivalimisteni” 1940. aastal, kus poliitilises retoorikas üritati luua ühtne monoliitne subjekt ning ühtsust võimu ja rahva vahel kirjeldati kõnedes aktiivsuse, loovuse ja vabaduse kategooriates. Kuid alates Eesti Nõukogude Vabariigi “vastuvõtmisest” Nõukogude Liitu 6. augustil 1940. aastal toimus “meie” enesekirjelduses oluline nihe. Kohalik “rahvas” oli kõnedes taandatud passiivse vastuvõtja rolli, kus ta allutati marksistlik-leninlik ideoloogiale, Stalini ja tema Partei diktaadile ja tahtele. Selleks kasutati erinevaid retoorilisi (deiktikud, tegusõnade passiivsed vormid jne) ja semiootilisi vahendeid.





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## **Towards a semiotic theory of hegemony: Naming as hegemonic operation in Lotman and Laclau**

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**Abstract.** The article concentrates on the possibilities of bringing into dialogue two different theoretical frameworks for conceptualising social reality and power: those proposed by Ernesto Laclau, one of the leading current theorists of hegemony, and Juri Lotman, a path breaking cultural theorist. We argue that these two models contain several concepts that despite their different verbal expressions play exactly the same functional role in both theories. In this article, however, we put special emphasis on the problem of naming for both theorists. We propose to see naming as one of the central translating strategies in the politico-hegemonic discourse. Our main thesis is that through substituting some central categories of Laclau's theory with those of Lotman's, it is possible to develop a model of hegemony that is a better tool for *empirical* study of power relations in given social formations than the model proposed by Laclau, who in his later works tends more and more to ground it in psychoanalytic ontology.

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## Introduction

The term “political semiotics” finds more and more usage among scholars in the field of social sciences. Yet seldom if ever does it refer to a discipline with clearly defined aims and scope. Rather it is a somewhat vaguely applied synonym for expressions like “political signs” or “political images” etc. Our purpose in this article is to address the problem of what would political semiotics as a discipline require. We are of course well aware that for a discipline to arise it takes much more than a single article, monograph or conference. Providing an elaborated conception of that discipline (or even some “grounding principles” for such an elaboration) is not the task we set for ourselves. Instead we try to make a contribution to the dialogue between political science and semiotics by way of introducing Juri Lotman’s categories from theory of culture to one of the most advanced conceptions of hegemony in contemporary political theory — the one proposed by Ernesto Laclau.

The general problem our article deals with is that of political power. We strive to give some hopefully fruitful hints for dealing with this issue from the semiotic point of view. Political power has gained much theoretical and methodological attention among disciplines such as philosophy, sociology and political science, but has occurred somewhat sporadically along the field of semiotics. The theses we propose are very much preliminary in nature — they form no coherent research report or conception, but are more like glimpses of the future. Our theses stem largely from what we see as a set of apparent theoretical congenialities between Juri Lotman, a semiotician, whose interests moved more and more towards issues usually governed by social or political theory,<sup>2</sup> and Ernesto Laclau, a political theorist whose conception of hegemony has had several stages of development ranging from Marxist tradition to post-structuralist discourse theory.

Our general idea is that the theoretical frameworks or metalanguages that these two eminent thinkers propose for conceptualizing social reality contain several concepts that despite their different verbal expressions play exactly the same functional role in both

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to refer in this connection to a quite recent volume of essays that is largely dedicated to the theoretical resources that Lotman’s semiotics of culture provides for conceptualizing power, hegemony and social reality as such (see Schönle 2006).



theories. By this we mean that the central categories of each theory can be substituted with each other without losing any theoretical coherence or epistemological value of either of the theories in question. For example, if we substitute the vocabulary of “logic of equivalence” in Laclau with Lotman’s idea of “continuous coding” (see below), we would not lose the point that Laclau is making by his theory. And the reason is that these two notions bear the same functional role in each theory. Of course, which conceptual matchings are there between those two approaches, is a matter of analysis, and this article tries to enlighten some of its aspects. But an important thing to stress in this connection is that despite their resemblances, the two theories have important differences that make mutual combination between these approaches a fruitful undertaking. Otherwise we would just reiterate the same points with different words.

In this article, however, we chose only to focus on Laclau’s conception of “empty signifier” as a *name* that functions as a precarious and hegemonic ground for a discourse. Our intention is to complement this conception with Lotman’s fundamental idea of rhetorical translation between discrete and non-discrete coding systems and to view naming as one of the translation strategies through which hegemonic relations are established. This way we can avoid the psychoanalytically oriented conception of ‘radical investment’ that is the basis of Laclau’s conception of naming (see Laclau 2005a: 112–117), and substitute problems of *affect*, *desire*, and *drive* with the problems of *translation*. And our main thesis is that through this substitution it is possible to develop a model of hegemony that is a better tool for *empirical* study of power relations in given social formations than the model proposed by Laclau, who in his later works tends more and more to ground it in psychoanalytic ontology.

The first task for us, therefore, is to give a brief sketch of the theoretical steps that lead Laclau to that direction. After that we can introduce some basic ideas of Lotman and bring them into dialogue with Laclau. In this article we dedicate a little more room for discussion on Laclau than to that on Lotman, because the latter’s positions are assumingly better known among semioticians than are Laclau’s ideas.

### **Laclau's conception of *the political*: some background remarks**

What are Laclau's theses concerning political power? Addressing this question calls first for a very brief sketch of Laclau's major theoretical affinities with a family of political thinkers. The most apparent of them is, of course, Antonio Gramsci, a Marxist theorist and political activist. His main contribution to political theory consists in elaborating a concept of hegemony as a form of power that is very different from mere *force*, *coercion* or *domination* (*dominio*) and depends largely on the so called *spontaneous* consent of those who are in the subordinated position. From the perspective of those groups who subordinate others in a society, we can say with Gramsci that

The supremacy of a social group is manifested in two ways: as "domination" and as "intellectual and moral leadership". A social group is dominant over those antagonistic groups it wants to "liquidate" or to subdue even with armed force, and it is leading with respect to those groups that are associated and allied with it. (Gramsci 1975: 2010, quoted in Fontana 1993: 141)

The latter form of supremacy is, of course, what Gramsci calls "hegemony". It should be noted, however that the terms "alliance" and "association" he uses when writing about "hegemony" refer "to a system of reciprocal links and relations whose common elements are consent and persuasion [...] In other words, the "alliance" is based on mutuality of interests and an affinity of values" (Fontana 1993: 141). So we can agree with Steedman when he argues, using more traditional vocabulary for political scientists, that, when there is public or state control "the control must also be seen as legitimate. Gramsci's hegemony is what the ruling class achieves when it can secure popular consent for the state's use of coercion" (Steedman 2006: 139). But we have to add that this hegemony is not purely a result of propaganda or brainwashing, nor is it just a matter of rational selfinterest or values, but has to do with everything in this list. This is what opens up in Gramsci the possibility of conceiving a relation of hegemony as a certain type of formation of *contingent* meanings or discourses in culture and society. Gramsci, however, did not take this step — at least according to some theorists, Laclau among them.

Despite many advantages of Gramsci's approach, the main shortcoming for Laclau is his tendency to ascribe the ultimate unifying

power in hegemonic formations to an economically defined fundamental class (Dallmayr 2004: 38). That is the main remnant of *essentialism* in Gramsci for Laclau and his coauthors (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 137–138). So, one of the aims of Laclau's theorizing of hegemony is to totally reject any ontological class unity and to acknowledge on the theoretical level the proliferation of very different and often incommensurable political struggles in the late capitalist society. That is one set of theoretical steps taken by Laclau in his conception of hegemony. Following his advice, we could call it a movement from Marxism to *post-Marxism* (Laclau, Mouffe 2001: ix).

But another very important family of steps needs to be highlighted in this conception. And that we could call: the movement towards a notion of *discourse* as the primary terrain of *objectivity*, hegemonic and power relations. Important parallels can first be drawn with Michel Foucault whose emphasis on the *positive* or productive aspects of power, especially its ability to produce discourse has reoriented the whole corpus of power studies. "What makes power hold good," for Foucault, "what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but it traverses and *produces* things, it *induces* pleasure, *forms* knowledge, *produces* discourse" (Foucault 1980: 119 — italics added). The general reorientation in the conception of power is that "It needs to be considered as a *productive* network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault 1980: 119 — italics added). The general methodological precaution that follows from this reorientation is

that we should direct our researches on the nature of power not towards the juridical edifice of sovereignty, the State apparatuses and the ideologies which accompany them, but towards forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localized systems, and towards strategic apparatuses. We must eschew the model of Leviathan in the study of Power. (Foucault 1980: 102)

The old questions like "who *has* power?" or "who is *repressed* by power?" make no sense anymore. The focus of studying political power moves away from the sovereign forms of power like state or administrative apparatuses and the hitherto systematically concealed forms of power — especially the power of discourses — enter the center of attention in the social sciences.

This, of course, means disavowing the *liberal* tradition of conceptualizing power that informs the lion's share of current political science. This is a tradition that starts with philosophies of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke and moves through several quasi-philosophical steps to the sociology of Max Weber, and through his influence it becomes a *common sense* view among the political scientists in the United States. And the main message of the liberalist tradition concerning power is something like this: power is — ontologically speaking — a *thing*. It is something that can be *possessed* or *distributed*. But what kind of thing is it? A thing that can be used to make somebody do something that he would not otherwise do. In other words: power is a *means of repression*.<sup>3</sup>

One of the indications of how influential this *liberalist* tradition is, is the fact that even the most well-known critics of liberalist political philosophy — most notably the Marxists and the so called communitarians — use the same vocabulary when it comes to the notion of *power*. Even Louis Althusser, the most eminent Marxist theorist of our time, despite his theoretical attempt to ease up the determinate nature of the relations between the basis and superstructure, had to concede that to his knowledge, “*no class can hold State power over a long period without at the same time exercising its hegemony over and in the State Ideological Apparatuses*” (Althusser 1993: 20, italics by the author). As for the “communitarians” — a family of political theorists who oppose the notion of abstract or “unencumbered” self (see Sandel 1998) that supposedly underlies the liberalist conception of society — we can cite Michael Walzer, the most quoted among them, as a way of illustrating their vocabulary for grasping power. “Politics is always the most direct path to dominance,” he indicates in his book *Spheres of Justice*, and continues: “and political power [...] is probably the most important, and certainly the most dangerous *good* in human history” (Walzer 1984:

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<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that the liberal tradition has entertained conceptions of “soft power”, “power of non-decision” or of “agenda-setting” that purport to indicate the alternative forms of power. Though this makes the liberal tradition seem more ambivalent on this question, we believe that these notions of power are nevertheless reducible to the old question of who gets whom to do what the latter would not otherwise do. In other words, they are reducible to the problem of repression.

15, italics added). And the talk of power as some sort of “good” is very extensive in this classic book.

Now, this is the notion of power that we have to dismiss if we take seriously the methodological instructions of Foucault. Laclau certainly agrees with Foucault in this respect. But what is problematic for him is Foucault’s conception of *discourse*. For Laclau the discourse is not an object among many, as it is for Foucault (see Foucault 1969; 1984), but the *primary* terrain of objectivity as such (Laclau 2005a: 68). Laclau refers to Wittgenstein’s idea of a ‘language game’ (see Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 108; Laclau 2005a: 106) and Jacques Derrida’s notion of ‘undecidability’ (see Laclau, Mouffe 2001: xi; cf. Norval 2004: 142) when he characterizes his concept of discourse.

For Laclau, nothing is constituted outside the discourse. Yet this has nothing to do with the debate between realists and idealists. Laclau does not deny that earthquakes and other physical phenomena exist. But whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the “wrath of God” or in terms of “natural disaster” depends on discursive structurations (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 108).

So the problem of the constitution of social and political reality becomes for Laclau the problem of the *constitution of discourse*. We concentrate on the general logic of discourse that he proposes in terms of the Saussurean idea that a signifying system or discourse is a system of *differences*, and try to sketch out the main ways in which he complements this idea in terms of ‘empty signifiers’ and ‘naming’.

### **Laclau’s concepts of discourse, hegemony and naming**

For Laclau, hegemony is to be understood only on the terrain of discourse: a hegemonic relation is a *certain* kind of articulation of meanings, namely an articulation that takes place “in a field criss-crossed by antagonisms and therefore suppose[s] phenomena of equivalence and frontier effects” (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 135–136). This articulation requires that a particular difference loses its particularity and becomes a universal representative of the signifying system as a whole. Why is this kind of representation needed at all? Because through that a *closure* for that system is provided. Since every system of signification is essentially *differential*, its *closure* is the precondition of signification being possible *at all* (Laclau 1996a:

37). But any closure requires the establishment of *limits*, and no limit can be drawn without, simultaneously, positing what is *beyond* it.

But how can you posit what is beyond the limits of the system of *all* differences? Laclau's answer is: only through radical or antagonistic *exclusion* (Laclau 1996a: 37). To put it in more simple terms: you have to exclude "them" radically or antagonistically in order to fully form "us" as a coherent system. For example: "it is through the demonization of a section of the population that a society reaches a sense of its own cohesion" (Laclau 2005a: 70). But this exclusion operates through two contradictory logics: on the one hand it makes possible the system of differences as a coherent *totality*; but, on the other hand, *vis-à-vis* the *excluded* element, the differences that now form a *totality* are no longer merely different but also *equivalent* to each other. To put it another way, their identity that is based on their more or less clear difference from each other tends to be corrupted or subverted by their being also equivalent to each other (Laclau 2005a: 70).

This insurmountable tension between the logic of difference and that of equivalence is unavoidable in the constitution of every discourse. But a very important conclusion from this tension is that *discourse* or *systemic totality* of differences is an object that is, at the same time, *impossible* and *necessary*. First it is impossible, because there cannot be a final victory of one logic over the other: purely differential discourse would be just meaningless noise or "discourse of the psychotic" (Laclau, Mouffe 1985: 112); and purely equivalential discourse would be just silence. And since tension between those logics is insurmountable, there is no *literal* object corresponding to a discourse. You cannot recognize the "True" meanings. But the totality of discourse is not only an impossible object, it is also a necessary one: it *has* to be created because without that object there would be *no signification whatsoever*. And this in turn implies that "Any 'closure' is necessarily *tropological*. This means that those discursive forms that construct a horizon of all possible representation [i. e. signification] within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is 'sayable' are going to be necessarily *figurative*" (Laclau 2006: 114).

And in explaining this logic of figural construction, Laclau coins the category of "empty signifier" (Laclau 1996a: 36–46). The idea is roughly this: in the formation of discourse the differences lose their identity based on differentiality — in other words: the signifiers that

form the discourse tend to get emptier and emptier from the point of view of their specific meaning. Consider the signifier “Bronze soldier” or “Bronze night”<sup>4</sup>. Its meaning is far less specific at the end of the 2007 than it was a year earlier. Now, this emptying of the signifier takes place through proliferation of different meanings that are attributed to it (cf. Laclau 1996b). But some signifiers tend to get emptier than others. Of course, in practice no signifier can lose its differential meaning altogether, yet Laclau’s idea is that the one that does it the most — the so called “empty signifier” — can also, in some circumstances, represent the discourse as a whole and incarnate the *totality* of the whole system of differences. Which of the signifiers assumes this function, is contingent in the sense that it cannot be determined *a priori*, but is constituted through hegemonic operation. If it could be determined *a priori*, the relation between the empty signifier and all the other differences would be a *conceptual* relation: a relation where the empty signifier would express a common core of all the particular differences belonging to the discourse. But that is exactly what Laclau denies (see Laclau 2006: 108–109). The relationship between the empty signifier and the discourse as a *totality* is the relationship between a *name* and an object (Laclau 2006: 109).

So, the problem of naming is at the center of his theory of discourse and hegemony. Through the act of naming the hegemonic relations are established. But how are names and objects related to each other? Laclau takes here a radically antidescriptivist stance (Laclau 2005a: 101–110; Laclau 2006: 109). Antidescriptivism as it stems from the works of Saul Kripke holds that naming does not involve any conceptual mediation but is a primary baptism through which a name is assigned to an object (see Kripke 1980). But Laclau with his references to Slavoj Žižek (1989) goes even further and asserts that the object is not something pre-given, not something that a name can be assigned to. Rather the unity or identity of the object is the result of *naming* it. Objects are (so to speak) *created* through naming. The name is the ground for the thing — not the other way round!

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<sup>4</sup> “The Bronze Night” (Estonian: pronksöö), also known as the April unrest (27–29 April, 2007), refers to the riots and controversy surrounding the 2007 relocation of the “Bronze Soldier”, the Soviet World War II memorial in Tallinn, Estonia.

This means that the study of naming strategies is of utmost importance for political analysis. For example: names like “Bronze night” and “Bronze Soldier”, “war against terror” or “struggle against fascism” function as *grounds* for certain political discourses — not just as some ancillary labels. They, of course, change the differential nature of signifiers that might end up being part of the corresponding discourses.

But a very important question arises concerning this logic of discourse: what are the *forces* behind these operations that enable naming to be the ground for discourse? And this is the point where our view starts to distance from Laclau’s answer, which draws mostly from Lacanian psychoanalytic conceptions of affect, desire and drive. We do not think psychoanalytic approach to be illegitimate in itself; in fact we even believe that it is a coherent general speculative ontology. But our aims are more *empirically* oriented. That is why we believe that we should dismiss the vocabulary of affect, desire and drive from the model of hegemony, and substitute it with Lotman’s cultural semiotic vocabulary of translation and bilingualism.

### **Lotman’s ontological background**

According to Lotman it is characteristic to all thinking mechanisms — starting from the structure of the brain to the organization of culture in all its levels — that they are heterogeneously structured. Every meaningful structure consists “of (minimally) two semiotic mechanisms (languages), which are mutually untranslatable and yet similar to each other, since each models, with its own means, the same extra-semiotic reality”<sup>5</sup> (Lotman 2004f: 641) Therefore, every meaningful totality (Lotman’s text, Laclau’s discourse) is at least bilingual and this also implies that semiotic meanings do not get their full constitution through correspondence to some monolingually graspable “reality”.

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<sup>5</sup> “[...] состоящую (минимально) из двух семиотических механизмов (языков), находящихся в отношении взаимной непереводаемости и одновременно подобных друг другу, поскольку каждый своими средствами моделирует одну и ту же внесемиотическую реальность.”



Lotman speaks about discrete and non-discrete (or continuous) coding systems. According to him, the mutual untranslatability of those coding systems is due to their fundamentally different structuring principles. In a discrete system, “the basic bearer of meaning is the segment (= sign), while the text or the chain of segments (= text) is secondary, its meaning being derived from the meanings of the signs” (Lotman 2001: 36). In the discrete coding systems the signs are linked to signs. Linear, causal, logical or chronological sequences characterize texts of this type (Lotman 2004d: 572).

In the continual (or non-discrete) systems, the primary bearer of meaning is the text “that does not dissolve into signs, but is itself a sign or isomorphic to a sign. Here, not the rules of linking signs are active, but the rhythm and symmetry (or arrhythmia and asymmetry, respectively)”<sup>6</sup> (Lotman 2004d: 577). The sign is transformed into its other manifestations or becomes equivalent to the corresponding blur of meaning on some other level. Phenomena that appear *different* gain ability to become *equivalent*; various analogies, homomorphisms and isomorphisms become possible that are characteristic to poetic texts and partly also to mathematic and philosophical texts (Lotman 2004d: 572). Using Jakobson’s distinction we could say that in the non-discrete linkage the paradigmatic pole of language prevails, and in the case of discrete linkage the same holds for syntagmatic pole (Jakobson 1971 [1956]: 239–259).

And here a problem arises: how is this antagonism or tension between the two types of coding systems (temporarily) overcome? In fact the situation is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, these two languages are mutually untranslatable. Yet, on the other hand, this bilingual antagonism is *constitutive* (as is the tension between the logic of difference and that of equivalence in the formation of a discourse in Laclau’s sense), because bilingualism is the condition for any thinking structure. According to Lotman this “minimal structure contains a third component: a block of contingent equivalences, a

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<sup>6</sup> “который не распадается на знаки, а сам является знаком или изоморфен знаку. Здесь активны не правила соединения знаков, а ритм и симметрия (соответственно аритмия и асимметрия).”

metaphorogenous device that makes possible operations of translation in the conditions of untranslatability”<sup>7</sup> (Lotman 2004f: 641).

This mechanism of rhetorical translation integrates the antithetic semiotic structures (the discrete and continuous coding systems) into a unified whole. This unity is necessary for translation to occur and produce positive results, despite the apparent impossibility of any translation (Lotman 2004d: 573). As an elementary condition for semiotic communication, these antithetic tendencies have to disappear in a unified structural totality. Otherwise, any positive meaning-generation would be impossible. And it is important to notice that it is a two-way (and simultaneous) movement: the continuous text (= sign) is translated by way of setting the discrete units into regular sequences, and the discrete sequences can also be conveyed through continuous texts (Lotman 2004e).

The function of Lotman’s mechanism of rhetorical translation is analogous to the one attributed to empty signifier in Laclau’s conception: it links the different signifiers into a chain of equivalence. And through that operation the signifiers lose their differential identity and become dominated by the logic of equivalence. Using Lotman’s vocabulary for making the same point, we could say that in the political discourse there prevails the non-discrete strategy of translation. It means that discrete and clearly differentiated signs are translated into non-discrete totality. “The main feature of such a world is universal resemblance of everything to everything; the main organizing structural relation that of homomorphism”<sup>8</sup> (Lotman 2004d: 570). This continuous translating strategy “makes one see manifestations of the One phenomenon in the various phenomena of the real world, and observe the One Object behind the diversity of objects of the same type”<sup>9</sup> (Lotman 2004d: 571).

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<sup>7</sup> “Минимальная структура включает в себя и третий элемент: блок условных эквивалентностей, метафорогенное устройство, позволяющее осуществлять операцию перевода в ситуации непереводимости.”

<sup>8</sup> “Универсальным законом такого мира является подобие всего всему, основное организующее структурное отношение — отношение гомеоморфизма.”

<sup>9</sup> “заставляет видеть в разнообразных явлениях реального мира знаки Одного явления, а во всем разнообразии объектов одного класса просматривать Единый Объект.”

Yet one question concerning this strategy still remains unanswered: in what way is this One all encompassing phenomenon represented? In other words, the question is: through which act is the discourse closed as a meaning-bearing totality? This problem leads us directly to Lotman's semiotic concept of naming.

### **Lotman on naming as a translating strategy**

As is well known, Lotman's answer to the previously posed question is: naming. As soon as the *outside* world (and that can also be a world that is coded in some *other* language) is set forth, it is also *named*, in other words: it is semiotized at least on the surface level (Lotman 2004f: 646).

The pure act of naming (uttering the words "Bronze Night", for example) is discrete in nature. But the meaning of the name can function as a representation of a continuous totality or in the extreme case — it can *become* that totality. This extreme case, as is observed by Lotman, is the logic of *mythological* naming or identification: "Mythological identification is in principle non-textual in character, emerging from the inseparability of the name and object. What may be at stake in such cases is not substitution of equivalent names, but transformation of the object itself"<sup>10</sup> (Lotman 2004c: 541).

In Laclau's sense it would be a case of not just equivalence between the name and the object it names — but one of identity. In such a case, the altering of the name would imply altering the object that is named. The name "Stalin" in the Soviet Union of 1940s did not just stand for the "Soviet people" — in the official discourse, it *was* the Soviet people.

At the other extreme we could imagine the act of naming a completely discrete unit. That would be a completely conventional naming. In that case no transformation takes place in the object when its name is changed into something else.

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<sup>10</sup> "Мифологическое отождествление имеет принципиально внетекстовый характер, вырастая на основе неотделимости названия от вещи. При этом речь может идти не о замене эквивалентных названий, а о трансформации самого объекта."

In neither of the extremes is politics or hegemony possible, because “We have an end of politics when the community conceived as a totality [the object], and the will representing that totality [the name], become indistinguishable from each other. In that case [...] politics is replaced by administration and the traces of social division disappear” (Laclau 2005b: 48). And “the asymmetry between community as a whole and collective wills is the source of that exhilarating game that we call politics, from which we find our limits but also our possibilities” (Laclau 2005b: 49).

### **Conclusion: Laclau and Lotman in dialogue**

Let us try to summarize our discussion. We have tried to show that the political discourse is always constructed as a bilingual system. Its main specificity consists in the tendency towards translating discrete elements into a non-discrete totality in the Lotmanian sense or difference into the chain of equivalence in the Laclaudian sense. The main operation that provides the closure of discourse is that of naming. And every closure is more or less hegemonic depending on the degree to which the name functions as the *ground* for continuity.

And we can combine Laclau’s insights on hegemony as an act of grounding a unity between differences through naming with Lotman’s insights on mythological naming through which the name and the thing that is named have a tendency to become indistinguishable. As a way of illustrating this point with concrete examples, we could indicate the proliferation of expressions like “accused of organizing the Bronze night” or “during the Bronze night” etc in the current Estonian mass media. The “Bronze night” is not a conventional name for certain events, it tends to become more and more inseparable from the object it names (no matter how fictitious or abstract that object might be). And this means that the Estonian media has a tendency towards the prevalence of mythological-continuous consciousness over the logical-discrete one. But we can problematize the name “Bronze night” itself and think of alternative names. If the *prevalent* name for the events of April 26–27 was, for example, “The Tallinn spring” or just “The April riots” the discursive articulation of those

events would be of very different sort. In other words the *meaning* of those events would be very different.<sup>11</sup>

And finally we arrive directly at the tasks for empirical researchers. For Juri Lotman, different tendencies towards discreteness or non-discreteness form the ground for a typology of cultures<sup>12</sup>. Through a combination of Lotman's work with the theoretical framework developed by Laclau and others, an immensely rich typology for empirical studies of political communication opens up. All those possibilities need theoretical as well as empirical consideration. And this is the task we intend to engage with in our future work.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> We can also indicate to the fact that the name “The Prague Spring” was used only in the Western media and among dissidents of the Eastern block. In the official discourse of Czechoslovakia and other Warsaw Pact countries it had no usage whatsoever.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Lotman 2004a, 2004b, etc.

<sup>13</sup> The article is based on our paper presented at the conference *Naming in Text, Naming in Culture* held at the University of Tartu on December 14–15, 2007. This research is a part of ETF6484 “Nomination and Anonymity in Culture” and of the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory.

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**К проблеме семиотической теории гегемонии:  
называние как «гегемоническая операция»  
у Юрия Лотмана и Эрнесто Лакло**

Настоящая статья является попыткой спровоцировать диалог между двумя разными теоретическими системами концептуализации социальной реальности и власти: это теория гегемонии Эрнесто Лакло, одного из ведущих современных ученых в области политической теории, и семиотико-культурологический подход Юрия Лотмана. Более отдаленная цель — выработать концептуальные средства для более ясного освещения соотношения между социальной реальностью и властью. Несмотря на различия в плане выражения этих двух авторов, мы видим в их разработках существенные содержательные и функциональные точки пересечения: понятие границы, антагонизм, название и т. п. В данной статье мы сосредоточиваемся на функции номинации в процессе конструирования политической реальности. Мы предлагаем возможность замены некоторых главных теоретических категорий Лакло категориями семиотики культуры Лотмана. Это позволило бы лучше эмпирически изучать стратегии конструирования социальной реальности и избегать привнесения психоаналитических трактовок, характерных для поздних работ Лакло.

**Semiootilise hegemooniateooria poole:  
nimetamine kui hegemooniline operatsioon Lotmanil ja Laclaul**

Käesolev artikkel on katse arendada dialoogi kahe erineva teoreetilise lähenemise vahel — need on kaasaegse poliitilise teooria ühe juhtiva teadlase Ernesto Laclau hegemooniateooria ning Juri Lotmani kultuuri-semiootiline lähenemine — mille kaugem eesmärk oleks välja töötada kontseptuaalsed vahendid hõlmamaks selgemini sotsiaalse reaalsuse ja võimu vahekordi. Hoolimata nendevahelisest verbaalse väljenduse erinevustest, näeme nende käsitlustes olulisi sisulisi ja funktsionaalseid lõikumispunkte — piiri mõiste, antagonism, nimetamine jne. Antud artiklis keskendutakse nimetamise funktsioonile poliitilise reaalsuse konstrueerimisel. Me pakume välja võimaluse asendanda mõned Laclau peamised teoreetilised kategooriad Lotmani kultuurisemiootika kategooriatega. See võimaldaks paremini uurida empiiriliselt sotsiaalse reaalsuse konstrueerimise strateegiaid ning vältida psühhoanalüütilise käsitluse sissetoomist, mis on Laclau hilisematele töödele omane.







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An outline for a semiotic theory of hegemony.  
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## AN OUTLINE FOR A SEMIOTIC THEORY OF HEGEMONY\*

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**Abstract.** There are basically three main problems that this article tries to address. First, it aims to elaborate and take to a more general level the main principles of the semiotic theory of hegemony that has been proposed recently (see Selg and Ventsel 2008). It takes as a starting point the discourse-theoretical approach to political analysis developed most notably by Ernesto Laclau and the Essex School, and tries to complement this with the insights provided by the semiotics of culture of Yuri Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow School. Second, it tries to develop a second-range model of hegemony that could be of service for designing empirical studies of concrete hegemonic formations and their different modalities. Third, it strives to provide a preliminary sketch of a concrete analysis of a hegemonic formation that has produced a dominating signifier ‘Singing Revolution’ for identifying very heterogeneous set of events in Estonia’s recent history.

**Keywords:** political semiotics, cultural semiotics, discourse theory, discourse analysis, hegemony, ‘Singing revolution’

### 1. Introduction

Since the so called ‘linguistic’ or ‘discursive turn’ in the social sciences, usually associated with the works of the later Wittgenstein, Foucault, the ‘post-structuralist’ and psychoanalytic conceptions of language and signs, the question of power in political analysis tends more and more to be addressed in terms of ‘meaning-generation’ rather than in the classical liberalist framework of ‘means of repression’, ‘rights’, ‘decision-making’ or ‘influence’. On the other hand, the tradition of the humanities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has produced a discipline that purports to be the ‘science of meaning’ *par excellence* – and that is usually called ‘semiotics’ (or sometimes ‘semiology’). So, it would seem very natural to conceptualise power from the *semiotic* point of view. Yet one could without much danger of being unjust say that very little has been done towards this direction thus far. What we mean by that is the lack of methodologically coherent conceptions of power in the field of semiotics. In other words, there is a lack of systematic movement towards what we would call ‘political semiotics’.

Besides a special issue of *Semiotica* (see *Semiotica* 2006, issue 159) dedicated to the problematic of the relationship between semiotics and politics, there are available some very broad comparisons between political science and semiotics (see Volli 2003) or concrete analyses of political signs (see Xing-Hua 2005) that at least use this term ‘political semiotics’. We have, on the other hand, some very general attempts to address the charges made by social scientists against semiotics for latter’s neglecting the political dimension (see Mandoki 2004). Several analyses come to mind that utilize semiotic vocabulary for dealing with issues usually associated with

politics: such as political campaigns, projects or framing (see Zichermann 2006; Clark and Jacobs 2002) or political advertisements (see McIlwain 2007). We could also point to several analyses of the semiotic environment of the over-politicized or authoritarian societies (see Lepik 2002; Babayan 2006; Buckler 2006). And it is worth referring to some general and more theoretically oriented comparisons between authors usually associated with the field of semiotics and those who have mostly contributed to the study of power or politics (see Steedman 2006, Bolton 2006). And last, but not least, we can point to a monograph dealing with the issue of totalisation and de-totalisation in semiotics, politics and philosophy (Monticelli 2008), and to one that sees as its purpose the development of semiotic conception of society, where a special chapter is dedicated to the problem of power (see Heiskala 1997, esp. ch. 13).

Therefore, there are at least three main problems that this article tries to address. First, we would like to elaborate and take to a more general level the main principles of the semiotic theory of hegemony that has been proposed recently (see Selg and Ventsel 2008). We take as our starting point the discourse-theoretical approach to political analysis developed most notably by Ernesto Laclau and the Essex School and try to complement this with the insights provided by the semiotics of culture of Yuri Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow School. Second, we try to develop a sort of second-range model of hegemony that could be of service for designing empirical studies of concrete hegemonic formations and their different modalities. Third, we aim to provide a preliminary sketch of a concrete analysis of a hegemonic formation that has produced a dominating signifier 'Singing Revolution' for identifying a very heterogeneous set of events in Estonia's recent history.

In what follows we tend to pay more attention to the works of Ernesto Laclau and Yuri Lotman as the most eminent representatives of the Essex School of discourse theory and the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics respectively. Yet at the same time we realize and sometimes indicate explicitly that the conceptions of those two thinkers did not develop in isolation, but were fruitfully influenced by their colleagues and co-workers. In other words, when we speak of Laclau's conception of hegemony (discourse, 'empty signifiers', antagonism etc) we always acknowledge the background influence of the bundle of theorists such as Chantal Mouffe, Aleta Norval, David Howarth, Yannis Stavrakakis, Oliver Marchart and others that are generally considered to form the so called Essex School; and when reference is made to Yuri Lotman's semiotics of culture, we do not purport to ignore the contributions of Boris Uspenskij, Vladimir Ivanov, Vladimir Toporov, Aleksandr Pjatigorskij and others who are usually associated with the Tartu-Moscow School.

Our general idea is that the theoretical frameworks that these schools propose for conceptualising social reality contain several concepts that play exactly the same functional role in both approaches. By this we mean that the central categories of each theoretical school can be substituted with each other without losing any theoretical coherence or epistemological value of either of the approaches in question. For example, if we substitute the vocabulary of 'logic of equivalence' in Laclau with Lotman's idea of 'continuous coding' (see Section 3.4 below), we would not lose the point that Laclau is making by his theory. Of course, which of the so-called conceptual matchings are there between those approaches, is a matter of theoretical clarification

But what is important with those matchings is that despite their resemblances, the two theoretical schools have important differences that make mutual combination between them a fruitful undertaking. This might give a contribution to the

development of social and political analysis that cannot be carried out using the analytical resources of either one or the other of those approaches.

So, the first general task we undertake is a preliminary exposition of the main methodological and conceptual guidelines of discourse analysis, as elaborated by the Essex School, in order to draw preliminary parallels with the methodology of the Tartu School of semiotics. The second part of our argument deals with the fundamental theoretical congenialities between the general theories (or ‘social ontologies’) behind each methodology. And our article concludes with the question of the mutual complements of those frameworks, a question that we address, among other things, in terms of a concrete analysis of a hegemonic formation.

## 2. What is discourse analysis?

As a way of sketching a more general theoretical tradition for the Essex School, we should, first, note that the history of discourse analysis could be traced back to the early 1960s. Since that period, not only the names of the schools have changed, but – in accordance to the posed scientific problems and hypotheses – the content and scope of the concept of discourse has altered considerably as well. Since the more philosophically oriented pioneering works of Foucault and Derrida, the notion of discourse has been complemented with a set of approaches that tend to orient themselves primarily to applying this category to the study of concrete empirical material.

### 2.1. *The critical discourse analysis*

For many, the commonplace starting-point for introducing the category of ‘discourse’ could be found from the increasingly influential tradition called ‘critical discourse analysis’ (CDA), an approach mainly accruing from the linguistics of Halliday, Bakhtin, and others. All the different currents of that approach see discourse as primarily a communicative event that is constituted by its participants (the speakers/writers) in a certain moment of time, space, circumstances and other features of context (see Wodak and Meyer 2001).

One of the founding figures of CDA, Norman Fairclough sees as the purpose of his so called critical language study (CLS) in analysing “social interactions in a way which focuses upon their linguistic elements”, and setting out “to show up their generally hidden determinants in the system of social relationships, as well as hidden effects they may have upon that system” (Fairclough 2001 [1989]: 4). It is of utmost importance for Fairclough that “CLS would place a broad conception of the social study of language at the core of language study.” (Fairclough 2001 [1989]: 11)

Within the CDA approach we could also discern the so called cognitive discourse analysis and the socio-semiotic discourse analysis. The former is mainly associated with the school of Teun van Dijk, a trajectory of study that applies the concept of discourse in a more restricted sense, namely, as referring to the oral or verbal results of communication. According to the cognitive discourse analysis, the discourse is constituted by the aforementioned linguistic results and the underlying cognitive structures required for understanding them (Dijk 1998).

The socio-semiotic discourse analysis inscribes other semiotic systems (besides the linguistic ones) into the discourse as well. According to the most eminent representative of this approach, Theo van Leeuwen (2008: 6), discourses are “social cognitions”, “socially specific ways of knowing social practices” that “can be, and are

used as resources for representing social practices in texts.” Besides that, discourses always represent action, because action is the foundation of knowing, and social practices are foundations of discourses (van Leeuwen 2008).

## 2.2. *The Essex School of discourse analysis*

Those general assumptions by van Leeuwen take us closer to the notion of discourse analysis developed by Laclau and the Essex School. The latter stress the practice-laden nature of discourse throughout their work, referring in this connection especially to Wittgenstein’s famous notion of ‘language game’ (see Wittgenstein 1983 [1953]: §§5, 23) as one of their fundamental philosophical tenets. In addition to this, they see at the very roots of their approach the so-called transcendental turn of modern philosophy (usually associated with the works of Immanuel Kant). The latter’s breakthrough is generally considered to consist in redirecting the central attention of analysis from facts to their conditions of possibility. The general thesis of this approach is that any perception, thinking or acting, presupposes some structuration of the field of meanings that precedes any factual immediacy. Of course, unlike Kant, contemporary analyses along these lines presume those structurations themselves to be historically, culturally and socially conditioned not *a priori* given (see Laclau 2001 [1993]).

According to the definition given by an introduction to a volume of political analyses from the Essex School (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000a), the term discourse analyses “refers to the practice of analysing empirical raw materials and information as discursive forms. This means that discourse analysts treat a wide range of linguistic and non-linguistic data – speeches, reports, manifestos, historical events, interviews, policies, ideas, even organisations and institutions as ‘texts’ or ‘writing’ (in the Derridean sense that ‘there is nothing outside the text’)” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 4). Therefore, treating whatever empirical data as signifying practices is at the centre of this approach to social and political analysis. The specifications of the concept of ‘signifying practice’ or ‘discourse’ will be dealt in much more detail below, but at this very general stage of our argument it suffices to say that discourses provide ‘the conditions which enable subjects to experience the world of objects, words and practices’ (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 4).

Since several currents of the twentieth century linguistic theory and philosophy influence the theory behind the methodology, it is no surprise that the research methods that are utilized by discourse analysts of the tradition in question have many affinities with those of the theoretical trends too. We can point in this connection to “deconstruction, Foucault’s archaeological and genealogical approaches to discourse analysis, the theory of rhetoric and tropes, Saussure’s distinction between the paradigmatic and syntagmatic poles of language, the Jakobsonian concepts of metaphor and metonymy, especially as reformulated by Lacan” and of course to “Laclau and Mouffe’s logics of equivalence and difference” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 5).

Yet it is important to note that discourse analyst distances him- or herself from both theoreticism and empiricism, acknowledging on the one hand “the central role of theoretical frameworks in delimiting their objects and methods of research” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 5), while on the other hand refusing to conceive social analysis merely in terms of subsuming each empirical case under his or her abstract theoretical concepts. So, “instead of applying a pre-existing theory to a set of

empirical objects, discourse theorists seek to articulate their concepts in each particular enactment of concrete research” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 5).

All those remarks regarding research methods are probably quite elementary for a semiotically or linguistically oriented reader. But the discourse analysis in question sees its main contribution to the studies of social, especially political relations that always contain an aspect of power in their structure. From the viewpoint of this problematic, those remarks cease to be so commonplace, since the mainstream of political science of the day has very different perspective on those issues. We can first refer to a recent intervention to this subject where Laclau’s position concerning the notion of ‘the political’ and its relation to several currents of political philosophy and political science was sketched (see Selg and Ventsel 2008: 170-173). What we shall add to this here is a general positioning of the discourse analysis among the field of the mainstream styles of political analysis.

It seems efficient to start this with juxtaposing discourse analysis with behavioural, rationalist and positivist approaches that discourse *theory* completely rejects. *Behaviouralism* presumes a crude separation of socially constructed meanings and interpretations on the one hand, and objective behaviour and action on the other. Drawing from the general hermeneutic critique of such separation and “following the writings of Weber, Taylor, Winch and Wittgenstein, discourse theory stresses that meanings, interpretations and practices are always inextricably linked.” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 6).

From the perspective of discourse theory we should also reject the *rationalist* approaches to social analysis, “which presume that social actors have given interests and preferences or which focus on the rational (or irrational) functioning of social systems” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 6). Discourse theorists “stress the historical contingency and ‘structural impossibility’ of social systems, and refuse to posit essentialist conceptions of social agency. Instead, agents and systems are social constructs that undergo constant historical change as a result of political practices” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 6).

One of the firmest oppositions is, of course, between discourse theory and the *positivistic* conceptions of knowledge and the methods that tend to be built on natural-scientific approaches to the study of society. Discourse theory “firmly rejects the search for scientific laws of society and politics grounded on empirical generalisations, which can form the basis of testable empirical predictions” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 6-7). The discourse theory rejects a naïve conception of truth (as in, say, ‘correspondence theory’) that often underlies positivistic approaches. And as a result of that it also “rejects the rigid separation of facts and values, accepting that the discourse theorist and analyst is always located in a particular historical and political context with no neutral Archimedean point from which to describe, argue, and evaluate.” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 7)

When we move to the main positive theoretical sources of discourse theory and discourse analysis, it is vital to stress the multifaceted character of this approach that picks up its analytical tools from Marxism, doing it, however, through radicalising and deconstructing them from the perspective of social constructivist and interpretive models. Discourse theory and discourse analysis reject, to be sure, the class-reductionism and economic determinism of Marxism and try to radicalise Gramsci’s and Althusser’s reworking of Marxist conceptions of politics and ideology. And an important source of insights for this radicalisation is the post-structuralist critique of language that paves the way for a non-essentialist and purely relational conception of meaning and discourse. “In so doing, discourse theory conceives of

society as a symbolic order in which social antagonisms and structural crises can not be reduced to essential class cores determined by economic processes and relations” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 5-6). This, in fact, indicates to another important difference with the approaches that invoke seemingly similar vocabulary (discourse, hegemony) as does the Essex discourse analysis.

A contrast with Stuart Hall and the Birmingham School’s style of analysis consist in the latter’s “retention of the ontological separation between different types of social practice, whether understood as ideological, sociological, economic or political. Discourse theorists, by contrast, affirm the discursive character of all social practices and objects, and reject the idea that ideological practices simply constitute one area or ‘region’ of social relations.” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 4). It is vital to stress this point, since it demarcates a clear difference from “those approaches to political analysis that use the concept of discourse, but regard discourses as little more than sets of ideas or beliefs shared by policy communities, politicians or social movements” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 4). With certain qualifications the latter tendency could be even attributed to Michel Foucault (see Foucault 1969, 1984) who maintained a distinction between discursive and non-discursive practices, but was according to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 107): “only capable of doing this in terms of a discursive practice”.

Thus far we have referred to the notion of discourse mostly in negative terms, trying to fix the main differences between this conception and other available approaches to social analysis. We turn next to the positive characteristics of this concept as these are set forth by discourse *theory* that underlies the discourse *analysis*. But before that we should summarize the main task of the latter, by indicating that since according to discourse theory of the Essex School, the agents and social relations “are social constructs that undergo constant historical change as a result of political practices” the “major task of the discourse theorist is to chart and explain such historical and social change by recourse to political factors and logics” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 6). It is one of the fundamental assumptions of discourse theory that no identity, no society or any other system of meaning is fully capable of constituting itself. Every society and identity is strictly speaking an impossibility, a never-ending attempt to fully constitute itself (see Laclau 1990b). But “the task of the discourse analyst is to explore the different forms of this impossibility, and the mechanisms by which the blockage of identity is constructed in antagonistic terms by social agents” (Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000b: 10). This, however, lets us draw an important parallel with the tasks that are seen for the semiotics of culture in the Tartu-Moscow School.

According to Lotman, semiotics of culture or cultural semiotics is a discipline that explores the mutual effect of differently built semiotic systems, the internal heterogeneity of semiotic spaces and the inevitable heterogeneity of cultural and semiotic polyglotism (Lotman 2002a [1981]: 158). Therefore, one of the fundamental problems for this discipline is “the formulation of the question of equivalence of structures, texts, functions” (Ivanov et al. 1998: 55). In other words, a cultural semiotician tries to chart the ways in which heterogeneous elements (texts, structures etc) are translated into being equivalent to each other, into being a part of the same system, despite the fact that every *exact* translation between those elements is strictly speaking an impossibility.

Our claim is that this apparent congeniality between the tasks that are seen for the researchers in each tradition is not a mere coincident, but stems from much deeper agreement between the very basic notions of the fundamental theories underlying



those approaches. When the Essex school uses mainly the term ‘discourse’ as the most central category for their theory, the Tartu-Moscow School is famous for the term ‘semiosphere’ that has since the 1980-s been replacing the earlier notion of ‘text’ as the most fundamental category of their approach. Still, it is important to stress from the beginning that for Lotman and the Tartu school ‘text’ is the basic concept of cultural semiotics and culture is treated as ‘text’ in their framework (see below). What in Lotman’s later works becomes known as ‘semiosphere’ designates basically the same set of conceptual interactions in his theory as the concept of ‘text’, referring to a bounded and organised system of meanings. Often he uses those concepts interchangeably.

### 3. Bringing discourse theory and cultural semiotics into a dialogue

We start our demonstration of the fundamental theoretical congenialities between the Essex and the Tartu-Moscow School by analysing the ontological statuses of ‘discourse’ and ‘semiosphere’.

#### 3.1. The ontological statuses of discourse and semiosphere

For Laclau the discourse is not an object among many, as it is for instance for Foucault (see above), but the *primary* terrain of objectivity as such (Laclau 2005a: 68). As is already noted above (see section 2.2) Laclau refers to Wittgenstein’s idea of ‘language game’ (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108; Laclau 2005a: 106) and, we should add, to Jacques Derrida’s notion of ‘undecidability’ (see Laclau and Mouffe 2001: xi; cf. Norval 2004: 142) when he characterizes his concept of ‘discourse.’

For Laclau, nothing is constituted outside the discourse. Yet this has nothing to do with the debate between realists and idealists. Laclau does not deny that earthquakes and other physical phenomena exist. But whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the ‘wrath of God’ or in terms of ‘natural disaster’ depends on discursive structurations (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 108). So the problem of the constitution of social and political reality becomes for Laclau the problem of the *constitution of discourse*.

Lotman would certainly agree with Laclau on the point that nothing is constituted outside the discourse and that this claim does not lead to denying the existence of the objects outside cognition. He never used this kind of vocabulary, though. But if we entrench carefully into his theoretical scheme we can detect that what he calls ‘text’ ‘culture’ or ‘semiosphere’ conceptualizes exactly the same ontological realm as does ‘discourse’ in Laclau’s vocabulary: namely, the *primary* terrain of objectivity as such. The best way to illustrate this very general congeniality would be to consider the problem of the discursive vs. extra-discursive in *Lotman’s* terminology. What it comes down to is the problem of *semiotic* vs. *extra-semiotic* reality. And as is the case with Laclau, the problematic part of the antithesis is the second one. At least two specifications need to be set forth concerning the extra-semiotic reality. First, the ‘extra-semiotic reality’ is ‘extrinsic’ only with respect to a given meaningful totality. ‘Extra-cultural’ sphere often turns out to be a sphere of an alien culture and the ‘extra-semiotic’ sphere, a sphere of alien *semiosis* (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 646). In one of his last works Lotman even goes so far as to erase the notion of ‘extra-cultural’ altogether and proposes to substitute it – at least in scientific vocabulary – with the notion of ‘other-cultural’ (see Lotman 2002b [1992]: 235-236).

With the extra-semiotic world the semiosphere has virtually no contacts, because outside the latter “semiosis itself cannot exist” (Lotman 2005b [1984]: 208). Every contact with the space located outside the semiosphere in question requires a prior semiotization of that space. Thus “the images of pre- or extra-semiotic that are interpolated to the outside world are very often created from within the given culture as its ideal anti-structure” [“Очень часто на внеположенный мир интерполируются представления о ‘естественности’ и до - или внесемиотичности, выработанные в недрах данной культуры как ее идеальная антиструктура”] (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 646). Second, from this point of view the definition of culture as the sphere of organization (information) opposing disorganization (entropy), we may say, “that the sphere of extra-cultural non-organization may sometimes be constructed as a mirror reflection of the sphere of culture or else as a space which, from the position of an observer immersed in the given culture, appears as unorganized, but which from an outer position proves to be a sphere of *different organization*” (Ivanov et al. 1998: 35 – italics by the authors). This implies, however, that the real outside world is an *active* participant in the *semiosis* and on its border with the semiosphere “numerous ‘mechanisms of metaphoric translation’ operate, ‘pumping’ to both directions the correspondingly transformed texts” [“в которой работают многочислен ные механизмы ‘метафорического перевода’, ‘перекачивающие’ в обоих направлениях соответственно трансформированные тексты”] (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 647). What it comes down to is that “from the position of an outside observer, culture will represent not an immobile, synchronically balanced mechanism, but a dichotomous system, the ‘work’ of which will be realized as the aggression of regularity against the sphere of the unregulated and, in opposite direction, as the intrusion of the unregulated into the sphere of organization” (Ivanov et al. 1998: 36). In that case, what we are dealing with is a complex and pulsating dialogue, not a one-directional reception. Returning to the example above, we could paraphrase it in the following manner: whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the ‘wrath of God’ or in terms of ‘natural disaster’ depends on discursive structurations or semiotization, and the latter in turn depend on the ‘intrusion’ of the earthquake into the sphere of those structurations.

Now, we can summarize from this reasoning a very important point concerning the semiosphere or culture: ultimately they are built up around an exclusion of disorganization or ‘extra-semiotic’ and that those excluded forms: a) are created by culture or semiosphere itself “as its ideal anti-structure”; and b) their exclusion is not a one-directional and final act, but a constant and potentially never-ending dialogue between the ‘excluded’ and the ‘excluder’.

This point takes us further in our attempt to show the underlying congenialities between Lotman and Laclau, because exactly the same logic could be found in Laclau’s conception of ‘constitutive antagonism’.

### 3.2. Exclusion as a fundamental condition for meaning

We should indicate, first, that Laclau shares with Lotman the very basic Saussurean idea that a signifying system or discourse is a system of *differences*. And since every system of signification is essentially *differential*, its *closure* is the precondition of signification being possible *at all* (Laclau 1996a: 37). But any closure requires the establishment of *limits*, and no limit can be drawn without, simultaneously, positing what is *beyond* it.

A significant puzzle is associated to the positing that, which is beyond the limits of the system of *all* differences (from the internal point of view). Laclau indicates that it is possible only through radical or antagonistic *exclusion* (Laclau 1996a: 37). To put it in simpler terms: you have to exclude ‘them’ radically or antagonistically in order to fully form ‘us’ as a coherent system.

But an important thing for Laclau is that this exclusion operates through two contradictory logics: on the one hand it makes possible the system of differences as a coherent *totality*; but, on the other hand, *vis-à-vis* the *antagonistically excluded* element, the differences that now form a *totality* are no longer merely different but also *equivalent* to each other. In other words, their identity that is based on their more or less clear difference from each other tends to be corrupted or subverted by their being also equivalent to each other (Laclau 2005a: 70).

This constitutes an insurmountable tension in any meaningful totality. Laclau coins a special vocabulary for conceptualising this tension. The discourse’s tendency to present its elements more equivalent than different is called ‘logic of equivalence’ by him; the opposite tendency bears the label of ‘logic of difference’.

According to Laclau there is an insurmountable tension between those logics in the constitution of every discourse and that leads him to conclude that *discourse* or *systemic totality* of differences is an ‘object’ that is, at the same time, *impossible* and *necessary*. First it is impossible, because there cannot be a final victory of one logic over the other: purely differential discourse would be just meaningless noise or ‘discourse of the psychotic’ (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 112); and purely equivalential discourse would be just silence. And since tension between those logics is insurmountable, there is no *literal* object corresponding to a discourse. It is in principle impossible to recognize the ‘True’ or ‘Ultimate’ meaning of whatever meaningful entity.

But the totality of discourse is not only an impossible object, but also a necessary one: it *has to* be created because without that object there would be *no signification whatsoever*. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 112) put it: “The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations – otherwise, the very flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning.”

But we can render the same point in terms of antagonistic exclusion: antagonistic exclusion can never be total since ‘total exclusion’ (in the case of purely equivalential discourse) would be a contradiction in terms – hence Laclau prefers to talk about ‘radical’ or ‘antagonistic’ exclusion. But on the other hand, some exclusion is absolutely necessary, because otherwise there would be no basis for forming a *system* of differences, because there would be no *closure* at all. (Of course, Laclau, explicitly positions himself on the post-structuralist theoretical terrain that has rejected the idea of ‘transcendental signified’ that could be a ‘natural’ basis for systems of meaning [see Laclau 2001].) Thus on the one hand, antagonism is seen to occur when “the presence of [an] Other prevents me from being totally myself. The relation arises not from full totalities, but from the impossibility of their constitution” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 129). But, it is noteworthy that for Laclau and Mouffe, the effect of antagonism is always mutual: “Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonises me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent it being fixed as a full positivity” (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 129).

So, we are back in the situation, very similar to the general constitution of semiosphere: something has to be *created* as an ‘outside’ in order to achieve systematicity in the ‘inside’.

To be sure, Laclau tends in his 1990-s works, to establish even more general concept for indicating the tension or structural impossibility of every structure: namely, that of ‘dislocation’ (see Laclau 1990a 39-41). Now, antagonism is no longer the one and only form of creating the ‘outside’ in order to constitute the ‘inside’, but “rather, it becomes one possible articulation amongst many” (Norval 2000: 223). This adds some complexity and plurality to his conception: “*From this site, it becomes possible to think of social division in terms other than the ‘friend/foe’ relationship*” (Norval 2000: 223 – italics by the author). But this does not change the general point about the internal tension in any meaningful totality.

A very important question arises here, however: what are the forms of this ‘creation’ that can elicit ‘closure’ for a system? Laclau’s general answer – which will later be specified in more detail – is pretty clear: “Any ‘closure’ is necessarily *topological*. This means that those discursive forms that construct a horizon of all possible representation [i. e. signification] within a certain context, which establish the limits of what is ‘sayable’ are going to be necessarily *figurative*” (Laclau 2006: 114). In other words: the discursive forms that have an ability to bring forth an artificial or constructed ‘victory’ of one logic over the other are *figurative*.

Lotman would, again, certainly agree on that point with Laclau. According to him, there is always an inherent tension or antagonism in every meaningful system - a tension that can be temporarily overcome due to “a block of contingent equivalences, a metaphorogenous device that makes possible operations of translation in the conditions of untranslatability” [“блок условных эквивалентностей, метафорогенное устройство, позволяющее осуществлять операцию перевода в ситуации непереводаемости.”] (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 641). What is this tension? And what about the problem of ‘translation’? Here too, Lotman speaks of two very fundamental categories – namely, the ‘discrete’ and ‘non-discrete’ coding systems – for understanding the constitution of meaningful totalities, categories that bear very obvious ‘family resemblances’ with Laclau’s idea of the two above-mentioned logics of difference and equivalence. But first, a few general remarks concerning the notion of ‘translation’ and ‘untranslatability’ in Lotman’s vocabulary.

### 3.3. The notion of translation

Where Laclau speaks of ‘articulation’ as the practice through which unorganised elements are organised into a meaningful totality or discourse (see Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 105-114), Lotman uses a more traditional term ‘translation’. However, it is clear that ‘translation’ does not refer to ‘linguistic translation’ in the narrow sense. We do not find Lotman’s name in the reference books on translation (see Salupere 2008). Yet at the same time the notion of ‘translation’ and concepts deeply entwined with it – re-coding, equivalence, transformation – are at the centre of Lotman’s cultural semiotic approach. It is vital at this moment to distinguish two different uses of the term ‘translation’ in Lotman’s work. First, he uses the term in the classical literary scientific sense when he deals with the problems of structural poetics. But he also speaks of ‘translation’ when he is referring to the phenomenon of culture and its dynamics in the general sense (Salupere 2008). We, of course, concentrate hereafter on the second sense of the term.

Lotman's conception of translation as the source of cultural dynamics draws a clear distinction between the cultural semiotic approach and the classical structuralism. Whereas the latter conceived language as more primary compared to speech, for Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school such a fundamental distinction was an impossibility – one cannot conceive language and speech separately. Generation of meaning (text, discourse) is not an automatic realisation of language resources from one language into another, but a translation, a transition. Automatic realisation would only be possible within artificial and monolingually coded languages, where the operations of text or message-transition are performed according to algorithmic rules. In that case we would have a situation where changing the direction of the operation to the opposite would lead us back to the original message. "The transformations of texts would be reversible" ["Трансформации текста обратимы."] (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 569). Any deviance from the rules of language in the speech=text could be considered as a reflection of the imperfectness of language. For Lotman, however, it is exactly the dynamic tension between different languages and texts that forms one very important condition for semiotic system as such, since he sees message as *new*, when it "does not emerge out of univocal transformations and therefore cannot be derived *automatically* from some initial text and according to pre-given transformation rules" ["которые не возникают в результате однозначных преобразований и, следовательно, не могут быть автоматически выведены из некоторого исходного текста путем приложения к нему заранее заданных правил трансформации"] (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 569). The reversibility of text transformation is contrasted with un(re)translatability, symmetry with asymmetry. This, however, is exactly the place where the problem of approximate or rhetoric translation – translation in the situation of untranslatability - enters the major scene.

### 3.4. Bilingualism in Lotman and Laclau

According to Lotman it is characteristic to all thinking mechanisms — starting from the structure of the brain to the organization of culture in all its levels — that they are heterogeneously structured. Every meaningful structure consists "of (minimally) two semiotic mechanisms (languages), which are mutually untranslatable and yet similar to each other, since each models, with its own means, the same extra-semiotic reality [in the sense elaborated above]" ["состоящую (минимально) из двух семиотических механизмов (языков), находящихся в отношении взаимной непереводимости и одновременно менно подобных друг другу, поскольку каждый своими средствами моделирует одну и ту же внесемиотическую реальность"] (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 641). Therefore, every meaningful totality is at least bilingual and this also implies that semiotic meanings do not get their full constitution through correspondence to some monolingually graspable 'reality'. Lotman defines language as "every system whose end is to establish communication between two or more individuals" (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 7). It is clear that his conception does not limit language to merely natural languages. Lotman applies the term 'language' also to customs, rituals, commerce, art, religious concepts etc. Lotman calls this kind of systems *secondary modelling systems*, which "are constructed on the model of language" (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 9). This does not imply that they reproduce *all* aspect of natural language (Lotman 1977[1971]: 9).

On the very fundamental level Lotman speaks of 'discrete' and 'non-discrete' (or 'continuous') coding systems (languages) that are simultaneously active in modelling the 'outside' or extra-semiotic reality. According to him, the mutual

untranslatability of those systems is due to their fundamentally different structuring principles. In a discrete system, “the basic bearer of meaning is the segment (=sign), while the text or the chain of segments (=text) is secondary, its meaning being derived from the meanings of the signs” (Lotman 2000 [1990]: 36). In the discrete coding system the signs are linked to signs. Linear, causal, logical or chronological sequences characterize texts of this type (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 572). In the continuous (or non-discrete) systems, the primary bearer of meaning is the text “that does not dissolve into signs, but is itself a sign or isomorphic to a sign. Here, not the rules of linking signs are active, but the rhythm and symmetry (or arrhythmia and asymmetry, respectively)” [“который не распадается на знаки, а сам является знаком или изоморфен знаку. Здесь активны не правила соединения знаков, а ритм и симметрия (соответственно аритмия и асимметрия)”] (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 577). The sign is transformed into its other manifestations or becomes equivalent to the corresponding blur of meaning on some other level. Phenomena that appear *different* gain ability to become *equivalent*; various analogies, homomorphisms and isomorphisms become possible that are characteristic to poetic texts and partly also to mathematic and philosophical texts (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 572).

To summarize the argument thus far we could use a well-known Jakobson’s (1971 [1956]: 239–259) distinction and say that in the discrete linkage the syntagmatic pole of language prevails, and in the case of non-discrete linkage the same holds for paradigmatic pole.

And this is a moment of our argument when we can draw a substantial parallel between Lotman and Laclau by using a quote from the most well known work of the latter:

Taking a comparative example from linguistics, we could say that the logic of *difference* tends to expand the *syntagmatic* pole of language, the number of positions that can enter into a relation of combination and hence of continuity with one another; while the logic of *equivalence* expands the *paradigmatic* pole — that is, the elements that can be substituted for one another — thereby reducing the number of positions which can possibly be combined. (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 130)

So, when we talk about ‘discrete coding system’ in Lotman’s sense, we could as well talk about the ‘logic of difference’ in Laclau’s sense, and vice versa. Of course, the same holds for the relation of the ‘non-discrete coding system’ and the ‘logic of equivalence’. Not to mention the ‘impossible’ yet ‘necessary’ relation between the discrete/non-discrete and the different/equivalent.

And here a problem arises: how is this antagonism, dislocation or tension between the two types of coding systems (temporarily) overcome? In fact the situation is somewhat paradoxical. On the one hand, these two systems are mutually untranslatable. Yet, on the other hand, this bilingual antagonism is *constitutive* (as is the tension between the logic of difference and that of equivalence in the formation of a discourse in Laclau’s sense), because bilingualism is the condition for any thinking structure.

We can refer back to the aforementioned ‘block of contingent equivalences’ or ‘metaphorogenous device’. We have explained the relation between Lotman’s ‘coding systems’ and Laclau’s ‘logics’, and the presumption of ‘inevitable tension’ involved in each conception. Now, it is time to sketch out the ways in which the *overcoming* of this tension is conceived.

### 3.5. Overcoming bilingualism: 'empty signifiers' and 'rhetoric translation'

Lotman's argument evolves out of his idea of 'rhetoric translation'. The mechanism of rhetorical translation integrates the antithetic semiotic structures (the discrete and continuous coding systems) into a unified whole. This unity is necessary for translation to occur and produce positive results, despite the apparent impossibility of any translation (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 573). As an elementary condition for semiotic communication, these antithetic tendencies have to disappear in a unified structural totality. Otherwise, any positive meaning-generation would be impossible. And it is important to notice that it is a two-way (and simultaneous) movement: the continuous text (= sign) is translated by way of setting the discrete units into regular sequences and the discrete sequences can also be conveyed through continuous texts (Lotman 2004a [1978]). Due to the principally different structuring principle of the continuous and discrete coding systems it cannot be the case of exact or precise translation here. The latter would require a one-to-one correspondence between the elements of the two systems enabling the projection of one system into the other. The discrete and exactly specified unit of one language is in the other language corresponded by a diffusively bounded blur of meaning transmuting gradually into another meaning (Lotman 2005a [1981]: 406). In a situation like that we are dealing with no precise translation, but with "approximate equivalences determined by the cultural-psychological and semiotic context common to both systems." (Lotman 2000 [1990]: 37).

Laclau, as we mentioned, explicitly presumes *figurative* discursive constructions for overcoming the tension between the logic of equivalence and difference. Explaining this figural construction, he coins the category of 'empty signifier' (Laclau 1996a: 36–46). The idea is roughly this: in the formation of discourse the differences lose their identity based on differentiality — in other words: the signifiers that form the discourse tend to get emptier and emptier from the point of view of their specific meaning. This emptying of the signifier takes place through proliferation of different meanings that are attributed to it (Laclau 1996b). For heuristic reasons Laclau differentiates between the 'empty' and the 'floating' signifiers, indicating that the status of *getting* emptier is the status of floating (Laclau 1996b). But some signifiers tend to get emptier than others. Of course, in practice no signifier can lose its differential meaning altogether, yet Laclau's idea is that the one that does it the most — the so called 'empty signifier' — can also, in some circumstances, represent the discourse as a whole and incarnate the *totality* of the whole system of differences, providing this way the closure for the system.

When Lotman speaks of 'cultural-psychological and semiotic context common to both systems' that might determine the result of the translation from discrete into non-discrete (or vice versa), a natural question arises concerning Laclau: is there any mechanism that might determine which of the signifiers in the discourse assumes the function of 'empty signifier'? Laclau's answer is that assuming this function cannot be determined *a priori*, but is constituted through *contingent* articulation. If it could be determined *a priori*, the relation between the empty signifier and all the other differences would be a *conceptual* relation: a relation where the empty signifier would express a common core of all the particular differences belonging to the discourse. But that is exactly what Laclau denies (see Laclau 2006: 108–109), since in the case of conceptual relations there would be no place for *contingent* articulations. The relationship between the empty signifier and the discourse as a *totality* is the relationship between a *name* and an object (Laclau 2006: 109). In other words, the empty signifier is nothing other than a signifier that has become a name for a discourse (the whole chain of signifiers). So, we have to deal here briefly with the

general problem between the relationship of names and objects from Laclau's perspective.

How are names and objects related to each other? Laclau takes here a radically antidescriptivist stance (Laclau 2005a: 101–110; Laclau 2006: 109). Antidescriptivism as it stems from the works of Saul Kripke holds that naming does not involve any conceptual mediation but is a primary baptism through which a name is assigned to an object (see Kripke 1980). But Laclau with his references to Slavoj Žižek (1989) goes even further and asserts that the object is not something pre-given, not something that a name can be assigned to. Rather the unity or identity of an object is the *retroactive* result of *naming* it. Objects are (so to speak) *created* through naming. The name is the ground for the thing, not the other way round. This, however, leads logically to Laclau's central notion – to that of hegemony as a form of *contingent* articulation of social and political meanings

### 3.6. Naming as a hegemonic operation in Laclau

It should be clear that the function of Lotman's mechanism of 'rhetorical translation' is analogous to the one attributed to *general* category of 'empty signifier' in Laclau's conception: it links the different signifiers into a chain of equivalence. And through that operation the signifiers lose their differential identity and become dominated by the logic of equivalence. Now that we have explained that, it is time, however to ask a crucial question: what is for Laclau the purpose of this category of empty signifier for political analysis? Answer could be framed easily: it is the most fundamental tool for conceptualising hegemonic relations. Namely, from the researcher's point of view, a hegemonic relation is nothing other than the situation where a particular signifier has assumed the status of an empty signifier. In other words it is an articulation, which requires that a particular signifier without entirely losing its particularity becomes a universal representative of the signifying system as a whole (Laclau 2005a: 70).

But as we have explained the very same relationship in terms of names, we could say according to Laclau, that a hegemonic relation is nothing other than a situation where a concrete and particular signifier functions as a name for an entire chain of signifiers. This means that the problem of naming is at the centre of Laclau's theory of discourse and hegemony. Through the act of naming the hegemonic relations are established. And the study of naming strategies is of utmost importance for political analysis. For example: names like, 'war against terror' or 'struggle against fascism' function as *grounds* for certain political discourses — not just as some ancillary labels. They, of course, change the differential nature of signifiers that might end up being part of the corresponding discourses.

Given our purposes in this article, our next logical step would to ascertain that the same general logic concerning the problem of 'naming' could be found in Lotman.

### 3.7. Naming as a hegemonic operation in Lotman

Now, when we use Lotman's vocabulary for conceptualising hegemonic relations, we should first specify that in the *formation* of hegemonic discourse (or hegemonic semiosphere for that matter) there prevails the *non-discrete* strategy of 'rhetoric translation'. It means that discrete and clearly differentiated signs are translated into non-discrete totality. "The main feature of such a world is universal resemblance of everything to everything; the main organizing structural relation that of homomorphism" ["Универсальным законом такого мира является подобие всего



всему, основное организующее структурное отношение — отношение гомеоморфизма”] (Lotman 2004a [1973]: 570). In other words, the identity of the former discrete elements is more or less transformed. This continuous translating strategy “makes one see manifestations of the One phenomenon in the various phenomena of the real world, and observe the One Object behind the diversity of objects of the same type” [“заставляет видеть в разнообразных явлениях реального мира знаки Одного явления, а во всем разнообразии объектов одного класса просматривать Единый Объект”] (Lotman 2004a [1978]: 571).

Since we indicated that the function of ‘rhetoric translation’ is analogous to that of ‘empty signifier’, the second specification we should make now has to do with the problem of ‘naming’.

Naming is a crucial problem for Lotman too, and we can refer to a recent article that dealt with it in this political context in more detail (see Selg and Ventsel 2008) and saw naming as one of the major strategies for constructing the political discourse. The name would have a function of primary translation, since as soon as the *outside* world (and that can also be a world that is coded in some *other* language, coding system, discourse or semiosphere) is set forth, “it is already *named*, that is, it is semiotized at least on the surface level” [“он уже назван, то есть хотя бы поверхностно семиотизирован”] (Lotman 2004c [1989]: 646). The meaning of the name can function as a representation of a continuous totality or in the extreme case — it can *become* that totality. This extreme case, as is observed by Lotman, is the logic of *mythological* naming or identification: “Mythological identification is in principle non-textual in character, emerging from the inseparability of the name and object. What may be at stake in such cases is not substitution of equivalent names, but transformation of the object itself” [“Мифологическое отождествление имеет принципиально внетекстовый характер, вырастая на основе неотделимости названия от вещи. При этом речь может идти не о замене эквивалентных названий, а о трансформации самого объекта”] (Lotman 2004d [1973]: 541). In Laclau’s sense it would be a case of not just equivalence between the name and the object it names, but a one of identity. In such a case, the altering of the name would imply altering the object that is named.

At the other extreme we could imagine the act of naming a completely discrete unit. That would be a completely conventional naming. In that case no transformation takes place in the object when its name is changed into something else.

In neither of the extremes is politics or hegemony possible, because “We have an end of politics when the community conceived as a totality [the object], and the will representing that totality [the name], become indistinguishable from each other. [That would be the case of mythological naming in Lotman’s sense] In that case [...] politics is replaced by administration and the traces of social division disappear” (Laclau 2005b: 48). And “the asymmetry between community as a whole and collective wills is the source of that exhilarating game that we call politics, from which we find our limits but also our possibilities” (Laclau 2005b: 49). In other words, there is a dialectics between mythological and conventional naming that makes politics possible.

### 3.8. *The forces ‘behind’ naming*

So, we could say that naming would be a very central category for conceptualising politics for both Laclau and Lotman. But is that all that politics is about? This

question for Laclau is actually a question concerning the *forces* behind these operations that enable naming to be the ground for discourse.

Laclau's answer draws mostly from Lacanian psychoanalytic conceptions of affect, desire, and drive (Laclau 2005a: 112-117). And this is the point where our view starts to distance itself from that of Laclau. We try to explain why by not so much through criticizing his relevant views *per se*, but rather through dismissing them by substituting the underlying categories of those views with Lotman's cultural semiotic concepts, which, we believe, serve better our *empirically* oriented aims than the Lacanian categories. We cannot elaborate the point here, but it suffices to say that the main problem of the latter, in our view, is that they tend to explain everything, therefore providing no theoretical criteria for distinguishing the 'meaningful' from the 'meaningless' that should be a starting point for any empirical analysis.

#### 4. From congenialities to fruitful complements: expanding the dialogue

The theoretical analysis thus far had the purpose of demonstrating the congenialities between Lotman and Laclau in order to provide a non-arbitrary basis for bringing those thinkers together. We started with the relationship between the notions of discourse and semiosphere (culture); moved on to the general 'logics' or 'coding systems'; then through juxtaposing the categories of 'empty signifier' and 'rhetoric translation' we concluded that the operation of 'naming' is of central importance for both Laclau and Lotman for potential conception of hegemony. These were the congenialities. Now, we are at the stage of drawing out the main complements that can be made to Laclau's conception of hegemony in terms of Lotman's cultural semiotics.

##### 4.1. Naming is but one hegemonic strategy

Since we dismissed the categories underlying Laclau's answer concerning the forces 'behind' names (see Section 3.8), we should pose the same kind of question to Lotman's theory: is naming the only strategy of 'rhetoric translation'? And the answer is, of course, 'no'. The potential 'forces' behind naming are to be found in Lotman's general conception of translation strategies.

Though naming is far from being the only translation strategy that characterises political or hegemonic practice, it could be conceived as a primary strategy in the sense that it functions as the most fundamental suture of a hegemonic discourse: a discourse that is generally identified by a single name is obviously more continuous, stable and less open to analytic criticism than a discourse identified by many signifiers, whether names or others. But hegemonic practice is always constructed as a bilingual system. Its main specificity consists in the tendency towards translating discrete elements into a non-discrete totality in the Lotmanian sense or difference into the chain of equivalence in the Laclauian sense. We could say, from the researcher's point of view, that every hegemonic practice strives to be identified – in the long run – by a single name that is the ground for the continuity of its identity. But this endeavour towards hegemony has many steps, stages, drawbacks, and of course, it is never final. To put it again in terms of researcher's point of view: there exist a great many translation strategies between the two extremes – the purely conventional and the purely mythological naming – that could be conceptualised as hegemonic practices.

This conceptualising would also provide some basis for dealing with ways of *how* the heterogeneous phenomena are articulated into a hegemonic totality and *how* they lose their particular content through this articulation into a relation of equivalence. Offhand it seems obvious that different elements of the chain of equivalence are articulated differently. Nevertheless, the mere contention that through equivalence the particular contents lose their identity, says nothing specific about the logic of that transformation. But handling this problem seems to be one of the most important tasks for an empirical political analysis. In fact, the problem of that transformation has been an explicitly addressed problem among the Essex school as well, mostly in terms of a need for specification of different types of hegemony or modalities of political identity. The starting point for one of the most important trajectories for future research consists in the theoretical clarification “of the relation between the logic of hegemonic practice and particular forms of political regime. For instance, in what way do democratic and authoritarian forms of hegemony differ?” (Norval 2000: 229). Since Laclau and Mouffe’s *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* the general hint for addressing the question of the *differentia specifica* of democratic hegemony has in one way or the other been associated with the notion of pluralism that is contrasted with authoritarian monism.<sup>1</sup> “The roots of authoritarian practice”, for Laclau and Mouffe, “are to be found in interweaving of science and politics, and the consequent epistemological privileging of vanguard party. By contrast, the democratic practice of hegemony calls into question the transparency of relations of representation and recognises that the identity and interests of social agents are the result of contingent articulatory practices” (Norval 2000: 229; cf Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 55-58). But the theoretical as well as analytical tools for studying different hegemonic discourses from the viewpoint of their typology remains under-theorised: “It is clear that the conceptualisation of hegemony offered here... is neutral with respect to the *type* of hegemony instituted” (Norval 2000: 231). So, “while discourse theory provides us with a sophisticated conceptualisation of the decision inaugurating politics, further reflection is needed on the bridging of the gap between the moment of hegemonic institution *tout court*, and the institution of a particular regime, such as a democracy” (Norval 2000: 231). Some clues for these future reflections are proposed through Derrida’s notion of the *ethical* or reintroduction of the original “Gramscian discussion of hegemony as a practice of ethico-political leadership and with it the normative aspect of the concept” (Norval 2000: 231), but our intention is to grasp the problem in terms of aforementioned ‘translation strategies’. Democratic social or hegemonic formation could, in our view, be specified as a discourse in which there is a predomination of *discrete* translation strategy: in other words, in a democratic political context, the signifiers (events, speeches, programs, even, for instance, the identities of politicians etc) that circulate in the public communication, tend to retain their discrete identity and not to be blurred through inscription into a continuous whole, that could be identified through very limited set of signifiers (at the extreme case: through only one signifier, for instance, the name of the leader, party or program). This, of course, implies that the less signifiers are there to be identified as the grounds for a discourse the less democratic this discourse could be considered. Or to put it in the vocabulary elaborated here: the more continuous (or mythological) is a political discourse, the less democratic it is. It is important to point out that there is no contradiction with the definition of hegemonic translation strategy given above, since an absolute hegemony of one political force would be – theoretically, but never completely in practice – possible only in an absolute totalitarian regime. On the other hand, our conceptualisation coincides with the ‘common sense’ among political

scientist that when a political force wins an election with too large a majority, it gives good grounds for suspecting a deficiency of democracy in a corresponding regime.<sup>2</sup> But our aim is not to limit this insight to merely electoral process, but to political or public communication in general, and to provide some tools for assessment of different types of political communication in terms of their discreteness or continuity. And that is a reason why we think the Tartu-Moscow School of semiotics could be of service here, since Lotman has developed several subtypes of translation strategies for both discrete and continuous types coding, and those could, in our view, be adapted for political analysis from the semiotic point of view. We will try to concretise our intention by way of giving a sketch for a concrete analysis. But before that, some brief additional remarks are of necessity concerning the notion of ‘text’ in the context of Lotman’s work.

#### *4.2. Lotman’s notion of ‘text’ as a potential basis for a typology of hegemony*

The notion of text as it is developed by Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow school could give some useful clues for political analysis, because the latter is as basic a concept for the cultural semiotics as is the concept of discourse for Laclau and the Essex school. We believe, though, that the latter is under-theorised compared to the notion of text by Lotman.

It should be clear that text is not a work (or piece or opus) of something – it is a wider concept. Text has to be expressed in signs, yet not everything that is materially expressed in signs is relevant for text as a meaningful totality (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 50-56). In the context of artistic text – that could in principle be generalised to texts in general – we could refer to Lotman’s observation that “the extra-textual bonds of a work can be described as the relations between the set of elements fixed in the text and the set of elements from which any given element in the text is selected” (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 50).

We should mention some of the main characteristics of text: its boundedness, heterogeneity, and hierarchy. In light of those features, the text ceases to be a simple message. In addition to the capacity to condense information, the text acquires a *memory*: it does not merely convey information that has been inscribed into it from the outside, but also transforms the messages and develops new ones (Lotman 2000 [1990]: 11-19). This makes the social-communicative function of text more complex. Besides the functions of conveying information, of creativity and memory, text operates as a mediator of cultural memory between the auditorium and the cultural tradition in which the information stored in the text actualises some parts of common cultural memory, simultaneously leaving other aspects of it into oblivion. Moreover, in the course of communication the consumer of text does not only communicate with the text but with itself as well – the text helps to rebuild the personality of the reader, alter its structural self-orientation and its connection with the meta-cultural constructions (Lotman 2002a [1981]: 158-162). The latter aspect is important when the discursive formation of the political subjects is at stake.

In what follows, we shall sketch out some strategies of hegemonic practice of signification that might ground a possible typology for empirical studies of political communication.

### 5. A sketch for political analysis: the discourse of ‘the Singing revolution’

The example belongs to one of the most revolutionary periods of the recent history of Estonia, a period when along with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Soviet identity – the so called *homo soveticus* – that thus far had been maintained in the public communicational space through total censorship was collapsing as well, being replaced by a new identity constructed on the basis of nationality or ethnicity.

National identity could be seen as a coherent discourse (or text) through which the homogeneity of a culture as a system is established. As we mentioned above, the latter also implies the system’s delimitation itself from the extra-semiotic reality or a reality of certain other semiotic system. Understood this way the identity formation can be seen as an ordering principle of cultural reality. The need for rearticulation of cultural identity usually stems from the change of culture’s position due to its inner or outer factors. In most cases the main causes for intensification of identity creation are external effects. We could, first, in this connection point to political or economic pressures (including direct dangers of war); secondly, the intensification of dialogue and the diversification of cultural contacts as well as the transformation of the operating cultural and power relations; and thirdly, the transformation of the communicational space through the introduction and spreading of new media. (Kotov 2005: 189).

All those conditions are evident in the Estonia of the late 1980s: the internal communicational space was disengaging from the total censorship of the Soviet Union, different civic initiatives were emerging, communication channels were opening and contacts with the world abroad expanding. The polemics over the incompatibility of the Estonian and the Soviet identity entered increasingly the public communicational space of Estonia. This antagonism tended discursively to divide society into two opposing camps – the ‘Estonians’ vs. ‘Otherians’<sup>3</sup>. That is, of course, a clearly undemocratic tendency from the above sense (though it should be added retrospectively that the aim of this construction served the struggle for restoration a democratic order in Estonia). Besides that it had an effect of increasing the risk of the local initiative to be repressively crushed down by the Soviet central authorities. The victims requiring events in Baku, Tbilisi, Riga and Vilnius demonstrated that this danger was quite tangible in the late 1980s and the early 1990s.

One of the most powerful discourses constructing the Estonian national identity during the period in question was a chain of various events and phenomena that has become to be widely known under a unifying name ‘Singing revolution’.

The name ‘Singing revolution’ was first used by Heinz Valk in an article that appeared in a widely read weekly newspaper of those days ‘Sirp ja Vasar’ (‘Hammer and sickle’) on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 1988 (Valk 1988). In the Estonian as well as in the wider historical memory the ‘Singing revolution’ signifies a set of events that contributed to the expansion of the economic and political rights of the local Estonian people and in the long run to the restoration of the independence of The Estonian Republic.<sup>4</sup> We can point to the most significant of these events here. First, the so-called ‘Phosphorite war’, a set of events during which the Estonian press publicly opposed the plan from Moscow to establish a phosphorite mine to the Eastern part of Estonia. Second, the plan for policy of Estonia’s independent economy that came to be known under the name ‘IME’ (the word ‘ime’ means ‘wonder’ in Estonian), an acronym for ‘Isemajandav Eesti’ (‘Self-managing Estonia’). Third, the restoring of

the status of the blue-black-white tricolour as the Estonian national flag. Fourth, the prevalence in the public communication of an idealized image of the first independence period of 1918-1940, especially the so called ‘Golden age of Päts’<sup>5</sup> despite the fact that in the historiography considering the final years of that period, this ‘golden age’ has usually been portrayed as an authoritarian regime. Fifth, the spontaneous night song festivals in the summer of 1988. Sixth, five extremely popular patriotic songs by a young pop-music composer Alo Mattiisen. Seventh, the so called ‘Baltic chain’, a mass protest meeting on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of August 1989 commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hitler-Stalin Pact that gathered together about 2 million people who formed a 620 km human chain all over the Baltic States from Tallinn to Vilnius. Etc.

The hegemonic power of the signifier ‘Singing revolution’ could be demonstrated, among other things, by the fact that a rivalry signifier from that period that had the same status as the unifying name for the same events at the beginning of the period in question, is virtually vanished from the common language use of Estonians. And that was the signifier ‘the second awakening’ that had clear associational relation to a very common signifier in Estonian historical consciousness, namely ‘the national awakening’. The latter is a stipulative term coined in the Estonian historical literature in the first decades of the 20th century. It refers to the period when against the background of economic and social change in the second half of the 19th century the acknowledgement of nationality began in the Estonian literary communication and the awakening of the national self-consciousness and national movement started to emerge. The signifier has established itself quite firmly in Estonian historiography as well as in the common language. That is not the case, however, with the ‘second awakening’. And one of the routes of explanation for these states of affairs could be conceived in terms of hegemony: compared to the signifier ‘Singing revolution’ ‘the second awakening’ had too little reference in the Estonian cultural tradition to be hegemonic. But it still needs to be clarified why is the status of the ‘Singing revolution’ still hegemonic for identifying certain events of the recent history of Estonia. And we approach it in terms of translation-strategies.

Those events aggregated under the name ‘Singing revolution’ are incommensurable in their particularity. The night song festivals and the ‘Baltic chain’ for example are completely different events. But it is exactly the constructed political identity that let them be seen – at least from the internal viewer’s point of view – as parts of one unified whole. This means that the heterogeneity of the phenomena was brought into unity through equivalential political articulations and the name ‘Singing revolution’ functioned as the ground for that unity. Using Lotman’s terminology: “the equivalence of non-equivalent elements forces us to assume that signs which have different denotata on the linguistic level have a common denotatum on the level of secondary system” (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 47). The different symbols of the Singing revolution became the symbols of the dislocation in the present *status quo*, signifying this way the pursuit of national self-determination. Yet this is the moment in Laclau’s conception that we intend to supplement with Lotman’s conception of translation. According to Laclau the movement from one hegemonic formation to another is always a radical break. Not that the elements are completely new, but the name of a discourse or the empty signifier around which the new formation is constructed, does not derive its central position from any logic that already functioned in a previous situation (Laclau 2005a: 228). We do not intend to claim that the translation from one formation to the other is determined by a pre-given structural deduction, but we would still put forward a more moderate proposition that some relations of equivalence and

some names for discourse are more *probable* than others. We try to show this in part through analysing the relation of Estonian tradition of singing festivals and the signifier ‘Singing revolution’ as the name of a discourse that formed the unity of Estonian political struggle for independence. In doing this we use Lotman’s subtypology for different translation strategies.

The ‘Singing revolution’ as a name constituting a discourse is a good example of a seemingly contingent name that nevertheless was able to establish itself in the consciousness of the people due to the preceding cultural tradition. The article by Heinz Valk in which he ascribed the label ‘Singing revolution’ to the night song festivals ultimately converged around it the meaning of many preceding as well as succeeding events in the Estonian cultural history. We can detect a primary translation here that consists in giving a verbal name to a nonverbal phenomenon. From the Lotmanian point of view it can be typologized as ‘external recoding’ where “equivalence is established between two chain-structures of different type, and between their individual elements” (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 36). The pre-story of the discourse of the ‘Singing revolution’ goes back to 1869 when the tradition of song festivals in Estonia was initiated. The first Baltic-German song festivals were held in 1857 in Tallinn and in 1861 in Riga. These were guiding examples for the first song festivals of the Estonians. The roots of the first song festivals could be traced back to the clerical songs of the Swiss-German origin. We can observe the second moment of translation here that could be conceptualised as plural external recoding. In the case of plural external recoding the meaningful totality is built up through translating several independent structures into a mutual relation of equivalence (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 36). A text originating from aesthetic-religious language is translated into a manifestation of the cultural unity of a nation. And it is important that the original sacral moment was transmitted to the tradition of Estonian song festivals as one of the cornerstones of Estonian nationality. It is especially relevant to emphasize in this context an observation by Lotman that although every text is unique, *ad hoc* construction of a unified sign for expressing a specific meaning, it is possible for it in further communication to become a part of the coding language (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 51-53). It functions then as an element of language through which it is possible to construct or deconstruct new texts (or political discourses).

As time went along and in addition to cultural self-expression the need for political self-expression emerged, the tradition of song festivals was recoded into political language. The national consciousness during the Soviet period and especially the 1980-s was informed by an idealized image of monolingual and mono-ethnic nation state (Aarelaid 1998; Aarelaid 2000; Kotov 2005; Ots 1998 etc). We could describe the national-romantic consciousness as monolingual (at least from the internal point of view) where the meaning of each member is derived from certain immanent recoding rules. “When meaning is formed by the correlation of a series of elements (or chains of elements) within a structure, we can speak of *plural internal recoding*” (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 36). According to Lotman, such immanent relational meanings are especially common in those systems that pretend to be generally accepted and to systematize the whole human reality (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 37). These are systems that are relatively closed to the outside world. The song festivals had a firm place and meaning in the system on national-romantic consciousness. And in explaining it the concept of internal recoding by Lotman is of service. Typologically the internal recoding is clearly a continually oriented

translation strategy, which in light of our remarks above constitutes a clearly undemocratic or rather authoritarian discourse. If we take the concept of song festival as it occurs in the national-romantic system, we can easily determine its content once we defined the relation of the concept with the others in that system. The song festivals are located on the poles of antithesis 'own/other', 'upper/lower', 'good/bad', 'freedom/slavery', 'exceptionality/mediocrity', 'educatedness/uneducatedness' and so on. All the left-hand members of these paired oppositions, on the one hand, and all the right-hand members, on the other hand, are variants of an arche-meaning, which gives us some idea of the content of this concept within the structural framework of the national-romantic consciousness. From the national-romantic viewpoint, however, there is no need to go outside the system. Within this kind of consciousness, in principle, the problem of the objective meaning of concepts in the language of another system of thinking does not arise (Lotman 1977 [1971]: 37).

The discourse of the 'Singing revolution' formed a fairly closed and self-centred discourse that from the typological point of view could be described as authoritarian. But we can also observe a tendency towards the opposite direction: in the new communicative situation of the 1990s, in the light of globalisation and the effects of multicultural ideology, as well as the decrease of the sense of direct foreign danger due to the collapse of the soviet system, not to mention the changed demographic situation resulting from the soviet policy, the discourse of the 'Singing revolution' has disintegrated and the national-romantic self-image of Estonians has fallen apart<sup>6</sup>, opening this way the door for more democratic or discrete forms of communication. During that period the role of the song festivals as a constituting text of nationality has vanished or marginalized. This meant that in those new conditions it was no longer possible to utilize the former, mostly mono-structural translation strategies. In that period the question of the relation of meaning of a concept in the structure with its extra-systemic meaning became primary important – it was concentrated on generating new ideas for building up the newly formed country that had recently regained its independence, as well as integrating it into the structures of the European Union and NATO. We could observe again the prevalence of the discrete coding system in the society. And the song festivals are seen first and foremost as a part of culture not so much as phenomenon incarnating the whole Estonian culture and society.

## **6. Conclusion**

Considering the theoretical remarks we have indicated thus far, the name 'Singing Revolution' does not seem contingent anymore, but its ability to translate different phenomena into a unity of discourse and attach to the consciousness of the people as the name of this discourse has certain explanation from the point of view of the semiotics of culture. The 'external recoding' in the article by Heinz Valk – the hegemonic act through naming – was so successful due to the fact that the Estonian culture's tradition related to singing had a very sacral or religious character and had a long tradition of 'internal recoding', a translation strategy that constitutes a discourse for which the contact with other discourses is of secondary importance. This sheds some light on the problem of authoritarian form of communication. It is important that the difference between democratic and authoritarian communication can be



identified by form of communication, namely through the predominance of internal recoding in the latter, which leaves the discourse pretty closed for other possible discourses. The ‘content’ of the communication – whether ‘good’ or ‘bad’ from some value-perspective – is not an issue when it comes to assessing a political communication.

It could certainly be claimed that the discourse of the ‘Singing revolution’ is type of authoritarian hegemonic discourse that gives a certain ‘singing’ aspect to all its elements. (The widely known identification for Estonians has even been: ‘Estonians – the singing people.’) During the Soviet period the song festivals were virtually the only time and place (after every five years) where the Estonian people could gather together and manifest their collective unity. But this very form of communication remained dominant also after the collapse of the Soviet Union and started to disintegrate only after few years. The signifier ‘Singing revolution’ still functions as an identifier of the events and the period mentioned above – yet, it is not *the* identifier anymore.

We are, of course, well aware that the argument developed here is in great need of further elaboration and the theoretical resources of both the Essex and the Tartu-Moscow School are far richer than such a brief exposition could possibly display. Yet we hope the latter to be at least a start for a systematic semiotic theory of hegemony or political semiotics more generally.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Actually the requirement of pluralism can be even traced back to Immanuel Kant’s idea of the ‘public use of reason’ (see Kant 1996 [1784]) that is generally considered to be the intellectual source of another very influential conception of democracy – namely, the so called ‘deliberative democracy’ that has been at the center of the debates of recent decades’ normative democratic theory, identifying as its roots the works on ‘public reason’ by the later John Rawls (see Rawls 1996 [1993]: Lecture VI) and Jürgen Habermas’s conception of the ‘public sphere’ (see Habermas 1989 [1962])

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Tilly (2007: 3): “Whenever we see presidential candidates winning election – and especially re-election – by majorities greater than 75 percent, we should entertain the hypothesis that the regime is conducting sham elections.”

<sup>3</sup> An untranslatable word ‘muulased’ was coined to signify all the non-Estonians. Grammatically it is an artificial form that could approximately be translated as ‘otherlanders’ or even more literally ‘otherians’ referring to a pseudo ethnicity of ‘Otheria’.

<sup>4</sup> See *Singing revolution* (2006) a film by James Tusty & Maureen Castle Tusty. Mountain View Production/Allfilm/Northern Light Production. USA/Estonia. Another indication of the wider acceptance of the signifier could be illustrated by an entry ‘Singing revolution’ in the Wikipedia: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing\\_Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Singing_Revolution).

<sup>5</sup> Konstantin Päts (1874-1956), The first president of Estonia (1938-1940)

<sup>6</sup> The amount of the native Estonians was a little over 60% of the entire population of Estonia. A massive urbanisation had been taken place. The development of heavy industry had resulted the emergence of the working class that was hardly compatible with the national-romantic image of a monolingual peasant culture.

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### **Hegemonic process of signification in photography<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT.** The first part of paper discusses the relationship between the theory of hegemony as elaborated by Ernesto Laclau and the semiotics of culture of Yuri Lotman. The ground for believing this incorporation of the two thinkers to be successful is the very apparent theoretical congeniality between them. They both belong to the Saussurean ontological terrain. For Laclau, hegemony is to be understood only on the terrain of discourse: a hegemonic relation is a certain articulation of meanings. One of these instruments through which power relations are established in society is photography. In the second part of my paper I try to develop bridge between given theoretical framework and Barthes's concept of *punctum* and "iconic photograph from visual rhetoric. My main purpose to elaborate some conceptual tools for clearer analysis of social reality, power relations and their visual representations. I focus on different strategies by which, in photography, the "people" is constructed as a homogenous whole of specific historical self-reflection of culture. The analyzed material is taken from the Stalin-era's Soviet Estonia's newspaper and magazine photos.

**KEYWORDS:** *theory of hegemony, Ernesto Laclau's concept of empty signifier, visual representation, semiotics of culture of Tartu-Moscow School, discourse theory*

The present paper tackles the questions that can be briefly formulated as follows: 1) how to visualise power? and 2) does semiotics have anything to offer to research on the visualisation processes of power? One of the means by which power relations are established and reproduced in societies is photographs. The issue of the visualization of power has been dealt with before. Reference can be made to Mihai Nadin and Richard Zakiaia (2004), Gunther Gress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996), as well as Roland Barthes (1972), all of whom have considered the representations of power in photography from a semiotic aspect. The works of Walter Benjamin (1963) and Susan Sontag (2001) are the classics on the construction of social "reality" in photography. Harold Laswell (1927), Jacques Ellul (1965) and others have written about the relations between propaganda and photography. Among Estonian authors, note should be made of Peeter Linnap, who has studied the visualisation of power and politics in contemporary history (2000, 219-252).

Despite this abundance of different treatments, the question: what is power and how is it expressed in photographs, remains mostly under-theorized in all of these works. The reply usually provided is circular, i.e. analysis focuses on the

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representations of things already considered as power (e.g. the self-presentations of persons in power) and proceeds from the classic definitions of propaganda power as manipulative force applied for the purpose of making the receiver behave according to the will of the sender (Lasswell 1995, 13-25; Haste 1995, 105-136). This means, however, that the deeper issue of the internal logic of the signification processes of power itself remains unquestioned.

The approach developed in the present paper proceeds from the tradition that has evolved from Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Michel Foucault's treatment of power. For these authors, power relations are not something pre-given, but are constructed through social significations. In addition to the prohibitive function, power always has a creative function, i.e. power produces discourses that generate meaning, to use Foucault's way of putting it. The present purpose is to inquire whether power relations in photography conceived in this manner constitute a particular kind of means for signification, and if they do, what is its internal logic. Moreover, several authors have emphasized that it is precisely in the analysis of visual representations of power that semiotics could contribute considerably to research on political discourse (Ahonen 1987, 143-157; Drechsler 2009, 86).

Keeping the above problems in mind, the paper to follow will attempt to reduce these shortcomings. In the theoretical part of the paper I will attempt to integrate the starting points of visual rhetoric and Roland Barthes's semiotic treatment of photographs with the semiotic treatment of the concept of hegemony, based on the theory of hegemony by Ernesto Laclau, one of the leading figures in contemporary political theory, and the semiotics of culture approach of the Tartu-Moscow school, especially that of Yuri Lotman. Hopefully this will allow to overcome the above criticism and to place semiotics in the framework of contemporary analysis of power (Selg, Ventsel forthcoming).

The second part of the paper makes an attempt, proceeding from the theoretical basis just outlined, to develop conceptual means for explicating more clearly the relationships between social reality and power and their representations in visual discourse. The present paper focuses on distinguishing different strategies by means of which "the people" as a homogenous entity, as an ideal image of socio-cultural self-description, present in a period-specific situation, is constructed in photographs. In the present paper, I will proceed from the definition provided by Alan Dundes, one of today's leading folklorists and anthropologists: the concept of "the folk" can signify any group of people who share at least one *common* characteristic. I will supplement Dundes's conception with Laclau's treatment of "the people", which will allow to get a better picture of the logic of this signification process itself.

In order to differentiate distinct hegemonic representation strategies, I have drawn as examples on photographs published in the Estonian press (daily newspapers and magazines) that were published from the occupation of the Republic of Estonia (1918-1940) by the Soviet Union in 1940, up to the second half of the 1950s. This period of time under the Stalinist regime marks the most tragic period in contemporary Estonian history, during which period the previous codes that established the socio-cultural (national) identity were negated and replaced with new (soviet) codes. Three factors influenced the choice of the time period and material for analysis: 1) the world view, ideology and value orientations of the collective body are reflected in the news media;

2) censorship (especially its Soviet special case) allows for a more effective channelling of spontaneous counter-discourses, and 3) the scope of this paper requires that a clear and specific research issue is defined. The paper will only analyse elements depicted in photographs themselves, and will not be concerned with the relations between photos and different texts that frame it (e.g. photo titles or captions, the relations between an article and the photos illustrating it; the placement of the photograph in the general structure of the newspaper, etc.). The chresthomatic texts on the relations between verbal and visual language are Kibèdi Varga 1989; Schapiro 1996; Mitchell 1986. The mutual organization between verbal text and what is depicted in the photograph will only be relevant if the verbal text is found within the frame of the photo itself.

### **By way of an introduction**

The experiential world of a human being is ungraspable as a whole in its diversity. With the turbulent development of mass media from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century onward, the relations between reality and appearance, and the construction of “reality”, have increasingly become the object of scientific and theoretical attention. Impelled by his experience of World War I, Walter Lippmann, the classic of media and propaganda theory, wrote in his famous work *Public Opinion* (1922), that our entire world-view is selective in its reflection of reality and mostly built up of stereotypes. Any kind of choice is one-sided and simplifying and will only bring out particular aspects and sides from the entire richness of experience and will leave others in shade. “Reality” is modelled according to effective or imposed, conscious or unconscious modelling conditions. It is clear that the principles of selection and the nature of the modelling of stereotypes are determined by particular cultural, political, social, economic, technical, and other factors. This paper will mostly focus on political and cultural factors and will leave the economic and technical ones aside.

In his discussion of the functioning of power in society, Louis Althusser divides the repressive institutions in society into two: repressive state apparatuses and ideological state apparatuses — the former mostly rely on physical force (police, military, etc.), whereas the latter primarily uses softer means of influence (family, school, media, etc.) (Althusser 1970, 3-38). The dividing line between the two cannot be rigorously distinguished, however, as they frequently intersect — censorship can be enforced by means of violence, but it can also operate as internal self-censorship. Thus the state does not need to apply direct physical violence in order to organize the social world, since by means of the educational system, but also through other channels of information, the state is able to control, create and reshape those mental structures and codes by way of which people interpret reality, including the state and power itself (Bourdieu 2003). True enough, in the framework of a totalitarian social order, propaganda and censorship have a markedly larger role in establishing and reproducing the hegemonic formation. According to some theoreticians (Lippmann 1955; Barlett 1950), censorship is in fact a necessary condition for successful propaganda. For the present context, it is relevant to observe that censorship mostly deals with the spread of one’s “own” discourse and the suppression of counter-discourses. The purpose of this

paper, however, is to explicate the nature of the hegemonic logic of signification of the “own” discourse in the public space of communication during the Soviet era, and not to make any claims of the effectiveness of censorship and propaganda. Moreover, censorship is always in operation in *any* mode of information production — be it because of a particular institution or the circulation of capital — and there is always an interest toward regulating information, including the availability of pictorial information (Linnap 2008, 176). Every society has its own specific systems of principles — be they implicit or explicit — and it is the diverse approaches to these limitations that determine “that which we know as the complete *information regime* of a collective body, or more narrowly as the operative *scopic regime* in the framework of mass communication” (Linnap 2008, 176). In what follows I will attempt to analyse this *scopic regime* by applying the concept of hegemony, supplemented by a synthesis of the principles of discourse theory and the semiotics of culture. Despite terminological differences in meta-languages, there are important substantial and functional points of intersection between the approaches of these authors — such as Laclau’s logic of equivalence and difference in the process of signification and Lotman’s continuous and discrete encoding, the concepts of discourse and text, the function of boundaries for the formation of meaning, naming, etc. In addition to the fact that interdisciplinary approach will allow semiotics to have a say in the analysis of political discourse, the approach of the semiotics of culture will fruitfully supplement the theory of hegemony with more diverse methods of analysis.

### **1. The semiotic approach to the theory of hegemony.**

Discourse studies have a long history, dating back to the early 1960s. During this time, not only the names of the schools have changed, but — according to the research goals set — the content of the concept of discourse itself has changed dramatically. Especially the different branches of critical discourse analysis that have their roots in linguistics, are united by the view that discourse is primarily a communicative event, constituted by its participants (speakers/writers) during a specific time, in a specific place and under specific circumstances, and according to other context-based characteristics. Their purpose is to integrate linguistic structures and social interaction together with social structures (Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis, 2001). Tentatively, approaches that take a more narrow view of the concept of discourse, limiting it to the oral or verbal outcome of an act of communication, can be distinguished in critical discourse analysis. (Socio)semiotic discourse analysis joins other semiotic systems to discourse, e.g. verbal, extra-verbal, visual semiotic systems. According to Van Leeuwen, discourses represent actions, since it is the latter that form the basis of any kind of social cognition and discourses (Leeuwen 2008, 6).

The present paper proceeds from the tradition that begins with Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony and the French tradition in discourse theory, primarily Michel Foucault’s treatment of “discourse” and “power”. This approach deliberately eschews essentialist conceptions of power (liberalism and Marxism being the best known of these), that start off by defining power as a definite “thing” and perceive as their most relevant problem the normative “justification” (liberalism) or “criticism” (Marxism) of this “reified power”. To simplify things a bit, the question of power

would then fall back to the question of who will be the prime minister after the next parliamentary elections, or who will command the repressive organs, and analyses of power would be limited to analysing the relations between the state, the administrative apparatus and the citizens. In visual discourse, power relations would then amount to the representations of different attributes of power — be it the pictures of party leaders, depictions of different symbols of power, etc. (for concrete semiotic analyses of visual political representations, cf. Xing-Hua, 2005; Ahonen 1991). In such a case only the aforementioned attributes-symbols would be replaced during regime changes, which would function as a mechanism for legitimizing power, and as an identification mechanism for the creation of collective consciousness (Kolonitskij 2001, 11-12).

For Gramsci, hegemony is not something that could be described by the characteristics of power, enforcement or domination (*dominio*). Hegemony is “intellectual and moral leadership” (Gramsci 1975, 2010), supported by common interests and values, mutually shared by the members of the hegemonic formation. It should be emphasized that for Gramsci, the legitimization of the hegemonic formation is not just the result of propaganda or brainwashing, nor explained solely by the calculation of rational interest, but that all these forces have a role in constructing the formation, and that it will be put into effect primarily through ideological state apparatuses such as schools, the media, the church, etc. (Althusser 1970, 3-38). As is well known, neither does Foucault treat power solely as a means of repression — instead, power is something that generates things and the possibility of discoursing about things. Power does not simply say “no”, but makes things, gives rise to pleasures, creates knowledge, produces discourses (Foucault 1976). In light of the above, the old questions such as “who has power?” and “who is repressed by power?” lose their former acuteness. In place of these questions, the attention of the social scientist proceeding from the approaches described above, will shift to concealed power relations, especially to the analysis of the power of discourse.

### **1.1. The hegemonic process of signification**

The Essex school, and especially its leading figure, Ernesto Laclau, represents one of the most promising and the most theoretically accomplished perspectives in contemporary theory of hegemony, especially with its conception of the “empty signifier” as a central category for defining hegemonic relationships.

So what is power for Laclau? As should be clear from what was said above, Laclau does not approach power from an essentialist perspective. Relations of power are constructed through social significations, meaning that all power relations are relations of discourse, and it is precisely in discourse that objectivity as such is constructed (Laclau 2005, 68). The field of signification of the concept of discourse is not, for Laclau, limited to writing or speech, but refers to any complex of elements where relationships play a constitutive role — “this means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it” (Laclau 2005, 68). Nothing is constituted outside discourse; however, this is not a variant of the classical debate between realists and idealists. Laclau does not deny that earthquakes and other physical phenomena exist. But whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the ‘wrath of God’ or in terms of ‘natural disaster’ depends on discursive structurations (Laclau; Mouffe 1985, 108). A parallel can be drawn here with Lotman’s argument that the

semiosphere hardly ever meets up with the extra-semiotic world, as this “extra-cultural” sphere frequently turns out to be the sphere of an alien culture and the “extra-semiotic” sphere the sphere of alien semiotics (Lotman 2004b, 647). Meaning is thus generated through the network of relationships within the culture, and the notions of the pre-semiotic or the extra-semiotic that are interpolated to the external world are frequently related internally by the given culture as its own ideal anti-structure (Lotman 2004b, 646). On the other hand, the world external with respect to a given culture (the extra-semiotic) is not a static and passive entity, but rather an active participant in semiotic exchanges — on its border with the semiosphere numerous ‘mechanisms of metaphoric translation’ operate, ‘pumping’ to both directions the correspondingly transformed texts and generate new texts (Lotman 2004b, 647). In one of his last works Lotman even goes so far as to erase the notion of ‘extra-cultural’ altogether and proposes to substitute it — at least in scientific vocabulary — with the notion of ‘other-cultural’ (2002, 161-162).

The issue of social and political reality falls back on the question of the constitution of the concept of discourse for Laclau, and the concept of text conceived as homomorphic with culture and semiosphere for Lotman. According to Laclau, hegemony should be interpreted solely on the level of discourse: a hegemonic relationship is nothing but an articulation of meanings of a particular sort (Laclau 2006, 103-114). This articulation presumes that a particular difference (a unit of meaning) partially (but never completely) loses its particularity and will become the universal embodiment of the system of signification as a totality, providing the system with an inevitably necessary closure and completion. This particular signifier — the empty signifier in Laclau’s terminology — will thereby acquire a dominant position in the system of signifiers, or discourse, subordinating to a greater or lesser extent all other members of the discourse by letting them appear as *equivalent* and by undermining their mutual differences (Laclau 1996, 36-46). “This operation of taking up, by a particularity, of an incommensurable universal signification is what I have called *hegemony*” (Laclau 2005, 70). Paradoxically, this process of undermining results in a certain unity or transparency (systematicity). The insuperable tension between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence is constitutive for every discourse. And it is at this juncture that we must make another detour through the semiotics of culture.

According to Lotman, the elementary condition for the appearance of any sort of meaning is bilingual encoding. By language, Lotman understands “any system that facilitates communication between two or more individuals” (Lotman 1977, 9). On the most fundamental level, encoding takes place between discrete and continuous systems of encoding: in discrete linguistic systems, the text takes a secondary role with respect to the sign, i.e. it is clearly separable into signs; thus there is no difficulty in distinguishing the sign as a particular kind of elementary unit. Here a sign is associated with other signs; texts of this kind are characterised by sequences, causes, chronological and logical relationships. In continuous languages, primacy falls on the text, which cannot be decomposed into signs, but is itself a sign (Lotman 2004a, 570). These two languages, furthermore, are mutually — from discrete language to continuous language and back again — completely untranslatable, due to the fundamentally different structure of the two languages.

Recall Laclau's logic of difference and equivalence, and the impossibility of completely reducing one to the other. Just like with Lotman's text as a meaningful totality, for Laclau's construction of discourse, or closing it into a significant whole, it must be stressed that this is both a necessary and an inevitable process. First, there can be no complete victory of one logic over the other, i.e. meaning cannot arise solely by means of the logic of difference or the logic of equivalence. This again means that discourse never closes completely and thus there are no absolute and ultimate meanings. At the same time, this closure, even if temporary, is nevertheless inevitable, as otherwise there would be no process of signification and thus no meaning at the first place. Consequently, the creation of this unity can only be a figural or tropological construction (Laclau 2006, p. 103-114). "In that case, the rhetorical devices themselves — metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, catachresis — become instruments of an expanded social rationality, and we are no longer able to dismiss an ideological interpellation as *merely* rhetorical" (Laclau 2005, 12).

Proceeding from the principle of untranslatability between discrete and continuous languages, Lotman is faced with the exact same problem: how is it even possible for some sort of a unitary meaning to arise from this opposed yet necessary structure? For Lotman, such a minimal system contains a third component: "a block of contingent equivalences, a metaphorogenous device that makes possible operations of translation in the conditions of untranslatability" (Lotman 2004b, 641). It should nevertheless be emphasized that due to the fundamental differences between the structure of continuous and discrete languages of encoding, no precise translation is ever possible, as this would presume a complete one-to-one correspondence between the units of the two systems, which would allow one system to be juxtaposed with the other. To the discrete and precisely specified unit in one language, there corresponds, in the other language, a diffusively bounded blur of meaning transmuting gradually into another meaning (Lotman 2005, 406). In such cases no precise translation can be produced, but rather an approximate one, a relation of equivalence derivable from the cultural-psychological and semiotic context that is common to both systems. In Laclau's vocabulary: no discourse is ever closed off completely, yet at the same time a temporary closure is inevitable, failing which there would be no signification at all. Performing a function similar to Lotman's "block of contingent equivalences, a metaphorogenous device" there is Laclau's "empty signifier" — it collects the differences of the signifiers into a chain of equivalence, or, put otherwise, discrete and clearly separable signs are translated into a non-discrete, continuous whole. This equation strategy allows the perception of a Singular phenomenon within the different phenomena of the real world, and a Unitary Object in the diversity of a class of objects (Lotman 2004a, 571).

Yet as this unity cannot result from a metaphysical and essentialist foundation, a question arises — what is it that creates the unity? This unity is a pure effect of naming. As Laclau indicates in his later works, the name becomes the basis for the thing, the object, the phenomenon, i.e. for discourse. But a name of this sort is not a conceptual relationship where the empty signifier expresses the common core of particular differences that would assemble them into a discourse. If so, the thing that would generate unity would again be something pre-given, it would be something essential. And this is exactly what Laclau denies (Laclau 2006, 108-109). At this point,

Laclau goes even farther — he claims that the object itself is not something pre-given, to which a name is attached, but rather it is only by naming that the unity or identity of the object is generated. Thus objects themselves are created during an act of naming. In Lotman's semiotics of culture, names and naming perform a very similar function — although a name by its nature is discrete, it functions as a name for the entire significant totality, and it would be more accurate to say that it generates the whole as a meaningful semiotic object during the primary process of semiotization (Lotman 2004b, 647). Paradoxically, in political discourse this is rather similar to mythological acts of naming, which grows out of the lack of distinction between things and names (Selg; Ventsel 2008, 167-183).

I have provided a brief outline of the semiotic theory of hegemony. We are now, however, faced with the limits of this approach, since if we remain content only with Laclau's "empty signifier" as the primary category of hegemonic relationships, it would appear that many other relations of equivalence remain under-theorized. Likewise, Laclau fails to theorize the hierarchy of and interaction between different languages of encoding in a culture, as a result of which it seems necessary to further involve the semiotics of culture approach, in order to develop better methods for analysis. In the following chapter, I will proceed from what has been written above and attempt to develop specific methodological means for analysing the visual representations of "the people". First, however, I must briefly describe how the concept of "the people" is to be understood in this paper.

## **2. The construction of „the people“ in photography**

The concept of "the people" or "the folk" continues to be problematic in both everyday language and in different scientific disciplines. It is not merely a concept that is part of scientific vocabulary, but is also loaded with different, and frequently conflicting discursive significations. Up until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup>, "people" was usually understood by reference to other concepts, i.e. it lacked any independent meaning of its own. For the most part, the content of this notion appeared as an opposition to a identity of different group of the populace — the lower class vs. the upper class or the elite, the people vs. civilization (being the non-civilized part of civilized society), but also as an ethnocentric opposition of western society to the primitive or savage society, etc. The problem of identity continues to form a central part of different social sciences and disciplines of the humanities — mention could be made of the philosophical approach to relative identity (Noonan 1980), the socio-psychological approach to identity (Sarbin; Scheibe 1983), and the cultural approach to identity (Baumann 1996).

The present paper waives any ontic definition of this concept; the question is not who specifically is part of the people, but rather, how is "the people" as such ontologically constituted — what is the logic of the signification process itself when we talk about "the people". Thus we will proceed from the treatment of "the people" by two influential theorizers, the American anthropologist Alan Dundes and discourse theorist Ernesto Laclau.

According to Dundes, the concept of "the folk" can signify any group of people who share at least one *common* characteristic. What this connective characteristic is, is



irrelevant — it may be a common vocation, language, religion; what is important is that this group, whatever the reason for which it formed, should share some traditions that they would consider as their own (Dundes 1977). It follows that the concept of “the folk” is substantially connected to the concept of identity, with *identity* being derived from the Latin word *idem*, meaning “the same”. It is obvious that identity does not refer to absolute sameness, the logic of  $A=A$ . An identification with something that is “the same” does not comprise a relationship of identity, but of equivalence. It is a relationship of similarity that in its turn defines the group from others who do not share in these similarities.

The application of the concept of “the folk” instead of the ethnic group would considerably broaden the theoretical foundation of identity research, according to which individuals are simultaneously part of different groups (Dundes 1983, 235-261). Although Dundes treats the identity of “the folk” as constructed, his definition of “the folk” remains simplified and under-theorized. In particular, Dundes fails to consider the situation where one *common* and *shared* characteristic begins to dominate, as well as the consequences of such a domination on other characteristics shared by the individual members of “the folk”.

For Laclau, it is precisely these aspects of the process by which “the people” is constructed that are the most relevant. According to Laclau, “the people” are not something that is constituted by something that itself remains outside, e.g. an objective spirit becoming itself (Hegel 1955) or the unity of language and the spirit of the people (Herder 2003), nor are “the people” something that has the nature of an ideological expression; it is but a relationship between social agents. “It is, in other terms, one way of constituting the unity of social agents” (Laclau 2005, 73). The operation that constructs „the people“ is, for Laclau, the result of the logic of a hegemonic process of signification. It is primarily characterised by the following aspects: a) the unification of a plurality of demands in an equivalential chain; the constitution of an internal frontier dividing society into two camps [“people” and “not-people”]; the consolidation of the equivalential chain through the construction of a popular identity which is something qualitatively more than the simple summation of the equivalential links (Laclau 2005, 77). According to Laclau, the role of something like an anchor point is attributed to *some* components of the equivalence in the process of constructing „the people“, which will then differentiate them from one another. These anchor points that will begin to signify the chain of equivalence are, in fact, the empty signifiers, the logic of which was discussed above.

To define “the people” in this manner distances it from the modernist conception of identity, according to which identity is something stable and homogenous, consistent and ordered. Rather, this approach departs from a contrary way of defining identity — identities are dispersed, a single individual has many, often contradictory identities, identities are no longer temporally as stable and they are open to changes and dynamics. Identity is not, therefore, an essential quality, a substantial phenomenon, but a project and a postulate (Baumann 1996, 18-36). In what follows, let us see how “the people” as an empty signifier is constructed in photography by an act of visual naming.

## 2.1. Strategies for constructing „the people“ in photography: visual naming

Visual rhetoric, which has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, attempts to apply the instruments of rhetoric to the analysis of visual images, and as such encompasses a wide variety of objects, from architecture to the presentation of interiors and public spaces (Defining Visual Rhetoric 2004; Blair 1999; Foss 1994; Twigg 1992; Stafford 1999). The concept of “iconic photographs”, derived from this approach, is relevant for the present discussion. The concept refers to those photographs that, within a particular society (culture): 1) are recognised by everyone (they have acquired iconic status); 2) are understood to be representations of historically significant events; 3) are the objects of emotional identification for the members of the society and 4) are regularly reproduced and republished by the media (Hariman; Lucaites 2001). In principle, these photographs establish a hegemonic relationship for constructing and representing historical events. This means that those images, words, and so on through which they are recognized, which give successive concrete contents a sense of temporal continuity, function exactly as what Laclau has called empty signifiers (Laclau 2005, 76). It is through them that the discourse of “historical reality” is constructed, where some points of view, presented by means of photographs (a parallel may be drawn with the eye of the camera) function as documents of what really happened, and others — those not represented on the photographs — are declared nonexistent. For this reason such “founding events” are always violent with respect to individual memories, since they subordinate the possibilities for individual interpretation (Ricoeur 2004, 79). This is further amplified by the widespread perception of photography as a impartial reflection of reality.

In his works that address photography, Roland Barthes has written that images do not say, they refer (Barthes 1974, 62). Through them, we *recognize* meaningfulness, but rather than present an *accurate description* of reality, or to reveal “the truth”, images ensemble and arrange new “meaningful blocks”, and these visual ensembles are rhetorical acts (Helmers; Hill 2004, 1-25). In “The Semiotics of Cinema”, Lotman writes that “conventional signs are capable of *telling*, of creating narrative texts, while iconic signs are restricted to the function of *naming*” (Lotman 1976, 7). This means that a particular photograph first indicates what is depicted in the photo as a meaning-bearing continuous text, that is, it *names* its significance during the first act of recognition (or *refers* to meaningfulness in Barthes’s sense), but does not yet subdivide it into different discrete meaningful structures. Such a process of reference is in fact the logic of equivalence with respect to the specific hegemonic content, the prevalence of continuous encoding over discrete encoding.

The Soviet Estonian media provides numerous examples of such hegemonic empty signifiers that take the form of photographs. One of the more famous ones is a photograph taken of the balcony of the embassy of the Soviet Union in Tallinn, from 20 June 1940, depicting Zhdanov, Lauristin, Ruus, Säre and others who arranged the coup d’état, waving to the „working people“ (Photo 1). In the Soviet public space of communication, this photograph began to represent an entire sequence of events both prior to and after the depicted moment: “the proletarian revolution”, the people’s support of the new socialist government and the anger targeted at the former government that harboured nationalist sentiments, the friendship of the workers with the Soviet Union, etc. As a particular temporal and spatial snapshot, a particular content in Laclau’s terminology, it is drained of its concreteness and becomes a signifier for the

entire discourse, or rather, constructs this discourse during the act of *visual naming*. It is clear that if a different photograph, one *without* comrade Zhdanov, would have acquired the status of an “iconic photograph”, an entirely different discourse would have been constructed on its basis, a different “founding event of history”, whose chain of equivalence would have been formed between entirely different particular contents.

It is important, however, to emphasize in light of the fundamental distinction between discrete and continuous languages, that “the worlds of iconic and conventional signs do not simply co-exist, they are in constant interaction, in continual mutual crossover and repulsion” (Lotman 1976, 7). This means that the dividing line between discrete and continuous languages is itself mobile and depends, among other things, on the level of analysis the researcher has chosen — we receive the visual image as a whole, but during analysis we can subdivide it into different constitutive elements, and vice versa — by studying the discrete encoding of the verbal text on the level of the signifier, we can focus on those continuous rules that construct the text as a whole out of these discrete elements. “There is an immediate, direct link between attempts to transform graphic signs into verbal signs and narration as the fundamental principle of text construction” (Lotman 1976, 8).

In what follows I will attempt to disentangle the internal principles of encoding of these “iconic” photographs (as text or discourse) that would characterise photography during the Stalinist period.

## 2.2. Strategies for constructing „the people“ in photography: dominant text.

One of the direct consequences of the intersection of different texts are cases where the invading text *subordinates* the prospects of the earlier text to generate new meanings. Here there are several possibilities: first, the prior texts are removed from the public space of communication. During the period under discussion, this was a widespread practice that could take on different forms: censorship, closed archives, physical destruction of the photos, etc.

From the semiotic perspective, the following possibilities are more interesting. The typical consequence of an invasion of an alien text is “text-in-text”, in which case the text takes on a series of functions: to be a catalyst for meaning, to change the character of primary signification, to remain unnoticed (Lotman 2004c, 66). In the present context, we will focus on the first two functions. In such a case, the basis for the generation of meaning is the switch, on the basis of some internal structural principle, from one system of semiotic understanding of text to another (Lotman 2004c, 66). There is an exchange of the encoding language required for translation, which in its turn brings about a rearrangement of prior textual structures.

During the time period under discussion, several important shifts, seldom seen in earlier photographic practice, can be introduced: A) a forceful injection of verbal text as an internal structural element of photographic images. From the “June coup” of 1940 until the end of the Soviet period, there is nary a picture to be found of an assembly of the masses, of meetings or public speaking events that would be part of public discourse and would lack slogans and banners. Prior to great festive events, these — usually quotations and slogans from Marxist-Leninist ideology — were prescribed by the higher authorities and were published as “recommended” notices in major daily newspapers. Here we have a case of encoding that Lotman has called plural external

recoding. In the case of plural external recoding the meaningful totality is built up through translating several independent structures into a mutual relation of equivalence. Verbal and visual text is translated into a total text.

Considering the novelty of such a symbiosis in representative practice, the quotation depicted in the photograph most likely functions similarly to Barthes's *punctum*, by which is meant a process of signification where one figure or detail present in the photograph draws attention to itself and begins to dominate the logic of the signification process, thereby excluding the equal participation of other elements in the process of signification (Barthes 1981). Or to apply the vocabulary of the theory of hegemony: a particular element performs the function of the *punctum*, establishing a chain of equivalence between other elements depicted in the photograph. Simultaneously, it will erase the mutual differences between the other elements (since they are all subordinated to a single element and will acquire their meaning through a relation with the *punctum*) and will dominate the entire totality of meaning depicted in the photograph.

Photo 2 depicts a mass of people, all carrying banners of Soviet ideology. The crowd consists of different individuals in their particularity, but it is precisely because of the banners that the group of people depicted in the photograph becomes "the people". The slogan "We demand that Soviet Estonia joins the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics" functions as the *punctum* or empty signifier, which, although it is a particular signifier (a single element among those depicted in the photograph), it nevertheless signifies, in the process of photographic signification, the "entire people", who are *constructed* out of the crowd of people *around* the idea presented in the banner. It is the slogan that is shared by all the different people in the photograph, other distinctions between them (e.g. differences in clothing, faces, etc.) lose their relevance. The slogan on the wall in photo 4, "Long Live The Estonian Communist Party" functions similarly as the *punctum*.

Essentially similar are cases B) where the other text is another visual image. The best examples of this are the pictures of Soviet party leaders that were carried around during demonstrations. Here, signification converges around the party leaders. As an aside: the slogans permitted during the meetings, but especially the pictures of party leaders were themselves decipherable texts from which one could deduce the political priorities of the state, and the current hierarchy in the top ranks of the party (Lepik 2002).

In the Stalinist-era news media, a special case of dominant text were photos C) that were formed by the creolization of the colour/black-and-white and photo/painting encoding languages. It was typical for newspapers to publish black-and-white photographs of mass meetings in which all the depicted flags and banners had been painted red. On the general black-and-white background the use of the colour red dominated as the element generating additional meanings, indicating the symbolic relationship between the colour red and the working classes, and the just fight against global exploitation (Kolonitsij 2001).

Here I presented some hegemonic relationships of equivalence in visual representations that function as principles for constructing *external* relations between elements depicted in the photographs. On the other hand, we can also distinguish

principles of organization in the process of signification that operate in a more concealed manner. One such principle is the code-text.

### 2.3. Strategies for constructing „the people“ in photography: code-text

As noted above, in political discourse, a mythological logic of signification is prevalent in the process of signification. A culture with a mythological orientation is characterized by an appearance of an intermediary between language and text — the code-text (Lotman 2005b, 425). Whereas on the first level of analysis, the relationship of equivalence is constructed by external shared characteristics: a crowd of people is constructed into “the people” by their *common* work (people working in a factory, on the fields, voting at meetings (see photo 4), etc.), activities (parades, salutes to the party leaders standing on the tribune, people reading the constitution together, etc.), clothing, the satisfied look on their faces, etc., where these *common* characteristics overshadow concrete differences between the members of “the people”, then in case of code-texts the situation is more complicated. A code-text is not an abstract collection of rules required for constructing a text, but a syntagmatically constructed totality, an organized structure of signs that is not expressed directly, but is realized as variants in the lower level texts in the hierarchy of the culture (Lotman 2005b, 425). For an external observer, it may be both ambivalent and polyvalent, to be divided into a paradigm of equivalent yet different meanings, or again into a system of antonymic oppositions, but for the inhabitants of the culture “the code-text is nevertheless monolithic, compact and unambiguous [...] organizing their memories and defining the limits to the possible variations of the text” (Lotman 2005b, 426). Thus we can distinguish, during this time period, a code-text that defines the depiction of the relationship between those in power (usually a particular party leader) and the common people. Naturally enough, in public discourse this was presented as the unity of the party and “the people”, but a unity with a strongly determined internal organization. These formal relations determined the manner by which the characters depicted in the photographs are related to one another, how they are related to the environment and other elements that comprise the picture — e.g. the placement of the characters with respect to the vertical division of the picture, the relations between speakers and listeners, the direction of the gaze, the active-passive relations of the subject derived from these, etc. (see photo 3).

The code-text is clearly revealed in various photographs that depict work. The activity of groups of people has been made so synchronous that “the picture-people are together like visual equations, mathematical formulae or sculptural ensembles” (Linnap 2000, 239). The hegemonic logic of the code-text is in operation in a more concealed manner than in previous coding strategies. By imposing specific mutual relationships between the positions of the subjects and the conditions for their depiction, it functions as a dominant process of signification, since it establishes some positions as active and others as passive, allows some positions to engage in relations with other elements in the picture and denies this to other positions, etc. (e.g. when decisions are made, Stalin always participates and is positioned hierarchically higher from “the people” in the vertical arrangement of the photograph, even if he is only present as a picture, as in photo 3). It is impossible to imagine a photo published by the press that would depict a common man who has placed his hand familiarly on the shoulder of the Leader and talks, that is, teaches the Leader, who has taken up the position of the listener. Other

“stars” from the higher ranks of the party besides Stalin may also take the position of the leader. Neither can we find a photograph of a voting where someone does not have his hand raised (see photo 4), etc. The noted literary scholar Katarina Clark has observed (1981) that only a single novel was written in the socialist-realist vein — M. Gorky’s “The Mother”. All the socialist-realist literature that followed were but variants of this invariant code-text. Similar tendencies can be observed in the Soviet-era public photo production regime. For hidden power relations in Soviet Estonia, cf. Undusk 2003; Ventsel 2007).

Here it is important to emphasize that as the culture functions, as new texts are generated or meta-descriptions written for the purpose of research, every sign of the code-text can appear as a paradigm (Lotman 2005b, 426). In the same manner, a text (in this instance, a particular photograph) can, during further communication, become part of the domain of the encoding language, that is, it itself becomes an element in the encoding language from which new texts are formed (Lotman 1977, 51-53). In conclusion, I will survey one more case of hegemonic process of signification that appears in the mutual organization of coding languages. This the dominant language.

#### **2.4. Strategies for constructing „the people“ in photography: dominant language**

In this paper I have proceeded from one of the primary theses of the semiotics of culture, that a text is never encoded in a single language, and that depending on the view-point of the reader, different kinds of organization can be perceived behind the text. In the present context, however, we are interested in cases where “in general the text has been encoded with some dominant code, besides which we can find local (second, third level) encodings” (Lotman 2005b, 427).

From the perspective of the self-reflection of the ideologies of totalitarian regimes, politics performed the subordinating function *par excellence*, which was expressed in the dominant role of the political dimension with respect to other fields that constitute the society (such as philosophy, religion, aesthetics, ethics, justice, etc.) (Kupina 1995, 13-15, Ventsel 2009). This is clearly revealed in photographs. “The people” are always politically charged to a greater or lesser extent. All the aspects and topics (sub-languages) that are important for “the people” have been visualised with a political dominant. Thus, in Stalinist photography, work is depicted with a markedly military and competitive character, and has no longer anything to do with the ideology of the work ethic prevalent in the Republic of Estonia (1918-1940). Whereas in the latter work was related to the idea of the spirit and unity of the nation, something that was derived from German romanticism, the emphasis has changed considerably in Stalinist work ideology. Concepts such as “socialist competitiveness”, and “triumphs of labour” indicate a permanent presence of the enemy; metalworkers are dominant among the workers, guaranteeing that the land is industrialised and would crush the capitalist adversary. Work can no longer be considered separately from political language, it comprises its sub-language. The same can be said of the fusion of political and military language — war *is* politics. By means of this dominant language, different elements found in photographs are encoded into a meaningful totality — a text.

## Summary

The present paper attempted to distinguish certain hegemonic strategies of encoding for depicting “the people” in the photography of the public space of communication during the Stalinist period. These were, on the one hand, photographs that had acquired the status of an icon in the public space; and on the other, the internal principles of construction of these “iconic” photographs, for which the following means of encoding were distinguished: 1) the dominant text as the dominant element of the process of signification depicted in the photograph; 2) code-text as the principle of organization of the mutual relationships between elements depicted in the photograph and 3) dominant language as the encoding system that subordinates other possible encoding languages in the process of signification. It seems that the Soviet public *scopic* regime is characteristic of the type of culture that Lotman has characterized as a collection of texts, as opposed to the type of culture that creates the collection of texts (Lotman; Uspenskij 1994, 245). In this type of culture, the content of the culture is pre-given with respect to the self-understanding of that culture, it consists of the sum of normalized, “correct” texts: “iconic photographs” that have been encoded according to a unitary canon.

The paper covered the practices of self-presentation of totalitarian power in photography. Contemporary history of Estonia offers excellent material for analysing the ways by which totalitarian power mutates into authoritarian power (from Khrushchev’s thaw onward), up until the complete collapse of the Soviet regime at the end of the 1980s. Further development in this topic could primarily proceed in two directions. First, how was the totalitarian and authoritarian discourse replaced by the democratic one in practices of representation — it’s not just that the violent suppression of alternative counter-discourses by the Soviet repressive and ideological state apparatuses ceased, but socio-cultural value judgments were also replaced — the liberal ideology with its cult of the individual was opposed to collectivist ideology more in accordance with soviet ideology. However, in one of his latest books, *On Populist Reason* (2005), Ernesto Laclau draws attention to the fact that populism is one of the forms that the hegemonic logic of signification can take, and thus it is not at all foreign to the democratic ordering of society and to the free press. This means that the principles of encoding characteristic of the Soviet era can be encountered even today. Second, a separate line of research could focus on the depiction in photography of that inevitable opposite member of the construction of the “we” identity — the “other”. From the perspective of the semiotics of culture, to each type of culture there corresponds its “chaos”-type, which is not primordial, uniform and always equal to itself, but represents equally active creativity of human beings, i.e. to each historically present type of culture there corresponds a unique type of non-culture. It is noted in the *Theses on the Semiotic Study of Culture* that “the extra-cultural field of non-organization can be constructed as a mirroring sphere of culture, or as a space which for an observer connected to the given culture appears non-organized but which, seen from outside, turns out to be a differently organized field” (1998, 34). In what manner this has been constructed in photographs of the political discourse during different historical periods could be one further lines of inquiry.

**Photos.**



Photo 1. The «Demonstration of the free will of the free workers of Estonia» is observed from the balcony of the embassy of the Soviet Union by (left to right) Neeme Ruus, Johannes Lauristin, Karl Säre and Andrei Ždanov.



Photo 2. The people demand that Estonia be accepted to the Soviet Union.





Photo 3. Passing the decision to join the Soviet Union.



Photo 4. Voting.

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# THE ROLE OF POLITICAL RHETORIC IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOVIET TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

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*The issues analysed in this paper are derived from the phenomenon of Soviet totalitarian language. As is well known, the Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology defined itself as a strictly objective, scientific world-view. Scientific discourse is characterised by attempts to minimise the ambiguity of the lexicon, which should ideally halt the drift of signifiers in relation to the signified. One would assume that the scientific nature of the reconstruction of society would have an impact on communication and natural language. The characteristics of totalitarian language reveal, however, that it is not in fact describable by a rigid connection between the signifiers and the signified, and that the semantic distinctiveness of words in the communicative function is compensated by the precise determination of their location in the axiological good-bad axis. In order to overcome this paradox, I will attempt, from a theoretical perspective, to draw out a fruitful intersection between Juri Lotman's concept of symbol and Ernesto Laclau's 'empty signifier', in light of which a symbol, as a special case of 'empty signifier', performs the function of a hegemonizing signifying practice. I will also highlight the role of symbols in political rhetoric and their impact on the development of Soviet language policies and the appearance of totalitarian language, and will point out, by way of a conclusion, that the more*

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*totalitarian a society is, the greater the role played in the construction of its socio-political reality by linguistic elements ambivalent in their content.*

**Keywords:** political rhetoric, totalitarian language, semiotics of culture, Laclau's concept of empty signifier, Stalinist era.

The construction of political reality is one of the many factors specifying human identity. For the self-reflection of the ideologies of totalitarian regimes, politics has the subordinating function *par excellence*, and for this reason political identity, arguably, has a considerable impact on socio-cultural identity. In what follows, an analysis is presented of the political discourse of the Stalinist era, based on the phenomenon of totalitarian language that was used for the indoctrination of the identity and world-view of Soviet citizens. The issues analysed in this paper are also derived from the phenomenon of totalitarian language. As is well known, the Soviet Marxist-Leninist ideology defined itself as a strictly objective, scientific world-view. Scientific discourse is characterised by attempts to minimise the ambiguity of the lexicon, which should ideally halt the drift of signifiers in relation to the signified. One would thus assume that the scientific nature of the reconstruction of society would have an impact on communication and natural language. The characteristics of totalitarian language reveal, however, that it is not in fact describable by a rigid connection between the signifiers and the signified, and that the semantic distinctiveness of words in the communicative function is compensated by the precise determination of their location in the axiological good — bad axis. It is the author's position that reasons for this are to be found in the politico-rhetorical origin of totalitarian language, in light of which totalitarian language is to be perceived as a manifestation of power in a rhetorical form. From this perspective, it follows that the function and significance of political rhetoric in the general communicative space of the society has a considerable impact on the normative nature of natural language, especially on the lexico-semantic level. I will try to show this from a semiotic point of view; semiotics is not only a theory of signs, but theory of communication as well. The relationship between language and ideology has been studied by Bakhtin-Voloshinov (1929). A semiotic view to ideology is to be found in Reis's semiotic theory of ideology (1993). Several analyses come to mind that utilize semiotic vocabulary for dealing with issues usually associated with politics: such as political campaigns, projects or framing (Zichermann, 2006; Clark & Jacobs, 2002) or political advertisements (McIlwain, 2007). Undsk (2003) and Vaiskopf (2002) have written about the specificity of rhetoric in Stalinist-era political discourse; specifically semiotic analyses in studies of the Soviet cultural type can be found in Lepik (2007) and Ventsel (2006, 2007).



Nevertheless, to date totalitarian language has managed to escape semiotic analysis. This paper represents a modest attempt at filling this void.

The paper is divided into two major parts. In the first part, I will briefly specify the relationship between discourse and language, and will describe the Soviet totalitarian language. The second part examines the relationship between political rhetoric and totalitarian language, and the role of symbols in political rhetoric. Using a theoretical approach, I will attempt to draw out a fruitful intersection between Juri Lotman's concept of symbol and Ernesto Laclau's 'empty signifier', in light of which a symbol, as a special case of 'empty signifier', performs the function of a hegemonizing signifying practice. I will also highlight the role of symbols in political rhetoric and their impact on the development of Soviet language policies and the appearance of totalitarian language, and will also point out, by way of a conclusion, that the more totalitarian a society is, the greater the role played in the construction of its socio-political reality by linguistic elements ambivalent in their content.

## LANGUAGE AND DISCOURSE

If discourse is to be understood as a historically specific system of meanings that is embedded in a set of social practices, institutions and organizations (Howarth & Stavrakakis, 2000), it follows that the entirety of human reality is meaningful and constituted by norms, systems, rules and shared truths, reproduced and transformed through social activity. Discourse, as the totality of meanings, overcomes the distinction between the linguistic and the extra-linguistic. Systems of signification always pre-exist, and determine our patterns of thinking and behaviour, but they can exist only insofar as they are constantly reproduced and transformed through social practices. Thus, social realities are inseparable from the meanings attached to them and constructed by them; in other words, "discursive practices that confer meaning on social reality at the same time constitute social objects and identities" (Raik, 2003, p. 25). In addition, all discursive practices are, in principle, translatable into natural languages. It is language that is used for creating a cognitive and conceptual world; a hypothetical image of reality, delineated by the horizon of awareness of the individuals living in a particular society/culture. By influencing and changing a person's linguistic world, one can influence their activities, i.e. their acknowledged or unacknowledged orientation in the world (Ušakin, 1995, p. 144).

In the present context, it is language as used in political discourses, and the impact on language as a whole, that is the primary focus of attention. In political discourse, the dominant discourse is also the discourse of power. The relationship between political discourse and other discourses is dependent upon the mode of social relations. Political

discourse can directly subordinate other discourses, as it indeed happens in totalitarian societies. The world-view engineered by political communication rests upon identical conceptual structures that reduce thoughts and allow the dominant discourse to differentiate the historically-significant from the historically-insignificant and thereby acquire control over the field of interpretations. Individual or group-based political positions are not constituted solely by institutional affiliation or acquired roles, but also by cognitive-evaluative codes (classification schemata) that are necessary for rendering sense to political activity. By way of such schemata, agents classify themselves and allow themselves to be classified (Bourdieu, 1987). In this framework, politics can be conceptualized as a practice for the creation, reproduction and transformation of social relations that cannot themselves be located at the level of the social, “as the problem of the political is the problem of the institution of the social, that is, of the definition and articulation of social relations in a field criss-crossed with antagonism” (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 153). Thus, it can always be understood as an expression of the power of discourses. One of the goals of the construction of political identity is, thus, the creation and reproduction of discourses through which power relations are furtively established in relation to the listener. One such medium, through which these dominant discourses (but also counter-discourses) are constructed, is natural language.

## TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

In his infamous anti-utopia *1984*, George Orwell brilliantly describes the transformation that a language can undergo in strictly controlled and closed societies. The practice of 20<sup>th</sup> century totalitarian regimes indicates that this startling analogy of literary fiction (Orwell’s ‘newspeak’) is possible in reality. During the last quarter of the previous century, linguists introduced the concept of totalitarian language into the vocabulary of the humanities. In specialized literature, totalitarian language is defined as a phenomenon that presumes a particular linguistic mentality, characteristic of totalitarian political systems. The latter are characterised by a complete or near-complete control by the state power over the rest of society (Brzezinski & Friedrich, 1956). In totalitarian political regimes, a particular organization (a party) subordinates the entirety of political power and sets the transformation of the entire society as the goal of its political practice (Anderson, 1993, p. 142). This is legitimized by a relatively clear-cut ideology.

The actual experiential world of the members of a society as a whole is, in a sense, unfathomable and diffusive. Ideology appears here as an interpretation of “reality”, as the relation of code to texts; the set of individual experiences. Ideology, by functioning as a code in which concrete social information is accumulated and in which it is ultimately

transmitted, thus possesses certain properties of “language” that enable the reception of this or that fact, both real and potentially possible, according to the specific historic-cultural context. One of today’s foremost ideology researchers, Andrew Heywood (1990), defines ideology as a system of beliefs, the veracity or falsity of which cannot be demonstrated in any scientific sense, but which nevertheless assists in structuring the world’s comprehensibility (p. 2). Thus, ideology’s field of significance is extremely broad. In political discourse, ideology appears primarily as the legitimizer of political power, as a factor in mobilising people, and creates a certain ideal organization in the customary muddle of political life by providing the so-called fundamental principles for the interpretation of the surrounding world.

It can be said that ideology as an element in social consciousness exists above all in natural language. Mediated by language, ideology takes root and begins to function in social consciousness. Conditionally, ideology can be treated as a relation of a secondary language to natural language, as a “secondary modelling system” in the terminology of the Tartu-Moscow school. Language allows power, in its diversity, to raise goals, to impart the ideology that legitimizes the practice of power, and to organize social order, all of which should ideally guarantee unanimity and the unification of pre-set patterns of behavior in the society (Kupina, 1999, p. 11). In totalitarian states, the politics of language have always served as an instrument in the hands of the dominant ideology by which the functioning and development of language is purposefully influenced, and which primarily operates on the language’s lexico-semantic level and determines the axiological aspect of words (Kupina, 1995, p. 7). Ideally, these processes lead to a situation where individual linguistic consciousnesses are identified to the highest possible extent with the linguistic consciousness of the masses, and instead of the interpretations of an individual “self”, there exists the position of the collective “self” (Cf Dobrenko (1993); Ventsel (2006).) This process is succinctly summarised by Arthur Koestler in his excellent *Darkness at Noon*, a book that dissects the logic of totalitarian power; the self, it is a grammatical fiction (Koestler, 1941). It means that in totalitarian society individual *I* is pure grammatical category. All depends on power.

## THE SOVIET TOTALITARIAN LANGUAGE

Soviet totalitarian language in its most radical form appears during Stalin’s reign of power. It was during this period that the absolute cult of the leader and the total control by the state’s (party’s) power over the rest of society took their final shape in the Soviet Union. In order to characterise the totalitarian language of the era, I will first provide a list of

relevant, very broad characteristics of Soviet ideology that will help in understanding the pursuit of linguistic determination by the authorities:

The Soviet ideology presumes to be scientific, i.e. it claims to describe the world objectively. “The Marxist-Leninist theory is the science of the development of society, the science of the working-class movement, the science of the proletarian revolution, the science for the construction of a communist society” (Lühikursus, 1951 (1938), p. 321).

The above leads to the second important distinction: only Marxist ideology is inherently scientific. Since science describes the world objectively, the “scientific” conception of the world becomes the sole correct way of describing reality (Arendt, 1973, p. 460—483). The “true” way of comprehending the world that comes from the “correct” proletarian class consciousness, its conditions and the tasks it leads to, were argued over by most of the artistic organizations in the Soviet Russia during the 1920s (e.g. Russian Association of Proletarian Writers (Rossyyskaya assotsiatsia proletarskikh pisatelei - RAPP), the left-wing art front (Levij Front Iskusstva — Lef)). Influenced by these ideas, the canon of Stalinist social realism later took shape, and ultimately, essentially monopolised the possibilities of cultural cognition in general (Hlebkina, 1998, p. 59—64; Groys, 1992).

The axiological nature of Soviet ideology. Everything irreconcilable with communist values is excluded from the pyramid of values and turned into a negative.

The eschatological nature of Soviet ideology: history culminates with the arrival of communism. The projection of supreme value into the future, and with it the end of history as such (or more appropriately, the end of prehistory and the start of true history).

The most relevant item in this list is Soviet ideology’s criterion of scientificity. In the ideology of totalitarian regimes, emphasis on the discovery of “the objective laws of history” or “the laws of life and nature” appeals to the common-sense understanding of the synonymy of science and truth (Chalmers, 1992, “Introduction”). Our everyday intuition tells us that the scientific world-view can be expressed in a language that is clear and distinct and has zero degrees of ambiguity. Ideally, this should halt the shift of significations in relation to signifiers and every word should correspond to a maximally, clear-cut content. According to the Marxist linguist Nikolai Marr, the Soviet theory of language was to be founded on principally novel, scientific thinking (Marr, 1936, p. 419). In Marr’s theories of language a worldwide ‘new language’ associated with the appearance of a new language user, the masses. In Marrism, language is defined by way of material culture, that is, through denotation: by its very nature, language is the creation of the human collective, the reflection of not just thought, but of social order that reverberates in the language’s syntax, grammar and semantics. Consequently, language does not exist in and of itself, but only through an organic connection with material culture and the society’s history. In such a theory of language, signs and their denotations are rigidly bound to each other; denotation determines the concrete instances of sign use. In principle, this amounts to an isomorphism of reality,

thinking and language (Romanenko, 2003, p. 189). Every structural change in the material world (e.g. change in relations of production) that should have an expression in the human consciousness (e.g. unitary proletarian class consciousness), is reflected directly in language (e.g. proletarian mass language).

In her *Totalitarian Language: The Dictionary and Utterance Reactions* (*Тоталитарный язык: словарь и речевые реакции*) (1995), the noted Russian linguist Nina Kupina analyses the Stalinist period “Glossary of the Russian Language” (ed. D. Ušakova). A dictionary represents the norms of the linguistic system of a particular era, describing and prescribing the rules for using and interpreting signs and sign systems. Thus, a dictionary, with its normative functions, is thus a suitable object of study for analysing language policies of state powers and the development of totalitarian language.

The following attributes characterise the Soviet totalitarian language according to Kupina (1995, p. 13—15):

Tendency towards the reduction and transformation of constant, ideological semantic concepts (*Leninism — it is Marxism in practice; social pacifism — a special case of opportunism, a social-democratic tactic that supports the imperialist policies of its state*).

Tendency towards the creation of artificial and quasi-ideologemes (e.g. *aristocrat-bourgeois*). (Ideologem - ideologically loaded word or expression (Kupina 1995, p. 13)).

Tendency towards a dualistic axiologization of vocabulary. The ideological expansion takes hold of all the levels of a word’s semantic structure, thereby determining the word’s connotative signification and simultaneously positioning the word in the polarised good-bad axis of values (e.g. *revolutionary — counter-revolutionary, soviet — anti-soviet*).

Tendency towards the creation of antonymous and synonymous rows that systematically affirm ideological dogmas. Even ordinary, everyday words that at first sight should carry no ideological baggage turn into ideologemes (e.g. ‘illiterate’ — someone who has grievously erred against a particular field of knowledge, *this person is politically illiterate*).

Tendency towards an ideological codification of non-traditional lexical combinations. Pronouns, adverbs etc. are explained ideologically (e.g. ‘from below’ — *because of the pressure exerted by the masses from below, the bourgeoisie may, from time to time, accede to the demands of the masses*).

The subordinating role of the political dimension towards other fields that constitute the society (philosophical, religious, aesthetic, moral, legal, etc.). This was apparent in a particularly radical and explicit form in Stalinist totalitarian language. The most important basic ideologemes are formulated in political discourse, and on their basis, other semantic

spheres acquire their political-ideological significations (Kupina, 1995, p. 23). In this manner, a new system of ideological values is selected, which then becomes the basis for the construction of primary semantic-ideological oppositions and the development of axiological rules.

These attributes of Soviet totalitarian language are plainly not in agreement with neither the marxist approach to language, nor the central pretension of Soviet ideology: to be a world-view based strictly on science. In light of the above attributes, totalitarian language can be described as a language whose target is to give form to the linguistic consciousness of a primitive man. Primitive thinking is characterised by the feeling of self-superiority (in totalitarian language, an absolute value judgement, where 'us' is always marked as the bearer of positive value) and the avoidance of complex thought operations that may threaten to crack the ready-made world-view (Vygotsky & Luria, 1993, p. 74—75). In principle, the entire strategy for constructing this political-ideological discourse can be reduced to two underlying statements: present US in a positive light and present THEM in a negative light. From these two statements, an operation of a reversal is derived: never speak anything negative about US and never speak anything positive about THEM (Dijk, 1998). The way in which these pairs of oppositions appear in texts, whether implicitly or explicitly, is dependent on the nature and purposes of the interest groups that produce the ideology.

It can be argued that through the mediation of totalitarian language, an asocial societal childishness was cultivated, with the purpose of completely inhibiting the social activity of the masses. This is most clearly expressed in the didactic and "educational" nature of the semantics of totalitarian language (On indoctrination during the Stalinist era, see e.g. A.Tšerbinin, 1998; 1999). The ideal citizen of the Soviet society was an adult child, whose consciousness is easy to direct and manipulate by the authorities (Dobrenko, 1993, p. 45).

This axiologically-polarized linguistic primitivism is clearly at odds with the clarity of scientific discourse and excludes the latter in principle. The key to explaining this contradiction is provided by an analysis of the function of political rhetoric, since, as was already noted above, it is politics that is the field in totalitarian language that subjects other semantic spheres to itself.

## RHETORIC IN POLITICAL DISCOURSE

If by politics we mean the application of mechanisms of power for the attainment of specific purposes, it is evident that such activities require a certain consensus on part of the subjects involved in political discourse concerning the content and mutual relations of

concepts that circulate therein, on the basis of which political discourse can exist as a field of communication in the first place. For the purposes of the present paper, political discourse can be defined as follows: political discourse is a body of discursive practices that identify the participants in a political situation as such and formulate the subject matter of concrete political communication. In order to mobilise the masses into a struggle for a class-free society, it is required, first of all, that the masses are able to conceive as significant the terms and concepts used in the discourse. In discussing political rhetoric, it should first be determined what distinguishes political rhetoric from other forms of rhetoric.

The classic conception of rhetoric says that it is an art of persuasion, defined by a set of specific rules. This paper is only concerned with verbal rhetoric. Extra-verbal rhetoric (e.g. gestures) is not addressed. The rules and structure of rhetorical discourse are not directly derived from natural language, but are rather a decisive reconceptualization of it (there are shifts in the system of linguistic relationships, the degree of facultative structures rises and they become the primary structure, etc.). “Rhetorical structure is transferred into verbal text from the outside and comprises a supplemental level of order for the text” (Lotman, 2002, p. 418). If we think of language as a discrete coding system, then rhetorical structure will appear in relation to it as a continuous coding system, integrating the text into a coherent meaning. The meaning of a complete text does not grow out of a linear or temporal sequence of segments, but is rather diffused in an n-dimensional semantic space of a given text (on a canvas, on stage, on screen, in an act of ritual, in social behaviour or in a dream) (Lotman, 2002, p. 406). According to Lotman (2002), the definition of text in cultural semiotics only superficially contradicts the linguistic definition of ‘text’, since even in linguistics texts are in fact coded twice: in natural language, and in a specific language’s meta-language of grammatical description. Messages only satisfying the first requirement are not treated as texts (Lotman, 2002, p. 159)

For the sake of clarity with regard to the purpose of the present paper, rhetoric can be perceived from two aspects. First, rhetoric as a *practice of speech*, which covers rhetoric perceived as a verbal art of persuasion, and its teaching. Second, rhetoric as a *discipline*. This latter case covers the descriptive and normative instances of rhetoric (Lachmann, 1994, p. 5—21). The normative dimension allows us to treat rhetoric as essentially a secondary grammar and define the socio-cultural function of rhetoric. Rhetoric functions as a meta-system, consolidating the society and shaping its self-consciousness. Rhetoric as a descriptive-normative system of signs and sign relations allows us to conceive of it as an intra-cultural correlate of social and aesthetic values (ibid.).

## THE FUNCTION OF POLITICAL RHETORIC

In accordance with its pragmatic nature, rhetoric is divisible into clearly defined types of speech whose specificity is established by the purposes of the speech. The primary types of rhetorical speech are political speech, court speech, and solemn or parade speech.

Political rhetoric is distinct from other speech practices primarily because it is used to register *official* political positions and intellectual frameworks that are then used not only for describing and conceiving, but also for *changing* the surrounding world. According to the American sociolinguist Joyce Hertzler (1965):

... the active language of people is a primary outgrowth of their life, and centres about things and occurrences that are essential to them. Hence it reflects every phase and aspect of their life, represents all known realities of life and tremendously influences every facet of life; in fact, it determines in considerable part what we are aware of, what we believe, how we pattern our thought and how we act. (p. 20)

But what, then, is the specificity of political rhetoric? According to the Russian researcher Rostislav Vodak, political language is located as if in a field of tension between two poles. On the one hand, it is determined functionally; on the other hand, it is subjected to the jargon of a specific group, together with its ideological world-view. “Political rhetoric must fulfil contradictory purposes: to be intelligible and comprehensible (in accordance with its propagandist tasks), and simultaneously targeted at a specific group (for historical and socio-psychological reasons)” (Vodak, 1998, p. 24). Thematic differentiation of political rhetoric determines its rhetorical specificity. Above all, political rhetoric is advisory and is thus directed towards the future. Its persuasiveness determines whether the addressee agrees with the addresser and either acts or does not act according to the latter’s will. At the same time, it determines social behavior and shapes the self-image of individuals (their diligence, resistance, decisiveness, manliness, patience, etc.). Thus, it is parade rhetoric that is characteristic of political rhetoric, whose purpose is to develop certain qualities and to mobilise psychological resources in the society (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 27). Thus, one of the functions of political rhetoric is the creation of social identity. This brings us promptly to the issue of symbols in political rhetoric.

## SYMBOLS IN POLITICAL RHETORIC

In political discourse (including rhetoric), symbols fulfil various different functions (Kolonitski, 2001, p. 11—12). First, symbols are means of identification, enabling the



creation of collective consciousness, solidarity, and the feeling of a unitary social community. Thus, symbols point to collective identity, operating as its sign. Second, symbols have a mobilizing and legitimizing function. In political practice, the utilization of symbols that are rooted in collective consciousness may help legitimize and assure the support of the masses for political subjects who use them for supporting their activities. Third, symbols bear a communicative function, used for transmitting important information that constitutes political discourse.

In the present context it is important to keep in mind that a symbol's capacity for producing meaning is always greater than is exemplified by its current realization: the associations that a symbol establishes with one or the other semiotic environment by its expression does not exhaust its meaning valences (Lotman, 2004a, p. 241). As a significant memory mechanism, symbols carry texts, plot schemas and other semiotic formations from one stratum of culture to another. Two aspects are relevant for us here: on the one hand, a symbol retains its invariant nature in the flow of time, yet on the other hand, "a symbol correlates actively with its cultural context, is transformed by its influence and transforms it itself" (Lotman, 2004a, p. 242). Its invariant nature is realized in different variants (*ibid.*).

## POLITICAL SYMBOL AS A CATEGORY IN HEGEMONIC PROCESSES OF SIGNIFICATION

I will now attempt to flesh out the above consideration of symbols with the concept of 'empty signifier' by one of the leading contemporary political theorists, Ernesto Laclau, as one of the central categories for specifying hegemonic relationships. However, this does not amount to the claim that as concepts, symbol and 'empty signifier' are identical; instead, in certain articulations of the process of signification, symbols appear in hegemonic functions (for a more thorough theoretical synthesis of Lotman & Laclau, cf Selg & Ventsel 2008). According to Laclau, it is only at the level of discourse that any sense is rendered to hegemony. For Laclau, discourse is the primary terrain of objectivity as such. Nothing is constituted outside discourse. Yet all this has nothing to do with the debate between realists and idealists. Laclau does not deny that earthquakes and other physical phenomena exist. But whether an earthquake is constituted in terms of the wrath of god or in terms of natural disaster depends on discursive structurations (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985, p. 108). So the problem of the constitution of social and political reality becomes, for Laclau, the problem of the *constitution of discourse*. Thus, hegemonic relation is a certain articulation of meanings (Laclau, 2006, p. 114). This articulation requires that a particular difference loses its particularity and becomes a universal representative of the signifying system as a whole. That way a *closure* for that system is provided. Since every system of signification is

essentially *differential*, its *closure* is the precondition of signification being possible *at all*. This particular signifier, an ‘empty signifier’ in Laclau’s terminology, thereby acquires a dominant position in the signifying system, or discourse, and subordinates, to a greater or lesser extent, all the other elements of the discourse, allowing them to appear as *equivalent* and undermining their particular differences (Laclau, 1996a, p. 36—46). Paradoxically, this undermining results in a certain unity or transparency (systemicity). Yet, the important conclusion from this tension between the logic of difference and the logic of equivalence is that there cannot be a final victory of either logic over the other; instead, it has to be created because without that object there would be *no signification*. However, it is relevant that, according to Laclau, the chain of equivalence that embodies the empty signifier cannot expand forever, since the expansion is limited once a set of core relationships have been established (Laclau, 1996b). The result is that at least some new associations (particular contents) would no longer be compatible with the residual particulars that are already in the chain. In other words, its invariant nature is realized in variants, making them similar to symbols as described above.

Thus, a symbol is a sign that possesses a singular content, arising from the co-existence of metaphor and metonymy. It points simultaneously to the particular and the general (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 168). “This is, however, nothing other than the defining characteristic of the symbol: the overflowing of the signifier by the signified” (Laclau, Mouffe, 1985, p. 11). This once again suggests Lotman’s idea that a symbol’s capacity for signification is always greater than its current realization.

## POLITICAL RHETORIC IN THE STALINIST ERA

The political rhetoric of the Soviet Union must be examined in an evident relationship with political propaganda. Broadly speaking, political rhetoric as an art of persuasion can be divided into four interrelated types: oratory, homiletics, didactics and symbolics. Each has its own strategy in speech and fulfils a specific task. The strategy of oratory is metonymic, being based on the juxtaposition and analysis of phenomena and ideas. By its very nature, oratory is dialogic. Unlike oratory, homiletics is monologic and its primary field of application is solemn, parade rhetoric. A homilist is similar to a prophet whose truth can not be contested. Here there is no need to justify the superiority of one’s position, but only to explain it. Homiletics is closely interwoven with symbolics. The latter provides the former with the structuring elements of speech, on the basis of which the unity of discourse is established. It is the unmistakable predominance of these two types of political rhetoric, homiletics and symbolic, that shifts political rhetoric towards propaganda. It should be noted here that in political rhetoric, the ambivalence inherent to symbols functions in yet another

way. Here, the impassioned and emotional load of the symbols becomes imperative. As long as a particular symbol is constantly associated with closely linked emotions, it will lay a foundation to an emotional generalization, required by the propagandist, and will hereafter aid the speakers in influencing the people in their desired direction (Barlett, 1940, p. 65). Mediated by symbols, the people's behavioral patterns and corresponding mental models are homogenized and fixed, in the long run reducing the deviation of their reactions from the norm.

Additionally, there was complete party-based censorship in Soviet culture over the public circulation of texts, which according to some researchers (Barlett, Lippmann), is one of the basic conditions for successful propaganda. This can be rephrased to say that the presence of censure will inevitably lead to the demise of oratory as a dialogic type of rhetoric.

Unlike in the post-revolutionary period, the political rhetoric of the Stalinist period is characterised by a considerable reduction in the relative importance of oratory and the fusion of symbolist and didactic types, and their propagandist peculiarity. The political turnabout that took place during the Stalinist period was expressed in the fading of national-bolshevist revolutionary fervour, and the pathos of a "peaceful build-up", which, in turn, led to the localization of the concept of world revolution; "to build socialism in a single country". However, at the same time this more-conservative direction in the Party political line was still explained with vocabulary derived from the revolution, leading to further emptying and ambivalence of the signifiers. Proceeding from political symbols treated as axioms, the goal of didactics was to provide order to the world-view, and the communication of this ordered picture to the audience in an intelligible manner. Stalinist didactics, however, took over the function of symbolics as well; the zone of axioms swelled until it turned into whole complete curricula, with their truth determined by reference to the authority: Stalin (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 197; Kupina, 1994, p. 44—52). Although Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin all figured as authorities, it was the will of the latter that determined which quotations could be used and how they should be interpreted.

This change is theoretically explainable on the basis of the works of Laclau and Lotman. The characteristics of Soviet totalitarian language as described by Kupina (1994): the reduction and transformation of ideological semantic concepts, the thriving of quasi-ideologemes in language, the construction of synonymous and antonymous rows, and the dualist axiologization of words, all indicate that a non-discrete translation strategy is prevalent in political rhetoric; discrete and clearly distinguishable signs are translated into a non-discrete whole, and "the main feature of such a world is universal resemblance of everything to everything; the main organizing structural relation that of homomorphism" (Lotman, 2004b, p. 570). In other words, the identity of the formerly-discrete elements is more or less transformed. This continuous translating strategy "makes one see

manifestations of the One phenomenon in the various phenomena of the real world, and observe the One Object behind the diversity of objects of the same type” (Lotman, 2004b, p. 571). Political discourse’s hegemonic logic of signification establishes a chain of equivalence between incommensurable words and concepts, which, ultimately, subordinates the vocabulary of other fields constitutive of society (philosophy, religion, aesthetics, ethics, jurisprudence, etc.). In Soviet totalitarian language, the political sphere subjected the semantics of the rest of language to itself. This process is roughly as follows: there are different signifiers floating in the discursive field, with their specific meaning lost (they are as if suffused with meanings — the extent of the attachment of signifiers is inversely proportional to the extent of their circulation in the given discursive formation); at some point, an empty signifier intervenes and, with a retroactive power, constitutes identity to the floating signifiers by attaching them together into a pragmatic chain of equivalence. This led to a situation where the Marxist-Leninist theoretical terminology, formerly part of scientific language, was emptied of its prior or particular content and, having become ambivalent political symbols, began to represent the entire social totality. *Industrialization* as a economic-technological term was emptied of its particular meaning and constitutes a chain of equivalence with signifiers from other discourses. *Industrialization is the weapon of class-struggle; only through industrialization is communism possible, etc.* This means that industrialization was turned into a universal representation for the entire social totality. The quotations, theoretical concepts and so forth, derived from Stalin and other classics of Marxism-Leninism, evolved into axiomatic-didactic symbols, began to justify the entire political situation, and legitimized the practice of power. The basic aim of the propagandists lay in maximizing the circulation of these slogan-like political symbols and in fastening them to the consciousness of the masses (Khazagerov, 2002, p. 169—171).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it can be noted that the reality constructed from political symbols during the Stalinist period was not one that could be used to describe the world in maximally unambiguous terms. The primary function of symbols circulating in political discourse was not to transmit specific and clear-cut content, but rather to generate an affect of emotions, crucial for identity creation. Under totalitarian conditions, the purpose of politico-rhetorical language is not the description of reality as unambiguously as possible, but rather the creation of an axiological (a so-called “black and white”) system of symbols, then used for constructing social identity, mobilizing the masses in the direction desired by the authorities, and legitimizing the party’s position of power in political discourse. In a society where politics subjects to itself other fields that together constitute the society, the impact of

political rhetoric, stemming from its peculiar nature, is inevitable for language as a whole (Cf. Lachmann's socio-cultural functions of rhetoric, especially the chapter "Rhetoric in political discourse"). Soviet totalitarian language is a telling example of this. Paradoxically, it seems that the more totalitarian the society, the more ambivalent the semantic references used by the authorities for self-description. The transparency and clarity of verbal contents might have undermined, on the linguistic-discursive level, the most important thesis of a totalitarian society: The Party is always right!

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