

Foreword

This special issue of Estonian film appears on the eve of the 100th anniversary of Estonian cinema. The past century has seen the development of a more or less full-fledged film production scene in Estonia: films of all genres are made both for festival audiences and with more mainstream spectatorial tastes in mind, both for the big and small screen; the domestic film school, established in the 1990s, is successful and constantly growing. The sphere of film studies, however, lags severely behind, and the local culture of film scholarship and criticism leaves much to be desired. Although Tallinnfilm has worked hard to restore and (re)introduce its heritage, and the monumental project of the complete database of Estonian cinema is under way, (institutional) conditions for research on (Estonian) film are practically non-existent. While the aim of this special issue is not to analyse the historical and contextual roots of this problem, it can still be regarded as a manifest (and a hint) of a sort: most significantly, it suggests that film studies occupy the same grounds as art history – a reality further confirmed by the fact that *Studies on Art and Architecture* already has a history of publishing scholarly work on cinema, as well as by the educational and professional background of several of the contributors to this issue.

In a certain sense, the following articles reflect the current state of Estonian film studies: the analyses of films of various periods, authors and genres are guided by different theoretical perspectives, from the long established tradition of semiotics to cutting-edge and internationally favoured interdisciplinary frames of reference. The most important key word is 'fragmentation': both in the sense that the result of this set of writings is a kaleidoscope of segments, rather than 'a grand narrative', and in the sense that on many occasions the breaks, upheavals, endings and new beginnings that have shaped the local culture provide a structuring frame for the discussions. Yet one can also detect many links, continuities and similarities, and in order to bring them to the fore the articles are presented according to the chronology of their subject matter.

In *Film Reception in Estonia in the Early 20th Century: From Fairground to Entrance Hall Entertainment* Virve Sarapik and Alo Paistik investigate the positions of early film criticism, drawing attention to its regional and disciplinary contexts and sources of inspiration. By doing this, Sarapik and Paistik point out the rather significant fact that cinema as a quintessentially international practice was from the very beginning considered a threat to the local (national) culture, preparing the way for the status of film as 'the great loner' in the Estonian culture of the Soviet period.

Eva Näripea's *New Waves, New Spaces: Estonian Experimental Cinema of the 1970s* focuses on the short, yet brilliant film-making career of Jaan Tooming, whose oeuvre constitutes one of the most intriguing episodes of Estonian film history. Tooming's works are examined through the lens of spatial representations, which underscores particularly well the rebellious mechanisms and stances of his cinema. By means of the conscious eclecticism of the methodological framework, the author also calls the reader's attention to the inspiring and basically endless possibilities of applying different theoretical perspectives to the analysis of local film history.

The celebrated Estonian animation, with its grand old man Priit Pärn, is the subject of two articles – Mari Laaniste's *Reflections of Self and Surrounding Circumstances in Priit Pärn's Films 'The Triangle' and 'Hotel E'* and Andreas Trossek's *The Death of Dark Animation in Europe: Priit Pärn's 'Hotel E'* – which offer complementary perspectives on Pärn's career phase of the late socialist and early capitalist years. While Laaniste provides a survey of the formal language, production contexts and critical reception of *The Triangle* and *Hotel E*, Trossek zooms in on the pictorial world of *Hotel E*, scrutinising its affinities and interrelations with the domestic and international art world.

The cinema of post-Soviet years is discussed in three contributions. Mari Laaniste's *Conflicting Visions: Estonia and Estonians as Presented in the Cinema of the 1990s and 2000s* treads the sensitive ground of national (self-)image, concluding that consciously constructed positive representations might ignite the national pride of Estonians but have no effect whatsoever on foreign audiences, who find the typical Eastern European images of bleak exoticism much more engaging. Katre Pärn's *The Author's Conceptualising Presence in Film: A Stylistic Analysis of Sulev Keedus's 'Georgica'* examines Keedus's authorial style using the tools of semiotic and cognitive theories, thus continuing, in a sense, the only locally established, semiotic tradition of filmic thought. Ewa Mazierska's *Postcommunist Estonian Cinema as Transnational Cinema* offers valuable insights of an outsider into six genre films of the postsocialist period, thus demonstrating that fascinating subjects of analysis can be found even when local film critics have failed to detect them.

In addition, this special issue includes Estonian translations of an excerpt from David Martin-Jones's book *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh University Press, 2006) and Jonathan L. Owen's review of *Via Transversa: Lost Cinema of the Former Eastern Bloc* (Estonian Academy of Arts, 2008). Martin-Jones's analysis is important in two respects: first, he summarises in a very fluent and reader-friendly manner some strands of the complex Deleuzian thought on film; secondly, he applies this frame of reference to a set of different national contexts, which suggests that his and Deleuze's ideas might have relevance to Estonian national cinema as well. Jonathan L. Owen's review reflects on the work of Estonian film scholars, evaluating it in the wider context of contemporary studies of Eastern European cinema.