

28 April–3 May 2014, Tartu University, Estonia

Convener: European Association for the Study of Literature, Culture, and Environment (EASLCE), Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES), Estonian Centre for Environmental History (KAJAK) at Tallinn University, Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu

Panel Chairs: Rob Emmett (Rachel Carson Center, LMU Munich) and Nicole Seymour (RCC/University of Arkansas, USA)

Selected Papers:

- Hannes Bergthaller, “From Environmental Justice to Planetary Immunity: Elysium as a Biopolitical Fable”
- Nicole Seymour, RCC / University of Arkansas, USA, “Ecocide on Celluloid: Silent Running as Vietnam War Cinema”
- Margarita Carretero-González, “Voicing the Silent Planet: Alejandro Amenábar’s Recovery of Earth’s Narrative in Agora”
- David Ingram, “The Biocultural Turn in Eco-Film Studies”
- Rob Emmett, “Time-lapse Ecomedia and Bayou Collapse”
- Antonia Mehnert, “Climate Change Fiction and the Re-telling of Environmental Time”

The biennial meeting of the European Association for Literature, Culture, and Environment (EASLCE) focused on the theme of “Framing Nature” and brought together biosemioticians, ecocritics, urban theorists, and environmental historians. “Framing Nature” benefited from the organizing leadership of the Nordic Network for Interdisciplinary Environmental Studies (NIES) and support from the Rachel Carson Center and its partner institution, the Estonian Centre for Environmental History at Tallinn University, Estonia.

Well over three hundred researchers from five continents met for a week of roundtable discussions, panels, and plenary sessions. Several panels highlighted the value of biosemiotics, an intellectual tradition that joins interpretation of sign and meaning-making systems with biological research. Biosemioticians, much like their counterparts in ecocriticism and environmental history, foreground the inseparability of meaning-making and forms of life, both human and nonhuman. Estonia and the University of Tartu in particular served as an

excellent host for thinking through the many ways in which we frame “nature” as an object of research. Tartu has been a world center for biosemiotics from the pioneering work of Jakob von Uexküll up to the present.

ULRIKE PLATH, director of the Estonian Centre for Environmental History (KAJAK), hosted a pre-conference roundtable on Environmental Humanities at Tallinn University on 28 April for an audience including members of KAJAK and a growing Estonian network in Environmental Humanities (TEH), a joint initiative of Tallinn and Tartu universities. The roundtable participants included EASLCE President **HANNES BERGTHALLER** (National Chung Hsing University, Taiwan), **MICHAEL EGAN** (McMaster University, Canada), **ROB EMMETT** (RCC), RCC Advisory Board member and current ESEH President **DOLLY JØRGENSEN** (Umeå University, Sweden), and **KATI LINDSTRÖM** (University of Tartu / KTH Stockholm Environmental Humanities Lab). The discussion emphasized the common commitments of scholars in existing disciplinary formations, such as environmental history, ecocriticism, environmental anthropology, and religious studies, and the necessity and timeliness of working together on research directed toward complex environmental problems.

While the KAJAK roundtable primarily reached an audience of Estonian researchers in environmental history and biosemiotics, a second roundtable in Tartu on 1 May brought together an overlapping group of speakers to further this discussion within the context of EASLCE as a European research association. The EASLCE-NIES roundtable, “Framing the Environmental Humanities in Europe: Looking Ahead,” focused on the question of how different disciplines frame “nature” as an object of inquiry. Former EASLCE President **SERPIL OPERMANN** offered a strong call for environmental humanities as an alternative to the hegemonic role of reductive scientism, while post-doctoral researcher **REINHARD HENNIG** and current EASLCE Graduate Forum representative **MICHAELA CASTELLANOS** voiced concerns for current graduate students entering a new field with uncertain career prospects. NIES chair **STEVEN HARTMANN**, **DOLLY JØRGENSEN**, **HANNES BERGTHALLER**, and **ROB EMMETT** emphasized opportunities for graduate students and early-career researchers and institutional supports for environmental humanities in Europe.

The RCC sponsored two panels on Ecomedia on 30 April and 2 May organized by Carson Fellow Nicole Seymour and Carson Alumna Alexa Weik von Mossner. Unfortunately due to illness, Weik von Mossner was unable to attend. The first panel featured **HANNES BERGTHALLER**, who analyzed Neill Blomkamp’s film *Elysium* (2013) and the limitations of a traditional cinematic representations of environmental justice. **NICOLE SEYMOUR** offered a historical reading of the science-fiction film *Silent Running* as a critique of ecocide waged during the Vietnam War. Next, **MARGARITA CARRETERO-GONZÁLEZ** argued that director Alejandro Amenabar’s use of extraterrestrial satellite views of earth in his film, *Agora* (2009), about the persecution of the astronomer Hypatia in fourth century Alexandria, demands that viewers question the role of fundamentalisms from a “whole earth” perspective.

A second panel featured leading eco-film theorist **DAVID INGRAM**, whose paper responded to a growing trend in eco-film studies toward “new materialist” and “biocultural” approaches. Ingram argued for the

continued relevance of textual hermeneutics and ideological analyses in a more inclusive, materialist approach to film. **ROB EMMETT** then offered a multi-modal analysis of time-lapse representations of land loss in Louisiana's bayou region and emphasized the power of environmental poetics in relation to environmental visualizations produced by government agencies.

ANTONIA MEHNERT, a member of the doctoral program in Environment and Society at the Rachel Carson Center and LMU Munich, presented a paper on climate change fiction on a separate panel. Mehnert examined how several contemporary US novels dramatize tensions between long- and short-term awareness of climate change through temporal narrative techniques.

The RCC's support for EASLCE 2014 strengthened our collaboration with Estonian partners at the KAJAK center and reinforced interdisciplinary projects between ESEH and EASLCE. With Ulrike Plath and KAJAK, the RCC will sponsor a four-day interdisciplinary ESEH Summer School in Estonia in May 2015.