Department of English Studies and Centre for Canadian Studies
University of Tartu, Estonia
Estonian Association for Canadian Studies
with the assistance of Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Tartu
and Embassy of Canada

THE NINTH INTERNATIONAL TARTU CONFERENCE
ON CANADIAN STUDIES

“VISIONS OF THE FUTURE”

October 12-13, 2019 at the University of Tartu, Estonia

Venue: The Main Building of the University of Tartu
Ülikooli 18 Room 139 (on the ground floor in the right wing)

PROGRAMME

Saturday, October 12

09:00-10:00  Registration
Lobby (cloakroom on your left upon entering)

10:00-10:15  Opening of the Conference
Richard Martin-Nielsen, Chargé d’Affaires, Embassy of Canada
Rhó Altnurme, Vice Dean for Research, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, University of Tartu
Raili Marling, Head of the Department of English Studies, University of Tartu

10:15-11:15  Plenary Session: The Real and the Virtual (Chair: Sara Bédard-Goulet)
Bertrand Gervais
Canada Research Chair in Digital Art and Literature
Director of the Research Laboratory on Hypermedia Works NT2, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada

The Virtual Life, Twenty Years Later: A Parallel Reading of Martha Baer’s (As Francesca) and Karoline Georges’ De synthèse

11:15-12:15  Session I: Speculative Fiction (Chair: Ene-Reet Soovik)
Raili Marling
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia
Death in Endtimes: Affect and Necropolitics in Nelly Arcan’s Exit

Edgars Ošiņš
Latvian Association for Canadian Studies, Riga, Latvia
Surviving the Future: Waubgeshig Rice’s The Moon of the Crusted Snow

12:15-13:15  Break
Lunch on one’s own

13:15-14:15  Session II: Science Fiction (Chair: Ene-Reet Soovik)
Milda Danytė
Department of Foreign Language, Literature, and Translation Studies
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
Five Centuries after Our Own Times: Élisabeth Vonarburg’s Science Fiction Novel The Maerlande Chronicles
Auli Viidalepp  
Imagining Anthropomorphic Robots in Canadian Sci-Fi Narratives  
Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia

14:15-14:45  Break  
Coffee/tea and refreshments (Room 140)

14:45-16:15  Session III: Spatiality, Temporality, and the Environment (Chair: Sara Bédard-Goulet)

Rūta Šlapkauskaitė  
Department of English Philology, Vilnius University, Lithuania  
Past Extinction, Future Survival: (Non-)Human Horizons in Claire Cameron’s *The Last Neanderthal*

Ene-Reet Soovik  
Department of Semiotics and Department of Culture Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia  
Early Atwood and Toxic Discourse

16:15-16:45  Break  
Coffee/tea and refreshments (Room 140)

16:45-18:15  Session IV: Estonian Writing in Canada (Chair: Eva Rein)

Sirje Kiin  
Freelancer Scholar, Estonia/USA  
*Images of Freedom in the Poetry of Estonian-Canadian Poet Urve Karuks*

Maarja Hollo  
Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia  
*Exiles in Salme Ekbaum’s Novels*

Eva Rein  
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia  
An Uncertain Tomorrow: Liminality in Salme Ekbaum’s „Külaliseks on ootus“

18:30-20:30  Reception hosted by Chargé d’Affaires Richard Martin-Nielsen and  
Opening of the Exhibit *Sharing Our Stories: The Baltic Diaspora at Home in Canada*  
Curator Piret Noorhani, Chief Archivist, Museum of Estonians Abroad (VEMU)/Estonian Studies Centre, Toronto, Canada

Venue: The Humanities Building of the University of Tartu  
Lossi 3 Lobby (on the second floor) and Hallway Gallery (on the third and the fourth floor)  
(cloakroom on the second floor in Lossi 3-223 in the right wing)

---

Sunday, October 13

10:00-11:00  Session V: Quebec in Focus (Chair: Sara Bédard-Goulet)

Kristina Minkova  
Department of American Studies, St. Petersburg State University, Russia  
Future of Aboriginal Governance: the Case of Northern Quebec
Françoise Sule
Vice-présidente, AIEQ, Europe, Afrique et Moyen-Orient; Stockholm, Suède
Workshop:
Quand la littérature québécoise s’enseigne dans le monde!

11:00-11:30  Break
Coffee/tea and refreshments (Room 140)

11:30-13:00  Session VI: First Nations; Legacy of Colonialism (Chair: Eva Rein)

Pilvi Rajamäe
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia
John Buchan’s *Sick Heart River*: A Vision of Canada vis-à-vis the US and the British Empire

Konstantin Romanov
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia
Visions of the Past: Cultural Memory and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

Kristina Aurylaitė
Department of Foreign Language, Literature, and Translation Studies Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania
“Native Remix:” Intertexts, Samplings, and Mash-Ups in Contemporary Indigenous Poetry

13:00-13:15  Closing of the Conference
**ABSTRACTS**

**Kristina Aurylaitė**  
Department of Foreign Language, Literature, and Translation Studies  
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania  
“Native Remix:” Intertexts, Samplings, and Mash-Ups in Contemporary Indigenous Poetry

This paper discusses a selection of texts by contemporary Canadian Indigenous poets, such as Jordan Abel and Joshua Whitehead, whose work is known for experimentations with form and method. Each of them, albeit in different ways, responds to and exploits the contemporary accessibility and materiality of language, resulting from its availability in the digital space and on the Internet, and inspiring a series of appropriative procedures, such as copy-pasting, sharing, and remixing, to which language seen as matter is subjected. Critics have referred to contemporary culture, dominated by new media technologies, as “remix” culture (Lev Manovich, Jamie O’Neil, Eduardo Navas, Kenneth Goldsmith, Craig Dworkin), in which every Internet user re/produces cultural content, even if often mechanically and uncritically. The poets discussed in this paper engage in much more reflexive and critical dialogues with the textual material they select, appropriate, and transform – that is, remix, often radically and provocatively – for their works.

**Milda Danytė**  
Department of Foreign Language, Literature, and Translation Studies  
Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas, Lithuania  
Five Centuries after Our Own Times: Élisabeth Vonarburg’s Science Fiction Novel The Maerlanede Chronicles

Élisabeth Vonarburg is considered one of the major contemporary writers of science fiction. Some of her works have been translated into English, but she is little known among English-language readers in Canada. The primary reason for this obscurity is that she writes in French, while the science fiction market has long been dominated by American writers. This presentation serves as an introduction to a very interesting writer and then looks more closely at one of her novels, Chroniques du pays des meres, “Chronicles of the Motherland,” The Maerlanede Chronicles (1992).

Vonarburg is one of many figures like Michael Ondaatje and Dionne Brand who emigrated to Canada as an adult and has made a name both for her writing and her role in literary culture. Born in France in 1947, she settled in the northern Quebec town of Chicoutimi in 1973.  

The Maerlanede Chronicles is narrated from a perspective of 500 years after our own era, when almost everything about earlier civilization has been forgotten, rubbed out by devastating natural and man-made disasters. The initial ‘what if’ in Vonarburg’s novel is similar to that in Margaret Atwood’s The Handmaid’s Tale (1985): what steps might governing powers take when most children die in infancy? Atwood suggests that men create a right-wing society that abuses women. Vonarburg, who developed her ideas before Atwood’s novel was published, also considers this possible, but only as the first stage in renewed human history. The novel’s present describes the Motherland, a society ruled by women. Is this an ideal society? Vonarburg does not see her novel as feminist and engages readers in making their own interpretations.

**Bertrand Gervais**  
Canada Research Chair in Digital Art and Literature  
Director of the Research Laboratory on Hypermedia Works NT2, University of Quebec in Montreal, Canada  
The Virtual Life, Twenty Years Later: A Parallel Reading of Martha Baer’s (As Francesca) and Karoline Georges’ De synthèse

The aim of this intervention is to propose a parallel reading of two novels separated by twenty years and which involve highly contrasted versions of the virtual. The first novel is (As Francesca) by Martha Baer, published in 1997 by Broadway Books in New York. The second is De synthèse by Karoline Georges, published in 2018 by Éditions Alto in Quebec City. These two novels have in common that they play on the complex relationship between the virtual and the real. However, whereas in Baer’s case, the two universes are in tension and oppose each other like the inverted faces of a polarized situation that they exacerbate; in Georges’ case, the two universes complement each other, and their multiple relationships unravel a situation of grief. Thus, what is openly opposed in one enters into symbiosis in the other. In other words, in twenty years, our relationship to the Internet and the virtual world has changed completely, which the very idea of a post-Internet illustrates perfectly. The aim of this presentation will be to address the notion of the virtual and to show, based on a reading of the two novels, how its conceptions have evolved.
References


Maarja Hollo
Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu, Estonia

Exiles in Salme Ekbaum’s Novels

Like many Estonians, Salme Ekbaum (1912–1995) together with her husband fled from Estonia to Sweden in the autumn of 1944. In 1949, the Ekbaums relocated to Canada, where Salme Ekbaum started her career as a professional writer. She debuted with her autobiographical novel *Valge maja* (*White House*), written in Estonia, but published in Sweden in 1946. In Canada, Ekbaum published seven collections of poetry, one collection of short stories, two volumes of memoirs, 14 novels and numerous articles in newspapers. In this paper I will examine the characters of Ekbaum’s novels *Kärestik* (*Rapids*, 1955) and *Arm ja ahnus* (*Love and Greed*, 1972), which are devoted to the subject of exile. All the main characters of these novels are exiles who escaped from their homeland in the tumult of WWII and try as best as they can to carry on their lives in their new homeland of Canada, never wishing to return to Estonia.

In her novels *Rapids* and *Love and Greed* Ekbaum represents the experience of exile from the point of view of women characters. Because the characters of *Rapids* are from different generations, their experiences and choices as exiles differ as well. In *Rapids* refugee trauma and the problematics of national identity are foregrounded, in other words the question of whether to remain an Estonian while living in Canada, or assimilate to the new society and give up being an Estonian. The action of *Love and Greed* is set some twenty years later than of *Rapids*. Its characters have made the choice to remain Estonians, and thus the central theme is not difficulties in adjusting to a new country or identity crises, but women’s possibilities for actualizing themselves professionally.

Ekbaum’s female characters live “under intellectual and physical deficit”; besides traumatic memories, they are tormented by the desolate daily routine in their new country of residence and by the lack of opportunities for personal fulfillment. The protagonist of the novel *Arm ja ahnus*, Elke Kanger has studied singing, but in Canada she cannot realise her ambition to be a singer although she is continuously striving for creative life. The problems of the present pose a challenge to the characters of Ekbaum’s novels, but they are also facing difficulties in coping with the memories of their past. The protagonist of the novel *Kärestik*, Liivia, is “haunted” by her past love. Liivia’s lover from her youth, Rene, who has settled in Germany, sends her letters to remind her of their past. For Liivia, Rene embodies all her ties with her homeland; that is the reason why she is not ready to cut off relations with him.

Sirje Kiin
Freelancer Scholar, Estonia/USA

Images of Freedom in the Poetry of Estonian-Canadian Poet Urve Karuks

Urve Karuks (1935-2015) was the child of an Estonian army officer, who was killed in 1943. She was forced to escape over the stormy Baltic Sea with her mother and newborn baby brother in the fall of 1944, when she was eight. Despite growing up using two other languages (seven difficult refugee years in Germany followed by immigration to English-speaking Toronto in 1951), she started in the late 1950s to write poetry in Estonian. It is very rare, not just in Estonian culture but in world literature generally, when an immigrant who has been educated in other languages is able to achieve a high level of artistry when writing in her/his mother tongue. Urve Karuks was one of those rare poets. It seems that keeping up the high metaphorical level of her poetry language was Urve’s way to defend her freedom, to retain choice in her poetical language.

Two collections of poetry were published in Canada (1968, 1976) and only one in free Estonia (1992). Posthumously her “Collected Poems” were published 2019 in Estonia.

The goal of her intense, brave writing was to reach for freedom with “every existing cell” in her body. She used many metaphors and stories to express her passion for freedom and future. Her early writing has been
compared to the norms-ignoring flower-children poetry of 1960s hippies, but her later poetry expresses universal ideas about freedom here/now and in the future (even afterlife).

**Raili Marling**  
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia  
*Death in Endtimes: Affect and Necropolitics in Nelly Arcan’s Exit*

We live in a time when crisis is not a state of exception but a constant presence. Timothy Morton (2013) believes that the end of the world has already happened. Scholars in different fields write about the end of nature and even future. In this context, Lauren Berlant (2016: 393) suggests that we are experiencing “a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life.” Alongside biopolitics, defined by Michel Foucault (1978, 2008) as the production and regulation of life, we need to attune ourselves to necropolitics, the production and regulation of death (Mbembe 2006).

The paper focuses on *Exit* (Paradis, clef en main) (2009, in English 2011) by the Quebec novelist Nelly Arcan. The novel is set in a near future, saturated by commercialism, in which suicide can be bought as a boutique service. The service responds to the inchoate loss of the will to live in a technologically and pharmaceutically controlled world. The novel’s narrator survives her deeply desired suicide and her narrative takes us into the affective, embodied and material aspects of depression and disability. The analysis will weave the theoretical discussion of neoliberal necropolitics with close reading of the affective-material poetics of the novel. The broader aim is to ask how fiction can help us express and come to terms with our shared vulnerability in the time with no future.

**Kristina Minkova**  
Department of American Studies, St. Petersburg State University, Russia  
*Future of Aboriginal Governance: the Case of Northern Quebec*

The paper discusses the socio-political and economic aspects of the development of Northern Quebec. Referring to documentary sources, including treaties between the Government of Quebec and the aboriginal peoples of the province, the author tells about new trends in the development of Indians and Inuit living in Northern Quebec. The author provides statistical data that allows to evaluate the “singularity” of Quebec autochthons.

The Northern Quebec and James Bay Agreement marked the beginning of a new era in the lives of the indigenous peoples of Northern Quebec. For the first time since the beginning of the European colonization of Canada, Quebec autochthons are not only on the path to recognizing their rights – to the land of their ancestors, to self-management, to language and culture – but also quite far along it. It is true that the remote areas of the North are still very dependent on federal transfers (and it is highly likely that this dependence will continue for the long time), the Quebec government is still prone to make it one of the many ethnic national minorities of Canada, but the foundations of social, political and economic independence of Northern Quebec natives have been laid quite successfully.

**Edgars Ošiņš**  
Latvian Association for Canadian Studies, Riga, Latvia  
*Surviving the Future: Waubgeshig Rice’s The Moon of the Crusted Snow*

Wasauksing First Nation journalist and writer Waubgeshig Rice has published one book of short stories: *Midnight Sweatlodge* (2011) and two novels: *Legacy* (2014) and *The Moon of the Crusted Snow* (2018). His most recent book belongs to post-apocalyptic speculative fiction, increasingly popular in contemporary Canadian literature. While Margaret Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy is by far the most outstanding example of the genre, other significant contributions have been made also by Native authors, including Cherie Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* (2017). Rice’s narrative does not start with traditional climate catastrophe, global pandemic or nuclear war but rather a malfunctioning and complete shutdown of communications and power grids. In an interview for *The Toronto Star* the author calls his novel “homage to the everyday people on reserves across Canada.” The First Nations have repeatedly experienced the end of their traditional world at the hands of white colonizers. Therefore, living on the land and cultivating the traditional lifestyle could well prove to be a new beginning for the surviving community.
Pilvi Rajamäe
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia

**John Buchan’s Sick Heart River: A Vision of Canada vis-à-vis the US and the British Empire**

The presentation will look at how John Buchan sees Canada’s future in his novel *Sick Heart River* (1941) in the context of its relations with the British Empire and the USA. The popular novelist Buchan, known as Lord Tweedsmuir when he was Governor-General of Canada (1935-1940), had made a well-publicized trip to the Canadian Arctic and used it as a backdrop for his novel where he examines the potential of the North to bring the disparate Canadian provinces more fully together and the complicated relationships between the French Canadians of Quebec with business interests in the United States, the Scottish-Indian descendants of the Hudson’s Bay Company employees, the Indians and their Catholic missions and the British imperial government after Canada became an independent dominion within the Commonwealth.

Eva Rein
Department of English Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia

**An Uncertain Tomorrow: Liminality in Salme Ekbaum’s „Külaliseks on ootus“**

Tiina Kirss who has studied the life-stories of Estonians who left their homeland during the Great Escape of 1944 found that “the refugee journey often consisted of several stages and that it proved to be much more hectic and complex than they first imagined” (2006: 616). Flight narratives also include various psychological aspects, such as feelings and emotions before departure and after arrival, sense of loss, relief and regret as well as reflections on one’s past experience and future plans. Thirdly, being a refugee was a traumatic experience, but as Kirss’ study reveals, there were hardly any possibilities for working it through. (2006: 616)

One of the most powerful passages in Salme Ekbaum’s novel „Külaliseks on ootus“ is the one rendering the protagonist Aino Rünk’s journey from Sweden to Canada. It depicts her in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, where she feels that she is completely at the mercy of the elements. It can be seen as a version of what Kirss has identified as the key image in Estonian exile prose fiction, “a boat at a stormy sea” (2002: 1872). Furthermore, as Aino’s feelings and associations (1952: 147) suggest of a situation of being in-between, it invites a reading informed by the concept of liminality as theorised by Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, and further developed by Bjørn Thomassen (2009). On closer scrutiny, liminality characterises not only Aino’s voyage from the Old World to the New World, but also her subjectivity throughout the novel’s narrative which records and reflects on her refugee journey spanning two continents.

**References:**


Konstantin Romanov
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies of Lomonosov Moscow State University, Russia

**Visions of the Past: Cultural Memory and Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada**

Collective memory as a term originated within frameworks of history and sociology. By the end of the 20th century it evolved into a separate interdisciplinary field of “Cultural Memory.” Despite the fact that many scholars are skeptical of the new field, today’s political reality proves its validity.

In this paper I am looking at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) in the light of shaping cultural memory of Canada’s young generation. Active in 2008-2015, TRC researched lasting impacts of the Canadian Indian residential school system on Indigenous students and families. In the Final report, issued in 2015, the commissioners concluded that this system played crucial role in undermining cultural continuity between generations of Canadian Indigenous peoples.

I analyze the Commission’s conclusions and “calls to action,” as well as public discussions triggered in the light of TRC activities and modern politics of culture in Canada in general. I argue that the notion of “traumatic past” has successfully been introduced into the national identity and institutionalized in Canada as part of the new “Culture of Remembrance.”

Jan and Aleida Assmans’ theory, especially its part devoted to traumatic memory and ways of healing, shapes the theoretical framework of the research.
Rūta Šlapkauskaitė  
Department of English Philology, Vilnius University, Lithuania  
Past Extinction, Future Survival: (Non-)Human Horizons in Claire Cameron’s The Last Neanderthal

A number of recent Canadian literary texts have been considering the disastrous consequences of Anthropocentric exceptionalism underlying our current biopolitics and the threat it poses to the survival of the natural world and the democratic social order. Many of these literary works are of the genre of dystopian or speculative fiction and quite a few are by Indigenous authors, like Cherie Dimaline’s The Marrow Thieves, Waubgeshig Rice’s The Moon of the Crusted Snow, and Catherine Knutsson’s Shadows Cast by Stars. Claire Cameron’s novel The Last Neanderthal (2017) shares many of the same concerns and tropes, however, its interest in species extinction and the domain of the human in the age of precarity manifests itself somewhat differently, i.e. through the parallel narratives of a present-day archeologist excavating Neanderthal remains and the Neanderthal girl, who features as the last of her species in the novel. Taking Anat Pick’s conceptualisation of “creaturely poetics” as a guiding principle, this paper attempts to read The Last Neanderthal through the lens of material ecocriticism and the ethics of vulnerability, bringing to the surface the ways in which the novel’s wilderness tropes and attentiveness to embodied life stage reading as an experience of empathy derived from a shared sense of intersomaticity and cross-species bonding and co-dependence. Arguably, Cameron may be looking at the past, but she is thinking of the future.

Ene-Reet Soovik  
Department of Semiotics and Department of Culture Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia  
Early Atwood and Toxic Discourse

Margaret Atwood’s fiction is noted for its uncanny and unflinching ability to engage with pressing, global concerns. Currently, it is the revival of The Handmaid’s Tale (1985) and its revisiting in The Testaments that has once again brought Atwood’s name on the Man Booker shortlist and given rise to the speculations that it might take „The Year of Atwood“ for the Nobel prize to be able to continue honourably after last year’s infamous gap. At the same time, the environmental issues urgently present in our everyday awareness highlight the topicality of the postapocalyptic visions of her MaddAddam trilogy.

These perceptive works have been addressed from various ecocritical points of view, with scholars focusing not only on the nuances of the catastrophe and its aftermath in the MaddAddam books, but also on the environmental context of the Gileadian society. Also Surfacing (1972) has inspired several readings discussing aspects of the human-nature relationship. The extent of Atwood’s own contribution to ecocritical discourse in Canada is demonstrated by the fact that as much as three excerpts from her critical survey Survival (1972) have been included in the magisterial volume Greening the Maple: Canadian Ecocriticism in Context (2013).

In 2012, Atwood published a tribute on the 50th anniversary of Rachel Carson’s Silent Spring. American ecocritic Lawrence Buell has suggested that Carson’s book was the effective beginning of what he terms as ‘toxic discourse’ involved with environmental hazards caused by human agency. The presentation will observe the presence of the lense of toxic discourse in Atwood’s early novels, written in the aftermath of Carson’s book.

Françoise Sule  
Vice-présidente, AIEQ, Europe, Afrique et Moyen-Orient; Stockholm, Suède  
Workshop: Quand la littérature québécoise s’enseigne dans le monde!

Depuis 1997, l’AIEQ favorise le développement de la recherche sur le Québec et propose des collaborations entre étudiants et enseignants ainsi que des programmes divers.

Cet atelier vous propose de mieux connaître l’AIEQ et de présenter quelques exemples d’activités comme le Prix littéraire des lycéens AIEQ, la formation FLE, la tournée d’auteurs.

Kadri Tüür  
Department of Culture Studies, University of Tartu, Estonia  
Making Place in Language: Plays by Raissa Kõvamees

Raissa Kõvamees (1907-1989) was an Estonian author who started writing and publishing in Estonian in 1930s. During WWII, her family fled to Sweden and subsequently to Vancouver, Canada. In exile, Kõvamees wrote and published her major works – novels and plays that recall the life on her native island of Muhu or follow the life of the Estonian exile community in Canada. The presentation focuses on three plays by Kõvamees, written in the 1970s, which depict the life of Canadian Estonians after the war.
Two distinct traits can be spotted in the language of the plays: on the one hand, certain English words appear in the dialogues; on the other hand, several place names of the New World that the characters refer to, are either Estonian, or are ‘Estonianised’ grammatically.

A closer look at the English words in an Estonian text suggests that these denote phenomena that were missing in the rural life that the characters had previously led in their homeland. So, ‘borrowing’ words from a new language is used to adapt themselves to a new cultural environment, while, ‘overwriting’ local place names with Estonian ones can be seen as an attempt to revive the old homeland in the present (mental) geography. These opposing tendencies are analysed in the presentation, using as a theoretical framework Canadian geographer Edward Relph’s theories of place, placelessness, and place-making. The discussion will dwell on the dynamics of insiders, outsiders, and the creation of vicarious insideness.

Auli Viidalepp
Imagining Anthropomorphic Robots in Canadian Sci-Fi Narratives
Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Estonia

Vincent Mosco (2004) points out myths as valuable tools for understanding complex things such as technology. Roslynn Haynes (2014) discusses literary narratives featuring stereotypical scientists whose experiments get out of control and bring humanity to peril. Reframed in the terms of Tartu–Moscow school of semiotics, an artificial character can be described as a perfect work of art or an ideal futuristic machine — a device created by man —, and culture as a collective mechanism “capable of performing intellectual operations” (Lotman 2003: 113-115).

In a typical pop culture narrative starring an artificial creature of intelligence¹, the robot is often depicted as a ‘perfect human’ (or, in Lotman’s terms, a perfect work of art), while the ‘real’ humans are seen as weak, helpless, and at the mercy of robotic creatures that are manipulating the situation at will. The ultimate fate of mankind is left to the reckoning between the “benevolent” and “evil” AI, thus stripping humans of their agency. Even the secretly powerful technologists (or scientists in Haynes’ terms) are shown to lose control of their creations — a kind of fabula that in AI-related public discourse can be recognised as technification in the terms of Hansen & Nissenbaum (2009).

Hereby my goal is to draw attention to the role of myths in speaking about technology such as Artificial Intelligence, and to describe a few examples of popular cinematic narratives of Canadian origin depicting anthropomorphic robots and/or enhanced humans (Battlestar Galactica / Caprica, Bionic Woman, Dark Angel, Sanctuary, to name a few).

References

¹ For example, Lilo & Stitch (2002), Ex Machina (2013), Westworld (2016-2018) or Humans (2015-2018)
THE EXHIBIT

Sharing Our Stories: The Baltic Diaspora at Home in Canada

Baltic Canadian Imprints


Venue: The Humanities Building of the University of Tartu
Lossi 3 Hallway Gallery (on the third and the fourth floor)
Open: Mon-Fri 8-21, Sat-Sun 8-19

Through photos, documents and life stories, Sharing our Stories: The Baltic Diaspora at Home in Canada profiles the age-old story of people forced to leave their homeland due to the Second World War and political oppression and start a new life elsewhere. This exhibit is based on a series of interviews with seniors from Ontario’s Estonian, Latvian, Lithuanian and Baltic German communities. Their personal 'snapshot stories' shed light on what it means to be Baltic, and on the universal experiences of migration and settlement.

“Seniors are keepers of cultural history and the generation of post-war immigrants in Canada is rapidly aging. We are at a critical moment for capturing and sharing the rich cultural knowledge that this generation has to offer,” says Petra Grantham, president of the Canadian Baltic Immigrant Aid Society. The exhibit was launched on Saturday March 4, 2017 at Estonian Studies Centre/VEMU (Museum of Estonians Abroad, 310 Bloor St. W., Toronto, Canada).

The project partners are the Canadian Baltic Immigrant Aid Society, Estonian Studies Centre/VEMU, Lithuanian Museum Archives of Canada, the Canadian Latvian Archive and Museum and the Latvian National Federation in Canada, who are working together as a collaborative known as Baltic Canadian Imprints. The ‘Snapshot Stories: Learning and Legacy Through Visual and Oral History’ project was funded by the Government of Canada’s New Horizons for Seniors Program and celebrates Canada 150 as well as the 100th birthdays of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The exhibit was designed by Toronto designer with an Estonian heritage, Uno Raamat, whose parents arrived in Canada as refugees after the Second World War. The short film was created by Kaisa Pitsi who graduated the Baltic Film and Media School in Tallinn, Estonia, but is now working in Canada.