

PREFACE

This volume of 'Place and Location. Studies in Environmental Aesthetics and Semiotics' features articles stemming from the papers presented at the international conference 'CULTURE, NATURE, SEMIOTICS: LOCATIONS IV', which took place in Tallinn and Tartu on September 23–26, 2004 and is a sequel to Volume Five.

Articles are divided into four sections.

The first section, 'Culture or Nature? Ambience, Presence and Beyond', observes the intricate relations between culture and nature. The relation between the spheres of nature and culture is characterized by hybridization, the occurrence of analogous mechanisms, though the common ground also manifests itself through conceptualization of the environment in order to make it comprehensible to the human mind. On one hand, autogenetic processes affect, at least to a certain extent, the development of such essentially human-centered environments as the city. On the other hand, there is the possibility of analyzing, for instance, the spatial behavior of animals in zoosemiotic perspective through cultural universals. The first section focuses primarily on the sphere of nature, the immediate and conventionally mediated experience of it, and then moves on to the different ways the architectural environment is given meaning.

The second section, 'Monuments in Change', features materials from the conference's special section of the same name. The organizer of this special section was Prof. Juhan Maiste and its authors are predominantly connected with the Department of Cultural Heritage and Conservation in the Estonian Academy of Arts. The main interest of this section derived from the temporal dimension of the environment: how different environmental elements preserve, within themselves, their history, and how this history occurs; how and to what extent the present day is obliged to preserve this history for the future.

The third section, 'Landscapes in Memory' features articles that observe the manifestation of different places in human consciousness, oral memory and folklore, and which at the same time consider the ways the representations of those places reflect social and cultural upheavals. Hence, this section primarily features analyses of locations that have gone through specific historical changes, and analyses of their representations. Several telling cases are examined, e.g. the different occurrences of the industrial center Kohtla-Järve in oral memory and the transformation of a former manorial center and kolkhoz landscape into an open-air art museum.

The last section, 'Visual Culture of Socialism' features articles from Dr. Jelena Grigorjeva's special section. The manifestations of the Socialist period are examined, mainly in regard to their environmental and visual aspects. Socialist visual culture constitutes a mnemonic visual heritage – a common iconic language for several generations of the former Soviet Union and socialist states of Eastern Europe. This concerns not only the direct propaganda of socialist values, but also the dissemination of the specific classical art corpus. Visual information, in contrast to literal articulation, is transported mostly on the subconscious level of the collective mentality, thus providing patterns that determine further unconscious perception.