



Tartu Semiotics Summer School 2023 "COMING SOON"

August 24–27, 2023
University of Tartu, Estonia

Call for presentations

What – and how – do we *know* and acquire knowledge about the future? What is the link between the past, present, and future? Furthermore, what does the capacity of future-making depend on? The aforementioned are some of the guiding questions through which we aim to shed light on and better comprehend the processes of creation, circulation, and choices of models of the future.

Knowledge about the future states of the world is always semiotically mediated. Omens, prophecies, utopias, prognoses, predictions, visions, plans – these are just some of the means we use to get a tentative glance at what is coming or as a direction for moving towards the desired future. Moreover, the future itself can be conceived and conceptualised in different ways: as something that can be predicted or as a forking pathway with endless possibilities. Times of rapid change call for a better understanding of what the future holds – as a concept, temporal dimension, a body of narratives, as something that arrives or something that is forged.

Tartu Summer School of Semiotics aims to resume the dialogue between different branches of semiotics and related fields in exploring the diversity of ways of engaging with the future(s) in culture, society and nature.

The angles or topics to explore include, *but are not limited to*:

1. Ways and means of modeling futures in culture, society and nature. Humans and non-human animals have different semiotic and semiotic capacities and means for cognising and modeling futures. How do these means impact individual or collective resilience? Some related aspects worth exploring might be:

- empirical and theoretical studies on ways of future-making in different domains,
- semiotic conceptions and approaches to the future(s),
- future(s) of semiotics.

2. Futures consciousness refers to the human capacity to understand, anticipate, prepare for and embrace the future. This capacity can be hindered in times of uncertainty and ambiguity, such as during change and/or crises. Accordingly, some related aspects worth exploring might be:

- ways of fostering futures consciousness in times of heightened unpredictability,
- the role of futures consciousness in meaning-making processes,
- the projection of futures that in turn guide and model behavior in the present.

3. Speculative futures. Some of the more commonplace approaches to thinking about the future involve prediction and management. This means that the future is conceived extrapolatively: it is (or rather ought to be) an extension of the present. A speculative approach, to the contrary, would attempt to rethink futures as independent of current trends and assumptions. It is a thought about future possibilities, and even impossibilities. Some related aspects worth exploring might be:

- semiotics and impossible futures,
- future histories – the present from the perspective of speculative futures.

4. Umwelt changes and the future of human-environment relations. Anthropogenic environmental changes and technological developments affect the umwelts of other living beings. From a non-human perspective, environmental change can result in a radical transformation of umwelts or umwelt transitions (Tønnessen 2009). On the other hand, the growing awareness of human impact also prompts the reevaluation and revision of human-environment relations. Some related issues to explore:

- What are the specifics of umwelt changes in anthropogenic environments, but also as resulting from the transformations of organisms through bioengineering?
- How to (re)imagine the future of human-environment relations?
- What are the impacts of the imaginations of the future on the current perceptions of and actions towards the environment?

As a part of the programme, there will be a **Workshop on the future of teaching semiotics** to celebrate 30 years of the semiotics study program in Tartu. The aim of the workshop is to share experiences, discuss and outline future perspectives in the field of teaching semiotics. Relevant topics could for example include methods and approaches in studies, classroom/online/outside environments, textbooks and study materials, study contents, changing roles, collaboration, the position of semiotics in academia and society etc.

Confirmed plenary speakers



Jaak Tomberg

a literary scholar, a co-professor of Contemporary Literature at the University of Tartu who is interested in the philosophy of literature, science fiction, utopia and utopian thought. His next study, entitled “How to Fulfil a Wish”, is about the fate and status of utopian imagination in a modern culture whose technological saturation has brought about a decisive proximity between realism and science fiction.



Gemma Jones

an interdisciplinary cultural researcher and strategist specialising in semiotics and futures thinking. She works with organisations, students and teams to help make sense of the complex swirl of culture and change in and between global and localised contexts. Her research interests centre on the future of places and communities. Gemma is the Head of Insight at Protein Agency and a co-founder of School of Critical Design. She guest lectures undergraduate and postgraduate students in critical research disciplines and speculative design. In the decade since her masters in Culture and Creative Industries at King’s College London, Gemma has worked on innovation, social impact, brand strategy and design projects with organisations including Nike, Microsoft, Noom, Bude Climate Partnership, Uber, and Costa.



Mattia Thibault

a semiotician and an Assistant Professor (Tenure Track) in Translation in the Creative Industries at Tampere University. His interests include semiotics and translations, speculative research, and playfulness and the built environment (real and digital). He is a member of the Language Unit and collaborates with the Gamification Group, the Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies and the Flagship project UNITE - Forest-Human-Machine Interplay.



Reet Aus

a fashion designer, environmental activist and senior researcher at the Estonian Academy of Arts Sustainable Design and Material Lab. Since 2002, Reet has been creating collections based on upcycling practises. She is a pioneer in the field of industrial upcycling for fashion, and has developed the UPMADE® certification, in order to pass on her knowledge to brands and factories. Reet's guiding mission in life is to save the fashion industry from itself, and to show that there is a way of ending the throwaway culture that causes so much waste and destruction around the world.

Submission and deadlines

We welcome proposals for 20-minute presentations (300–600 words) accompanied with a short bio note (up to 50 words). Send submissions to semiotics@ut.ee with 'Proposal for Summer School' as the subject.

To participate in the workshop **on the future of teaching semiotics**, send a short outline of your thoughts and insights on the topic in the form of 3-5 questions and 3-5 suggestions to tiit.remm@ut.ee.

Proposals and outlines should be submitted by **April 20, 2023**.

Acceptance notification by **April 30, 2023**.

Registration will open on **May 1, 2023**.

Preliminary programme by **May 20, 2023**.

Further information on our homepage: tsss.ut.ee.

Follow us: www.facebook.com/TartuSemioticsSummerSchool.

Tartu Summer School of Semiotics is organised by the Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu in cooperation with Estonian Semiotics Association.

