

Semiosalong:  
The Afterhours Tartu Semiotic Salon  
2015-2023





# Semiosalong: The Afterhours Tartu Semiotic Salon 2015–2023

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## Introduction

Semiosalong is the afterhours Tartu semiotic salon, active since 2011. Or at least that is what it says at the top of each of the video descriptions on the [Semiosalong YouTube channel](#), which at the moment of this publication contains 48 videos – which means that the channel reflects only a fraction of the whole storied history of Semiosalong, most of which transpired in-person, in a long series of different clubs, basements and bars in Tallinn and Tartu, Estonia. The very name of “Semiosalong” reflects the Estonian heritage and genesis of our salon. Outside of Estonia, many fail to realize that Semiosalong is only the Estonian-language equivalent of “Semiosalon”, and not some attempt at clever wordplay like “come *along* with us in *semiotics*”, or something like that. The series is now facilitated through the [International Semiotics Institute](#) at Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech Republic; however, we have elected to keep the original Estonian name as well as the designation *Tartu* semiotic salon because we feel that the spirit of the salon still remains in the wintry basements and bars of Tartu, and because we still owe the existence of the salon to its Estonian progenitors, and we thank them. We must thank the Estonian Semiotics Association ([Eesti Semiootika Selts](#)), Professor of biosemiotics Kalevi Kull, head of the Department of Semiotics Timo Maran, and Lecturer of Semiotics Katre Pärn, for their continuous support. We also thank Mehmet Emir Uslu for his many stunning poster designs – which are included throughout the book – for his years of help with organizing, and for his numerous inspired presentations at the salon. We also thank our many event photographers throughout the years, specifically Daria Arkhipova and Sugatta Battarcharya, for their permission for including their unattributed photographs. We must also thank the first instigators of Semiosalong in 2011: Kristin Orav and Piret Karro, former MA and PhD students in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu, who were the brave pioneers and of this long-lasting enterprise..

This volume follows on the 2014 publication *Sõbralik Semiootika: Semiosalongi Tekste Aastast 2011–2014*, where you can find a report (in Estonian) on the contents and transpirings of the salon in its early phase.



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You can also find a full record of all Semiosalong series back to 2011 on the [Semiosalong Blogspot Archive](#). Sõbralik Semiootika means “friendly semiotics”: the *afterhours* salon was always serious about the social. It was always about gathering in unofficial and sometimes unsanctioned venues, and our sessions have always predictably developed into late-night parties. In connection with this, last time we spoke to Kristin Orav about the current direction of Semiosalong, she expressed some disapproval. She noted that the salon has become increasingly academic; she also noted how the online platform seriously limits the party potential of the salon. Moving online was a simple necessity of life during 2020 and 2021, but in 2023 the question may remain, why stay online? Regarding the academicization of the salon, on this point she is probably also right. The intellectual tenor of the salon has only sharpened in recent years, possibly to the exclusion of a broader audience. We might benefit from diversifying our speakers to include more non-academics in the future. She also seemed to think our numbers have dwindled. “In my day, we *filled* von Krahl” (a popular and sizable bar and venue in Tallinn). This last observation is disputable, but certainly we can admit that the in-person event is not what it used to be, and the formal, intellectual, academic (and online) aspect of the salon has predominated.

Transferring Semiosalong to the online Zoom platform was our only choice in the Winter of 2020. We provide some reflection on the implications of this transfer in the recent *Sign Systems Studies* notes publication titled “Funktionskreis and the biosemiotics signifieds: towards the integration of semiotics” (2022), co-authored with Oscar Miyamoto, Ludmila Lacková and Kalevi Kull. While on the one hand, it indisputably diminished the party atmosphere of the salon, on the other hand, it certainly enhanced the intellectual quality of the salon beyond measure. Holding the salon always onsite in Tartu and Tallinn meant that speakers could only be recruited within the country, whereas now we are able to recruit



speakers from anywhere in the world, and this has allowed us to be more selective. Also, the number possible attendees for any given session is now greatly increased. Further, the pedagogic value of being able to upload every session to the YouTube channel cannot be overestimated. This is why post-pandemic we have maintained the Zoom platform for our sessions, even while in-person viewing sessions are growing each semester, here in Olomouc and up in Tartu. Whether the salon may return to its fully in-person model at some point is a decision that will be made by E. Israel Chávez Barreto, the current host of the salon and designer of many poster advertisements featured throughout this work.

Staying online is also part of the initiative to absorb Semiosalong into the broader framework of the International Semiotics Institute (ISI). The ISI was started in 1988 by renowned musicologist and semiotician Professor Eero Tarasti in Imatra, Finland. In 2014 it was moved to Kaunas, Lithuania under the directorship of Professor Dario Martinelli. In 2022 the ISI was moved again and currently resides in the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University Olomouc, under the directorship of Tyler James Bennett. The opening ceremony of the ISI was a Semiosalong event that featured speeches by Susan Petrilli, Eero Tarasti, Dario Martinelli, Kalevi Kull, Paul Copley, Marcel Danesi, Ludmila Lacková, Alin Olteanu, and Josep Muntañola. The full program and link to the recording can be found in the appointed section of this volume. The tasks and aims of the ISI have evolved over the decades, but one consistent obligation has been to facilitate communication between the many regional and international semiotics associations. This is how we conceive of Semiosalong today: an international forum for students and teachers of semiotics to share their research, maximizing and enhancing interactivity across boundaries and borders of all sorts. The principles of general semiotics as sketched by the ISI today are:

1. cross-, inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinarity,
2. intersectionality and inclusivity,
3. multispecies, linguistic and cultural polyglottism,
4. co-authorship and not-for-profit open access,
5. self-reference, ad hoc modelling, and improvisation.

The current volume contains the names, presentation abstracts, theme descriptions, and poster advertisements for all Semiosalong series and sessions between 2015 and 2023. Those series include: History and Praxis, Semiotics of Space, Synécheia, Mythokatalysis, Transmutations, Semiotics in Latin America, Semiotics of Conflict, Excavations in the Esoteric, Order from Chaos: Self-Organizing Systems, Semiotics in a Post-Truth World, Semiotic Seismology – Anticipating Instability, Semiotics of Crime, and Semiotics of Death. We have also included short lists of recent publications by speakers and hyperlinks to the video recordings when possible. There was one series in 2018 in Estonian language dedicated to education, and facilitated by Mark Mets and Merit Rickberg, however the abstracts for that series are not included in this volume. The series are printed in reverse chronological order, such that the most recent series, History and Praxis, is at the front of the book, and the oldest series, Semiotics of Death, is at the back of the book. This is done in order to give as up-to-date an impression of the salon as possible, and because there will hopefully be numerous new online editions of this volume in the years to come, and the latest abstracts and series

theme descriptions will always be inserted at the front of the book, with fresh hyperlinks and author information.

Finally, we also thank our current Czech benefactors at Palacký University in Olomouc. The publication of this book was supported by the Erasmus+ project Humanities Going Digital, project number 2020-1-CZ01-KA226-HE-094363. The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein. If you or your students are interested in being presenters at Semiosalong, please contact us at [semiosalong@gmail.com](mailto:semiosalong@gmail.com). People of all different areas, academic and non-academic alike, are welcome in our salon, which remains not-for-profit and whose results are all made freely available through the various open-access public platforms linked above and throughout the text. Cheers, na zdraví, terviseks.

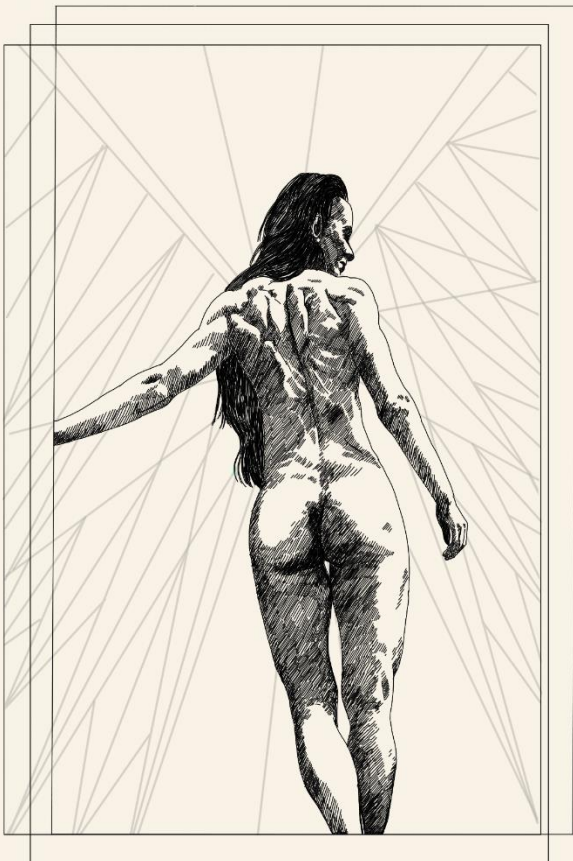
2023, in Olomouc

*Tyler James Bennett*  
*E. Israel Chávez Barreto*



history  
and praxis

spring  
semiosalong 2023



History and Praxis  
Spring Semiosalong 2022  
*Design by E. Israel Chávez Barreto*

History remains a central concern of semiotic inquiry for several reasons. It is often posed as a hypothesis that for something to be a sign and for someone to recognize it as such, there needs to be a sedimentation of effectively executed practices: a local ‘history’ of interactions that assure the preservation and transmission of knowledge. Theories of sign processes also often bring ‘history’ as a primordial component of the sign systems behind them; so that, for instance, a natural language is to be defined as a code “*plus its history*”. Simultaneously, semiotics is also anti-historicist: the synchronic method of Saussure is commonly thought to exclude the temporal, and the Russian Formalists disregarded everything outside the ‘text’ – particularly personal biography and context – in rebellion against the prevailing historical and material determinism of their day. But even they were concerned with the genesis of the phenomena under study, precisely in order to explain how it is that something comes to stand for something else. History entails praxis where signification structures intersect communication acts, and the concatenation of practices weaves the ‘proper’ fabric of history. But *whose* history? We invite participants this semester to reflect on this personal question and its inevitably political answers.

E. Israel Chávez Barreto, *Praxis and History: On Some Stolen Ideas for a Diachronic Semiotics*

The presentation will make a case for a diachronic semiotics that brings together insights from linguistics, biosemiotics and general semiotics. The ideas on which the proposal is built have been stolen, borrowed, and developed to some degree in different directions, from conversations with fellow semioticians, from presentations and articles from linguists and semioticians, from readings on linguistics and semiotics, etc. The core of the proposal is that a fundamental feature of meaning is its being arbitrary, from this it follows that meaning making presupposes a continuous instantiation of practices that inevitably brings about variation which, under some circumstances, results in the reconfiguration of sign systems' organization. In this way, sign systems are conceived as historical and dynamic, and semiotics, thus, as an inherently historical discipline.

E. Israel Chávez Barreto has a PhD in Semiotics from the University of Tartu. His recent publications include the article [Funktionskreis and the biosemiotic signifieds: Towards the integration of semiotics](#), in co-authorship with Oscar Miyamoto, Tyler Bennett, Ľudmila Lacková and Kalevi Kull, He has also published, in co-authorship with Don Favareau, the mini-comic book [Introducing Paul Cobley: a graphic guide](#).

Marina Estefania Guevara, *The Habit. Coverage, Nudity and Trans-vestism in Crónicas de Indias*

This presentation will propose a reading, based on some 16th century texts, of the way in which colonial subjects apprehend the existence and corporality of others, as well as their own, through the figure of clothes, of their absence (nudity), and of their displacements (*trans-vestism*). The habit – what covers and identifies, the habit – is here the complementary face of the figure of the *discovery*. Clothing served as one of the first parameters for the classification of the other. As protection, dissimulation or ritual, clothing invests bodies with new potentialities, understanding here the body as an active and complex process of appropriation according to which certain historical and cultural possibilities are embodied. Performativity is the repetition that the law needs to update itself. The European narrative, especially, focused from the beginning on the nakedness of others, but some conquerors also experienced, for different reasons, a change of habit. Trans-vestism, for its part, can represent survival strategies, or identity adjustment gestures, be they gender or social status. The new reality of miscegenation in the colony came to problematize the social categories established in the West. In the act of seeking and redefining this new reality, these people question the very notion of identity, traditionally understood as something stable, and allow the idea that the colonial binary is immutable to be destabilized.

Marina Estefanía Guevara is a linguist, graduated from the University of Buenos Aires, and a PhD student at Palacký University. Her recent publications include [The Habit. Covering, nudity, and trans-vestism in chronicles of the Indies](#) (in Spanish).

Yuliia Mostova, *New Challenges Caused by AI: A Semiotic Perspective*

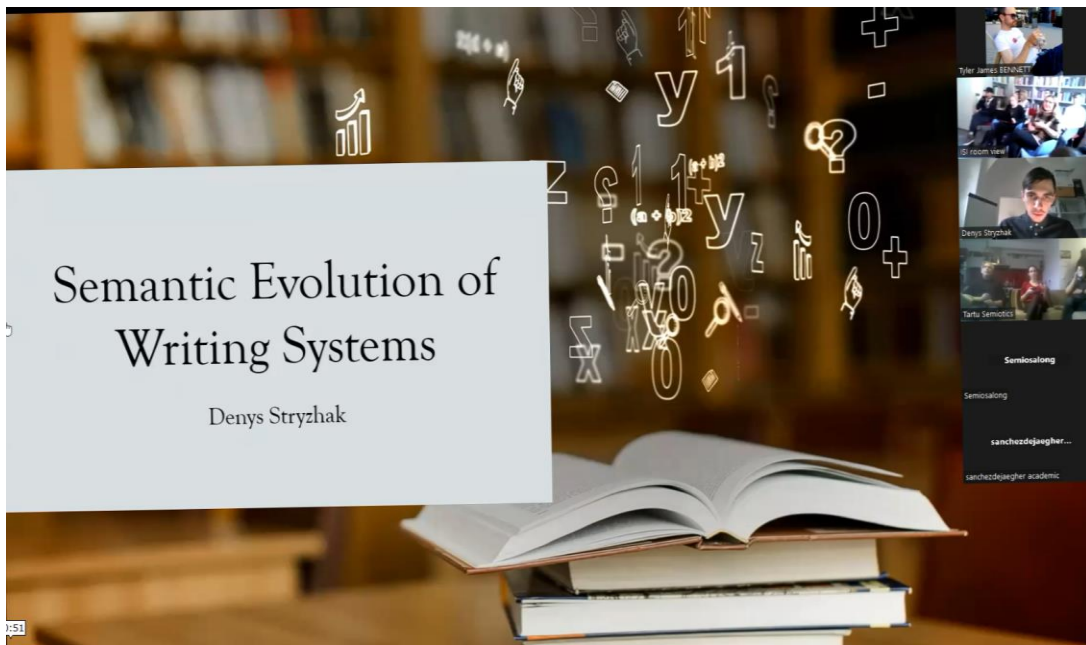
The presentation will reflect upon Kay L. O'Halloran's "Matter, meaning and semiotics". It will explore the relationship between two worlds: the physical/material world and the world of meaning. Semiotic systems are the most complex, involving physical, biological, social, and meaning systems: all these dimensions must be considered, as changes in one of them can affect the entire meta-system. The interplay between material and semiotic worlds is examined by O'Halloran from a social semiotic perspective, with a focus on meaning and its significance in human existence. The role of visual communication, including visual semiotic resources and visual aspects of multimodal texts, is also discussed, but the focus remains semiosis in the digital age and the social implications of the current digital ecosystem, conceptualizing digital technologies as a one-way mirror where individuals use digital media for every aspect of their lives while being watched, analyzed, and manipulated by those who own and designed the platforms. The article suggests that semiotics has a significant role in design, policymaking, and activism around future digital technologies. The presentation will thus show how semiotic resources structure reality, using examples from various fields, including mathematics, science, and computer programming languages.

Yuliia Mostova is a PhD student at the Department of Czech Language at Palacký University. She completed her BA in Czech and Ukrainian philology at the Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University and earned her MA in Czech and Ukrainian philology at Palacký University. Her current research deals with the ubiquity of gender bias in Natural Language Processing (NLP).

Denys Stryzhak, [\*Semantic Evolution of Writing Systems\*](#)

My presentation dives into the fascinating evolution of semantics of writing systems, tracing their development from the earliest forms of proto-writing to the complex and nuanced writing styles people use today. By exploring the diverse range of writing systems that have been used throughout history, it is possible gain a deeper understanding of how the semantics of writing has evolved and transformed over time. I will show the ways in which these changes have shaped the way we communicate, and how they have been influenced by factors such as technological advancements and cultural and social changes.

Denys Stryzhak is a Bachelor's student in the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University in Olomouc. His research interests include the history and development of writing systems, ciphers, and codes.





Miriama Holická, [\*The Role of Language in the Social and Historical Construction of Queer Gender Identities\*](#)

By approaching gender as a sociohistorical construct that is socially and institutionally enforced within a gradually shifting binary framework, its expression can exist as a spectrum able to be studied both semiotically and linguistically. In highly grammatically gendered languages (such as Slavic or Romance languages), the entwinement of gender and language is ever-present. I explore the challenges that arise from the intersections of non-linguistic gender expression and the confines of a language that historically enshrines the hierarchical gender binary within itself.

Miriama Holická is a PhD student at the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University in Olomouc. Their current research focuses on the linguistic expression of genderqueer and gender non-binary individuals in the Czech LGBTQ+ community, and the issue of divorcing gender expression from the gender binary.

Yogi Hale Hendlin, [\*Ecodelic Commitment as Semiotic Praxis\*](#)

Author of *Darwin's Pharmacy: Sex, Plants, and the Evolution of the Noösphere* (2011), Richard Doyle has conceived of the notion of “ecodelia” as a more apt description of psychedelia. Rather than “mind” or “soul” manifesting (psyche-delic), ecodelics manifest what Peirce called the phaneron – the ecology of existing relations and states. This talk examines how ecodelic substances, such as sacred plants and fungi, can help us readjust our Umwelt, insofar as we can learn to use latent attributes of attending to the more-than-human world through ecodelic experience. Intending to attend to nature with ecodelic substances, as well as engaging in practices that permit recalibrating prejudgment (as is well rehearsed in the hermeneutic tradition), I argue, can provide scientific insights that combine first-person science (neurophenomenology), second-person science (participatory action research), and third-person science (the western scientific method of measurement, reproducibility, and attempted neutrality), triangulating the warm data from these three modes of being and perceiving that can extend our epistemological awareness. Such dedication can sow the soil for coordinating modes of human life that take into account our interspecies relations, valuing the biosemiotic community.

Yogi Hale Hendlin. Yogi is an Assistant Professor in the Erasmus School of Philosophy and co-editor of the journal *Biosemiotics*. He is also principal of the Feral Ecologies Lab. His recent publications include the book chapter [Biosemiotics and environmental health](#), and the article [Mobilizing COVID-19 level public health interventions for climate breakdown is necessary](#) (with Ruben Visser).

Hongjin Song, [\*In the Corners that History Does not Reach: On Received History, Collective Memory, and Narrative Fragments\*](#)

In Battleship Potemkin (*Броненосец Потемкин*), Eisenstein's masterpiece, the Tsar sent troops to oppress revolts from the local people, leading to bloodshed on the Odessa Steps. The slaughter, though it never happened in history, was so impressive to its audience that a great many people take it as a true event. In daily discursive practice, history is not a static narrative that cannot be changed, but a dynamic relationship with the translocal collective memory, which is not limited to geolocation (macroscopically), collective memory of the community (mesoscopically) and the personal memory of individuals (microscopically). The idea of received history (Gadamer) leads to a negotiation on the historicity of an event, which grants the possibility for public discourses to enter "a consecrated place of history". However, the pressure of grand narratives persists, interfering with the functioning of these discourses as a totalized text. They can only present themselves in the corners that the *Geschichtswissenschaft* cannot reach and function as fragments of narratives that supplement the overall, homogeneous narration of history. In the presentation, I seek to clarify how these fragments' function in the socio-cultural landscape, as well as important features of these fragments, which contribute to further discussions on the complexity of history and the pragmatic use of collective memory to reshape history on the discursive level.

Hongjin Song is a PhD student and a Junior Research Fellow of Semiotics and Culture Theory in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. His research interest is centered on collective memories, power relationships, and social discourses. His research currently focuses on a semiotic understanding of the rumor phenomenon.

Daniele Monticelli, [\*Crisis as/or Explosion? History in Juri Lotman's later works\*](#)

This presentation reads Juri Lotman's later works (1985–1993) against the background of the debates on historicity and temporality in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall. The collapse of the USSR provoked a shift of attention in Lotman's work from texts to historical processes that he considers from the point of view of change and novelty, paying particular attention to the place of human freedom and choice in history. The presentation will more specifically focus on Lotman's notion of 'explosion' as a useful analytical tool for the study of historical crisis, in which unpredictability and indeterminacy seem to disallow our capacity for rational decision. It will be argued that the notion of explosion helps us to understand the individual and cultural mechanisms that activate in a state of crisis and to evidence the risks as well as the potentialities of the latter. Conceived in the climate of the 1989 revolutions, Lotman's thoughts on unpredictability, change and freedom gain a new topicality in our times, when human history seems to have entered a phase of permanent crisis.

Daniele Monticelli is a Professor of Translation Studies and Semiotics at Tallinn University. His recent publications include the anthology [\*Translation Under Communism\*](#) (edited with C. Rundle and A. Lange), and the article [Lotman in the Anglophone world: General trends, two new anthologies and a companion](#).

Erik Kõvamees [\*The Notion of Value in Economics and Semiotics: A Historical Perspective\*](#)

In his establishment of the new science of semiology and his description of the sign, Ferdinand de Saussure used an economic analogy, invoking the notion of value. On the basis of this analogy, it is possible to heuristically posit a distinction between so-called economic value and so-called semiotic value. The objective of this talk is to not only discuss this differentiation and examine its consequences as such, but also to examine this opposition from a historical perspective. In short, this lecture will address what value as a notion entails both economically and semiotically speaking, how the notion has evolved historically (over time), and finally, the relevance (and importance) of understanding this notion as concerns the understanding of (contemporary) socioculture.

Erik Kõvamees is a Junior Research Fellow in the University of Tartu's Department of Semiotics. His latest publications include [Prisons as total institution semiospheres](#), and [Semiosis is always at the border, which operates it](#) (in co-authorship with Ott Puumeister and Kalevi Kull).

Lukáš Zámečník, *[Dynamical Systems in the Work of Jan Kořenský](#)*

Jan Kořenský promoted the interdisciplinary relations between linguistics and natural sciences and drew from these relations the conceptual means to build his own hypotheses about the nature of speech and communication. This presentation aims to make visible the conceptual borrowings from dynamical systems theory that Jan Kořenský used. Above all, we will try to show to what extent is fulfilled the Kořenský's hypothesis – from his treatise “The Chaos of Speech and the Order of Language?” (1999) – about the transformation of the conceptual pair of “order and chaos” in the humanities.

Lukáš Zámečník. is a Researcher from the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University. His recent publications include [The role of philosophy of science in quantitative linguistics](#) and [Causal and non-causal explanations in code biology](#).







Semiotics of Space  
Autumn Semiosalong 2022  
*Design by E. Israel Chávez Barreto*



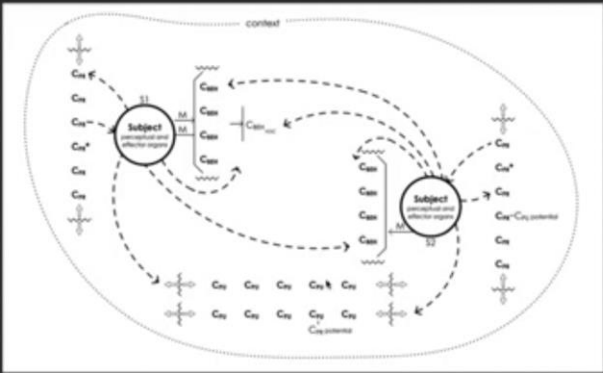
Does semiosis imply the existence of subjective space? What about physical space? Many have used the notion of space in a somewhat metaphorical manner, from Umberto Eco's "c-space" to Juri Lotman's "semiosphere". Yet, if we are to talk about truly lived and everyday experience, space must be examined in a deeper way than just as a useful metaphor. Semiotics of space is concerned with communication practices on the ground and overlaps with urban studies, mostly through anthropology and sociology; but 'inner space' may also be interrogated at a more abstract level. Luis Prieto suggests that the identity of the personal subject depends on recognition of the non-subject – there is something which the subject cannot be, but brings it into being by negating the space of the subject's own body. This non-subject body space becomes a terrain open to interpretation. The social semiotics of space emphasizes pragmatics, whereas Prieto's linguistic semiotics of space is more concerned with syntactics and semantics. There are many ways to divide the inquiry, and there are numerous specialists in the semiotics of this topic, most notably for us the late Pierre Pellegrino – to whom this Semiosalong series is dedicated – but also a couple others who will speak to us during this series about their current research. We invite all participants to reflect upon the abstract nature of subjectivity as well to engage with street-level social semiotics by joining us in the online space for the latest Semiosalong series, starting from October 27th, 2022.

Oleksii Popovich, [\*From Networks to Fluids: Shifting Spaces in Wartime Zoological Gardens\*](#)

A place where species meet, zoos have been studied in zoosemiotic (Maekivi 2016, Cerrone 2020) and zoobiological frameworks (Hediger 1969, Hediger 1950). However, research on zoos in war has been rather limited (Hediger 2013, Braverman 2013, Malamud 1998), primarily covering zoos in WW2, and usually written in the theoretical vein of biopolitics and critique of animals' inscription into the war machine. Ukrainian zoos surviving the wartime conditions have been widely covered by mass media reports, but have not received researchers' attention yet. I propose to interlink the conceptual vocabularies of zoosemiotics and actor-network theory to trace the transformations of human-animal relations affected by the disruptions of physical and acoustic environments, of critical supplies, and displacements of significant human and nonhuman actors. I argue that actor-network theory and zoosemiotics share key sensibilities to pragmatic relations on-site that can be easily disturbed (and possibly repaired) by modifying affordances and enrolling human and nonhuman actors in novel ways in an effort to enhance the durability of the network and realign the multiplicity of Umwelten. Specifically, I suggest that concepts of regional, network, and fluid space developed by John Law and Annamarie Mol can complement the zoosemiotic notions of Umwelt and eco-field, particularly when the robustness and flexibility of spaces are posed as research questions.

Oleksii Popovich is an MA student in the Department of Semiotics at Tartu University. His research interests are changes in actions and processes within wartime zoos, actor-network theory, contemporary theories of agency, zoosemiotics, and the ontological turn in anthropology.

# Transactional model of communication (Mäekivi, Cerrone 2021)



Close analysis of instances of human-animal communication, accounts for differences in bodily structures, distinguishes a variety of cues, accounts for changes in environment through the course of communication, usable for interspecific communication



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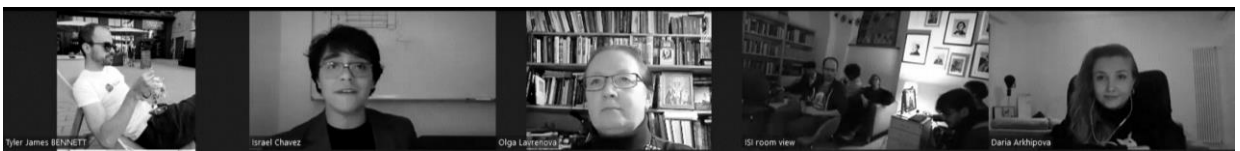
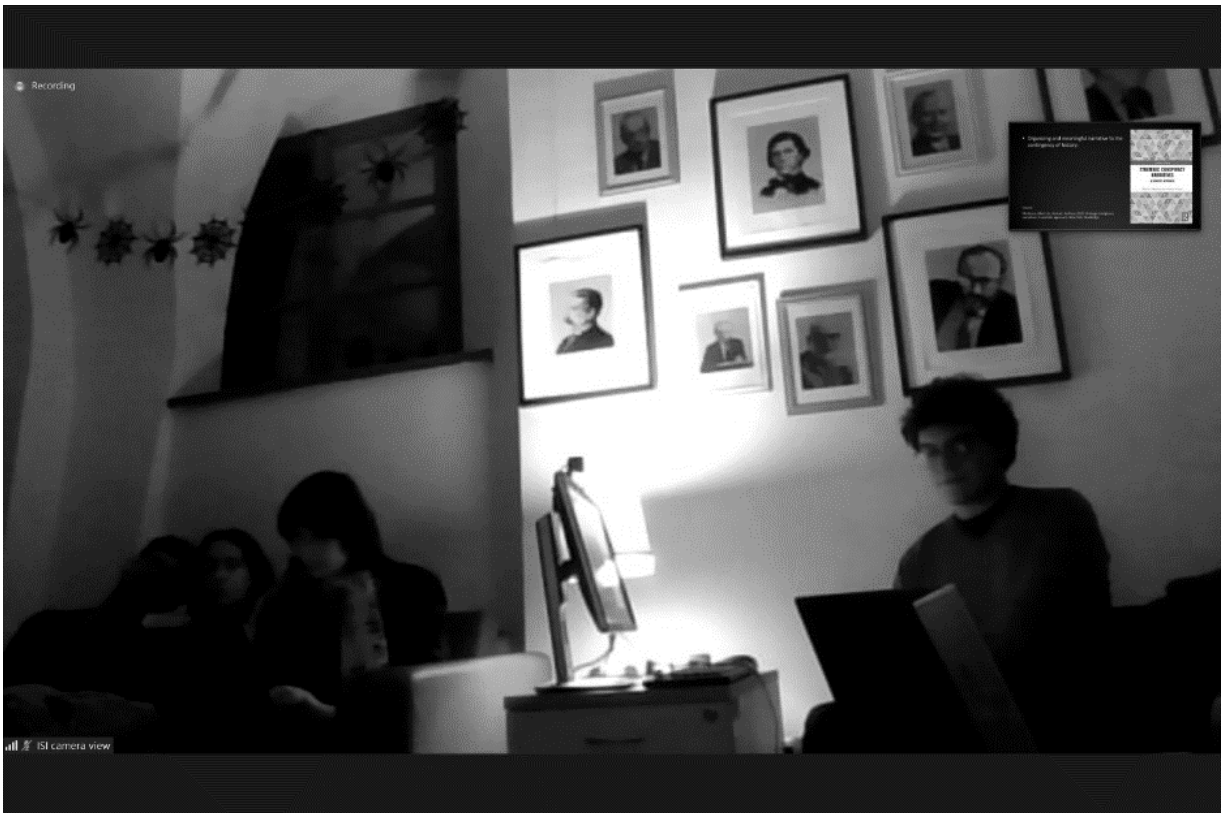
quizz (2022) intro x (4) WhatsApp

chance procedures

João Queiroz, [\*Performance Space in Theatrical Dance as Semiosis\*](#)

Performance space can be defined as the exosomatic embodiment of a problem space resulting from a process of intersemiotic translation (IT). My approach is based on Peirce's mature semiotics, distributed cognitive science, and process philosophy. The central propositions are: IT is semiosis; IT is a dynamic process; IT is a cognitive artifact. I'll explore these ideas by taking advantage of examples of theatrical dance.

João Queiroz is a Professor at the Institute of Arts and the Postgraduate Program in Communication, Federal University of Juiz de Fora, Brazil. His recent publications include [Semiotic relation in literary photobooks: the case of Leminski's Quarenta Cliques em Curitiba](#) (with Ana Fernandes) and [Intersemiotic translation as a cognitive artifact – from Webern's serialism to concrete poetry](#) (in co-authorship).



Daria Arkhipova, [\*A Biosemiotic Perspective on the Built Environment and its Representations in Social Media\*](#)

First, in this presentation, I will focus on a publication in the journal “Biosemiotics” (<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12304-022-09497-5>), which presents a biosemiotic approach to studies of the built environment, human practices within it, and its representations in social media. The article presents biosemiotic participatory categories that can be useful for studying the built environment, its practices and digital representations. It also applies the framework to case studies aiming at understanding how representations in social media affect users’ practices within the built environment and the other way around. Second, in this presentation, I will talk about digital environments in general and specify the role of the Artificial Intelligence agent in mediating physical environments into digital representations. The conclusions reflect how social media representations of the built environment impact the users’ cognitive, axiological, emotional and bodily states.

Daria Arkhipova is studying a joint PhD at the University of Turin and at the University of Tartu. She has also been a visiting researcher at TU Delft in the Netherlands. Her recent publications include [\*The built environment in social media: towards a biosemiotic approach\*](#) (with Federico Bellentani).

Tiit Remm, [\*Chronotopic Analysis for the Semiotics of Space\*](#)

Chronotopic analysis was initially proposed (by Mikhail Bakhtin and later Peeter Torop) for literary and film studies, that is, for studies of artistic texts. I discuss the possibility to apply the framework for studying the design of everyday environments seen from the perspective of semiotics of space. The distinction of topographical, psychological and metaphysical chronotopes provides an applicable framework but also some puzzles. The presentation is based on a research on a recent campaign for (re)designing central squares and areas in small Estonian towns.

Tiit Remm is a researcher of semiotics and director of curricula in semiotics at the University of Tartu. His recent publications include [Is there a Lotmanian method for semiotic analysis of spatial texts?](#), and [Heterotopie et places émergentes du texte de la ville](#).

Olga Lavrenova, [\*Games with Space: Cultural Landscape Studies as a Provoker of Spatial Semiosis\*](#)

This presentation is based on a publication “[Games with Space](#)” (in Russian) in the journal *Epistemology & Philosophy of Science*. The main idea is that the scientific approach to the study of geocultural space is a provocateur of new models and meanings of landscapes. On the one hand, humanities explore the meanings of places and regions that have been formed over the centuries. On the other hand, the meanings created by culture are involved in the process of secondary interpretation. The most common are several areas of interpretation that play an active role in structuring our ideas about geocultural space. They can be conditionally designated as “games with space”, since they have a certain amount of arbitrariness, but there are also the well-established rules. Several of them will be considered – a game of scales, a game of geographical modeling, a game of structures, a game of time, a game of meanings, a game of feelings, a game of institutionalization.

Olga Lavrenova is a geographer, philosopher and historian. She is President of the International Association for Semiotics of Space and Time, and honorary member of the Russian Academy of Arts. She is the author of [\*Spaces and Meanings: Semantics of the Cultural Landscape\*](#).



Heidi Campana Piva, [Modelling Flat Earth](#)

The idea that ancient people thought the Earth was flat is a popular myth. In fact, humans have known about the spherical shape of our planet for about two and a half thousand years. Yet, the heliocentric spherical model of our solar system has been – for a while now – disapproved by those who are part of the so-called modern Flat Earth movement, which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. As much as we would like to think so, the Flat Earth Society is not a joke, but rather, they present themselves as ‘genuine scientists’ interested in facts, reason, and ‘the truth’. Given this situation, in this Semiosalong seminar, we will be taking a look at the Flat Earth Society Facebook page, seeking to identify some of the meaning-making processes and mechanisms involved in Flat Earth discourse. We will also briefly discuss the philosophical position known as Direct Realism and how this relates to the flat representation of Earth. Most importantly, I will seek to answer the following questions: What can semiotics learn from the Zetetic model of Earth? And why should we care? – Flat-earthers are obviously not to be taken seriously in the field of science. Nevertheless, I would argue that we mustn’t underestimate the capacity of this movement to reveal many pertinent problems underlying society today. Despite how ridiculous it sounds, the Flat Earth movement reflects how a portion of humanity interprets our place in the cosmos and, as such, is deserving of unironic attention. (That does not mean, however, that we shall not laugh at least a little bit during this presentation.)

Heidi Campana is an MA student at the Department of Semiotics of Tartu University. Her main research interests are anti-scientific movements, conspiracy theories and science denialism. Her recent publications include [Semiotically mediated human-bee communication in the practice of Brazilian meliponiculture](#).

Viktorija Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė, [\*Monuments in Lithuania: shaping state identity\*](#)

Monuments can be practices through which state identity is represented, created and revealed. In this context an analysis of monumental practices reveals that the debate about monuments is primarily shaped by political factors. How should we read monuments, and how does semiotics help in political studies of monuments? These are the questions that will be answered during the meeting.

Viktorija Rimaitė-Beržiūnienė is an Assistant Professor at Vilnius University. Her recent publications include [Political monuments in Lithuania: Artistic aesthetics and national identity](#).

Federico Bellentani, [\*Digital Solutions for Controversial Monuments: A Semiotic and Geographical Approach\*](#)

With the advent of digital transformation, there have been many research projects at the intersection of computing, digital technology and humanities aimed at digitalising cultural heritage. Their general objective has been to protect, preserve and pass on cultural heritage for current and future generations. Here, technologies such as Data, Artificial Intelligence and Extended Reality have been considered as offering unprecedented opportunities to create new forms of users' engagement with cultural heritage. If the digital preservation of cultural heritage has received much attention over the last two decades, less research has been done on the increasing embeddedness of the digital into physical monuments and memorials and on digital-native memorial practices. This paper proposes a semiotic and cultural geographical approach to investigate digital memorials and memorial practices. While doing so, it assesses the role of digital technology in providing solutions for controversial monuments and memorials, i.e. that honor events, people and ideas whose messages are considered controversial or offensive to certain social groups. Overcoming the idea that digital technology is merely a tool to "update" the controversial meanings of monuments, the semiotic and geographical approach here proposed focuses on the symbolic, cultural or political aims of each solution, with the aim to understand and not to repress conflict: conflicts exist and digital technologies can provide alternatives to them by activating learning, creative and playful practices around monuments and memorials. These ideas are explored through the analysis of monuments and memorials in Estonia, a country at the forefront of digital transformation and actively involved in the cultural reinvention of the Soviet built environment.

Federico Bellentani is a Post-doc Researcher at the University of Turin, within the ERC Consolidator Project FACETS. He is the author of [\*The Meanings of the Built Environment: A Semiotic and Geographical Approach to Monuments in the Post-Soviet Era.\*](#)



1<sup>st</sup> session  
October 27<sup>th</sup>, 2022 (Křižkovského 12, online)

[International Semiotics Institute Grand Opening](#) with Susan Petrilli, Eero Tarasti, Dario Martinelli, Marcel Danesi, Kalevi Kull, Paul Copley, Ludmila Lacková, Alin Olteanu and Tyler James Bennett.

After eight years in Kaunas under the direction of Professor Dario Martinelli, the International Semiotics Institute has been relocated to the Faculty of Arts at Palacký University in Olomouc. The first half of the evening consisted in a series of talks from renowned semioticians who have been involved in the development of the ISI, from its founder, Professor Eero Tarasti, to its new director, Dr. Tyler James Bennett.

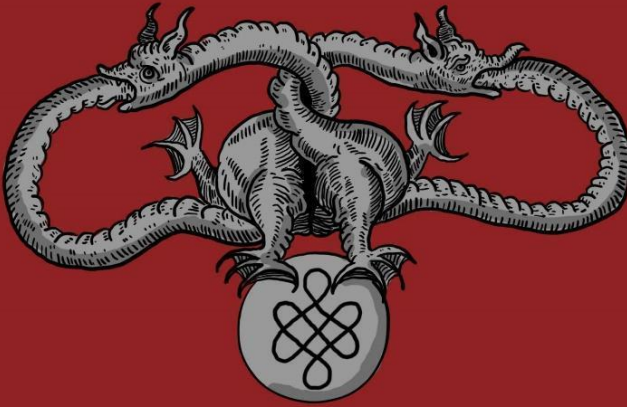
Josep Muntañola, [\*The challenge of the Semiotics of Space to the Design, Architectural and Urban Practices and Theories of Today\*](#)

The talk presents some recent ideas in relation to the dialogical genesis of architecture and urban planning and later examines them in the light of the approaches of Mikhail Bakhtin and Juri Lotman. At the same time, Bakhtin and Lotman's theories are contrasted with other semiotic and hermeneutic positions. This highlights the interrelations of physical and social space. The proposal put forward by is uncommon in the historical analyses of culture, but it gives an account of the complexity of the object under study, for, indeed, physical non-semiotic spaces function in a very different way from the cultural spaces inhabited by humans. The proper study of the semiotics of space lies in how these two dimensions might influence each other. This exact topic is explored by analyzing several city plans in different epochs.

Josep Muntañola Thornberg is an Emeritus Professor from the Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya, and full member of the Reial Acadèmia Catalana de Belles Arts. He has published over a hundred books on the theory and practice of architecture. His recent publications include [\*Lotman and Bakhtin in the architectural design theories of today\*](#).



NECHEIA



Synecheia  
Spring Semiosalong 2022  
*Design by E. Israel Chávez Barreto*



Synécheia (*συνέχεια*) is a Greek word meaning ‘continuity, continuous succession, order’. The word inevitably brings to mind the philosophical doctrine of synechism proposed by Charles Peirce, which expresses the tendency to regard things such as space, time, and law as fundamentally continuous. The most well-known implication of Peirce’s term is his rejection of Cartesian mind-body dualism. For Peirce, the physical and the mental are not separated in kind but plotted on a graded spectrum of signs. Synechism also challenges the opposition of realism and idealism, but where semiotics falls in this opposition depends on who you ask. Sixties-era semiology was sometimes conceived as a critique of realism, whereas contemporary biosemiotics embraces so-called semiotic realism. The boundary between the one and the other blends just like in synechia, an ocular condition where the iris and the cornea seem to blend with one another, and the limits remain a matter of perspective. Yet, there can surely be a biological basis even for a general semiotics that embraces structural semiology with all its anti-realist implications. The series probes these blurred boundaries and will showcase a number of different approaches to the yet-to-be-defined general semiotics, which takes the basic continuity of signs as its primary interest.

Jeremy Sherman, [\*The Semiotic Grounding Problem: Biosemiotic's "Hardly Addressed Problem" and how to Tackle it Scientifically\*](#)

Biosemiotics poses revolutionary questions but tacitly employs a conventional natural philosophy method for addressing them that may be limiting the field's influence. Here the conventional method is termed as abstract engineering: it posits dual-aspect (form and function) reified abstract modules and forces that we imagine assembling to model functional biosemiotic systems or phenomena. Such modeling can be useful for describing what must be explained but is often mistaken as explanatory. Through Peirce's concepts of synechism and prescinding, he hinted at an alternative to the abstract engineering method that would both ground semiotics in physical work and exemplify an alternative to abstract engineering applicable in other fields. Here I outline a proposed "neo-synechist" method and offer nine standards for the application of this method.

Jeremy Sherman is an Independent Researcher in biosemiotics, evolutionary epistemology and psychology. He is the author of [\*Neither Ghost nor Machine, The Emergence and Nature of Selves\*](#).

Vít Gvoždiak, [\*General Semiotics and Token:token Models: The Case of Simulation and Emulation\*](#)

In the first half of the twentieth century, the thinking about signs in Central Europe (or Czechoslovakia) was largely dominated by the tradition of the Prague Linguistic Circle. However – despite their innovativeness – the works of Vilém Mathesius, Jan Mukařovský, and Roman Jakobson cannot be understood as a contribution to general semiotics in the strict sense. The emergence of general semiotics in Czechoslovakia can be properly situated in the mid-1960s, and moreover not as something that would arise from the linguistic tradition of F. de Saussure or L. Hjelmslev and of course not even the semiotic one, say C. S. Peirce. General semiotics in Czechoslovakia has its main source in cybernetics (Klíř – Valach 1965, Tondl 1966). This cybernetic source was transformed into a specifically general semiotic approach by Ivo Osolsobě (1969), who is known primarily for his critical rehabilitation of the concept of ostension (Osolsobě 1967, 1986a, cf. Gramigna 2016). In this talk I will further elaborate Osolsobě's not so widely recognized (1986b) notion of token:token model; i.e. a situation when the object of epistemological interest is neither a single token nor its type but a particular token as a model of another token of the same series/type. Despite its seemingly limited effectiveness token:token modelling turns out to be a relatively strong explanatory principle. The token:token modelling approach will be employed as a general framework for conceptual specification and differentiation of the terms “simulation” and “emulation”, which are both understood as special cases of semiosis.

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Vít Gvoždiak is a Researcher at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. He co-edited, with Martin Svantner, the anthology [\*How to Make Our Signs Clear: C.S. Peirce and Semiotics\*](#), and he has published numerous articles, one of the most recent being [Arbitrariness and rationality](#).

Oscar Miyamoto, [\*Peirce Goes 'Interstellar': The Hyperbolic Continuum and the Diagram of the "IT"\*](#)

Peirce's meditations about time are central to understanding his broader theory of mind, and vice versa. He argued that time is a "hyperbolic continuum" (W 8: 134) deriving from the universe's evolutionary tendency to adopt habits (CP 8.318). If this hypothesis is taken seriously, semiosis itself could be understood as a relativistic model of time, "our form of intuiting logical connections". I will take a deep dive into Peirce's manuscripts, where he concludes that the irreversible flow of mind (e.g. consciousness) operates with a type of causality different from mechanical force (e.g. energy conservation). In the light of this, I will examine what I consider to be an overlooked aspect of Peirce's schematic imagination, his metaphysical diagram of the "IT" (W 8: 530). In this cryptic yet hypnotic model Peirce shows that reality operates with three expressions of stage, consisting of precedence, contemporaneity, and succedence. Finally, I will comment on some of Peirce's contributions to physics, astronomy, and mathematics, which are recently being rediscovered by different scientific paradigms. I will observe, thus, that Peirce's evolutionary cosmology anticipated our current understanding of the universe at quantum and astronomical scales, which consider the key role of a subjective or interpretative point of view.

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Oscar Miyamoto is a science writer and PhD student in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. His research interests are episodic memory studies, zoosemiotics, and Peircean semiotics. He recently published the paper [Four epistemological gaps in alloanimal episodic memory studies](#) in the journal *Biosemiotics*.

Joshua A. Bacigalupi, *Synécheia: Continuous Becoming via Ethical Habits and Esthetic Ends*

As early as the presocratics, Heraclitus explored the nature of being, characterizing any ostensible state as the result of a continuous process, an ever changing river. Such a continuous process, however, does not offer a clue to the nature of change, let alone “becoming”. Change, or continuous succession, must be marked by events, which require distinctness, asymmetries and order. But, given some kind of potential in Peirce’s synechism, how might the “actual” emerge to constitute such events, thereby punctuating change? Aristotle also explored these ideas by arguing that an event or thing A must have had some B-ness already within itself for it to have become B. Otherwise, all change would be a series of acausal catastrophes (Ross 1995[1923]: 182). Based on the work summarized in Bacigalupi (2013), this talk will start by proposing how it is at all possible for change, most generally, to be non-catastrophic and how A, in the process of becoming B, should have already had some B-ness within it. Having provisionally resolved this classic paradox, there is nevertheless the problem of sustaining such a habit of “becoming” and non-catastrophic change. How might semiotic systems, in particular, navigate the seeming contraction between maintaining order and its change? To address this question, this talk will explore Peirce’s synechism, which is partly predicated on his pragmatism, and which is itself predicated on ethical and esthetic considerations (CP 5.129). Using Bacigalupi (2013) as a heuristic lens to illustrate these abductive considerations, a model of semiotic self-regulation will be proposed as a means for veridical “becoming”.

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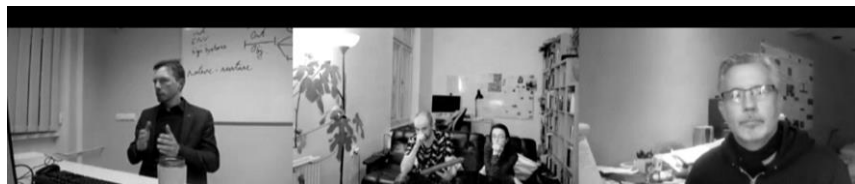
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Joshua A. Bacigalupi is a doctoral student in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. His recent publications include [Semiogenesis: A dynamic system approach to agency and structure](#), and [Creative agency via higher-dimensional constraints](#) (with Victoria N. Alexander).





Muzayin Nazaruddin, [\*Post-disaster Landscape Transformations and the Dilemma of Nature-culture\*](#)

Disasters caused by natural hazards and their subsequent recovery processes inevitably transform landscape in varying degrees. This talk will focus on post-disaster landscape transformations, which usually involve two (seemingly) contradictory modes: integrating nature and culture or separating the two. Although the dichotomy of the concepts of ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ has received harsh criticism from several angles in the past decades (e.g. Haraway 1985; Latour 1991), I will demonstrate how they have been adapted to certain practices and hence cannot be simply explained away through conceptual analysis. Taking two Indonesian cases, the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami and the 2010 eruption of Mt. Merapi, I will explore nature-culture integration or separation as manifested in post-disaster landscape transformations through three crucial topics: post-disaster spatial categorization, post-disaster human settlements, and disaster remembering and mitigation. The first topic discusses how the production of disaster-zone spaces as widespread post-disaster spatial planning is based on an uncritical separation perspective of nature and culture. A disaster-prone area is an abstract space where nature is dominant and hazardous; therefore, not suitable for humans. From the perspective of integration, avoiding such hazardous places should be contextual, which is only possible if humans understand the rhythms and specifics of the natural processes that influence their lives. The second topic explores how post-disaster human settlements should be framed with a broader perspective of post-disaster spatial reorganization, including housing, working, and homing functions. It will also explore how the relocation program brings along complex consequences, especially the emergence of a multiple-distracted landscape, which will become the basis of more complex cultural changes. The third topic discusses how the nature-culture integration or separation also affects the modes of memorizing past disasters and mitigating future disasters, i.e., highlighting disaster-related landmarks or merging them into landscapes and everyday taskscapes.

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Muzayin Nazaruddin is a PhD student at the Department of Semiotics of Tartu University. His recent publications include [Contestations of cultural memory at a disaster monument: The case of the Aceh Tsunami Museum in Indonesia](#), and [The role of natural disasters in the semiotic transformations of culture: the case of the volcanic eruptions of Mt. Merapi, Indonesia](#).

Timo Maran, [\*Grounding the Semiosphere: Ecological Crisis is the Crisis of Meaning-making\*](#)

From a semiotic perspective, the Anthropocene manifests as a massive multiplication and spread of abstract symbols that lack referential connection with biological and material processes. Such growth of symbols is anti-ecological because of the large amounts of matter and energy required to produce and upkeep various media and artifacts that embody signs. As symbols are based on human conventions, they cannot also react directly to changes in environmental and ecological processes (described as dissent by David Low 2009). This is the degradation of the object in the sign that is characteristic of Anthropocene semiosis. In the biological realm, organisms rely on the presence of objects (as environmental constraints, properties, and resources). In icons and indexes exists a connection between object and interpretation and, accordingly, between material and semiotic realms. Eduardo Kohn (2013) and Andrew Whitehouse (2015) proposed the concept of semiotic ground to denote the semiotic basis of the ecosystem. It may be claimed that icons and indexes constitute a common semiotic ground for human and non-human species alike that is also connected to the patterns of the material realm. We should find ways of grounding the semiosphere, that is, reestablishing the connection between the human symbolic sphere and ecosystems that are predominantly iconic and indexical. The semiosphere could be reinterpreted as the ecosemiosphere – a semiotic system comprising all species and their umwelts, alongside the diverse semiotic relations (including humans with their culture) that they have in the given ecosystem, and also the material supporting structures that enable the ecosemiosphere to thrive (Maran 2021).

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Timo Maran is Professor of Ecossemiotics and Environmental Humanities, and Head of the Department of Semiotics at Tartu University. His recent publications include the book chapters [Semiotics in Ecology and Environmental Studies](#), and [Applied ecossemiotics: Ontological basis and conceptual models](#).

Ivan Fomin, [\*“Your Neighbors are, in a Measure, Yourself”. Towards a Peircean Account of Intersubjective Synechia in Social Semiosis\*](#)

“Nor must any synechist say, ‘I am altogether myself, and not at all you.’ ... your neighbors are, in a measure, yourself, and in far greater measure than, without deep studies in psychology, you would believe”, says Charles S. Peirce in his article “Immortality in the Light of Synechism”. The idea of intersubjective continuity is essential for Peirce’s general theory of signs and especially for its applications in the social sciences and humanities. The power of this concept consists in the fact that it allows us to account for intersubjective aspects of meaning-making and habit-taking. Thereby, it opens a possibility for developing a Peircean version of social semiotic theory that would complement the existing systemic-functional tradition of Social Semiotics. In particular, the category of logonomic rules that is central for Bob Hodge and Gunther Kress’s social semiotics can be theorized on the basis of Peirce’s conceptual apparatus. In Peirce’s terms, logonomic rules can be seen as final interpretants that emerge in intersubjective synechia. They function as habits of intersubjective mind that enable both thought (production of initial interpretants) and action (production of dynamic interpretants). The development of a synechist theory of social semiosis is crucial for bridging Peirce’s pragmaticist phaneroscopy with social phenomenological approach to we-subjectivity. It can also be important when it comes to other semiotic concepts and ideas that imply some sort of intersubjective synechia, such as Ferdinand de Saussure’s ideas about language being a phenomenon of “conscience collective”. Overall, Peirce’s concept of synechism can be used as a powerful integrative tool that allows us to account for intersubjective continuity which is theorized across various linguistic, semiotic, and sociological traditions.

Ivan Fomin is a transdisciplinary Researcher with interests in semiotics and political studies. His recent publications include [Sociosemiotic frontiers](#), and [Memes, genes, and signs: Semiotics in the conceptual interface of evolutionary biology and memetics](#).

Pauline Delahaye, *The devil is in the detailed definitions: can non-human animals have a “language”?*

The question of language, and more precisely, of language as an ability owned exclusively by human beings, is an almost obsessive one. Most of the time, we can see that the very definition of language, through history, was shaped in order to exclude non-human animals, rather than to describe an objective phenomenon. Different criteria have been used to draw this line. We will see that all of them are problematic, mostly because they are chosen not for their relevance, but for their supposed human exclusivity. With each new ethology or anthropology discovery, they have become more

fragile. We will show how difficult it is to draw the line, and what accepting a continuity between our species can teach us about variety in human languages.

Pauline Delahaye is a Post-doc researcher in the Department of Semiotics at Tartu University. She is the author of several articles and monographs in French, and of the book [\*A Semiotic Methodology for Animal Studies\*](#).



NECHER

Anastasiia Bondarenko, [\*The Abecedary. Introduction to Hryhorii Skovoroda\*](#)

The aim of my talk is to illustrate how Hryhorii Skovoroda's legacy can contribute to both general semiotics and theosemiotics in particular. From the fable and its Strength (Сила) to the secret language of the Emblem; from the figure of speech to the Abecedary of the world, from the laws of nature to the cosmological Observatorium: the world of this Ukrainian scholar is immense. Even though Skovoroda primarily focuses on the Bible, he nonetheless employs all kinds of religious imagery, both Christian and pagan. He extolls the virtues of unlimited expression, a fundamental phenomenon of religious experience. While Umberto Eco uses the terms of Encyclopedia and Dictionary, Skovoroda teaches to read the word of God from scratch: from the very Abecedary.

Anastasiia Bondarenko is an MA student at the Department of Semiotics of Tartu University. Her research interests are theology, theosemiotics, and general semiotics. Her MA thesis is a semiotic view of the works of the Ukrainian philosopher H. Skovoroda.

Jamin Pelkey, [\*Zhuangzi, Greimas, Peirce: Fellowship of the X\*](#)

Recent research on the chiasmus figure (X) has demonstrated its powerful potential for highlighting opposites in relation at every level of linguistic structure and in many pre-linguistic and non-linguistic domains as well. The ultimate function of the X pattern and its derivatives seems to be its ability to bring together while keeping apart – an ability to create or convey relationships of continuity and interdependence between oppositions without collapsing them into a static unity – its ability to generate a third term to mediate between binaries. Following a review of chiasmic typology and its embodied sources, this presentation examines three case studies in relation, organized around the Peircean categories, to illustrate a range of meaningful approaches to chiasmic modeling:

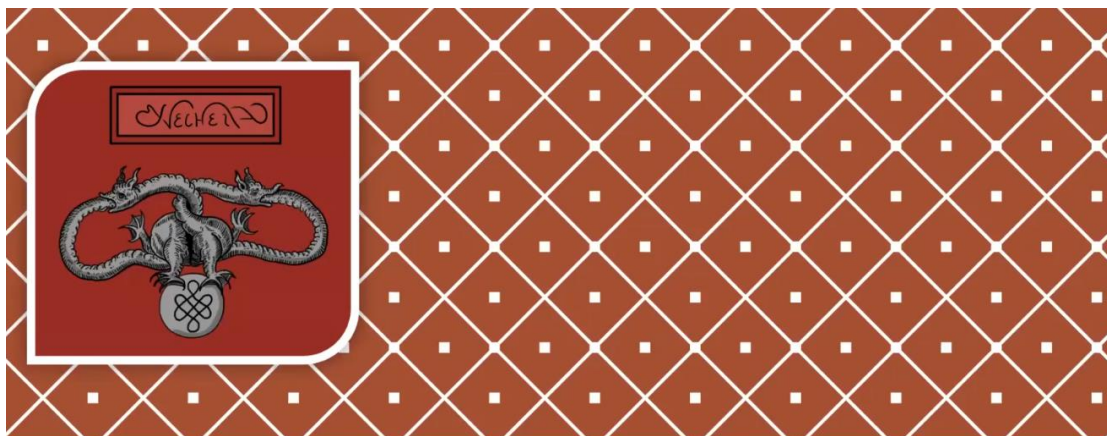
Firstness: Chiasmic ring structures in Zhuangzi’s butterfly dream chapter

Secondness: Chiasmic modeling in A. J. Greimas’s semiotic square

Thirdness: Chiasmus patterning in C. S. Peirce’s pragmatist semiotics

I propose that the relationships between these thinkers should itself be understood as chiasmic, with potentially profound implications for semiotic theory, analysis, and application. The implication that I bring back into focus at the conclusion of the presentation is rather more practical than theoretical, but it also has potential for being understood from a biosemiotic perspective as a further extension and development of Jesper Hoffmeyer’s “evolutionary growth in semiotic freedom”.

Jamin Pelkey is Associate Professor at the Department of Languages of Toronto Metropolitan University (formerly Ryerson University). He is Co-Editor-in-Chief of *Semiotica*, and member of other editorial boards. His latest publications include [\*The Semiotics of X, Chiasmus, Cognition, and Extreme Body Memory\*](#) and, as editor, the anthology [\*Bloomsbury Semiotics\*](#).



ZHUANGZI, GREIMAS, PEIRCE

*Fellowship of the X*

Jamin Pelkey

Ryerson  
University

Languages,  
Literatures & Cultures  
Faculty of Arts

10 March 2022







autumn  
semiosalong

Mythokatalysis  
Autumn Semiosalong 2021  
*Design by E. Israel Chávez Barreto*

Mythokatalysis compounds the Greek *μῦθος* (myth) and *κατάλυσις* (catalysis). The Greek-French dictionary *Le Grand Bailly* offers, among other definitions, for the first: “expressed word, discourse”, and for the second: “action of dissolving, to destroy (a government), to end”. The title is inspired by the opening lines of Roland Barthes’ major work on the topic: “mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the ‘nature’ of things.” Myth has an orthogonal relationship with ideology – ideology ‘naturalizes’ the cultural codes to the point of invisibility, where myth both precedes and undermines culture. Italian fabulist semioticians like Umberto Eco, Italo Calvino, and Roberto Calasso, wove images from mythology into synthetic works that simultaneously challenged culture and germinated new myths. The conception of myth in this way is like Janus of the Two Faces, the Roman god of duality, doorways, and transitions. Thus we are interested in both the appropriation of myth in subversive action, as well as the dissolution of myths which have themselves become naturalized. Mythokatalysis articulates contemporary social debates in which myth serves both progressive and reactionary agendas. We invite you to join our series, and to expect topics including colonialism and postcolonialism, politics of identity, symbolic violence, ideology critique, and others.

Juri Talvet, [\*Tartu 2024 \(European Capital City of Culture\) and the \(Invisible\) Roots of Estonian Autochthonous-National Conscience and Culture\*](#)

Without access to the Estonian language, a foreign visitor of Tartu can hardly understand why poetry and poets are so important even for present day Estonia. Any foreigner could notice among many cultural monuments and statues those of the founders of our poetry and literary creativity in Tartu: Kristian Jaak Peterson (1801-1822), Friedrich Reinhold Kreutzwald (1803-1882), Lydia Koidula (1843-1886) and Juhan Liiv (1864-1913). But does a foreigner really notice them? One of them is quite recent (Koidula) - only a few years old. I doubt if an average Estonian has ever paid attention to the modest memorial stone of Juhan Liiv. Somewhat better known are the memorial statues of K. J. Peterson and F. R. Kreutzwald, though both are, too, relatively recent. Anyway, they all are mute. They are the founders of our poetry and literature. As free-thinkers, writers-philosophers, deeply immersed in ideological dissent, their importance goes far beyond poetry and literature. They have been the main moulders of our autochthonous-national conscience and culture. Without their work the present day Estonia, operating in all its spheres in our own language, Estonian, would be have been hardly imaginable. By the way, Juhan Liiv (our “dear poet-madman”) was the first ever Estonian who dared to manifest in writing (in his poem “Kas näitad?”) the dream and the prophecy of a free independent Estonian state (“Ükskord on Eesti riik”).

Jüri Talvet is Professor Emeritus of Tartu University. He has published numerous books, such as [\*A Call for Cultural Symbiosis Meditations from U\*](#). He has also published his own poetry and has translated many works from Estonian poets into different languages.

Jaan Valsiner, [\*How Allegorical Sign Fields Set the Stage for Human Dramas\*](#)

Human real life dramas of any kind – celebrations, calamities, boredom of trivialities of daily busyness – are encapsulated by various hyper-generalized and therefore “silent” frames of sign fields. The social direction of these fields is given by pleromatically encoded allegories. We will look at the ways in which the making of allegories is an insertion of value into the meaning construction process as it reaches a relatively high level of abstraction.

Jaan Valsiner is a Professor of cultural psychology. He has worked at Clark University since 1997, and has been visiting professor at Aalborg University, Tartu University, and others. His publications include [\*General Human Psychology\*](#) and many other monographs and anthologies.

## autumn semiosalong 2021

presentations by Auli Viidalepp, Viktoria Yermolaieva, Mattia Bellini, Eduardo Chávez, Ignacio Ramos, Siobhan Kattago, Eleni Alexandri, Shekoufeh Mohammadi, Jüri Talvet and Jaan Valsiner.

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Eleni Alexandri, [\*The Impact of Spectacles on Identity through the Example of K-Pop\*](#)

Following the objectives of the Autumn Semiosalong 2021, Mythokatalysis, this presentation will focus on the issue of identity in today's world, observed and examined through the global phenomenon of K-Pop. Korean popular music (or in the common abbreviation K-Pop) is a rich semiotic subject, which enables the researcher to approach a variety of topics related to society and culture. In this presentation, different manifestations of identity will emerge, such as national identity, social and personal identity, the identity of subcultures, and more. Thus, by breaking down (katalysis) the myth of K-Pop, we will retrieve a spherical image of identity.

Eleni Alexandri is a PhD student in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. Her research covers the field of Eastern Asian forms of art and entertainment, as well as Eastern Asian Mythology. Her recent publications include [K-Pop as \(mis\)representation of Korean culture](#).

Shekoufeh Mohammadi, [\*Codified Identities. The Case of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh\*](#)

This talk focuses on the applications of Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotic theory to the history of Jamshid, Zahak and Fereydoun, one of the most important passages of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh, the national epic of Iran. The aim is to explain the semiotic strategies used by the Persian poet to narrate a history with various religious, mythical and historical layers that in a first reading seem to be only an epic legend. Due to the sociopolitical limitations of the poet, the pre-Islamic dimensions of the passage had to be concealed through such strategies and they are manifested in the special use of given names, adjectives and analogies, verbal tenses, rhetorical resources such as repetition, ellipsis, etc., as well as in an intentional handling of the order of narration. Based on the theory of Peircean iconicity and in relation to the abductive logic involved in artistic creation, in my work a systematized search of the iconic characteristics of the mentioned passage is put into practice, highlighting the semantic effects that they exert and their relevance for a complete and correct interpretation of the mentioned passage.

Shekoufeh Mohammadi has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Alicante, Spain, and currently works as Professor-Researcher at Instituto de Investigaciones Filológicas, UNAM. Her recent publications include [Peircean metaphor reexamined: creation, function and interpretation](#), and the Spanish-language monograph [La leyenda de Siavas. Un recorrido mitológico, ritual y literario](#).



autumn semiosalong 2021



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Ignacio Ramos, [\*The Infinite Dialogue between the Part and the Whole: The Living Tissue of Cultures\*](#)

To engage with Lotman's works is a constant challenge to fixed ways of thinking and rigid ways of classifying discourses. Lotman's own discourses might sometimes appear as seemingly contradictory, even if, some would argue, it is precisely that apparent contradiction that opens a space for meaning generation. Once I heard, in Cuba, a quote from Lotman that said "Those who have seen war from a short distance have a less clear idea of it than those who have seen it from afar". Lotman's proposals have lent themselves to the analysis of indigenous communities in Mexico. The forms of culture are only so inasmuch as they are lived, and they become alive in things like the perception of time, of history, of life and death, the conception of dreams, the way the body is conceived, etc. The theories developed in Tartu have helped us to understand some aspects of those threads that make up the fabric of life and of cultures. The variety of indigenous communities in Mexico is still very big. In my talk, however, I will focus on the work I carried out with the Hñahñu people. The Hñahñu place great importance in the body as an instrument by means of which they cognize and navigate the world. Two premisses of Lotman will serve as the main axis of this presentation: 'the fundamental act of thought is translation', and 'the fundamental mechanism of translation is dialogue'.

Ignacio Ramos Beltrán is Professor of psychology at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. He has published several articles on anthropology, semiotics, and Mexican indigenous cultures, such as [Relato, sueño, tiempo: funcionamientos semióticos de la realidad y de la conciencia.](#)

Siobhan Kattago, [\*Ghostly Pasts and Postponed Futures: The Disorder of Time During the Corona Pandemic\*](#)

Since the first lockdown in March 2020, time seems to have slowed to a continuous present tense. The Greek language has three words to express different experiences of time: *aion*, *chronos* and *kairos*. If *aion* is the boundless and limbo-like time of eternity, *chronos* represents chronological, sequential, and linear time. *Kairos*, however, signifies the rupture of ordinary time with the opportune moment, epiphany and redemption, revolution, and most broadly, crisis and emergency. This paper argues that the pandemic is impacting how individuals perceive time in two ways: first, as a distortion of time in which individuals are caught between linear time (*chronos*) and rupture (*kairos*) invoking the state of emergency and secondly, as an extended present that blurs the passing of chronological time with its seeming eternity (*aion*). As a result of the perceived suspension of ordinary time, temporal understandings of the future are postponed, while the past hovers like a ghost over the present.

Siobhan Kattago is Associate Professor of Practical Philosophy in the Department of Philosophy at Tartu University. Her recent publications include [\*Hannah Arendt's uneasy relationship with sociology\*](#), and [\*Ghostly pasts and postponed futures: the disorder of time during the corona pandemic\*](#).

Mattia Bellini, [\*On the Use of Interactive Digital Narratives to Build and Represent the Complexity of Cultures\*](#)

Culture is complex. It comes from numerous elements and complex relationships between them: ideas, customs, social behaviours, products, or ways of life. Often the same culture encompasses a number of conflicting or mutually exclusive perspectives, which could be difficult to represent and account for in a unilinear narrative form. For this reason, scholars have started to look at Interactive Digital Narratives (IDNs) as powerful tools to represent the multifaceted nature of cultural heritage, thanks to their multi-perspectivity and the personal involvement they require. My talk aims at discussing how IDNs can be used to represent the complexity of real and fictional cultures.

As a flag bearer of the representations of a fictional cultural heritage, the video game *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim* will be discussed. This game features an impressive narrative apparatus, a large portion of which is constituted by in-game books narrating the religion, history, mythology and – in general – culture of the people inhabiting the region of Skyrim. In addition, the complex cultural system featured in this game relies partly on the “culture” of its players: some of the legends forming the cultural heritage of Skyrim have possibly originated with the first-hand experience of players of the previous instalments of *The Elder Scrolls* series. Therefore, knowledgeable players feel as if their past actions participated in the construction of the cultural background of Skyrim. This design choice can give players unprecedented possibilities to understand how cultures evolve through the passage of time and in reaction to complex social, political and economic influences.

However, the evolution of cultures is often much more uncertain in the real world. As an example of the use of an IDN to represent the complexity of a real cultural heritage, I will talk about the work of Jonathan Barbara. The Maltese scholar and his team are now developing a digitalized Hypogeum of Hal-Saflieni – a Neolithic burial ground built over the course of more than two millennia, between 4000 and 1500 BC. This virtual reality experience is meant to allow easier access to an otherwise restricted UNESCO World Heritage site and to foster interest in its cultural value. But the long history of the Hypogeum is necessarily full of uncertainties and a number of sometimes conflicting perspectives germinating around it with the passage of time. This complex system of hypotheses and beliefs requires new narrative tools to be comprehensible, and IDNs have been proposed as fitting mechanisms for its representation. Indeed, the hermeneutic modes typical of IDNs accommodate conflicting views in a unified representation, and show how cultural sites and artefacts are often, in their singularity, an encapsulation of multiple plausible stories and beliefs. By discussing the freedom of design choices afforded by fictional storyworlds and the uncertainty characterizing historical reconstructions, I will highlight the potential and drawbacks of interactive digital narratives in representing the complexity of a culture.

Mattia Bellini is a doctoral student in comparative literature at Tartu University. His recent publications include [Interactive digital narratives as complex expressive means](#) and [Formal organization and complex responses to video games narratives](#).

Eduardo Chávez, ['Semiotics? Umberto Eco and Stuff Like That?' Tellings of a Marginal Discourse](#)

The current status of semiotics in society and academic environments is rather marginal, and this is one of its many paradoxes (Gaines, 2015). It is paradoxical because semiotics deals with all aspects of meaning; it is relevant to every field of inquiry (Posner, Robering and Sebeok, 2003) and is applicable to everyday experiences producing meaning. Yet, it's not an established field in most academic systems, and it lacks full recognition in the disciplinary 'market' (Rastier, 2001). This talk will present the results of a larger research that focused on the under-researched area of semioticians' identity construction and how it was examined by focusing on their narratives, produced in a particular setting. In this study we provide a current state of semiotics, according to the responses provided by a population of forty scholars from twelve countries who tell how they interact and (de)construct identification in the field of semiotics. Moreover, we account for the existence of a prevailing discourse that intends to convey the practitioners' own subjective experiences of living and working in a marginalised field.

Eduardo Chávez Herrera is a postdoctoral researcher in the school of applied linguistics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. He holds an MA in semiotics from the University of Tartu and a PhD in applied linguistics from the University of Warwick. His recent publications include ['Oh, semiotics? Umberto Eco and stuff like that?' Telling and constructing a discourse of marginality](#) and [Semioticians' Glassy Essence: The Discursive Construction of Semiotics Through the Eyes of its Practitioners.](#)



Viktoriia Yermolaieva, [\*Symmetry-Asymmetry in Lotman's Semiosphere\*](#)

Juri Lotman in his article “On the semiosphere” (1984) gave special attention to the problems of symmetry-assymetry, oppositions, and mirror mechanisms in the semiosphere: “The mirror mechanism, revealing symmetrical-asymmetrical pairings, is so widespread in all sense-making mechanisms, that you might call it a universal, including the molecular level and general structure of the universe, on the one hand, and a global creation of the human soul, on the other”. However, he later adds: “all these elements of symmetry-asymmetry are only mechanisms of meaning-making, and like the bilateral asymmetry of the human brain, characterize the mechanism of thought, without predetermining its content; they determine the semiotic situation, but not the content of this or that communication.” The question is thus: where does the idea of the universality of symmetry-asymmetry mechanisms in the semiosphere come from? In my presentation, I will examine this question by making a comparative analysis of Vernadsky’s ideas outlined in his book “Reflections of a natural scientist” and Lotman’s idea of semiosphere.

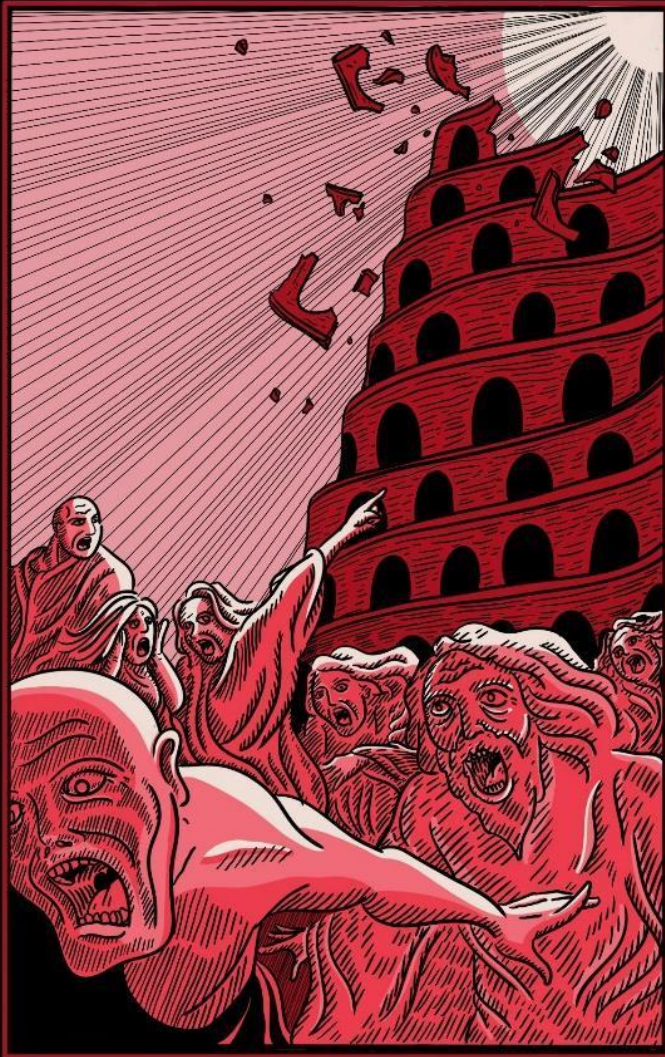
Viktoriia Yermolaieva is a PhD student at the Department of Semiotics of Tartu University, and her research is dedicated to questions of authenticity and authentication processes in contemporary culture.



Auli Viidalepp, [\*Science, Fiction, Folklore: Mythologizing Machine Learning\*](#)

Technology-related narratives can roughly be divided into scientific (“realistic”) and fictional (“fantastic”), the former belonging to research and science communication, and the latter to the genre of science fiction. Scientific texts aim for a maximally accurate description of objective reality, while fictional texts function as reflections of the possible worlds of their authors, readers and/or characters. Presumably, these two categories are separable – but are they really separate? Much of culture lives in the liminal, folkloric, in-between space where phatic communication and social capital matter more than the verifiability of every statement. And when we need to understand and organise new knowledge about concepts such as ‘Artificial Intelligence’, the first interpretations are borrowed from our daily experiences of the whole culture, from cellphones and housebots to science fictional characters; from user stories and data science to eschatological mythology. What does this behaviour say about technology, and what does it say about us?

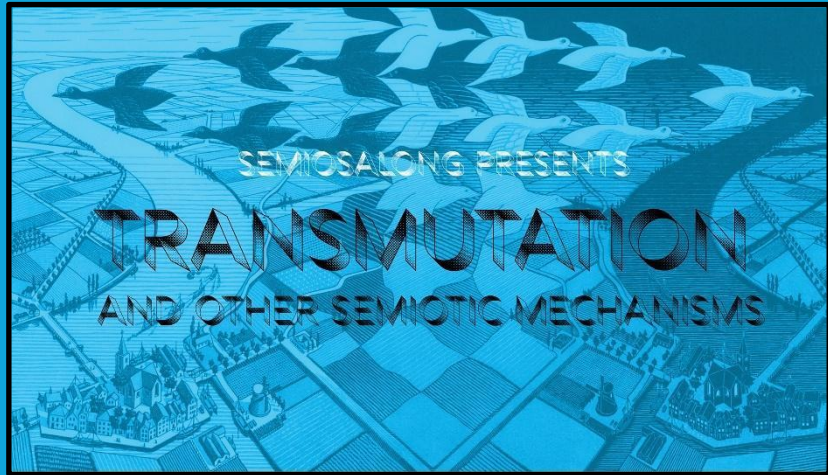
Auli Viidalepp is a PhD student in Semiotics at Tartu University. Her recent publications include [Sociocommunicative functions of a generative text: the case of GPT-3](#) and [Representations of robots in science fiction film narratives as signifiers of human identity](#).



# myt hoka tal ysis

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Transmutation  
(and other semiotic mechanisms)  
Spring Semiosalong 2021  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

A look into the everyday phenomenon of meaning creation might suffice to make us notice that meaning is often dependent upon more than one sign system. When we look at a movie, there are sounds, voices, music, images; when we speak with someone, there are gestures, there are pronunciations telling us where our interlocutor is from, there are hints telling us about her or his age; when we walk down the street there are signs that give indications to us by means of their shape, their color and their location. Every piece of information that we obtain from all the meaningful things we encounter every day is determined by the fact that each of these pieces of information are in fact signs belonging to different sign systems. It is thus interesting to ask, what kinds of relationships are established between sign systems? How is it that they can work together? Perhaps, one possible answer is that in addition to the possibility of expressing meanings in different ways, there are also meaningful units able to move from one sign system to another. Indeed, it might be so that there is a sort of permanent dialogue or negotiation between sign systems that allow us to make sense of the things we encounter every day. This, in its turn, might be seen as a translation processes whereby a meaning gets transmuted as it moves from one sign system to another. It was Roman Jakobson who called transmutation this process of translating between different sign systems, but this is surely not the only way we can think about the relationships between sign systems. Accordingly, the aim of this Semiosalong series is to discuss not only Jakobson's concept, but all the other possible mechanisms and processes that lie behind the multifold interactions of the sign systems we use in our daily lives.

Mariam Nozadze, *Semiotic Features of Recognizing the Homeric Hero: A Study of Adaptation Poems*

This presentation investigates the representation of two Homeric characters, Helen of Troy and Achilles, in XX-XXI century English language adaptation poems, describing the semiotic transformations of these epithets. The study aims to explain the usage of Homeric epithets like “swift-foot Achilles”, “Achilles brave-heart”, and “Helen white-armed” in contemporary texts, showing the author’s choice of Homeric epithet as a ground layer for building their own character in his/her poem. The context of these poems as well as the rules and mechanisms of literary adaptations are the primary interest in this research. To investigate the semiotic processes of Homeric epithets for the authors and for the readers of these poems, we apply the following theoretical approaches and notions: The Epic Reduction (Mary Hartley Platt, “Epic reduction: receptions of Homer and Virgil in modern American poetry” 2014), the notion of Fluctuation (Umberto Eco, *On Literature* 2005), Myth and Repetition (Laurie Maguire, *Helen of Troy: From Homer to Hollywood* 2009,) Knowledge Activation (Edward J. O’Brien, “Knowledge activation, integration, and validation during narrative text comprehension” 2014).

Mariam Nozadze is a PhD student at Tbilisi State University, Classical Studies, and also holds a MA degree in Semiotics from the University of Tartu.

Federico Bellentani, *Transmuting the Politics of Memory and Identity in the City: The Case of Estonia*

This presentation analyses how national politics of memory and identity transmute into the city and its built environment, with a focus on monuments and memorials in Estonia. National elites can manipulate memory and identity for political purposes, helping to promote a uniform national memory and reinforce sentiments of national belonging. Often elites use the built environment as a text where to inscribe a specific image of the nation or the city. In doing so, they erect built forms aiming to legitimate their political primacy and to promote the kinds of ideals they want users to strive towards. This is especially the case of monuments and memorials: elites deliberately design them to convey dominant historical narratives and to encourage specific future expectations on the basis of which to set their cultural and political agendas. As such, monuments can shape and spread dominant worldviews, reinforce political power and set off social dynamics of inclusion and exclusion. While elites design monuments to convey dominant meanings, their interpretations are never enclosed once and for all. The interpretations of monuments may change over time following changes in culture, social relations, concepts of nation and views on past events, as the recent controversies during the Black Lives Matter protests have demonstrated. Both the top-down and bottom-up interventions on controversial monuments can be seen as translation strategies to transform them so as to be in tune with the given cultural context. These ideas are explored through an analysis of the trajectory of cultural reinvention through monuments in Estonia.

Federico Bellentani is a Post-doc Researcher at the University of Turin, within the ERC Consolidator Project FACETS. He is the author of [\*The Meanings of the Built Environment: A Semiotic and Geographical Approach to Monuments in the Post-Soviet Era.\*](#)

Elli Marie Trigel, *Catch a Bull at Four: Transmutation and Mindfulness*

In the contemporary course of turning mindfulness into an efficient quick-fix stress-reduction tool, discussion about cognitive processes involved in meditation practice seems to be isolated from the general rhetoric of spiritual development. When practicing meditation and integrating a mindful attitude into daily life, personal meaning-making processes are gradually (or in some cases, suddenly) altered. There are semiotic mechanisms involved in those autocommunicative practices of generating higher states of mind. Buddhist tradition has extensive experience in describing their dynamics. Chan/zen presents tons of literary texts and allegories (e.g. 10 ox-herding pictures) to illustrate the path of self-transformation from one system to another (and beyond). Although languages have their limitations, in combination with silence, they are the only means for being able to make sense of and articulate lived-through spiritual experiences. Understanding the flexibility and inherent emptiness of ways of knowing cannot be reached without an awareness of sign-systems, as one cannot transcend what one does not know.

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Elli Marie Tragel is a doctoral student in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. Her research interests are Buddhism, deep experiences, autocommunication and semioethics.



Herman Tamminen, *Will the Sun Shine on thy Soul God's Lustre of Gold, or, Notes from Between the Above and Below*

It is well-known, that globally throughout the times there have existed several systems of belief that have deified the sun. It is also well-known that gold (Au) is one of the most malleable of metals, oftentimes used as material for fetishes and decorations – for ritualistic and other, more down to earth purposes. The role of the sun in systems of belief is quite intuitive, and the vague resemblance of gold to the sun along with its physical characteristics in part explains its use. The sun gifts the world the whole spectrum of light and fuels life itself, remaining inexplicable (in the past), crossing the skies as the earth revolves around it (in the past, and in language – from sunrise to sunset). Gold does nothing beyond being an object of lust for the human being since time immemorial; being the first metal ever employed by our species, it is still coveted. The sun – and by that, “the ineffable” – remains out of reach, whereas gold is relatively easily obtained and warped to our liking. Many systems of belief recommend that we not beseech earthly riches but rather rid ourselves of lust and material greed. The economic situation of the world, however, shows otherwise. Hence, to an extent, the accumulation of wealth may be seen as symptomatic of the dissipated state of “the ineffable” in our times. The aim of this presentation is to glare at some possible connections between the sun and gold by resorting to analytical psychology and semiotics of culture. The semiotic position of the sun will be charted according to the fragmentation of universal space, only to find its opposite within the Earth, and their mutual relation will be studied. The material characteristics of gold, making it suitable to be connected with the sun, will be laid out, and the odd iconic relation between sun :: god :: gold will be explored. Finally, some esoteric speculation over eras will be committed.

Herman Tamminen is a PhD student in semiotics at Tartu University. His recent publications include [Body ground red – integrating Peirce, Kristeva and Greimas](#), and [Four ways of triadic ‘sign-ness’ on two semiotic squares](#).

[Mark Mets, \*Cultural Data and Semiotics: Transformations and Systems\*.](#)

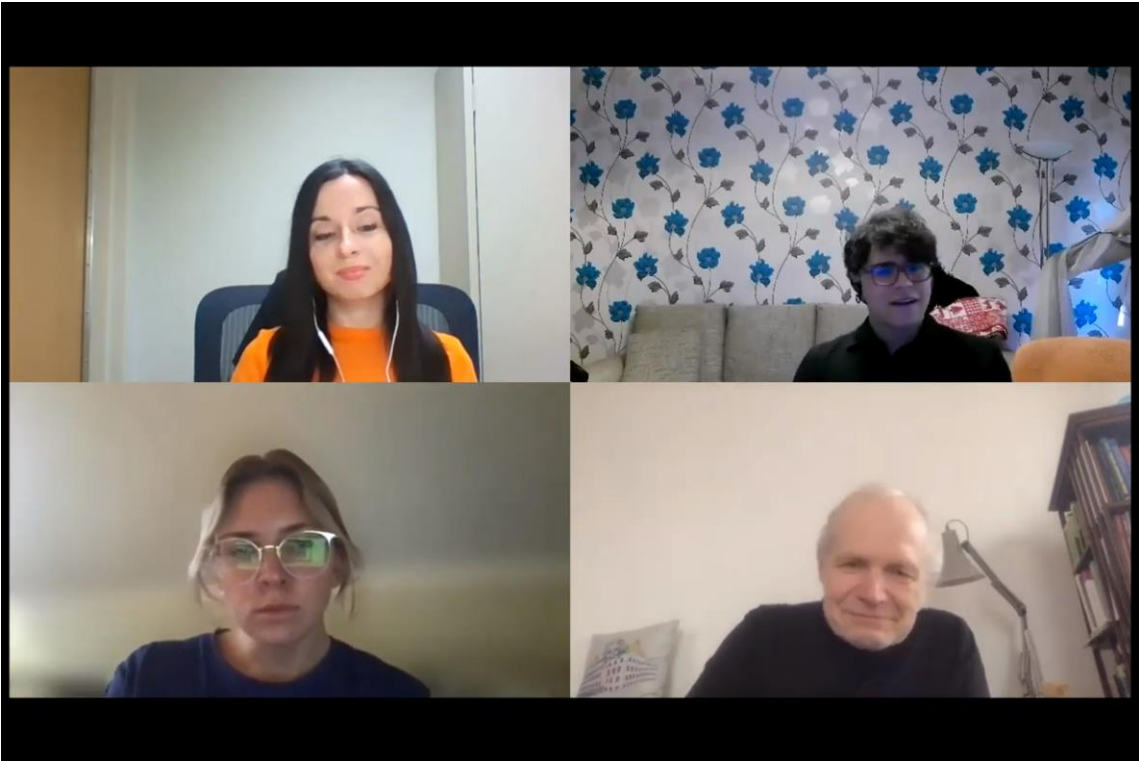
Digital culture and digitalization of culture create vast amounts of data; it transforms our cultures and societies as well as our academic meaning-making about them. There is a growing awareness about the limitations and dangers of using such data, but also about the possibilities it provides for academic research. This topic has not been ignored in semiotics. Different scholars have seen the importance of semiotics as a way to critically approach big data as well as to work towards a systemic understanding of culture with big data and multidisciplinary research. Semiotics can also provide a better understanding of different transformations related to data from various modalities. This presentation gives a short insight into the topic of cultural data analysis by discussing some of the existing semiotic approaches in this direction, relating them to the topic of transformations, and raises questions about possible future research directions.

Mark Mets is a PhD student in of Cultural Studies at Tallinn University. His main research interests are the semiotics of culture and cultural data analysis.

[Andrew Creighton, \*Implosion, Umwelt and Formal Rationalization\*](#)

Implosions and formal rationalized systems have been a prevalent area of study for nearly four decades now. Researchers in this field have turned their attention to a variety of subjects including the merging of social spheres, technology, and roles and identity, however, a more physiological and biological perspective on these issues has largely been left unconsidered. In this presentation, I will demonstrate how the implosions of meaning under formal rationalized systems change and regulate biological entities and their abilities to incorporate and interact with the world.

Andrew Creighton is a doctoral student at the Department of Semiotics of Tartu University. His recent publications include [Umwelt, enchantment and McDonaldization](#).



[Ludmila Lacková, \*Between Form and Substance: A Non-Orthodox Reading of Hjelmslev\*](#)

Besides the formalization of Saussure's model of the linguistic sign, the contributions Louis Hjelmslev made to linguistics seem to have not received all the attention they deserve. This might be due to the inaccessibility of many of his papers – lots of them available only in Danish or French – or, perhaps, to the excruciating complexity of glossematics. The work that introduced the Danish linguist to a broader audience was, most likely, the *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, translated by Francis J. Whitfield in 1957. However, a thorough exploration of the Hjelmslevian oeuvre might show that, surprisingly enough, some of the concepts presented in the *Prolegomena* are partially contradicted by the author himself in his less-famous writings. In this talk, I will present a non-orthodox reading of Hjelmslev, basing my argumentation on two central Hjelmslevian concepts: the attenuation of the dichotomy form-substance and the law of participation. We will see that the relation between form and substance is in fact more complex than a simple reduction to a binary opposition, and this will ultimately force us to question the directionality of the determination between form and substance. The complicated relation between form and substance will be illustrated by examples of interlingual translation and various modalities of transmutation, with a focus on visual arts.

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Ludmila Lacková is Head of the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University, Olomouc. Her recent publications include [Participative opposition applied](#) and [Folding of a peptide continuum: Semiotic approach to protein folding](#).

Leonard Shlain's *The Alphabet versus the Goddess* argues that 'right brain' feeling and affect have been suppressed by alphabetic language for millennia. Nowhere in Shlain's book do you find citation of Jacques Derrida, however its main hypothesis is basically just a simplification of Derrida's famous *Of Grammatology*. Much is lost in this simplification, but the texts of deconstruction themselves are so byzantine that they can be difficult to decipher. It is easy to demonize second-generation semiology for how preoccupied it remains with verbal language – this disavowal is a mistake, but there are some other features of their approach that should rightly trouble you. Deleuze and Guattari's schizoanalysis provides an effective program for undoing logocentrism from the inside, but are you prepared for the results of total destratification?

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Tyler James Bennett is Assistant Professor of semiotics at Palacký University and Director of the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc, Czech Republic. His main interests are deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and biosemiotics. His recent publications include "[Biosemiotic aesthetics may unify general semiotics](#)" and "[Second generation semiology and detotalization](#)".







Semiotics in Latin America  
Autumn Semiosalong 2020  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

Nowadays, the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce has a strange hold on the Latin American mind, but this is not the only semiotics that happens in Latin America. The Saussurean revolution of the mid-20th century left strong traces in the subcontinent that were carried back to Europe and elsewhere by the Latin Americans escaping from then rising dictatorships. In this climate, Latin American semiotics was born as an act of resistance, as a revolutionary practice. The following decades brought some important changes that impacted both the region and the discipline. The second half of the 20th century saw the institutionalization of semiotics, and with it, the tension between semiotics as a critical thinking tool and its assimilation by design and marketing programs. Yet, these seemingly opposite tendencies are of crucial importance for the dynamicity of the discipline. This adds up to the many contradictions, different points of view, and internal forces that have shaped semiotics in Latin America into an ever-changing and vibrant field. The present series will dwell on the kind of semiotics specific to the region (even in the cases when it was developed abroad), from its beginnings in the 1950s to its later developments at the turn of the century. The presentations will give a glimpse of the vast landscape of Spanish and Portuguese-speaking semiotic research, given that today the Latin diaspora in semiotics reaches even as far as our beloved city of Tartu.

[Jorge L. Flores Hernández, \*Bachelor Machines: An Intertextual Reading of Roberto Bolaño's 2666\*](#)

Roberto Bolaño's *2666* is a monster of a novel, sprawling over a thousand pages and consisting of five chapters that read as separate books unto themselves, given their mostly disconnected plots and characters. To further complicate matters, there's an abundance of references to several other works of literature and the plastic arts, as well as to historical events. Since the book offers no narrative closure, a reading strategy is required to make sense of *2666*. The strategy proposed here, drawing mainly from the work of Julia Kristeva, is that of an intertextuality which reveals a hidden pattern organized around a center: Marcel Duchamp's "The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even" (*La mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*). The artwork expresses the mechanics of the institutionalization of multinational exploitation via the link between sex and death. The latter link, best popularized in the psychoanalytic ideology critique of Jacques Lacan, is the one theme that demonstrably underpins every section, and every subsection, of Bolaño's book. Duchamp's work of art provides the model for these mechanics as they are played out in *2666*.

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Jorge Luis Flores Hernández has an MA in semiotics from Tartu University. Currently he is a PhD student at Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona, in the Spanish Philology Department. His main research interest is literary analysis following the textual models of Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco.

[Carlos Guzmán, 'Aiming at the Significance Target': Emergence of Agentive Semiotics in the Colombian Semiotic Landscape](#)

The landscape of semiotic studies in Colombia has been quite desolate after a very active period, at the end of the 60s and part of the 70s, when studies in semiology were in vogue at social communication and art faculties in Colombian universities. The beginning of the first decade of the 21st century saw a renewed interest in the “science of the signs” and brought out new study groups that sprouted in different universities around the country. Among those groups, the one founded in 2002 by professors of the Department of Humanities of Jorge Tadeo Lozano University has become quite representative of the new trajectories of Colombian semiotics. The spearhead of this group is the bold theoretical proposal of Agentive Semiotics developed by professor Douglas Niño. Agentive Semiotics, following the Peircean tradition and inscribed in the relatively recent field of cognitive semiotics developed in the Aarhus and Lund schools, aims to introduce a new way to understand the emergence of meaning based on the relations between agents and their agendas.

Carlos H. Guzmán has an MA in semiotics from the University of Tartu and a second MA in semiotics from the Jorge Tadeo Lozano University in Bogotá. His research interests include visual semiotics, diagrammatic reasoning, and the development of the agentive proposal.

E. Israel Chávez Barreto, *From Buenos Aires to Geneva: The Semiotics of Luis J. Prieto*

The name of Luis J. Prieto stands out as a sort of forgotten hero of Latin American semiotics. Originally from Argentina, he was forced to leave his country after the military coup of 1966. His exile took him to Algeria, where he worked alongside Jean-Claude Passeron. In 1968, he joined Paris VIII, the Université de Vincennes, and a year later he was appointed Professor of General Linguistics in Geneva, where he was the last holder of Saussure's chair. Prieto remained in Switzerland until his death in 1996. Even though his works are known on both sides of the Atlantic, he is seldom read, and his theories still await the recognition they deserve, both in contemporary semiotics and in linguistics. This presentation will give a short overview of Prieto's life and works, thus we will explain, both from a theoretical and from a historical perspective, the way in which linguistics meets semiotics in the specific *sémiologie* that Prieto developed. Our aim is to highlight two aspects of Prieto's theory: first, its importance for general semiotics, and second, the connection between semiotics as a scientific discipline and the critique of ideology. This last aspect is crucial since for Prieto, as for many other Latin American semioticians, semiotics fundamentally was, and hopefully still is, a revolutionary practice.

Oscar Miyamoto, '*Chile, Mole y Pozole*': A Brief History of Semiotic Studies in Mexico

Ever wondered why Latin-Americans come to study semiotics, specifically, in Tartu? Spanish is the answer! You name it: Lotman, Saussure, Jakobson, Kristeva, Greimas, Eco, and Peirce. All of them have been spiced up by Spanish-speaking translations that made it possible for Mexican semiotics to become a colorful but revolutionary field of study. This talk will map the international connections that made such bibliographical fact possible. For example, did you know that, back in 1997, a Cuban scholar translated Juri Lotman's work? We will also discuss up-to-date examples of how semiotics has evolved as an interdisciplinary field or, as we say in Mexico, a wild combination of 'chile, mole and pozole'. There is a whole Spanish-speaking semiotic universe out there, come and find out more about it!

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Oscar Miyamoto is a Mexican PhD student at the University of Tartu. His nerdy adventures have taken him from the intertextuality of heavy metal music to the visual pragmatics of scientific diagrams. His publications include [Four epistemological gaps in alloanimal episodic memory studies](#).



Leticia Vitral, [\*Yes, Nós Temos Semiótica! Semiotics in Brazil\*](#)

In the Latin-American world, Brazil stands out as the only Portuguese-speaking country in a hispanophonic continent. This linguistic isolation allowed Brazil to integrate and develop its academia independently from the rest of the region, gaining some local colors. However, since Brazil itself has continental proportions, academia was far from being a homogenized practice. In the field of semiotics, different tendencies and developments can be identified in different cities, states and regions of the country. Semiotics in Brazil has the feature of a very interdisciplinary field, highly present in the studies of literature, linguistics, arts, communication, cultural studies and political sciences, whereas structural semiotics found its home in the studies of literature and linguistics. Peircean semiotics is the chief semiotic theory in the fields of arts and communication, while Lotmanian semiotics dominates the studies of culture. In this presentation we are going to see how these European and American tendencies came to find a place in Brazilian academia and how it has developed there; always in tune with the local productions, environments and scenarios, bringing in new challenges and ideas to the field. Further, we are going to see how the ideas of intersemiotic translation, semiotic creation and playful use of signs and language are intrinsic to one of the most important cultural manifestations in Brazil: the Tropicalia movement.

Leticia Vitral has a PhD in comparative literature from Linnaeus University, Sweden. Her recent publications include [Gestures as diagrams from Peirce's mature semeiotic](#), and [Iconically modeling a demolition process in the photobook Palast Der Republik](#) (in co-authorship with João Queiroz).



Semiotics of Conflict  
Autumn Semiosalong 2019  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

Discussions about conflicts often revolve around two main questions: how to solve them and how to avoid them? Despite our often fearful and negative attitude towards them, conflicts play an important role as a dynamic force in the world around us and thus deserve a more multifaceted approach. The semiotic viewpoint offers an interesting insight and allows us to observe conflict as a universal mechanism of meaning generation. In turn, conflict presents one of the most fruitful research objects for semiotic inquiry. It is in the moment of conflict where everyday life routines lose their automaticity, revealing different meaning structures and making the semiotic nature of our reality apparent. The autumn Semiosalong 2019 aims to bring these two perspectives into dialogue with a series of lectures addressing various contexts – cultural, social and environmental, with the aim of gaining a deeper insight into the nature and function of conflicts.

Nelly Mäekivi and Riin Magnus, *Conflict-free Life: Relations Between the European Mink and Local People*

Why should one study the locals' perception of an animal, who is apparently conflict free? We argue that involving the local community in the reintroduction process and addressing their concerns already prior to reintroduction is a beneficial way to mitigate potential problems. With the example of European mink (*Mustela lutreola*) and the locals of the Estonian island Hiiumaa, where the animal has been reintroduced, we hope to explicate that local attitudes matter even when there is no (potential) conflict. We also show that as the social situation, activities and lifestyle of people or the species' own population size changes, the species may acquire a different status and the social relations may render the species with a conflict status, even if the species itself does not interfere with human life. To achieve our goal, we will apply the research platforms offered e.g., by Jakob von Uexküll (1982, 1992) (the question of the overlapping of *umwelten*), Almo Farina (2004; Farina, Belgrano 2006) (the degree of correspondence of the search image and *eco-field*), Timo Maran (Maran 2015, 2016) (perception of alien species and hybrid environments). Our empirical research will rely on interviews, archival materials and media texts.

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Nelly Mäekivi is a researcher at the University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics. Her recent publications include [A zoosemiotic approach to the transactional model of communication](#) (with Mirko Cerrone), and the article [Ecosemiotic analysis of species reintroduction: the case of European mink \(\*Mustela lutreola\*\) in Estonia](#) (with Riin Magnus).

Riin Magnus is a researcher at University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics. Her recent publications include the book chapter [Ecosemiotics: signs in nature, signs of nature](#), the article [Ecosemiotic analysis of species reintroduction: the case of European mink \(\*Mustela lutreola\*\) in Estonia](#) (with Nelly Mäekivi), and [Grounding biosemiotic Aesthetics: extensions back and forward](#).

**1<sup>st</sup> SESSION**  
**JONAS PIAAM**  
 Who owns the sea and its resources? Human-seal interactions and conflicts of meanings, practices and knowledge.

**MONDAY**  
**16<sup>th</sup> - 18<sup>th</sup>**  
**DECEMBER**  
 International Hotel  
 Wageningen, the Netherlands

**SEMiotics OF CONFLICT**

**SESSION 3/3**

**2<sup>nd</sup> SESSION**  
**NELLY MAEKWI & RIVN MAGNUS**  
 Conflict-free life: Relations between the European mink and local people

Joonas Plaan, *Who Owns the Sea and its Resources? Human-seal Interactions and Conflicts of Meanings, Practices and Knowledge.*

The presentation focuses on conflicts between fishers and seals, hoping to demonstrate its roots, reasons and consequences. Whether it is the waters of Newfoundland and Labrador in Canada or fishing grounds in Pärnu bay, Estonia, fisher-seal interactions seem to always create conflict, neglecting the fact that marine space is a shared space, between humans and non-humans. But the competition for fewer and fewer fish in the sea keeps fuelling the conflict, making you ask: “who owns the sea and its resources?” In order to understand this, the talk will present how meanings of the seal have changed through time, what are the practices of different agents interacting with seals and how knowledge about the marine animal is created.

Joonas Plaan is an environmental anthropologist from Tallinn University who also works as an expert on sustainable fisheries in the Estonian Fund for Nature. His publications include [Capitalism, fisheries and climate: a maelstrom of change in the Baltic Sea.](#)

Andrey Makarychev and Alexandra Yatsyk, *Semiotic Facets of Bare Life and Biopolitical Othering: Estonia and Beyond*

The presentation takes a semiotic look at Estonian biopolitics as represented by literary narratives, films, museum exhibits, and other cultural genres. We mostly focus on how the concept of ‘bare life’ coined by the Italian political philosopher Giorgio Agamben resonates locally with its multiple experiences of foreign rule and demographic losses. In our interpretation, the idea of bare life describes a typical totalitarian situation in which victims and perpetrators may easily swap roles and the boundary between the two is to remain inherently indefinable. It is only through this lens that one may explain Agamben’s insistence that everyone can find herself under the conditions of bare life. The Estonian example convincingly illustrates close interlacing between geopolitics and biopolitics but also represents a sui generis case of the bare life phenomenon without direct connection to the sovereign power, as Agamben and his multiple followers would have expected. In particular, we single out three contexts in which the idea of ‘bare life’ reverberates in Estonian biopolitics:

- The “pristine life” that is culturally represented through highly symbolized nostalgic appeals to come back to the “old good times”;
- The “ruptured / fractured life” of the time of people’s submission to foreign powers;
- The “post-colonial biopolitical life” of Estonian Russophones who after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 found themselves in the position of an unwelcomed minority struggling to find its proper role in an independent Estonia.

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Andrey Makarychev is Professor of regional political studies at Johan Skytte Institute, University of Tartu. Alexandra Yatsyk is project coordinator at Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu, and analyst for the Free Russia Foundation. They have co-authored the books [Lotman’s Cultural Semiotics and the Political](#), and [Critical Biopolitics of the Post-Soviet: From Populations to Nations](#).



Andre Uibos, *On Time and Conflict: A Semiotic View*

Time stands for something other than itself; at least this would be a semiotic way of looking at it. Such conceptualization allows temporality to be viewed as a dichotomic structure with its expression and content plane (inspired by Louis Hjelmslev's analysis). This presentation addresses a specific type of 'content' to which time as 'expression' is often tied: conflict. Specifically, time in this presentation is understood as a type of empty signifier with its own complex logic. While different properties or types of time will not be investigated in this presentation, it can be said that conflict 'employs' time in a noteworthy fashion. The main argument is that conflict, in fact, takes time: a precious resource or even a form of capital (Marian Preda). This can be viewed as a type of power relation: conflict prolongs itself, creating a situation where time, as it is expressed, is governed by the underlying logic of conflict. This view can be explained by media events, which have the ability to determine which information plays a part in constructing our social reality, including temporal relations: which information matters enough to take the time. Thus, it is perhaps necessary to assess any conflict by also paying attention to the effect that the conflict has on temporal relations. The presentation draws out some views enabled by semiotic analysis on this topic.

Andre Uibos is a doctoral student in sociology at the Institute of Social Studies at the University of Tartu, Estonia. His research focuses on digital media and digital methods in education, with theoretical interest in communication, time and environment modeling. His recent publications include [Deconstructing social acceleration: towards a discrete model of temporality for social research](#).

Elo-Hanna Seljamaa, *Communities of Conflict on May 9 and Beyond*

The annual cycle of holidays along with practices associated with the observance of a given day of importance provides a basis for distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The official holiday calendar established by a state need not fully match the holidays celebrated by its residents, and it is common for individuals, families, organizations, and groups of other kinds to observe idiosyncratic holidays of their own, which may emerge as arenas for making statements, managing conflicts and arranging social relationships. One such holiday in contemporary Estonia is May 9 or Victory Day, which marks the end of World War II and is observed first and foremost by Estonia’s Russian speakers. Drawing on long-term ethnographic fieldwork, the presentation discusses May 9 celebrations in Tallinn as a Russianspace where daily rules of interethnic coexistence in the capital are periodically broken, asking why this is happening and where it might lead; what, if anything, does it have to do with communities?

Elo-Hanna Seljamaa is a senior researcher at the Department of Estonian and Comparative Folkloristics, University of Tartu. Her recent publications include [Diversities claimed, displayed and silenced: encounters at the new Estonian National Museum](#), and [Limits and opportunities of heritagization: two examples from Estonia](#).

Alin Olteanu, *Killing in the Name of... Culture*

I argue that the recent rise of populist discourse in Europe is rooted in culturalism, an ideological theory claiming that culture strictly determines the behaviour of individuals and groups. This is seen in the identification of a supposed “refugee crisis” by the proponents of populism, who argue that this crisis threatens the cultural identities of Europeans. In fact, Europe is not undergoing a refugee crisis. Also, a supposed influx of non-European immigrants does not challenge a supposed cultural identity of Europeans. Contemporary populist discourse makes sense only in view of an invented, rigid notion of cultural identity, that does not correspond to social reality. I argue that rather than try to cultivate a “European identity” instead of “national identities”, the EU should develop policy in disregard of cultural identity. In an age of looming environmental disaster of global proportions, of globalization and digitalization, policy must be driven by sustainable development goals, not supposed cultural identities and peculiarities.

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Alin Olteanu is an adjunct researcher at the Department of Linguistics and Cognitive Semiotics at RWTH Aachen University. He is the author of [Multiculturalism as Multimodal Communication: A Semiotic Perspective](#) and [Philosophy of Education in the Semiotics of Charles Peirce: a Cosmology of Learning and Loving](#).



Excavations in the Esoteric  
Autumn Semiosalong 2018  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

The taboo and stigma of all things esoteric is strong in the academic discourse, and for good reason. Occult and hermetic studies have little definition or unifying basis beyond the mere fact that they are anti-systemic, that they involve secrecy and concealment, and that there can be no means for the verification of their hypotheses and results. The disavowal of the esoteric from academia is thus grounded in the latter's unscientific status, and yet hermetic occultism shares roots with science, and science has not always been the only credible means of inquiry. The label of scientific may designate only that which is understood through codified means. If the object of interest is definitively that which is outside the grasp of established descriptive systems, then scientific approaches may even preclude its apprehension. Further, the disciplinary identity of semiotics itself is bound up in the idea of exploring meanings which may not be exhaustively described within already established symbolic conceptual systems, therefore the scope of tools relevant to semiotics may not be restricted to the approved tools of the scientific discourse. Beyond the enumeration of the endlessly interesting non-scientific toolsets that are used in semiotics, the series also interrogates the notion of disavowal: what really motivates the disavowal of non-scientific ways of inquiry today, and in times past?

Òscar Castro, *Hermeticism and the Search for a Semiotics of the Sacred*

Hermetism or hermeticism is the ancient way to study the relations between the macrocosmos and the microcosmos. This connection has never been understood correctly in western thought. Centuries ago, it was part of the sciences of transmutation, contemplation of stars, and gnosis of oneself. Linked by the legendary figure of Hermes Trismegistus, it was thought that this wisdom was more ancient than Moses, and the Corpus Hermeticum was the basic reference for these teachings. Discredited by Isaac Casaubon when analyzed philologically, it was discovered that the text could have been written between II and IV BC. Hermeticism then was treated like *occulta philosophia*. The rise of rationalism and the discourses of the new science and the Inquisition closed the options for real science (Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, Leibniz, Pascal, Berkeley), but the heat of hermeticism continued to imbue life with force, like a perennial tree. Nowadays there are new studies revealing that the teachings may after all come from Ancient Egypt, and not only from Hellenistic times, so that Greek thought and mythology share Egyptian roots. We see that these steps open the possibility to study the phenomenon of the sacred beyond myth, and past religions to aim at a new semiotics of the sacred... a '*hierosemiotics*'. To pursue this, I put into question Umberto Eco's position about hermeticism, and I propose a new reading of Lotman's semiosphere, which is beyond interconfessional beliefs, and approaches the threshold between nature-culture from an ecosemiotic point of view.

Oscar Castro is an Assistant Professor at the Autonomous University of Barcelona. His recent publications include [Slime mould: the fundamental mechanisms of biological cognition](#) (in co-authorship), and [A walk through the history of Spanish thought influenced by Uexküll](#).





Tiit Remm, *The Personal and the Universal in Spatial Models of the Sociocultural World*

Spatial models and metaphors aim to provide universal knowledge but remain detached from each other, remain personal theories. Would bridging the ideas of cultural space and social space help to uncover signs from cultures where there are only a few traces left? In this talk I discuss some grounds for theoretical spatial models, particularly Juri Lotman's cultural space (and semiosphere) and Pierre Bourdieu's social space. Are these models related to each other or rather to personal, or even esoteric metalanguage and way of modeling the world? Both can be applied if there is a plentitude of study material and it appears how one model points to boundaries in cultural space while for the other there are apparently no boundaries organizing the social world. But can spatial models be applied if there is a lack of material, as in the case of archaeology? Can any cultural boundaries or social distinctions be proven based on a tomb?

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Tiit Remm is a researcher of semiotics and director of curricula in semiotics in the University of Tartu. His research is focused on sociosemiotics and semiotics of space, particularly on urban semiotics and the use of spatial environment and spatial concepts for societal management as well as semiotic aspects of spatial modeling in humanities and social sciences generally. His recent publications include [Is there a Lotmanian method for semiotic analysis of spatial texts?](#), and [Heterotopie et places emergentes du texte de la ville](#).

Kyle York, *Approaching Buddhism through Analytic Philosophy*

In this talk I will first give a rough outline of what analytic philosophy and Buddhist philosophy are. Then I will discuss the advantages of approaching Buddhism through the lens of analytic philosophy and how these two traditions can interact in rich ways. Comparisons will be made to other methods of engagement with Buddhist texts. I will argue that analytic philosophy provides a particularly good framework for engaging with Buddhism that, rather than merely explicating Buddhist ideas, can treat Buddhism as a partner in a joint project of solving certain philosophical problems. Analytic philosophy can update and improve upon ancient Buddhist texts in certain ways, just as Buddhist texts can bring new ideas to analytic philosophy and challenge and reveal underlying assumptions made by contemporary philosophers in the analytic tradition. I'll give a couple of case studies to show how this can be so, within a Buddhist notion of karma and an analytic discussion of phenomenology. I will also show examples of what an analytic engagement with Buddhism looks like. I will largely draw from Garfield's "Engaging Buddhism: Why it Matters for Philosophy", Glock's "What is Analytic Philosophy?", and other texts such as "Pointing at the Moon: Buddhism, Logic, Analytic Philosophy."

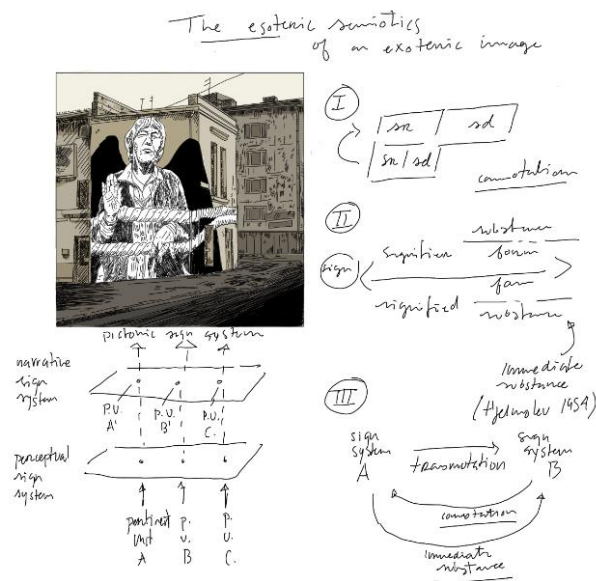
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Kyle York is currently a PhD student studying ethics and moral philosophy, and received their M.A. in philosophy from The University of Tartu. His recent publications include [Why Monogamy is Morally Permissible: A Defense of Some Common Justifications for Monogamy](#), and [The Philosopher as Moral Activist: A Call for Ethical Caution in Publication](#).

E. Israel Chávez Barreto, *An Exoteric Image and its Esoteric Semiotics*

A certain piece of conspicuous street art in Tartu calls out for semiotic analysis – the aim of that analysis is twofold: in the first place it will exhume the arch-structuralism of the likes of Louis Hjelmslev and Luis J. Prieto in contemporary application. In the second place it will show that, even for some unassuming street art, there is a second operative semiotic layer that conditions its reception, but remains implicit without guided mediation. The presentation outlines a model for analyzing a specific kind of semiotic productions – namely those which result from an articulation of two or more sign systems – attempts to characterize that articulation as a connotative structure, and bears out the enduring relevance of a few foundational principles of classic structuralism.



Eugenio Israel Chávez Barreto holds a PhD in semiotics from the University of Tartu and currently works at the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University. His recent publications include the article [Funktionskreis and the biosemiotic signifieds: towards the integration of semiotics](#), in co-authorship with Oscar Miyamoto, Tyler James Bennett,

Ludmila Lacková and Kalevi Kull, and [Opposition, comparison, and associativity: on Luis J. Prieto as a reader of the \*Cours de linguistique générale\*](#). He has also published, in co-authorship with Don Favareau, the mini-comic book [Introducing Paul Cogley: A Graphic Guide](#).

Sugata Bhattacharya, *Visual Hunting and Gathering*

In the contemporary world, human interaction is saturated with visual images – both still and moving – created by the camera. But, the question arises – is the human eye just another camera? On the one hand, the world we see through our eyes is akin to a camera; and on the other hand there are key differences. The eye is not a passive organ like a camera sensor, but actively processes the information it receives. The human eye contains around a 100 million cells which sense light – but a cross-section of the optic nerve, which connects the eye to the brain, has far fewer cells – only a million or so. The talk will probe scientific knowledge from comparative anatomical studies of vision in insects, reptiles, birds and mammals. The talk will then extend these findings to how the limitations of the human eye shape art, and the diverse perspectives used by different cultures to depict the visual world around us.

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Sugata Bhattacharya completed his Master of Arts degree in Semiotics at Tartu University in 2019. Sugata works as an electrical engineer, and lives in the Pacific Northwest region in the United States, where he enjoys spending time outdoors and watching birds.

Mehmet Emir Uslu, *When the Hunt Goes Wild: Cynegetic Relationships with Nature*

As descendants of what is generally called ‘hunter-gatherers’, to us, hunting represents more than merely the ways and means of food procurement through non-human animals. From Huaorani of the Amazons to the Germanic trackers of the Rhineland, hunting consists of various social mechanisms of boundary, regulation and stratification within communities. As such, hunting is not only the collected knowledge and practice of elementary sustenance, but also an interface whereby ‘culture’ interacts with the wild, whether through the spatial aspect of the hunting ground or through the technologies of weaponry crafted and employed therein. In this talk we’ll be going through the conceptualization of the hunt, modes of relationship between humans with their surroundings, specifically via the European cultures of the medieval period, as well as the folkloric myths of the Black Blood and the Wild Hunt.

Mehmet Emir Uslu is a PhD student at the University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics. He is also a designer at *New Socialist UK*, and for the Semiosalong series from 2016 to 2020. His recent publications include [Semiocide: an introduction to semiotics of destruction of the meaningful](#).



Order from Chaos: Self-Organizing Systems  
Spring Semiosalong 2018  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*



Self-organizing structures arise spontaneously from the interaction of the parts of a disorganized whole. The emergent order is decentralized, but in the case of living systems often entails mass cooperation between organisms. The parts involved in the ant colony may not be aware of any common aim but work together nevertheless, to realize a whole greater than the sum. The extent to which the parts of a human society are aware of any common aim behind their swarming is equally disputable, but it is certain that neither the case of the ant colony nor the metropolis can be explained mechanistically. Is it possible that conscious, instrumental aims might inhibit the emergence of new self-organized systems? The Spring Semiosalong 2018 series investigates the intersection of complex systems and political philosophy by considering how cooperative spontaneous orders emerge independent of the conscious intention of their individual parts.

Alex Davies, *Choice Bounded by a System: UT Students and their Course-load*

The talk introduces the fact that there is a long-standing, and widespread tendency for University of Tartu undergraduate students to take 2 times as many courses at once as undergraduate students in many universities that score higher (by various metrics of quality) than the University of Tartu. The talk then explains how this context institutionally shapes the style of learning adopted by undergraduates (surface over deep), and the possible reasons why such curricula designs exist and continue to exist at the University of Tartu.

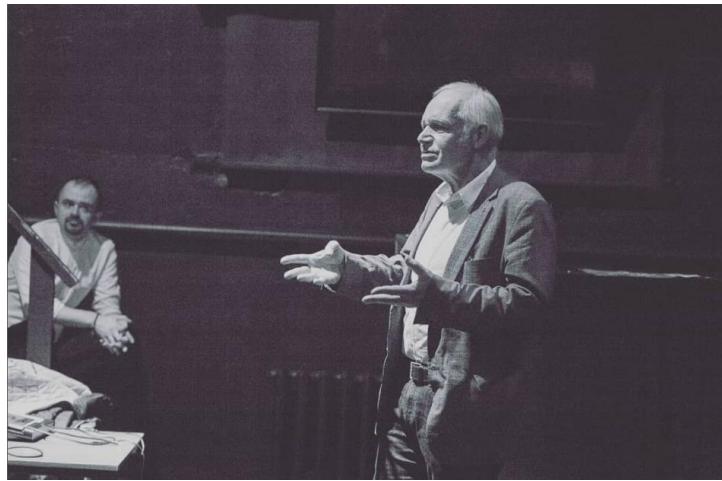
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Alex Davies is an Associate Professor in philosophy at the University of Tartu. His recent publications include [Science Communication, Cultural Cognition, and the Pull of Epistemic Paternalism](#), and [Identity Display: another motive for metalinguistic disagreement](#).

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*Kalevi Kull and Mihail Lotman gave two presentations. No abstracts were provided, but they attracted large crowds.*





SEMIOSALONG SPRING SESSIONS

# ORDER IN/FROM CHAOS

SELF-ORGANISING SYSTEMS

GENIALISTIDE KLUBI  
MAGASINI TN, NO: 5  
UPPER HALL

APR 2<sup>nd</sup> 18:32 PEETER TINITS  
INTELLIGENCE OF THE CROWDS  
IN NATURE AND CULTURE

OLEG SOBCHUK  
CREATIVITY OUT OF CHAOS:  
MAN'S NEW DIALOGUE  
WITH CULTURE



Peeter Tinitis, *Intelligence of the Crowds in Nature and Culture*

Humans and other animals naturally gather in groups that can behave quite differently from individuals. Self-organization can lead to processes that take place on the level of the collective, but do not reflect the wishes of any individuals. These relationships – between the group and individual, or a system and its parts – can be quite difficult to understand. It often requires an exploration of different candidate explanations, playing them out in various scenarios, comparing them, and also reckoning with our own limits of interpretation. I will introduce a few of these basic patterns that have been found in complex systems research via classical studies. Self-organization can often make systems smarter than their parts, but sometimes also stupider. I will discuss a few known practical cases where this can be relevant, ranging from traffic jams and burning buildings to happy neighborhoods and gainful jobs. Systems thinking can help where self-organization goes wrong.

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Peeter Tinitis did his BA and MA at the Department of Semiotics in the University of Tartu. He is now working with data around the areas of digital humanities, cultural evolution, and historical sociolinguistics. His recent publications include [Deep Transitions: Towards a comprehensive framework for mapping major continuities and ruptures in industrial modernity](#), and [Cultural Attraction in Film Evolution: the Case of Anachronies](#), in co-authorship with Oleg Sobchuk.

Oleg Sobchuk, *Creativity out of Chaos*

All of us are creative – in one way or another. Some draw beautiful images, others write interesting prose or invent innovative theories. But how does creativity happen? An immediate impulse may be to explain the creative acts – especially the remarkably creative ones – by a mysterious, or even mystical, thing called “talent.” Another explanation of creativity – “hard work” – is less mystical but no less mysterious: it is not clear at all how “hard work” gets transformed into Guernica or the proof of the Poincaré conjecture. The question of this talk will be this: can we provide a non-mysterious, scientific explanation for creativity? Can we learn the mechanism of creativity? I will suggest an explanation of creativity based on evolutionary theory – as understood in biology. So: cultural (not genetic) mutations, cultural (not natural) selection, and cultural (not biological) evolution – these notions will be used in explaining the essence of creativity.

Oleg Sobchuk is a postdoctoral fellow at the Max Planck Institute for the Science of Human History. His recent publications include [How granular should our explanations of fantastic fiction be?](#), and [The shortlist effect: nestedness contributions as a tool to explain cultural success](#).



E. Israel Chavez Barreto, *A Semiotic Approach to Knowledge and Ideology*

How does cenoscopic knowledge, understood as knowledge generated by “primary modeling systems” in the specific sense Sebeok used the term, lead to the existence of another kind of knowledge, produced by “secondary modeling systems”, which presents the modeled reality, the historical, secondary, reality, as a natural extension of the data of sense perception? How is it that we can be fooled by signs into thinking that they represent things as they really are? An attempt for providing a possible answer to these questions will be the aim of this presentation. We will begin by assuming that when a complex system interacts with its extrinsic conditions, the interaction is constrained by a principle of order by means of which extrinsic conditions become relative conditions; relative to the system. The generating of these relative conditions will be called modeling activity. We then assume that the modeling relations, established by modeling activity, between extrinsic conditions and those same conditions as perceived, are always sign relations. It is of the nature of a sign to represent its object in some respects; indeed, this is but a consequence of the ordering principle that governs modeling. The ground of the sign relations in which modeling consists is thus explained by positing a direct encounter, an actual secondness, between the system’s intrinsic conditions (its organization) and its extrinsic conditions (the *entia realia* with which the system interacts). But the intersubjectivity of such encounter is far from being the whole story. Modeling, as a sign relation, takes place, as Deely pointed out, over and above the interacting subjectivities. The relational scaffold in which modeling consists is articulated by what can be called, following Luis Prieto, a principle of pertinence. Pertinence explains why certain features of a given thing will become features of the modeled object by making explicit the point of view from which modeling activity is carried out. But pertinence is seldom conscious for the users of a modeling system. The system that carries out modeling activity often knows no other reality than the modeled one, i.e. the pertinent reality. It is unaware of the fact that something lies beyond the sign. Our conclusion is that it is the central role of pertinences in modeling, to enable the sign’s potential for deceit, which makes it possible for discourses and other semiotic structures to present objects as they appear for a system, as the way things really are. At higher levels of semiotic activity, mainly anthroposemiosis, this results in the belief that a sign is a natural extension of material reality; that signs neutrally reflect material, mind-independent things. That there is such possibility is what forces us to accept, with Voloshinov, that “all signs

are ideological”: for, in Peircean terms, they would strive to present as dynamic what actually is nothing other than their immediate object.

Eugenio Israel Chávez Barreto holds a PhD in semiotics from the University of Tartu and currently works at the Department of General Linguistics at Palacký University. His recent publications include the article [Funktionskreis and the biosemiotic signifieds: towards the integration of semiotics](#), in co-authorship with Oscar Miyamoto, Tyler James Bennett, Ludmila Lacková and Kalevi Kull, and [Opposition, comparison, and associativity: on Luis J. Prieto as a reader of the \*Cours de linguistique générale\*](#). He has also published, in co-authorship with Don Favareau, the mini-comic book [Introducing Paul Cogley: A Graphic Guide](#).

Andres Kurismaa, *Did Humans Self-domesticate?*

The hypothesis that our species owes some of its key social and biological traits to a process of evolutionary self-domestication is not new. However, until recently, evidence and discussion on the topic has remained limited and largely hypothetical. In this talk, besides highlighting some of the historical and theoretical background of this question, recent findings and analyses on the self-domestication concept will be presented from anthropology and biology, with a view on some of the evolutionary, developmental, and social aspects of possible self-domestication in our species. Although still preliminary, such transdisciplinary analyses may allow us to cast new light on key aspects of human behavior, such as intraspecific cooperation/conflict, as well as questions on the evolution of semiotic capacities.

Andres Kurismaa is a researcher at the School of Natural Sciences and Health of Tallinn University. His recent publications include [From integrative biology to the nerve impulse: rethinking neural information and semiotics in functional systems perspective](#), [The negentropic theory of ontogeny: a new model of eutherian life history transitions?](#), and the book chapter [Revisiting basal anthropology: a developmental approach to human evolution and sociality](#).



Semiotics in a Post-Truth World  
Spring Semiosalong 2017  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

Terms like fake news and alternative facts come from a state of paralysis in the flood of information. The proliferation of conflicting messages, the accelerated news cycle, and technologies of image and video manipulation marginalize verifiability as a criterion of truth. But even in a post-truth world we persist in the belief in our own ability to hear through the static what is really going on. When contradiction interrupts our daily broadcast we reject its sources, ignore its particulars, or troll the sender. In the process we legitimize the polarization of discourse. We do so tongue in cheek, or with fingers crossed behind our back, as if to absolve ourselves from the price. It is easier to dip back into a familiar echo chamber than to recognize the other. Can we extricate ourselves from the self-gratifying feedback loop? Where can semiotics enter into the discussion of the post-truth world?

Tyler James Bennett, *You Can't Handle the Truth! Jacques Lacan's Perverse Enjoyment of Mad Max: Fury Road*

One commonplace assumption is that, if only we had access to the hard facts, we would know what to do with them and we would act accordingly. Jacques Lacan's psychoanalysis sets out from the contrary assumption: the encounter with the real and acquisition of the truth are the exception rather than the rule, we will do everything we can to avoid them, and when we do come across the hard facts, we pretend to misrecognize them. This disavowal of the real is the condition of participation in the symbolic power structure. Special mechanisms are required to engage the real. Slavoj Žižek's hybrid of psychoanalysis and ideology critique shows how our submission to the injustices of late capitalism is partly motivated by sexual repression. When applied to *Fight Club* (1999), *Westworld* (2016), and *Mad Max: Fury Road* (2015), it reveals these works to be just such mechanisms that reflect back to the subject the dual structure of our fetishistic disavowal of reality.

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2012. *The Pervert's Guide to Ideology*. Directed by Sophie Fiennes. Zeitgeist Films.

Tyler James Bennett is Assistant Professor of semiotics at Palacký University and Director of the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc, Czech Republic His recent publications include “[Biosemiotic aesthetics may unify general semiotics](#)” and “[Second generation semiology and detotalization](#)”.





Katre Pärn, *The Truth, the Post-truth, and Nothing but the Truth (of Cinema Adaptations)*

The problematics of information flow across various media and between users and agents, and of adaptations and alterations occurring in the process, have been reoccurring themes in the discussions on the ‘post-truth era’. Yet these discussions tend to be limited to a certain type of media, texts and agents. It might be interesting to take a “post-truthian” look at other cultural systems – artistic as well as academic – on the ways they adapt their sources and theorize about the process of adaptation, but also to consider these cultural systems themselves as adaptations, in an attempt to say something about a more general cultural mentality.

Katre Pärn is a Lecturer of semiotics at the Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu. Her recent publications include the book chapter “[Modelling](#)”, for the *Bloomsbury Companion to Juri Lotman*, the article [Märkmeid semiootika ajaloost Eestis: semiootika 20. sajandi alguse eestikeelses trükisõnas](#) and “[Towards the semiotics of the future: from anticipation to premediation](#)”.

• SEMIOSALONG SPRING SESSIONS •

**SEMIOTICS IN  
A POST-TRUTH WORLD**



**GENIALISTIDE**  
**KLUBI** 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR  
APRIL 18  
19:00

**ANDREAS VENTSEL & MARI-LIIS MADISSON**  
AFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION AND SEMIOTIC  
MECHANISMS OF MISINFORMATION



Andreas Ventsel & Mari-Liis Madisson, *Affective Communication and Semiotic Mechanisms of Misinformation*

Social media allows informational units to spread virally. By the time the critical interpreter has caught what is or is not reliable, a myriad of new informational units have already been created and virally communicated. All that matters is that the information is visible and clickable, and what determines that is how it feeds into people's existing prejudices. Social media tends to lead communicators into echo chambers of similar-minded people and hermetic meaning-making. The presentation focuses on post-fact (visual) rhetoric and tries to conceptualize dis- and misinformation in the context of affective communication.

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Mari-Liis Madisson is a researcher at the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu and she is the author of [Strategic Conspiracy Narratives: A Semiotic Approach](#) (co-authored with Andreas Ventsel). Her recent publications include [Discourses of blame in strategic narratives: the case of Russia's 5G stories](#) (co-authored with Sten Hansson and Andreas Ventsel).

Andreas Ventsel is Associate Professor at the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. He is the author of [Strategic Conspiracy Narratives: A Semiotic Approach](#) (co-authored with Mari-Liis Madisson), and [Introducing Relational Political Analysis](#) (co-authored with Peeter Selg).

Märt Põder, *Nietzsche's Posthumous Post-truth Manifesto*

Friedrich Nietzsche didn't personally publish his essay "On Truth and Lies in a Non-moral Sense". In fact it was his sister who published it in 1896, when the philosopher was already mentally ill. In that sense the essay, which was planned to be part of a compendium to pre-Socratic philosophy, is not literally posthumous, but only post-conscious – yet in its naïveté it somehow remains both central and a bit embarrassing to his whole philosophical project. Although it might seem that Nietzsche is proposing moral nihilism in this essay as well as in his later works, his project is better characterized by its flavor of bio-power surplus-virtue ethics, which morally motivate its core, veiled in literary flourish and personal mythologies. In a different sense of the word, Nietzsche is considered a posthumous thinker in that he was writing to an audience not yet alive. This is borne out all the more in the "self-incurred immaturity" of our post-truth society, bedazzled as we are with the new forms of discourse made possible by information technology. I take up the thread of Nietzsche's ambiguous relation to truth, reality, and role-models, and break down our wishful diagnosis of the post-truth situation into the building blocks of the eternal recurrence of pre-truth.

Märt Põder is a philosopher, activist and translator. He has worked as philosophy teacher at the Mart Reiniki Gymnasium, and as lecturer at the Tartu High School of Arts. He is a founding member of Open Knowledge Estonia.

Mehmet Emir Uslu, *Against the Fetishism of the Discourse of Disinformation*

The treatment of post-truth as a self-contained abstraction precludes the possibility of its understanding via its precedents in history. Its novel terminology and newer means of dissemination conceal the underlying factors and conditions upon which disinformation operates. Its pervasive presence and its mysterious workings build an illusion of an inevitable and impenetrable enemy, against whom paranoia and immersion in conspiracy theories appear to be defensive measures. Neither novel, nor unfathomable, disinformation is a recurring element in society and, as such, should be considered in the context of its prior occurrences. Through observation of precedents and their historical circumstances, dispelling the myths and mysteries around disinformation can reveal the structural conditions that allow it to entrench itself in public space.

Mehmet Emir Uslu is a PhD student at the University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics. He is also a designer at *New Socialist UK*, and for the Semiosalong series from 2016 to 2020. His recent publications include [Semiocide: an introduction to semiotics of destruction of the meaningful](#).

Ian Weatherseed, *Semiotic Self-defense for the Useful Idiot*

From medieval dancing plagues to cutting-edge political theatre, the human species has long-demonstrated a remarkable vulnerability to coercion. Our current communications infrastructure and media mix have engorged this vulnerability, so much so that – while “democracy” has slid into “managed democracy” and “media” into “mass media” – individual and collective meaning making and identity have been muddied to the point of incoherence. What’s worse, as unwitting useful idiots, we are often complicit in our own betrayal. Can we escape from under the dunce cap of the useful idiot? And, if so, what hat should we wear instead? In this talk, primarily using the work of Bateson and Peirce, the presenter explores the options available to us by scrutinizing the relations found between the elements of the Peircean triad, ultimately revealing a potential escape through manipulation of semiotic ratios that transcend the self-other axis.

Ian Weatherseed is an independent researcher and consultant based in the UK. He is interested in all things liminal and can often be found wandering deep in the woods.

Ott Puumeister, *Speech Freed, or, Everyone has a Right to their Facts*

Guy Debord argued in the 1960s that the society of the spectacle separates the means of representation from individuals. In the 1990s, Giorgio Agamben stated that language and communicativity themselves are, in their spectacular form, separated from those communicating. Language is thus freed from the speaker; “freedom of speech” here signifies the limit of representation where language signifies nothing other than linguistic activity itself in its spectacularity. The internet has promised to return language and representation to the individual, allowing speakers to create their very own personal worlds. But these personal worlds are made possible by the fact that language no longer has any outside, it is a spectacle that “discourses endlessly upon itself in an uninterrupted monologue of self-praise.”

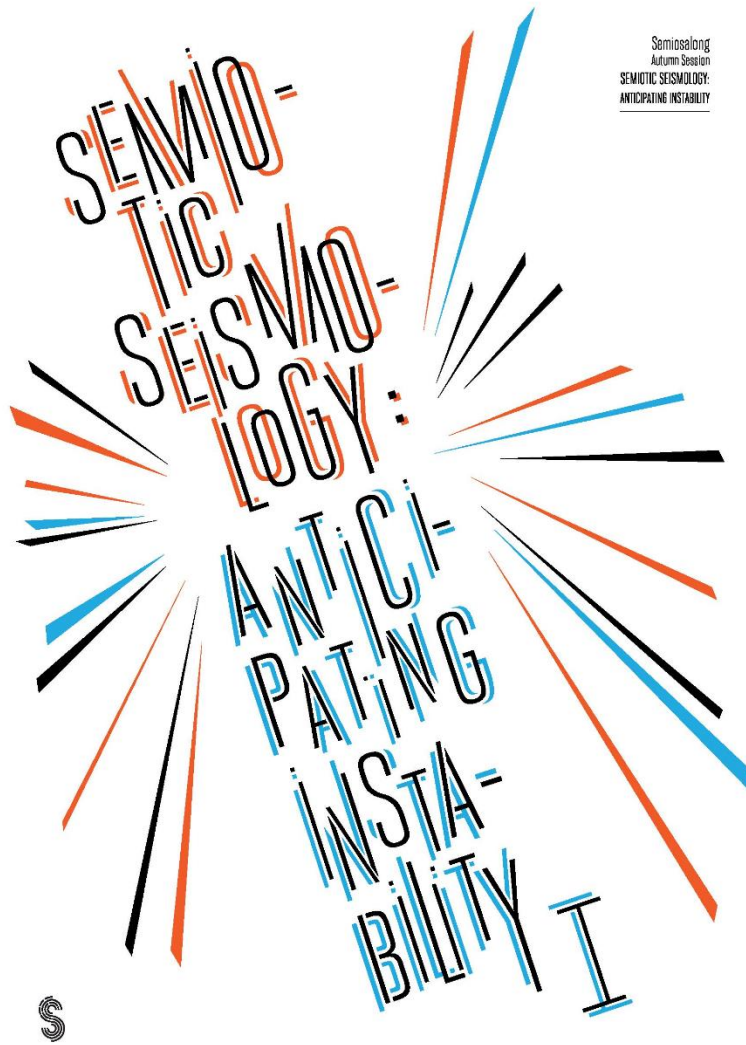
Ott Puumeister is a Research Fellow in the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu. He is also editor of *Acta Semiotica Estica*. His recent publications include the book chapter [Identities on the border](#), and the articles [Sémiotique 2021: l'année en revue](#) (with Frank Nuessel), and [Semiosis is always at the border, which operates it](#) (with Erik Kõvamees and Kalevi Kull).



Geoffroy Pavillet, *Famous Trials*

History's greatest trials reveal the climatic bias of legal actors at turning points of history. Truths are inherently established within a systemically-governed hierarchy of beliefs, leading even genuine democracies to place inevitable constraints on speech. Great trials, like great scientific revolutions, oppose parties whose beliefs cannot be accepted by universally accepted paradigms with parties whose existence relies on the perpetuation of such paradigms. By default, system-dominant parties may rig it to prevent their being put on trial, while most trials of a legal system's weaker parties are usually trivial, allowing legal systems to brush away any errors falling within a system's acceptable levels. Famous trials stand out via oppositions that pose an existential threat to the system that judges them, from heliocentrism trials (Bruno and Galileo) to the post-revolutionary trial of Louis XVI. Ultimately, by calling out irreconcilable conflicts of interest between the trier and the tried, famous trials are at their core reflective trials of the very systems trying them.

Geoffroy Pavillet is a data privacy counsel for Thermo Fisher Scientific. He is a Canadian Barrister, holds Civil and Common law degrees from the University of Ottawa (Canada), a Master's in Economics from the University of Madrid (Spain) and a Master's in IT law from the University of Tartu (Estonia). He resides in Frankfurt, Germany.



Semiosalong  
Autumn Session  
SEMiotic SEISMOLOGY:  
ANTICIPATING INSTABILITY

Semiotic Seismology: Anticipating Instability  
Autumn Semiosalong 2016  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

The naive always expect revolution within their lifetime. It is typical to exteriorize personal mortality: of course something big will happen soon! On the other hand we know, species go extinct, civilizations disappear, continents are swallowed by the sea, just like our bodies end up in the ground. We instinctively go about life as if this were not the case, unless we have reason to suspect imminent cataclysm. What are the possible metrics of such prediction? How does one think outside a rationality prescribed exactly by the endangered system? How can semiotics think ahead of the learning curve to minimize fallout from personal and global network disintegrations?

Merit Rickberg, *Ethnocentric History: A Mechanism of (dis)Integration?*

The educational policies that currently shape the European school system portray ethnocentric history as a phenomenon of the past. Grand narratives of ‘pride and pain’ that were mediated through classical history textbooks have been replaced with new kind of learning materials from various EU projects like “Developing a Culture of Co- operation”, “Educating for Diversity and Democracy”, “Shared Histories for a Europe without Dividing Lines,” etc. Instead of a single story about the past, these materials provide students with tools that should help them work out the meaning of the historical experience on their own without forcing any ready-made historical identity on them. In such a way, history education is expected to reduce tensions that arise in multicultural societies due to the collisions of different historical narratives. However, despite being shunned from school curricula on the level of EU policies, many EU-wide studies among history educators show the ethnocentric approach has not disappeared from history lessons. As explained by German history theorist Jörn Rüsen, ethnocentrism (in all its different forms) is quasi-naturally inherent in human identity. A world with clear boundaries between the Self and the Other and with a pre-determined path leading from the past to the future can be seen as a coping mechanism that helps us deal with the threatening experience of time in this everchanging and unpredictable world. In this talk, I will discuss the ambiguous role of ethnocentric history in the framework of Juri Lotman’s description of cultural dynamics that is based on the one hand, upon a constant striving towards plurality and the creation of new languages; and on the other, upon the need for unification and singularity. My aim will be to analyse the reasons behind the failure of the political fight against ethnocentrism in history education on both individual and social levels in culture.

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Merit Rickberg is the head of the Juri Lotman Semiotics Repository at Tallinn University and a doctoral student in semiotics and culture studies in the University of Tartu. She's member of the Editorial Board of the book series *Bibliotheca Lotmaniana* (Tallinn University Press). Her recent publications include the book chapter [Lotman and the Tartu-Moscow School of Semiotics](#), co-authored with Silvi Salupere for the *Bloombury's Companion to Juri Lotman*, and [Lotmanian perspective on complexity in cultural system](#).

Jonathan Griffin, *Eschatology: Doom of the Elect*

The discourse, attitude, and emotional responses surrounding the Trump/Clinton US presidential campaign and its aftermath show that Christian eschatology lives on within the humanistic rejection of Christian terminologies. Working from a theoretical basis that uses Kenneth Burke's three orders of terms (positive, dialectical, and ultimate), we begin with a sampling of social media and news responses to Trump's election which demonstrate apocalyptic thinking analogous to what is found in Christianity and its expectations of a coming Antichrist and Doomsday. We highlight the similarity by fleshing out the Christian apocalyptic perspective, tracing out a thread from New Testament writings (using 1 Corinthians, Philippians, the Gospel of Matthew, and Revelation) through early Christian writers like St. Ephraim the Syrian and St. Cyril of Jerusalem through later Eastern Orthodox thought.

Jonathan Griffin holds a PhD in semiotics from the University of Tartu. His recent publications include the co-edited monograph [\(Re\)considering Roman Jakobson](#) (edited with Elin Sütiste, Remo Gramigna and Silvi Salupere), and [A pentadic model of semiotic analysis](#).

Luke Rahmanova, *History Gives us a Peculiar Footnote: Some Time ago in the Eurocentric World*

Regions were said to be inhabited by man-eating monsters. These were more or less variations on the following: the Sciapods, or Scythians, who despite having one leg to our usual two, were swift runners; the headless Blemmyes, whose faces were nevertheless human; and the Panotians, whose ears were large enough to double as cloaks, but otherwise looked much like our own. Our ancestors first heard about them from cutting-edge scholars of their time: Herodotus and Pliny, both very trustworthy people. Modern scholars like to ignore these creatures. Others, like Mikhail Bakhtin, believe that these grotesque bodies represent Europe's open-mindedness and capacity for cultural growth by recombining, exaggerating or agglutinating the familiar human body (or cultural body). However, we should think twice before being so dismissive or optimistic. These monsters illustrate an ambition for conquest. They reduce the rest of the world to a composite cultural periphery and their discourses and culture to caricatures; more importantly, through the metaphor or distorted bodies, they suggest that other cultures are wrong.

Luke Rahmanova is a doctoral student at Tallinn University. Her research focuses on hidden authoritarian overtones in medieval and popular culture.

Tyler James Bennett, *Industrial Schematic Prognostics*

The series theme indicates a distinction between inductive prediction and ‘anticipation’ – dramatic turns of historical event cannot be predicted in the usual way, but may be foreseen by attending to the critical mass of inconsistencies within the symbolic dispensation. Here ‘prognostics’ is the word chosen for its application in engineering, where prognostics assess whether a system or component will soon fail to perform its intended function. The notion of the schema is used to explain how relevant perceptual particulars become categorized, and which details should be ignored. When ways of thinking become mass-produced, schematization is industrialized. This is what Adorno means by “The Schema of Mass Culture” (2001[1981]). He saw the occurrence of widespread, ends-justify-the-means rationalization on the individual level as a reliable indicator of imminent upheaval at the societal level. Foucault uses the panopticon – a hypothetical prison in which security guards aren’t even necessary – as a metaphor of self-imposed surveillance in a new security state to come. On the eve of the 2016 presidential elections in the United States, and in the absence of reliable facts from which to pose a logical prediction, the prognosis looks grim indeed.

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Tyler James Bennett is Assistant Professor of semiotics at Palacký University and Director of the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc, Czech Republic. His main interests are deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and biosemiotics. His recent publications include [“Biosemiotic aesthetics may unify general semiotics”](#) and [“Second generation semiology and detotalization”](#).





Riin Magnus, *Losing the Sense of Suffering*

In the presentation, I broadly sketch two paths cultures have taken to tackle the schism between the feeling of being alive and yet having to die. The first one highlights the felt schism as the birth of the true human being, the other forestalls the rise of the feeling with various forms of social anesthesia. While focusing on the latter, the paper discusses the transformation of suffering in a medical civilization as proposed by the Austrian philosopher and catholic priest Ivan Illich (Illich 1978), the socio-cultural mechanisms of suppressing the feeling of suffering and anxiety: isolation, anchoring, distraction, and sublimation as proposed by the Norwegian philosopher P. W. Zapffe (Zapffe 2004 [1933]) and the rise of violence as caused by the lack of cultural contexts for suffering, as proposed by ecopsychologist Andy Fisher (Fisher 2002). Illich and Fisher both argue that modern market oriented and technological societies do not encourage the creation of cultural frames which would help to tolerate suffering and pain, providing only the means of their elimination and suppression. Zapffe develops an even deeper cultural pessimism, as the cultural frames appreciated by the aforementioned authors, are seen fencing off consciousness by anchoring. The presentation will finally ask whether the tools of mind that have upheld humans as semiotic beings, certain mythologies and narratives, could also these days provide the cultural frames for suffering and reconcile the ways of being we consider controversial in rational terms.

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Riin Magnus is a researcher at University of Tartu, Department of Semiotics. Her recent publications include the book chapter [Ecosemiotics: signs in nature, signs of nature](#), the article [Ecosemiotic analysis of species reintroduction: the case of European mink \(\*Mustela lutreola\*\) in Estonia](#) (with Nelly Mäekivi), and [Grounding biosemiotic aesthetics: extensions back and forward](#).



# Semiotics of Crime

 SEMIOSSALONG

Semiotics of Crime  
Spring Semiosalong 2016  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

This year we are all obsessed with the new BBC iteration of the stories of Sherlock Holmes. What is the source of this story's enduring fascination? The connection of semiotics to criminology, forensics, and detective work, has been deliberated over by some of the great semioticians of recent times past, like Thomas A. Sebeok, Umberto Eco, and Marcel Danesi. What are the prototypical signs, if not clues? But there is more to the fascination than just this. Sherlock Holmes wasn't only a detective. He was also a criminal. Sherlock was a murderer, an arsonist, a kidnapper, and a drug user, and as we watch this newest version of the old story we can be sure that we are captivated as much by this dimension his character, as we are by his uncanny ability to solve mysteries, or are they linked? Sebeok tells us Sherlock's genius was not in fact deductive inference. Rather, it was a form of Charles Peirce's abductive inference – the creative hypothesis-making and guesswork responsible for new ideas. One inevitably notes about 'abduction' that its usual meaning has nothing to do with inference at all, but itself designates a crime. Did Peirce intend this plurality of meanings when he named creative inference abduction? ... because there is something illicit indeed, in every new idea. Are all semioticians criminals?

Mehmet Emir Uslu, *Inference and Criminology in the Works of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle*

Arguably the progenitor of the genre of detective fiction, Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes is a fertile field that lends itself to semiotic analysis through detection and interpretation of seemingly disparate details and clues. Through the past century, Doyle's Holmes depicted the essence of a detective / semiotician – insightful, imaginative and perceptive towards his surroundings. Methods of inference employed by Holmes constitute a basic methodology of criminal investigation. Conan Doyle's works are also remarkable indicators of the social structure of 19th century United Kingdom, as well as being precursor to later crime writers, from Agatha Christie to Colin Dexter and Rex Stout

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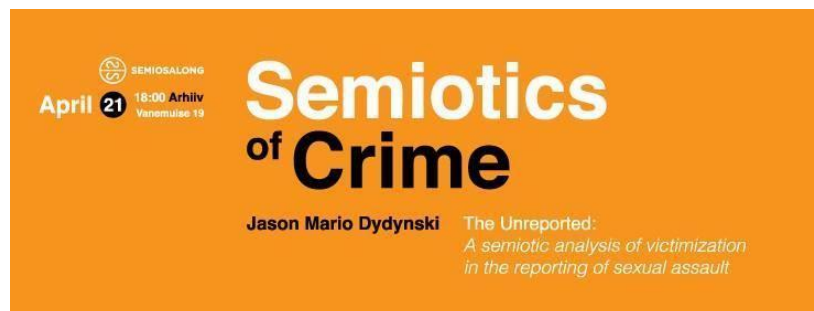
Katre Pärn, *Filling the Void: Signs of Crime*

The semiotic perspective can enter into criminological discussions on various levels, for example on the socio-cultural level as a study of sociocultural mechanisms surrounding and “producing” crime and deviance; on the institutional level of law and justice systems as a study of cultural subsystems defining, formalizing and enforcing the spheres of the criminal and the legal; or on the level of forensics as a study of signs of crime. It will also allow us to see the interrelationships between those layers, the ways in which the signs of crime are constituted, produced outside and beyond the scene of the crime. The presentation will explore some of the semiotic facets of construction, reconstruction and deconstruction of crime – of semiotics of crime, semiotic crimes and semiotics of (de)criminalization – from the perspective of the workings of sign and media.

Katre Pärn is a Lecturer of Semiotics at the Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu. Her recent publications include the book chapter [Modelling](#), for the *Bloomsbury Companion to Juri Lotman*, the article [Märkmeid semiootika ajaloost Eestis: semiootika 20. sajandi alguse eestikeelses trükisõnas](#). and “[Towards the semiotics of the future: from anticipation to premediation](#)”.

Jason Mario Dydynski, *The Unreported: A Semiotic Analysis of Victimization in the Reporting of Sexual Assault*

Often cases of sexual assault go unreported. The reporting of sexual assault can lead to different outcomes. Across cultures authorities still directly or indirectly pressure victims not to pursue or to drop sexual assault charges, as it may cause damage to the assailants' reputation. Thus the victim can be viewed as a criminal in an attempt to regain subjectivity. This presentation will provide a semiotic model for cases of sexual assault and then go on to a cross-cultural analysis of sexual assault reporting in South Korea, the United States, and Estonia.



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Jason Mario Dydynski has a PhD in semiotics from the University of Tartu. He is also a marketing specialist working in various international companies. His recent publications include [Universality and specificity of the kindchenschema: a cross-cultural study on cute rectangles](#), with Sookyung Cho and Christine Kang and [Modeling cuteness: moving towards a biosemiotic model for understanding the perception of cuteness and Kindchenschema](#).



Sarah Chua, *Your Guardian Does not Sleep*

Power is everywhere, and much of this has been channeled into guardian figures found on either side of the law. Whether law enforcement agencies or organized crime networks, they have been built up as mythology in Barthes' conception, encapsulated in a Guardian as a source of protection and security. The title is one such reference of biblical origin that relates the Guardian to assurance amidst a chaotic and uncertain world. A semiotic look at both organized crime and law enforcement structures reveal similarities between them. Both reinforce the "us" against "them"; they arise as a form of certainty in a world where there are interests to protect and threats to defend against, where there is chaos and injustice. In terms of structural organization, both emphasize discipline and hierarchy, division of labor, conformity to internal codes as well as internal checks and balances. Both are also susceptible to deviations: just as improper use of force by law enforcement agencies lends itself to criticism, organized crime networks can also drop their clients and neglect their responsibility. Where, then, does law end and crime begin? The presentation will discuss issues raised over the State of Emergency in France in light of the 13 November 2015 terrorist attacks and the nightly raids in certain neighborhoods of the country especially in the first weeks of the State of Emergency. Questions over the extent of state surveillance and what constitutes police violence remain ever relevant. While we can consider as pessimistic Hobbes' view of man in his natural state, there is a growing perception that a strong and authoritative sovereign could restore order and ensure security – hence the increasing popularity of the extreme right. We might still long for the Guardian to be there for us, but when does big brother watching over us turn into big brother watching *us*? This poses the next question: where one big brother fails to live up to expectations, do we, then, find another family? Our presentation will look at interviews of shop-owners who explained why they were better off trusting the Russian Mafia than the law enforcement of the state. Much ink has been split over the legitimacy of the law and its enforcement agencies, an often-cited conception being Rousseau's social contract where individuals renounce personal recourse to violence in order to live together in a society ruled by law. But, for the individual who fears violence each day, how relevant are such questions of legitimacy? It has also been noted that certain state police structures began offering security services to individuals and businesses, which has eroded the market share of organized crime networks. From the

individual's point of view, would it then be more appropriate to speak of alternative currents of power that precisely alternate? If power is everywhere, tracing power relations between entities would allow us to identify Guardian figures and understand individual decisions which may have little to do with traditional concepts of law and crime.

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Sarah Chua has a master's degree in semiotics from the University of Tartu.



Semiotics of Death  
Autumn Semiosalong 2015  
*Design by Mehmet Emir Uslu*

Semiosis is a key identifying feature of life. Wherever we find life, we find the creative negotiation of contradiction, the experience of meaning. But semiotics itself is not strictly interested in semiosis. It is also interested in mono-semic, predictable systems found outside of biology. The borderland between the semiosic and the non-semiosic is a liminal space peopled by fuzzy hybrids of great interest. If semiosis defines life, it also puts in relief that which is beyond. There are two dimensions to the semiotics of death. In the first place, its interest is in those pseudo sign structures whose plurality has perished. How do signs cross this meaningful threshold, where translation ends and copying begins? How can such departed structures be preserved, or even resurrected? In the second place, the semiotic study of more literal instances of death, by their untimely reminder of personal mortality, can illuminate the reality of the sub-symbolic realm. The semiotics of death breathes life back into the recumbent subject.

Ott Puumeister, *Surviving Finitude*

Health has replaced salvation, as we know. The only thing that matters is thus our non-diseased presence in the present. There is no longer any “beyond” toward which to strive, there is no other world in which to exist: we are no longer finite beings defined by infinity. Infinity offered us a very convenient concept of afterlife of which we knew nothing, since we were radically transformed when entering the world beyond. We could not stay the same. What happens when there is no longer a world that would promise us infinite existence? What becomes of our possibilities of survival? Could we, perhaps, survive and continue to exist in the state of indefinite finitude, of a never-ending present in which we could always stay the same?

Ott Puumeister is a Research Fellow at the Department of Semiotics of the University of Tartu. He is also editor of *Acta Semiotica Estica*. His recent publications include the book chapter [Identities on the border](#), and the articles [Sémiotique 2021: l'année en revue](#) (with Frank Nuessel), and [Semiosis is always at the border, which operates it](#) (with Erik Kõvamees and Kalevi Kull).

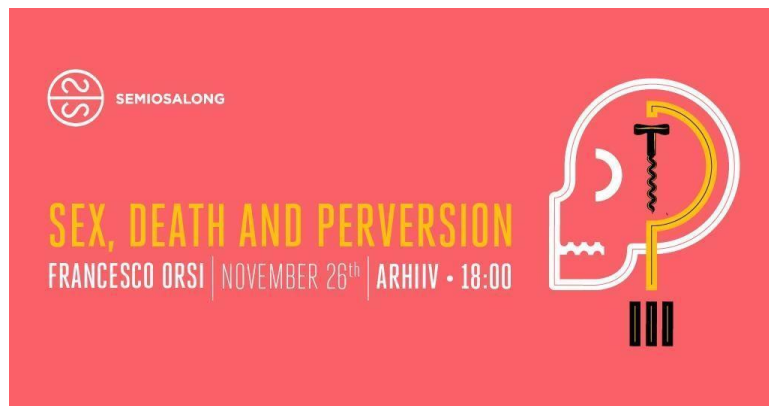




3<sup>rd</sup> session  
November 26th, 2015, at Arhiiv  
(Vanemuise tn. 19, Tartu)

Francesco Orsi, *Sex, Death and Perversion*

We are all quite familiar with so-called sexual perversions, whether thanks to literary, audiovisual, anthropological sources or on first-hand experience. But what is a necrological perversion, i.e. a perverted attitude towards death? Are the two perversions related, and how? And, finally, should we perhaps reject all such talk as based on some misconception? In this Semiosalong I will provide a tentative philosophical roadmap to approach these questions.



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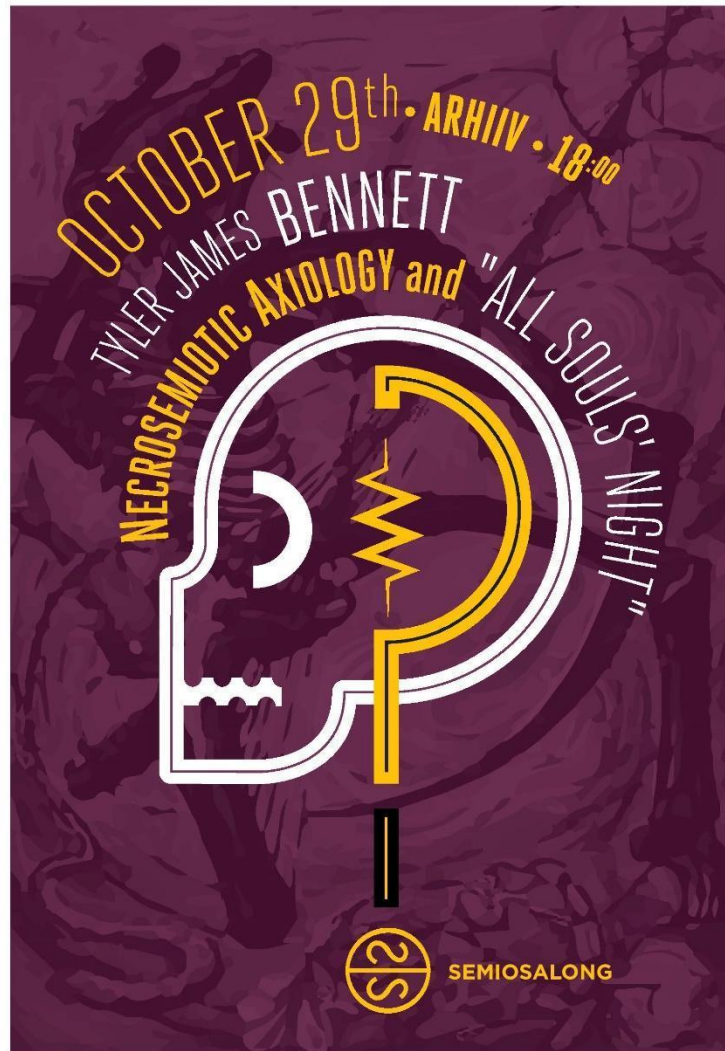
Francesco Orsi is Associate Professor of Theoretical Ethics at the Department of Philosophy of Tartu University. He is the author of [\*The Guise of the Good, A Philosophical History\*](#).



Luke Rahmanova, *Death Does not Exist*

There are some cultures that are afraid to speak about death; others seem to do it excessively. And in fact, Umberto Eco claims that a story can only be truly great if it reminds us of our mortality. For the living, death can be many things: it is a universal experience, and it may be the only limit for our hubris. It can be something to dread. It may also be welcomed. It may even be personified into some cuddly old chum. But what is even more universal than death is our lack of knowledge of it. Despite all our efforts to personify it, to narrate it as something transformative (in the case of Christian martyrs) or anticlimactic (in the case of French kings who die after hitting their heads on doorframes), to personalize it or to make it cold and clinical, we can never truly talk about it. Death is the ultimate Other, and no amount of storytelling can truly make a dent in its ontological strangeness. We may have a fear of dying, perhaps, or the wish to die, or simple curiosity. But these are all experiences of the living; we do not know what the dead truly experience. Every story about death is a story about life.

Luke Rahmanova is a doctoral student at Tallinn University. Her research focuses on hidden authoritarian overtones in medieval and popular culture.



Tyler James Bennett, *Necrosemiotic Axiology and "All Souls' Night"*

The idea of the semiotics of death series was to indicate semiosis by tracing its relief. If the definition of life is bound up with semiosis, then the disquisition upon death may aid the pursuit of that most elusive of meanings. William Butler Yeats' poem "All Souls' Night" is just such a disquisition, and on this eve of Halloween and the Day of the Dead, we recite the poem by Yeats to invoke the presence of its late author. The poem itself is a séance for some of Yeats' own departed friends. The poem's stanzas are organized to pay tribute to William Thomas Horton, Florence Beatrice Emery Farr, and Samuel Liddell MacGregor Mathers. Each of them participated in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, the occult fraternity in which Yeats himself also participated, but with which he broke decisively in later life. All of Yeats' works bear the mark of the Order, and those of Yeats' three friends equally illustrate the power and temptation of the macabre pursuit of the meaning of life through the contemplation of death. The poems of Yeats, and the Tarot cards themselves for example, "have mummy truths to tell / Whereat the living mock, / Though not for sober ear, / For maybe all that hear should laugh and weep an hour upon the clock" (Yeats 1928). These spooky truths may be relevant even for scientific cognitive and biosemiotics.

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Tyler James Bennett is Assistant Professor of semiotics at Palacký University and Director of the International Semiotics Institute in Olomouc, Czech Republic. His main interests are deconstruction, psychoanalysis, and biosemiotics. His recent publications include "[Biosemiotic aesthetics may unify general semiotics](#)" and "[Second generation semiology and detotalization](#)".

