

## Editors' comment

This issue of *Sign Systems Studies* can be called “a special issue of Tartu semiotics”, even though it represents only a small piece of the work currently done in the Department of Semiotics of the University of Tartu. Established by Juri Lotman and its first head Igor Černov in 1992, this department has grown into a persistent and sustainable centre of semiotics. Here, already three generations of semioticians appear together. The second generation — the pupils of Juri Lotman’s generation (Mihhail Lotman, Peeter Torop, Kalevi Kull, Ülle Pärli, Jelena Grigorjeva, Irina Avramets, Silvi Salupere, and others) included the main authors for *New Tartu Semiotics*, the special issue of the *European Journal for Semiotic Studies* published in 2000 (Bernard *et al.* 2000).

Now, the third generation — pupils of Lotman’s pupils — become more and more influential in the contemporary Tartu semiotics. Anti Randviir, Kati Lindström, Riin Magnus, Andreas Ventsel, Tiit Remm, Vadim Verenich, Mari Niitra, Davide Weible among the authors of the current issue belong to this generation, in addition to other active Tartu (or Tartu-bound) semioticians of this third generation (Timo Maran, Elin Sütiste, Kaie Kotov, Katre Pärn, Katre Väli, Daniele Monticelli, Morten Tønnessen, Kadri Tüür, Tanel Pern, Tuuli Raudla, Silver Rattasepp, Maarja Saldre, and several others). Among these, Anti Randviir as the first of the third generation, already has his own pupils in this list.

All three generations, together with many colleagues from all over the world, met this year (August 22–26, 2011) in Palmse, Estonia, for the Tartu Semiotics Summer School. It was a successful academic event that attempted to carry on the best of our field — the deep understanding of

semiotic mechanisms, together with a creative atmosphere of the semiotic circle.

Tartu semiotics faces a difficult challenge. We develop semiotic research simultaneously in several branches of semiotics which traditionally use quite different approaches (semiotics of culture, biosemiotics, sociosemiotics, and some more) — and it is our hope to be able, after some period, to reach a more coherent system of semiotic concepts that would include these distant fields. Or, at least, to arrive at a better mutual understanding between the scholars of different branches of semiotics.

Thus, “Tartu” means here a research tradition that is based on and follows the Tartu–Moscow semiotic school, that develops the tradition based on Jakob von Uexküll’s biosemiotics, and includes several studies from different branches and approaches. This may mean that here the integration is based more on the shared location than theoretical unity. However, we suppose that the theoretical integration is achievable, and that it is characteristic of contemporary semiotics worldwide to struggle with a set of incoherent approaches, without a comprehensive or integrative terminological (or even conceptual) apparatus yet. Many of these features of contemporary semiotics are densely and intensely present in Tartu, and thus here it may be possible to reach some solutions that the global semiotics has to find.

The current special issue can be seen as a sequel of *New Tartu Semiotics*, published in the *European Journal for Semiotic Studies* in 2000 (Bernard *et al.* 2000), and parallel to *Tartu Semiotics Section*, published in the *Chinese Semiotic Studies* since 2011 (Kull 2011).

In addition to the publication of some recent work, we devote quite a large part of this issue to the history of Tartu semiotics. The work with the legacy of our teachers includes translation of some earlier Russian-language texts into English. In this issue we publish Juri Lotman’s rather important work on the analysis of art as a modelling system (Lotman 1967) first time in English.

## References

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The editorial team

*Kalevi Kull*

*Kati Lindström*

*Mihhail Lotman*

*Timo Maran*

*Silvi Salupere*

*Peeter Torop*