

International conference

Zoosemiotics and Animal Representations

Tartu, Estonia. 4–8 April 2011.

Zoosemiotics is an interdisciplinary research program introduced by American semiotician Thomas A. Sebeok in the 1960s with the aim to merge semiotics and ecology and to launch semiotic studies of animal communication. The foundational idea in zoosemiotics is that relations between animals and their environment as well as between different individuals are not purely physical, but are to a large extent sign-mediated. This gives a significant role to the animal subjects, and recognizes more as well as higher forms of complexity in animals than previously assumed. A lot has happened since the concept of zoosemiotics was proposed: the rise of biosemiotics and cognitive ethology are two among many important developments in the field of animal communication studies. Now, almost 50 years after Sebeok's initiative, the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu organizes an international gathering aiming to look back at the history of zoosemiotics, but also to look ahead towards the future of semiotic studies of animals. At this event, the scope of zoosemiotics is defined broadly, so as to include specific studies in the history of science, philosophical accounts of animals, case studies on animal communication as well as animal representations in literature and other media. At the same time, the focus of the conference is explicitly twofold: "semiotic processes" and "animals" are the key concepts that are to guide the conference as well as the individual presentations. To this conference, we invite researchers from various backgrounds who have been inspired by zoosemiotics or who are interested in different aspects of semiotic studies of animals.

Key topics of the conference

- Theory and methodology of zoosemiotics
- History of zoosemiotics, the legacy of Thomas A. Sebeok
- Practical applications of zoosemiotics (e.g. zoosemiotics and conservation)
- Zoosemiotics' relation to relevant fields such as cognitive ethology, biosemiotics, ecocriticism etc.
- Animal experience (semiotics and phenomenology)
- Semiotic perspectives on animals in literature, art, films etc. (e.g. seeing man in animals, and the animal in men).
- Semiotics of human-animal relationships: historical, social and communicative perspectives (e.g. the semiotics of zoos, of wildlife management, and of domesticated animals).

The conference "Zoosemiotics and Animal Representations" has an international advisory board. All presentation abstracts will be peer-reviewed. The conference is organized by the Department of Semiotics at the University of Tartu under the auspices of the Centre of Excellence in Cultural Theory (CECT, EU/Estonia), and is supported by the Estonian Science Foundation (ETF/ESF).

Conference timeline

First call for papers: March 2010.

Deadline for abstracts: 15 September 2010.

The conference "Zoosemiotics and Animal Representations": 4–8 April, 2011.

Deadline for conference publications: September 2011.

Contacts

E-mail: zoosemiotics@semiootika.ee

Postal address: The conference "Zoosemiotics and Animal Representations", Department of Semiotics, University of Tartu, Tiigi 78, Tartu 50410, Estonia.

Organizing team: Timo Maran, Jelena Grigorjeva, Morten Tønnessen, Kadri Tüür, Silver Rattasepp, Nelly Mäekivi.