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Abstract: Future Narratives as Epistemologies. The Prefigurative Modes of Language

From a social constructivist view, Futures Studies is both: pre-factual and post-factual. Statements about futures build on current assumptions on what might or might not become factual. They are thus situated in a pre-factual realm, allowing for verification only from an ex-post perspective. At the same time, those current assumptions can be described as post-factual. The necessary selection and interpretation of data or the giving of reasons involves an - often implicit - affective and emotional basis. This basis is reflected in the language used to describe futures. Yet, the systemic implications of narratives as epistemologies and the prefigurative mode of language are rarely an issue in Futures Studies, where the discussion about narratives evolves mostly around the output of futures thinking.

Based on poststructural theories, this contribution will introduce and discuss analytical approaches from semiotics (R. Barthes) and discourse analysis (H. White) in order to show and analyse the narrative structures of futures thinking. As these form the base for constructing futures, narrative analysis aims at making the applied system explicit, thereby opening it for reframing. In effect, the emergent character of futures thinking is shown, which allows, literally speaking, to play with the foundations a future is built upon and thus enables the construction of alternative futures.

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