

Multimodal literacies – media affordances, semiotic resources and discourse communities (1st Colloquium)

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The emergence of literacy practices in multimodal discourse interrelates in various ways with innovations in media technologies. Mobile phones afford novel textual practices, such as swiping taking photos, or location tagging, while books and journals afford paper perusing and turning pages. As Kress (2009, 55) has shown “social action and affordances of material (Gibson, 1986) together produce semiotic resources which are the product of the potentials inherent in the material, of a society’s selection from these potentials and of social shaping over time of the features which are selected”. In this sense, a newspaper is not likely to afford the act of reading to a toddler, but would be a suitable object for crumpling up or ripping apart. In a similar way, the affordances of information technologies interrelate with distinct hypertextual and multimodal practices that have emerged over time and in response to particular discourse communities.

Though researchers agree that meaning making spreads by default across different semiotic modes, it is less clear what modes are made of. Approaches in social semiotics view mode as a “resource for making signs in a socio-cultural group” (Kress & van Leeuwen 2002) while more categorical approaches connect mode to specific sign-related properties in different semiotic systems, cf. image, language, sound (Stöckl 2004, Bucher 2013). This colloquium invites contributions that explore multimodal literacy practices by looking at the interplay of media affordances, semiotic resources and discourse communities. We welcome both theoretical and empirical contributions that explore a vast range of topics, including but not limited to the sub-themes indicated below

- How can we define and measure multimodal literacy? How can SFL and social semiotics help to uncover the concept of multimodal literacy?
- What is a mode and how can we examine its stratified systems of meaning? What is the meaning making potential of sound/music, image, text and other semiotic resources? How can different modes/semiotic resources be integrated into a cohesive and coherent whole, i.e. a song, text, film, blog/vlog, meme, text message, etc.?
- How does a given medial environment enable and constrict multimodal meaning making? In what ways do individual users and discourse communities adapt to the semiotic affordances of different media environments?
- What skills and competencies are required for a critical and fruitful engagement with multimodal texts and their underlying media technologies, cf. *television, movies, music, surfing the Internet, social networking, talking on a cell phone, texting, magazines, newspapers, fiction and video games*?

References

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