

PANEL PROPOSAL

180 minutes (2 x 90 minutes) slot

MULTIMODALITY 2.0 | NEW THEORIES, NEW METHODS, NEW CHANCES

PANEL ORGANISERS

John **Bateman** | *University of Bremen*
Carman **Ng** | *University of Bremen*
Jana **Pflaeging** | *University of Salzburg*
Hartmut **Stöckl** | *University of Salzburg*
Janina **Wildfeuer** | *University of Bremen*

THEMATIC STRANDS

primarily **(3)** “Analysing multimodal digital discourses“
and **(4)** “Stretching the boundaries of multimodality”

So-called ‘digital media’ give rise to diverse socially and historically situated practices; like all media, they are *biotopes for semiosis* (cf. WINKLER 2008: 213), in which semiotic modes participate and realise meaning on the basis of their material and semiotic qualities (cf. BATEMAN 2016; BATEMAN et al. 2017). With technologies and applications evolving swiftly, digital forms are often claimed to break new ground in the manipulation of materiality and, consequently, pose new challenges to both theoretical and empirical work in multimodality.

The take on multimodality we present in this panel offers methodologies and analytic schemes that shed light on various ways of organising materiality in digital environments. In particular, we pay close attention to the relations that hold between the materiality provided in digital contexts, semiotic modes that arise from and within it, concrete artefacts and performances that are created drawing on such modes, and, ultimately, the interpretations of modes and their intersemiotic relations. Not least, we thereby seek to revisit and renegotiate what supposedly ‘digital’ communication actually comprises.

Building on the contributors’ 10 years+ of extensive work in multimodality, this panel proposes a sufficiently broad and robust foundation, a theory and methodology of multimodality geared towards practical application. We seek to chart inroads into more comprehensive and systematic investigations of communication in digital environments through a triangulation of theoretical, methodological and practical positions:

Adopting a theoretical perspective, John BATEMAN (Abstract 1) revisits the relation between (‘digital’) media and modes, and questions the benefits of the wide-spread distinction between the ‘digital’ and the ‘non-digital’. Janina WILDFEUER (Abstract 2) presents a methodological discussion of *discourse semantics* and *textual logic* as two particular concepts relevant to the analysis of digital environments. Jana PFLAEGING’s (Abstract 3) contribution relates directly to BATEMAN’s and WILDFEUER’s talks in that she

presents complex composite infographics of the theoretical and methodological points they make. Carman NG (Abstract 4) zooms in on the case of Alternate Reality Games and their use of the digital environment. While Hartmut STÖCKL also presents a case study on social advertising, his contributions rounds off our presentation of new approaches to multimodality by offering a more broadly conceived analytical framework from a rhetorical perspective.

The panel's overall aim is to position itself in critical relation to the conference's general objective towards discussing digitality by providing more systematic and robust approaches to the analysis of multimodal communication that allow the precise definition and distinction of media and modes and their comprehensive analysis in various multimodal environments.

Panel Overview: 180 minutes (2 x 90 minutes) slot

- 1** John Bateman | DIGITAL: IS THIS REALLY A THING? | 30 + 15min
- 2** Janina Wildfeuer | DISCOURSE SEMANTICS AND TEXTUAL LOGIC | 30 + 15min

- 3** Jana Pflaeging | VISUALISING THEORY AND METHODOLOGY IN MULTIMODALITY | contribution to **1** & **2**

- 4** Carman Ng | MORPHING HYBRIDITY: EXPLORING ALTERNATE REALITY GAMES | 30 + 15min
- 5** Hartmut Stöckl | A RHETORICAL TAKE ON MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION | 30 + 15min

References

- Bateman, J.A.** (2016): "Methodological and Theoretical Issues for Empirical Investigations of Multimodality", in: Klug, Nina-Maria and Stöckl, Hartmut (eds.): *Handbuch Sprache im multimodalen Kontext*. Berlin: de Gruyter Mouton, 36-74.
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DIGITAL: IS THAT EVEN A THING?

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The talk will present a critical discussion of the concept of digitality and the rather blurring distinction between 'digital' and 'non-digital' media with regard to its usefulness for and within multimodal analyses. It will demonstrate that the organisation of virtual digital forms most often involves various forms of recreations of other media and that it is therefore necessary to exercise considerable caution when speaking of 'digital media'. Instead, it is necessary to concentrate on the semiotic modes in the digital environment and the evolving artefacts and performances that changing materialities afford.

DISCOURSE SEMANTICS AND TEXTUAL LOGIC: METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR DIGITAL MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS

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This talk discusses two relevant methodological concepts for the analysis of digital environments and the resulting artefacts and performances with regard to their usability and appropriateness for comprehensive empirical analyses.

As one methodological specification for these analyses, the notion of *discourse semantics* has been introduced to the field as particularly suitable for the combination of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (cf. BATEMAN 2011, 2016). Within this context, it has most often been applied to and used as a particular configuration of semiotic modes which provides the necessary interpretative mechanisms for determining the intended range of interpretations of these modes (cf. BATEMAN 2016, BATEMAN et al. 2017).

A further notion intrinsically related to the concept of discourse semantics is that of a *textual logic* of meaning making in digital media, which puts the focus of analysis on the inferences and logical conclusions to be made when interpreting digital multimodal artefacts (cf. WILDFEUER 2014, 2018). The textual logic thus gives one particular view of the mechanisms involved in multimodal meaning making which focuses on logical operations throughout the reception of the artefacts and performances.

The talk will critically discuss, compare and triangulate both notions as essential methodological frameworks for the analysis of digital environments and particular the now needed empirical work with them.

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VISUALISING THE THEORY AND METHODOLOGY OF MULTIMODALITY

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It is in the very nature of multimodality to explore meaning-making that integrates a broad range of semiotic modes. Somewhat paradoxically, scholarly exchange *about* multimodal phenomena, especially work that develops a theoretical argument, still seems to adhere to a rather logo-centric tradition (PFLAEGING 2013, 2018). Notwithstanding, there is ample potential for *visualising* complex theoretical positions, e.g. by drawing on the inherent visuality of verbal metaphor (PFLAEGING 2015). Rather than being decorative embellishments to a verbal text, such visualisations can fulfil an *epistemic function* in the complex process of knowledge dissemination.

Having a background in fine arts/graphic design, I have created visualisations for colleagues working in various areas of linguistics (e.g. in text linguistics, BROCK & PFLAEGING 2018; in media linguistics, SCHILDHAUER 2016; in conversation analysis, LUGINBÜHL ET AL. 2016; and in multimodality, STÖCKL 2016, PFLAEGING forthcoming) and audiences (e.g. scholars and first-year students, see esp. PFLAEGING & BROCK 2017).

Accordingly, my contribution relates directly to the talks proposed by BATEMAN and WILDFEUER. Together, we have created several composite infographics that complement their explanations of a theory and methodology of multimodality.

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MORPHING HYBRIDITY: EXPLORING ALTERNATE REALITY GAMES

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This presentation discusses methodological complexities in applying multimodal approaches to examine alternate reality games (ARGs). ARGs communicate transmedial narratives across digital environments and the real world; encompassing diverse media forms, from multimedia, social networks, to live performances. Multimodally complex, ARGs blur boundaries between reality and fiction, digital and physical gameplay, complicating the research and theorization of gameplay experiences. Such endeavors remain challenging because of the ontological hybridity of digital games, which interweaves subjective experience, activity, and technological materiality (LEINO 2012). Moreover, ARGs increasingly constitute serious-purpose interventions, such as fostering youth-based social innovations (EVOKE 2010-2017). To articulate the materiality and multifaceted implications of ARGs, the presentation intersects empiricism-driven multimodality in theorizing transmediality (BATEMAN 2017) and socio-semiotic multimodality of learning and communication (BEZEMER & KRESS 2016). Specifically, I address the transmedial textualities of ARGs; the experiential requisite of play; and difficulties in documenting ARGs for research. Grounding the presentation are case analyses of *Speculation: Nexus X* (HAYLES, JAGODA, and LEMIEUX 2014), a pedagogical inquiry into finance capital via science fiction; and *Unknown 9* (REFLECTOR ENTERTAINMENT 2018), a conspiracy thriller transmedial franchise that has been unfolding since September 2018, across such platforms as ARG, videogames, comics, podcasts, novels, film, television, and live events.

References

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A RHETORICAL TAKE OF MULTIMODAL COMMUNICATION: THE CASE OF SOCIAL ADVERTISING

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Since its conspicuous use in the title of a seminal essay (BARTHES 1977/1964), the rhetorical has surfaced in multimodality research in essentially three ways (cf. BATEMAN 2014: 119–136). First, the notion of *rhetorical figure* was adopted for the study of visual images (DURAND 1987) and then quickly gave rise to the idea of *verbo-visual rhetorical figures* (BONSIEPE 1968; GAEDE 1981; MCQUARRIE & MICK 2003; PHILLIPS & MCQUARRIE 2004; MULKEN 2006). Second, efforts to model multimodal coherence have used conjunctive relations (MARTIN/ROSE 2007, 119) between visual and verbal propositions to develop a *rhetorical structure* (MANN/THOMPSON 1988) of multimodal texts. Third, accounts of multimodal genre (STÖCKL 2015: 56–60) emphasize the close connection between elements of the situation, most notably function, and choices of semiotic resources. Despite the recognition that the design of multimodal communication is a *rhetorical process* (KRESS 2010: 121), which requires *rhetorical strategies* (HIIPPALA 2014: 114) that deploy multimodal structures, no consistent rhetorical approach has yet been conceived.

The present paper outlines just such a comprehensive rationale for analysing multimodal communication rhetorically (cf. STÖCKL 2014: 379–390 for visual rhetoric). Rhetoric is understood here as the study of goal-directed or task-based multimodal (inter)-action between communicators, who make strategic structural choices on the basis of optimum effectiveness and situational appropriateness (cf. OLSON 2007: 3, 12f.; KOCH & SCHIRREN 2016: 221–226). Rhetorical multimodal analysis offers a number of advantages: it makes all kinds of dynamic contexts (cf. WILDFEUER & POLLAROLI 2018: 180–182) the crucial point of departure for meaning-making in a rhetorical situation, it highlights plausible socio-cognitive effects of multimodal structures as results of heuristic cognition, and it allows shifting perspectives between different levels, e.g. context/ situation, topoi, argumentation, figures, discourse structure etc.

How the analytical hermeneutic works will be exemplified on case studies of social advertising drawn from a sizeable corpus compiled between 2017 and 2018 from *Lürzer's Archive*. The rhetorical situation of social advertising differs from commercial contexts in that it aims at “raising (...) awareness and thereby calling on the recipient to support social action or adopt an (...) opinion” (STÖCKL & MOLNAR 2018, 267). The paper will investigate the genre-specific multimodal rhetorical strategies generated in this special context by scrutinizing the following aspects of multimodal rhetoric: image content (types), linguistic means, verbo-visual rhetorical figures, multimodal argumentation and rhetorical discourse structure. A brief glance sideways at the social advertising films posted on social media will allow an assessment of how different medial affordances affect multimodal rhetoric.

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