

CALL FOR PAPERS

12th International Congress of the German Society for Semiotics (DGS) “The concrete as sign” (“Das Konkrete als Zeichen”) in Stuttgart, October 9-12, 2008.

Panel organizers: Dr. Ellen Fricke (Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder), Dr. Irene Mittelberg (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Sedinha Teßendorf, M.A. (Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt/Oder).

GESTURES IN COMMUNICATION: PROCESSES OF CONCRETIZATION AND ABSTRACTION

Every gesture is a concrete, spatially and temporally determined communicative event. Research on co-verbal gestures has shown that they are intricately synchronized and coordinated with both the semantic and pragmatic functions of the concurrent speech. This panel focuses on body movements that can be observed during speech and explores the nature of the tight relationship between the two modalities from a specific angle. The central assumption is that the relation between gesture and speech is determined, *inter alia*, by processes of both concretization and abstraction. Iconic gestures may concretize, for instance, aspects of the speaker’s mental imagery that are not at all expressed verbally. Gestures may also activate the base of a verbal metaphor and stand as a concrete sign for an abstract idea. Deictic gestures can guide the attention of the listener to non-verbal concrete objects, which in turn may be interpreted as a sign in their own right, standing for either a concrete or an abstract entity. Finally, as semaphores, gestures may undergo gradual processes of abstraction, e.g., stylization.

Taking such semiotic processes of concretization and abstraction as a point of departure, we invite contributions addressing the following questions and points of discussion:

- What levels of concretization and abstraction can we find in gestural sign carriers? If we compare gestures and the visual arts in this respect, what similarities or differences can be found? What can we learn, for instance, from representations of gestures in drawings and cartoons?
- How are processes of concretization and abstraction distributed across the manual and speech modalities? Which semiotic concepts allow us to account for these processes to a high degree?
- In what ways do different gesture types exhibit similarities and/or differences regarding processes of concretization and abstraction?
- Are there language-specific or culture-specific differences? In particular, if we compare signed languages and co-verbal gestures, what are the commonalities and differences?
- How do gestures differ from actions? To what extent are gestures abstracted from actions? What is the role of ritualization?
- How have gestures evolved ontogenetically and phylogenetically? What is the role of certain processes of concretization and abstraction for specific levels of evolution? What can be said about parallels between human and non-human primates?

In view of these questions, a special focus of the panel will be on the topics of deixis and indexicality, metonymy and metaphor, ritualization and stylization, as well as on specification and concretization of lexical meaning and mental imagery via gestures.

Abstract submission guide: The abstract may be submitted in either German or English and should not exceed one page. Please include your name, academic affiliation, e-mail address, and the title of the talk. Deadline for submitting abstracts is July 4, 2008. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by the end of July, 2008. Presentation slots will be 30 minutes (plus 15 minutes for discussion and technical set up). For information and abstract submission, please contact Ellen Fricke at science@ellenfricke.de.

PANEL ORGANIZERS

Dr. Ellen Fricke
VW-Project "Towards a Grammar of Gesture"
Department of Social and Cultural Sciences
Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
Grosse Scharrnstr. 59
D-15320 Frankfurt (Oder)
science@ellenfricke.de

Dr. Irene Mittelberg
Department of Language & Communication
Faculty of Arts
Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam
De Boelelaan 1105
1081HV Amsterdam
i.mittelberg@let.vu.nl

Sedinha Teßendorf, M.A.
VW-Project "Towards a Grammar of Gesture"
Department of Social and Cultural Sciences
Europa-Universität Viadrina Frankfurt/Oder
Grosse Scharrnstr. 59
D-15320 Frankfurt (Oder)
tessendorf@euv-frankfurt-o.de