

Multimodality as a discipline? Provocative thoughts and serious efforts

Janina Wildfeuer, University of Bremen, wildfeuer@uni-bremen.de

More than ever, multimodality is one of the most influential semiotic theories for analyzing media artefacts, and it enjoys growing global popularity. Until now, however, this popularity has not found a common voice: the conceptual anchoring of multimodality as well as its empirical applications often remain nationally and regionally local and ideas of a theory of multimodality are heterogeneous and uncoordinated. Multiple views of the definition of modality and mediality have emerged, but theoretical determinations and methodological examinations have not always developed with appropriate mutual consideration or respect. Therefore, the field finds itself in the role of supplementing disciplinary and interdisciplinary work, calling for practitioners and theorists alike to add complementary approaches rather than seeking often unmotivated replacement. For the field to move ahead, a more mature status of reflection, mutual support, and interaction with regard to both past and future directions would be helpful.

In my talk I will critically discuss whether multimodality research as undertaken in various research groups and taught at several universities is on its way to achieve this mature status and whether we can call this a disciplinary endeavor. For this, I will look at explicit approaches towards a common basis upon which the monolithic view of multimodality as a concerted disciplinary field could be built and highlight the criteria and specifics of multimodal research that seem to be most apt to develop the needed strength and potential for discipline-building explorations.