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Centre for Multimodal Communication

At the Centre for Multimodal Communication (CMC) we study texts and acts of communication as complex multimodal phenomena and develop ways of handling such phenomena theoretically and methodologically. Our approach to multimodality springs from the social semiotic view of language and communication pioneered by Halliday (1978) and Hodge and Kress (1988), who argued for the importance of investigating language and communication, not as fixed, rule-governed sign systems, but as systems of semiotic meaning-potential in socio-cultural contexts. Where Halliday (1985, 1994) put forward a social semiotic functional approach to language, Kress and van Leeuwen (1996, 2002), van Leeuwen (1999, 2006, 2011) and others build on Halliday's ideas, exploring the meaning-potential and use of other semiotic resources (e.g. images, sound, typography, colour) as well as the multimodal interaction and integration of these resources in communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 2001; van Leeuwen 2005).

At CMC we see multimodality as the study of the wide array of semiotic resources people use to communicate and the way they use these resources in concrete social settings. We are developing a distinct approach to the study of multimodality in which:

- we see the social semiotic and systemic-functional study of language as having a central place in multimodality studies;
- we study single semiotic modes as well as modes in combination, all within the broader framework of a general theory of multimodality;
- we see the physical embodiment of signs and sign articulation as a crucial part of understanding their social and cultural organization;
- we combine the study of semiotic artefacts with the study of the practices in which they are embedded, with some emphasis on business communication, stylistics and various forms of storytelling, and we study technologically mediated semiotic resources both analytically and critically;
- we combine pure research aiming at developing innovative methods and theories for the study of multimodal communication with applied research that engages with key social, cultural, political and economic issues such as globalization, corporatization, social exclusion and social control.

(<https://www.sdu.dk/en/cmc>)

Within this general framework, the members of CMC pursue a wide range of more specific research interests: the digital resemiotisation of buying and selling interaction (Boeriis, Dakwar, Poulsen, van Leeuwen); graphic medicine (Maagaard); multimodal discourses of sustainability and the environment (Johannessen, Nørgaard); multimodal semiotics of architecture and architectural renderings (Boeriis, Maagaard, Nørgaard); multimodal semiotics of film (Boeriis); multimodal stylistics (Holsting, Maagaard, Nørgaard); social media and semiotic technology (Johannessen, Poulsen, van Leeuwen); systemic functional descriptions of Danish (Holsting) and German (Holsting, Petersen); typography and the materiality of graphic trace-making (Johannessen, Nørgaard, van Leeuwen) and visual narrativity (Maagaard).

The centre's history and members

CMC is born out of a strong tradition at the Department of Language and Communication for adopting a functional approach to language and communication. In the early noughties, a small group of younger researchers got interested in the social semiotic approach to multimodal communication and formed an informal research group on multimodality. The group and its research gained a strong impetus with the appointment of Theo van Leeuwen as Professor of Multimodal Communication and founding Director of CMC in 2013 and has since then developed into a robust and dynamic research centre with international recognition.

The centre consists of the following researchers: Morten Boeriis, Julia Rytter Dakwar, Alexandra Holsting, Christian Mosbæk Johannessen, Cindie Aaen Maagaard, Nina Nørgaard, Søren Vigild Poulsen, Uwe Helm Petersen and Theo van Leeuwen. Previous members who are now engaged elsewhere are: Thomas Hestbæk Andersen, Carl Bache, Niels Christian Hansen, Danica Jovanovic and Sumin Zhao. The centre has a strong tradition of welcoming visiting scholars with an interest in multimodal semiotics and a wish to interact with the Odense group.

On the centre's initiative, two of the most central figures in social semiotics and CMC affiliates, Michael Halliday and Gunther Kress, have been awarded Honorary Doctorates at the University of Southern Denmark in recognition of their pioneering, groundbreaking work in the field – work which is foundational to much of the research that is carried out in CMC.

Over the years, the centre has hosted Ph.D. workshops and master classes (2013, 2014, 2018), symposia and seminars on toys (2014), trace-making (2014, 2016), multimodal narrative method and analysis (2015), social media and semiotic technologies (2016, 2017), multimodal childhood (2018) as well as the 9th International Conference on Multimodality (2018) with 200 participants.

CMC has attracted external funding for a number of research projects. In her Distinguished Postdoctoral Fellowship funded by the Carlsberg Foundation (2015-2017), Zhao researched early digital and multilingual literacy practices, while Nørgaard wrote up her monograph on multimodal stylistics of the novel during a Carlsberg Semper Ardens Fellowship (2017-2018). The REED project (2016-2019), which investigates the remediation of education, is funded by NOS-HS – The Swedish Research Council and is run by Boeriis and van Leeuwen in collaboration with Martin Engebretsen (University of Agder), Staffan Selander (Stockholm University)

and Tuomo Hiippala (University of Helsinki). Finally, RESEMINA is a VELUX funded research project investigating how shopping in physical stores is translated into a digital experience online (2018-2021). The project was originally developed by Andersen and van Leeuwen with Gitte Rasmussen (SoPraCon) and is now conducted by Boeriis, Dakwar, Poulsen and van Leeuwen in collaboration with members of the Centre for Social Practices and Cognition (SoPraCon).

Selected representative publications that have come out of the centre's research are Andersen and Holsting's systemic functional description of Danish, *Teksten i grammatikken* (2015); Boeriis' exploration of stratification, "Modeling Multimodal Stratification" (2017); Johannessen and van Leeuwen's collection of multimodal perspectives on the acts of writing and trace-making more generally, *The Materiality of Writing. A Trace-Making Perspective* (2018); Maagaard's study of visual narrativity in still images in "Picturing Scripts: A Combined Narrative, Social Semiotic and Cognitive Approach to Visual Narrativity" (2018); Poulsen, Kvåle and van Leeuwen's special issue of *Social Semiotics on Social Media as Semiotic Technology* (2018); Höllerer, van Leeuwen, Jancsary, Meyer, Andersen and Vaara's integration of organization and management studies with the study of visual and multimodal communication in *Visual and Multimodal Research in Organization and Management Studies* (2019); Nørgaard's multimodal approach to meaning-making in the novel in *Multimodal Stylistics of the Novel: More Than Words* (2019); and a collaborative online encyclopedia of central multimodal terms and concepts, *Key Terms in Multimodality: Definitions, Issues, Discussions* (www.sdu.dk/multimodalkeyterms).

Short introduction to Poulsen's article

It is characteristic of work in social semiotic multimodality that it does not only engage with a wide range of analytical objects (images, sound, advertising, video games, toys, architecture, etc.), it also draws on insights from and enters into dialogue with many different fields of research (linguistics, semiotics, film and media studies, gestalt psychology, iconography, social theory, etc.). As pointed out by van Leeuwen (2005: 1):

Social semiotics is not "pure" theory, not a self-contained field. It only comes into its own when it is applied to specific instances and specific problems, and it always requires immersing oneself not just in semiotic concepts and methods as such but also in some other field.

This openness towards other fields of research is reflected by Poulsen's research article below in which he discusses the potential of merging the social semiotic approach to multimodality with concepts from mental spaces and blending theory (Fauconnier and Turner 2002). The article continues an ongoing discussion in CMC of key terms in the field, in Poulsen's case by exploring and critiquing cognitive and social semiotic approaches to the concept of "multimodality".

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