

New times, new disciplines? The foundational role of multimodality and the challenges it raises for disciplinary boundaries

A lecture by visiting speaker Professor John A. Bateman, Bremen University

2.00pm–5.30 pm Wednesday 4 October 2017

Martin Hall Seminar Room MHL1.17a/b

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) suggest that the practice of 'monomodality' arose in the 19th century and needs to be seen as a historical phase that no longer lays claim to the aesthetic and cultural high ground. Several art movements of the early 20th century re-negotiated the boundaries between music and painting, between painting and text, between photography and theatre, as well as extending the kinds of materials that might be employed; these developments contributed significantly to the acceptance that combinations of expressive resources now enjoy. However, monomodality as a broad cultural orientation has also naturally had substantial consequences far beyond the arts. Taking linguistics as a case in point, the seminal works of Saussure, Hjelmslev and many others in the first half of the 20th century were overwhelmingly monomodal in orientation. As a result, text-related disciplines that emerged or had their origins in the early 20th century still show strong monomodal biases. In this talk, I raise the question as to whether it is time for a thorough reappraisal of this situation. Many disciplines and research areas are now coming up against issues of multimodality and consequently discuss how multimodality might be addressed – nevertheless, the kinds of multimodality encountered in such discussions are typically quite restricted. In contrast to orientations anchored within individual disciplines, therefore, I will instead consider what it can mean for theory, method and practice to reverse the emphasis and to *begin* with multimodality as a foundational phenomenon rather than to approach it from elsewhere. Building on the methodological principles elaborated in Bateman, Wildfeuer and Hiippala (2017) and the characterizations of semiotic modes and media offered in Bateman (2016) and Bateman (2017) respectively, I will suggest a thoroughly multimodal orientation and show how it is supportive of methodologically more robust engagements with multimodal materials and performances, while also offering beneficial clarifications of the nature of multimodality from a theoretical semiotic perspective. Communication, construed very broadly, has always been multimodal and so it is perhaps time do this fact more justice.

References

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John Bateman has been working in the field of Natural Language Generation since 1982 and obtained his PhD in Artificial Intelligence at the University of Edinburgh in 1986. He is now Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of Bremen within the Department of English. He has previously held roles in generation projects at Kyoto University, USC/Information Sciences Institute, and the German National Research Center for Information Technology/IPSI, as well as lecturing in Translation Science at the University of the Saarland, Saarbrücken and in Computational and Descriptive Linguistics at the University of Stirling, Scotland.



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