

Exposé : A social semiotic approach to multimodality

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Multimodal approaches make the claim – explicitly or implicitly – that language (whether as speech or writing) is not all there is that requires attention in research around communication / representation / meaning / identity, and so on. That is, multimodality marks out a much expanded frame in which research needs to take place. It does not however constitute a theory of itself: theory is supplied by researchers who come with a theory, and with the questions derived from that.

In my case that theory is Social Semiotics. It brings a focus on meaning and meaning-making (and sign-making), and on all related issues. It regards semiosis as a social process and therefore sees meaning as generated in social (inter-) action. In my talk I will describe some salient notions of Social Semiotics on the one hand – *interest*, the *motivated sign*, the issues of *rhetoric* and *design*; and of modes and multimodality on the other – *affordance*, *logics*, *orchestration* and *ensembles*, *epistemology*, *ontology* and *ideology*. Given the focus and themes of the week-long *L'école IR Vidéo*, two central concepts that I will focus on in the talk will be *interest* and *design* seen in the light of multimodality.

Methodologically, the joint approach embedded in a social semiotic multimodal approach poses many questions for research: some quite old and well known, but now appearing in unfamiliar form (e.g. gathering materials; transcription); others entirely new and in need of being explored and defined (e.g. 'what are the units of analysis?', questions of how to 'read'). And so the framing of the talk overall is toward methodologies in general; and to methodologies related to video in particular.