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**REVIEW: Thurlow Crispin, Dürscheid Christa & Diémoz Federica (eds) (2020). *Visualizing digital discourse*. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter.**

EDITOR: Crispin Thurlow
EDITOR: Christa Dürscheid
EDITOR: Federica Diémoz
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## **SUMMARY**

This edited volume “Visualizing digital discourse” examines the role of visuality in digital discourse. The editors, Crispin Thurlow, Christa Dürscheid and Federica Diémoz explain in the introduction that the volume is not a conference proceedings, even if it is based on a conference “Visualizing (in) the Media” from November 2017. The book is organized into 3 parts and 12 chapters, which problematize the concept of visuality and deliver empirical studies on various visual resources (emojis, videos, photos...). The aim of the book is therefore to contribute to the field of multimodality research.

After the introduction by the editors and before the beginning of the first section, Chapter One, which is entitled “Towards an embodied visual semiotics: Negotiating the right to look” is a so-called ‘flagship’ chapter by Rodney H. Jones (University of Reading, UK). Indeed this chapter shows in a programmatic way how the volume wants to define a new approach of visuality. Technologies and especially mobile digital photography have opened up a new form of visual semiotics. Analysing visual resources should not be only searching what pictures mean, but also how the possibility of making images has transformed the nature of the visual. The author illustrates this paradigmatic change with livestream videos of police encounters, in which drivers use videos to communicate their experience of being looked at and claim the right to look as Mirzoeff (2011) defines it. Referring to what Heidegger (2008) calls “being-in-the-world” (Dasein) and “being with” other social actors (Mitsein), Jones defends the idea of an embodied visual semiotics, or in other words semiotics with social and phenomenological perspectives.

The first section, “Besides words and writing” is composed of three chapters focusing on emoji, a sign between image and word. Chapter Two, “Emoji invasion: The semiotic ideologies of language endangerment in multilingual news discourse” by Crispin Thurlow (University of Bern) and Vanessa Jaroski (University of Bern) examines the metadiscourse about emoji in a corpus of articles in English and in French in which journalists talk about emoji. The authors do not analyse the practices of the users, but how users represent and talk about emoji. They identify three rhetorical tactics: emoji can appear as a new language, emoji can be conceptualised as an invasion and emoji can be seen as a sign of linguistic, cultural and intellectual degradation. This study explores the concept of semiotic ideology that refers to

people's assumptions about what signs are and about what they should be. Those beliefs explain more about speakers and their conception of language than about the language itself.

In Chapter 3, "Beyond the binary: Emoji as a challenge to the image-word distinction", Georg Albert (University of Koblenz-Landau) tries to overcome the dualistic distinction between images and words in order to define emoji. He starts reminding that typological definitions of smileys, emoticons, emoji and kaomoji are often misleading because they mix formal and functional criteria. At a morphological level, emoji are like logograms (<\$>, <&>, <%>), they are not combined with other graphemes to build meaningful morphemes. But the function of emoji can not be compared to punctuation marks. Most studies assume that the principal function of emoji is to express an emotion. Albert explains that emoji can prototypically fulfil four main functions: to indicate an utterance's intended illocutionary force, to structure complex utterances, to add information about the mode of an utterance and to indicate social styles or registers. It can also happen that an emoji replaces a word. This complexity shows that emoji can not be simply classified as words or as images.

Chapter 4 "Evolving interactional practices of emoji in text messages" by Rachel Panckhurst (Paul Valéry University of Montpellier) and Francesca Frontini (Paul Valéry University of Montpellier) is also dedicated to the usage of emoji. The authors explore the 88milSMS corpus to show if emoji are more often used to express an emotion (sometimes as softeners) or with a referential function to replace a word. Three main situations are identified: emoji are a redundant addition that expresses the same as the written text, emoji are a necessary addition that avoids a misinterpretation, emoji replace a word. The analysis is an attempt at studying emoji in their syntactic context, observing how emoji and sequences of several emoji are inserted. The authors underline the sociolinguistic aspect of emoji and recognise that the corpus represents a specific social group who has a more innovative use of emoji.

The second section, "The social life of images" begins with Chapter 5, "Revisualization of classed motherhood in social media" by Sirpa Leppänen (University of Jyväskylä). Referring to the concept of recontextualization (Bauman & Briggs 1990 and Silverstein & Urban 1996), Leppänen defines what she calls "revisualization" to show how images can be reinserted in a new context. The article is a case study based on examples from social media blogs in Finland, and especially Shitty Mother's Diary, that parodies themes and styles for representing motherhood in homing blogs. Leppänen explains how by imitating and creating a contrast between image and text the parodic blog points out the pervasiveness of discourses about motherhood.

Chapter 6, "Making Let's plays watchable: An interactional approach to gaming visualizations" by Axel Schmidt (University of Mannheim) and Konstanze Marx (University of Greifswald) is devoted to a new genre, the so-called Let's Plays videos, in which gamers film their gaming on YouTube and comment at the same time. The authors analyse how a rather individual activity has become a platform format and what makes Let's Plays video watchable for the viewers. This contribution follows the methodology of Ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis (EMCA) to describe how this activity builds a verbal, embodied and visual meaning that makes the gameplay more comprehensible and attractive for viewers.

Chapter 7, "Intimacy at a distance: Multimodal meaning making in video chat tours" by Dorottya Cserző (Cardiff University) also presents a new genre based on visibility. Video chat tours are often improvised videos between two or more persons, on which people describe their

new home or their environment. Such videos use movement and speech to create meaning and are specific because they try to create intimacy at a distance. Based on the methodology of conversation analysis, Cserző points out the fact that the joint attentional frame in video chat tours is more fragile than in face-to-face communication.

Chapter 8, “Visual bonding and intimacy: A repertoire-oriented study of photo-sharing in close personal relationships” by Rebecca Venema (Università della Svizzera italiana) and Katharina Lobinger (Università della Svizzera italiana) focuses on the role of visuality in interactions between couples and friends. The authors assume that interactions based on visuality serve, among other things, to build social relationships, to create social memory and to express the self. The results of this study show that these practices are often ritualized. They allow partners to co-experience emotions. As opposed to written texts and their linear logic, this kind of interaction is experienced more intuitively.

The third and last section is entitled “Designing multimodal texts” and is devoted to multimodality. It opens with Chapter 9, “Multimodality and mediality in an image-centric semiosphere – A rationale” by Hartmut Stöckl (Salzburg University). This paper assumes that contemporary communication has been going through a phase of growing image-centricity. Stöckl develops two specific notions of centrality: centrality in a compositional and perceptual way and semantical centrality. As far as this definition of centrality, Stöckl formulates five hypotheses explaining the difference between old mass/print media and new/social media. This chapter sketches a multimodal research agenda in order to understand the way new practices change the role and the meaning of visual resources.

Chapter 10, “Designing ‘good taste’: A social semiotic analysis of corporate Instagram practices” by Lara Portmann (University of Bern) presents the use of Instagram by two Swiss supermarket chains, Coop and Migros. Focusing on ten variables, Portmann analyses how these two chains aestheticize food, selling to people not only products, but also stories and cultural narratives and lifestyles. This contribution assumes that visual resources on Instagram construct the social meaning of food.

Chapter 11, “Diachronic perspectives on viral online genres: From images to words, from lists to stories” by Jana Pflaeging (Salzburg University) raises the crucial question of genres. The author presents a diachronic study of a quite new genre, the listicle, a short-form that uses a list as a structure. This form tends however to become a storicle, integrating a lot of images and animated gifs. In addition, the example of listicles shows how the need for social conviviality between users is commercially exploited by professional content providers: becoming viral, this kind of genre increases the value of advertising spaces.

The last chapter, “Social media influencer’s advertising targeted at teenagers: The multimodal constitution of credibility” by Dorothee Meer (Ruhr-University Bochum) and Katharina Staubach (Ruhr-University Bochum) concentrates on what Katheder (2008) calls osmotic advertising. This form of advertising consists in unmarked product placement. In this contribution, the authors analyse Dagi Bee’s channel, a German YouTube star, who shares make-up tutorials with teenagers. This article examines how credibility is based on the illusion of authenticity: the beauty expert seems to be a normal teenager in her room, and the video generates the impression that influencer and viewer are co-present and share the same space.

## EVALUATION

This volume presents a new approach to studying visuality in discourse, successfully bringing together the work of language and communication scholars. One of the strongest features of this book is that it considers visual resources not only as a sign to decode but also as a sign in interaction with other verbal signs. The structure of the book is coherent and allows the authors to introduce various aspects of visual resources such as the status of the image as a sign (Section 1), the social role of visuality (Section 2) and the evolution of genres and practices (Section 3). Considering this, the volume is very useful for scholars interested in multimodality and visual studies.

In the first section, the definition of emoji from an article to another may seem inconsistent at first sight. As opposed to Chapter 4, Chapter 3 does not differentiate between emoji, smileys and emoticon. Chapter 4 considers emoticon as a punctuation mark and emoji as the expression of a feeling. In addition to that, the functions of emoji are differently considered in those two chapters. Chapter 3 identifies more functions than Chapter 4, that only sees the emotional dimension of emoji. These differences show that emoji and their variable status between word and image are still a challenge to studies in multimodality.

One of the merits of the book is to offer a new approach to visual resources. Yet, the methods that are used are often used for conversation analysis, which is understandable. To examine genres like video chat tours or make-up tutorials, they tend indeed to reconfigure the rules of face-to-face communication. Chapter 9 by Stöckl is one of the main advances from a methodological perspective. Then it lays the basic foundation for a new method of visual semiotics that is not only based on conversation analysis but also considers visuality in a larger context. Referring to Lotman's concept of semiosphere (Lotman 1990), Stöckl (see also Stöckl 2020) suggests to examine the whole of a community's semiotic modes, genre repertoires and media.

The other merit of the book is to explore new genres like video chat tours (Chapter 7), listicles (Chapter 11), Let's Plays (Chapter 6) or make-up tutorials (Chapter 12). These very different genres have yet something in common. They allow readers to understand how communication practices are changing and how the role of visual resources in their embodied and affective dimensions implies a recreation and reconfiguration of social meaning.

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#### **ABOUT THE REVIEWER**

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