

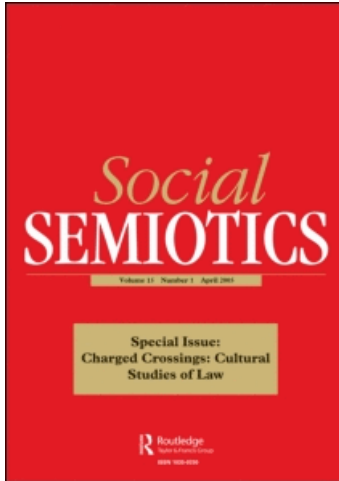
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Multimodal discourse in mediated spaces

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INTRODUCTION

Multimodal discourse in mediated spaces

In line with the burgeoning interest in the analysis of multimodal and mediated discourse, in this special issue we venture to profile empirical research that investigates how different semiotic, spatial and interactional resources are interleaved in the mediated discourses and lived practices of particular settings. The aim we have in mind is not an overarching theoretical contribution, but rather to expose the heterogeneity and variety of contemporary sites and mediated spaces of social interaction and sociality in which multimodal interaction and communication transpire. In this special issue, these sites include public places of commemoration, a critique session in architectural education, a collaborative video-editing suite, a cross-cultural virtual work site, domestic and public spaces in reality TV parenting programmes, a participatory democratic meeting, and a domestic setting for a story told by an aphasic man.

Space and discourse are increasingly enmeshed and mutually constitutive. There are, of course, different conceptualisations of space, such as semiotic space, interactional space, social space, geographical space, virtual space and more. Many of these have emerged, directly and indirectly, from the vibrant ideas and stimulating concepts stemming from human and cultural geography. Recently, emerging sub-fields that have space and spatialities as a prominent focus or actor include the study of semiotic landscapes (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010) or, alternatively, linguistic landscapes (Shohamy and Gorter 2009) and (interactional) mobility studies (Adey 2010; Haddington, Mondada, and Nevile forthcoming; McIlvenny, Broth, and Haddington 2009; Vannini 2010). Intricate conceptualisations such as Harris's (1998) "integrational linguistics", Scollon and Scollon's (2003) "geosemiotics", and also Thrift's (2007) "non-representational theory", as well as much of the theorising done under the larger umbrella of "performance theory" – all these open up invigorating intellectual discussions in which spatial modalities and discourses are enmeshed and intertwined (for recent overviews, see Falkheimer and Jansson 2006; Warf and Arias 2009).

The explorations of multimodal and discursive spaces in our special issue concern not only discursive representations of space, but also how socio-semiotic constructions of places and spaces are multimodally accomplished and performed. One goal is to investigate and understand the contingent relationships between modes of semiosis/discourse and multiple spaces. The layering of different spaces combined with the interweaving of semiotic modalities in and across these spaces affords a variety of subjectivities, agencies, actions and micro-ecologies. Additionally, if there are multiple perspectives on space, then the movement or transition between spaces is crucial. The discursive mediation of two spaces – through docking, coupling, relaying and bridging, for example – may lead to schisming or "space-switching". Furthermore, the semiotic and discursive properties of a space may be appropriated or echoed in other spaces (interspatiality) for a variety of tasks and purposes. Discursive modes may or may not be interchangeable as an actor traverses spaces.

Indeed, with the “turn to mobility” in the social sciences, new mobile methods are emerging to track mobile actors as they move through “space”. Discourse is on the move, and a methodological sedentarism is being challenged. Adding a critical perspective, socially construed and sustained spaces can be seen as differentially distributed semiotic resources. Thus, there is a politics at work in the performativity of spatial and mobile practices. Places and spaces are both politicised and politicising actors, and are often not the ends but the means for other ideological ends.

The contributors to our special issue pursue the analysis of multimodal discourse and mediated space by employing diverse methods that are each inspired by different disciplinary sensitivities. These include emphases on social interaction and conversation analysis, textual analysis, narrative research, multimodal (discourse) analysis and more – all of which coalesce around the conceptualisation of how semiotic meanings both emerge and are mobilised in different social and spatial settings. The research interests of the co-editors of this special issue also originate within different schools and perspectives.

Paul McIlvenny’s interest in spatial questions in relation to multimodal discourse and social interaction emerged out of an engagement with the exciting work on mediated discourse by the late Ron Scollon (Scollon 2001; McIlvenny 2011). In a number of papers and books, Scollon brought spatial questions into discourse studies in a fruitful way (for example, Scollon 1997; Scollon and Scollon 2003). Before he died he was working on a book entitled *Geographies of discourse*, which put spatial issues centre-stage. A further influence, in common with Chaim Noy, was the emergence of a “mobility turn”, which prompts us to reconsider the centrality of movement to social life (Urry 2000, 2007). McIlvenny’s heightened interest spurred him to coordinate a NordForsk-funded research network in the Nordic countries called “PlaceME: Place, Mediated Discourse and Embodied Interaction (2006–2009)”. This special issue is a result of the international conference “SID 2008: Space = Interaction = Discourse” that he organised in Aalborg, Denmark, in November 2008. Many of the contributions to this special issue were first presented in that conference. Some were solicited later by the co-editors for inclusion.

Alternatively, Chaim Noy’s pursuit of the interrelations between discourse, spatiality and multimodality stems partly from recent research within the field of tourism studies. In contemporary tourism studies, the role that spaces play in social analysis cannot be overlooked. In the world of tourists and tourism, space is a precondition: the enterprise of tourism cannot be defined or, for that matter, even conceived without addressing the spaces that tourists, and many other related objects, transgress. Further, the conglomerate industries of tourism construct, destroy, transform, and colonise various spaces. Of course, with the advent of new technologies, this is all the more pertinent, as virtual and mediated tourist spaces and sites enter into the game of tourism (and as tourist spaces enter the spheres of everyday life) – competing over, luring and capturing our gaze, which then becomes, uncannily, the tourist gaze (Urry 1990). Recent contributions in this field, argue convincingly for a thorough rendering of the meanings that places and spaces are imbued with/emptied of in late modernity (for instance, Coleman and Crang 2002; Edensor 2001; Noy 2010; Noy and Kohn 2010).

Joining the co-editors in this special issue are a cohort of accomplished scholars together with younger researchers who are fascinated with tracing interactions between, and assemblages or enmeshments of discourse(s) and space(s), as well as

interrelations between different approaches and methods with respect to how we can explore the semiotics of spaces and spatialities. A multimodal approach unveils various spaces and modes of spatialisation in and through which social life transpires and becomes meaningful.

In the first contribution to our special issue, entitled “Articulating spaces: Inscribing spaces and (im)mobilities in an Israeli commemorative visitor book”, Chaim Noy explores the interrelations between discourse, space, and spatiality as these are embodied in and performed by a commemorative visitor book in a carefully crafted museum in Israel, which is pregnant with multimodal meanings. Noy’s enquiry combines recent developments in a number of quarters in the social sciences, including the “multimodal turn” in the research of literacy and discourse, and a number of additional shifts (commonly labelled “turns”), including “the visual turn”, “the spatial turn”, “material culture”, and so forth. The premise of this eclecticism is that a comprehensive and integrationist approach to how social and discursive practices are pursued and how they accomplish meaning entails attuning to the intertwinement of modalities in contemporary social life. This requires acknowledging that while discrete conceptualisations are helpful on analytical grounds, an integrationist analysis of social interactions and their meanings necessarily calls for multidisciplinary approaches attuned to their multimodal sensitivities and sensibilities.

In the second article, Gill Abousnnooga and David Machin continue the theme of combining spatial, material and discursive analyses of national monuments. In “The changing spaces of war commemoration: A multimodal analysis of the discourses of British monuments”, they methodically examine British war monuments that were erected during the last century in and around the United Kingdom. The authors employ sensitivities and adapt methods from both social semiotics and critical discourse analysis to shed light on the compelling meanings that these material and spatial monuments have and perform. Using comparative analysis of these war monuments, which are “part of our everyday semiotic landscapes”, allows the exposition of the means through which their designers make use of familiar semiotic resources in order to communicate, and to infuse the public spaces around them, with ideologies and (ideologically worked) identities. In addition, since these war monuments were erected in different periods, some of the differences – and admittedly of the similarities – in terms of national commemoration can be witnessed. They argue that war monuments are one important part of the way that war, soldiery and militarism are legitimised in our societies in diverse ways at different times. In the tradition of social semiotics, they seek to describe the available semiotic resources that are available to communicators to create meaning in these three-dimensional representations. Together, our two opening contributions hint at the highly spatial and multimodal dimensions not only of monuments and commemoration, but more crucially of militarism and nationality; through the medium of time and (national) longing and commemoration, they analyse how temporalities and spatialities are enrolled in the construction of national identities in everyday life.

The third contribution by Gustav Lymer, Oskar Lindwall, and Jonas Ivarsson presents an analysis of the making of “intertextual” connections in architectural critique in an educational setting through an investigation of a particular critique session involving a student design that is supposedly inspired by Günther Domenig’s addition to Albert Speer’s famous congress hall in Nürnberg. In their article entitled “Space and discourse interleaved: Intertextuality and interpretation in the education

of architects”, they innovatively work towards an ethnomethodological respecification of notions of intertextuality as part and parcel of the embodied and spatial practice of critique itself. The intertextual connections made in the “crit session” that they video-recorded are not only aesthetic. They are also interspatial and multimodal. Ultimately, interpretation, reception, intention, historicity and the socio-semiotic construction of the space of design are shown to be participants’ concerns *and* a matter of situated instruction. This article, together with the two that follow, analyse sites that are “backstage” (Goffman 1959), in the sense that the activities of *planning* and *producing* cultural artefacts of sorts (from buildings to movies) are being pursued. Unlike the first two contributions, which examine public objects, here we have preparatory (and pedagogical) activities, which of course occupy and construct their own social sites and stages.

In the fourth contribution, Elizabeth Keating and Sirkka Jarvenpaa examine technologically-mediated spaces wherein and whereby three teams of engineers – from India, Romania, and the USA – engage in work-related communication. In “Interspatial subjectivities: Engineering in virtual environments”, the authors use conversation analysis and the analysis of interviews that they have conducted with the participants in order to study how spatial orientation to spaces of participation is displayed, and how understandings are arrived at across both spaces and cultures. Keating and Jarvenpaa offer the concept of “interspatial subjectivities” (or alternatively, intersubjective spaces) to guide their way through the investigation of online-mediated (group) interactions and interviews. Their analysis of the empirical data suggests what resources are needed by the participants in order to communicate interspatially and, at the same time, to demonstrate their intercultural proficiency when there are many misunderstandings (and attempts to repair them) that emerge when multiple parties communicate in such a setting. Cultural differences in sharing knowledge and organising work are difficult to perceive and accommodate to when the basis of communication is not face-to-face but virtual. This is an important issue because globalisation and new media are making cross-cultural collaborations more commonplace, which results in a new awareness of different cultural and occupational identities and practices.

Screens, conversations, and spaces are also the materials and the environment in which Eric Laurier and Barry Brown’s study of the routine working environment of the edit suite is placed. In the fifth contribution, “The reservations of the editor: The routine work of showing and knowing the film in the edit suite”, they take us into the editing room, where the work of sorting, choosing, and meaningfully bringing together various strips of film is pursued. Therein, the authors focus on conversations between the editor and the director, who are assembling a short documentary film. The analysis of the conversation employs recent insights and methods from conversation analysis, where conversation is taken to include embodied interactions, gestures, spatial features and more – specifically taking place in front of a number of screens on which audiovisual materials are manipulated. Paradoxical though it sounds, making the film’s visual order visible – that is visible in a comprehensive manner – is challenging and requires a different type of conversational coordination and spatial organisation by the films’ editors and directors inside the editing suite.

Moving on to the situated use of video recordings, screens and relays, which are employed as part of televised reality series in which parents are taught how to

educate their “troubled/troubling” offspring by watching live and recorded video, Paul McIlvenny offers an up-close and critical examination of video relays – nowadays profusely embedded in these programmes. In “Video interventions in ‘everyday life’: Semiotic and spatial practices of embedded video as a therapeutic tool in reality TV parenting programmes”, the author focuses on embedded video technologies, and illustrates how they are appropriated as a resource and mediational means to mediate action in a way that is comprehensible and routinised within these reality TV shows. McIlvenny inquires how domestic and public spaces are perceived and configured by recording (in) them, and by scrutinising the recording later or *in situ*. The detailed analysis of both verbal interaction and spatial and embodied features illuminates the rather varied functions that are accomplished by watching, “watching-with” and commenting on instructional videos that serve therapeutic aims. All in all, while these heavily surveilled and staged home environments surely bring to mind the types of practices found in *Big Brother*, McIlvenny goes beyond schematic cultural criticism to suggest, instead, how the conduct of social behaviours is interpreted and recirculated.

In the seventh contribution, “The interactional production of multiple spatialities within a participatory democracy meeting”, Lorenza Mondada reconsiders spatiality within an interactional and praxeological perspective, while stressing the importance of social action for the making of space. From her ethnomethodological perspective, space is not just materiality pre-existing to interaction; it is a practical achievement – often over long periods of time. In order to demonstrate how interaction, language and space mingle together, she analyses the ways in which spatiality is treated in a participatory democracy meeting with local citizens that is taking place to further the planning of an urban project. In her case study, the production of space is observably negotiated, discussed and argued. Her analysis of video-recorded fragments of this meeting reveals a multilayered spatiality. Firstly, it focuses on “represented space” as it is described and referred to within talk; secondly, on the “interactional space” that emerges from the active and moving distribution of the participants within the room; thirdly, on the “semiotic space” in which proposals made by the citizens are inscribed and archived. These multiple and interleaved spatialities are all interactionally achieved through the way in which the participants’ actions are organised in a timely and embodied manner. One of the key agents in her work is the facilitator who runs the meeting, and who mediates between the different participants, and between them and the surface on which proposals are inscribed and archived. It is through this actor’s creative multimodal “discourse choreography” that the space of the meeting itself, as a participatory democratic space, is established.

The last contribution by Tarja Aaltonen and Sanna Raudaskoski is an “article as narrative” that reflexively tells a story about the creation and interpretation of literal and metaphorical story space through hand-drawn maps and narration. In “Story-world evoked by hand-drawn maps”, the focus of the narrative is video-recorded storytelling during a coffee-table encounter and how it is reshaped and transformed in the process of analysing it. In the analysis, attention is paid to the maps that one of the interlocutors, an aphasic man, has drawn, and the role of multimodal and multisemiotic aspects of narration and the design of mutual understanding. With an innovative approach to narration in interaction, they explore how “storyworlds” are anchored, on the one hand, in face-to-face storytelling, and, on the other hand, in the life histories and mediated landscapes of the interlocutors (and of the

researchers). The article moves between different scenes (home, university and town) and shows how different places evoke different storyworlds thereby unveiling the multiplicity of space. Aaltonen and Raudaskoski are careful to show the imaginative artfulness and spatial awareness of people who face the challenges of severe language impairment in their everyday lives, which leads us to note that an “impairment” is constituted differently across modalities and spaces.

A number of common themes run through these empirically rich and varied contributions, over and above their commitment to the analysis of space, semiotics and multimodal discourse. In the remaining space of this editorial, we would like to briefly highlight a number of these themes – often *leitmotifs* – that can serve as a map, to employ a spatial metaphor, to this special issue.

One of the emerging commonalities that most of these articles share concerns the subtle relationship between spaces, semiotics and *surfaces*. Interestingly, spaces are mediated and populated by surfaces and by their technological relative, screens. From surfaces of (co)inscription – pivotal in the articles of Noy, Mondada, and Aaltonen and Raudaskoski – to the surfaces of monitors – in the articles of Laurier and Brown, and McIlvenny – and on to the analysis of the surfaces and appearances of buildings and monuments – in the contributions of Lymer, Lindwall, and Ivarsson, and of Abousnougga and Machin – interesting and intricate relations emerge between spaces and screens, which can and should be fleshed out and conceptualised. First, surfaces and screens sometimes delimit spaces. They mark the end of the extension of three-dimensional depth and its transition into two-dimensional surface. In other words, surfaces are sometimes where spaces become “flat” (as it were), which one can only look into but not through. One might reflect on the use of transparent (as well as semi-transparent and unidirectional) surfaces – car windows, aquarium glass walls and the two-way mirror walls behind which many hidden television cameras are positioned (in the article by McIlvenny) come to mind – which can mark a transition between different spaces and types thereof (private/public, domestic/commercial, etc.).

Second, surfaces and screens are sometimes also where other spaces unfold. This could be the case where images are projected on the screen, such as in the contribution by Laurier and Brown where various screens project simultaneously various spaces, and all that takes place within a given space – labelled by the authors as “the editor’s suite” (or space). Further, it could also be the case where spaces hold inscriptions of sorts, and these inscriptions (verbal and/or visual) refer to, re-animate, and construct other spaces. This is true for the examples in the article by Abousnougga and Machin, in which spaces and images are carved on the surfaces of war memorials, and in Noy’s contribution, in which inscriptions and drawings establish imagined and remembered spaces, and in Aaltonen and Raudaskoski’s study, in which the authors follow the spatial leads that are inscribed on paper during the interview. In these settings, surfaces allow inscription, and they are common “things” on which discourse may be, for example, materialised, recorded, archived, and/or published (made public).

In reflecting and projecting space (Noy), surfaces are, of course, made to be socially active or agentic and require more subtle conceptualisation than we can presently provide. In terms of traditional studies of face-to-face interaction, surfaces call to mind what might be held as the epitome of (or the primordial) sur/face: that of the human body, and specifically of the face. Throughout the history of social communication and interaction (not restricted to humans), these were the contours and

movements of human (sur)faces that became the primary resources for communication and meaning-making. Hence in many senses, the surfaces and screens that are studied in this collection may be viewed reflexively: they allow us to look at the “faces” that look at them.

Another *leitmotif*, admittedly one we anticipated, concerns research methods that employ and analyse video-recorded data. Recently, the use of visual methods in general (see Heath, Luff, and Hindmarsh 2010), and specifically the analysis of video-recorded data, has expanded and become the focus of attention itself (for instance, Knoblauch et al. 2008; but also Knowles and Sweetman 2004; Pink 2006; van Leeuwen and Jewitt 2001). The rising awareness of the visual (including video) mode in addition and in relation to other modalities obviously decentres the text-centred readings of social life. This is not new. What does seem to be prescient is the incorporation of this awareness gleaned from the environments of our research into the academic environments where we present our findings and our interpretations, and where social knowledge is discussed, consolidated and transmitted. These environments are overwhelmingly text-centred or text-biased, and we cannot but consider the great gains that await academic communities in the social sciences (and beyond) when these settings will also become truly multimodal. This would mean that multimodality would not be a concept referring only to research methods and to “social reality” out there, but to the exchanges and discourse of our scholarly communities and mediated spaces.

A final *leitmotif* that runs through this collection concerns critical approaches to spaces and spatialities. With the awesome power that spaces possess as resource and precondition for social life and for the constructions of meaning therein, it is no wonder that spaces and access to spaces and forms of spatiality are constantly competed over and manipulated. Critical perspectives can illuminate the politics imbuing spaces, which is what some of the contributions to this special issue pursue, whether directly or implicitly. In the articles of Noy and of Abousnougga and Machin, for example, it is quite obvious that space is being injected with and grasped by military and national symbolism and meanings. In McIlvenny’s contribution, the critical perspective runs through the analysis of how national “reality” television constructs, appropriates and governs domestic and public spaces and the practices that are performed therein. This is also true for the “democratic meeting” that is the occasion for the interplay of social interactions and semiotic resources that Mondada investigates. In her study, to establish a “democratic space” (where, again, other public spaces are planned and negotiated) is itself a highly politically charged, yet locally achieved matter across multiple mediated spaces.

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