

13th Conference of the IAVS-AISV

Visual Semiotics & Agency / Sémiotique visuelle et agentivité / Semiótica visual & agencia

September 28-30, 2023, Universidad de Bogotá Jorge Tadeo Lozano, Bogotá (Colombia)

Call for Papers

In their seminal work, *Traité du signe visuel* (1992), Groupe μ asks the fundamental question whether visuality as such is a Hjelmslevian form, that is, whether it is pertinent to the nature of meaning conveyed. Once you abandon the autonomy postulate of structuralism, taking into account the psychology and phenomenology of perception, as suggested by Sonesson already in 1989, and now more widely accepted within cognitive semiotics, it becomes obvious that all phenomena offered to (human) perception by way of the visual sense must share numerous properties, in spite of differing in other respects. Whether or not this human kind of visuality also shares properties with visually conveyed experience of other animals is a further issue for investigation.

The domain of visual semiotics is therefore much wider than that of the semiotics of pictures, with which it is often identified, or which is at least the part most often practised. It goes beyond architecture, urbanism, and the like, to comprehend all kinds of artefacts, whether the result of artisanal practice or contemporary design, even pertaining to direct perception itself. Indeed, large parts of the meaning we experience in relation, if not to our own body, then certainly to that of others, is visual, as is the meaning of clothing, food, gesture, sports events, tourism, dance, theatre, and performance in the artistic sense. The same is true of everything from scarecrows and dummies in the show window to sculptures and public monuments. Many of these examples address several different senses (apart from being polysemiotic in Zlatev's sense (2019), that is, involving different kinds of meaning-making), but visuality often constitutes the Dominant in the Prague school sense of the term. But even in cases in which visuality doesn't predominate, more thorough investigations than those of which we dispose at present are called for. The question *What does the visual do?* has become a highly relevant one.

In exploring the wider domain of visuality, we cannot help but encountering an issue which has recently acquired the centre stage of scholarly interest in archaeology, cognitive science, and phenomenology: the nature of agency. Without forgetting the pioneering work on semiotics of agency by Douglas Niño (2015), it is no doubt in the critique of Lambros Malafouris (2013) that agency has come to the fore as an issue within semiotics. Precisely because it is highly reductionistic, Malafouris's work has already started to spur a wider semiotic account of agency. No doubt, the seminal work of Alfred Gell and Shaun Gallagher has taught us that agency is a complex, multi-layered notion. With reference to the authors quoted, it may be better to formulate the issue of agency at the general level of visuality than at that of pictures. This is not to deny that this question also has urgency with respect to pictures. It was as a reaction to the idea of Jean-Marie Schaeffer (1987), according to whom photography can be produced by purely causal means, without any intervention of purpose, that Sonesson (1988; 2015) developed the idea of remote intentions. But the issue of agency becomes ever more convoluted with the prevalence of computer-engineered pictures, starting with software packages and pre-sets and ending up with image-producing algorithms, for instance, on the internet, video games, film, streaming platforms, etc.

Outside of semiotics, recent discussions on the role of the agency in the generation of meaning show a panorama of continuous developments, but without evident trends of convergence. For instance, in the introduction to their *Handbook of Phenomenology of Agency*, Erhard & Keiling (2020) list, among others, topics such as the metaphysics of agency, rationality, voluntary and involuntary action, the phenomenology of agency, the phenomenology of freedom, and embodied agency. Thus, agency has an ontological meaning (the ability to do), with aesthetic (doing with aesthetic effects), epistemic (doing with the effect of knowing) and ethical-political consequences (doing with the effect of intervening). But, at the same time, it can be inquired what the relation between these topics and visual meaning-making is. What is, for example, the relation between pictures and embodied agency? What is the relationship between agency and visual media reception? (cf. Susanne Eicher, 2014). Is there anything which is characteristic about the phenomenology of visual pictorial perception? Or in the other direction, what is the impact of visual images on the agency and the sense of the agency? What is the relation between visual persuasion and agency control? What is the reach and scope of pictures in power and politics (the relation of agencies on agencies)?

We invite those researchers focused on visual semiotics to participate, as well as those versed in socio-semiotics, or in philosophy, psychology, social sciences, and cognitive action, who are interested in sharing their research, discoveries, and findings pertaining to the relationship between agency (in its broadest sense) and visual semiotics. Although we welcome contributions about the semiotics of pictures as always, we would like to see a new emphasis on other kinds of visual semiosis, and on agency in all the senses of the term, applied not only to the act of creating visual artefacts but also to its interpretation.

The following list includes some key (although not all) themes of relevance to the conference:

- The pertinent features of visuality (in human and other perception)
- The part played by visuality in polysemiosis
- Visuality and/or agency in architecture and urbanism
- Enhanced agency and visual semiosis
- Remote intentions and system of relevancies
- Visual technologies and agency
- Collective agency and visual understanding
- Visual design and Agency
- Pictures of/for animal agency
- Projected agency and visual images
- Visual Branding and Agency
- Visuality, Agency, and Politics
- Visual Art & Agency
- Phenomenological layers of agency
- Agency in the interpretation of pictures

Calendar for authors

May 15	Paper proposal deadline (max 500 words), accepted languages English, French, and Spanish. Submission platform: https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=13iavs
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June 15	Communication of the paper proposals accepted/rejected (or to be reviewed)
July 15	Opening of online registrations
August 15	Registrations deadline (required for all presenters)
September 1	Final draft of the organization of each thematic session
September 15	Publication on the website of the final Conference program

Participation fee: US\$50 (in addition to membership fee, which is 42 euros). The participation fee covers lunches, book of abstract, and other conference paraphernalia.

The congress will be held in person.

Plenary Speakers:

Susanne Eichner

Dr. Susanne Eichner is a professor at the Academy of Film and Television, Potsdam-Babelsberg (Hochschule für Film und Fernsehen “Konrad Wolf”) in the Department of Media Studies. She is the author, notably, of *Agency and Media Reception* (Springer 2014).

José Enrique Finol

José Enrique Finol has gained a Bachelor of Arts from Universidad del Zulia, Venezuela (1972) and a Ph.D. in Information and Communication Sciences from EHESS (1980), with a postdoctorate in Semiotics and Anthropology from Universidad de Indiana, USA, (1991-1993). He is the author of numerous books, including *La Corposfera. Antropo-Semiótica de las cartografías del cuerpo* (2015), which has just been published in English by de Gruyter (2021)

Shaun Gallagher

Shaun Gallagher is the Lillian and Morrie Moss Chair of Excellence in Philosophy at the University of Memphis (2011-). He is also a founding editor and continues as a co-editor-in-chief of *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, an interdisciplinary journal published by Springer (Google Metrics). His research interests include phenomenology and the philosophy of mind, philosophical psychology, embodiment, intersubjectivity, hermeneutics, and the philosophy of time. His numerous books and papers have often addressed the issue of agency at different levels.

Jean-Marie Klinkenberg

Jean-Marie Klinkenberg is a Belgian linguist and semiotician. Professor at the University of Liège, Jean-Marie Klinkenberg taught language sciences there, and especially semiotics and rhetoric, but also francophone cultures. He developed part of his rhetorical and semiotic works within the Groupe μ . A significant part of his work within Groupe μ as well as separately has been devoted to the nature of images and visuality in general, notably the *Traité du signe visuel* (1992). He is a former president of the *International Association of Visual Semiotics*.

Alexandra Mouratidou

Alexandra Mouratidou is a doctoral student in Cognitive Semiotics at Lund University. Using a combination of phenomenological analysis and experimental studies, she is demonstrating that what cognitive scientists call “choice blindness” is really a case of “manipulation blindness”. In particular since she has used the choice of pictures in the experiments, her work poses important questions about agency in the interpretation of pictures, both before the act of manipulation, and after it.

Göran Sonesson

Göran Sonesson is Professor Emeritus at the *Division of cognitive semiotics, Lund University* and holds doctorates in general linguistics from Lund and in semiotics from Paris. He has published numerous papers, both theoretic and experimental, on pictorial, cultural, and cognitive semiotics, as well as on the semiotics of communication and translation and the evolutionary foundations of semiosis. Apart from anthologies, his papers have appeared in journals such as *Semiotica*, *Cognitive Semiotics*, *Cognitive Development*, *Sign System Studies*, *Degrés*, *Signa*, *Signata*, *Sign and Society*, *Frontier of Psychology*, etc. His main book-length works are *Pictorial Concepts* (1989), which is a critique

of the critique of iconicity, and *Human Lifeworlds* (2016), which is a study of cultural evolution. His new book, *The Pictorial Extensions of Mind* will be published next year by deGruyter. He was among the founders of the *International Association for Visual Semiotics*, as well as the *International Association for Cognitive Semiotics*.

Morten Tønnessen

Morten Tønnessen is Professor of philosophy at University of Stavanger's Department of social studies, and Vice-Dean of research at Faculty of social sciences. He does research in the fields of biosemiotics, human ecology, human-animal studies, and welfare studies. Tønnessen is Main Editor-in-Chief of Biosemiotics, and the President of the Nordic Association for Semiotic Studies. He has recently written on the notion of agency.

Jordan Zlatev

Jordan Zlatev is Research Director for the Division for Cognitive Semiotics at the Centre for Languages and Literature at Lund University and editor-in-chief of the Public Journal of Semiotics. His research focuses on the nature of language as a semiotic system, in relation to consciousness and other sign systems like gesture and depiction. He is the author of *Situated embodiment: Studies in the emergence of spatial meaning* (1997) and over 90 articles in journals and books.

The International Association for Visual Semiotics (IAVS-AISV) was founded as an association under French law in 1989 in Blois. The aim of the IAVS-AISV is to gather semioticians all over the world who are interested in images and, in general terms, in visual signification, without privileging any particular interpretation of semiotics and without favouring any semiotic tradition. Since 1990, IAVS-AISV has organized 11 conferences, as well as 5 meetings in other frameworks. The conferences took place in Blois, Bilbao, Berkeley, Sao Paulo, Siena, Quebec City, Mexico City, and Lyon, Istanbul, Venice, Buenos Aires, Liège, and Lund.

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