

ZiF-Research Group *Communicating Disaster*

Closing Conference “Dealing with the Disasters of Others”

26-28 January 2012

Presentation Abstract:

Relating Disasters to Space and Time, Practice and Identity
The Contribution of Situated Texts

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When we usually deal with disasters from the viewpoint of communication analysis the communicative parts of the disaster are often reduced to those social events where communication is at the centre of the practice. As a result there is a tendency to overlook those types of communication which are both structurally and functionally characterized by the fact that they are ‘situated’ in physical practices and their material ecologies (and therefore can help us to understand these practices by means of communication analysis).

In my talk I would like to focus especially on ‘situated texts’. The term refers to written linguistic utterances (and other signs shaped for visual perception) that are fixed to material things which cannot be removed; in many cases these things are not only the medium for carrying the utterances but also serve other functions like, for example, that of a barrier. The utterances and things are not only part of places shaped by society and organizations but also embedded in social practices that go far beyond communication, like transporting people or controlling them at security checkpoints. From a linguistic point of view such types of texts have recently found interest (cf. e.g. AUER 2010) since they largely differ from what is usually seen as the characteristics of written text in contrast to oral talk-in-interaction. As RON and SUZIE WONG SCOLLON have shown in their book about “Discourses in Place” (2003) the relation of utterances to material and space links the system of linguistic communication to a lot of other ‘geosemiotic’ resources related to material and space as well. In my talk I would like to show how analyses of situated texts and discourses can systematically contribute to our understanding of disaster, risk and security as regards the dimensions of social practices, space, time and identities (our own as well as the others’).

References:

AUER, PETER (2010): *Sprachliche Landschaften. Die Formung des Raums durch die geschriebene Sprache*. In: DEPPERMAN, ARNULF / LINKE, ANGELIKA (Ed.): *Sprache intermedial. Stimme und Schrift, Bild und Ton*. Berlin / New York: de Gruyter, pp. 271-300 (Institut für deutsche Sprache, Jahrbuch 2009).

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SCOLLON, RONALD / SCOLLON, SUZIE W. (2003): *Discourses in Place. Language in the Material World*. London / New York: Routledge.

For further questions on the conference or the research group,
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