Section:

Beyond Letters: Methodologies and Meanings in Graphic/Visual Communication Systems

Names of coordinators along with contact details:

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Call for papers:

This panel examines innovative methodological approaches to the study of graphic/visual communication systems. The primary focus is on graphic/visual elements that are not necessarily created to encode linguistic elements from a phonic/verbal use of language, but they contribute to meaning-making. While cognitive linguistics and the theory of conceptual metaphor have proven to be particularly productive tools for analyzing graphic and visual sign systems, the panel also seeks to foreground alternative methodologies that offer complementary insights.

Particular attention will be given to how visual features—such as form, shape, typeface, layout, proportion, and spatial organization—contribute to the semantics of graphic artefacts. These elements are not merely decorative or supportive but often play a central role in meaning construction, sometimes surpassing the importance of linguistic content.

By bringing together examples from a range of cultural and historical contexts—including but not limited to ancient Egyptian, East Asian or native American writing systems, contemporary branding strategies, and comic book narratives—the panel aims to showcase the diversity of non-verbal meaning-making strategies across time and space. The goal is to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue accessible to scholars from various fields, including those not specialized in the specific cultural domains discussed.

We invite to submit papers related (but not limited) to the following topics:

1. Interplay Between Graphic Elements and Spatial Composition
- Studies exploring how layout, orientation, or sequencing within a visual field influences semantic interpretation.

2. Conceptual Metaphors, Metonymies, and Synecdoches in Non-Alphabetic Scripts
- Analyses of visual metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and other figurative strategies in graphic communication systems across cultures.

3. Borderline Signs: Between Lexical, Pictorial, and Structural Functions
- Explorations of elements of non-alphabetic scripts such as determinatives, classifiers, graphic patterns, or others that blur the line between image and text.

4. Conceptual and Lexical Challenges in Talking About Visual Communication
- Papers reflecting on terminological gaps, cross-disciplinary borrowings, or the (in)adequacy of existing vocabularies.

5. Typography, Iconicity, and the Materiality of Script
- Analyses focusing on how the visual form of writing systems contributes to or alters meaning

6. Visual Logic in Contemporary Contexts: Comics, Infographics, and Branding
- Contemporary analyses of how sequential art, data visualization, or brand identities use visual logic for persuasive or narrative purposes.

7. Signs Without Sounds: Sign Languages and Silent Graphic Communication Systems
- Case studies of systems naturally, intentionally or functionally disconnected from spoken language (e.g., sign languages, visual mnemonics).