

Prof. Bexte: A Language without Words. Icons in a Globalized World

Whenever we travel – in cars, tubes, trains or aeroplanes – we are confronted with a special type of images: icons. They are meant to indicate what to do, where to go, how to behave in critical situations etc. Most of them look abstract, assuming they might be understood all over the world by everybody from any culture, any language etc. In the 1960ies it was the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead who came up with exactly that idea. Mead and her partner Rudolf Modley urged the United Nations to create a language without words, consisting of icons. She called them »glyphs«. The project failed, though. And meanwhile nobody believes in universal languages any longer. Nevertheless, standardized icons may be found all over the world (for instance emojis). The seminar deals with exactly that situation. – We will discuss the following text:

Margaret Mead / Rudolf Modley: »Communication among all people, everywhere«, in: *Natural History*, vol. 77/7, 1968, pp. 56-63.