

Breast cancer awareness and fundraising campaigns in Sweden from a material-semiotic perspective

Notes on my research at ZtG 15.8 -30.11 2016

My research project is a situated study of the verbal, visual and artefactual expressions for social engagement in breast cancer awareness and fundraising campaigns. The specific case that I am examining is the Pink Ribbon campaigns in Sweden (2015 - 2016), where two main organizing bodies back up the two campaigns, Cancerfonden (The Cancer Foundation) – a research funding organization, and the Breast Cancer Association BRO – a patients' organization.

The questions I address are: How do the campaigns offer and facilitate social engagement in/as a common cause? What role does the materiality of the campaigns play? Are the articulations of the campaigns only textual products of a discourse of commodification and marketization, or do they facilitate – *afford* – other (progressive) social possibilities? Finally, what is the *performative potential* of the campaigns as a social practice?

I approach these questions by studying the implementations of the campaigns graphically, verbally and in video material, but also through displays of material-technical practices such as a reminder app for breast self-examination, which involves the social public in a different way. Overall, I adopt a set of social semiotic tools, meaning that the different expressions of the campaigns – the represented actions, materials and artifacts – account for *semiotic resources*, or possibilities for meaning making. In addition to being material, resources are also social and cultural. Another central concept is *affordances*, which refers to the possible uses of the resources in concrete social and discursive contexts. In other words – in a social semiotic perspective, it is the interests of sign makers that shape and realize discourse. However, studying the campaigns I also emphasize (the need for) a more performative perspective – I argue that the campaigns should not only be seen as realizations of discourse, but that they offer different possibilities for participation and social engagement. I study how various references to (and *uses of*) emotions produce affective resources – building on Sara Ahmed (2006, 2014) but also on studies of the history of emotions (Johannisson, 2009; Ljunggren, 2015), I examine how emotions and affective resources become central in affording social coherence and engagement in the campaigns.

References:

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