



Future Directions in the Humanities and Social Sciences

The Institute of Advanced Study in the Humanities and the Social Sciences organizes guest lectures on innovative topics in the humanities and social sciences. The particular aim of these encounters is to promote the dialogue between various disciplines and especially between the «two cultures». For this purpose, the Institute invites scholars who venture outside their own fields into the territory of the natural sciences and medicine, law, economics, politics and other fields.

Thursday, 13 December 2012, 18:15 – 19:45
Unitobler of the University of Bern, Lerchenweg 36
Room: F023

Mimicry – “Menace” or Mode of Communication?

Prof. Dr. Sabine Sielke, Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn

Mimicry is a central term of biology which, during the last three decades, has gained increasing conceptual and analytical relevance in the humanities and the social sciences. Common to all concepts of mimicry is that they figure as forms and processes of communication, as exchanges of signals between two or more participants operating in a regime of costs and benefits. Defining mimicry as a mode of communication involving forms of transparent imitation and cooperative deception, our Bonn research group “Mimicry as Communication” suggests that mimicry and related phenomena of imitation serve a crucial mediating function in processes of interaction between individual organisms, subjects, social groups, and cultures.

Inspired, in part, by our exchange between literary|cultural studies and biology, ongoing since 2007, our project challenges the assumption, prevalent in cultural studies, that mimicry operates primarily as a strategy of subversion which affirms cultural difference. Instead, our collaboration between literary and cultural studies, linguistics, medicine, and biology accentuates the social and ethical dimension pertaining to phenomena of imitation, e. g. in the contexts of intercultural dialogue and in various modes of interpersonal communication.

In my talk I will, first, present the scope of our collaborative work on mimicry; secondly, focus on the dialogue on mimicry between sensory biology and cultural studies I have been engaged in during the last few years; and thirdly, discuss my own current research on mimicry as a mode of inter- and transdisciplinary dialogue.

Sabine Sielke is Chair of North American Literature and Culture and Director of the North American Studies Program and the German-Canadian Centre in Bonn as well as Associate at the W. E. B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard University and member of the Advisory Board of the Center of Modernist Studies at Zhejiang University, Hangzhou. Her publications include *Reading Rape* (Princeton 2002) and *Fashioning the Female Subject* (Ann Arbor 1997), the series *Transcription*, the (co-)editions *Verschleierungstaktiken: Phänomene von eingeschränkter Sichtbarkeit, Tarnung und Täuschung in Natur und Kultur* (2011), *Orient and Orientalisms in US-American Poetry and Poetics* (2009), *The Body as Interface* (2007), *Gender Talks* (2006), *18x15: amerikanische post:moderne* (2003), *Der 11. September 2001* (2002), *Making America* (2001), *Engendering Manhood* (1998), *Gender Matters* (1997), and *Theory in Practice* (1994) as well as essays on poetry and poetics, modern and post-modern literature and culture, literary and cultural theory, gender and African American studies, popular culture, and the interfaces of cultural studies and the sciences. Her current research projects engage phenomena of memory, mediation, and seriality, the crossroads of the cognitive sciences and cultural studies, narratives of science in fiction, and mimicry as communication.

Institute of Advanced Study
In the Humanities and the
Social Sciences | IASH
Falkenplatz 16
CH-3012 Bern
www.iasn.unibe.ch

u^b

**UNIVERSITÄT
BERN**