

Remembering our dear colleague Uta Sassenberg

Obituary

Uta Sassenberg passed away on Sunday November 20, 2011. Through her death, we lost a very kind, upright and competent colleague.

Since October 2009, Uta Sassenberg worked as an academic employee in the Department of Neurology, Psychosomatic Medicine and Psychiatry of the German Sport University in a research project about alexithymia and gesture within the excellence cluster „Languages of Emotion“. Already shortly after joining our department she fell severely ill, but finished her dissertation and received her doctoral degree in July 2010. Up until last month she was involved in research projects, within the limits of her strength.

After a training as a construction drawer, Uta Sassenberg studied Psychology and Criminology (BSc) at the University of Lincoln, U.K. from 1999 – 2002. A study visit at the Max Plack Institute for Psycholinguistics was followed by a master's degree in Psycholinguistics at the University of Edinburgh, U.K. from 2003 – 2005. As of 2005, Uta Sassenberg worked on her doctorate in the Department of Psychology (Cognitive Psychology) at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, and as of 2007, at the Berlin School of Mind and Brain.

From the perspective of cognitive psychology, Uta Sassenberg made a significant contribution to gesture research. The results of her work are relevant for theory building within gesture research and within cognitive science in general. Her cumulative dissertation „Thinking hands: How co-speech gestures reflect cognitive processes“ provides the first empirical evidence for the „Gestures-as-Simulated-Action“-Model of gesture production. She developed an innovative and multi-methodological design to address her research questions. In doing so she was the first to set spontaneously produced gestures in relation to fluid intelligence and to anatomic findings. Her publications on this issue were featured in leading journals; additional co-authored publications are in preparation.

The diagnosis of a malignant disease hit Uta Sassenberg at a moment in her life when she was just at the beginning of her way – not only in her professional life but also in her private life. It is admirable how she bore her fate, never complaining and always confident. Uta Sassenberg was a passionate researcher and applied herself to gesture research till the end.

Uta Sassenberg aged 36. We will all be missing her very much.

Obituary by Hedda Lausberg