Demonstratives are well-studied in formal semantics and philosophy of language. They are standardly defined as indexical elements that need to be accompanied by a gesture, usually a pointing gesture. They are treated as directly referential with their referent depending on the associated demonstration (Kaplan 1989). Although there exists extensive work on the meaning contribution of demonstratives in semantics and philosophy, the exact nature of the accompanying gesture has generally been ignored within these fields. For instance, it went widely unnoticed that not only pointing gestures, but also iconic gestures can co-occur with demonstratives. Furthermore, the questions of how such accompanying gestures can be assigned meanings and how these meanings interact with the verbal meaning are not investigated in the literature on demonstratives. In addition, research has concentrated mostly on “definite demonstratives” like this or that and has for the most part neglected other demonstratives like German so (but see Ehlich 1986, Umbach & Gust to appear).

In semiotics on the other hand, researchers have focused explicitly on gestures and how their meaning contribution can be integrated into speech (Fricke 2012). Such issues are also discussed in cognitive science and robotics, for instance to support the development of virtual agents capable of multi-modal human-machine interaction (Kopp et al. 2004). In general, there is a growing research community investigating how gesture information interacts with information from the verbal system (McNeill 1992, Kendon 2004, Rieser et al. 2013 among others).

This workshop aims at bringing together research from these different areas – formal semantics and pragmatics, philosophy of language, semiotics, and robotics – to discuss the various views on demonstration and demonstratives from different perspectives and angles, thereby arriving at novel insights for the study of demonstratives and gesture alike.