

SEMIOTICS

SEMINARS · FALL 2001



Center for Semiotics

UNIVERSITY OF AARHUS

Center for Semiotics

UNIVERSITY OF AARHUS

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JUNIOR RESEARCH SEMINAR

Supervision

The supervision classes are primarily used by the students to present and discuss papers and various problems in connection to the studies with the Center for Semiotics. E.g., it is a forum where one can present an idea for an examination paper as well as the fully elaborated paper. The sessions are also used to present recently published scientific articles, theories and hypotheses.

The purpose of the supervision classes is thus to strengthen the students' analytic competences, to offer a forum for mutual inspiration, to increase the individual student's knowledge of what fellow students are working on, and to increase knowledge of new developments in semiotic and cognitive theories.

Further information available at the Secretariat.

COVER ILLUSTRATION:

Jackson Pollock: *Lavender Mist: Number 1*, 1950

Oil on canvas, Oil, enamel, and aluminum on canvas; 221 x 300 cm

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Introduction

by Per Aage Brandt

Semiotics has always been both an inquiry into the nature of signs and—since signs convey meaning—a philosophical field of rational reasoning on world- and meaning-related questions, such as the following:

Is meaning part of the world? Or is it the human mind's own pure invention and therefore not part of the world? Or is meaning part of the mind, which is part of the world? Is meaning the part of the mind which interprets the world, including itself? If so, how does the human mind interpret the world, including itself?

The ontological idea of a given *physical world* had to historically prepare these questions as their necessary cultural prerequisite, a prerequisite in fact developed along with the intellectual activity called science. This idea of a scientifically specifiable 'physicality' had to lead to the problem of understanding meaning, since such a physical realm never just coincides with the experienced realm of being, but rather subtracts from it and lets the experienceable residue be thought of as a mysterious remainder, as an 'imaginary reality' which stays crucial to human life, but now appears as a negatively designated extra-world, as an extra-physical something, left over by the physicalization of the world.

The intriguing paradox has been that this part of 'what there is', which remains while resisting physicality, still has to be real and also has to be imaginary;—*real*: for evidently, we live in a context of narrative intelligibility and share most of it, as language convincingly

shows us when things and states of affairs past and present are agreed or disagreed upon in discourse;—and *imaginary*: for we also know that the regularities of this narrative context do not prevent us from dreaming up, imagining, or inventing things, creating ideas that need not be shared or even believed by ourselves in order to be what they are and to be there 'with us'. We might say that meaning is formally real and substantially imaginary. How is this possible?

There are at least two standard solutions. Either we experientially, phenomenologically, live in a *spiritual supplement to* physicality, or we experientially, phenomenologically, live in a world of mental *interpretations of* physicality (and of its interpretations). The former, 'spiritual' option is counter-intuitive, however, since it excludes the possibility of doubt and disagreement—or only allows this manifestation of 'spiritual freedom' on the grounds of supplementary explanatory notions of (exceptional) evil or madness—, whereas the latter, rationally more plausible, 'mental' option then calls, on the other hand, for a technical elucidation of the crucial principles of *interpretation* (by the mind) and *interpretability* (of the world).

Note that the term "interpretation" is used as part of a metaphor (by the way, there is nothing wrong with being used as part of a metaphor). Its source is a general concept of translation and mediation between two human languages, while the target is our problem of how 'physis' and 'anti-physis' (spirit), or 'meta-physis'

(mind), can coexist in what we call the World. According to the metaphor—following its inference—the two sides are similarly constructed in a certain respect (both are instances of ‘Language’). The metaphor does not tell us how this comes about; it just makes us think of the problem in this way.

The ‘naturalistic’ hypothesis of meaning being an *interpretation OF*—as opposed to the ‘spiritualistic’ view of meaning as a *supplement TO*—is adopted by philosophers like the mathematicians René Thom and Jean Petitot, and by most researchers in cognitive semantics. There are, however, many different versions of this semiotic ‘naturalism’.

One is Thom’s and, roughly, Lakoff/Johnson’s: there is a macro-physical, or ‘pheno-physical’, domain of objectively given spatio-temporal and causal states and processes; these have given formal properties that our minds pick up and interiorise, if they significantly affect our bodily interaction with them; this interiorisation is *schematism*. The gap separating ‘physis’ and ‘meta-physis’ is thus bridged by ‘pheno-physis’. The rest is metaphor. The rest includes affect, notional meaning, deontic values, linguistic and otherwise semiotic behavior.

Another is Talmy’s and Fauconnier/Turner’s: there is a neurally specialized mental function which can make incoherent, or partial ‘ceptions’ (perceptions, conceptions) into coherent meanings by filling in from a stock of mentally available ready-mades that language helps us store as ‘fictions’; the result is an ongoing process of creative construction that blends the fictive and the referential ingredients into homogeneous, meaningful semantic wholes (a semantic “kitchen”). The central assumption is that there is a mental “cooking-pot”, a

cognitive mechanism of conceptual integration that neutralizes the difference between semantic domain addresses, modal values, provenances etc. of the ingredients and treats them all alike. The mind is generous. Here, the gap between physicality and meaning is bridged by a neuro-semantic integration; metaphor is just a special case.

Still another is the version to be found in contemporary *cognitive semiotics*: intersubjectivity and human interaction are considered especially important foundational aspects of human experience, and are considered as distinct from any other grounding ‘input’ source. Intentionality, shared attention, volition, communicative and performative regulations, expressive organizations, gestures, enunciation, etc. are original, underived phenomena that contribute decisively to the intelligibility of any objective input. Here, causal and intentional structures, however different, are equally basic and equally active in the evolutionary and developmental structuring of the mind. Thus, a number of themes known from phenomenology play a crucial role in this setting of the drama. It is notably assumed that human behavior itself can be ‘naturalized’. This part of our experience is not just a result of our own “spiritual freedom”, also called our “historicity”, but is deeply rooted in our affective, emotional biology and is structured by the interactive properties of our subjectivity. Consciousness as such is a biological fact, but *human* consciousness seems to specialize in inter-mental cooperation; it “addresses” other minds and “attunes” to other minds addressing it. Therefore, it can think in unfilled arguments: semantic miracles like the pronominal quantifiers—terms like **something**—testify to this foundational particularity. Interrogative attitudes,

and hence the frozen questions we call “problems”, are based on this capacity. Unfilled arguments are (some)things we hope to have filled by others. Individuals can ‘have them in mind’ while waiting for information to be retrieved from the world. Schematic structures are relational networks whose terms and nodes are such unfilled slots, to be provided by communication or experience. Communication includes transfer of experience from mind to mind; it also creates shared action and situational interaction, namely when the schematic slots are filled by the communicating persons themselves. In such cases, we have ‘situations’, ‘framed’ by the filled schemas, and possibly ‘reframed’ by new schemas emerging from new behaviors. And since human behavior is particularly unstable—it changes much more, faster, more often and more radically, than the doings of any other agents or objects we know—behavioral schemas constantly vary; but they are also particularly fast and well processed when perceived, memorized, and reactivated (i. e. learned). This is a condition that enriches the resources of our minds and opens them to the world as if by offering us a *literary* attitude to it: *behavioral structure* as described in literary uses of language or rendered by drama and theatrical gestures and ‘representations’ becomes our main source

of conceptual tools for grasping and thinking of any processes and states in the world, whether experienced, reconstructed or construed theoretically at any level of generality (i. e. of abstraction). Generalization, as such, is a natural tendency of the mind, because communication has trained it for rapid categorization of behavior. Thus, the mind basically interprets the events of the world *as if* they were behavioral phenomena; it understands them ‘in terms of’ meaning derived from things happening between self and other in situations; it treats the world as if it were a web of communications.

On these grounds, *interpretation* can elucidate the mind-world-meaning problem. Semiotic research in the broadest possible sense is required if we want technically detailed accounts of the implied bio-psycho-socio-glosso-neuro-phenomenological aspects of meaning. This research is possible, as long as the grounding philosophy can stay clear of spiritualism. Hopefully the Humanities of the future will more fully emancipate themselves from theology, and to a larger extent take part in the rational enterprise of studying humans. No other area of study could contribute as much to the development of our knowledge of Meaning as it is actually, historically experienced and expressed.

Signs, Meaning, and Reference

Peer Bundgård | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 13:15 - 15:00. Auditorium 221.**

Ever since Antiquity, semiotics has been defined as the “science” or the “doctrine” of signs; i.e. the study of the way in which something essentially stands for something else and is construed as standing for something else: say, a word for an idea, a proposition for a thought, or an object (a footprint in the sand) for another object (a man). Modern semiotics, however, could hardly be characterized as a science of signs *stricto sensu*. Rather, in Algirdas Julien Greimas’ founding work, semiotics is considered a science of the fundamental properties of meaning, regardless of what sign triggers the meaning. Neither does current cognitive semiotics, or cognitive linguistics, focus on the “semiological” or “sign-dependent” nature of meaning. In cognitive linguistics, a sign system as language is instead considered as expressing or specifying pre-linguistical structures and cognitive procedures of meaning-construction.

In this seminar, we will take up yet again some of the original semiotic considerations on the nature of signs. We will attempt to show that, at least in its modern manifestation, (E. Husserl, C. S. Peirce), semiotics aims at articulating a science of signs, a doctrine of meaning, and a theory of reference, and that the intention of characterizing signs, sign systems, and interpretation of signs is compatible with a pre-linguistic conception of meaning. In contradistinction to this idea, other, more restrained, conceptions will be presented,

including Umberto Eco’s early attempt to confine semiotics to the study of culturally determined relations between signs and meaning, and, as a counterpart to this, G. Frege’s anti-psychological restriction of “semiotics” to the study of the relations between meaning and reference.

PROGRAMME

Sept 12 & 26: Edmund Husserl: 1st Logical Investigation (Text no. 9 in Reader “Kognition og Semiotik”).

Oct. 10 & 24: Edmund Husserl: 4th Logical Investigation (Master copy available at the Center).

Nov. 11: Maurice Merleau-Ponty: “Sur la phénoménologie du langage” (Master copy, French/Danish, available at the Center).

Nov. 21: Gottlob Frege: “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (Master copy, German/English/Danish, available at the Center).

Dec. 5: C.S. Peirce: “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs” (Text no. 2 in Reader “Kognition og Semiotik”).

Dec. 19: Umberto Eco: “Theory of Codes” (Text no. 3 in Reader “Kognition og Semiotik”).

Cognitive Linguistics

Peer Bundgård & Svend Østergaard | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 13:15 - 15:00. Auditorium 221.**

In cognitive linguistics, language is not understood as referring to objective structures in the world; rather, language consists of symbolic units, which in one way or another activate a conceptual structure. This is the case, e.g., in C. Fillmore's frame semantics. The conceptual structure is, of course, related to the phenomenal world, but not in a one-to-one manner, because the former depends on the speaker's viewpoint. As an exemplification of this, we intend to show how *tense* is conceived of in cognitive linguistics. For instance, the past tense does not imply that the event referred to is "objectively" in the past, but rather that the speaker adopts a viewpoint from which the focus of the sentence is in the past. We intend to show the implications of this theory for textual meaning.

At least two questions arise in cognitive linguistics: 1) does language activate conceptual structures in any systematic way? 2) what are the properties of the conceived phenomenal world that language picks up?

As regards the first question, construction grammar replies that the same syntactic form seems to activate the same schematic meaning, irrespective of the lexical elements. For instance: "he sneezed the napkin off the table" conveys a sense of causation, although this is not implied by the verb *sneeze*.

The second question is, of course, immense. We have chosen excerpts from the work of L. Talmy to focus on how the *figure/ground* organization of percep-

tion and the structure of *attention* have a bearing on language. A reason for this focus is that figure/ground and attention have great significance for other cognitive systems as well, for instance, memory, the structure of narration, and the human inferential system. Using Langacker's work as reference, we also intend to look at how language reflects the mind's ability to extend a boundary around a portion of time or space in order to conceive this portion as a single unit. Finally, in the last session we will present a joint paper (with F. Stjernfelt) on the analysis of compounds.

PROGRAMME

Sept. 13: Introduction. M. Tomasello: *Cognitive Linguistics*.

Sept. 27: Tense and Mood. G. Fauconnier: *Mappings in Thought and Language*, pp. 72-98.

Oct. 11: Frames. C. Fillmore: *Frame Semantics*.

Oct. 25: Construction Grammar & Blending. G. Fauconnier & M. Turner: *Blending as a Central Process of Grammar*.

Nov. 8: Figure and Ground. L. Talmy: *Figure and Ground in Language*.

Nov. 22: Windows of attention. L. Talmy: *The Windowing of Attention in Language*.

Dec. 6: Objects and events. R. Langacker: *Nouns and Verbs*.

Dec. 20: *Compounds*. Paper by F. Stjernfelt, P. Bundgård and Svend Østergaard.

All texts are available for copying at the center.

Signs for Sale

Organized by Henrik Dresbøll | **Tuesdays in seminar weeks, 10:15 - 12:00. Auditorium 221.**

This seminar examines and discusses some of the signs for sale in our everyday environment, i.e. advertising, design, brands, and market-related communication in general.

Whether intended or not, we can say that Sidney Levy was one of the historical fathers of the idea of combining marketing and semiotics. In an article from 1951, he said: "People buy products not only for what they can *do*, but also for what they *mean*". From a semiotic point of view, this sentence hits the nail on the head: what, why, and how is meaning produced on the market? In trying to answer this pragmatically, but also theoretically important question, we will attempt to examine and analyse different types of meaning-production within the marketplace. For example: internal and external communication in organisations, choices of metaphors, design profiles, the aesthetics of various logograms, etc.

The approach to such a complex symbolic and semiotic order must necessarily be manifold and interdisciplinary: the analysis of metaphors in cognitive semantics; theory of reception, and marketing theory in general; IT and cognition on non-biological substrates; social theory of organisations as autopoietic systems; general theory of communication; and branding.

PROGRAMME

- Sept. 11: Introduction, *Henrik Dresbøll*, MA student.
Sept. 25, Dec. 4: IT and Cognition, *Mikkel Holm Sørensen*, PhD student.
Oct. 9: Advertising and Metaphors, *HD*.
Oct. 23: Organisations as Autopoietic Systems, *Ole Thyssen*, professor.
Nov. 6: Visual Semiotics and Design, *Kjerstin Vedel*, MA.
Nov. 20: Relevance and Branding, *HD*.
Dec. 4: Reader-Response Theory, *Søren Askegaard*, Associate professor.
Dec. 18: A Cognitive Approach to Marketing Semiotics, *HD*.

RECOMMENDED LITERATURE

- Umiker-Sebeok, J. (ed.): *Marketing and Semiotics*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1987.
Alsted, C. et.al (ed.): *Marketing and Semiotics*. Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 1991.
Buhl, C. og Dahl, H. (in Danish): *Marketing og Semiotik*. København: Akademisk Forlags Semiotikserie, (1993), 1996.

The Stratified Mind

Peer Bundgård & Svend Østergaard | **Fridays in seminar weeks, 10:15 - 12:00. Auditorium 221.**

The concept “psycho-” in the title does not, contrary to what common usage might lead us to believe, refer to more or less aberrant, psychologically conditioned semiotic behaviour. It stems from ancient Greek, *psyché*, where it means: vital force, soul, or consciousness and mind.

In the original Greek notion of *psyché*, we find a simple reference to a complex subject: *psyché* is not only consciousness or self-awareness, it also refers to a broader internal, dynamical system—the “vital forces”—of which consciousness is a part. In recent studies of consciousness, we often find the same stratified conception of the human *psyché*: on the one hand, self-awareness and consciousness proper, on the other hand the overall psycho-physical system of not-necessarily conscious processes, cognitive mechanisms, background processing, and, eventually, their neuro-physiological and neuro-biological foundations which underlie and encompass self-awareness. Generally, this broader psycho-physical system is referred to as the Mind.

In this seminar, we will introduce recent conceptions of the stratified mind. We will develop the possible relations between self-awareness (phenomenological consciousness) and unconscious background cognition; and we will evoke various neuro-scientists’ hypotheses as to the latter’s neuro-physiological foundation. One of our basic assumptions will be that the fundamental strata of the Mind are causally related but relatively

autonomous, in the sense that none of the higher order levels (say, “phenomenological consciousness” proper) can be exhaustively reduced to its causal foundation. Instead, we will consider the different levels of the mind as emergent higher order features of the biological system constituting their physical cause.

PROGRAMME

Sept. 14: Lakoff & Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*: chapt. 7: pp. 94-117.

Sept. 28: G. Edelman, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*: pp. 99-146.

Oct. 10: J. Searle, *Mind, Language and Society*: pp. 39-83.

Oct. 26: G. Edelman vs. J. Searle, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*: pp. 211-252 & J. Searle, *The Mystery of Consciousness*, pp. 37-51.

Nov. 9: V. Ramachandran, *Phantoms in the Brain*: pp. 174-211.

Nov. 23: A. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*: chapt. 1.

Dec. 7: A. Damasio, *The Feeling of What Happens*: chapt. to be specified

Dec. 12: F. Varela & E. Thompson, “Color Vision”.

(Master copies available at the Center.)

Cognition and Semiotics

Svend Østergaard | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 10:15 - 12:00. Auditorium 221.**

In this seminar we will treat the cognitive foundation of meaning and reference. It is a tenet of cognitive science that meaning cannot be analysed independently of the psychological and social processes through which it is constituted, including such phenomena as perception, attention, conceptualisation, categorization, schemas, discourse context, social interaction etc. We will therefore focus on these subjects in the seminar.

The first topic will be the relation between perception and conception. This is a very complicated topic, because we cannot understand perception as a simple feed-forward process independent of conceptual meaning. For instance, the same patch of colour is judged to be redder if a person is told that it comes from a tomato than if told that it comes from an apple. Therefore, sensation seems to be influenced by our interpretation of the world, i.e., by conceptual meaning.

In discussing this problem we will take our point of departure in L. Talmy: *Fictive Motion in language and 'Ception'*. This text will be treated in some detail, but further elementary background knowledge about perception might be useful. For instance, G. W. Humphreys: *The process of visual object recognition* and Cees van Leeuwen: *Perception*.

Of course, perception and conception are related to categorization, and for this topic we will use F. Ungerer & H. J. Schmid: *An introduction to cognitive linguistics*, pp. 1-113, as background reading, but literature on

categorization abounds, one famous example is G. Lakoff: *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. What Categories Reveal about the Mind*.

A third theme will revolve around the notion of *schema*. We will first treat the notion generally, under the assumption that schematic understanding is experientially grounded; for this J. M. Mandler: "How to Build a Baby: II. Conceptual Primitives" is useful reading. Next, we will study topological schemas with M. Johnson: *The Body in the Mind*, pp. 65-137, as reference text, and finally, dynamic schemas, for which G. Lakoff: *Philosophy in the Flesh*, pp. 171-234, is required background knowledge. The lectures will not, however, follow these texts pedantically, but will digress into various geometric and dynamic aspects of schemas.

Finally, it is not always possible to relate human meaning structures to bodily experience. If that were the case, we would not have jokes, poetry, cartoons, or even science. The theory of blending seems to be an appropriate tool to account for higher order meaning. In the last lecture, we will touch upon this topic, with S. Coulson and T. Oakley: "Blending basics" as appropriate background reading.

All texts except Lakoff: *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* will be available as master copies at the center. All the available texts except Cees van Leeuwen: *Perception* are considered obligatory reading.

PROGRAMME

Sept. 12 & 26: Perception/conception

Oct. 10 & 24: Categorization

Nov. 7 & 21, Dec. 5: Cognitive Schemas

Dec. 19: Blending

INTRODUCTION TO SEMIOTICS

Introduction to Semiotics

Varii | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 10:15 - 12:00. Auditorium 221.**

Senior students (junior researchers) will give a series of lectures on selected themes and issues covering an important part of the semiotic and cognitive landscape as it appears today, as well as the elementary notions, models, and problems that newcomers will need to understand.

Jacob Aagaard, student of Cognitive Semiotics and originator of this initiative, explains the idea:

”The world is a big place, with a multitude of semiotic theories and methods. In order to better understand these, we need to acquire considerable fundamental knowledge. As the students at the Center have many different backgrounds, it is impossible to predict what everyone does or does not know. For this reason, this introduction, given by alternating volunteers throughout the year, will help you acquire the necessary basics; a wide range of subjects will be presented and

discussed—from basic semio-grammar and mental space analysis to theory of evolution and neuroscience.

We also plan to publish short essays on the Center’s web page, corresponding to the individual lectures.”

PROGRAMME

Sept. 13: General Grammar

Sept. 27: Mental Spaces

Oct. 11: Metaphor Theory

Oct. 25: Cognitive Models

Nov. 8: Dynamic Schemas

Nov. 22: Catastrophe Theory

Dec. 6: Narratology

Dec. 20: Semantic Domains

S E M I N A R C A L E N D A R

September

Tuesday 11	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 12	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 13	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Research Meeting
Friday 14	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		
Tuesday 25	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 26	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 27	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	
Friday 28	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		

October

Tuesday 9	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 10	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 11	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Research Meeting
Friday 12	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		
Tuesday 23	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 24	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 25	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	
Friday 26	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		

November

Tuesday 9	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 10	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 11	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Research Meeting
Friday 12	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		
Tuesday 20	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 21	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 22	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	
Friday 23	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		

December

Tuesday 4	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 5	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 6	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Research Meeting
Friday 7	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		
Tuesday 18	10-12: Marketing and Semiotics		
Wednesday 19	10-12: Cognition and Semiotics	13-15: General Semiotics	
Thursday 20	10-12: Introduction to Semiotics	13-15: Cognitive Linguistics	
Friday 21	10-12: Psycho-semiotics		