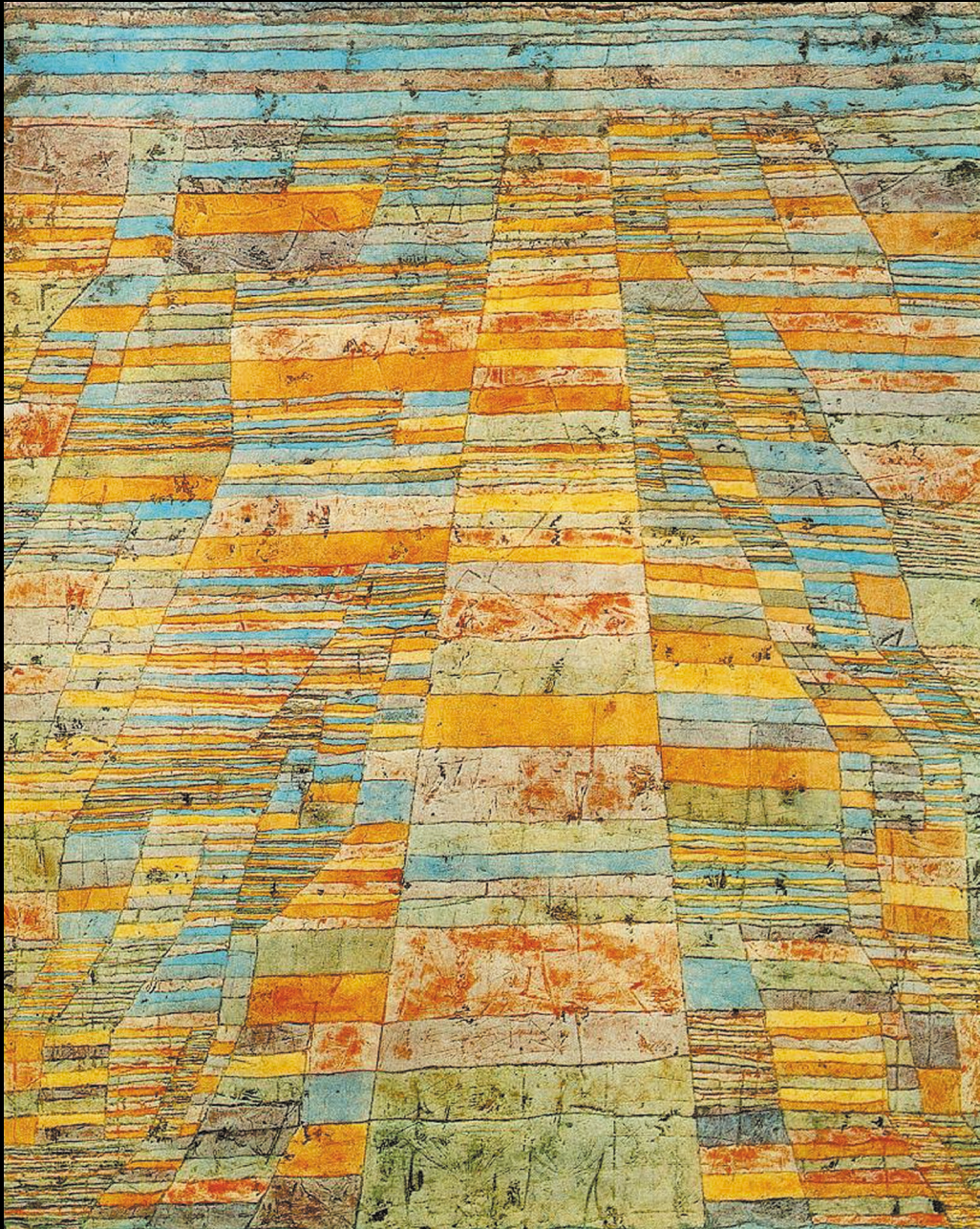


SEMIOTICS

FALL 2003



PAUL KLEE: HIGHWAYS AND BYWAYS, 1929

Center for Semiotics

UNIVERSITY OF AARHUS

Introduction

by Per Aage Brandt

Imagine a discipline where it is relevant to discuss and analyze Magritte or Bonnard the whole morning, then Spinoza in the afternoon, then Charlie Parker the next day, and Joyce, followed by Bush-Blair-Fogh and the new holy oil wars, followed by the grammar of nominal compounds compared to that of genitive compositions, plus the art of interface design as displayed on your computer, modelled in terms of mental space networks, before sunset that day; then the nature of human symbolization, and the theories of consciousness, memory, and emotions, before the weekend. This could be a typical week at the *Center for Semiotics*.*

The overarching goal, as the blending fathers M. Turner and G. Fauconnier would say, is to provide some general understanding of the human production of *meaning*. This is an actually existing discipline, it is called semiotics, and it is a project of theory and analysis of the fundamentals of the part of reality which is not physical matter, but which nevertheless seems sufficiently real to be able to dominate our lives completely and for example make us fear the end of human presence on the planet, or make us rejoice in the happiness of living in the best of all worlds, or both: the reality of our minds and its communicable contents, our virtually or actually shared imaginations, beliefs, fears, fantasies, forms of practical knowledge, history, science, philosophy..., in short, culture, stabilized products of human *cognition*.

Cognitive semiotics is the discipline that studies the way humans cognize their world and find meaning in it; and the meaning-based way humans then invent societal forms, cultures, civilizations, sublime refinements or radical atrocities, still based on meaning and always bound to vary with the material and immaterial conditions of human thinking: our bodily existence; the design of our perception and concept formation; the styles and techniques of seeking food and shelter, and of mating, fighting, celebrating, living and dying; the development of language- or sign-based forms of

communication; the state of our symbolic storage forms and techniques for memorizing and sharing experiences; etc.

So what *is* meaning, and *is* there any? (Answer the last question first :) There is a format in our minds that makes it possible to dream and to speak, to think and to feel, and in general, to *mean* – i. e. to know what you are thinking of and thus to intend what you are communicating. This format or general phenomenological design of human minds is, we assume, what meaning means. It has a neural underpinning that cognitive sciences are eager to specify; and it has a ‘spiritual’ clothing when appearing on the stage of consciousness where we all meet it. We can study it in both modes, at least when we are free to do so, from spiritual constraints imposed by intolerance and violence or misery and impotence, and from behavioral reductionism and its denials of the value of ‘introspection’.

Semiotics is the inter-discipline aiming at an unrestricted study of the human reality. It is mainly restricted by the limits of actual knowledge and our interpretation of it. Therefore, since all knowledge is sign-based, *signs* and their interpretations must be central epistemological concerns of semiotic research. But in the perspective of human cognition, signs are themselves based on *things* – they are indeed aspects of things – and the ways in which things are framed by situations or cross-situational categorizations and classifications, naturally anchored in our own interaction with the world; therefore, a cognitive semiotics also has to attend to problems of ontology. All the good old *quid est* questions: what do we mean by ‘object’, what is a ‘thing’, an ‘event’, an ‘act’, a ‘situation’, a ‘frame’, a ‘process’... , are to be asked again, fearlessly if possible, in an empirical key. What do we mean by X? Such a question is an indirect but often useful way to obtain empirical knowledge of the underlying problem of *what it is* to mean something. Instead of nothing.

* Seminars take place every other week; this plan should make it easier for students from other places and universities to participate. Please note that it is practically impossible to study semiotics via correspondence and through postal contact only. For intellectual reasons, you will have to attend the seminars physically.

Categories, Concepts, and Lexical Semantics

Svend Østergaard | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 11:00 - 13:00.** Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

This course is an elementary introduction to cognitive linguistics. As a basic text book we will use W. Croft and D. A. Cruse: *Cognitive Linguistics*, available at the internet address: lings.ln.man.ac.uk/Info/staff/WAC/.

The first part of the book deals with general principles of cognitive linguistics. It is our aim to understand these principles and also to treat some of the topics in greater details; for instance, how language is related to the *attentional system* and how a (fictive) *viewpoint* is construed in language. Additional literature will be presented during the course concerning these topics.

The second part of the book deals with lexical semantics. Chapter 5 treats the notions of sense boundaries, facets of senses (the two different senses of *book* in *an interesting book* and *a red book*), and microsenses.

The chapters 6 and 7 present a dynamic construal approach to sense relations, based on the assumption that words do not contain sense-units but are means to construe a sense in a given context. *Part-whole relations*, *oppositeness*, *complementarity*, and *antonymy* are aspects of the regularity with which sense relations are construed in language. Three sessions will be devoted to these problems.

The course will continue in the spring 2004 where we will examine causal and aspectual representations. The ultimate goal is to understand how the semantics at the lexical and the clausal levels are integrated into a global understanding of the text.

Models of Meaning

Per Aage Brandt | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 14:00 - 17:00.** Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

The standard models of sign relations, semiotic functions, or meaning in general are generally insufficient, and most of them suffer from shortcomings due to relativistic and nominalistic mindsets. A realistic and scientifically viable theory of meaning and signification should include perspectives developed by cognitive research and prepare for an unlimited science of the human mind, of the human societal cultures, and of the general semiotics of human behavior. However, cognitive models in linguistics, semantics, psychology, anthropology, philosophy etc. are not coherently

adjusted and remain uncoordinated and often mutually contradictory. Most also suffer from limitations inherited from analytic philosophy. The project of a *cognitive semiotics* is committed to the task of elaborating the structural semiotic models, connecting the confused findings and thinkings of the cognitive field, and integrating the essential contributions of both. The seminar will present episodes of this process, with a special focus on models of language and models of 'culture and society'.

Construction and Representation in Art

Per Aage Brandt | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 12:00 - 14:00.** Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

The great art psychologist Ernst Gombrich's characteristic rejection of 20th century modernism in art – in *The Preference for the Primitive* – illustrates the need for a new cognitive approach to the understanding of art. Instead of subscribing to a polemic opposition of a modernist aesthetics of concept and construction and a classicist aesthetics of illusion and representation, I suggest that we should study the complementarity of construction and representation in art universally, based on the direct semiotic connection between the *technique* displayed in the construction of the work of art as a material object, and the *motif* implied as a metaphysical horizon beyond its referential representation. The cor-

responding semantic networks, in terms of mental space theory, will be presented and confronted with phenomenological evidence from modern painting, sculpture, architecture, and music.

The possible evolutionary role of art as a *grounding practice* of symbolization – cf. the psychologist and philosopher Merlin Donald's works – will be discussed in the framework of such a semiotic of art, to develop on the background of the historical challenge of modernism and the constitutive hypothesis of an aesthetic semiosis.

Emotions, Memory, and Language

Svend Østergaard | **Fridays in seminar weeks, 10:00 - 12:00.** Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

This is a course in general cognition with special focus on emotions. In the first part we will discuss the philosophy of emotions, how emotions have been categorized, the metaphoric representations of emotions, and the schemas used to describe them.

In the second part of the course we will look into the relation between emotions and more specialized cognitive areas such as memory, language, volition, and decision making.

Papers by A. Baddeley, D. L. Schacter, A. Wierzbicka, and V. Gallese will be consulted in regard to these topics. A. R. Damasio: *Descartes' Error* is useful for understanding the role of emotions in decision making and in the social integration of the subject.

Finally we will discuss the neural underpinning of emotions. J. LeDoux: *The Emotional Brain* is recommended for this purpose.

Introduction to Neuroscience

Mikkel Wallentin | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 9:00 - 11:00.** Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Cognitive semiotic research is increasingly inspired by the development in the neurosciences. But in order to utilize the knowledge generated in this field, an elementary understanding of key aspects of brain function is necessary. This course gives an ultra short tour de force introduction to the fundamentals of neuroscience. The textbook by Mark F. Bear and colleagues: *Neuroscience – Exploring the Brain* will be used as a point of departure. It is recommended that participants in the course acquire this book.

1. Physiology of the Brain Part I: *Neurons and Neuronal Transmission* (Textbook chapters 2-6)
2. Physiology of the Brain Part II: *The Structure of the Nervous System* (Textbook chapter 7)
3. *Vision* (Textbook chapters 9-10)
4. *Audition and the Somatic Sensory System* (Textbook chapter 11)
5. *Motion* (Textbook chapters 13-14)
6. *Emotion* (Textbook chapter 18)
7. *Language and Attention* (Textbook chapter 20)
8. *Memory* (Textbook chapters 23-24)

SEMINAR IN NARRATIVE SEMIOTICS

“Storytelling” as Strategic Communication

Lene Fogsgaard, Børge Fogsgaard, and Svend Østergaard | **Sep. 11, Oct. 9, Nov 6, and Dec 4.. Auditorium 221.**

Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Connecting research in the science of humanities and experience in the private job sector and public administration, this seminar applies theories in cognitive linguistics and textual analysis to the realm of “storytelling” within public and private businesses and organizations. Storytelling functions as a human management strategy in businesses that seek to optimize the distribution and utilization of knowhow, to revise the organizational structure and to redefine values, plans of action, expected outcomes and long-term goals, and is becoming increasingly popular due to its persuasive power. In dealing with possible (and likely) resistance to organizational alterations and adjustment of job definitions, promoting a conceptualization of the planned directional shift within a narrative framework is apparently more efficient than argumentation based on statistic documentation or sociological facts, since it explicates in a meaningful way changes that might otherwise, in their unmasked form, seem undesirable to workers, who, from a business management perspective, are complicated subjects in that they are intentional agents, powered not by batteries but by representations and evaluations of these representations. Such assets, equipped with minds and hence also mind-sets, are more valuable when motivated by systematic

conceptualizations in which they figure as protagonistic actants engaged in some worthwhile task – whose realization serves to reinforce their individual as well as group identity – than by the obligation to perform tasks presented as authoritative commands (i.e. imperative speech-acts). Not much is known about the reasons why this cognitive euphemization has proven so successful; most discourse on the matter concerns how it functions, how it is best promoted and how results are achieved (cf. Stephen Dennings, former director of knowledge management at the World Bank, author of *The Springboard. How Storytelling Ignites Action in Knowledge-Era Organizations*, Butterworth-Heinemann 2001, et al.). Using case-stories (possibly including short presentations by seminar participants) and producing so-called ‘springboards’ (representing stories by visual means), we will evaluate the proposed principles of narrativity in current theories in Human Resource Management research and the argumentation supporting them, drawing on a dialogue between literature on storytelling and literature in semiotics, cognitive linguistics (e.g. metaphor theory, mental space theory, theories on narrativity), literary analysis and speech-act theory.

Research Meetings

Center for Semiotics has regular research meetings in which invited guests give a paper relevant for the work at the center. The idea is to have an open discussion on the background of the presented paper. The programme for the fall semester is the following:

September 25, 15:15 - 18:00. Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Peter Widell, University of Aarhus

Reality, Eventuality and the Emergence of Propositional Attitudes

October 23, 15:15 - 18:00. Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Henning Nølke, University of Aarhus:

The Scandinavian Theory of Linguistic Polyphony

November 20, 15:15 - 18:00. Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Lene Schøsler, University of Copenhagen:

Are valency patterns cognitive patterns?

December 18, 15:15 - 18:00. Location will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

Frank Kjørup, University of Copenhagen:

Title to be announced

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

SEPTEMBER

Wednesday 10	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 11	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Storytelling	
Friday 12	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

Wednesday 24	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 25	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Research Meeting	
Friday 26	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

OCTOBER

Wednesday 8	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 9	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Storytelling	
Friday 10	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

Wednesday 22	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 23	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Research Meeting	
Friday 24	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

NOVEMBER

Wednesday 5	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 6	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Storytelling	
Friday 7	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

Wednesday 19	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 20	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Research Meeting	
Friday 21	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

DECEMBER

Wednesday 3	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 4	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Storytelling	
Friday 5	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

Wednesday 17	9-11: Introduction to Neuroscience	11-13: Cognitive Linguistics	14-17: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 18	12-14: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-18: Research Meeting	
Friday 19	10-12: Mind and Cognition		

Please note: Locations for the seminars will be announced later on: www.hum.au.dk/semiotics

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PLEASE NOTE OUR NEW ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE NO. – FROM SEPTEMBER 1, 2003

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