

SEMIOTICS

SPRING 2004



SANDRO BOTTICELLI: RITRATTO DI GIOVANE UOMO. C. 1460-85

Center for Semiotics
UNIVERSITY OF AARHUS

Making Sense

Per Aage Brandt | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 15:00 - 18:00. Room 390.**

Semiotics is dedicated to developing the study of meaning. This study is diverse, and has as many branches as there are ways in which humans can ‘make sense’ of their world. General semiotics studies the philosophical conditions of ‘sense-making’. It searches for the most elementary questions, such as: What is it at all to make sense? What is a sign? Why are we making sense and using signs? How do we (humans) distinguish signs from everything else? What (sorts of) signs *are* there? Where does language come into the picture?

Meaning and Mind, Cognition and Consciousness – these are among the classic pairs of notions to be discussed. Current research and theories on these matters, and correlating experiential phenomena (internal events: thinking, feeling, imagining) and bodily processes (external events: activities and states), tend to include the pair Culture and Communication in the field of cognitive studies,

even of the fundamental ‘Human Nature’: we are *naturally cultural*: intersubjectively connected and developing variable connections within the limits of possible mental integrative operations and the available semantic domains of our reality. We culturally strive for significance and significant ‘difference’ within our shared capacities – obtaining conflicting meanings in our naturally rather similar minds, conflicting conceptualizations in rather similar consciousnesses, cultural differentiations in basic natural sameness, and discontinuities within a semio-cognitive continuity that nevertheless frames a shared ‘life world’, a stable human reality which is our common ground.

The spring semester’s discussions will partly be based on Brandt, P. Aa., *Spaces, Domains, and Meaning, Essays in Cognitive Semiotics*, Coll. European Semiotics, Peter Lang Ed., Berne 2004.

Art and Mind

Per Aage Brandt | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 13:00 - 15:00. Room 390.**

Art is an important concern of cognitive and semiotic studies, because it offers invaluable instances of formal and semantic intertwinings, manifestations of intensely elaborated expressions and meanings, and thereby constitutes a unique window into the human mind. – Art is of course important in and of itself since it constitutes a considerable part of the field of the humanities; semio-cognitive methods and approaches contribute to the general inquiry into its works and principles.

In this seminar, we will compare the more semiotic (expressive) and the more cognitive (content) aspects of pictorial art, poetry, and music, exemplified by selected

international material – and in parallel, we will discuss some speculations and experimental results of current semio-aesthetic and neuro-aesthetic research.

Among the analytic tools frequently activated in our study of the semiotic architectures of works of art will be the models of enunciation and discourse forms, of mental spaces, blending, and dynamic-schematic relevance. The modelling – the art of analyzing art – will often also be discussed as a special challenge, since art is so ‘difficult’ and appears to ‘resist’ general attempts at understanding, perhaps more than any other genre of human communication, including even jurisdiction...

SEMINAR IN NEUROSEMIOTICS

Language and Brain

Mikkel Wallentin | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 10:00 - 12:00. Room 390.**

The development of neuroimaging techniques, such as Positron Emission Tomography (PET) and functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) has revolutionised the way, psychophysical investigations can be carried out. Scanning experiments within these paradigms has provided the world with a large amount of data on the relation between language faculties and the brain. In this course we will take a closer look into the results of these investigations and the models for language processing they entail. Among

other things, we shall investigate the early steps of language processing, such as speech production, and phonological- and orthographical processing. We shall also look into experiments involving sign languages. The course includes a visit to Center for Functionally Integrative Neuroscience (CFIN) at Aarhus University Hospital, where functional brain imaging research is being carried out. A detailed program and references will follow on the first day. No prior knowledge of brain imaging is required.

SEMINAR IN MIND AND COGNITION

Memory, Imagery and Concepts

Svend Østergaard | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 10:00 - 12:00. Room 390.**

This course concerns the particular cognitive functions such as perception, attention, memory, imagery, linguistic competence, social competence, etc., as well as the more general question of how to understand the relation between human phenomenology and brain functioning. The lesson from brain research is that what is experienced as unitary at the phenomenological level is in fact separated into several functional parts at the neuronal level. This raises fundamental questions of what a unitary experience is. In the first half of

this semester we will concentrate on the function of memory, mainly by consulting the work of D. L. Schacter, and in the second half we will deal with imagery, where one of the leading researchers is S. M. Kosslyn. In relation to the last topic we will discuss what the limits to imagery are. If we have no image of the concept infinity what are then the mechanisms by means of which humans can generate such concepts? Papers related to this problem will be distributed at the seminar.

SEMINAR IN COGNITIVE LINGUISTICS

Verbs and Representation of Causality

Svend Østergaard | **Wednesdays in seminar weeks, 12:00 - 14:00. Room 390.**

This course is a presentation of basic ideas from cognitive linguistics. In this semester we will concentrate on aspect, tense and representation of causality. With these topics the verb is a central lexical element and for this reason we will use William Croft: *Verbs. Aspect and Argument Structure* as a basic textbook. The book is available in an electronic version at the *sem fælles*

conference room. In the last part of the semester we will read some short stories and analyse the texts from the perspective of cognitive linguistics. For instance, how is tense used to keep track of the “reality status” and voicing of the proposed content? How are connectors used to represent the causality of the narrative course?

Cognition and Literary Text

Line Brandt | **Thursdays in seminar weeks, 15:00 - 17:00. Room 390.**

The seminar takes a practical approach to textual analysis within an interdisciplinary framework, borrowing ideas from linguistics, traditional literary analysis and semiotics, and developing ideas that may be useful for further implementation of a theoretical merger between literary studies, cognitive semantics, philosophy and semiotics as a specialized, textually oriented branch of cognitive semiotics.

Making a methodological distinction between the reading of a text and possible literary interpretations of it, the primary focus will be on the meaning construction involved in the process of reading, though to some extent interpretation will also be discussed for the sake of clarifying the relation between these two dimensions. A theoretical framework is proposed for the reading of literary texts, suggesting a layering of semiotically relevant aspects of textual comprehension, where each level influences and informs other levels in an online reading process that stabilizes as a prerequisite for interpretation. These interconnected 'semiotic layers' are the levels of enunciation, semantic analysis of narrative as well as non-narrative storytelling strategies, and rhetorical effects.

Enunciation, as proposed by the grammarian Benveniste in his analysis of personal pronouns, has to do with the built-in subjectivity in all human languages, displaying its presence as linguistic markers of a presupposed communicative situation enabling any utterance. Such an implied situation indicates a speaking subject, an addressee, an object of shared attention, and a deictically given place and time. Subjectivity in this sense, as it relates to meaning construction, and only indirectly to propositional truth-value, is understood as the explicit, as well as implicit, existence of a subject in a given text (and only secondarily to the philosophical subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy).

The enterprise of cognitive literary analysis may prove helpful to scholars and artistically inclined individuals engaged in the reading and/or writing of literature. From a cognitive perspective, the directionality is

inversed: since literary text is a product of language, and language is motivated by our mental capacities and predispositions as thinking and communicating creatures, literary text is one of our best sources of information about how the mind works.

The approach here is a phenomenological one; our intersubjective experiences of texts informs us about cognitive processes involved in meaning construction. From the perspective of cognitive studies, then, the directionality is two-fold: it is equally plausible to focus on the literary aspect (cf. its relevance to Comparative Literature and the Study of English, as proposed by Mark Turner 1991) as on implications for cognitive semiotics. It is also two-fold in the sense that theoretical hypotheses can be tested and new ones materialize by looking at empirical manifestations of the cognitive affordances about which these hypotheses are formulated; the text serves to confirm/disconfirm as well as generate hypotheses.

The aim of the literary semiotic endeavor is to develop a framework for close reading of texts, paying attention to enunciations structure, viewpoint structure, affect and 'temperature', temporal structure, schemas, and mental spaces (cf. Mental Space Theory), as well as inform us about the intrinsic features of these notions, investigating the applicability of concepts from cognitive semantics, such as 'framing', and introducing Conceptual Integration Theory (CIT) into literary studies.

The main body of empirical material will consist of short fictional prose. An advantage of using *literary* texts is that it eliminates the need for ethnographic data accompanying the utterances analyzed, because the contextual situatedness is unspecified. An advantage of using *short* texts is that their brevity allows for comprehensive analysis, and that the formal condition of brevity, given the limited duration of the experience, breeds interesting literary effects, as well as an inherent propensity for humorous indulgence.

“Storytelling” as Strategic Communication in Marketing and Advertisement

Lene Fogsgaard, Børge Fogsgaard, and Svend Østergaard | **March 5, April 2, and April 30, 10:00 - 12:00. Room 390.**

Continuing the efforts of the previous semester of studying “storytelling” as a Human Resource Management strategy in business and organizations, i. e. corporate storytelling, we take on an approach focusing mainly on narrative structure. We will also go deeper into the reasons why the narrative approach has proven so powerful in a world which at first glance seems rather distant from or even opposed to the world of fiction.

At a general level, the research will lean upon L. Talmy’s claim (*Toward a Cognitive Semantics*, 2000) that humans are equipped with a narrative cognitive system, coupled with the insights from M. Turner’s work (*The Literary Mind*, 1996).

We will also dedicate a session to revise the current use of the actantial model from the structuralist tradition and its eventual readjustment by means of advances made possible by a semio-cognitive perspective. We conceive of the actants as resting on force

dynamics and causative schemas, which are figurativized in narratives.

While elaborating some operative models by reintroducing a diegetic model (Brandt et al.) as a useful analytical tool and point of departure for theoretical reflections, we will comment on a few practical guides to storytelling or “cookbooks” published by business consultant agencies.

Equipped with more adequate tools we propose to enter the field of publicity by analyzing storytelling devices in advertising and netbased communication, i.e. storytelling as related to branding.

Since the seminar will be dedicated predominantly to analysis, we invite each participant to find material and present an analysis of one or more ads during the seminar.

You can join the seminar without having participated in the sessions of the previous semester.

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 spring semester is the following:

Friday, February 20, 10:00 - 13:00. Room 390.

Gustav Barfod, Political Science

Fra Hiroshima til Twin Towers: den globale politiks semiotik

Friday, March 19, 10:00 - 13:00. Room 390.

Volkmar Engerer, State and University Library:

Moderne aktionsartteorier: Hvor to lingvistiske paradigmer mødes / Die Linguistik der Transformation

Friday, April 16, 10:00 - 13:00. Room 390.

Ole Togeby, Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature:

Signals and acts – body and mind

Friday, May 14, 10:00 - 13:00. Room 390.

Armin Geertz, Department of the Study of Religion:

Cognitive Perspectives on Religious Identity among Selected North American Indian Tribes

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

FEBRUARY

Wednesday 4	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 5	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 6	10-12: Storytelling		

Wednesday 18	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 19	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 20	10-13: Research Meeting		

MARCH

Wednesday 3	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 4	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 5	10-12: Storytelling		

Wednesday 17	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 18	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 19	10-13: Research Meeting		

Wednesday 31	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
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APRIL

Thursday 1	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 2	10-12: Storytelling		

Wednesday 14	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 15	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 16	10-13: Research Meeting		

Wednesday 28	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 29	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 30	10-12: Storytelling		

MAY

Wednesday 12	10-12: Language and the Brain	12-14: Cognitive Linguistics	15-18: Cognition and Semiotics
Thursday 13	10-12: Mind and Cognition	13-15: Cognitive Aesthetics	15-17: Literary Semiotics
Friday 14	10-13: Research Meeting		

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