

Cognitive Cultural Criticism Conference at the University of Vienna

Date: 4 – 5 October 2012
Organisers: Margarete Rubik und Christa Knellwolf King

LIST OF ABSTRACTS

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 10.45 – 11.30

“Moving” Images and How to Deal with Them

Monika Seidl (University of Vienna)

In my contribution I will start with the problem affective intensity poses for analysis. I will exemplify my point with three different examples. The first two examples will present two different takes on the final sequence of Rouben Mamoulian’s 1933 MGM production *Queen Christina* starring Greta Garbo. This scene shows a long drawn-out close-up of Garbo’s face. The first example, Roland Barthes essay ‘The Face of Garbo’ from *Mythologies* (1956), understands intensity as disconnected from narration and meaningful sequencing. The second example, Mary Ann Doane’s essay ‘The Close-Up. Scale and Detail in the Cinema’ (2003), interprets affect and intensity as closely related to the narrative. As a third example I will briefly introduce aspects of Raymond Williams’s overarching concept of “structures of feeling”. Here Williams tries to combine personal (individual) intensity and collectively shared social formations. In my analysis I will concentrate on Williams definition of structures of feeling from *Marxism and Literature* (1977) as “structured formation(s) ... at the very edge of semantic availability”(132).

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 11.30 – 12.15

Staging the Irrational: A Cognitive Approach to Representations of Madness in Modern Drama

Margarete Rubik (University of Vienna)

Critics have frequently concerned themselves with the difficulties of describing the foreign and unknown, especially in the context of postcolonial studies. But madness, for most of us, is an equally alien territory, inaccessible, frightening, shrouded in mystery. Like pain, insanity largely defies communication by language, and remains one of the last taboos in our society, which challenges a host of conflicting emotions, ranging from disgust and horror to contempt, amusement or pity. Perhaps even more radically than in the case of foreign ethnicities, our concepts of mental illness tend to be stereotyped and emotionally charged; our expectations and beliefs concerning madness are largely drawn from, at best, half digested, popularized medical reports, but also from jokes and cartoons. The schema “madness” calls up a host of clichéd expectations about particular symptoms and forms of behaviour. I want to examine the means by which madness is presented in several modern British plays. I will refer to Joe Orton’s *What the Butler Saw*, Alan Bennett’s *The Madness of George III*, Joe Penhall’s *Some Voices* and *Blue Orange* as well as Sarah Kane’s *4:48 Psychosis*. These plays depict madness in quite different ways, some playwrights merely using it as a metaphor for social interaction, while some indeed try to enact what it feels like to the afflicted individual, while others confront the thorny question of how it ought to be treated.

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 14.00 – 14.45

**The Cognitive Unconscious in Ngugi Wa Thiongo's
Childhood Memoir *Dreams in a Time of War* (2010)**

Christa Knellwolf King (University of Vienna)

In their book *Philosophy in the Flesh*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that “mind is part of the very structure and fabric of our interactions with our world.” The larger goal of their book is to expose the false assumptions entailed by the philosophical traditions of the west. In my paper I therefore want to explore the implications of their revisionary account of mind for the interpretation of literature. Using Ngugi wa Thiong'o's autobiographical work *Dreams in a Time of War* (2010) as an example, I explore approaches to the architecture of the “cognitive unconscious”, paying special attention to the role of schemas, scripts and frames that give expression to double consciousness, the experience of being torn between the alienations of a colonial childhood and the warmth offered by family and community, in spite of extraordinary hardships.

Concentrating on Ngugi's use of the term “dream”, I want to explore the spectrum of its meanings, ranging from political vision, nightmare, to the powers of the imagination. From the time of his early essays, Ngugi has always been interested in analysing the tools of creativity. When he recounts some of the stories which were told by the members of his large family sitting together at the end of the day, he is hence interested in the influences of the characters and plots of these oral tales on his ability to cope in a world that is schizophrenically divided between the world of the coloniser and the colonised. In this presentation, I will discuss Ngugi's account of the divergent influences on the formation of his sense of identity. I will also ask in what ways Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive account of the physical and emotional dimensions of narrated experience can account for the resilience to colonial violence which pervades Ngugi's memory of his early years.

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 14.45 – 15.30

**Hidden behind words: exploring the imperial subconscious of Sylvia
Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936)**

Caterina Novak (University of Vienna)

My paper focuses on the way in which Britain's imperial legacy functions as a hidden subtext in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Summer Will Show* (1936). On the one hand, it explores the cognitive strategies by which Sophia Willoughby, the protagonist and focalising consciousness of the text, struggles to repress awareness of the Empire (symbolised by her "half-caste" nephew Caspar) on her own life, particularly the dense web of metaphors with which she surrounds the boy in order to avoid having to recognise and respect him as an independent human being. On the other hand, it investigates how Sophia's mental processes are turned into textual strategies which serve to write Caspar out of the reader's conscious awareness, to the extent that his role – albeit crucial for the development of the plot and its cataclysmic ending – has been largely overlooked by critics who have read *Summer Will Show* either as Communist propaganda or as a celebration of lesbian liberation.

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 16.00 – 16.45

(Re-)cognition: Reading Affinity in J.M. Coetzee's *Foe*

Michela Borzaga (University of Vienna)

In *The Political Unconscious* (1981), Fredric Jameson famously asserted that “only weak, descriptive, empirical, ideologically complicit readers attend to the *surface* of the text”. Since then, ‘symptomatic reading’ has turned into one of the most dominant and popular methods of literary interpretation. Defining their work as a parallel endeavour to political activism, literary critics have been interpreting works of literature through the lens of ideology critique and deconstruction. Suspicious of the text’s surface, the trained literary critic has to ‘unmask’, ‘unveil’ and detect the Marxian or psychoanalytic symptom. J. M. Coetzee’s postcolonial transformation of Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, titled *Foe*, clearly addresses questions of racial difference, gender and power relations. It has largely been interpreted according to this agenda with the consequence that Friday has either been relegated to a symptom of political and other power structures, or to the epitome of ‘The Other’.

Recent cognitive approaches to literature (see Elaine Scarry’s *Dreaming by the Book* or Rita Felski’s *Uses of Literature*) have drawn our attention to the surface of literary texts again. The aim is not to uncover meanings hidden in the symbolic depths of the text but to concentrate on the linguistic choices which are actually there on the surface and which signify by evoking associations, this is to say, by implicitly referring to culturally defined frames and schemas. By attending to the surface of Coetzee’s *Foe*, I will re-read this text with a view to uncovering its tightly structured web of meanings which suggest affinity rather than alterity. I will show how, by embracing the text’s surface, readers can take on a new ethical and affective stance. Whereas deconstructive critics have been wary of recognition, because this implies a failure to get away from a culturally constructed hegemony and, therefore, is comparable to the attempt to colonize or appropriate otherness, I will argue – in accordance with Rita Felski – that an ethical practice of reading always involves a complex logic of (re-)cognition: we fit what is different or unfamiliar into already existing schemas; in this sense to recognize means to “know again”. At the same time, recognition is never mere repetition but a complex dialogic inter-subjective process which entails both difference and identity, the familiar and the strange, the old and the new. Therefore, recognition oscillates “between knowledge and acknowledgment, the epistemological and the ethical, the subjective and the social”.

Thursday, 4 Oct.: 16.45 – 17.30

Mapping the Emotions of Encounter: Aboriginal Australian peoples and Overland Exploring Parties, 1835-50

Paul Turnbull (University of Queensland, Australia)

In the years between 1835-50 there were a dozen or so government-sponsored survey expeditions of southern, central and western inland Australia. Nearly all of these expeditions encountered and interacted with the Aboriginal peoples whose ancestral country they traversed.

Remarkably, to date there has been little close scrutiny of what expedition participants wrote of these meetings in the journals they kept, or what they said in the accounts of their exploring that many wrote for T. and W. Boone, and other London publishers of exploration and travel narratives.

This paper is essentially a preliminary report on using text analytics software to investigate around ten accounts of overland exploration in southern, central and western Australia published during the late 1830s and 1840s. The accounts have been analysed to determine the presence and frequency of references to particular behavioural gestures and expressions of emotion occurring in the course of cross-cultural encounter and interaction. These texts have also been analysed to identify what relations exist between references within them to particular emotions and gestures.

To date, three questions have guided this inquiry. The first is what computationally based contextual analysis might add to our understanding of how Europeans construed Aboriginal cognition and affective states of consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century Australian colonial context. The second is what such analysis might tell us about the experiences and emotional responses of explorers in the course of their journeying. The third is what differences of interpretation and affective response emerge from conventional and machine based readings of these historical texts.

Biographical Note:

Paul Turnbull is Professor of eHistory in the School of History, Philosophy and Politics at the University of Queensland. He is the creator of several major online resources, including *South Seas: Voyaging and Cross-cultural Encounters in the Pacific (1760-1800)*, a major online resource centred on James Cook's momentous Pacific voyage of 1768-71. Paul has also written extensively on racial science and the scientific use of Indigenous Australian bodily remains. His most recent publications include the edited collection, *The Long Way Home: the Meanings and Values of Repatriation* (Berghahn, 2011).

Friday, 5 Oct.: 9.30 – 10.15

**“The Role of Transitional Objects in the Contemporary
South African Trauma Novel”**

Ewald Mengel (University of Vienna)

Young children use dolls, teddy bears or safety blankets (Linus in Charles Schultz’ *Peanuts*) as substitutes for the mother/child bond. For the young child, the transitional object functions as a mother “*Ersatz*”. Instead of the mother’s breast, it accepts something else instead, a toy, token, or fetish which fills out the place which nature has evacuated.

The concept of the transitional object may also be applied to the adult world. Winnicott believes that the transitional object is “the fundamental element of culture, the way into the world of play, creativity, including the arts, religion and science.” In this case, it does not signal fetishism or regression but something positive, the mourning and sublimation of loss, and the resumption of representation that was destroyed by trauma.

The contemporary South African novel is full of transitional objects. They stand for the loss people have suffered, and form an important link between the generations. They help to overcome trauma, to start the mourning process, and in this way signal the beginning of something that might be called “working through” or “coping” with grief that is triggered by bereavement. “Cognition” or “re-cognition” is part of this process, “re-membering” by way of “re-lating” its method.

Friday, 5. Oct.: 10.15 – 11.00

“Unfathomable mind, now beacon, now sea”: Can inference lead us to a model for nonpropositional effects in the Literary Domain?

Paul Fagan (University of Vienna)

It is almost three decades since Sperber and Wilson declared, “No one has any clear idea how inference might operate over non-propositional objects.” To the extent that Pragmatics has been devoted to cognitive effects on mental representations with propositional forms such as explicatures and implicatures, the field of Literary Pragmatics today remains in limbo in so far as it cannot account for literary texts as loci of both propositional and non-propositional forces. In this talk I will propose for discussion the case that if we consider literary texts not as decodable products but rather as cognitive processes or events, triggered but not limited by the text, then we can access *comic* and *sublime* effects in terms of the cognitive processing of disjunctions, incongruities, and jammed signals *between* text, contexts/schemata, and pragmatic misfires.

Giving brief examples of these strategies from the discursive community of Irish meta-reflexive comic fiction, I will argue that by reimagining Grice’s co-operative maxims of Quality, Quantity, Relation, & Manner in the discourse-specific terms (and problems) of genre, authorship & authority, ideology, ethical imagination, digression, neologisms, *etc.* – as well as in conversation with Theory, such as a Bergsonian view of processing the incongruities between realism and idealism, a Burkean or Lyotardian view of the sublime and unrepresentable effects of processing larger inferential incongruities, and a Derridean view of implicature as a “supplement” – then we can explore how cognitively processing their violations can create both propositional implicatures and non-propositional comic and sublime effects.

Friday, 5. Oct.: 11.30 – 12.15

Concept Studies: Disciplinary Gains and Interdisciplinary Prospects

Olga Vorobyova (Kyiv National Linguistic University, Ukraine)

Most scholars in Western Europe who are starting to systemically look at concepts as relevant theoretical construals as well as convenient tools for analysis might be surprised to learn that the post-Soviet humanitarian community is getting more and more tired of, if not allergic to, the research ubiquity of concepts taken in their phenomenological and instrumental dimensions, facing of late an avalanche of papers on and about concepts of various types and ranks – from 'naive' to cultural and ideological as well as literary and aesthetic, from conventional to idiosyncratic, from nationally specific to universal, etc. The oscillations between concept-mania and concept-phobia are not incidental; the current presentation will consider their underlying reasons as well as gains (defining the term, introducing the 'concept :: anticoncept' dichotomy, systematizing the ways of concepts' manifestation, building up their typology, elaborating the algorithm of concept modeling, etc.) and gaps of concept studies in Ukraine and Russia, mainly to avoid the pitfalls the newly launched project on Cognitive Cultural Criticism might get into.

If the intradisciplinary component of the concept studies seems to have been nearly exhausted, its interdisciplinary vector naturally comes into play at least in three main directions: (i) neuropsychological, with a special emphasis on the neural mechanisms of concept generation, presumably grounded in parallel distribution, (ii) sociocultural, focusing not so much on concrete concepts but rather on the specificity of their dynamic configurations, related to the discourse milieu where the respective conceptual networks are formed, and (iii) psychoemotional. The latter appears to be particularly important, given the double nature of concepts which, as emotionally charged mental representations, integrate their static and dynamic properties in the way similar to protean corpuscular-wave matter.

Friday, 5. Oct.: 12.15 – 13.00

Figuration Across Artistic Media – Tropes in Language and the Fine Arts Abstract of the Proposed Presentation

Elżbieta Chrzanowska-Kluczewska
(The Jagiellonian University in Kraków, Poland)

My theoretical assumptions to be developed in the presentation coincide with the following statement by a psycholinguist, Raymond W. Gibbs, Jr. (1994: 434):

We can't help thinking about the mind in figurative terms, because the mind itself is primarily structured out of various tropes. These figures of thought arise naturally from our ordinary, unconscious attempts to make sense of ourselves and the physical world.

I assume, then, that all semantic figures, viz. tropes, are *primarily conceptual constructs, reflected in language*. Yet, my thinking about language is related to George Lakoff's, Mark Turner's and Mark Johnson's theorizing about metaphor in certain respects only. Namely, I do not treat metaphor as the umbrella term for all kinds of conceptual and, derivatively, linguistic figuration, but as one of *master tropes* that shape our understanding of reality. In this I follow the pre-cognitive "poetic logic" of Giambattista Vico (*La Scienza Nuova Seconda*, 1744/1984), revitalized by the American theoretician of discourse, Hayden White (1973, 1978, 1999). Vico postulated the grand *tetrad* of what later Kenneth Burke (1945/1962) called *master tropes*, and White renamed *basic tropes*, to wit *metaphor-metonymy-synecdoche-irony*. In his analysis carried out from the viewpoint of cognitive psychology, apart from the due place allotted to metaphor, Gibbs stresses the prominence of metonymic/synecdochic models of thinking and of the ironic mode of thought (with hyperbole, understatement and oxymoron as its subtypes). In Chrzanowska-Kluczewska (2004, 2009), I discuss the set of large figures of our thought and language, which can be called *megatropes* (following Paul Werth's terminology applied in his cognitive theory of extended metaphor). I argue there that the list can neither be limited to the Jakobson/Lodge duet of *metaphor-metonymy* as two artistic paradigms, nor even to the Vichian tetrad. Following the suggestions scattered in an indirect form across the criticism of the poststructuralist and deconstructionist current (Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, James Hillis Miller, Paul de Man), I put forward a suggestion to extend the list of four master tropes by the following candidates: *simile*, *antithesis*, *catachresis* (in the broad sense of *semantic abuse*, cf. Chrzanowska-Kluczewska 2011), *euphemia*, *hyperbole*, *suppression* and *defamiliarization* (after Viktor Shklovsky).

Since the above-mentioned figures might well represent a universal poetic patterning of the human mind, a natural query arises to what extent the figures that shape the production of literary texts/discourses qualify as well as instances of *semiotic figuration*, present in the fine arts (painting, sculpture, installations), architecture, urban planning, garden-designing, etc. Ever since the famous paper by Roman Jakobson (1956) on the metaphoric-metonymic duality in literature, painting and cinematographic art, we have witnessed an ongoing debate among semanticists, literary critics, philosophers of

language and art, art critics and art historians on whether tropes can actually be *seen* in the arts.

In my presentation (limited to the discussion of painting and sculpture), I side with Barthes (1982), Ernst H. Gombrich (1996) and the eminent Polish semiotician of art Mieczysław Porębski (1980/2009), who claim that we are fully justified to talk about tropes in painting (beside *symbol* and *allegory*, which have always been unanimously accepted as conspicuously present in the visual arts).

Two issues crop up that are directly relevant to the main theme of the Conference. The first is the question to what degree figuration across various artistic media is universal and to what degree it remains culture-specific. Arto Haapala (2006: 148) rightly points out that “[a]esthetic experience is a cognitive experience in that in the fusion of the horizons, the horizon of the person involved acquires new aspects”. ‘Cognitive’ means here ‘epistemic’ as well as ‘grounded in an environment’, conceived not only in physical but largely cultural terms. The second issue is what Richard Eldridge (2006: 16) mentions as the inextricably bound aspects (“intensities”) of a literary work of art: “representational-thematic, emotional-attitudinal, and craftlike-sensuous”. We can claim that they are no less conspicuous in other objects of art. This emotional-attitudinal quality of artworks is of special interest to what Margaret Freeman (2009: 11) calls “third generation cognitive science” and which recognizes the central role of emotions and human feelings in the cognitive processing. Its sources are traceable to the phenomenological philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945/1962), the writings of Susanne Langer (*Feeling and Form. A Theory of Art*, 1953), and its claims have also been supported by the research in contemporary neurobiology carried out by Antonio Damasio (*Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, 2003).

I hope that by bringing together the ideas from such fields of study as literary semantics/cognitive poetics, philosophy of language, and literary and art criticism, I will convince the Conference participants that it is reasonable to talk about the universally and/or culturally shared poetics of mind, language and the visual arts.