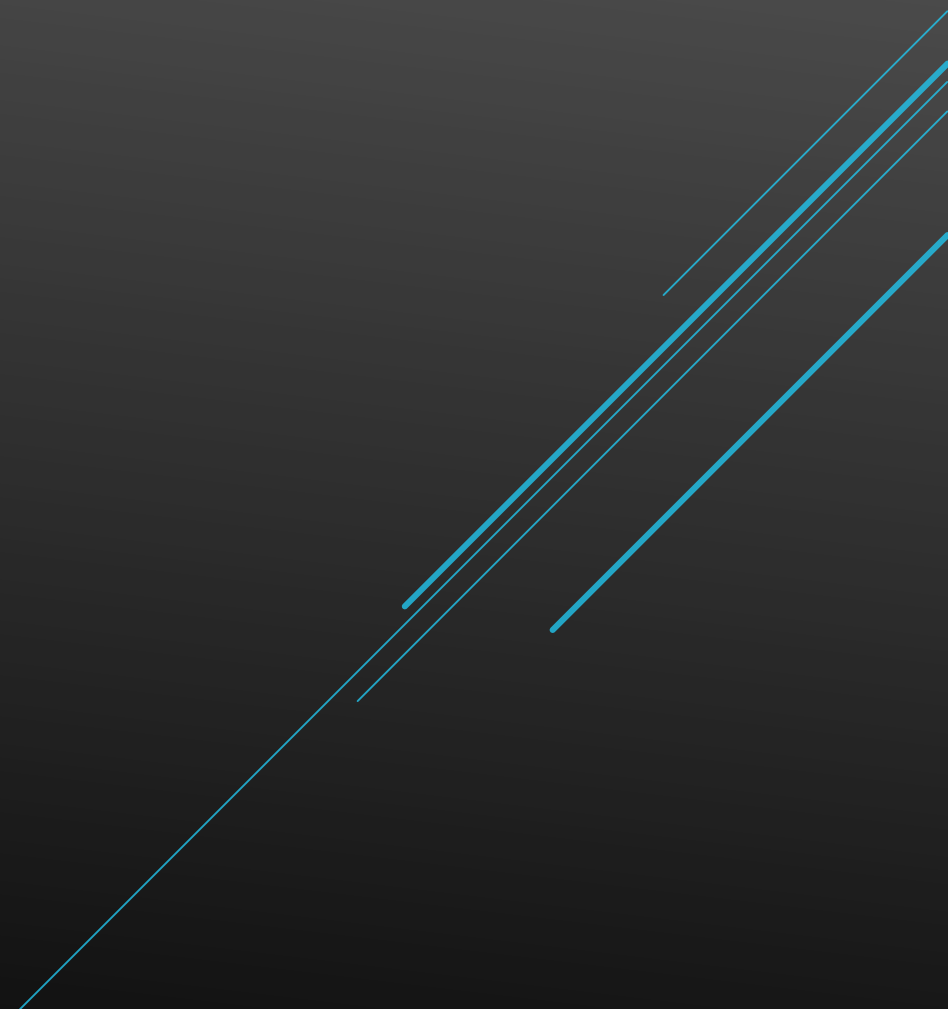



BASICS OF COGNITIVE SEMIOTICS

03 ⇒ Phenomenology, semiotics, cognition



IN THIS LECTURE

- First evaluation
 - What we've learned so far
 - Basics of phenomenology
 - Phenomenology and semiotics
 - Semiotics and cognition
- 
- A series of white lines of varying lengths and thicknesses, arranged in a parallel, diagonal pattern, extending from the bottom right towards the top right of the slide.

FIRST EVALUATION

- Two-part evaluation: Paper and presentation.
- Choose one of the texts we have read so far.
 - Write a critical review of any one specific point .
 - 1000 words, not including references.
 - Use secondary sources.
 - Use a standard citation and reference format. (MLA or APA preferred.)
 - Submit as pdf, doc(x) or odt. Use an easy reading font like TNR.
- Give a short (10-15 mins.) presentation of the paper. Slides not necessary, but recommended.

PAPER STRUCTURE

- Brief introduction about the paper itself
 - Brief overview of the point to be criticized
 - Critical review of the point
 - Conclusions
 - References
-
- 1000 words is about 2-4 pages, depending on indentation and spacing. What matters is the word count. Papers *maybe* longer or shorter, but make it as close to 1000 as possible.
 - Your presentation should **not** be you reading the paper to the class, but rather an explanation and discussion of why you chose that point, what the point was and how you criticized it.

BASICS OF SEMIOTICS, REVISITED

Concepts we have seen so far:

- Umwelt
 - Functional cycle
 - Sign
 - Semiosphere
 - Modeling system
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FOUNDATIONS OF PHENOMENOLOGY

- Why do we need phenomenology for the study of cognition?

The first person approach to consciousness can help us illuminate some problematic areas about it by direct examination.

- And what does that say about semiotics?

We need to ask ourselves what semiotics does, what the role of cognition is for whatever we want to say about semiotics and the principles we use for studying semiotics altogether.



- ▶ Let's revisit the notion of phenomenology: We can think of it as “the study of the immediate data of consciousness, without reference to anything that consciousness might tell us, or purport to tell us, about the extra-mental world” (Kenny 2010: 817).

Let's unpack this.

THE BEGINNINGS OF PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ Edmund Husserl, born in 1859, in Prostějov (!!!), had a background in mathematics and was deeply interested in logic and philosophy. He studied under Franz Brentano, whose empirical view of psychology deeply influenced his later career.
- ▶ After a psychologist stint (that is, he had a psychologist view of logic), he later moved to an anti-psychologist, epistemological investigation of consciousness.

HUSSERL



- ▶ When studying the structure of consciousness, we observe the direct linguistic representation of *intention* in the form of propositions. This is what allows us to distinguish *meaning* from nonsense.
- ▶ A proposition reflecting intentionality is meaningful in a single act, “that of uttering the words *as* having certain meanings, which has two aspects or constituents, one physical and the other mental” (Dummett 2014: 41).

HUSSERL'S PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ **Proposition:** A sentence that is either true or false.
- ▶ **Intentionality:** The *aboutness* of something. What a proposition is about. Think of the *content* of a thought.
- ▶ **Epoché (bracketing):** Suspension of judgement when describing phenomenologically.

CONCEPTS TO KEEP IN MIND



- ▶ Describe the top figure suspending judgement.
- ▶ This is all part of the task of *phenomenological reduction*.



EPOCHÉ

- ▶ “To take a very simple example, when I perceive a chair, I always perceive it perspectively and never all at once. And yet, the noetic* act of perception corresponds not to any of the sides of the chair that become visible as I move around it but to the chair itself as the unity of all possible perceptions of it” (McGuirk 2008: 108)

PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

* *Noesis* and *noema* are a verbal distinction between consciousness and object, provided we know that the distinction between these two is not exactly cartesian.



- ▶ Do you see any relation between phenomenology and the semiotics we've learned so far?



WHAT DOES PHENOMENOLOGY HAVE TO DO WITH SEMIOTICS?

- ▶ Peirce developed his own flavor of phenomenology, parallel to and uninformed by Husserl's work.
- ▶ He baptized this practice "phaneroscopy."
- ▶ The aim of phaneroscopy is to "chart the distinct, general forms of all possible experiences" (Stjernfelt 2016: 22)
- ▶ Peirce first called this phenomenology "the science of categories." We will talk more about this in a bit.

PEIRCEAN PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ Phaneroscopy examines the “phaneron,” that is “anything that can come before the mind in any sense whatsoever” (MS [R] 336:2).
- ▶ Peirce will roughly equate the phaneron with an *idea*.
- ▶ In a way, it is the examination of an experience as it comes to you, in a similar way to how you suspend judgement when giving a phenomenological description.

PHANEROSCOPY

All that is imagined, felt, thought,
desired, or that either colors or
governs what we feel or think is in
some sense before the mind. The
sum total of it I will name the
phaneron.

MS [R] 284: 38

- ▶ Husserl sees phenomenology free from prior presuppositions, whereas Peirce sees a basic background upon which phenomena is experienced (the *categories*) (Sonesson 2015: 44—45).
- ▶ Besides conceptual differences, their philosophical background was not compatible.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN PEIRCE AND HUSSERL

We can probably spot issues in both of the systems reviewed so far. What do you think? Are there any glaring issues?

PROBLEMS

- ▶ Propositions as the means to represent experience in a raw manner.
- ▶ Dependence on a philosophical system to make this “raw” experience valid as data.
- ▶ The validity of the data itself.

SOME PROBLEMS

- ▶ Uexküllian phenomenology is a different beast altogether. What we have learned so far can easily be construed as a way to study the structure of consciousness in the way Husserl described it.
- ▶ The claim that Uexküll's work is phenomenological depends on how we take our theoretical description of the Umwelt to work.
- ▶ Do we have to give priority to self-reports as the only way to develop a scientific phenomenology?

UEXKÜLLIAN PHENOMENOLOGY

- ▶ If consciousness is a special type of *awareness* (Tønnessen 2015: 361), then the key to phenomenology is awareness itself.
- ▶ We can assume a first person perspective across realms of living beings.
- ▶ But does awareness imply *qualia* or are qualia byproducts of consciousness?

EMBODYING UEXKÜLLIAN PHENOMENOLOGY

*qualia: the intrinsic qualities of our phenomenology: “How could anything composed of material particles be the fun that I’m having, or have “the ultimate homogeneity” (Sellars, 1963) of the pink ice cube I am now imagining, or matter the way my pain does to me? (Dennett 1993: 65).

- ▶ As different types of phenomenology become available to our own study of cognition, we have to critically assess the validity and usefulness of such approaches towards developing a conceptual strategy of our own.

WHICH PHENOMENOLOGY THEN?

- ▶ Let's backtrack a bit and revisit our knowledge of Peirce so far.
- ▶ Signs, semiosis, phaneroscopy. What does this say to us about cognition?
- ▶ Peirce's work can indeed be thought of as a theory of mind.

SEMIOTICS AND COGNITION

- ▶ Let's remember how we thought of Peircean signs: As a relation, a sort of process. Thinking happens through signs.
- ▶ Signs, however (and as you may remember), are not *words*. There's something more complex to them.
- ▶ Peirce's concept of cognition "is construed as the development of internal or external signs, and not as a succession of conscious states of mind" (Skagestad 2004: 249).
- ▶ Cognition is not based on specific mental states, but on how we manipulate signs, and how signs are directed towards other signs.

PEIRCE'S SEMIOTICS AS A THEORY OF MIND

- ▶ Peirce's idea of the mind, however, differs from everyday and standard concepts of what a mind is. His idea is that mind is a property of the universe in general, and that there's a gradual variation on how mental properties can be ascribed to particulars.
- ▶ Mental phenomena, for Peirce, demands a certain directedness towards something.

“X possesses intentionality if it cannot fully be described without implying a grammatically simple affirmation about it which cannot be expressed without employing one or another intentional verb” (Short 2007: 174)

PEIRCE'S CONCEPT OF THE MIND

- ▶ This is the crux of the issue: How far does phenomenology take us?
- ▶ How far does semiotics take us?

CAN WE STUDY THE MIND
PHENOMENOLOGICALLY THEN?

There's still a number of questions to ask about this, from Tønnessen et. al 2018:

- ▶ Are there phenomena beyond human experience?
- ▶ What is the relation between semiosis and phenomena?
- ▶ Should Biosemiotic Phenomenology be practiced as pure theory, or as applicable for empirical studies?
- ▶ How can biosemiotics contribute to phenomenology?

PHENOMENOLOGY AND BIOSEMIOTICS



- ▶ Perhaps one way to go about this is by *naturalizing* the project of phenomenological research.
- ▶ But how scientific can the first-person perspective be? How do we even reach it?
- ▶ But naturalization of the study of mental phenomena is a wild topic on its own, so we'll have to stop here.

NATURALIZATION



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