BASICS OF COGNITIVE SEMIOTICS

05 From CogSci to CogSem

ON THIS CLASS

- Philosophy of mind and consciousness, continued
- A new paradigm for semiotics.
- What to do with CogSem

CONSCIOUSNESS, CONT'D

- It seems that for every model of cognition, there is no particular reason why consciousness should come with it (Chalmers 1996: 109).
- Can materialism be salvaged? Do the objections hold?
- One possible consequence of refuting materialism is returning to dualism.
- But dualism doesn't seem to hold, does it?

PHENOMENAL PROPERTIES

- One option we have here is endorsing property dualism, a type of dualism about what it means to have phenomenal experiences.
- Phenomenal properties would, theoretically, not depend on physical structures to be instantiated. Instead, they could be a basal, universal law.
- Remember Peirce's concept of the Mind as a gradual property.

OBJECTIONS TO PEIRCEAN MENTAL PROPERTIES AND PROPERTY DUALISM

- Panpsychism
- Intractability
- Moving the goalposts
- Randomness of sign relations

COMPUTATIONAL THEORY OF MIND

- If we decide we don't like this ontological juggling, one of the main materialist theories of the mind theorizes it as a computer.
- Briefly put, for the mind to be equated as a computer, we have to see it like this:
  - *Thoughts come in a logical form*
  - *Mental representations have a certain syntax*
  - *Mental processes are operations defined on that syntax and reliably truth-preserving* (Fodor 2000)

COMPUTATIONAL THEORY, CONT'D

- A CTM can be framed as an RTM:
  - *Propositional attitudes are relational*
  - *Among the relata are mental representations*
  - *Mental representations are symbols (syntactic and semantic)*
  - *They have their causal roles because of their syntax*
  - *Propositional attitudes come with the semantic properties of the mental representations (Chemero 2009)*

IS THE MIND A COMPUTER?

- The “language of thought” is the formal system of symbols and their combination that happens in cognition.
- How can the mind instantiate logical operations?
- Do we really need representations for cognition?

EMBODIED COGNITION

- An alternative to the CTM is found in theories of embodied cognition. These postulate that the mind is instantiated by the organism *within* its environment.
- *Eliminativist* theories of mind see no use for representations. Embodied cognition falls within this category.
- Some reasons to go this route are:
  - *Less work for the organism (no need to reconstruct the world)*
  - *No need for a centralized operation of mental processes*
  - *Giving priority to the actions of an organism in real time*

EMBODIED COGNITION, CONT'D

- Embodied cognition is pluralistic enough to have a variety of alternatives, some of which may even invoke representations to a limited degree.
- The *availability* of the world becomes central in a cognitive science that does not believe the story about representations is accurate (Noë 2009: 82).
- There is enough evidence to believe that "problem-solving load is spread out across brain, body, and (sometimes) world" (Clark 2012: 278)

TYING SEMIOTICS TO THE ALTERNATIVES

- As cognition can be studied in different, sometimes incompatible ways, we can approach both ends through semiotics.
- We have already seen a first possibility with Peircean semiotics as an RTM.
- But what role can semiotics play in this environment?

COGNITIVE THEORIES OF THE SIGN

- In one of the earlier proposals for a cognitive semiotics, Dadessio thinks semiotics is not doing enough to know *how* we get access signs (1995).
- Cognitive semiotics can use signs *qua* representations easily.
- Since a Peircean sign works well as a representation, it seems that cognitive semiotics could do a good job as an RTM with different terminology.
- But is there a need for that?

SEMIOTIC LANGUAGE OF THOUGHT

- The need for the semiotic approach is preserving the semantic aspect of what lies beyond the linguistic.
- Remember, once again, how Peirce saw thought as signs.
- There's two lines we can follow: limiting signs to only be thoughts or expanding thought to cover all we call signs.

SEMIOTIC EMBODIMENT

- Remember, however, Uexküll's work on the Umwelt.
- While we don't need to do away with Peirce, it seems that Umwelt theory works much better without the need for representations.
- However, we can also work Peirce into this framework by reframing signs as behavioral cues.
- Finding the origins of cognition in the organism-environment unit seems a viable scientific approach (Järvilehto 2009)

COGNITIVE SEMIOTICS AS PHENOMENOLOGY

- Perceptual meaning takes place through iconicity. Once again we get a Peircean glimpse of how signs work.
- Though partially embodied, this branch of CogSem focuses on the phenomenal differentiation of icons (Sonesson 2016).
- Phenomenological methodology would work as an interface between bodily experience, language, social life and objects in the world (Zlatev 2012).

COGNITIVE SEMIOTICS AS TERMINOLOGY

- Perhaps a different way to see CogSem is by using it as new terminological tools for what exists already out there in CogSci.
- The question is, how useful is semiotic terminology for CogSci?
- As semiotics cares about meaning preservation, if our approach in CogSci sees meaningfulness in cognition, then there is an argument to be made for CogSem as a conceptual framework.

THE REJECTION OF PSYCHOANALYSIS FOR THE STUDY OF ART

- Nativism, coupled with semiotic terminology, can give rise to a narrative picture of meaning-making (Buckland 2000).
- How could we actually apply this?
- In fact, is there any way traditional objects of semiotic studies can be analyzed through a CogSem approach?

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