Culture, Nature, Memes
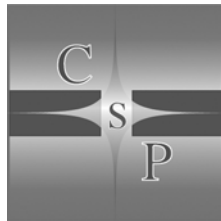
Culture, Nature, Memes

Edited by

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INTRODUCTION

THORSTEN BOTZ-BORNSTEIN

This collection of essays on cognition, which involves continental as much as analytical approaches, attempts to observe cognitive processes in three areas: in culture, in nature, and in an area that can – at least from some point of view – be perceived as an "in-between" of culture and nature: memes. All authors introduce a certain dynamic input in cognitive theory, as they negotiate between the empirical and the conceptual, or between epistemology and the study of culture. In all chapters, culture, nature, and memes turn out to be dynamic in the sense of being non-essentialist, their significations and modulating functions always being multi-dimensional.

Paul van den Hoven analyzes culture in the form of modern myths and discourses that denote and connote by using methods of semiotics and cognitive linguistics. He focuses on meaning, intertextuality, as well as on the tensions and deviations between subjectivity and objectivity. Cultural discourse analysis treats the discourse as a complex social sign, which implies claims about the conscious or subconscious interpretation processes of actual readers. For van den Hoven, it "combines semiotics with ethnography." His aim is not so much to provide a detailed analysis of myths but to describe the interaction between the media and the person and to define the generic frames that are necessary to understand certain signs. The meaning is never in the sign itself but flows out of the interaction of a sign with a certain cognitive structure. The complexity of the cultural world, as well as that of the conceptual frames of knowledge, leads van den Hoven to the development of a "conceptual blending theory." Sign structures can contain strong ideological loads and van den Hoven wants to find out how the place of input elements in the cognitive system determines the blends.

In a similar vein, Axel Gelfert analyzes the social dimension of knowledge when considering "testimony" as culturally modulated behavior. Gelfert concentrates on cross-cultural understanding and the cognitive role of culture by examining utterances and signs in different contexts. Testimony includes road signs and maps or any epistemic sources on which we generally rely. However, testimony is a complex phenomenon not only because of its diverse inductivist and deductivist stances but, first of all, because it is rooted in culture. Even more, testimony is a transcultural phenomenon *par excellence* because even those people who share a mutual trust are not "essentially" homogeneous groups but follow complex

transcultural patterns.

Barry Hartley Slater finds that minds are not computing machines but mechanisms for handling the environment and not symbols. Slater's "realism" implies that "intentional objects exist in social space, and not in some far distant 'eternal' realm." While Fodor thought that "there are still symbols in human brain" forming "The Language of Thought," and Dretske attempted to "'naturalize the mind' so that genetic and evolutionary processes take over from any social process," Slater suggests to make even more dynamic the scientific understanding of mental states and, finally, to exclude dreaming and thinking within the realm of consciousness.

When it comes to the consideration of nature, the authors elaborate equally dynamic patterns. For Peter Simons the natural world is a single connected whole. Within the context of this "metaphysical naturalism," Simons examines, not so different from what is done by some recent "memeticists," the problems of generation and emergence. Philosophers in the 19th century, Simons explains, "inspired by evolutionary ideas, coined and embraced the terms 'emergent' and 'emergence'." The word "emergent" is related to dynamics as it "was first employed to try and stake out of position intermediate between mechanism and vitalism in the debate over whether life is metaphysically compatible with mechanism" and contradicts the approaches of positivism, physicalism and reductionism.

Also, Simone Gozzano concentrates on the relations between thought and language when tracing animals' thoughts and beliefs. He starts with the notion of representation – the key element in the cognitive revolution – and functional states as a net of horizontal links encompassing perceptual inputs and internal workings.

While Gelfert is interested in how our thoughts are shaped by institutions, Heidi Maibom analyzes the effect that emotions have on our thoughts. She designates jealousy as a core relational theme in which emotions, more so than thoughts, provide a "sense" of actions. Maibom's psychological explanations work mainly against cognitivist reductionism. The dynamic component of her model becomes obvious when she claims that some emotions do not require previous judgments but are themselves sources of judgments.

Mark Cain provides a criticism of extreme concepts of Nativism, that is, the idea that most of our lexical concepts are innate. Cain finds that innate concepts need not be present at birth but need to be triggered by specific experiences. This dynamic system is compatible with evolutionary biology (telling us that innate systems evolve only because they are *useful*).

With these thoughts, Cain comes very close to the domain of memetics that is explored by four authors in this volume. Sandra Egege believes that

our shared innate biological capacities produce a common conceptual schema that is fundamental to our view of reality and our knowledge of the world. Egege examines cultural differences that are based on language difference. Putting Dennett's meme-complex theory in the context of Whorf-Sapirian theories on the dependence of language and reality she is able to highlight the role of language-memes in the perception of the world and in self-perception. The following question arises: If Whorf's linguistic relativism is wrong, what about Dennett's memetic relativism?

In my own contribution, I criticize memetics as a cultural theory along the lines drawn by genetics, which remains deeply entrenched in the hard sciences. I concentrate on the fact that memes cannot create a dynamic phenomenon such as style. Style is dependent on cultural *constellations* and cannot be contained in the single units called memes.

In a similar way, Francesco Gil-White refuses to believe that "Darwinian systems involve simple and blind algorithmic processes that nevertheless produce gradual accumulation of adaptive design." A static concept like that of "selfishness" cannot explain cultural evolution, which is much more dependent on social learning cognition. No story has ever been retold *exactly* but transmission is always mutation.

Yujian Zheng is concerned by the fact that the selective filters of memes are constructs of earlier memes and genes. When designating our own powers of representation as originating from a totally *blind* and *unrepresenting* source, "creation," or "emergence," become paradoxical phenomena. In response to the ultimate challenge that autonomous consciousness, intentionality, and freedom are illusions, Zheng argues for a conception of deeper, evolution-bound normativity.

PART I: CULTURE

Chapter One

Cultural Discourse Analysis and the Cognitive Process

Paul van den Hoven

Introduction

We can distinguish at least three different kinds of discourse analysis. The first one attempts a reconstruction of the social-cultural context, values, or intentions of the author or, in case of oral interaction, of the participants. The analyst is the reader, other readers function only in the periphery. No claims are made about the way the text functions after its publication. Important examples we find in the analysis of (social-political) discourse to identify the social values of its authors. This contribution is not about this type of analysis.

The second one concerns the analyst as an educated reader of usually a famous, elaborated and rich piece of discourse: the bible, the scriptures of Confucius, the program of a famous person or movement, an important piece of legislation, and so forth. The reader claims to contribute an interesting, probably 'new' reading of that discourse as a contribution to its intertextual position. The subjectivity of the reader is evident. The social contribution (besides the intellectual and academic) can be how the text ought to be read but is independent of any claims about how the text is actually read by the other. This contribution is neither about this type of analysis.

The third one is a semiotic approach that treats the discourse as a complex sign that functions in a society. The analysis results in a claimed relevant aspect of the 'social' meaning of the discourse. This is the type of analysis we will focus on. This type of analysis inevitably implies claims about the conscious or subconscious interpretation processes of actual readers. Jonathan Bignell in his introduction on media semiotics is fully aware of this (2002, 3).

[…] at the one extreme, it could be argued that the meanings in the media can be understood by doing a very detailed analysis of media texts […]. At the other extreme, it could be argued that meaning in the media can be understood by asking individuals how they interact personally with media in their own lives. These positions are oversimplified caricatures of, respectively, a very rigid kind of semiotic analysis known as structuralism, and a recently developing kind of media research known as ethnography.

There is a large gap between these two extremes. This is why Bignell takes an in between position, dealing in his analyses with semiotics as well as with reflection upon the specifics of the reading situation and the (intended) audiences.

We shall see that while the discourse of semiotic analysis is a powerful way of analyzing [… texts, it needs to be extended and problematized by research done on the reception […]. (2002, 150)

But to connect both perspectives turns out to be really hard. Presenting deep and interesting semiotic analyses (the reason why I admire this work as an introduction to media semiotics), Bignell leans heavily on the semiotic distinction between *denotation* and *connotation* to be able to incorporate Roland Barthes concept of the *myth*, which in its turn fills in the concept of *ideology*. This leads to formulations such as:

Myth takes hold of an existing sign, and makes it function as a signifier on another level. (17)

But on the same time, quoting Barthes (1973:129-130):

[E]verything happens as if the picture [on the cover of *Paris-Match,* of a black soldier saluting the French flag/pvdh] naturally conjured up the concept, as if the signifier gave a foundation to the signified: the myth exists from the precise moment when French imperiality achieves the natural state.

The first quote is the formulation of a theoretical semiotic exercise. The analyst as a reader sees through the mechanism, distinguishes between sign 1 (existing sign, denotation) and sign 2 (sign on another level, connotation, myth). The analytical position is evident. The second quote reflects upon the interpretation process of the supposed 'naive' reader. The reader perceives a natural relation between a signifier and the signified, a relation that the analyst has de-masked.

This opposition clearly illustrates that the pair *denotation – connota-*

tion, the concept *myth* belong to the realm of the analyst, who perceives the connotations as the ground for a myth of French imperiality. For the naive reader the black soldier saluting the French flag 'denotes' French national unity (in Barthes's analyst evaluation: French imperiality). If the reader would also perceive this as a 'connotation' of the picture as a sign, it is not a myth any longer, even if he accepts the connotation as justified.

We can see that the reading of the analyst is dissociated from the reading of the 'other' and that the analytical concepts apply on the analyst reading only. In this type of semiotic analysis the analyst inevitably constructs actual readers as 'the other.' But then we lack a model of the interpretation process of the so-called naive reader; what is the counterpart of what Barthes identifies as French imperiality and how is it constructed?

There is a fourth approach that may help to fill this gap. *Cognitive linguistics* attempts to model the cognitive processes involved in text interpretation. In theory such a cognitive model should function as a check on the validity of a semiotic analysis; semiotic analyses should be compatible with the cognitive model. And the cognitive model should be able to explain audience behavior. In practice the specificity of the cognitive models we know now are still far away from these pretentions. Nevertheless serious developments in this field make it relevant for (multi)cultural discourse analysis. Several cognitive linguists try to explain how formally similar or even identical signs can lead to very different results of interpretation processes (meaning). To give a rough idea of the intriguing problem: it is easy to construct several plausible contexts in which a participant in a conversation can ask "Which black pot do you mean? The red one or the blue one?" Cognitive linguistics tries to explain how the sign *black pot* can get such different meanings that it can function in contexts like these.

Searching for an explanation a series of hypotheses has been developed – especially in mental space theory now developed into *conceptual blending theory*. These hypotheses deal with the relation between the sign and its meaning. Insights have been developed that draw from several fields and are highly compatible with Peircean semiotics. These insights, developed independently of cultural discourse analysis, can turn out to be a valuable instrument to model interpretation processes that lead to diverting interpretations of a complex sign in multicultural contexts.

In this article I will summarize my interpretation of this conceptual blending theory (based on a reading of Fauconnier and Turner 2002) in such a way that its potential to model cognitive processes in multicultural contexts (concerning *cultural differentiation* as well as *cultural force*) is emphasized. I will present an analysis that shows how a specific (cultur-

ally determined) cognitive structure can influence the construction of meaning in five different ways. I will also show how we can model the cognitive counterpart of the Barthesean notion of *myth* and therefore of *ideology* in terms of the conceptual blending theory. I will illustrate the analysis with examples of the reading of typically western advertisements by a group of Chinese students.

It will not be my goal to attempt to predict readings. The model is not fit for that, rather explains why this is not possible. But it seems adequate to interpret the responses of actual readers in terms of the structure of their cognitive processes and connect this to the sign structure. It is also possible to model the assumptions of a semiotician about the actual reader in terms of the cognitive processes they project on this reader and evaluate them on their plausibility.

1.   Summary of the Theory

The conceptual blending theory is a broad theory, covering many diachronic and synchronic phenomena. In many aspects it is sketchy; often it is not entirely well articulated. Therefore this summary is inevitably an interpretation, maybe even an adaptation on several points.

- The basic assumption of the theory is that what is encoded in a (complex) sign is an instruction to the interpreter's cognition to perform a mental process, called *conceptual blending*.
- A formally similar sign instructs to set up a structurally similar process. But the performance of this process – the running of the blend – can vary from relatively simple (simplex blending) to highly creative and complex (named mirror, single scope and double scope blending). What the characteristics of the processes are depends on the relations of the activated elements in the receiver's cognition. From this we can deduce that the meaning is not in the sign structure as such but in the receiver's cognitive structure at a given moment in interaction with the sign structure.
- Conceptual blending theory recognizes compositionality. Semiotic codes have a grammar; languages have an elaborated grammar. But the 'meaning' of the composition of the parts has to be understood as ways to instruct the receiving cognition how to structure the blending process; the process itself is and stays fundamentally a creative process.
- Conceptual blending theory is a cognitive network theory. The meaning of a concept is determined by its connections in the mental network. These connections develop by social experience

(Peirce!). Therefore they are not fixed, but can be amended by the interpretation processes.

- Conceptual blending theory recognizes the possibility of conventionalization; it is seen as a relatively fixed position in the cognitive network of relatively stable frames. Such fixed frames may originate from a blend that the individual repeatedly ran over time, or can be learned as a whole. They may be difficult to decompress.
- In most circumstances blending processes run unconsciously and are therefore often neglected. We are only conscious of the outcome. But we can become conscious of the processes when they are disturbed (for example when they run into unacceptable results) or get stuck. In the blending process the input spaces stay active and therefore drawbacks – mostly unconsciously – can be made, changing the input spaces.
- Conceptual blending theory recognizes that structurally similar processes can result in highly dissimilar outcomes.

Two examples may illustrate these basic notions. Suppose an individual has never been confronted before with the complex linguistic sign *Traditional Chinese Jazz*. Nevertheless – this is one of the most intriguing aspects of the human cognition – this individual will run into an interpretation process. Conceptual blending theory models a possible cognitive process as follows.

The structure of the sign – this is knowledge of the English sign system – tells the reader that *Traditional* and *Chinese* apply to *Jazz,* and that *Traditional* modifies *Chinese* or modifies *Chinese Jazz*. Not familiar with *Chinese Jazz*, but familiar with *Western Jazz* and familiar with *Traditional Chinese Music*, these two concepts and their cognitive connections may be activated, due to his understanding of the sign. This is facilitated by the fact that in the cognitive system these concepts may relate, as the formal structure of the sign requires; both concepts relate to a generic space *Musical Forms*.
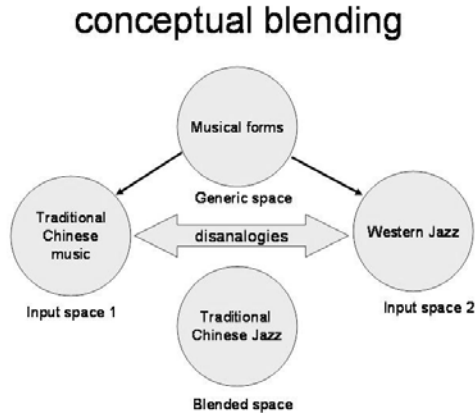
Figure 1

The frame structure of the three frames, input space 1, input space 2 and the generic space is here similar. Dependent on the individual, they will contain musical structures, examples, elements of performances, instruments, sounds. But although structurally similar, both input spaces contain disanalogies, which makes that the content cannot easily be integrated into the blending space; choices have to be made. This blending process is called *mirror blending*. That choices have to be made explains why it is hard to predict in general what the individual will conceptualize – if anything – as *Traditional Chinese Jazz*. It may even cause that the individual is stuck in the cognitive process on this point, resulting for example in a statement: "I do not know what that is. Is it Jazz on traditional Chinese instruments, or in the traditional Chinese tone-system?"

Given the sign and such a response of the interpreter, the model provides an insightful and plausible connection between these two. It accounts for three important things that we can deduce from this response. Firstly that a cognitive process is going on; the model accounts for the elements of such a process. If there is no process running, the interpreter cannot be stuck. Secondly the response shows that the hypothesized elements are active. And thirdly it illustrates that especially when a blend does not run smoothly, the individual can become conscious of it.

But the blending process is not implied in the sign, only its basic structure is. So interpreters can deviate. Maybe another individual reader responds: "I do not know any Chinese Jazz, and certainly not any traditional forms of such a thing." Here the power of the model becomes clear. We can deduce from this response that this less playful interpreter must have activated a slightly different structure that also fit into the sign structure. He must have taken Chinese Jazz together.
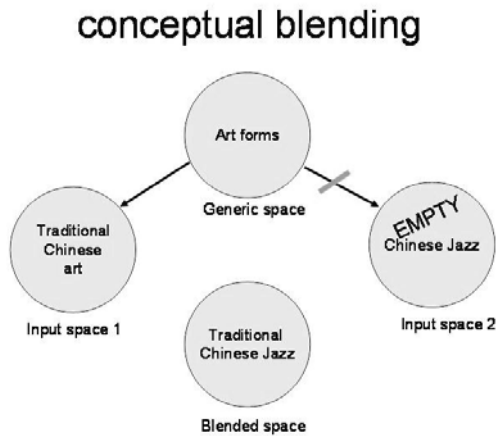

Figure 2

Maybe this more conventional interpreter could have been brought to the process as depicted in the first schema by a slightly amended sign: *Chinese Traditional Jazz*, because now the direct connection of Chinese with Jazz is blocked by the sign structure.

The second example is more serious in relation to our main topic. It in fact forms a significant part of my motivation to try to develop (elements of) a model of the interpretation process of the 'naive' reader. Let us take the famous example of Barthes mentioned above. I quote from Bignell (21):

Barthes imagines himself at the barber's, looking at the cover of an edition of the French glossy magazine *Paris-Match*. On the cover is a photograph of a black soldier in uniform, who is saluting the French flag. The

signifiers […] can be easily read as meaningful iconic signs, which denote the message 'a black soldier is giving the French salute.'

But, and these are Barthes's words, the picture signifies that:

France is a great empire, that all her sons, without any color discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors. (Barthes 1973: 116).

And:

If I state the fact of French imperiality without explaining it, I am very near to finding that it is natural and goes without saying: I am reassured. (143)

What is the reading process that Barthes imposes on himself in his role as a naive visitor of a barbershop? I depict his characterization of 'the other' in figure 3.
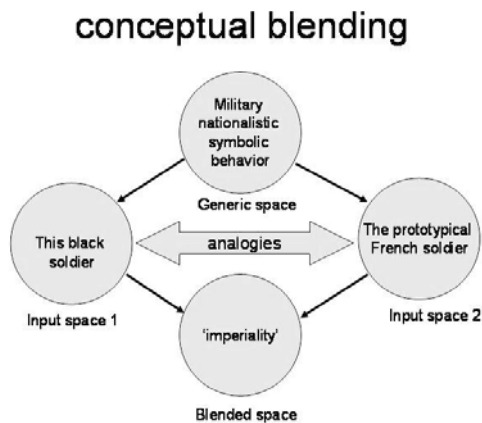

Figure 3

What I do here is nothing more than modeling the cognitive process that is assumed by Barthes's description of the naive reader in the first

quote. Figure 3 shows an example of the simplest blending process, called *simplex blending*. Input space 2, activated by input space 1 via the generic space, has argument slots that are filled by the elements from input space 1. The result is compressed in the blend: indeed the black soldier becomes a normal and therefore ideologically neutralized instance and therefore according to Barthes a mythic and imperialistic instance of nationalistic symbolic behavior.

But Barthes's own interpretation process is entirely different. We can model that too. It runs in at least two stage:
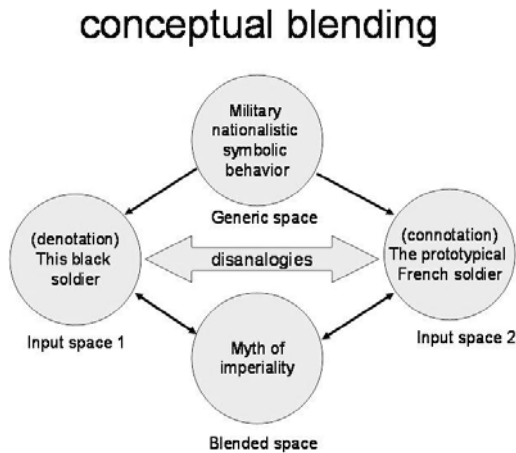
conceptual blending

Military
nationalistic
symbolic
behavior

Generic space

(denotation)
This black
soldier

disanalogies

(connotation)
The prototypical
French soldier

Input space 1

Myth of
imperiality

Input space 2

Blended space

Figure 4

This first stage is an example of the most complex form of blending, *double scope blending*. The analyst Barthes constructs a conflict between two input spaces that have different frame structures; they became – by an earlier blending process – associated with their prototypes *denotation* and *connotation* and thereby in the blend *became* denotation, respectively connotation; they become a *myth*. Obviously, this black man cannot be an instance of the prototypical French soldier. This forces him to construct a new frame in the blended space and selectively project elements from both input spaces into a new relation: the sign as a whole gets the meaning of *the myth of imperiality* (the first quote). We can speculate that a drawback to input space 1 may be that *the black soldier* is reinterpreted as *a victim*,

while a drawback on input space 2 may be that it gets an even stronger connection with concepts that represent negative values. The last drawback can be explained because Barthes's interpretation process obviously continues (the second quote):
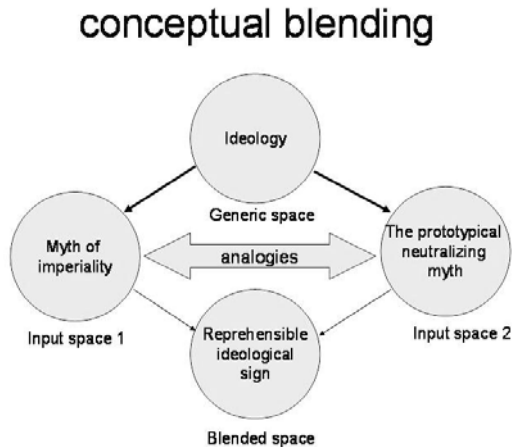

Figure 5

In figure 5 input space 1 contains the blend of the first stage. Actually (this is fundamental), the entire process is still available. In a *simplex blending* process this blend fills the slots of input space 2, via the generic space *ideology*. We will see that frequently the content of an input space activates its prototype. This process explains the empirical fact that the analyst Barthes brought up the *Paris-Match* photograph in his essay as an example of his theory.

I agree with Barthes that the picture is a reprehensible sign if it intends to evoke the process depicted in figure 3. That is not the issue. Crucial in this entire structure is his construction of the 'other', clearly dissociated from himself, the presupposed, but not empirically verified interpretation process of the naive barber shop visitor (figure 3). I do not deny the possibility or even the plausibility of such a process. I only state that his claim is an unverified empirical one. And conceptual blending theory supplies alternatives, also for not semiotically educated readers. This indicates that there is a need to verify, or at least argue the plausibility

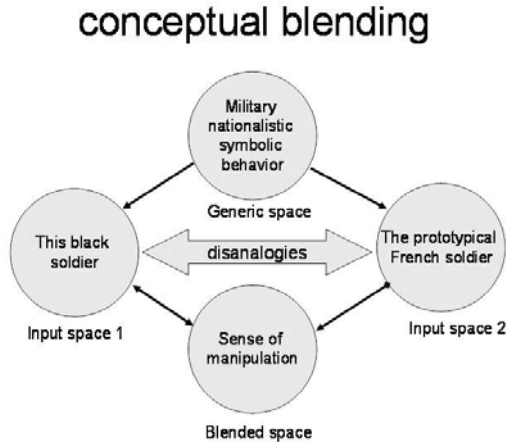of the process depicted in figure 3. I give one alternative process in figure 6.

Figure 6

According to this construction, the reader feels manipulated. The black soldier does not fit his prototype, although he understands that the sign structure invites him to make this connection. This leads to a mirror blending process. Notice that this process does not require any explicit semiotic insights of the reader but may be as plausible as the process depicted in figure 3. This reader may respond, with a draw back towards input space 1: "This is certainly not a typical black French inhabitant"; the reader rejects what he perceives as the intended meaning of the sign. Given the social-political situation in France that time I consider these readings at least as plausible as the ones depicted in figure 3. But once again, that is not the point here. The example illustrates that semiotic analyses often require a careful modeling of the implied claims about actual reading processes and a careful evaluation of their plausibility. If claims are as far reaching as the ones Barthes suggests, it may be wise to collect and analyze actual responses of real readers.

These two examples illustrate the theory and the way the analyses run. Cognitive linguistics can at least specify the claims made about the other as a reader, bring us a step further towards detailed and differentiated

empirical expectations and possible observations that are implied by the semiotic statements. And it can help us to explain deviating readings by interpreting the reader's responses. It is this attempt towards specificity that we will use to analyze the concepts of *cultural differentiation* as well as *cultural force* from a cognitive perspective.

2. Cultural differentiation

From the conceptual blending model we can derive five sources of cultural diversity in interpretation. These sources correspond with interpersonal diversity in general. But because many conventionalized frames are determined by socio-cultural factors, the chances to encounter significant diversities increase in a multicultural context. The five sources are: (1) lack of a generic frame, (2) a deviating generic frame, (3) deviating connections of the input spaces, (4) different blending processes, (5) different drawbacks. I will explain and illustrate each of these sources.
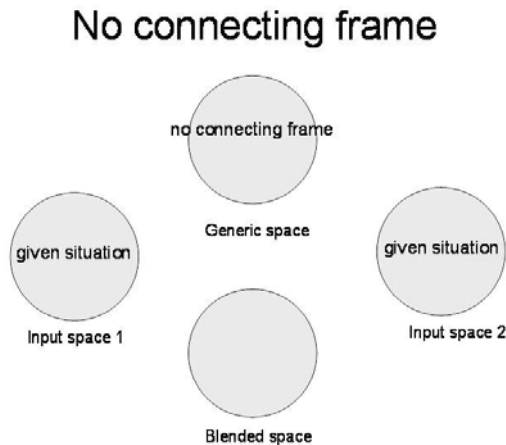
(1) Lack of a generic frame

Figure 7

In a complex sign both input spaces can be given, meant to generate a blending process. We saw already an example with the *Traditional*

Chinese Jazz. This process can only run if the interpreter has a *generic frame* at his disposal that suits to connect the input spaces. Such a frame can be obvious for the one interpreter, absent for the other, maybe due to a lack of presupposed, culturally determined experiences. Usually the structure of the sign indicates clearly that both inputs are supposed to be related. In such cases the interpreter experiences that he is stuck in the process; the text feels incoherent. We see this as evidence for the validity of the model.

A clear example of this occurred in a group of Chinese students, watching a European advertisement for Smart cars. A man parks his Smart. He needs a coin for the parking meter but has no. The meter maid already approaches. He throws his cap on the ground and starts singing, hoping for alms. He sings a song with the line: "I have got so much love…." Then a man passes, correcting him: "I have got so much life…." The first man as well as the meter maid looks astonished at the second man (last still).

The structure of the sign is articulated; because it is the last shot, the appearance of this man must be significantly related to the input so far. In input space 1 we have the singing and begging man, in input space 2 the correcting man. None of the students could grasp the relation, all felt uncomfortable about this, knowing they were 'missing' something significant. The cause here is that they missed significant specifications in both input spaces, namely that the first man was singing – badly and with a wrong line – an in Europe famous song of Robbie Williams. And they missed that the second man was that famous Robbie Williams himself, necessary to activate a generic frame. Therefore the generic space stayed empty. They simply could not connect both input spaces and therefore could not run the blend. And they were aware of this. The moment they were informed about the two facts, they smiled and grasped the pun themselves; they *were* able to run the blend.

(2) A deviating generic frame
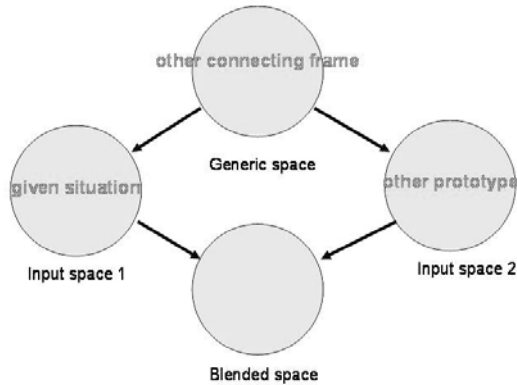
Deviating connecting frame

Figure 8

Especially when only one input space is explicitly indicated in the sign and the other input space has to be activated by the interpreter via a generic space, there is a chance that an interpreter activates deviating generic frames. Deviating from other interpreters, maybe deviating from what the author may have intended. The interpreter is usually not aware of this, unless he is in a dialogue with other interpreters. From the interpreter's responses we can infer our hypotheses about the activated generic frame.

Zhang Yingchun, a Chinese student, reads a Dutch advertisement for TGP Post, a mail delivery company. In a stylized world numerous red balls depart from some persons, roll through the city (Rotterdam), pass some people, and in the end the largest one ends in the arms of a happy young man. The ad is fast with short shots on rhythmic music. I show the first three balls that depart from persons.
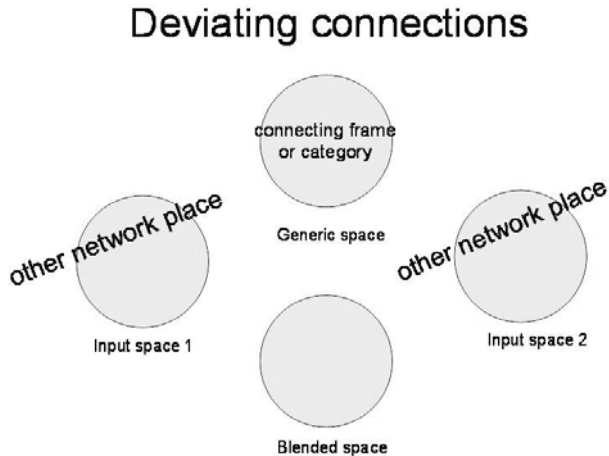
All other students connect these input spaces 1 via the generic frame with prototypical counterparts of the people (input space 2): the inhabitant of an apartment building, the office worker, the young woman having breakfast, likely to be blended together as *all kind of people*. But not Yingchun. Very unexpectedly he combines the man on still 2 and the woman on still 3, via the generic frame of *inter human relations*, as a couple. This means that he perceived the structure of the sign in such a way that it requires a relation between still 2 and 3. This is already remarkable because still 2 follows still 1 in a similar way. He interprets also their environments as part of a communal house. In the blend he projects a rich series of connected values, and – indeed the movie is very vast – he sees the woman receive the ball. This is actually not the case; she throws the ball away.

This interpretation is very interesting, given the fact that this student comes from a small village, from an extended family. His peers characterize him as a real family man. And – asked to deliver a series of pictures that he associates with this ad, he comes up with all scenes from small village communities, family scenes, and warm social behavior. We can hypothesize that these values may explain the prominence of this connecting frame that he activates.

An intriguing theoretical issue is whether we must explain the fact that he – wrongly – sees the woman receive the ball as a draw back from the blend; because they are man and wife, because the shot with the man precedes the shot with the woman, maybe because the man is the man and the woman the woman, the woman must be a receiver. Confronted with the deviating interpretations of his peers, Zhang Yingchun courageously and firmly maintains his opinion.

(3) Deviating connections of the input spaces

Deviating connections

connecting frame
or category

Generic space

other network place

Input space 1

other network place

Input space 2

Blended space

Figure 9

Probably the most frequent source for differences in interpretation will be that the content of one or of both input spaces has a deviating place in the cognitive network of the interpreter, and therefore – by definition – a deviating meaning. We saw already several extreme examples of this. The students saw just a man – they did not see Robbie Williams – so certainly the connected concepts and values will deviate from an interpreter who does see the famous artist. The student in our last example saw a married woman; some of the others saw an independent person, having breakfast before going to work. In both cases we could only detect these differences because we observed their consequences in other elements of the blending process.

Often these deviations are hard or not to detect; the input spaces dissolve in the blend and unless this leads to consequences elsewhere, they will stay unnoticed. Whether that means that they are unimportant, remains to be seen. For example, when Zhang Yingchun processes in the TGP-post commercial an input space with a family relation, it may be obvious that the connections of that concept in his cultural world will differ strongly from those of a European interpreter. This will even be the case if he accepts the European cultural context and interprets the family

concept from a European perspective. If his cultural knowledge is
sufficient, the concept he activates may resemble the European concept,
but in that case the connected values will strongly differ. As he formulated
it: "I am happy I come from an extended family and I pity the people who
do not."

The next example is subtle. A Chinese student reads a Dutch
television commercial for Volkswagen. Driving a Volkswagen – the sign
indicates – makes you a member of a big family; everybody starts to hug
the new buyer. After several of these scenes the man is approached by a
group of people (last still).

The student characterizes these people as *ethnic others*, the man as
white male white-collar worker. Notice that again these characterizations
are the product of a blend. The characters are via a generic space related to
their prototypes and the result is that this man *is* a white male collar
worker, these people *are* ethnic others. She perceives the structure of the
sign so that these two elements must be related and therefore activates the
generic space *friendship between humans*, inspired by their behavior. This
leads to the spectacular blend: *all people become your friends*. That is the
meaning she reports as the result of her interpretation process.

This process cannot have been *simplex blending*. A simplex blending
is a process in which both input spaces fit because of there uncomplicated
analogies. This would have led to a blend: *these people are friends*. We
must assume a more complicated *mirror blend*; the frames are equal but
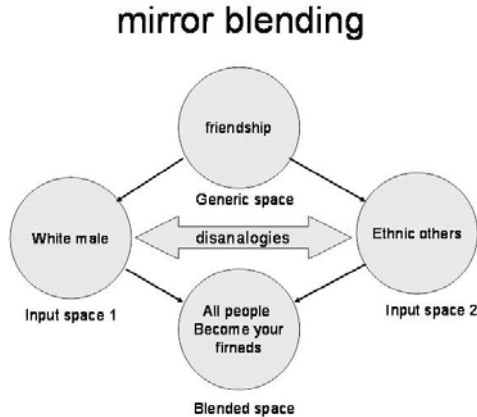there are disanalogies. In a scheme:

mirror blending

friendship

Generic space

White male   ← disanalogies →   Ethnic others

Input space 1   Input space 2

All people
Become your
firneds

Blended space

Figure 10

After blending the movie characters with their prototypes, combined with the socio-cultural values of this interpreter, she perceives conflicts between the input space 1 and 2 as connected. The interpreter solves the conflict by projecting input space 2 in the blend as *all people*. If *these* people are connected with the man via the activated frame of friendship, then *all* people are connected with the man.

Firstly, her interpretation may be very close to the one we may predict for the intended audience – Dutch (white?) consumers – although for them input space 2 is more specific and connected with more specific values and concepts. These people are (descendents of) Mediterranean workers who came to the Netherlands in the seventies. Indeed is it still quite rare that a close friendship exists between autochthon Dutch and these allochtonous people. But the specific socio-cultural values of exactly this encounter our Chinese interpreter misses because of a deviating input space 2.

Secondly, notice that this interpreter is not Dutch, not male, and not white. We see here a clear example of the interpreter in a multicultural context who – unconsciously – takes or tries to take the perspective of the supposed cultural context of the message. This is different from the TGP-post student.

Thirdly, this example raises the question whether there will be interesting drawbacks here. This is empirically a hard phenomenon to tackle – but from an ideological perspective surely the most important one. Conceptual blending theory gives us at least a tool to model the possibilities. The commercial – as the stills may show – pictures the behavior very exaggerated. So two contrary processes may occur. On the one hand the friendship may be perceived as a realistic option, which may alter the connections of the input spaces slightly in a direction that the disanalogies become less sharp. But on the other hand the friendship is articulated by this advertisement as very unrealistic; only buying a Volkswagen can bring about such an extraordinary situation. If the interpreter perceives it this way – subconsciously – the structural disanalogies may be reinforced. In the 'real' world perception of the oppositions may be strengthened.

(4) Different blending processes

The fourth source of deviating interpretations is in the heart of the process: deviating blending processes. These always depend on differences from the sources (1) – (3). Nevertheless this source should be distinguished because it adds elements to these differences, magnifies them, or can neutralize them (which can make it even more difficult to detect the deviations in the cognitive systems).