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Past Colloquia: 2006

Anthony Jack. Wednesday, 20 December 2006. 4-5pm, 618 Crawford Hall. Title: "Can fMRI Shed Light on Cognitive Control?" Anthony Jack is Post-doctoral Research Associate in the Department of Neurology at the Washington University School of Medicine and Ph.D. in Psychology, University College London, 1998. Website :<http://tony.jack.googlepages.com/home> (<http://tony.jack.googlepages.com/home>) .

Abstract: Humans have a remarkable ability to flexibly adapt to changing circumstances and novel situations. We reconfigure our cognitive processes on the fly, allowing us to process information in a way that serves our current goals. Can fMRI shed light on how we accomplish this remarkable feat? This talk will consist of two parts. In the first part, I will outline two series of experiments which demonstrate how state-of-the-art fMRI research can shed light on the mechanisms underlying one specific type of cognitive control: spatial attention. The second part will involve a much broader discussion of issues involved in cognitive control. I will point to some links between consciousness and cognitive control, and suggest that we can learn more by investigating the relationship between brain areas involved in "visual" and "social" processes.

Vera Tobin. Wednesday, 29 November 2006. 4-5pm. 618 Crawford Hall. Title: "Literary Joint Attention." Website: <http://stuttercut.org/> (<http://stuttercut.org/>)

Abstract: Language has a variety of resources for assigning different degrees of salience to different aspects of an utterance, its expressed content, and the context in which the utterance appears. These resources serve as tools for language users to direct one another's attention with respect to these domains and to coordinate understanding in discourse. Furthermore, in natural language, sentences

and conversational turns are constructed not in isolation, but as the products of an interactive process between speaker and hearer, in which elements such as pauses, repairs, restarts, and linguistic and non-linguistic displays of agreement, confusion, interest, or disinterest all contribute to the construction of coherent streams of talk (see, for example, Charles Goodwin, *Sociological Inquiry*, 1980).

Joint attention is a fundamental aspect of interpersonal coordination in which, in its most basic form, two people are both focused on an external object and mutually aware of this shared focus. In person, people coordinate their communicative activities in real time and get immediate feedback about whether they have succeeded or failed in their communicative intentions. A host of visual cues helps us to keep track of the immediate attentions of our interlocutors, and this knowledge provides important information about what we can consider part of the common ground underlying a conversation.

Other settings of language use, such as those associated with the production, dissemination, and reception of literary texts, can lack many of these mechanisms for immediate coordination. How, then, and to what extent, do participants in these discourses take one another into account? In this talk, I present the phenomenon of literary joint attention as a subset of joint attention in general, and give a detailed analysis of its mechanisms as they play out over the textual history of one of the most famously revised poems in modern English, Marianne Moore's "Poetry".

This analysis demonstrates the radically material and collaborative process of meaning construction involved in literature, and the grounding of that collaborative process in the joint attention of its participants. It also makes the connections between these literary acts and their counterparts in natural discourse newly clear, pointing the way to an interactionalist and cognitive stylistics of attention.

Nurit Ben-Zvi. Wednesday, 15 November 2006. 4-5pm. 618 Crawford Hall. Title: "Timing and Creativity in Orally Transmitted Biblical Cantillation." Ben-Zvi holds a Ph.D. in Ethnomusicology from the Hebrew University and spent a postdoctoral year in the Cognitive Ethnomusicology Lab in OSU, during 2002-2003. Her research focuses on oral transmission of music and speech traditions. She is interested in the human creativity intrinsic to oral cultures and explores the cognitive processes underlying the performance practice of chanting. Interested faculty may join Ben-Zvi for coffee **3-4pm in SAGES café**.

Abstract: Cognitive Ethnomusicology is a very young area of research. It aims to integrate culture, music and human cognition to better understand how the brain responds to music and how music making by humans influence brain activity. Because its main key concepts and thoughts are such as:

orality, in/out context performance practice, literacy/illiteracy, cultural values, expertise and symbolic communication” are almost parallel with central themes of research in Cognitive Sciences (such as: learning/memory, perception/action, writing/reading, emotions, expertise/creativity, music/language production), music is considered at present time by neuroscientists as the “food of neuroscience” (e.g., Robert Zatore, *Nature*, 2005) and by psychologists arguing that “this discipline could provide us with a list of musical traits that are common to all known musical cultures and traits that are culture-specific” (e.g., Isabelle Peretz, *Cognition*, 2006). In this talk, I will present some main aspects that relate to rhythm perception and production in orally transmitted Biblical Cantillation by old-aged cantors. I will describe the riddle intrinsic to this religious ancient musical practice (Hebrew script is consonantal, i.e., deep orthography, and melody exhibits no periodicity) as well as some methodological aspects. By arguing that Time is not only a crucial factor in ear communication (basing on behavioral studies), but also is related to temporal memory processes (by basing on imaging studies), I would suggest that the temporality of human cognition interpolated with retrieved musical knowledge and on line creativity, give rise to cultural oral pattern to spontaneously emerge. One intriguing open question that arises from the study of rhythm production in Cantillation is whether temporal information presented independently from spatial action (i.e., as an abstract program), as some theories of timing claim, or timing is intimately correlated with spatial events, thus an emergent property of concrete events themselves? It seems that the issue of ‘internal clock’ will still remain a debatable issue.

Jesper Sørensen. Wednesday, 8 November 2006, 4-5pm, 618 Crawford Hall. Title: “The Construction of Agency in Ritual Action.” Jesper Sørensen is Associate Professor in Comparative Religion, Institute of Philosophy, Education and the Study of Religion, University of Southern Denmark. He is currently International Scholar, Memory and Development Lab, Department of Psychology, Washington University, St. Louis.

➤ Abstract: It is a common understanding that the performance of ritual actions is motivated by beliefs in superhuman agents (gods, spirits, ancestors) and that the only thing distinguishing rituals from ordinary actions is the role played by these agents. In short, people perform ritual actions because they believe in superhuman agents, and ritual actions are special because of the special features of the beings believed in. In this paper, I will argue that it might be the other way around: that it is the performance of ritual actions that makes representations of superhuman agents relevant in the first place. Based on recent cognitive studies of human action representations, I will argue that humans represent the actions of other people by means of two relatively independent neuro-cognitive systems. One is based on representations of specific action gestalts and relates these to proximate intentions of the observed agent. The other, in turn, combines series of such action gestalt into a

causally related sequence specified by an ultimate intention. These two systems are thus hierarchically related and in unison they give rise to representations of other peoples' actions as both meaningful and goal directed. In ritual actions, however, these two systems are disconnected. The actions performed are represented as having proximate intentions, but for a number of reasons they are not automatically combined into causal sequences specified by an ultimate intention. This has a number of cognitive effects, and prominent among these is that it makes representation of unobservable superhuman agents highly relevant. Gods, spirits and ancestor are able to re-establish the connection between proximate and ultimate levels of the action representation thus making the action both meaningful and goal directed. This role of superhuman agents in ritual action will, in turn, make these agents more relevant when understanding or explaining non-ritual events as both meaningful and goal directed.



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