

Both in content and in form *Transcendental Wordplay* aims for, but never quite achieves, a refreshing mixture of traditionalism and innovation. In the book's preface, West professes his 'mistrust' for most current academic writing, which he views as both jargon-ridden and unnecessarily hostile, and calls upon American literary critics to return to basics. Fittingly, considering the book's subject, West aspires to write in a playful, informal, densely allusive style, which he believes will appeal to 'ordinary readers' who also 'recoil from most academic literary criticism' (xvi). By interspersing his formal pontifications (West's pun, not mine) with myriad informal jokes, asides, witticisms and anecdotes, *Transcendental Wordplay* ambitiously undertakes to resist academic dullness, and to revive as well as explain the ebullient transcendental style. It is easy to sympathize with this endeavor, but it does not take one of West's pathologically suspicious ideology critics to see that his stylistic project undermines itself, if only because West's prose shares at least one telltale characteristic of the modern academic discourse that he disdains so much: excessive prolixity. Weighing in at more than 500 pages, *Transcendental Wordplay* is an extremely and in several ways unnecessarily long book. Moreover, the book's opaque structure, with its 14 mutually overlapping chapters, makes the underlying argument hard to discern and follow. West may well claim transcendental precedence for his freewheeling resistance to formal economy – think of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* or Melville's *Moby-Dick* – but at some points in his discussion he might have benefited more from modeling himself on other textual precursors, like Poe's brief tales or Dickinson's compact lyrics. Thoreau, as West notes, not only punned but also tried to contain punning's tendency to overwhelm other discursive modes, and perhaps West should have followed his hero on this point, too. At its best, in any event, transcendental wit was never the same as sheer loquacity or undue long-windedness, and one cannot help thinking that West sometimes treads perilously close to the latter.

Peter Mortensen

University of Aarhus

Mark Turner, *Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. 224 pages; ISBN: 0-1951-3904-6; \$25 cloth.

Let us start by carving out two basic premises: Firstly, no matter what methodology or tradition the social scientist subscribes to, one thing remains an unquestionable, fundamental condition of her endeavour: she cannot ever escape her own cognitive constitution. Secondly, almost all that can be called the social scientist's object, that is, almost everything that somehow constitutes human society or culture is, unavoidably, mediated through human cognition.

And so what? These may just seem to be pretty banal and somewhat futile observations. But not so. It may be that most social scientists would subscribe to them, but, and this is the point, they do not seem to take them as seriously as they should. And, in this respect, the cognitive scientist Mark Turner argues, 'social science as a whole is in a position something like biology before the theory of evolution':

Biologists, or rather botanists and zoologists, studied flora and fauna in exhaustive detail, in niches, *in situ*, penetrating the mysteries of their local habitations, measuring them, counting them, tracking cycles, writing all this down in the equivalent of field guides, and developing the ability to predict many natural phenomena, including phenomena of change – if frost falls, the bud is harmed; if the soil is enriched, growth improves, and so on ... But these interpretations did not explain and were not meant to explain the biological processes according to which these species could exist in the first place, or descend, or develop, or differ. To explain these more basic issues required the theory of evolution, which, once it was available, became an indispensable instrument in the professional study of local, narrowly coordinated, *in situ* life forms and the niches they inhabit.⁴

Human meaning is, of course, essential to social science, but nevertheless it tends to be taken as something given. And from the point of view of cognitive science, whose task is to face and try to tackle this very difficult phenomenon, such a (lack of) treatment of human meaning is unsettling. Turner continues:

Taking human meaning as given and interpreting it, according to one or another social scientific practice, without referring to the neurocognitive level at which these meanings emerge, is like taking the existence of life forms as given and interpreting them without referring to the theory of evolution (14).

Or even more bluntly, social scientists have at the heart of their endeavour a phenomenon which they only have a superficial conception of. However, the cognitivists do not pass judgment on the social scientists for that. They sympathize deeply:

Social science does nothing wrong here, since cognitive science has no theory of emergence and descent of meaning that can begin to compare with the theory of evolution of species. We really are in the position of botanists and zoologists before the theory of evolution, and it is indeed something like the theory of evolution that cognitive science is trying, by gists and piths, with set-backs, to discover (14).

But if the cognitivists themselves have not yet succeeded in grasping completely what constitutes human meaning and how it works anyway, and if social science has managed to be a flourishing science hitherto without having to rely on the cognitivists to tell them what human meaning is, then why bother now? That is basically the question that Mark Turner attempts to answer in *Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science*.

A New Path

Firstly, that social science has been a flourishing science without cognitivist interference does not mean that it could not get better. Secondly, social scientists themselves seem to acknowledge the need for a reconsideration of their craft. At the turn of the millen-

4. Mark Turner, *Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 13.

nium social science, like so many other fields is tormented by ideological and methodological schisms and is on the lookout for new strategies and profiles – a new unified identity.

In 'A New Context for a New American Studies?' (1989), Robert F. Berkhofer explores the nature of particular central notions, the notions of text and context, that have shaped and split American Studies since the war. The problem, according to Berkhofer, is that American Studies is torn between two extreme poles: a traditionalist, 'contextual fundamentalism' and an equally fundamentalist 'textualism,' which is informed by the interdisciplinary influence referred to as 'the linguistic turn.' The image that Berkhofer evokes is one of a conceptual highway. The logic of this metaphor is simple: Since you cannot drive on both sides, since the choice of one side – in competition – excludes the other, and since both sides have their manifest weaknesses, American Studies is left in a methodological and political dispute and a painful *methodenschmerz*. But how may this be resolved? How can a fruitful middle way be found? And what should it look like?

Berkhofer presents the different sides of the conceptual highway in the following way. Contextual fundamentalism is constituted by a range of traditional creeds:

At the heart of contextual fundamentalism is the premise that documents, artifacts, or texts are basically self-interpreting without recourse to any explicit framework. As practise, such an approach acts as if the text's words or the artifact's existence were determinative, that is conceptually coercive, of the 'reading' they are to receive – regardless of the reader's values, politics, interpretive paradigm, or interpretive community. Thus 'facts' are discovered, not created or constituted by the frameworks that enable their existence.⁵

Hence, according to contextual fundamentalism, the ultimate context is history itself, and the text is simply a fragment of that historical context. Consequently, out of contextual fundamentalism springs the ideal of the 'Great Story,' the overall story comprising all individual stories, which have somehow been fitted together and reconciled into one viewpoint and one voice.

Textualism is the radical opposition: denaturalization, demystification, deconstruction, dehierarchalization, and dereferentialization. The coherence, unity, and determination that contextual fundamentalism presupposes for historical reality are heavily challenged or completely exterminated by the attitudes which favour a textualist approach. The notion of a manifold but shared human biology is replaced by the notion of class division – an enactment of the ancient nature/culture dichotomy. The notion of a shared underlying

5. Robert F. Berkhofer, 'A New Context for a New American Studies?', *American Quarterly*, 41, 4 (1989), 589.

American myth, which it is the job of scholars to reveal, is turned into the notion of a divided society. Ideas are no longer something that are governed and directed by a common basis, but something over which political battles are fought. Signified and signifier are torn apart. The meaning of a text is no longer determinative. In fact, language is subversive of its own meaning. No one or nothing holds cultural authority, and hence there is no privileged essence, no elite, no universals, no privileged aesthetics, no authorial meaning, and no primary foundation. It is all a matter of ideological and political struggle.

These opposing sides are incompatible, and each has proven inadequate or futile in its own way. Yet, this situation could also be framed differently: that each also seems to have – albeit in too radical a measure – something that the other one needs, something that would strengthen the other one. Hence, what Berkhofer presents as a new alternative is not just a rejection of both, but a middle way, which on the one hand avoids the ‘conceptual relativism, intellectual if not social anarchy, and philosophical and political nihilism’ (595) which the linguistic turn ultimately leads to, while on the other hand also avoiding the ‘naiveté of the old historicism’ (591):

Surely the effort must advance beyond the recent flood of new but normal histories of methodologies, disciplines, and mediate between – if not proceed beyond – textualism and contextualism as versions of context, between poetics and politics as textual versions of social reality. It cannot accept and base its narrative upon a transparent social history as normally written for grounding its own analysis of the social production and consumption of texts through demystification. It cannot rehierarchize or re-essentialize some basic social and cultural categories as it poeticizes the contextualization of other concepts and categories. It cannot move the marginal peoples to the center of the story in the guise of the other but still resort to the traditional paradigm of the past as the Great Story. Lastly, it ought not pretend to a middle way, if it narrows the road to achieve that path (603).

Interestingly, it seems to be exactly on the same position, on the middle of the conceptual highway of approaches to human meaning, that cognitive science has also found a new path, a path that appears to lead, better than any previous paths, to the heart of the mysteries of human meaning. Cognitive science itself also has a history of great schisms, which are alike in nature to the ones that Berkhofer finds in American Studies. Often cognitivists frame these schisms as the opposition between subjectivism and objectivism.

Subjectivism ultimately leads to the same kind of cultural nihilism, anarchy, indeterminism, and cognitive solipsism that the linguistic turn has tormented social science with. Objectivism, on the other hand, tends to ignore everything that is human in human meaning. According to the objectivist creeds, human beings merely acquire, carry, and use meaning, either correctly or wrongly. They do not create or shape meaning themselves. Meaning transcends human beings.

In the last two-to-three decades, however, a new cognitive paradigm has emerged and developed into a powerful and influential branch of human science. Some call them 'West Coast Cognitivists' (as opposed to the predominantly formal and objectivist 'East Coast Cognitivists' – we are, of course, talking about the East and West coasts of the United States); others, including themselves, refer to this new 'school' as 'Second Generation Cognitive Science' (henceforth SGCS). Many identify SGCS with works such as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), Mark Johnson's *The Body in the Mind* (1987), and Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987). In these hallmarks of the new cognitive science, the authors depart from the opposing sides of the conceptual highway of cognitive science and lay down the contours of a new path: 'experientialism.' Experientialism is a kind of middle way, but it is also much more. To use Berkhofer's phrase, it 'proceeds beyond' both subjectivism and objectivism. Today the exploration of the potential of experientialism has expanded and improved the new cognitive paradigm extensively, and new research spearheaded by people like Mark Turner and his partner for almost a decade, Gilles Fauconnier, has turned SGCS into a massive research program.

Cognitive Dimensions of Social Science is an icon of present-day SGCS, with special focus on Turner and Fauconnier's groundbreaking theory of 'conceptual integration,' also called 'blending,' which we will return to below. As the title indicates, the book is, in fact, nothing less than an invitation from the author to consider the potential of a future engagement, or even wedding, between cognitive science and social science.

Interestingly, Berkhofer's concerns overlap considerably, if not completely, with questions raised at a conference at the School of Social Science at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton in May 1997, which was attended by Mark Turner, who spent a year at the Institute in 1996-97: 'Where exactly do we stand, and where do we go from here? What kind of problems should we be addressing, with what kinds of approaches and arguments?' Turner's answer, 'in a nutshell,' to this 'bracing swash of impossibly broad questions' 'is that social science is headed for an alliance with cognitive science' (4). Hence, in spirit at least, Turner suggests exactly what Berkhofer is on the lookout for: a new context for social science. And this context is, in broad terms, the basic premises that were written out at the outset of this review. It is, though Turner himself is more modest in his choice of words, a proposal for a restaging of social science methodologies and ideologies in a framework of cognitive science. Or to put it in a fashion that highlights the essence of Turner's endeavour, a restaging of a science that deals with the products of human cognition in a science that deals with the workings of human cognition.

This may sound like a clear case of interdisciplinary imperialism: one discipline attempts to swallow another by subordinating its scope and method in a larger framework. That, however, is by no means the case. At the very core of the cognitive science community are people with backgrounds in different disciplines in the Humanities. And the results achieved in cognitive science to a great degree depend upon this fact: that hypotheses and theories have been built on evidence collected in different areas of research, what Ronald

Langacker refers to as 'converging evidence.'⁶ Thus, Turner's embedding should be seen as a symbiotic embedding rather than an imperialistic embedding. Viewed against the background of the by now traditional divisions that exist in the field of the Humanities, cognitive science is by nature trans-disciplinary. And the simple reason is that evidence of human cognition is found in all fields of the Humanities.

Furthermore, since the research done by cognitive scientists shows that dimensions such as physiology, neurobiology, and genetics play a central role in human cognition, cognitive science even presents a natural link between the Humanities and the natural sciences. As opposed to Descartes' dualism, SGCS holds that body and brain are crucial to understanding how the mind works. There are no pure ideas in a sphere of pure mind, and this is what makes SGCS anti-objectivist. On the other hand, the fact that we do share the same biological codes and the fact that we are a social species and not an individualistic species, gives us a shared basis for meaning-making which underlies cultural differences. One could say that despite the fact that there are huge cultural differences between nations and even inside nations, it will always potentially be possible for us to understand each other because a shared basis is what constitutes us as human beings, and this is what makes SGCS anti-subjectivist. To return to Turner's evolution-metaphor for understanding human meaning: simply observing forms may lead to disastrous fallacies since the apparent discreteness of these forms belies the universality and communality of their maker: human cognition.

In other words, the nature of the approach that Berkhofer is trying to provide for American Studies seems to be very much the nature of the approach that has emerged in SGCS. And the reason why the social scientists should care is that apparently they have become exhausted from staring at the forms only. The new context that Turner proposes is not one that abandons any particular previous social science methodology, but one that aims at taking social science behind its forms to view its research and methodologies in a new light, and then eventually either/both reconsider old methodologies and research results or/and contribute to developing the cognitive theories. Both disciplines are venturing out on new paths. These paths are alike, and each discipline has something the other one craves: social science has expert insight into an important area of human cognition, and cognitive science has the tools to give social science a push forward.

The Descent of Meaning

Turner and Fauconnier's particular candidate for a theory of the way human beings create new meaning and hence Turner's candidate for understanding the complex social products that human beings have always been able to develop is, as mentioned above, conceptual integration. And in his book, he uses the insights from this theory to consider a range of traditional social science methods and qualitative analyses.

6. Ronald Langacker, 'Assessing the Cognitive Linguistic Enterprise. In René Dirven, Ronald Langacker, and John R. Taylor (eds), *Cognitive Linguistics: Foundations, Scope, and Methodology*. Cognitive Linguistics Research, 15 (New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1999), 26.

The first chapter of the book is a salutatory duel with the renowned social scientist Clifford Geertz. Turner takes up Geertz' brilliant analysis of the Balinese Cockfight in 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight' (1973) and offers an alternative blending-analysis. In very broad terms, what the theory of blending proposes is that the most distinctive, basic, and important cognitive skill that human beings have is the ability to combine and fuse two, or more, different domains of knowledge or experience – two, or more, mental structures – whereby a new, unique domain of knowledge – a new mental structure – emerges. This new mental structure is not just the sum of the contributing mental structures. It has an emergent structure of its own, which is the result of 'fitting' selectively the contributing structures. And the Balinese Cockfight as a social phenomenon, Turner argues, is the result of such an integration of mental structures.

The Balinese have experience with their social structures and with cocks, and these domains of experience serve as contributing 'inputs' to the blend that constitutes the Balinese cockfight. In this very complex blend, an extremely refined ritual emerges where roles and characteristics from the contributing inputs are blended to create new roles and relations. The cock, for instance, as a fighter, receives a kind of human status, which is the result of blending the Balinese cock-owner's potential human intentionality of fighting for a higher social ranking with the cock's instinctual behaviour. That is, in the ritual, in the blend, the Balinese man can behave like a beast.

But rituals like cockfights are just one very obvious example of blending. Blending is at work everywhere, Turner argues, and it constantly directs our thoughts in ways that are so subtle that we would never notice them without careful analysis. And this might be the very reason why so many otherwise very refined methodologies have failed to meet the ultimate scientific criteria. The human mind is so fast and so comprehensive that no scientist can ever hope to exert control over it while practicing her science. And in the phenomena she studies, there will consequently also be much more than meets the eye. Hence, what she has to do is try to understand the mechanisms that control her and the phenomena she studies.

Other examples that Turner gives are for instance counterfactual reasoning (if X, then Y), human choice making, and thinking in terms of analogy. Again, what underlies these examples, it is held, is that particular, universal, 'faster than its own shadow' mechanism, blending. A counterfactual assertion like 'If Churchill had been prime minister in 1938 instead of Neville Chamberlain, Hitler would have been deposed and World War II would have been averted' is a blend composed, among more things, from what is known about Churchill as an outspoken opponent of Germany in 1938 and the historical situation of Chamberlain facing the threat from Germany in 1938. This kind of thinking is quite ordinary in our everyday lives, and it underlies much scientific thinking too. But despite the fact that careful methods for using counterfactual thinking in science have been worked out, it remains problematic. Counterfactual thinking may be useful for many purposes since such hypothetical or fictional situations can be used to throw light on actual situations, but it is an illusion to think that it can be used for completely controlled lab-like

experiments. Most of the blending process, Turner argues, happens below 'the horizon of conscious observation' (109) and it draws on such entrenched, and to most of us 'invisible,' patterns that bias is extremely difficult even to detect. Blending is part of an almost instinctual 'backstage cognition,' as Turner and Fauconnier call it, the efficiency of which cannot afford to wait for slow conscious thinking. The ability to blend, Turner and Fauconnier have argued elsewhere, is what makes us human and what has given us the immensely complex modern world we have and distinctly human things like language, religion, refined tool use, art and philosophy. If the mental work that underlies these magnificent phenomena had been conscious mental work, if we could only blend at a conscious level, we would probably still be living in caves. It would be like having to be conscious of your every heart beat, your every breath, every step you take when you walk, and so on. Living would be impossible.

Just as we are not aware of the genes and the evolutionary development that constitute us, we are mostly unaware of the evolution of meaning of which we are the ultimate source. And this takes us back to the beginning of this review. To understand human meaning, and this is Turner's high-level argument, one must understand how it comes about and the principles of its evolution, its descent. We must have a theory that is to human meaning what the theory of evolution is to biology. Human beings do not just pick up and accumulate meaning; they develop new meanings on the basis of 'existing' meanings, while preserving (or sometimes discarding) the 'existing' meanings. And the emergent meanings may serve as inputs for further emergent or altered meanings. Social scientists have tended to be content with observing beautiful butterflies, so to speak; they have not inquired into the maker of these creatures. But in order to reach a deeper understanding of what constitutes the phenomena they are studying and to reach a deeper understanding of what determines even the nature of their own approach, they have to take the concept of human meaning much more seriously. This is an extremely challenging task, but a whole new generation of cognitive science is ready to suffer with them.

Anders Hougaard

University of Southern Denmark, Odense

Orm Øverland, ed. *Not English Only: Redefining "American" in American Studies*. European Contributions to American Studies XLVIII. Amsterdam: VU University Press, 2001. ISBN: 9053837566; 202 pages; paper, \$45.

As the editor of *Not English Only* states in his 'Introduction: Redefining 'American' in American Studies,' 'in their different ways, the majority [of the articles collected in the present volume] explore how ideological and cultural traits recognized as 'American' have found expression in a variety of languages' (8). Indeed, the present volume starts from the paradox that though multiculturalism since roughly the late 1980s has been the new orthodoxy in American Studies, this has not led its practitioners seriously to question, let alone qualify, the monolingualism – 'English only' – that has characterized the discipline if not from its inception (Øverland insists that early histories of American Literature, such as the