



Multiliteracies and “Transpositional Grammar”

**Reframing Multimodal Meaning
Making**

*Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope
University of Illinois*



M.A.K. Halliday and Ruqaiya Hasan's *Systemic-Functional Grammar*

“A grammar is a resource for meaning, the critical functioning semiotic by means of which we pursue our everyday life.

It therefore embodies a theory of everyday life; otherwise it cannot function in this way... A grammar is a theory of human experience.”



Halliday, M.A.K. 2000 [2002]. "Grammar and Daily Life: Concurrence and Complementarity." Pp. 369-83 in *On Grammar: The Collected Works of M.A.K. Halliday*, Volume 1, edited by J. J. Webster. London UK: Continuum. Pp. 369-70.



The New London Group

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Courtney Cazden
Gunther Kress
Allan Luke
Bill Cope

New London, New Hampshire, September 1994

Making a Difference

Three key elements:

1. Diversity

Identity, engagement and transformation

2. Multiliteracies

Synesthesia and multiple learning modalities

3. Pedagogy

Epistemological Knowledge processes and repertoires

Each one of these elements involves choices and differentiation.

- *The teacher as a designer of learning experiences and an educational professional.*
- *The learner has agency and is a co-designer of their learning.*



Harvard
Educational
Review

Spring 1996 Issue »

A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies


Designing Social Futures

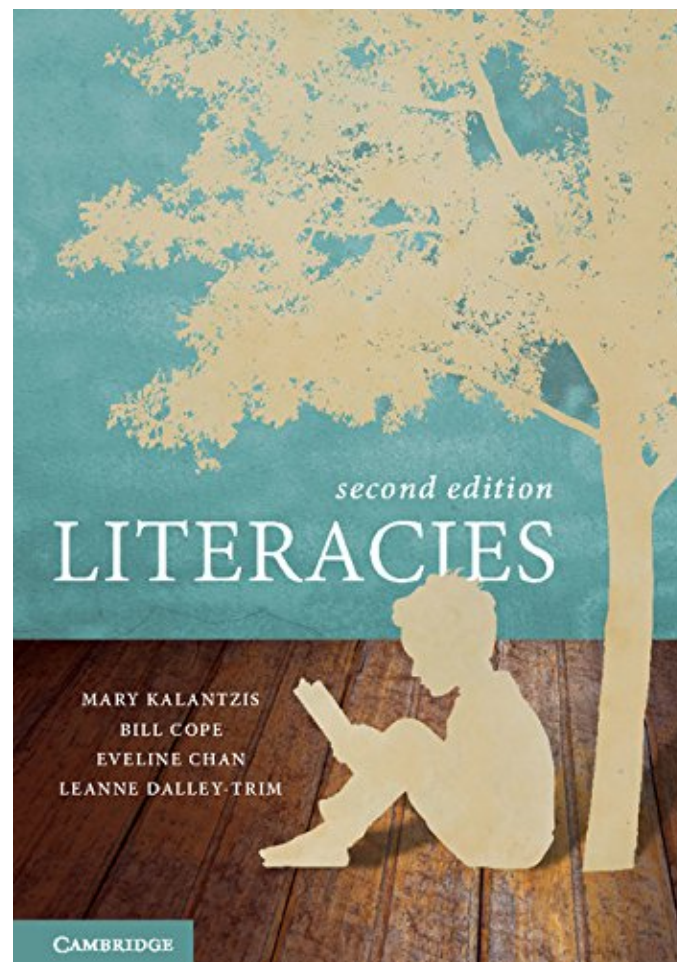
THE NEW LONDON GROUP

Multiliteracies

Literacy learning and the
design of social futures

Edited by
Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis

 Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group



Mary Kalantzis, Bill Cope
Νεκτάριος Στελλάκης, Ευγενία Αρβανίτη
ΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΙΣΜΟΙ
Μια παιδαγωγική διαφοροποιημένου σχεδιασμού
και πολυτροπικών νοηματοδοτήσεων
Μετάφραση: Γιώργος Χρηστίδης

 ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ

Multiliteracies: A Definition

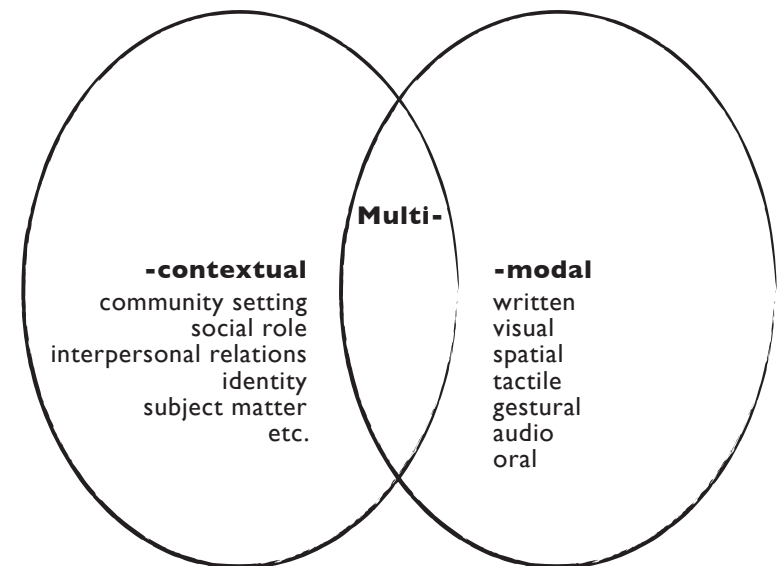
From “literacy” as a single correct usage, to
“literacies” in the plural, two “multis:”

1. Variability

The variability of meaning making in different cultural, social or domain-specific contexts. These differences are becoming ever more significant to our communications environment.

2. Multimodality

With new media of communication, meaning is made in ways that are increasingly multimodal—in which written-linguistic modes of meaning interface with oral, visual, audio, gestural, tactile and spatial patterns of meaning.

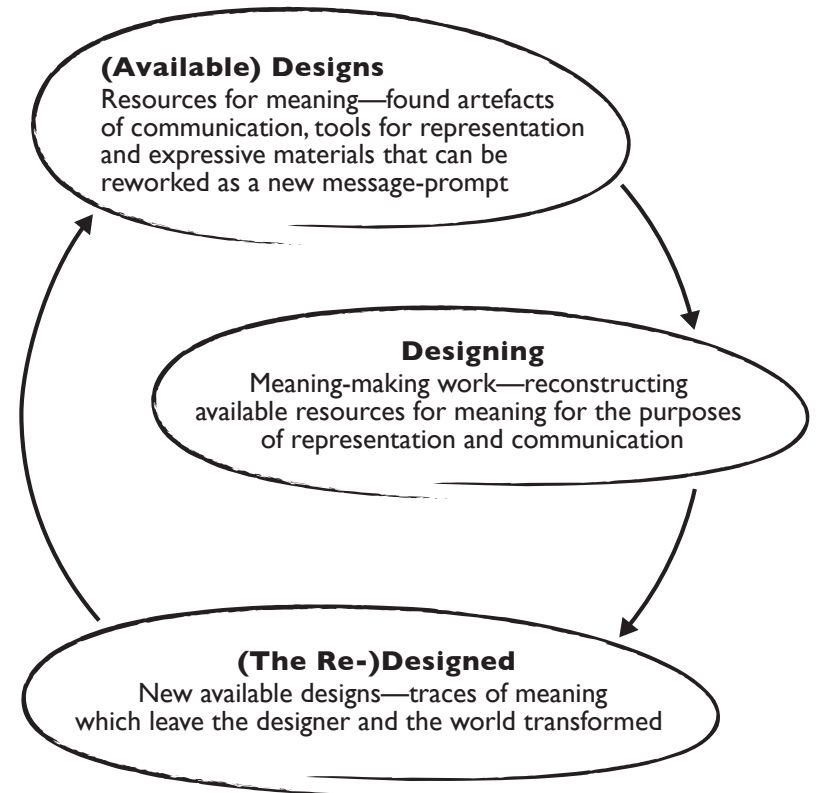


The “What” of Multiliteracies: Designs of Meaning

Designs: Resources for meaning; available designs of meaning.

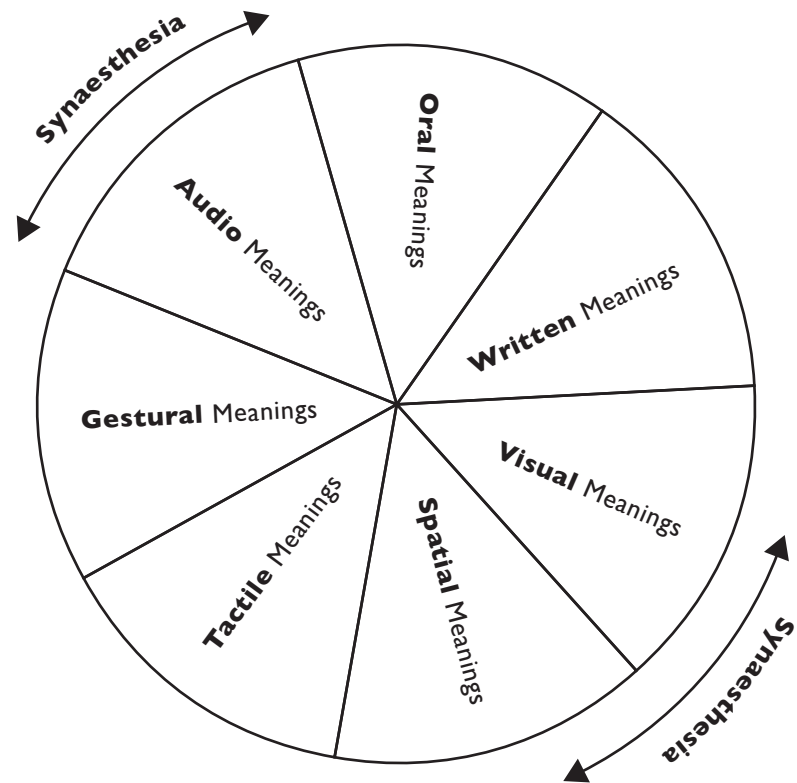
Designing: The work performed on/with the designed in the meaning-making process.

Designed: The resources that are reproduced and transformed through designing.



The "What" of Multiliteracies: The Modes or Forms of Meaning

Text
Image
Space
Object
Body
Sound
Speech



The "What" of Multiliteracies: The Functions of Meaning

Five questions about meaning, when "it" is something that might be meaningful...

1. **Reference:** What is it about? (What do the meanings refer to?)
2. **Agency:** Who or what is doing it? (How do the meanings connect the persons they involve?)
3. **Structure:** What holds it together? (How do the meanings cohere?)
4. **Context:** What else is it connected to? (How do the meanings fit into the larger world of meaning?)
5. **Interest:** What's it for? (Whose interests are the meanings skewed to serve?)

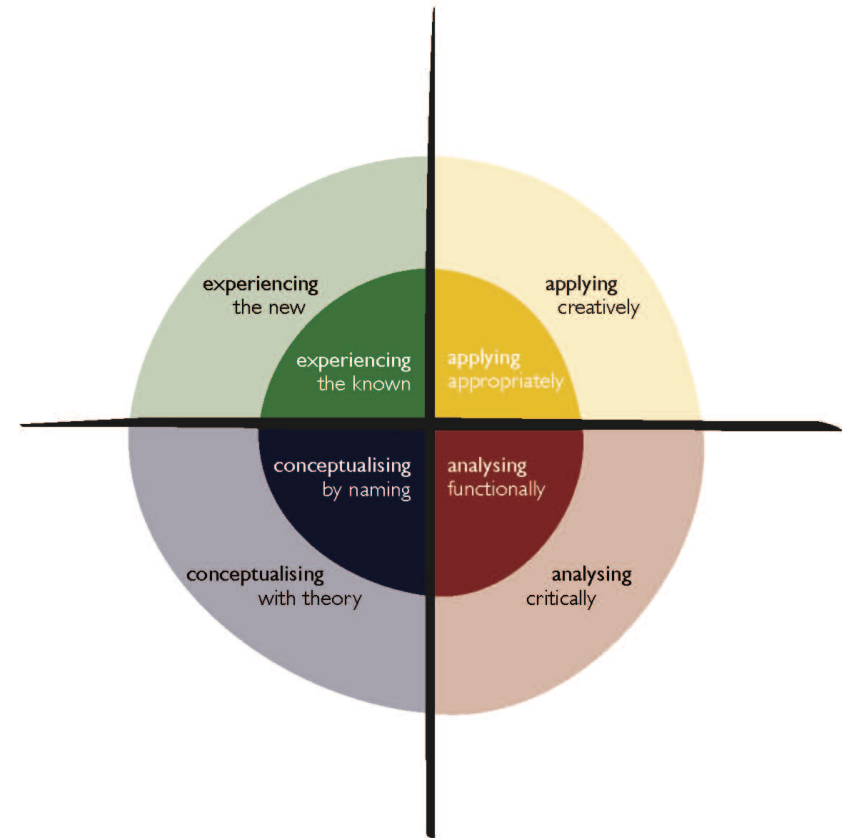
The “How” of Multiliteracies: Analyzing Written Texts

Experiencing (Situated Practice): exposure to real world texts and texts in students’ lives.

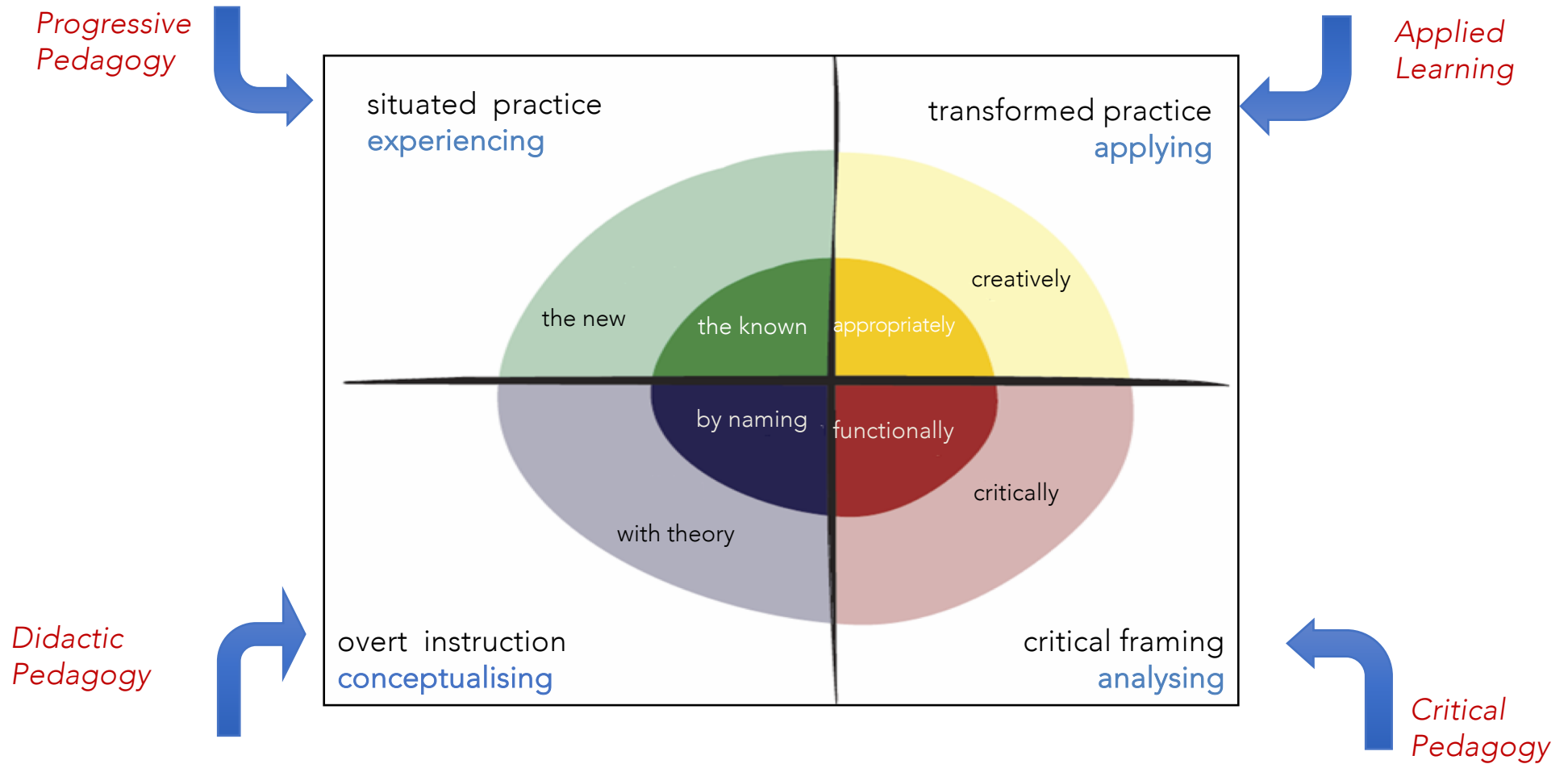
Conceptualizing (Overt Instruction): talking about how the texts work.

Analyzing (Critical Framing): talking about what the texts are for.

Applying (Transformed Practice): making and using texts, applying new knowledge about texts.



Multiliteracies as Pedagogical Repertoire





Human habitation

250,000 years

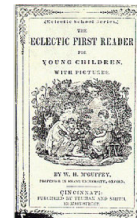
ORACY



Bologna 1088



Academic Freedom



Mid 19th Century



University Mass compulsory schooling

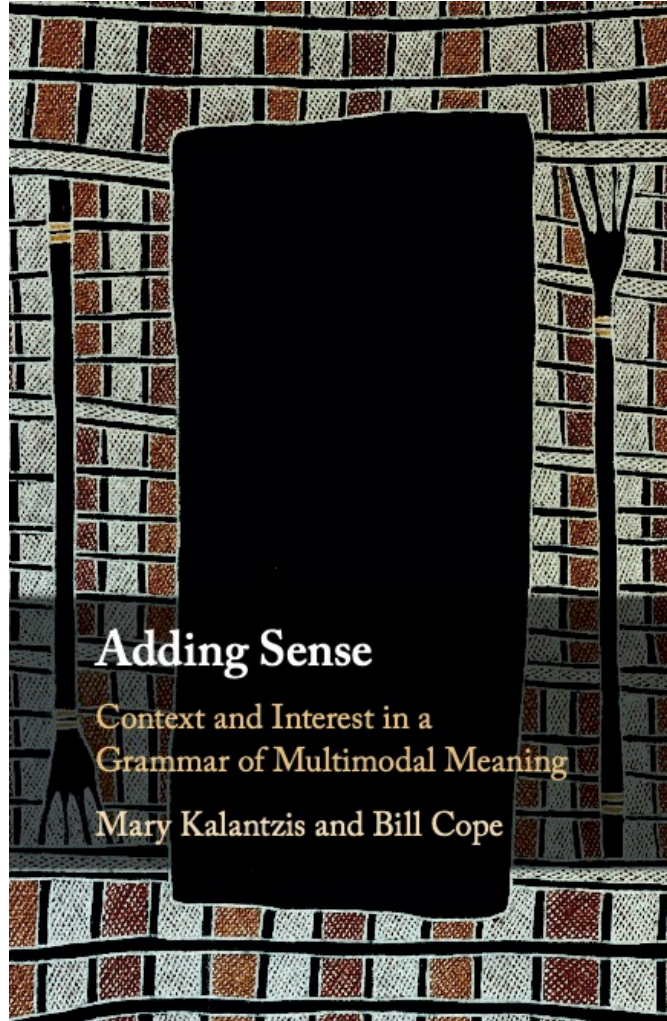
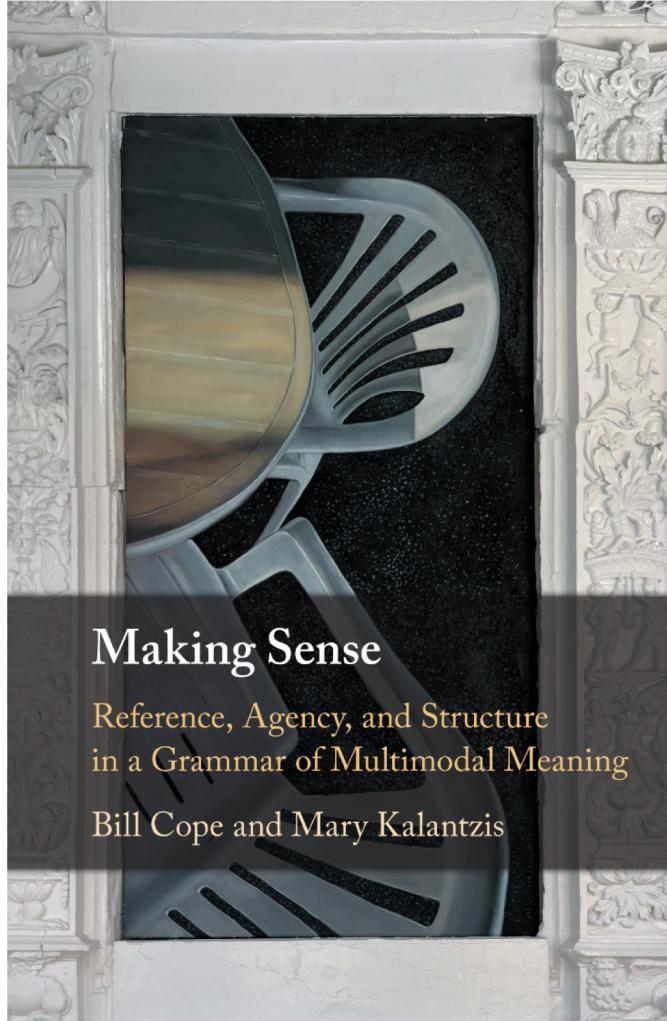
800 years

150 years

PRINT



DIGITAL



Transpositional Grammar

Cambridge University Press, 2019 (in press)

Aims of a Transpositional Grammar

1. An Ontological Turn

The radical separation of text and speech, showing that “language” is an unhelpful category.
Replacing the language turn in humanities and social sciences with an ontological turn.

2. Affordances of Different Forms of Meaning

The dynamics of form-form transposition, such that meaning the same thing (with the same reference, agency, structure, context, interest) can never be quite the same, as determined by the material affordances (opening and constraints) of media.

3. Transposition

Beyond structuralism (of any kind, from Saussure, Chomsky, even some versions of systemics),
the characteristic of the cells in the system are not (just) their form and function,
but the imminent possibility of their becoming something different.

But beyond poststructuralism, the vectors of movability are systematically patterned.

Some transpositions are more ready to happen than others – for example

- instance/concept,
- self/other,
- entity/action,
- possibility/assertion,
- representation/communication/interpretation,
- solidary interests/antagonistic interests)

The mountains loomed large.



The same meaning, different affordances

'The mountains loomed large'

Text

Sequential meaning elements

A reading path that prioritizes time



Image

Simultaneous meaning elements

A viewing path that prioritizes space

Affordances: complementary, redundant, supplementary...



J.M.W. Turner's *Rain, Steam and Speed*

The train in the picture is unnervingly still. The weather is the same in every viewing of the painting. We have to work to interpret the image as event, because all we can see is entities, and actions are conjectural. We can project action from the orientation of the vanishing point and the vector of the railway tracks. The train must have come from somewhere; it must be moving to be going somewhere; and it will soon pass into a future of uncertain weather that lies behind us viewers. Although the hare is scared, it will likely not be killed, and the trajectory of the tracks assures viewers that we will survive the train's passing.

Cope & Kalantzis / Transpositional Grammar • meaningpatterns.net/turner *Rain, Steam and Speed: The Great Western Railway*, J.M.W. Turner, oil on canvas, 91×121.8 cm, 1844, National Gallery, London, NG538.

**Developing a shared language
with which to speak about all forms of meaning**

**Form Meets Function in a
Transpositional Grammar**

Meaning Forms

Meaning Functions

	Text	Image	Space	Object	Body	Sound	Speech
Reference							
Agency							
Structure							
Context							
Interest							

Meaning

```
graph LR; Meaning --- Reference; Meaning --- Agency; Meaning --- Structure; Meaning --- Context; Meaning --- Interest;
```

Reference

Agency

Structure

Context

Interest

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Meaning Functions**

What's this about?

Reference

|

Who or what is doing this?

Agency

|

What holds this together?

Structure

|

What else is this connected to?

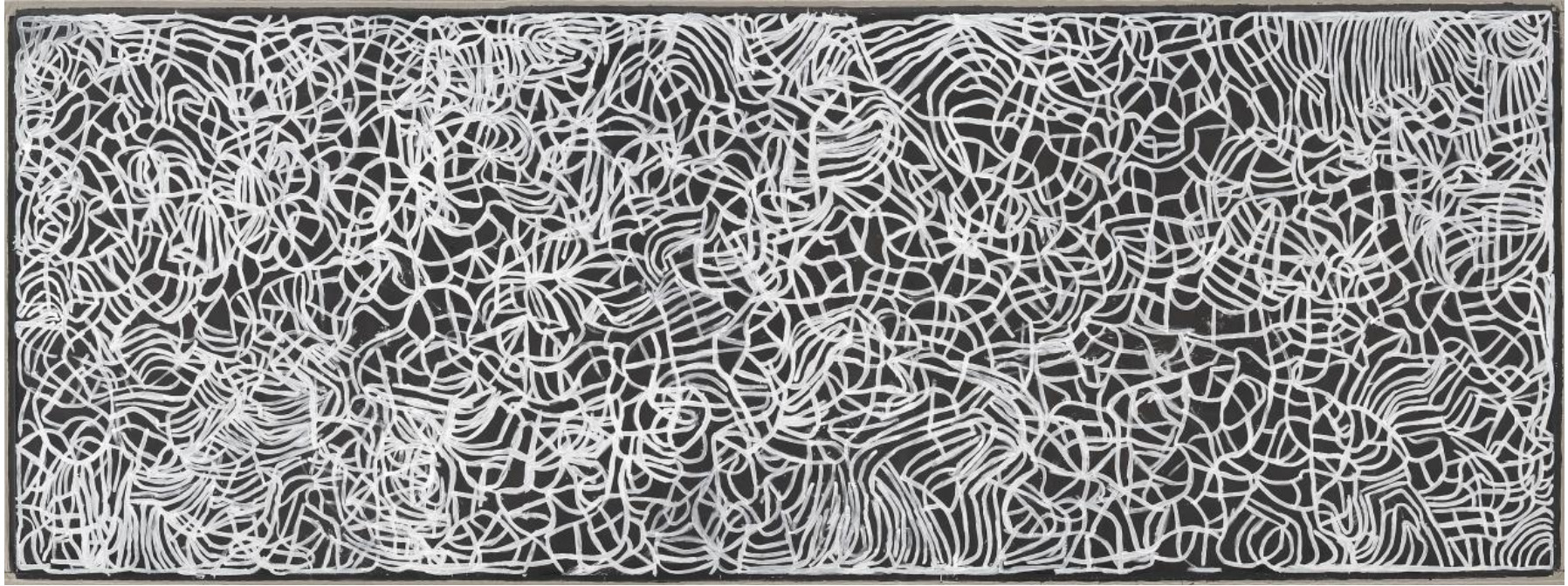
Context

|

What's this for?

Interest

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Five Questions about
Meaning**



**Form:
Image**

Emily Kame Kngwarreye. *Big Yam Dreaming*. 1995. Oil on canvas, 291.1cm x 801.8cm, National Gallery of Victoria

Meaning Functions

Reference: yam, land, person, person, people (one of each, *this*, and in general).

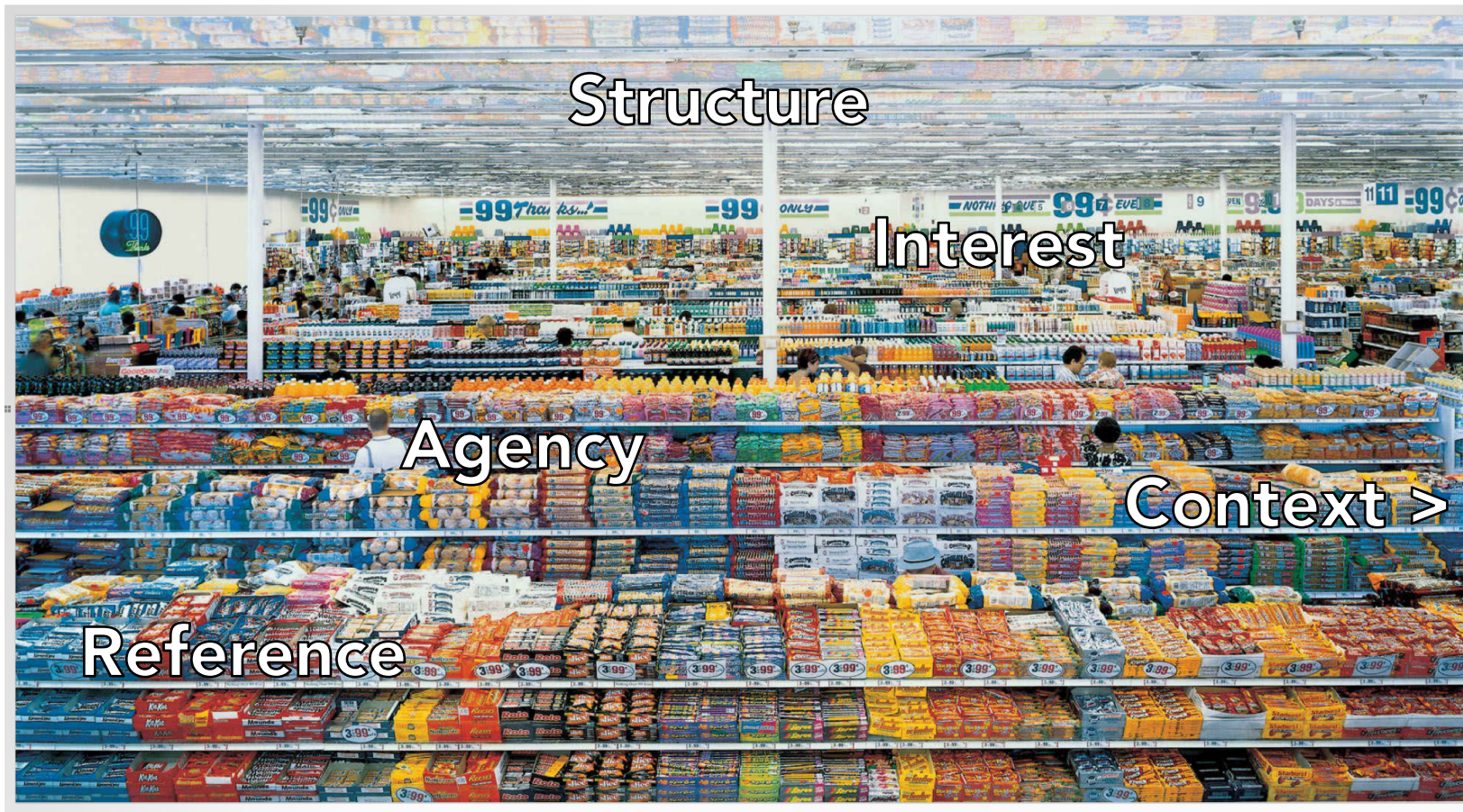
Agency: the land speaks, the country belongs, the yam lives the person, and more.

Structure: the shoots and roots of the yam creeper, painted lines, cracks in the desert soil, Anmatyerre language, and more.

Context: Alhalkere people, galleries, tradition, modernism, and more.

Interest: the land to which Kame speaks, to connect with Emily, to address the politics of theft and the historical pain that Indigenous Peoples have endured and continue to endure, to make some money, and more.

Supermarket Order



Andreas Gursky. *99 Cent*. Digital Image.1999. (Modified)



Transposition

Gunther Kress has a concept for movement that he calls “**transduction**.”

Denise Newfield speaks of “**transmodal translation**.”

Hartmut Stöckl speaks to the “**transcription**” of meaning from one mode to another.

Jay Lemke analyzes “**transmedia transversals**.”

We use the concept of **synaesthesia**, as does Kress, in order to align multimodality with movement of meanings across senses...

The principal innovation we are attempting in this grammar is to develop and apply a notion of **transposition** to account for movement across meaning forms and meaning functions.

Gunther Kress, @ The Learner Conference, 2003, Institute of Education, University of London

Transposition: Some Propositions

Transposition is about movement. Meanings are not fixed. They impatiently await our changing them.

There are two vectors of transposition, two ways to parse any meaning:

1. Form <> Form Transposition

The same meaning can be expressed in different forms, but when the transposition is made, the meaning is never quite the same. This is why we have multimodality, why we juxtapose meanings and layer them over each other.

2. Function <> Function Transposition

All five meaning-functions are present in every meaning. Here, transposition occurs as we shift our attention from one function to another. And within each meaning, there is constant movement, for instance...

Transpositional Grammar: Some Recalibrations

Form and Function

Meaning-forms are the material means we use to make meaning, using media.

Meaning-functions are the range of things we can mean.

Questions of Function

You can ask the five questions of any meaning, every meaning. This is a functional grammar.

Associations of Form

The grammars of Text and Speech are radically different from each other.

Text is closely aligned with Image and Space.

Speech is closely aligned with Sound and Body.

1. Reference

Specification

Instance

Absence

Concept

Circumstance

Entity

Action

Property

Quality

Quantity

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Reference**

Reference Example 1: Instance < > Concept

In static, structuralist grammars:

In **text**, there are singulars and plurals.

In **image**, there are realistic pictures of singular instances and iconic pictures of concepts

Transpositional grammar:

Something, the same thing,
can be an instance in one moment,
and a countable concept in another.

The meaning is in the transposability,
from unique complex, singularity
to abstracted criterial features.



Museum of Society and Economy, Vienna, 1925



Otto Neurath's Pictorial Statistics

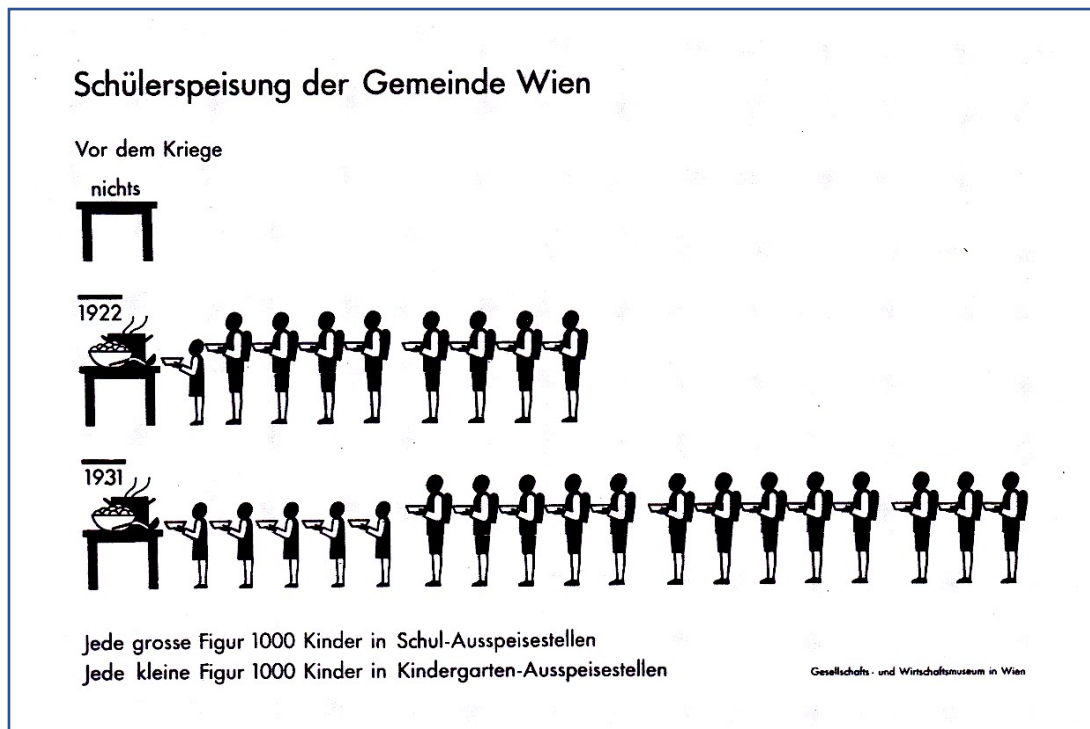
In realistic image, we can mark the difference with a representation of something in its inarguable singularity, compared to icons which refer only to the criterial features of more than one thing. Now we have a picture of a singular person, Otto Neurath, in a photo taken in 1919 by Heinrich Hoffman when Neurath was President of the Central Office of Economics in the short-lived Bavarian Soviet Republic. The caption in a photo booklet on the revolution printed at the time said, "Dr Neurath, Socialization Commissar." The photographer later joined the Nazi Party, making his way eventually into Adolf Hitler's inner circle where he became the only photographer allowed to take the Führer's portrait. Republished in a Nazi newspaper in 1932, this time the photo was captioned "The Jew Neurath."

Otto Neurath's Pictorial Statistics

School Meal Provision by the Vienna Municipality

Each small child = 1000 kindergarten children

Each larger child = 2000 schoolchildren



1. Cont.

Reference

Specification

Instance

Absence

Concept

Circumstance

Entity

Action

Property

Quality

Quantity

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Reference**

Reference Example 2: Entity < > Action

In static, structuralist grammars:

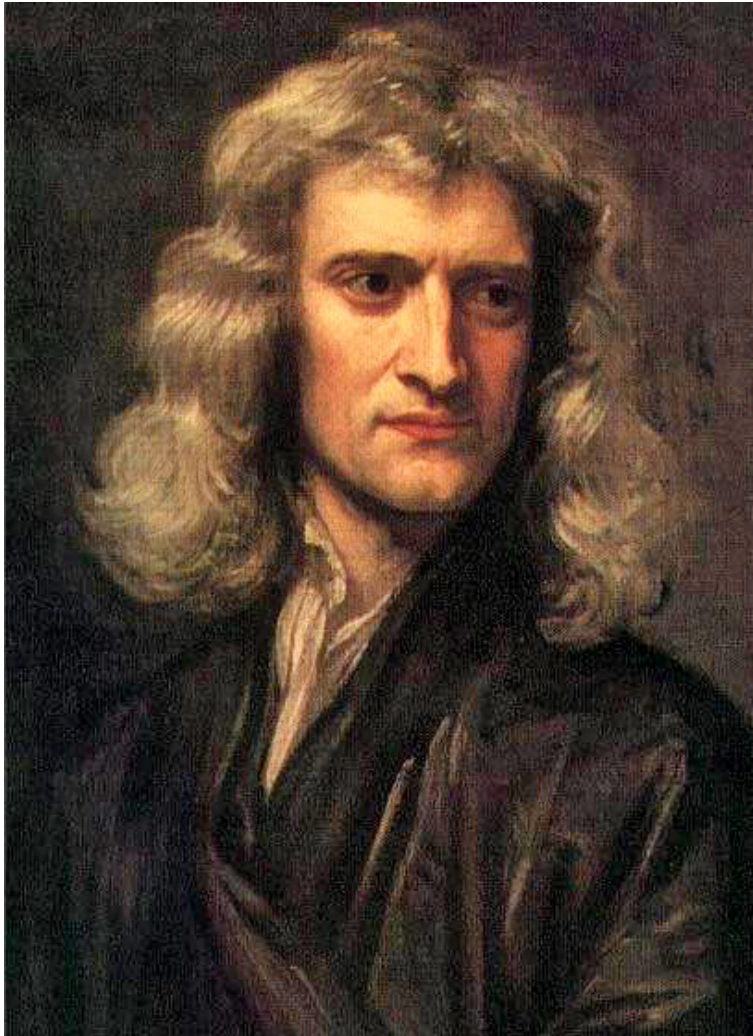
In **text**, there are nouns and verbs (e.g. nominalization, making actions thing-like).

In **image** there are pictured objects and vectors.

Transpositional grammar:

Something, the same thing,
can be a thing in one moment,
or the actions that created its thingness in another.

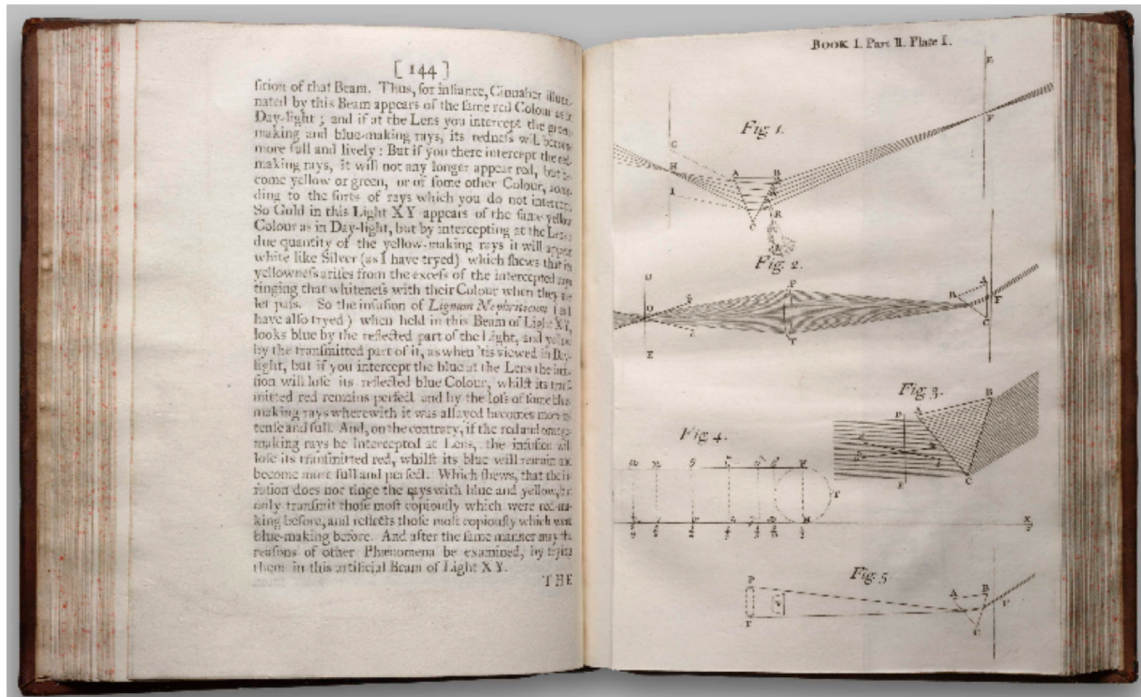
The meaning is in the transposability
between entity and action.



Isaac Newton's *Opticks*

“For it has been proved... that the changes of Colours made by Refractions do not arise from any new Modifications of the Rays impress'd by those Refractions, and by the various Terminations of Light and Shadow... It has been shewed also, that as the Sun's Light is mix'd of all sorts of Rays, so its whiteness is a mixture of the Colours of all sorts of Rays... [I]t may be concluded, that the white Colour of all refracted Light at its very first Emergence, where it appears as white as before its Incidences is compounded of various Colours.”

Newton, Isaac. 1730 [1952]. *Opticks, or a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and the Colours of Light*. London UK. 1704.



Isaac Newton's *Opticks*

The Sun shining into a dark Chamber through a little round hole in the Window-shut, and his Light being there refracted by a Prism to cast his coloured image in PT [in Fig. 5] upon the opposite Wall: I held a white Paper V to that Image in such a manner that it might be illuminated by the coloured light reflected from thence... And I found that when it was equally or almost distant from all the Colours, so that it might be equally illuminated by them all it appeared white.

Newton, Isaac. 1730 [1952]. *Opticks, or a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and the Colours of Light*. New York NY: Dover Publications. P. 117.

2 Agency

Event

Predication

Transactivity

Role

Self

Other

Thing

Conditionality

Assertion

Requirement

Possibility

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Agency**

Agency Example: self < > other

In static, structuralist grammars:

In **speech**, there is first person and second person.

In **body**, there is an embodied self and other.

Transpositional grammar:

My self is your other.

I am the same self in each case,
but the meaning is different according to role.

When by empathy, I feel for you, I transpose my self-meaning into your other-meaning.



Edith Stein, *The Problem of Empathy*

Stein: “The subject of the empathized experience... is not the subject empathizing, but another. And this is what is fundamentally new in contrast with the memory, expectation, or the fantasy of our own experiences.” As I remember my own pain, I can anticipate pain, I can fantasize pain, and each of these meaning transpositions (to rephrase in the terms of our grammar) is a transposition over time within the first person-self. Empathy, by contrast, is “reflexive sympathy, where my original experience returns to me as an empathized one,” a transposition of other-to-self-to-other across bodies and space. Stein references Adam Smith’s notion of “sympathy” here. Empathy is a “particular case of reiteration” of meaning.

Stein, Edith. 1917 [1989]. *On the Problem of Empathy*. Translated by W. Stein. Washington DC: ICS Publications. Pp. 10, 14, 18.

3. Structure

Ontology

Material Structures

Ideal Structures

Design

Relation

Metaontology

**A Transpositional Grammar:
Structure**

Structure Example: material < > ideal

In static, structuralist grammars:

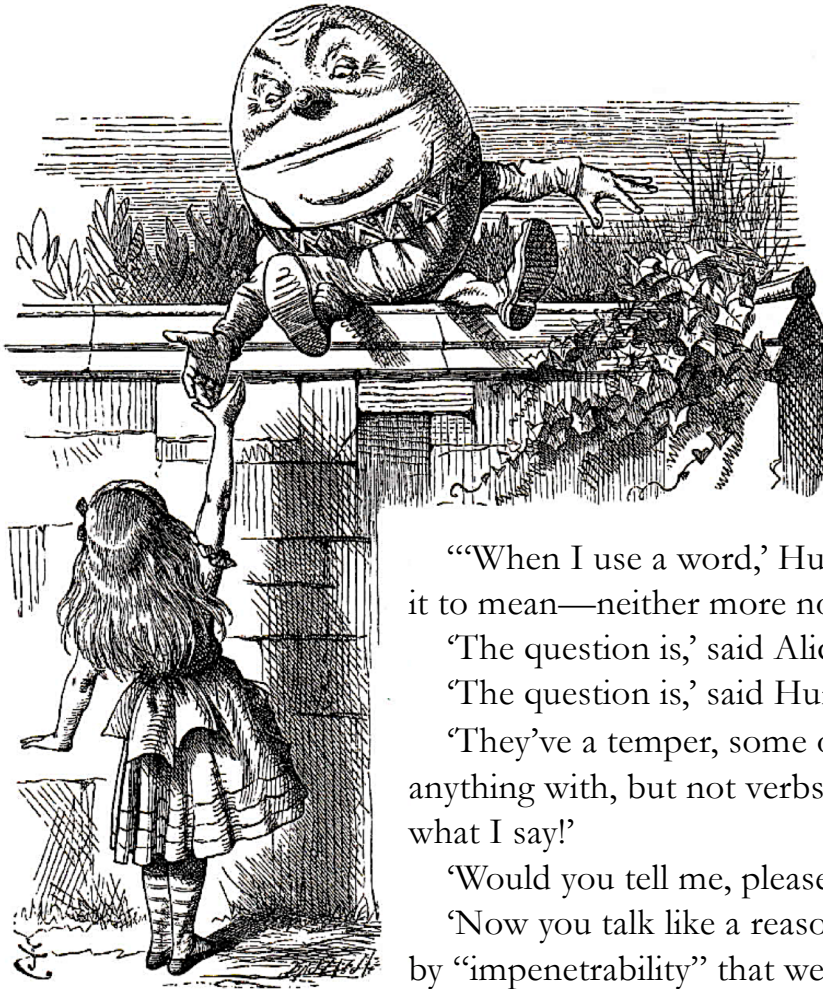
Materialist systems (Skinner)

Idealist systems (Chomsky ,
Descartes, Kant)

Transpositional grammar:

Play of the material and the ideal, where the one can exceed the other.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice*



Carroll, Lewis. 1872 [2000]. *The Annotated Alice: Through the Looking Glass*,
Edited by M. Gardner. New York NY: W.W. Norton. Pp. 213-4

“When I use a word,” Humpty Dumpty said in rather a scornful tone, “it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.”

“The question is,” said Alice, “whether you can make words mean so many different things.”

“The question is,” said Humpty Dumpty, “which is to be master—that’s all.”

“They’ve a temper, some of them—particularly verbs, they’re the proudest—adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs—however, I can manage the whole lot of them! Impenetrability! That’s what I say!”

“Would you tell me, please,” said Alice “what that means?”

“Now you talk like a reasonable child,” said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased. “I meant by “impenetrability” that we’ve had enough of that subject...”



Gilles Deleuze's *Logic of Sense*

Carroll brings us, says Deleuze, an elaborate “play of sense and nonsense... Humpty Dumpty (whose waist and neck, tie and belt, are indiscernible) lacks common sense as much as he lacks differentiated organs.” He “opposes... the impenetrability of incorporeal entities without thickness to the mixtures and reciprocal penetrations of substances, ...the ‘pride’ of verbs to the complacency of substantives and adjectives. Impenetrability also means the frontier between the two—and that the person situated at the frontier, precisely as Humpty Dumpty is seated on his narrow wall, has both at his disposal.” Concludes Deleuze: “Things and propositions are less in a situation of radical duality and more on the two sides of a frontier represented by sense.”

Deleuze, Gilles. 1969 [1990]. *The Logic of Sense*. Translated by M. Lester. New York NY: Columbia University Press. Pp. xiii, 80, 25, 24.



Salvador Dalí, *The Queen's Croquet Ground*, 1968

Alice's Sense

Alice is the perfectly well tempered inhabitant of the world. She encounters nonsense, and makes of it what she can, always testing it against her common sense, as if the imaginable could be true. She is ever-ready to contemplate the possibility that meaning might exceed experience. She encounters the smile of the Cheshire Cat that can linger after its body has vanished. She heeds the advice of the Queen to think of six impossible things before breakfast... Alice is cautious but never conquered by fear of the unknown. She is careful and at the same time courageous. She remains curious, tolerant of difference, and self-reflective about the comparative conditions of her knowing. She is always willing to move between sense and nonsense, where nonsense is a test of possibility and imagination is a journey into knowability.

4.

Context

Materialization

Likeness

Directedness

Abstraction

Participation

Representation

Communication

Interpretation

Position

Time

Place

Medium

Speech

Sound

Body

Space

Image

Text

Association

Genre

A Transpositional Grammar: Context

Context Example: Functional Transposition, representation < > communication

In static, structuralist grammars:

No distinction between
grammars of representation
and communication

Language-centric

Transpositional grammar:

Inner speech and mindsight (representations) are radically
different from speech and perception/imaging
(communications).

Meaning is about the potentials of representation to
become communication, and the necessary transpositions
(the same meaning, and never quite the same).

Malinowski's "Context of Situation"



Malinowski... takes a fragment from a conversation between Trobrianders about a canoe—"We run front-wood ourselves, we paddle in place, we turn we see companion ours, he runs rear-wood"—and shows that it can't make sense "without reference to the broader context of verbal utterance," the meanings of things and social relationships, both practical and magical, that make the totality of Trobriand culture... [or] "context of situation." Malinowski is interested in "speech as mode of action rather than as a countersign of thought." This approach to meaning he characterizes as "functionalist."

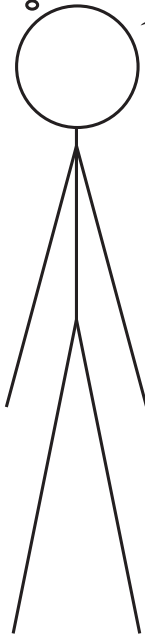
Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1962. *Sex, Culture, and Myth*. New York NY: Harcourt, Brace & World. pp. 223-5.

Representation

Communication

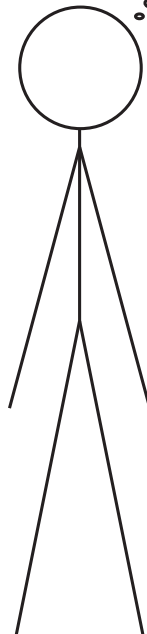
Thinks

Speaks



Interpretation

Thinks about what
the other person is saying



Participation

The making of meaning in the context of the social relations of its sharing—whether it is representation (making meanings for oneself); communication (making meanings that are accessible to others); or interpretation (making sense of meanings in the found objects of multimodal communication).



Lev Vygotsky's "Inner Speech"

"Inner speech is speech for oneself; external speech is for others," says Lev Vygotsky, and though these are connected, they are fundamentally different in their forms and functions.

In our terminology, inner speech is representation, and external speech is communication. Communication is not a straightforward replication of representation, as if we could simply say what we thought. Nor is thinking simply a product of what is sayable, as if the development of our meanings were singularly speech-centered. There is always a grammatical transposition.

Vygotsky, Lev Semyonovich. 1934 [1986]. "Thought and Language."
Vol. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. P. 225.



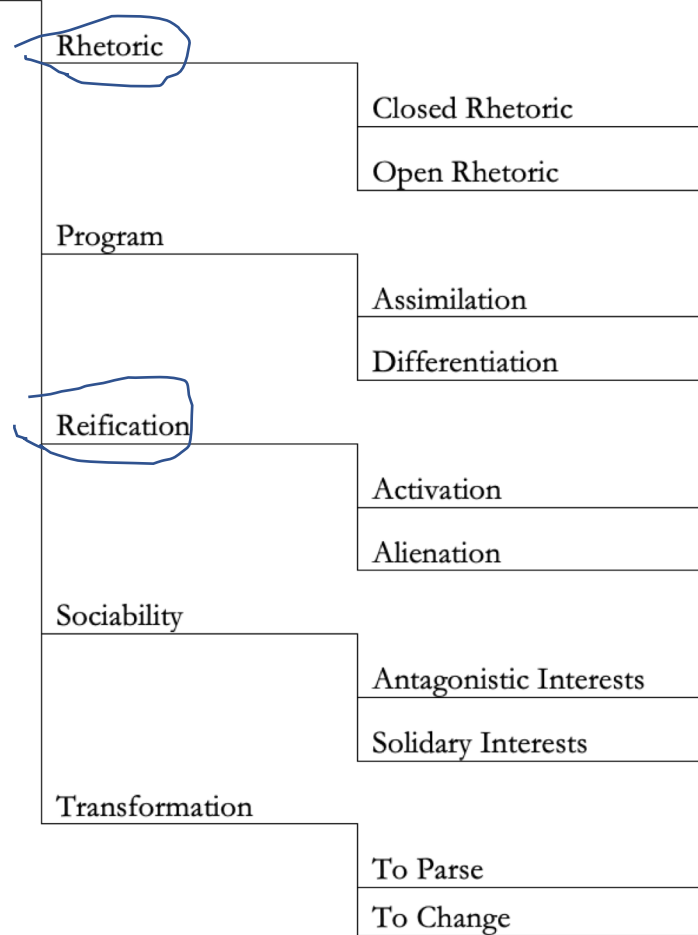
Celebrating 100 years, 1989

Seeing the Eiffel Tower

Take the Eiffel Tower, says philosopher Colin McGinn... The visual field, says McGinn looking at the Eiffel Tower, consists of a center and periphery; it has a fuzzy perimeter; it exists in a spatial relation to the observer in a perceiver-centered space that has a foreground and a background; dimensionality is created by binocularity; we concentrate consecutively on parts of what we see. We encounter an infinity of the seeable, the overflowing of potential detail in perception, says Jean-Paul Sartre in another among the few philosophies of the image —few, we suggest, because of our modern obsession with language. If you looked at the Eiffel Tower for long enough you could see every piece of wrought iron, and every intersection between one piece and another. For impractical purposes, this is an infinity of seeability.

5.

Interest



A Transpositional Grammar: Interest

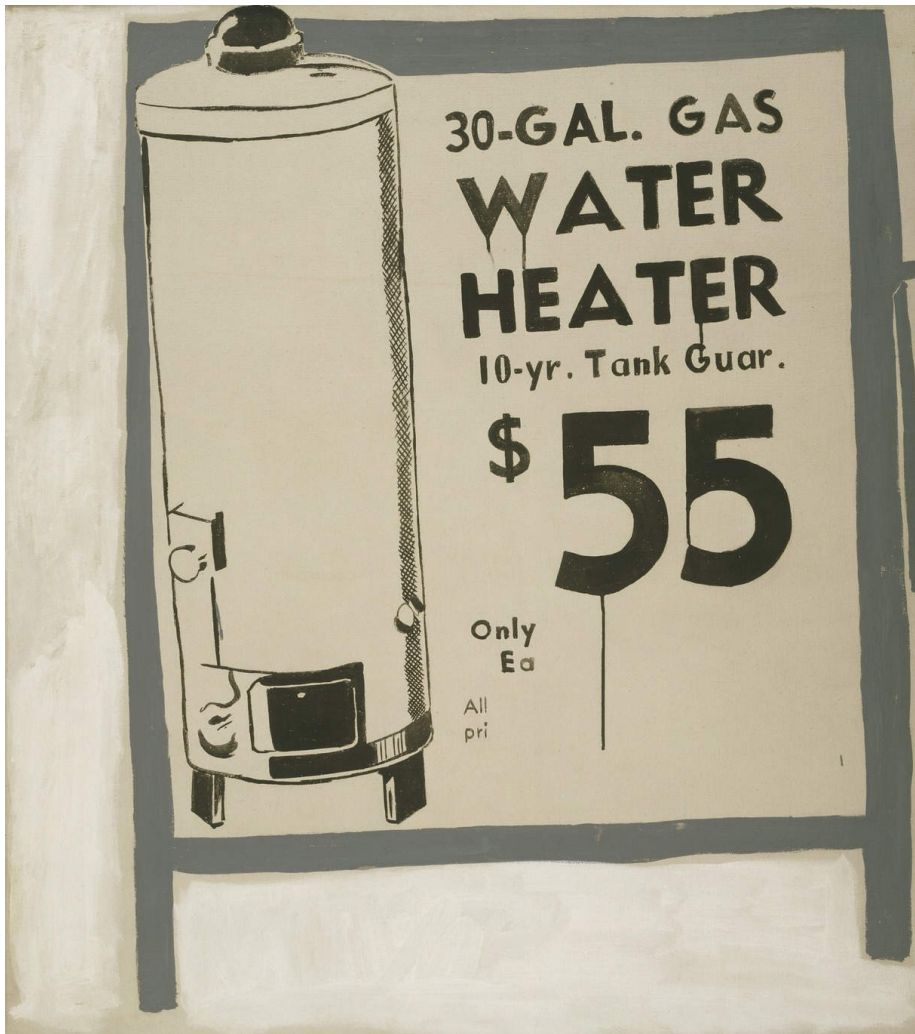
Interest Example: rhetoric < > reification

**In static, structuralist
grammars:**

Formalities of rhetoric

Transpositional grammar:

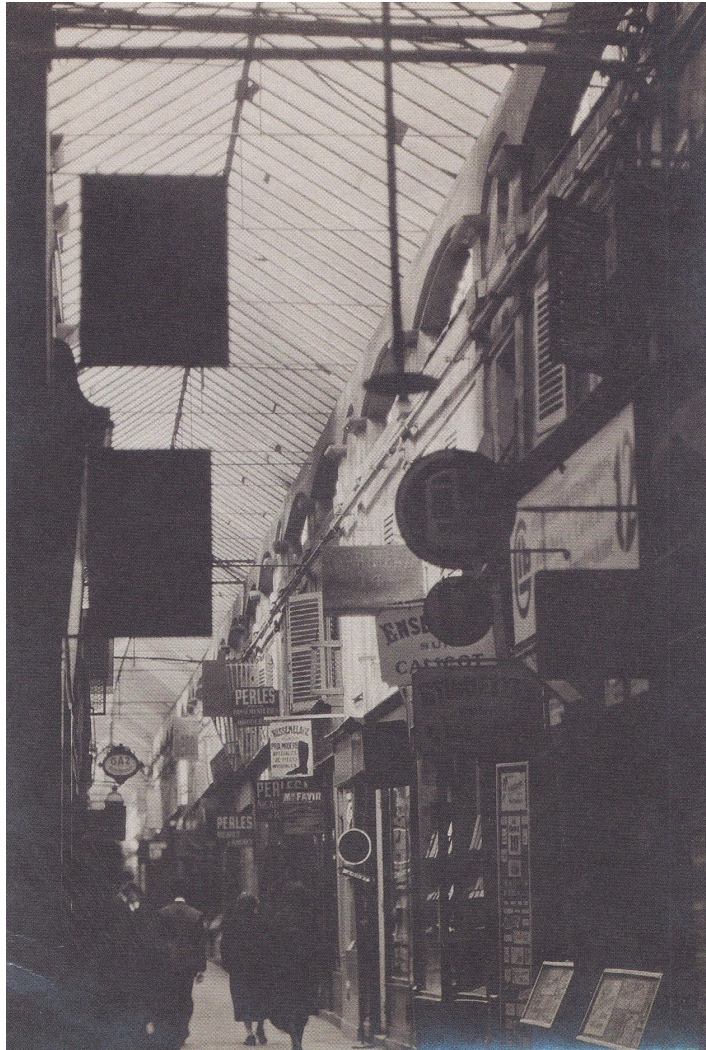
Dialectical interplay of rhetoric and reification



Andy Warhol's *Water Heater*

"I just happen to like ordinary things."

Warhol, Andy. 2006. *"Giant" Size*. London UK: Phaidon. P.91
Andy Warhol. *Water Heater*. 1961. Casein on canvas, 113.6 x 101.5 cm.
Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Germaine Krull's Shops of Paris

When she comes to picture them, Krull's Paris arcades are dark, melancholy places. Once marvels of architectural novelty, pedestrian streets enclosed and covered with steel and glass roofs, by the time she was photographing them and Benjamin was writing about them, they were old, relics of previous century's modernity. Of their past allure, Benjamin said, in the arcades "art enters the service of the merchant." "The Phalanstery"—a group of people living in shared utopian community—"is a city composed of arcades... street galleries... The arcade is a street of lascivious commerce... wholly adapted to arousing desires... [T]he commodity proliferates along the margins and enters into fantastic combinations... In this ville en passages," this city of passageways, "the engineer's construction takes on a phantasmagorical character."

Benjamin, Walter. 1939 [1999]. "Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century." Pp. 14-26 in *The Arcades Project*, edited by H. Eidland and K. McLaughlin. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press. pp. 15, 17, 42.

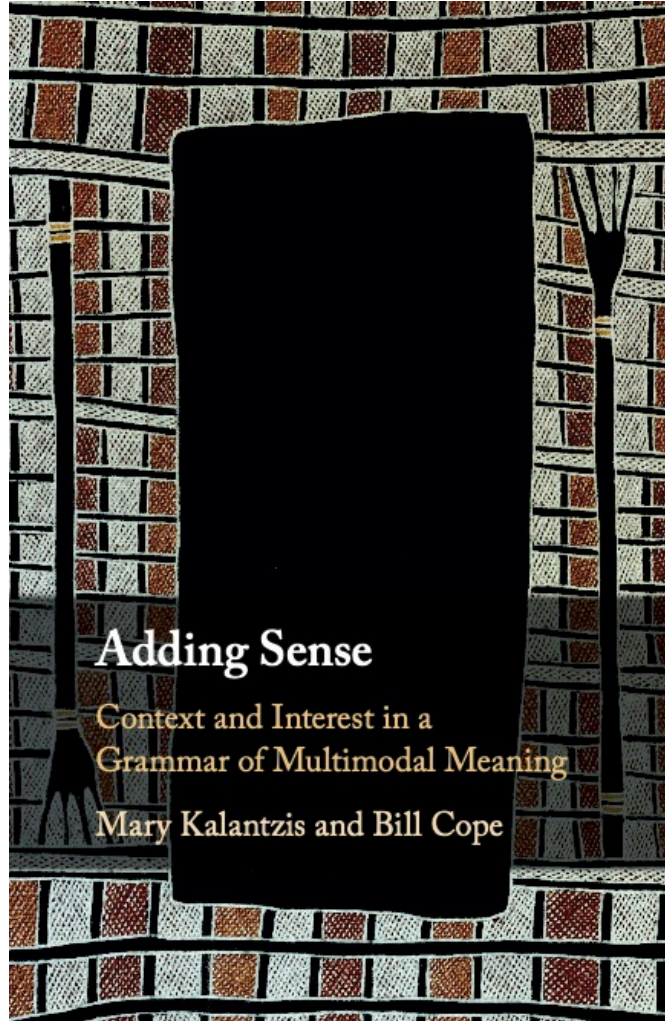
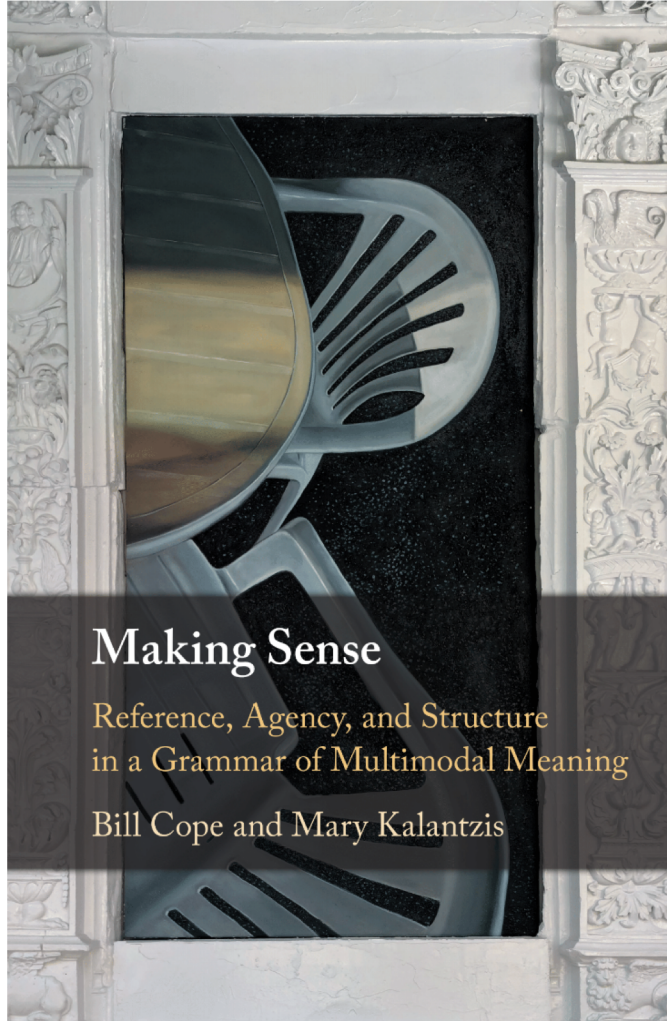


Victor Gruen's *Shopping Centers*

In 1952 Gruen co-wrote an article “Shopping Centers: The New Building Type.” Then the most widely circulating architecture magazine in the United States, *Progressive Architecture* devoted almost a whole issue to the article. It was more like a manifesto, because no examples yet existed of the building type he announced...

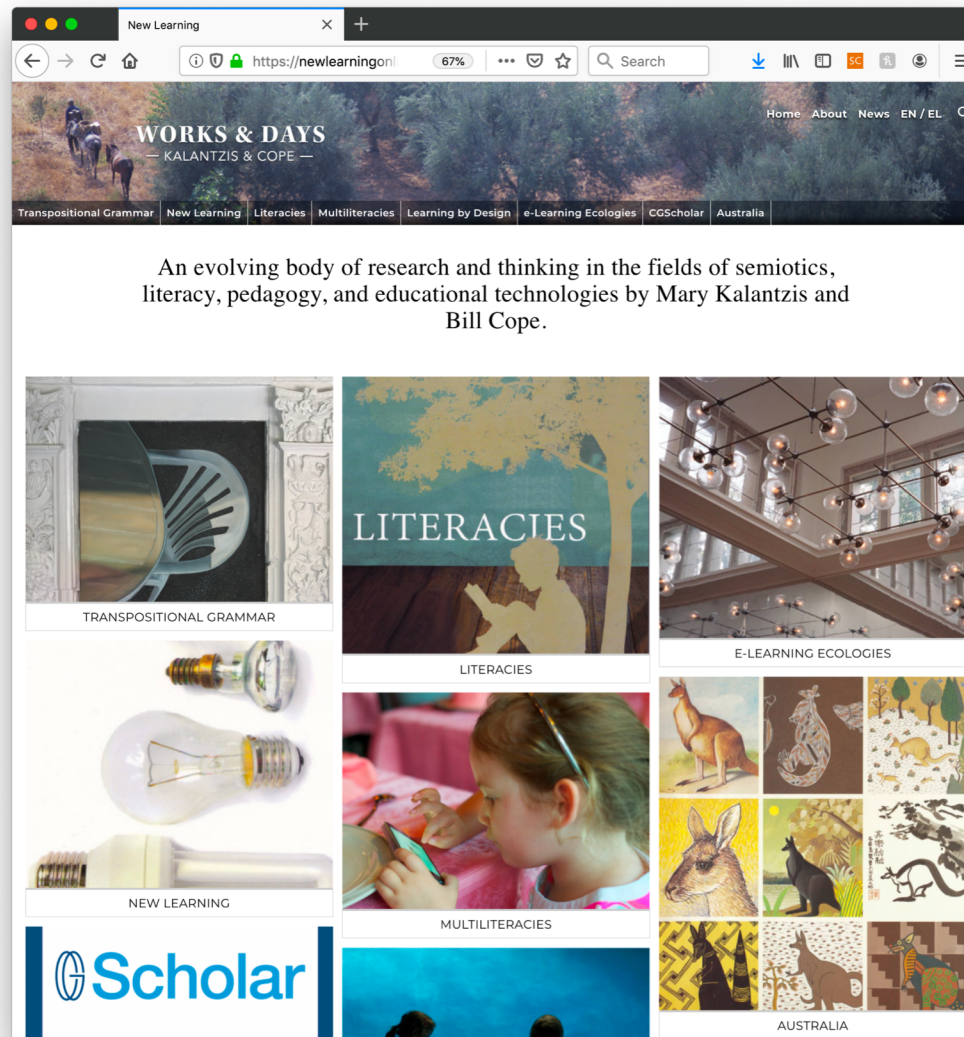
“With the advent of the large shopping center there will be a new outlet for that primary human instinct to mingle with other humans—to have social meetings, to relax together, to enjoy art, music, civic activities, the theater, films, good food, and entertainment in the company of others. What are the requisites to the fulfillment of this function of a social and cultural center?”

Gruen, Victor and Laurence P. Smith. 1952. "Shopping Centers: The New Building Type." *Progressive Architecture* (June):67-109. Pp. 70, 67-8.



Transpositional Grammar

Cambridge University Press, 2019 (in press)



newlearningonline.com

neamathisi.com