Frames and Framing: Dynamic Nature and Material-Cognitive Interplays

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Within semiotics research, the notions of ‘frames’ and ‘framing’ have been around for quite some time, drawing inter alia on the socio-linguistic method of Frame Analysis established by Erving Goffman in 1974 (cf. Manning & Cullum-Swan 1992; foundational see also Van Leeuwen 2004, and as precursor to this approach Bateson 1972). Frames can be seen as key concepts to explain how humans make sense of situations, interactions, and semiotic artefacts in general.

With regard to art (Sauer 2021, cf. the progress in archeological scholarship, Günther & Fabricius 2021) and literature, both in the sense of material, multimodal and multisensory artefacts (cf. Igl 2022, Bachmann & Heimgartner 2017; foundational see also McGann 1991 and Bornstein 2001), the term ‘frame’ can refer to both an actual object that functions as boundary and setting of an artefact on the one hand, and to the notion of how our minds provide context and process information based on pre-established schemata. In this abstract meaning, frames can be understood “as cognitive tools by which we navigate through our symbolic universe”, as Quendler pointedly states:

“They organize familiar patterns of knowledge to establish correspondences or ‘mappings’ that guide comprehension, ranging from basic construction of meaning to the creation of complexly shaped (psychological) realities. A frame implies a certain perspective that shapes the focus of our attention. Thus, like the frame of a painting, conceptual frames influence what we perceive and how we perceive things.” (Quendler 2010: 9)

In our proposed special issue, we want to take a ‘double perspective’ on frames as both material and cognitive phenomena. More precisely put, our aim is to shed light on the interplay of materiality and cognition by looking at concrete material framing strategies in art and literature (as conceptualized above) and how they evoke and functionalize (sometimes conflicting) cognitive frames in the process of engaging a reader or spectator.

The dynamic nature of frames and framing

A key characteristic of frames as ‘cognitive tools’ – and a challenging factor when it comes to the-

orizing the notion – is their at once stable and dynamic nature. For instance, when we approach an object or event under the conceptual frame of art or fiction, this crucially influences our perception, expectations and judgements of said object or event. At the same time, though, the conceptual frames are themselves subject to change, since they will be affirmed and consolidated but also challenged and adjusted within scenarios of their 'use'.

This dynamic understanding of frames is in line with the shifted paradigm of the so-called 'second-generation' approaches in cognitive sciences that no longer understand the mind as a computational apparatus for information processing. Instead, "they converge on a view of the human mind as shaped by our evolutionary history, bodily make-up, and sensorimotor possibilities, and as arising out of close dialogue with other minds, in intersubjective interactions and cultural practices." (Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014: 261–262) These current so-called '4E' approaches – as referring to "the enactive, embedded, embodied, and extended qualities of the mind" (Kukkonen & Caracciolo 2014: 261) – also constitute the foundation of most recent analytical frameworks in the cognitive study of literature and art (cf. for the latter Lombardi, Sauer & Di Cesare 2023: 127–139).

Material-cognitive interplays

'Frames' are hereby understood as both (material) artefacts and (cognitive) tools for creating and guiding processes of perspectivization, meaning making, and reader/viewer engagement.

The proposed special issue thus aims at:

• taking a cognitive semiotics perspective that is grounded in the 'second generation' approaches to cognition; that is, on an understanding of the human mind to be embodied, embedded, enactive, and extended ('4E-cognition');
• re-considering the notion of frames "as cognitive tools by which we navigate through our symbolic universe" (Quendler 2010: 9) and their key attribute of 'stable instability' by looking at concrete framing strategies in literature and art;
• promoting an interdisciplinary approach to frames and framing strategies in art and literature by taking into account both their shared and particular affordances (Gibson 1979) and measures of engaging their audience (readers/observers) in the co-creation of meaning.

With this in mind, contributions are welcome from disciplines as diverse as literature, image studies (art, design, film, etc.), cultural studies and cultural anthropology, philosophy, developmental psychology, and neuroscience, among others. Theoretical, methodological and content-oriented contributions are equally welcome. Consideration of examples and case in point analyses is desirable, but not mandatory. Please direct questions to Natalia Igl (literature) and Martina Sauer (image). Please send submissions of abstracts with no more than 800 words to Natalia Igl (natalia.igl@hiof.no) and Martina Sauer (msauer@bildphilosophie.de) until March 3, 2024. A publication is scheduled for 2025 or 2026 as a special issue of the Zeitschrift für Semiotik.

Literature

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