

Jean Petitot*

From the blue waters of the Baltic and Kattegat to the Red Sands of Burgundy. Per Aage Brandt (April 26, 1944 – November 10, 2021)

<https://doi.org/10.1515/cogsem-2022-2007>

On Thursday, November 18, 2021, at the “Sables Rouges” cemetery in the charming French medieval town of Villeneuve-sur-Yonne near Sens, took place the funeral of Professor Per Aage Brandt, who died on November 10. He was one of the most important linguists and semioticians of his generation, but also poet and musician, scholar and humanist, a strong academic personality in Denmark, France, the United States and Latin America, Dane and citizen of the world. He lived in Burgundy for 10 years. In the presence of his French wife Maryse Laffitte, whom he met in 1980 in Copenhagen, his family, colleagues (including several from Denmark) and friends from Villeneuve, a moving ceremony paid him many tributes.

Per Aage was a friend with whom I shared much of my scientific life. We had many common interests in several fields and I have always been amazed by his extraordinary human and spiritual richness, both in semiotics and philosophy as well as in the arts at large. These few lines would like to evoke the many talents of this exceptional personality.

Deeply attached to France, P. Aa. Brandt was awarded the *Grand Prix de Philosophie* of the Académie Française in 2002 and, the same year, was elevated to the dignity of Officer of the Order of Arts and Letters.

Born April 26, 1944, in Buenos Aires to a Swedish mother and a Danish father, he spent his childhood and a large part of his life in Copenhagen. Very early on, he was passionate about poetry and music and proved to be exceptionally gifted. This creativity accompanied him throughout his existence. In 1969, he published a first collection of poems, *Poesi*, followed by a regular production in poetry (about 30 volumes), characterized by its philosophical and meditative tone and its melancholy tinged with irony, making him one of the greatest Danish poets (he was awarded the Aarestrup medal in 1993 and the Danish Academy medal in 2009). His wife Maryse translated some of his poems into French, some published and others

*Corresponding author: Jean Petitot, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France, E-mail: petitot@ehess.fr

read in Villeneuve during “poetic concerts”. Several of them were also translated into English by the American poet Thom Satterlee in the collection *These Hands* (Host Publications, Austin, 2011). American critics praised “the musicality, the charm, the elegance, the compactness, the subtlety, the intelligence”. In 2014, Satterlee (also author of the metaphysical thriller *The Stages* (Crooked Lane Books, New York, 2015) on an assassination linked to the disappearing of original manuscripts by Kierkegaard) published *New and Selected Poetry of Per Aage Brandt* which was presented as follows: “Long considered one of Denmark’s most distinguished poets and scholars, Per Aage is writing his best poetry today, in the twilight of a long and prolific career. His poems take the reader on a lyrical journey through a mind that is constantly probing, questioning, remembering, reflecting, indicting.” Then in 2017 came another noticed collection: *If I were a suicide bomber & other verses*, about which Joanna Trzeciak said: “Smart, impish, and spare, Per Aage Brandt finds the physical in the metaphysical, and the fizz in the physiological.”

Confirmed jazz pianist, P. Aa. Brandt was already as early as in 1963 leader of this own trio. A true specialist in the history and technical specificities of this art, initiated into its mysteries by the pianist and composer Finn Savery, he had, among other things, the privilege of playing with the saxophonist Albert Ayler (whom John Coltrane considered as his successor) during his stay in Copenhagen. Ayler often played with trumpeter Don Cherry, another jazzman loving the Nordic countries (Stockholm). His career is well summarized in his interview with Didier Robrieux, “La vie en bluesy and free”, published in November 2020. In his beautiful home in Villeneuve, he had transformed the cellar into a large studio where he could play and record with his partners, among whom the saxophonist Karsten Vogel, his lifelong friend, with whose sextet he won the award for best Danish jazz group in 1966 and with whom he recorded *Cry!*.

It should also be noted that P. Aa. Brandt starred in the documentary *Talk Like Whales* by Vibeke Vogel (Danske Film Institut, 1993) on the Atlantic journeys of the whales and he himself made a documentary *Five Pairs of Shoes* on the neo-expressionist painter Anette Abrahamsson (Danske Film Institut, 2005), member of the movement, *De unge vilde*, also including Erik Frandsen, Claus Carstensen and Inge Ellegaard who illustrated the cover of certain collections of his poems. He organized several seminars with Stig Brøgger and Hein Heinsen, professors at the *Academy of Fine Arts* influenced by Jean-François Lyotard.

But it was above all linguistics, semiotics and philosophy of mind that led P. Aa. Brandt to his international fame substantiated by the publication of a dozen books and about 250 articles (some of which are available on the *Academia* site). In the course of half a century of reflection he addressed all aspects of the morphogenesis, diegesis, modalization and aesthetics of meaning. “In short, *semiotics* in

all its states” as he says in the excellent interview he had with Amir Biglari (*Entretiens sémiotiques*, Lambert Lucas, Limoges, 2014) and where he offers a perfect summary of his career.

Also theoretically very precocious and brilliant, P. Aa. Brandt dedicated himself with an irresistible and inexhaustible passion to the study of the multiple dimensions of meaning. After the turmoil of May 1968, he defended a PhD in 1971 in Copenhagen entitled *L’analyse phrastique – Introduction à la grammaire* where he took up the notion of *stemma* from Lucien Tesnière (1893–1954, the *Éléments de syntaxe structurale*, Klincksieck, Paris, 1959), a notion referring to the graph structure of phrases, essentially centered on the verbal node and the verbal *valence* (analogous to valence in chemistry).

In 1971, he also contacted Algirdas Julien Greimas (1917–1992) and participated regularly in his seminar at the 6th Section of the École Pratique des Hautes Études de Paris (now, since 1975, EHESS, the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales). Structuralism had been booming there since the end of the 1950s. He was already familiar with Greimas since 1967, where he had introduced structural semantics in the Danish journal *Poetik*, of which he was the co-founder.

As a young Danish linguist and semiotician, P. Aa. Brandt was particularly able to immerse himself in this intellectual adventure, blending multiple theoretical traditions. Indeed, by its geographical position and its history as a cultural area, Scandinavia has traditionally been open to both continental (French, German, Italian, Spanish), Anglo-Saxon and Slavic traditions of thought.

The Danish linguistic tradition is considerable. It is dominated by the legendary figures of Viggo Brøndal (1887–1942, one of the fathers of linguistic structuralism) and Louis Hjelmslev (1899–1965, the father of glossematics) who in 1931 created the Linguistic Circle of Copenhagen. They had close links to Russian and Czech formalism, the Linguistic Circle of Moscow (active between 1915 and 1922) then Linguistic Circle of Prague (from 1928) led by Russian exiles as prominent as Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and Prince Nikolai Trubetzkoy (1890–1938, the father of phonological structuralism, but anti-Saussurean and anti-universalist as regards the relations between languages and cultures).

This generation who founded formalism, structuralism and functionalism (one can never separate structure and function) had itself close links to two major philosophical and scientific branches in the previous generation: on the one hand, the phenomenology of Husserl (1859–1938) and *Gestalttheorie*, on the other hand Saussure’s sign theory (1857–1913).

Brøndal aimed at developing a universal grammar conceiving the relation between thought and language as a “geometry” transforming the world into meaning. For him, the organization of meaning went through categorizations functioning as systems of contrasts either irreducible or mediated by neutral or complex terms.

For Hjelmslev, every semiotic system was biplanar and articulated a plane of expression (the Saussurian “signifier”) and a plane of content (the “signified”), each plane being itself articulated by the duality of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations between its units. The “matter” organized by the “form” (that is the structure) then becomes a “substance”. This hylomorphism is characteristic of such theoretical approaches.

P. Aa. Brandt was an heir to these masters. To celebrate them, he organized the Symposium *Linguistics and Semiotics. Actuality of Viggo Brøndal* in 1987 (Travaux du Cercle linguistique de Copenhague, 22, 1989), then the Symposium of the Centenary of the birth of Jakobson (*Acta Linguistica Hafniensia*, 29, 1997, the Journal of the Linguistic Circle).

In Paris, Greimas had completely overhauled the two dual, syntactic and semantic dimensions of narrative studies from a strongly structuralist perspective. On the one hand, there was the dimension of deep syntactic structures, actantial structures identified, studied and classified by specialists in folklore and popular tales such as Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), a Russian of German origin whose famous treatise *Morphology of the Folktale* (published in Leningrad in 1928) analyzed tales in accordance with the principles of Goethean Morphology as they had been taken up by the Russian formalists. Under the infinite diegetic variations of their superficial manifestations, be they figurative (sets, places, landscapes, eras, etc.) or discursive (the characters involved in more or less complicated plots), operate deep *actantial* structures making subjects, which are manipulated by “destiny-makers”, interact with each other and overcome trials and defeat anti-subjects by means of adjuvants until they are rewarded in a gratifying way with marks of recognition. From tales and legends to the current techniques of “storytelling” through the critical analysis of literary, plastic or musical artworks, scholarly studies on narrative structures are innumerable and their rich structural syntax has been studied with the same refinement as the syntax of natural languages.

It should also be noted that there is also an actantial structural syntax for sentences, such as it has been shown by Hjelmslev with his masterful analyses of the so-called case structures (subject, object, sender, addressee, instrumental marked in some languages by prepositions), and after him by Lucien Tesnière, or even later by American linguists such as Charles Fillmore (1929–2014) or Ronald Langacker.

Parallel to his narrative syntax, and inspired by Brøndal and Hjelmslev, Greimas had also theorized, a fundamental semantics made up of categorical “values” (constituting paradigms of opposed contents) which circulate between the actants, a bit like monetary values circulate in the circuits of economic exchanges.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (whose controversy with Propp in the mid-1960s was important) had shown in his analyses of myths that narrative structures had the fundamental anthropological function of psychically and socially metabolizing irreducible conflicts (“dialectical contradictions”, as it were) between opposing categorical values. The dynamics of narrative plots generally leads from an unstable initial situation of conflict or lack to a quest for values which ends with a final stabilized situation where the conflict is dialectized, the lack remedied and the desired values achieved. It is the structure of the paradigms of values (meaning, semantics) that is crucial, more than the narrative intrigues (syntax).

P. Aa. Brandt immersed himself in a dynamic and innovative way in this theoretical context, while maintaining the dialogue with other approaches to symbolic activities, be it the semiotic currents inherited from Peirce or Umberto Eco’s (1932–2016) more cultural one in Bologna, or linguistic theories like those of Noam Chomsky or Jerry Fodor (1935–2017). His activities and academic contributions in these fields were innumerable and made him one of the masters of his generation. His theoretical skills were fully displayed in this multidisciplinary and international context and enabled him to weave deep cultural links between Europe, North America and also Latin America, Argentina to which he remained deeply attached, and also Brazil (São Paulo, Belo Horizonte) and Colombia (Bogotá).

He worked on almost all strata of linguistic and semiotic systems. On the expression side, the stratification “phonemes → phonematic chains → prosody → intonation”; on the semantic side, the stratification “semantic → schematic semantics → syntactic semantics → sentence semantics → enunciation → communication”; on the functional side, the stratification “morphemes (closed classes of conceptual schemas, the ‘syncategorematic’ part of language) → lexemes (categories centered on prototypes, the ‘categorematic’ part of language) → syntagms → sentences → texts → literary genres.

For each conceptual issue, he brought theoretical innovations. An example is his deepening of the Greimassian notion of veridiction in “Quelques remarques sur la véridiction” (*Actes sémiotiques*, 1982). In classic tales and myths, truth and falsity of values are guaranteed by transcendent (divine, religious, royal ...) destiny-makers, and their truthful status and their axiology are therefore “decidable”, i.e., determinable. But once what Hölderlin called “God’s retreat” has been accomplished, there is no longer any absolute and/or natural guarantor of values. The missing destiny-maker becomes an “Other” in the Lacanian sense of the term, and the subjects then need to believe in some “supposed-knowledge” which comes to occupy the place of veridictory guarantor. The objects-of-value that circulate in the narrative and existential intrigues are no longer objects invested by values possessing a decidable veridictory status, but rather objects selected by what we

could call a *marking*. The marking is carried out through “signifiers” in Lacan’s sense of the term. In his text, P. Aa. Brandt surprisingly intersects two semiotic triangles, one, Saussurian, binding together signifier (in the Saussurian sense), conceptual signified and referent (empirical denotation) within the framework of a positive logical semiotics where veridiction is decidable, the other binding together signifier (in the Lacanian sense, a marking signifier coming from the Other), signified (transcendent dialectical Ideas that cannot be conceptualized) and referent (objects of desire) within the framework of a negative meta-psychological semiotics where the veridiction is undecidable.

In Paris, P. Aa. Brandt immediately established contact with Jean Petitot, who was working on the application to Greimassian semiotics of the new dynamic models of morphogenesis developed by René Thom (1923–2002) at the end of the 1960s. This hylemorphic “dynamic schematism” of structural relations made it possible to formalize, in an original way, first the mereological principle according to which the terms of a structure are defined by reciprocal differences as parts of a whole, and then the fact that these reciprocal differences are dynamic. In short, the structure is described globally by a family of dynamics (in the mathematical sense) defined on an “internal” space whose attractors represent the terms. These attractors are in dynamic competition and separated by repulsive thresholds, and as long as the family of dynamics is parameterized by an “external” space, the latter is broken down into domains, each domain being the one where one of the internal attractors is dominant. We thus obtain a “categorized” external space (a paradigm) where the paths unfold in so many syntagmatic chains. The component elements of a structural syntax are now amenable to a dynamic description. This led to the development of a “morphogenesis of meaning”, a “physics of meaning”, a “semiophysics”, a “phenophysics” (neologisms seeking to name the invention of a morphodynamic and naturalistic approach to meaning).

Along with Wolfgang Wildgen, who was the first linguist to have worked on Thom’s linguistic models (his *Catastrophe Theoretic Semantics. An elaboration and application of René Thom’s theory*, is from 1982), Per Aage Brandt and Jean Petitot have formed a semio-linguistic modeling group which was at the origin of several publications (articles, books, collections), conferences, and seminars. It was in this context that P. Aa. Brandt defended his thesis *La charpente modale du sens* at La Sorbonne in 1987; a thesis, in which he proposed a dynamic interpretation of Greimas’ theory of actantial modalities. The thesis was published in 1992 and shortly after followed by *Dynamiques du sens* (1994) and *Morphologies of Meaning* (1995).

Morphodynamic semiotics remained one of his privileged topics. For example “Forces et espaces: Maupassant, Borges, Hemingway” (2014) offers a dynamic interpretation of narrative structures in terms of forces: “Agents operate in spaces

with particular dynamic properties, insofar as the latter unfold characteristic forces, determining acts and facts. (...) Forces are (...) causal or intentional. Causal forces are either banal or 'fatal'. Intentional forces are agentive (volitive and embodied in agents) or magical (supernatural and non-agentive, but always volitive). The dynamically invested spaces, which frame the situations, are linked by a canonical diegetic order, allowing the forces to have prospective and retro-active effects."

In 2005 he co-organized with W. Wildgen at the University of Urbino the conference *L'héritage sémiotique de René Thom*, published in 2011 under the title *Semiosis and Catastrophes. René Thom's Semiotic Heritage*. And from 2016 he regularly participated in the seminar *Actualité de René Thom* organized by Isabel Marcos and Clément Morier.

From the 1980s, P. Aa. Brandt found himself in a favorable academic position allowing him to develop a strong institutional base for his work. In 1988, he created the *Center for Semiotics* at the University of Aarhus where he was a professor. This center of excellence obtained significant public support for several years and became the most important international center for structural semiotics with Paris (Greimas) and Bologna (Eco). Young researchers like Svend Østergaard or Peer Bundgaard took part in this laboratory. There was an enthusiastic, innovative, studious atmosphere and numerous events specializing in mathematics, semio-linguistics, cognitive sciences, aesthetics, and phenomenology were held there, in particular the recurring *Winter Symposia*.

From 1999, P. Aa. Brandt, W. Wildgen and Barend van Heusden were the editors of Peter Lang's 'semiophysical' publication series: *European Semiotics*. He defined its goal as follows: "This approach, which has its origins in Phenomenology, Gestalt Theory, Philosophy of Culture and Structuralism, views semiosis primarily as a cognitive process, which underlies and structures human culture."

P. Aa. Brandt was also one of the founders of the group of semio-linguists *Sigma* which brought together scholars from Jean-Claude Coquet and Jean Petitot's group in Paris, Umberto Eco's group in Bologna and Brandt's group in Aarhus. In this context, he organized in 1989 a beautiful Conference at Sostrup Castle north of Aarhus on the shores of the Kattegat. Other Sigma conferences were organized by Omar Calabrese (Bagni di Lucca), Herman Parret (Rockefeller Foundation, Bellagio), Jean-Pierre Desclés (Paris).

P. Aa. Brandt participated actively in the Cerisy Conference *Au Nom du Sens* co-organized in homage to Umberto Eco in 1996 by Paolo Fabbri and Jean Petitot. He gave a talk on "Le mystère de l'interprétation" which analyzed the antinomic status of the interpretive chain Author → Text → Reader, that is to say, the multiplicity of meanings inherent in a text which, on the one hand, is both empirically given and objectively structured, and on the other hand is indefinitely

reconstructed by its interpretations. How to avoid the interpretive loop (the “hermeneutic circle”) if the part/whole mereology of the empirical text comes from an interpretation that is supposed to be the only process able to construct the text? P. Aa. Brandt asked the question like this: “How can [the reader] compare two distinct totalities, namely the interpreted text and the uninterpreted text, if it is through interpretation that the text becomes a whole [cut into parts]? This is not possible. (...) It is therefore necessary that the text can be divided [structured] before any interpretation”. We need a proper *bona fide* structuring that precedes the reader and, as the philosopher of Gestalt and Husserlian mereology Barry Smith insists on, is based on “boundaries” and “on drawing lines”. This discussion converged with semi-realistic and naturalist theses and departed from the semiotic demiurgy of certain idealisms to instead study the objective pre-semiotic structures on which semiotizations are built.

As Eco said, it is a question of “moderating” “the purely cultural conception of semiosis”. In “Il riferimento rivisitato” (1996) and in *Kant e l’ornitorinco* (1997), Eco asserts that “whatever the weight of our cultural systems”, “there is something in the continuum of experience which imposes limits on our interpretations”. “Language does not construct being *ex novo*”. There is always “something already given (but already given does not mean already finished and complete)”. There is a “zoccolo duro dell’essere”. Let us quote it in Italian: “Nel magma del continuo ci sono linee di resistenza et delle possibilità di flusso, comme delle nervature del legno o del marmo che rendono più agevole tagliare in una direzione piuttosto che nell’altra.” We can see that, as stated by P. Aa. Brandt in his conference, “the big question here is obviously that of knowing how the empirical text, by virtue of its ‘internal coherence’, as Eco says, controls and commands the semantic construction (...) and thus avoid all dialectical hermeneutics.” And it is here that the structural hylemorphism – the evolution of which we can follow from Lessing, Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* and Goethean Morphology to Russian formalism and structuralism as well as to its morphodynamic models and its neurocognitive incarnations – finds all its operativity: it reveals the pre-semiotic morphological organization of the artworks which can both trigger and constrain their semiotic interpretations.

P. Aa. Brandt’s relationship with Eco was old. In 1973 he had invited him to Roskilde University and later, in Bologna, they discussed the application of morphodynamic models to semantic categorization. Later, in 2017, in *Umberto Eco in His Own Words*, he published a homage “Umberto Eco, la gaia scienza” supplemented by a technical discussion “From Mirrors to Deixis. Subjectivity, Biplanarity, and the Sign” concerning the very particular sign status of icons, deictics or mirror images.

In its many facets, semiotic reflection was for P. Aa. Brandt inseparable from a philosophical self-reflection oriented towards the philosophy of science. His work in this field earned him, for example, being designated as a member of the jury of the “International Prize for the Philosophy of Science” that the Portuguese government created with the Gulbenkian Foundation in honor of the eminent philosopher Fernando Gil (1937–2006) after his passing. This allowed him to strengthen his links with Gil’s school in Lisbon (in particular concerning the aesthetics and the organization of living beings according to Kant and Goethe).

During the 1990s, P. Aa. Brandt increasingly extended structuralism towards the cognitive sciences. He focused, on the one hand, on American cognitive linguistics and cognitive semantics and on the other hand on the overhaul of structural semiotics in terms of (neuro-)cognitive sciences. In cognitive semantics, structures are no longer, as in formal grammars à la Chomsky and in cognitive psychology à la Fodor, logico-combinatorial structures but rather iconic, topological, geometric and dynamic *image-schemas*. In cognitive neuroscience, syntactic models defined in terms of neural networks are based on the notion of attractors in neural dynamics (cf. Daniel Amit’s *Modeling Brain Function: The World of Attractor Neural Networks*, Cambridge University Press, 1992). There are therefore very deep affinities with the Thomian morphodynamic models from the 1970s; it took them 20 years to cross the Atlantic.

The first convergence was with the eminent linguist Len Talmy (SUNY Buffalo) who, along with Eve Sweetser (Berkeley), played an essential role in his transition from dynamic models to cognitive science. Talmy worked in particular, from the 1980s, on the way in which language semantically and grammatically specifies the major frameworks of perception and action as, for example, the structuring of space, the dynamics of forces and their causal action, or “targeting” (the cognitive-linguistic system of referentiality grouping together anaphors and deixis). For this he developed cognitive semantics based on iconicity, image-schemas and Gestalts interfacing perception, action and language. In order to make his work better known in Europe, in December 1995 an important international conference, *Topology and Dynamics in Cognition and Perception*, was held at the Umberto Eco Research Center at the University of San Marino. Here, P. Aa. Brandt also referred to the work of Eve Sweetser on iconicity, modalities, metaphor and mental spaces. In 1996, he wrote a review of Sweetser’s book *From etymology to pragmatics*. A good reference on these themes is his article “Sens et modalité dans la perspective d’une sémiotique cognitive” in *Actes Sémiotiques* (117, 2014).

P. Aa. Brandt then established a close relationship with Gilles Fauconnier (1944–2021), a French logician and linguist based at the University of San Diego, as well as with George Lakoff (Berkeley). The latter had completely overhauled the theory of metaphor by showing that it was a phenomenon which by far exceeded

the poetical use of different sorts of analogies, similes, and so on, and was in fact a major global mental tool for structuring thought and concepts. With his colleague Mark Johnson, he had explained as early as 1980 in *Metaphors We Live By* that the syntactic-semantic organization of a concrete domain could be used to structure another much more abstract domain (just think of the many accounts describing the existential events of life in terms of journeys, or even of discussions as war). Close to Lakoff, to his own colleague from San Diego Ron Langacker, and to Eve Sweetser (with whom he edited *Spaces, Worlds, and Grammar* in 1996), Fauconnier developed the theory of “mental spaces” (1984) and initiated thereafter a close collaboration with Mark Turner on the notion of conceptual integration (“conceptual blending”), the essential tenets of which are summed up in their *The Way We Think* (2002). Here, they explain how conceptually organized scenes belonging to very different semantic domains can nevertheless be transformed and partially merge and thus produce original *meaning effects* and new emergent meaning structures.

P. Aa. Brandt worked at Stanford University in 2001–2002 at the *Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences* and, from 2005 to 2011, he was professor of cognitive science at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland where he established the *Center for Cognition and Culture* and the *Laboratory for Applied Research in Cognitive Semiotics* (LARCS). In 2005 he created the journal *Cognitive Semiotics* which later became the official journal of the *International Association for Cognitive Semiotics* founded in Aarhus in 2013.

He then published, among other texts, *Spaces, Domains, and Meanings* in 2004 where he took up and redeveloped his “stemmatic grammar” introduced in *L'analyse phrastique* from 1971. As he explained: “it builds on the discovery that the semantics of syntactic nodes is schematic and canonical: a short list of semantically informed nodes form canonical cascades that allow recursion and thereby ground our capacity to spontaneously create and immediately grasp even very complex syntactic networks as meaningful.”

As to this, we can also refer to “Sémiotique, cognition et sémiotique cognitive” (available on *Academia*) where he develops “a new interpretation of the concept of sign, of the functioning of metaphor and metonymy, and of blending in mental space theory”. His text “La deixis langagière” (2014) aims to renew “the functioning of deictics in language (...), namely the demonstratives, the articles and the shifters or ‘embrayeurs’”.

He continued to work on many other favorite themes: enunciation, prosody, diegesis, modal schematism. And also poetics: let us quote for example his analysis in *The Shakesperean International Yearbook* from 2004, “Metaphors and Meaning in Shakespeare’s Sonnet 73”, a famous sonnet on aging where the poet conjugates as in a vanity the classic metaphors of autumn and its yellow leaves, the

passing of the day, sunset and twilight, and also the ruins of symbolic places. He co-authored with his daughter Line a number of works on metaphor and blending in literature, e.g., *Cognitive poetics and imagery* (2005), *Making sense of a blend* (2005).

As regards the foundations of linguistics, he insisted on the fact that the neurophysiology and neuropsychology of the mind cannot succeed without including a theory of meaning consubstantial with language, thought, action, communication, social and cultural practices. *Homo sapiens* is a political (cf. Aristotle) and symbolic species. Within the framework of a semiophysical and neurocognitive perspective on the naturalization of meaning, mind and consciousness, P. Aa. Brandt was interested in the way in which biological evolution had been able to elaborate, during the hominization, processes of categorization, schematization, agency and linguistic reprogramming of prelinguistic cognitive resources. Recent theories of the semiogenesis of *homo sapiens* radically transform the traditional separations between natural sciences and cultural sciences. P. Aa. Brandt referred in particular to the works in evolutionary cognitive semiotics of the neuro-anthropologist Terrence Deacon (Harvard, Boston, Berkeley) whose *The Symbolic Species. The Co-evolution of Language and the Brain* (1997) had a big impact. He ardently defended these scientific advances and equally ardently criticized the deconstructionist drifts of contemporary human and social sciences.

During these decades, all these theoretical reflections also allowed P. Aa. Brandt to come back to his artistic practices, both poetic and musical. He was very interested in *translation* and in particular in untranslatable poetics where the signifiers of the expression are part of the semantic content and where the content therefore is no longer independent of its expression. He himself translated works by Molière, Sade and Bataille into Danish, as well as the *Cantabile* collection written in French by the Prince Consort of Denmark Henri de Laborde de Monpezat (1934–2018). This translation was adapted into a symphonic suite by the composer, organist and pianist Frederik Magle.

In 2011, now in his house in Villeneuve, he continued his research. In 2019, he published *The Music of Meaning* on signs, symbols, icons, metaphors in music and poetry. Finally, he published *Cognitive Semiotics. Signs, Mind and Meaning*, 2020, which he described as follows: “this book discusses the understanding of meaning and mind through four major dimensions: mental architecture, mental spaces, discourse coherence and eco-organization. (...) Cognitive Semiotics outlines several bridges between ‘continental’ and ‘analytic’ thinking in the study of semantics, pragmatics, discourse and the philosophy of language and mind.”

In March 2021, he published the first article, “De la chorématique. The Dynamics of Lived Space” in the new journal *Acta Semiotica* (University of São Paulo) of which he was a member of the Editorial Board.

And all this while continuing to record several musical pieces, for example the Scandinavian lyrical pieces of *Souffle Nordique* in 2019 with his Trio Njörd, and organizing “poetry concerts” in his house.

A cosmopolitan scholar, child of European Enlightenment, but also a romantic and bluesy artist, always inspired by the luminous spectrum of his country of origin, from Niels Bohr to Søren Kierkegaard and Karen Blixen, vivified by the blue waters of the Baltic and the Kattogat, heir to one of the most eminent genealogies in the sciences of language and culture, P. Aa. Brandt, whom Greimas paternally called his “Danish genius”, now rests in the Red Sands of Villeneuve-sur-Yonne.

Paris, November 21, 2021

Bionote

Jean Petitot

École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, France

petitot@ehess.fr

Jean Petitot is Professor at the Mathematical Center (CAMS), École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris and former director of the CREA at École Polytechnique. He is member of the International Academy of Philosophy of Science. He is interested in mathematical modeling in semio-linguistics, cognitive sciences and philosophy of science. He began to work in singularity theory and dynamical systems under René Thom’s direction. He now dedicates his work to the mathematical, neurocognitive, and phenomenological analysis of visual perception.
<http://jeanpetitot.com>