

- Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines
- www.unine.ch/lettres

Cognitive science and the Arts (2LN2229)

Filières concernées	Nombre d'heures	Validation	Crédits ECTS
Master en sciences cognitives	Séminaire: 2 ph	Voir ci-dessous	6

ph=période hebdomadaire, pg=période globale, j=jour, dj=demi-jour, h=heure, min=minute

Période d'enseignement:

- Semestre Printemps

Equipe enseignante

Diana Mazzarella, Professor in Communication and Cognitive Sciences, UniNE
diana.mazzarella@unine.ch

Contenu

From children's pretend play to everyday storytelling, and from actors on stage to audiences in the theatre, humans have a remarkable capacity to act, feel, and make sense of situations they know are not real, and yet experience as deeply meaningful.

This course explores the cognitive science behind our engagement with fiction, using theatre and performance as a rich and illuminating case study. We will ask how people manage to behave truthfully under imaginary circumstances, how others interpret and respond to such behaviour, and why fictional situations can move us emotionally, even when enacted by actors, masks, or inanimate objects brought to life on stage.

Drawing on research in cognitive science, psychology, and social cognition, we will examine the cognitive, social, and emotional processes involved in pretending, storytelling, role-taking, and interpretation. Particular attention will be paid to behaviours that are developmentally and socially widespread — such as pretend play in children and narrative practices in ordinary conversation — and to how these everyday phenomena relate to artistic performance.

Key topics include pretence, theory of mind, empathy, communication, interpretation, and emotional engagement with fiction. Throughout the course, we will critically assess how scientific research can help us understand human creativity, imagination, and aesthetic experience, and where its explanatory limits may lie.

Forme de l'évaluation

This seminar requires mandatory attendance and active participation (7 sessions).

The final grade is the result of two components:

30% Continuous assessment documented via regular assignments (via Moodle) and active participation in in-class discussion.

70% Project proposal

The deadline for submitting the project proposal is June, 4th.

Generative AI tools may be used to support stylistic revision (e.g., language, clarity, or organisation), but not for the generation of substantive content. Any use of such tools must be transparently declared. If questions arise regarding the use of AI, the instructor may request an oral discussion of the work to ensure understanding and authorship.

Modalités de rattrapage

Students that do not satisfy the pre-requirement concerning mandatory attendance are not admitted to the assessment. If, for justifiable reasons (e.g., sickness), a student misses one session, they are invited to contact the professor to arrange some compensatory work.

Failing to submit an assessment by the deadline or failing to prepare an in-class presentation will automatically result in a fail.

A project proposal that is not submitted by the required deadline, without good cause, will not be accepted and will automatically result in a fail.

In case of fail, students will be required to submit relevant assessments in written form via Moodle and/or a new project proposal by August, 15th.

- Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines
- www.unine.ch/lettres

Cognitive science and the Arts (2LN2229)

Documentation

The material for the seminar will be made available on Moodle.

Forme de l'enseignement

Lectures, group discussions led by the lecturers, student presentations.

Objectifs d'apprentissage

Au terme de la formation l'étudiant-e doit être capable de :

- Discuss the cognitive operations involved in creating a theatrical performance
- Identify opportunities for interdisciplinary work on the cognitive science of theatre
- Apply relevant methods in cognitive science to the study of performance and spectatorship

Compétences transférables

- Summarize scientific literature
- Present your research ideas in a clear and structured way
- Justify methodological choices
- Develop a scientific project