

Communication, Context, Conversation

May 3-4, 2019

Contents

About	3
ECOM	3
Invited Participants	4
Schedule	5
Friday, May 3 rd	5
Saturday, May 4 th	6
List of Abstracts – Talks	7
Friday, May 3 rd	7
Saturday, May 4 th	11
List of Posters	16
Useful Information	18
Nearby Restaurants	19
How to get to UConn?	19
Sponsors	22

ECOM

The Expression, Communication, and the Origins of Meaning (ECOM) research group was established in 2010 by Dorit Bar-On at UNC-Chapel Hill, as part of a 4-year NSF grant for collaborative research received in 2009 [award # 0925896]. In the summer of 2014 ECOM moved to the University of Connecticut, where it has received a start-up grant from the UConn Dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. ECOM is affiliated with the UConn Philosophy Department, the UConn Cognitive Science Program, the CT Institute for Brain and Cognitive Sciences, and the UConn Humanities Institute.

To date, ECOM has brought together hundreds of researchers – faculty and students – from philosophy, linguistics, comparative psychology, evolutionary anthropology, cognitive science, and more, in an effort to generate sustained and meaningful interdisciplinary discussion through regular meetings, speaker series, and workshops. This will be ECOM's 6th workshop at UConn. We have held workshops on topics such as pointing and gestural communication, expressive language, human and nonhuman animals' minds and morals, and emotions and expressions. To learn more visit our members page, our research page, and our list of publications at <https://ecomresearchgroup.com>.

Invited Participants

Paul Bloomfield	UConn, Philosophy
Larry Horn	Yale, Linguistics
Mark Jary	Roehampton, Media, Culture and Language
Stefan Kaufmann	UConn, Philosophy
Bill Lycan	UConn, Philosophy
Craige Roberts	Ohio State, Linguistics
Lionel Shapiro	UConn, Philosophy
William Snyder	UConn, Linguistics
Zoltan Szabo	UConn, Philosophy
Catherine Wearing	Wellesley, Philosophy

Schedule

Friday, May 3rd

10:15–10:45	Registration	
10:45–11:00	Welcome remarks	
11:00–12:15	Federico Rossano UCSD, California Cognitive Science	Where Should I Begin? Calibrating the Design of First Actions in Conversation
12:15–12:30	Coffee	
12:30–1:10	Poppy Mankowitz Nova U. of Lisbon, Lisbon Philosophy	Expressions in Focus
1:10–2:40	Poster Session & Lunch	
2:40–3:25	Dorit Bar-On UConn, Connecticut Philosophy	‘Pragmatics-First’ Approaches to Animal Communication and the Evolution of Language
3:25–4:05	Constant Bonard, U. Geneva, Switzerland & U. Antwerp, Belgium Philosophy	Extending the Gricean Model of Communication
4:05–4:20	Coffee	
4:20–5:35	Anne Bezuidenhout U. of South Carolina, SC Philosophy & Psychology	Discourse Relations and Appositive Relative Clauses
5:35–5:45	Short Break	
5:45–6:30	Ruth Millikan UConn, Connecticut Philosophy	Distinguishing Between Sign and Context

Saturday, May 4th

9:00–9:45	Breakfast	
	Danielle Matthews	Pragmatic Development:
9:45–11:00	University of Sheffield, UK	How Children Learn to Use
	Psychology	Language for Social Communication
11:00–11:15	Coffee	
	Mike Deigan	
11:15–11:55	Yale, Connecticut	Stupefying
	Philosophy	
	Mihnea Capraru	
11:55–12:35	Nazarbayev U., Kazakhstan	Drawing the Semantics–Pragmatics
	Philosophy	Distinction in Animal Communication
12:35–2:00	Lunch	
	Mandy Simons	
2:00–3:15	Carnegie Mellon U., Pennsylvania	Bridging and Beyond: An Account of
	Philosophy & Linguistics	NP Interpretation in Context
3:15–3:30	Coffee	
	Rory Harder	
3:30–4:10	University of Toronto, Ontario	The Affiliative Conception of Sense
	Philosophy	
4:10–4:20	Short Break	
	Mitch Green	
4:20–5:05	UConn, Connecticut	Avowals and Expositives:
	Philosophy	Where Showing Meets Saying
5:05–5:15	Short Break	
	Robyn Carston	
5:15–6:30	UCL, UK	Lexical Innovation,
	Linguistics	Sense Conventions and the Lexicon

List of Abstracts – Talks

Friday, May 3rd

Where Should I Begin? Calibrating the Design of First Actions in Conversation.

Federico Rossano, UC San Diego, California, USA

Chair: Paul Bloomfield

In deciding what social actions are being produced during a conversation, conversation analysts tend to adopt an *emic* perspective (a participants' perspective, see Pike, 1967), and, thus, have developed a procedure that has been called the “*next-turn proof procedure*”¹. The claim is that the interactional nature of conversation provides an obligation among participants in an interaction to display to each other their understanding of the previous conversational turn and if no correction occurs, then the assumption should be that B has correctly understood A, and therefore that A's turn was aimed at eliciting the kind of response that B produced. This procedure has been labeled the “central methodological resource for the investigation of conversation”².

Erving Goffman famously rejected the idea that this proof procedure would be sufficient to account for the interpretation of social action in social interaction by noting that: “an account of second utterances in terms of their contingency on a first leaves unexplained how there could be any firsts; after all, from where could they draw their design? Conversation could never begin”³. Yet in his criticism he stopped short of any empirical investigation on the matter of calibration of an individual's first action and the origin of those designs. How do we calibrate our first actions given what we know about others, the social situation we are in, our communicative abilities and given our cognitive abilities?

This paper utilizes both observational and experimental data to present preliminary findings on how human and non-human primates calibrate requests for actions and for objects, to what degree communicative practices change through development and what affects such change.

¹(Sacks et al. 1974)

²(Sacks et al. 1974: 728)

³(1983: 50)

Expressions in Focus

Poppy Mankowitz, Nova University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal

When someone says ‘Grandpa didn’t kick the bucket, he passed away’, they will normally communicate that the expression ‘kick the bucket’ is inappropriate to refer to Grandpa’s dying, whereas the expression ‘passed away’ is appropriate. That this information is communicated is puzzling, since the speaker does not explicitly indicate that they are conveying their view about appropriate expression use. I will provide an account of this phenomenon, based on the idea that focus can be used to indicate the relevance of alternative expressions. I will then show how the account illuminates several important metalinguistic phenomena, including metalinguistic negotiation, metalinguistic negation, and embedded pejorative expressions.

‘Pragmatics-First’ Approaches to Animal Communication and the Evolution of Language

Dorit Bar-On, University of Connecticut, Connecticut, USA

Chair: Mark Jary

Recent discussions of the evolution of language have advocated a ‘*pragmatics-first*’ approach: the idea that pragmatic phenomena are key to understanding differences between linguistic and animal communication, as well as the possibility of the emergence of the former from the latter. However, as argued in Bar-On & Moore (2017), advocates of the ‘pragmatics-first’ approach have understood ‘pragmatics’ in two importantly different ways; both have roots in the philosophy of language. On the first notion (due to Carnap 1942), pragmatic phenomena are those that involve context-dependent determination of the content/significance of an utterance or signal. On the second (due to Grice 1957), pragmatic phenomena essentially involve the production of utterances with audience-directed communicative intentions (and their attribution to producers by their interpreters). I use the distinction for two related purposes. First, to evaluate a recent and influential formal analysis of monkey calls, due to linguist and philosopher Schlenker et al. (e.g. 2014, 2016, 2017), which invokes certain pragmatic principles to explain the derivation of call meanings through a form of pragmatic enrichment. And second, to motivate the need for an intermediate notion of pragmatics – one that would allow us to reconceive the significance of animal communication for our understanding of the evolution of language.

Extending the Gricean Model of Communication

Constant Bonard, University of Geneva, Geneva, Switzerland & University of Antwerp Antwerp, Belgium

The standard picture of communication in philosophy, linguistics, and other fields is importantly structured by the distinction between signals that display overt intentions to communicate (overt signals) and those that do not (non-overt signals). This distinction is generally taken to draw the line between the explanatory scope of the two main models of communication: the code model would account for communication through non-overt signals and the Gricean model for communication through overt signals. In this paper, I challenge this picture by showing that some non-overt signals can be accounted by what I call *the extended Gricean model*, which I introduce here, and in which the notion of non-natural meaning is replaced by the more encompassing notion of *non-natural suggesting*. I focus on examples of non-overt laughter.

Discourse Relations and Appositive Relative Clauses

Anne Bezuidenhout, University of South Carolina, South Carolina, USA

Chair: Catherine Wearing

Following the tradition that regards appositive relative clauses (ARCs) as syntactic “orphans” that are integrated with their host clauses only at the discourse level, I argue for the view that ARCs are independent clauses that are attached to antecedent clauses via discourse relations. This view is able to account for some experimental findings regarding the interpretation of clauses containing ARCs – in particular, the finding that ARCs, especially those in sentence-final position, can be understood as the target of denials. This discourse-relation view is also able to account for the way in which ARCs can move from a backgrounded status to a foregrounded one, depending on certain sorts of contextual factors. This treatment of ARCs aligns with the views of Hunter & Asher (2016). Koev (2017) suggests that we can extract a definition of at-issueness from Hunter & Asher’s account, which he labels Coherence (C)-at-issueness and distinguishes from two other notions of at-issueness, Q-at-issueness and P-at-issueness. A consequence of this is that we can ask when ARCs would be predicted to be C-at-issue. Koev discusses these predictions and points to some potential counterexamples. I address some of these worries and suggest that the shifting discourse status of ARCs is perhaps not correctly described as a shift in at-issueness.

Distinguishing Between Sign and Context

Ruth Millikan, University of Connecticut, Connecticut, USA

Chair: Bill Lycan

A great many signs contain self-signing elements. If not recognized, these signs may be thought inarticulate, whereas every sign necessarily belongs to a productive sign system and is as such necessarily articulate. Failure to recognize self-signing elements can misalign the distinction between sign and environment, even between sign and sign sender. This is especially damaging when considering signals used by animals.

Saturday, May 4th

Pragmatic Development: How Children Learn to Use Language for Social Communication

Danielle Matthews, University of Sheffield, Sheffield, UK

Chair: William Snyder

My goal is to synthesize viable accounts of children's communicative development putting particular emphasis on skill learning. I will chart a developmental trajectory, starting with the newborn, moving through early infancy towards intentional control over preverbal communication, before considering the transition to conventional language and finally its use in the preschool years (including consideration of the murky status of children's understanding of linguistic conventions as such). Infants come into the world wanting to be together with others and soon replace the comfort of touch and physical responsiveness with that of dyadic communication. With time, they gain increasingly precise control over their vocal communication and manage to weave the external world into their interactions. They start to communicate with the intention of directing others' attention and expect us to comment appropriately. At the same time, they pick up on the fact that people use speech in reliable ways as they go about daily action. They infer how specific linguistic forms work and to use words as part of routines. They thus build a structured inventory of form-function relations. In any context, they draw on this history of experience (akin to Katherine Nelson's notion of semantics) to infer what a speaker meant in the moment (sometimes by considering their intentions or attentional states, sometimes not since the process has habitualised). Likewise, children learn to choose the most effective means of saying something themselves given a history of more or less successful exchanges. In becoming increasingly confident in how specific linguistic forms – and languages in general - are used (with relation to the world, to other possible forms and to speakers), they launch processes of representational redescription (Karmiloff-Smith, 1994) at the cognitive and social-cognitive levels. One outcome is to effectively create an ever more precise awareness of others' mental states, the effect language has on them and an assumption that others also share this awareness. More advanced pragmatic skills (e.g., deception, pretending not to hear, hidden authorship) build on this insight. In sum, children start off with pragmatics, derive a semantics and use it to do more pragmatics - to understand language in specific social contexts and to make inferences when necessary about communicative intentions.

Drawing the Semantics-Pragmatics Distinction in Animal Communication

Mihnea Capraru, Nazarbayev U., Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan

Life scientists customarily assume that animal signals are for communicating information. There is, however, significant dissent, going back to Dawkins and Krebs in 1978. According to the dissenters, animal signals are merely for manipulating the receivers' behavior and not for informing them. This influential view has driven eusocial insect experts to identify the meanings of ant signals with their behavioral effects (Hölldobler and Wilson, 1991, 2008). Often the same signal produces different behavior in different contexts; this practice has thus resulted in the violation of Occam's Razor through the multiplication of meanings beyond necessity. For example, when harvester ants meet intruders on the outskirts of their territories, they flee toward their nests, but when the same happens near the nests, they fight. Two meanings are therefore posited, 'Fight!' and 'Flee!' Since separate meanings require either separate natural histories or separate learning histories, the more meanings we posit, the more we reduce the theory's epistemic probability.

This article introduces a more parsimonious account of the relation between signaling and behavior. Signals that elicit multiple behaviors often do so by transmitting a single, informational meaning. In the harvester ant case, that meaning is, 'Danger, here and now!' Depending on the receivers' pre-existing behavioral dispositions, they will respond with different behaviors. In our example, these signal-independent dispositions result from generic territorial behavior. Thus from just one meaning, combined with independently plausible, pre-existing dispositions, the entire range of behaviors emerges for free.

Stupefying

Mike Deigan, Yale University, Connecticut, USA

It often happens that addressees accept a speaker's utterance—sometimes with explicit confirmation—without grasping the at-issue content of that utterance. I call this phenomenon *stupefying*. The existence of stupefying shows, I argue, that the at-issue content of an utterance can be added to the common ground of a conversation without that content being attended to by all the participants in the conversation. This allows for an important means of manipulative speech that has been overlooked. It also shows that we should drop a commonly held assumption about the dynamics of attention in conversation.

Bridging and Beyond: An Account of NP Interpretation in Context

Mandy Simons, Carnegie Mellon University, Pennsylvania, USA

Chair: Zoltan Szabo

It is well known that the reference of a noun phrase, especially of a short definite, is typically semantically indeterminate. When it is, context may serve to fix the intended reference. One well-defined case of contextually determined reference is that of bridging (Clark 1975), illustrated in (1) below:

1. My car isn't drivable. The brakes are shot. (*the brakes* = the brakes of the speaker's car)

In bridging, an inferred relation to an already mentioned entity serves to provide a restriction on the interpretation of the target NP. But bridging is perhaps not really so different from cases where the restriction is provided by other types of contextual information such as the conversational topic or features of the discourse situation.

In this talk, I will present a model of bridging developed jointly with my colleague David Danks. Our model treats bridging as involving operations over (instantiations of) concepts, utilizing spreading activation as the central driving process. In contrast to earlier accounts (Clark 1975, Asher and Lascarides 1998), the model takes neither definiteness nor propositional coherence to be central to the explanation of bridging, although it recognizes a role for both. I will then go on to consider how the model can be applied more broadly to account for the contextual restriction of NP reference in the absence of an explicit antecedent. I will try to draw out some general conclusions about the role of context in interpretation and about the distinction between bottom-up and top-down interpretational processes.

The Affiliative Conception of Sense

Rory Harder, University of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

In this talk, I give a novel argument for Fregeanism about demonstrative meaning and develop a novel conception of demonstrative sense. Fregeanism about demonstrative meaning holds that the meaning of a demonstrative (in context) is finer-grained than its referent. The standard way of motivating Fregeanism appeals to the claim that knowledge-transfer is the basic purpose of (linguistic) communication (Evans 1982, Heck 1995, 2002). For a Fregean, the meaning of a demonstrative is given by its sense, and the conception of sense that arises from this standard motivation is the epistemic conception of sense (Dickie & Rattan 2010). I raise several interrelated problems for the standard motivation, of which the main one is that the claim about the basic purpose of communication is unfounded. The novel argument I give relies upon the role of joint attention in demonstrative understanding, and appeals to empirical work in developmental psychology, mainly in the tradition of Bruner (1983), to show how joint attention plays its role in the context of a basic human motivation for sharing and coordinating attitudes. The conception of sense that arises from this novel motivation is the affiliative conception of sense. Time permitting, I discuss the under-appreciated phenomenon of emotional deixis (Lakoff 1974) in relation to the affiliative conception of sense.

Avowals and Expositives: Where Showing Meets Saying

Mitch Green, University of Connecticut, Connecticut, USA

Chair: Lionel Shapiro

Avowals of attitude such as ‘I believe that...’ and expositives such as ‘I claim that...’ are often used to show the force, epistemic status, or other conversationally relevant feature of the complement clause they embed. A tempting but untenable explanation of this fact would construe such complement clauses as being semantically transparent. The alternative pursued here starts with concepts from the evolutionary biology of communication, defines a notion of a *verbal signal*, and uses it to explain how in the relevant uses, speakers can both say that something is the case (e.g., that I claim that q), and show it to be so (that I am putting forth q in a certain way). The notion of showing invoked here is elucidated with the evo-bio notions of *index* and *handicap*, and helps us to make sense of communicatively rich phenomena in our own species without reliance on the psychologically demanding notion of speaker meaning.

Lexical Innovation, Sense Conventions and the Lexicon

Robyn Carston, University College London, London, UK

Chair: Craig Roberts

Speakers can use language creatively to express a new ad hoc sense or to coin a new word, and hearers are usually able to grasp the new sense or word by virtue of their inferential pragmatic capacities. Such new senses or words may be transient innovations or may become conventional and stable components of the lexicon. Taking an interdisciplinary perspective (drawing on work in philosophy, psychology and linguistics), I will argue that (a) such pragmatically-based sense conventions are the essence of the phenomenon of (cross-categorial) polysemy, (b) conventionalised senses are stored in a communicational lexicon which is distinct from the lexicon of the narrow language faculty, and (c) contrary to some recent views in the philosophy of language, sense conventions, although hugely enabling, are not essential to the explanation of successful communication.

List of Posters

What Conversation Really Is

Sam Berstler, *Yale University, USA*

Just What Was that Supposed to Mean? An Investigation of Non-Overt Pejorative Communication

Ralph DiFranco, *Auburn University, USA*

This paper gives an account of non-overt derogatory gestures, like the middle finger when performed by subtly extending one's finger and making-as-if to scratch one's cheek. I argue that the derogatory power of this gesture and others like it is due to the fact that the performer does not making their communicative intentions easily discernible, which makes pinning down the insult challenging and can undermine corrective measures.

Attempts to Appropriate Slurs and Grice's First Maxim of Quality

Benjamin Lennertz and David Miguel Gray, *Colgate University & University of Memphis, USA*

What goes on when a speaker attempts to appropriate a theretofore unappropriated slur? We argue that we can make sense of this act using a Gricean picture – relying on a violation of something like Grice's First Maxim of Quality. However, since on many accounts of slurs, their negative aspect is not truth-conditional, a more general version of that maxim must be at play. So, our project has an upshot both for theorizing about slurs – that attempts to appropriate can be made sense of from a Gricean perspective – and for theorizing about Grice's framework – that we have further evidence for generalizing Grice's First Maxim of Quality beyond the realm of information exchange.

Semantic Tools for Contextual Meaning Modulation

Kate Stanton, *Yale University, USA*

Cooperation in Testimonial Conversation

Alejandro Vesga, *Cornell University, USA*

Testifying speakers are responsible for having the right kind of authority concerning the content of their testimony. A complete theory of testimony should not only offer an account of what this authority amounts to but also a theory of how to individuate the contents they are responsible for. This project aims to dismiss a strict semantically-primacy approach to the latter question, as it has been defended or assumed by many philosophers. In turn, it also sketches a context-dependent answer in which the evidence of cooperation modulates the kinds of communicative strategies that can convey the contents of testimony.

Useful Information



McHugh Hall

Talks will be held at the **Room 305** of **Lawrence D. McHugh Hall (MCHU)** (formerly Laurel Hall).

Coffee breaks and lunches will be offered in the corridor in front of the room.

The **poster session** will be held on Friday, during lunch.

UConn Wi-Fi is free for all guests. Simply connect to **UCONN-GUEST**.

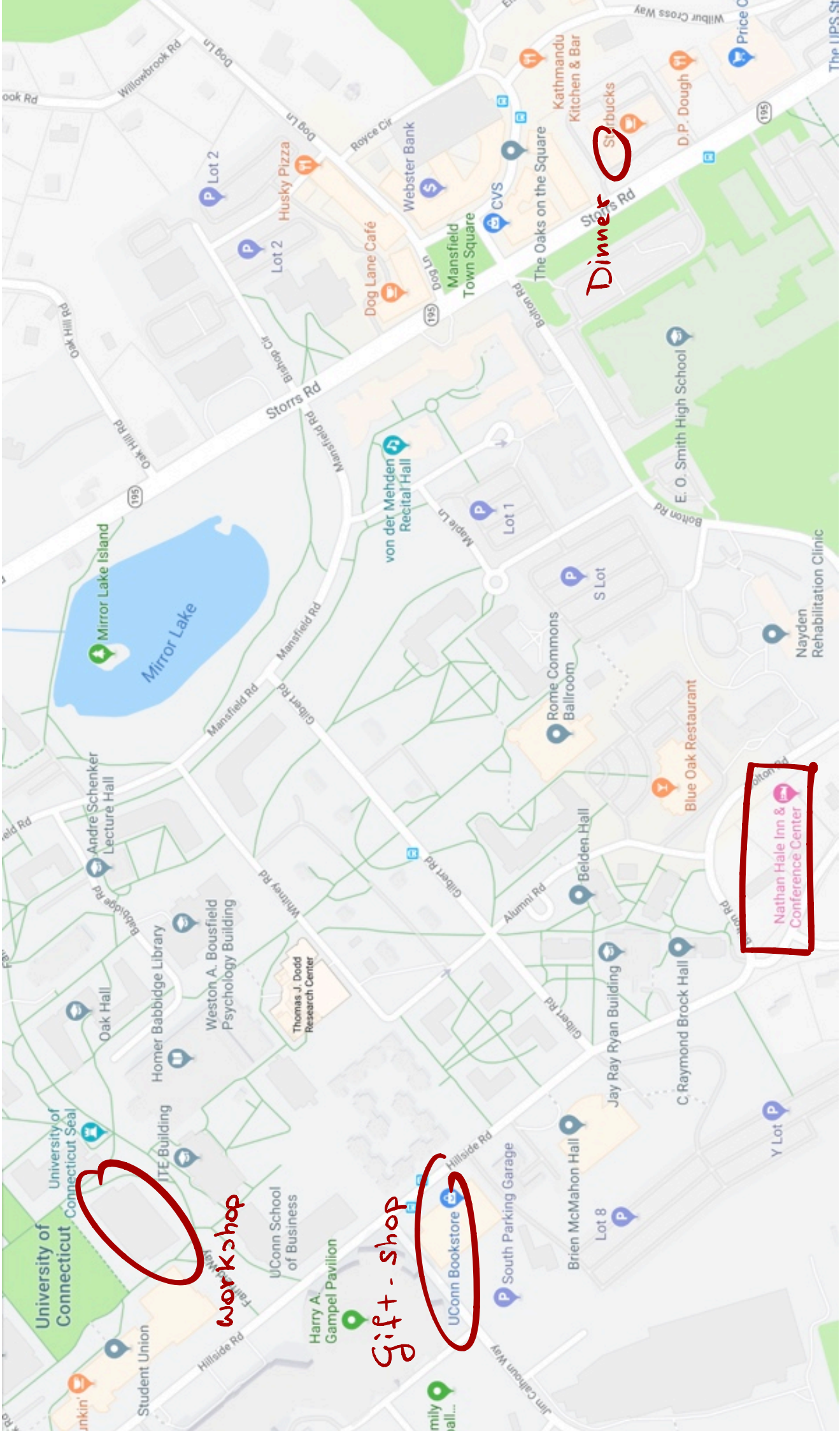
The Conference dinner will be held at *Chang's Garden*, in Storrs Center, on Saturday, right after the talks.

Nearby Restaurants

- Subway (Student Union): (860) 427-7506
- Dog Lane Cafe (Storrs Center): (860) 429-4900
- Blaze Pizza (Storrs Center): (860) 200-0216
- Katmandu (Storrs Center): (860) 477-1148 (Nepalese and Indian Food)
- Oriental Cafe (Storrs Center): (860) 429-6888 (East Asian Food)
- Apple Bee's (East Brook Mall): (860) 423-6069

How to get to UConn?

- **By Car:** Parking is available in South Parking Garage, 2366 Jim Calhoun Way, Storrs, CT 06269.
- **By Airplane (Bradley):** The closest airport is Bradley International Airport in Windsor Locks, CT, about 45 minutes away from the Storrs campus.
- **Airport Ground Transportation (Bradley):** Taxis and Uber/Lyft depart from the designated taxi zones outside of the Baggage Claim level of the terminal. The fare averages \$40.00 – \$80.00 one way, depending on how you choose to travel.
- **By Airplane (Logan):** Boston Logan International Airport is also one of the closest major airports, about an hour and 40 minutes away from the Storrs campus. You may use Peter Pan buses to come to the Storrs campus.
- **By Bus:** Peter Pan buses stop at designated stops on the South end of campus outside of West and Alumni residence halls, and at the Nash- Zimmer Transportation Center in Downtown Storrs. Please see their website (<https://peterpanbus.com>) for more information on schedules and fares.
- **By Train:** Hartford's Union Station (HFD) is serviced by Amtrak's Northeast Regional and Vermonter routes. Union Station is located about 30 minutes away from the Storrs campus. Peter Pan buses also stop at Union Station.



Workshop

Workshop

Gift-shop

Dinner

Nathan Hale Inn & Conference Center



QUICK GUIDE	
Admissions	Gordon W. Tasker Building (Undergraduate)
TSK	Nathan L. Whetten Graduate Center (Graduate)
WGC	Library
Library	Homer Babbidge Library
HBL	Medical Services
Medical Services	Hilda May Williams Student Health Services
WSH	Parking
Parking	North Parking Garage
NPBK	South Parking Garage
SPRK	Police and Fire Departments Public Safety Complex
Police and Fire Departments	Police and Fire Departments
PSC	Student Services
Student Services	Wilbur Cross Building
WCB	Visitors Center
Visitors Center	Lodewick Visitors Center
LVC	

Main Campus at Storrs



Visit maps.uconn.edu for building information, driving directions and parking assistance.

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