

UCSD cognitive scientist awarded Guggenheim Fellowship

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UCSD COGNITIVE SCIENTIST AWARDED GUGGENHEIM FELLOWSHIP

Gilles R. Fauconnier, a professor of cognitive science at the University of California, San Diego, has been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for 1998.

Guggenheim Fellows are appointed on the basis of unusually distinguished achievement in the past and exceptional promise for future accomplishments. This year, Fauconnier is one of only 168 artists, scholars, and scientists from more than 3,000 applicants chosen for this honor.

At UCSD, Fauconnier has been researching what he calls the complex "backstage cognition," the invisible or behind-the-scenes mental activities responsible for our everyday language and reasoning.

He is particularly interested in how the human brain brings together or blends different concepts in its constant search for meaning. The general term for this activity is "conceptual blending," which doesn't refer to a physical location in the brain but rather to a conceptual meeting place where images and ideas merge and then emerge.

From this activity comes our ability to organize thoughts, sift reason from confusion, and sense the spark of creativity. It's the foundation for our understanding of language and what we recognize as common sense.

Fauconnier holds advanced degrees in mathematics and doctorates in linguistics from the University of Paris and UCSD.

He joined the UCSD faculty in 1988 after serving in various academic posts in France, including Chair of the Department of Language Sciences at the University of Paris. His book, "Mental Spaces," which focused on "cognitive domains," appeared in French, English and Japanese.

While at UCSD, Fauconnier has continued his research on language and cognition, culminating in 1993 with the discovery of the general cognitive process of conceptual integration and blending. The finding resulted from a collaboration with Mark Turner, a professor of English at the University of Maryland.

Fauconnier's latest book, "Mappings in Thought and Language," presents a comprehensive approach to the study of the hidden or backstage cognitive constructions and connections that operate invisibly when we think and talk.

He is a member of the Cognitive Science Society, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and the International Cognitive Linguistics Association.

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