Imagine you are at the office one morning, and you overhear someone utter the sentence in (1).

(1) If Alice had gone to the party, Bob would have stayed home.

If you take the speaker to be telling the truth, you come to know a few different things: There was a party; Alice (probably) wasn't there; Bob (probably) was; and most importantly, there is some sort of connection between Alice's going to the party and Bob's going to the party. But what is the nature of this connection? Does the semantics of counterfactual constructions like (1) constrain the space of possible relations between the antecedent and consequent?

In this talk, we present a number of possible types of explanations and argue that English counterfactual constructions in fact disallow some explanations, and privilege some licit explanations over others. Using Structural Equation Modeling (à la Pearl 2000) and an enriched notion of possible worlds (Starr 2012), we show how counterfactuals can informatively update the common ground without making reference to accessibility relations or similarity, and in doing so, how some sets of counterfactuals can be jointly incompatible.

In a recent paper (SuB 2018) I argued that the presupposition of questions should be understood as a consequence of what I called the duality of questions: the fact that in the semantics, a question denotes a set of propositions that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, and the observations that a question needs to partition the common ground (and hence be associated with a set of mutually exclusive propositions). In this talk I will explore this claim further through a puzzle about the presuppositions of degree questions pointed out by Gentile and Schwarz (SuB 2017).
This talk is concerned with the semantics of neat mass nouns, mass nouns like pottery, furniture, livestock, and poultry.

There is, in the earlier literature on mass nouns – e.g., Bunt 1980, 2006 (following Quine 1960) – a widespread assumption about neat mass nouns, that they are semantically no different from count nouns and that the only difference is that neat mass nouns grammatically lack a feature +COUNT.

Against this it was argued by Rothstein 2011 and Landman 2011 (as well as by others), that neat mass nouns are semantically different from count nouns in that they, unlike count nouns, allow measure comparison interpretations.

There is, however, a snag in the argument: Singular count nouns also allow measure comparisons interpretations, when their interpretation is downshifted (i.e., when they have a grinding interpretation). This means that, if we can attribute the measure comparison interpretations for neat mass nouns to downshifting, Bunt may be right after all, and neat mass nouns do pattern with (singular) count nouns.

I will argue in this talk that while indeed neat mass nouns allow measure comparison interpretations under downshifting, neat mass nouns, unlike count nouns, also allow measure comparison interpretations that do not involve downshifting.

The argument will be made in the context of a Guided Tour of Iceberg Semantics, as laid out in my forthcoming book. At the end of the talk we will reach the conclusion that the Rothstein-Landman observation does hold: Neat mass nouns are semantically different from count nouns and from mess mass nouns (nouns like time, meat, and water).