

# PHILOSOPHIA SCIENTIÆ

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*Philosophia Scientiæ*, tome 2, n° 2 (1997), p. 213-229

[http://www.numdam.org/item?id=PHSC\\_1997\\_\\_2\\_2\\_213\\_0](http://www.numdam.org/item?id=PHSC_1997__2_2_213_0)

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**From Actions to Symbols:  
Wittgenstein's Method and the Pragmatic Turn**

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**Abstract.** In an endeavor to contribute to an understanding of ‘worldmaking’ in Goodman’s sense the paper tries to clarify the relation between a (linguistic) symbol and what it stands for. It argues that Wittgenstein’s pragmatic method can help to avoid two mistakes: the mistake of staying (without noticing it) inside the confines of our own language and thus failing to grasp the possibility of new and different symbolic worlds; and the mistake for a language-game approach of underestimating the systematic interconnections of partial linguistic abilities that allow to speak of a ‘world’ in the first place. In the first part, five methodological maxims are extracted from the later writings of Wittgenstein. In the second part five steps, from prelinguistic social activity to a classificatory use of symbols (and thus to the establishment of the relation of a sign standing for an object) are discussed in detail.

## Introduction

Among the important and still rewarding reorientations in the field of philosophy in our century is what has become known as the ‘linguistic turn’<sup>1</sup>. It has been supplemented, for example by authors working in the spirit of the later writings of Wittgenstein, by a ‘pragmatic turn’. The linguistic turn claims that what we call ‘the world’ is not given to us independently of language. Language is not (as for instance John Locke had thought) just a means of representing or communicating the ideas we form on the basis of the impressions we have received from the outside world. Instead, language has a constitutive character. What we take to be ‘the world’ is constituted to a large extent not only by the human sensory or mental organs and by the processes and inner activities that go with them, but by language.

The pragmatic turn, which will be at the center of my interest here, claims that in order to understand this constitutive character of language and in order to critically evaluate the results of the language-constituting steps (i.e.: to evaluate our most basic categories for describing ‘the world’) it is helpful (if not indeed mandatory) to treat language as a system of actions, of possible activities, of what Wittgenstein has called ‘language games’.

Both these reorientations are expressed in titles or subtitles of books by Nelson Goodman: His *Languages of Art* reminds us in its subtitle that we need a general ‘theory of symbols’. And the title of another book of his, *Ways of Worldmaking*, can be taken as expressing in the shortest possible way that the world is not simply given to us, but that our activities produce it, or rather: produce them. The plural is necessary to indicate that there are quite different kinds

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Frederick Ferré for helping me to avoid a grave misunderstanding and for correcting my English.

of activities with quite different results. For that reason the question of their possible integration is an additional issue; but it is a too large one to get into at this point.

In the first part of my paper I plan to discuss some basic methodological questions arising from attempts to actually show how and in what sense activities can make worlds, i.e. (on the lowest level) how we can get from simple actions to symbols. In the second part I will leave the methodological issues and sketch how I think that the very first steps from actions to symbols can be taken, and I will try to say what it means for a symbol to stand for something. Metaphorically speaking, in this second part I will use the philosophical microscope, with the result that I will not treat much more than one symbol only. But what is lost in scope by this procedure will, I hope, be gained in clarity.

Let me indicate the kind of problems that I have in mind by characterizing two ways in which such an attempt to get from actions to symbols can fail: On the one hand one can fail by staying on the side of actions, without really building and crossing the bridge to the world of symbols. This can most easily happen when one important question remains out of focus, namely the question of how language games are internally related to each other. If our view is restricted to simple language games that involve one-word-utterances with just one specific function each, it easily looks as if the development of a person's ability to take part in language games is as simple as the development of a number of independent social skills, like learning how to play hide-and-seek: Join in and do as the elders do. Certainly language *is* a social skill, so it is not simply false to apply this model of acquisition. But it is hard to see how a putting together of simple skills can result in what could be called the acquisition of 'a world'. So we have to keep in mind that language games have strong internal connections to each other, and this must show in the process of reconstruction.

A second and related possible failure in an attempt to bridge the gap between actions and the world of symbols is to stay (without noticing it) on the side of what we have come to take as *the* world although it is in fact only *our* world. In this case the result would not be a number of unrelated social skills, although it might possibly look that way to a superficial observer. Our result would indeed be a *system* of abilities, but the systematic relations between them would be a mere uncritical reproduction of such relations as they are in *our* world, in our language. We would fail by not showing how the 'web' that connects the items of the world arises from actions, how the "logical mortar" (as Frege calls it at one point [Frege 1969, 14]) has been absent at first and has then emerged. Instead, we would describe

the process of language acquisition as something taking place on a fixed and ready stage, namely, on the stage of *our* world, in our own living-room. When our children learn how to play hide-and-seek we make sure that no open fire or dirty closet will threaten the process. And we will be glad to find in the end that they have grown up to be persons just like ourselves. We can welcome them in our world, as we had expected all along. Spelling out the analogy, it means that in this second type of failure we carry with us our favorite set of philosophical and/or semiotic distinctions and describe the process of worldmaking in such a way that the result fits nicely into the confines of our philosophical preconceptions. It is this kind of failure that will occupy most of my time here.

## 1. Wittgenstein's Methods of Leaving the Living Room

### 1.1. What it means to be trapped

When I now treat some details, I will begin with the second of the two mentioned possibilities of failing, the danger of staying in our own living room instead of leaving home and going out into the uncultivated landscapes of worldmaking. The project (I repeat) is to describe an intelligible way that leads from 'simple' actions (without any particular symbolic character to them), to actions of a special kind, namely, to symbolic actions, and from there to symbols as separate entities. Of the symbols we would like to be able to say, firstly, that they 'stand for' certain 'entities' or 'objects', and secondly that they are connected in such a way that together they form or represent 'a world'. So the fiction we are upholding for methodological reasons is that we do not really know what a symbol is, we do not know what it means for a symbol to 'stand for' an object, and we do not know in which way symbols can go together to form a world.

What are the methodological concerns standing behind this fiction? What exactly does it mean to stay in the living room, and how is the methodological fiction, the telling of a story of steps of language acquisition, supposed to safeguard us against this danger? As a point of departure I take the well known first paragraphs of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* [Wittgenstein 1953]. He says there that St. Augustine presents a very common but deeply misguided picture of language. He does not really describe how a first language can be acquired by a person who knows *no* language at all. Instead, without being aware of it, St. Augustine describes how someone who already masters a language would be able to learn new words in the sense of new *sounds*. If Wittgenstein is correct in this criticism, the process described by St. Augustine would be like

learning a new code: The whole system of language is presupposed to be there, fixed and ready, and it is tacitly taken to remain in place. The new steps consist solely in learning a new sound for every single word. It is clear that this way of proceeding leaves intact the (unmentioned) system of the first language, it leaves unquestioned its particular internal order as a system of actions. St. Augustine's understanding of what a language should look like remains unchanged by his naive kind of 'remembering' how he had learned it. It does not even come into view. Nothing really new can happen. Following his method, we would stay in the living room, we could only find what we have known all along.

In Wittgenstein's view, St. Augustine's description of his acquisition of language is like a description of somebody who knows how to play chess, but who has to understand new conventions as to what shapes or colors of a given material are used in a foreign country to indicate the different pieces of the game. In such a case, simple pairings can be used to describe what the person has learned, for example: the red piece of plastic is the king, a green piece is a pawn, etc. Such a description would not mention the rules of the game of chess at all. In a parallel fashion (says Wittgenstein) St. Augustine describes his acquisition of language as if the 'place in the game' of all the words would have been known to him and only their sounds would have to be learned.

But why is it so important to critically discuss the *system* of language, the places that the elements have in the game of language? Wittgenstein's claim is that understanding the system, understanding the difference between the roles that expressions can have, — understanding these things is what we need in order to solve or overcome the problems of philosophy. We have to see that the different elements in language function quite differently; there are substantial differences between parts of speech. In this sense, expressions can have fundamentally different 'places' in the language they are parts of, and if we are in error about these places, we get confused and can for example no longer see the difference between material and 'linguistic' or 'metaphorically created' entities [cf. Schneider 1997].

The typical starting point for this kind of confusion is a naive understanding of the phrase 'every meaningful expression of the language stands for something'. By not distinguishing the different ways in which expressions can have meaning, we run the risk of taking something as 'belonging to the world' that actually 'belongs to language'. For example, philosophers have wondered about the mysterious character of entities like 'mental events'. According to Wittgenstein, what is needed here are not better empirical methods of

investigation but an understanding of certain ways of using language in the context of other activities. So the question should be: How does our talk of 'mental events' get into our language, so that these events become members of our world? A parallel argument could be made for the existence of numbers and other abstract objects. So to understand correctly the way in which these entities belong to our world, we have to understand how their expressions get into and belong to our language. As a cure against getting entangled in these kinds of problems Wittgenstein takes a very close look at our activities of 'world-making': How do different kinds of words function in such a way that it appears as if they would stand for certain entities? Can we understand how what he calls 'grammatical fictions' are possible? And will such an understanding enable us to tell the difference between a harmless use of an ordinary way of speaking and a case in which language, as he says, goes on holiday, where we get misled, get on the wrong track?

As has been mentioned, one main reason for St. Augustine's error is taken by Wittgenstein to be a naive understanding of the phrase 'every expression stands for something'. At one point he speaks about the paradox that he seems to deny the existence of mental states, although this is not at all his intention. He goes on:

The paradox disappears only if we make a radical break with the idea that language always functions in one way, always serves the same purpose: to convey thoughts — which may be about houses, pains, good and evil, or anything else you please [PI 304]<sup>2</sup>

So the error is to treat words and things as two kinds of entities existing side by side; the cure would be to understand the different kinds of work that words actually do and to understand how in the process of producing ever more complicated linguistic forms, new kinds of talking about 'entities' arise. In so far as these ways of talking are meaningful, we might have reasons to say also that 'new entities' arise or are constructed. And if this happens in a web of connections, we might feel close to the bigger prospects of 'worldmaking'.

## 1.2. Five methodological maxims

How then does Wittgenstein proceed, what is his method of guarding himself and his readers against the danger of staying in the

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<sup>2</sup> „Das Paradox verschwindet nur dann, wenn wir radikal mit der Idee brechen, die Sprache funktioniere immer auf *eine* Weise, diene immer dem gleichen Zweck: Gedanken zu übertragen — seien diese nun Gedanken über Häuser, Schmerzen, Gut und Böse, oder was immer.“

living room and reproducing our old preconceptions, disguised at best by a new terminology? I will try to spell out some characteristic traits of what I read as his thoroughly pragmatic method. I will express it in terms of five closely related maxims. Their formulations are not his, they are the result of my interpretation. I will state them and comment on them briefly. I take it that Wittgenstein's way of arguing is so well known that it is unnecessary to demonstrate here their actual presence in his texts.

Maxim (1): In the story of the acquisition of ever more complicated forms of language, the person acquiring them has to be able to see each step as meaningful.

This is an important point, I think, and it seems to me that Wittgenstein needed some time to see and observe it clearly<sup>3</sup>. He sometimes speaks of 'preparatory steps' in the process of learning a language game. For example, he says that the step of introducing numerals into the builders' language has as a preparatory step that the number-words and their order have to be learned by heart.

But in order to avoid St. Augustine's mistake of staying in the living room, we immediately have to ask: What exactly is it that the person has learned, who has mastered this preparatory step? It is clear that the answer cannot be 'counting'. Also it would be very misleading to say that the names of the numbers have been learned, because the person who acquired the new skill of reciting the numerals by heart does not yet know what numbers are and does not know the relation of 'naming a number with help of a word'. Wittgenstein contemplates the idea that the numerals stand to groups of things in a relation comparable to the relation in which a word like 'slab' stands to slabs. For larger numbers at least this would be a dubious claim. But at another point he seems to see (correctly, I think) that it is the most important aspect in the acquisition of the numerals that they have a modifying role in relation to other expressions. This is what Frege had tried to express by saying that a numeral makes a statement about a *concept*. A word like 'five' is typically modifying an expression like 'slab'; it does not stand all by itself. In the context of Wittgenstein's builders' scene, it is the utterance of expressions like 'five slabs' which constitutes a meaningful step in the process of building a house. (So here we get

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<sup>3</sup> I would like to add that I have in mind here very basic expressions of the kind of which Wittgenstein himself takes his examples. I do not deny the possibility that on an advanced level for example a new scientific terminology might be introduced in such a way that the meaning of the first words cannot be completely grasped before some other terms have been introduced.



a glimpse of the connections between the parts of language, of the systematic 'web' that will lead to 'worlds'.) So what is learned is the practical activity of counting and of bringing the correct amount of material. This activity can be shown to other people, it can be demonstrated, attempts to take part in it can be corrected, and it can be seen as immediately meaningful in the context of erecting a building. All locutions like 'numerals stand for numbers' are expressions of a much later competence. In the context of Wittgenstein's methodological reconstruction these formulations would be illegitimate descriptions of a learner's competence, because the world the making of which we try to observe does not yet contain numbers.

To answer a possible objection, I would like to mention that of course it is not impossible to learn some numerals by heart in a first step, and *then* to go on by learning how to use them to count. But I would insist that the first step in this case would be nothing but a simple play of imitation. It can be experienced as meaningful, but meaningful only as a socially rewarding activity like singing songs together. This is good enough for making it possible that such ways of learning actually occur; as we know, children learn a lot in this playful social way. I only want to insist that this social type of payoff, important as it is, must not be described by saying: Now she knows the names of the numbers, and later she will learn what to do with this knowledge. There is no knowledge *of* something at this 'preparatory' stage, only a know-how. To overlook this difference would be the Augustinian mistake: We stay in our living room, wrongly supposing that we are furnished with numbers and the word-name relation already, instead of asking how they got there in the first place. So I repeat the first maxim: In the story of the acquisition of ever more complicated forms of language, the person acquiring them has to be able to see each step as meaningful.

A second methodological maxim I take from the writings of Wittgenstein is closely related to the one just discussed. It can be formulated in the following way:

Maxim (2): The meaningfulness of every new step has to show on the level of action. Or in the words of Gregory Bateson: There is no difference that does not MAKE a difference.

Applied to the case of the numerals this means that it would be illegitimate to say of somebody pointing to a pile of slabs and uttering 'five' at one time and uttering 'slabs' at another time, — it would be illegitimate to say of such a person that she has *meant* their number in the first and their *kind* in the second instance, if this 'meaning one thing' as against 'meaning the other' does at no point show on the level of action. A difference that at no point *makes* a

difference is no difference. Wittgenstein's own example is that of attending to the *shape* or to the *color* of something: It would be meaningless to say that the same gesture of pointing in one case 'meant' or was directed at the color, but in another it meant or was directed at the shape, if this difference does at no point become visible as a practical difference, as a difference, for instance, in the way the ongoing language game is continued. [PI 33 f.]

Maxim (3): The characters of the fictional story of acquisition are 'people like you and me', they are not parts of people (like their eyes, their inner mental processes, their nervous systems). The story to be told tells about their overt actions, not about the actions of their minds in their inner, private life. It is illegitimate to postulate inner actions or inner preparatory steps where no overt differences in actions can be detected.

This maxim is a specification or nearly a paraphrase of the last one. It stresses (against the philosophical tradition that tried to reconstruct the world out of the inner activities of private subjects) that for a pragmatic reconstruction the level on which it takes place is that of real, complete human beings. The suspicion or indeed the experience standing behind this methodological maxim is that in the history of philosophy many postulated inner activities or processes are only projections of well known overt activities into a realm of an inner life. In cases where this is true, the plausibility that these projections might have for some readers as candidates for explanations, stems from our familiarity with their overt counterparts. But this means that we are moving in a circle; we are reproducing what we want to explain; again we are not leaving our living room.

Circular arguments of this type, despite the criticism raised against them by Wittgenstein, are still very common. The American philosopher Mark Johnson, for example, tells us that there are image-schemata existing on a pre-conceptual level of our experience and operating in our perception [Johnson 1987]. And the German neurophysiologists Roth and Schwegler have recently advanced the hypothesis that the brain, getting nearly lost in its flood of informational processes, marks certain of them in a special way, and that this kind of being marked is what we call consciousness [Roth/Schwegler 1995; cf. Schneider 1995a].

For a philosophical reconstruction of 'ways of worldmaking' this kind of talk is illegitimate. By this claim I do not mean to deny that in the context of an empirical theory, a construction of such models may be meaningful. It would be an interesting point indeed if it should turn out that a model of the brain, for instance, can *only* be constructed in an anthropomorphic way, as if an inner person would

act rationally, to avoid getting lost. But for philosophy the order has to be the other way round: After we have gained some clarity in the domain of public linguistic actions and in the meaning of the word 'reference', we may in a second step turn to the question how 'referring to something inner' is possible. And only after we have some understanding of this possibility, may we ask how an empirical investigation into this inner life can be conducted and how it relates to what is (literally) 'in' our head, i.e. in our brains.

Maxim (4): The methodological fiction is, that the characters of our story of acquisition do not possess LANGUAGE, it is not that they are unable to distinguish food from stones and get confused about who is the wolf and who is the grandmother. No 'theory of the origin of mental faculties' is intended at this point.

This again is very close to what has been expressed in the last maxim, still I think that it is worth mentioning. It says, in Wittgenstein's words, that the basis of our story is "the common behavior of mankind" [PI 206]<sup>4</sup>. So, although we try to avoid the danger of taking too much of our own furniture for granted, we are not trying to explain how worlds can be made 'from scratch', for instance how a world can be built up by designing hard- and software for a computer or a robot. We are not telling a story about how a character in a philosophical fiction, imagined to be 'somebody' who has no world at all, would go through a succession of steps, starting from chaotic sense data and ending with clearcut concepts. In a certain sense our fictional characters (like all living beings) do have a world, we can even picture us as sharing a world with them, namely the pre-linguistic world of laughter and tears, of eating and sleeping. So even without language we can share a world up to a certain degree in a practical way, as we do for instance with our dogs or cats. It is no *philosophical* problem to explain how a newborn child is able to tell a real breast from a fake or how a dog can recognize its master. For philosophy, these abilities are simply 'given'. Treated as philosophical problems *only*, such projects would therefore be hopeless and misguided, although in biology, of course, they can be (and indeed are) highly interesting.

Maxim (5): Generally, our methodological fiction takes the 'outer' and the 'social' to be better understood, or at least to be more easily accessible, than the 'inner' and the 'private'. The existence of the 'inner world' is not denied, but the methodological project is to explain the inner with help of the outer, and not, as has been customary in philosophy, the other way round.

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<sup>4</sup> „Die gemeinsame menschliche Handlungsweise ist das Bezugssystem, mittels dessen wir uns eine fremde Sprache deuten.“

This maxim can be taken as a kind of summary or as an expression of a basic intuition of the 'pragmatic turn'. It needs no further comment, I suppose, except perhaps that it is worth mentioning that it applies to any attempt to specify what "the common behavior of mankind" amounts to. It warns us to be careful not to project too much of our living room furniture into the inner lives of members of, for example, a foreign culture.

So much then for the methodological maxims that I would like to take from Wittgenstein as a minimal safeguard against the danger that we find nothing but our own world when we set out to understand the 'ways of worldmaking'. In the second part of my paper I will now give a sketch of what I see as one possible way 'from actions to symbols'. As I have mentioned already, it is a close-up picture and will for that reason cover only a very short part of the way to symbols, let alone to whole worlds. But I hope it is satisfactory in two respects I have mentioned: It tries to heed the five maxims just discussed; and it tries to make visible the kind of internal, systematic connections between possible moves in language games, the leaving out of which I have above criticized as resulting not in worlds, but in a collection of separate competences of the hide-and-seek type.

## **2. First Steps Towards a World of Symbols: What Does it Mean for a Symbol to 'Stand for' Something?**

As has been stated in maxims (3) and (4), our story can and should start out on a level where a number of human beings are together who eat and sleep, who get hurt and fall in love<sup>5</sup>. They share "the common behavior of mankind"; it is not a part of our project to explain why they are not bathing in boiling water and are not eating stones for dinner. So we can take it that there will be various activities going on which have a social nature: holding somebody's hand; rocking her rocking chair; passing the salt; doing the dishes.

There will be cases in which different people are playing different roles in these social activities: In feeding a baby or a disabled person, there naturally is an active and a passive role; in other cases (like Wittgenstein's builders' scene) there will be one person, for example, climbing the ladder and another one holding it; one person going to get the slabs, another one standing on the ladder and fitting them in.

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<sup>5</sup> Some of the material of this second part of the paper is simultaneously published in German; cf. Schneider, in press.

Now I take it that in a social context of this kind a non-symbolic activity of '*imitation*' can take place, and it can either be playful (as in the case of noise-imitation that small children like to play); or it can be closer to what we call 'work': One person has a certain technique of, say, lifting a slab, and a second person tries to imitate the first, which in turn may inspire the first one to repeat it for her. The imitating person might get corrected, she might try again, and might master it after a while. Although one could no doubt say that in both cases there is some kind of 'communication' going on, I would not call any of these actions 'symbolic'. They are what they are; they are not standing for anything, although they organize the rapport of two or more people in the sense that what one person is doing depends on how she perceives what the other person is doing.

One could be tempted to say that the demonstrating person is pointing out to the observing one the generic act that her individual act belongs to or exemplifies. But to my judgment this would be a case of staying in the living room: In our story it does not make sense to say that the person *knows* a generic act or that she *means* it or wants to *exemplify* it. As Goodman has pointed out, exemplification is only where predication is, and predication is missing at the stage of development here under discussion<sup>6</sup>. All this mentalistic and semiotic furniture has yet to be constructed; it cannot be used to describe what the participants of our story are doing. To say that they 'mean' it even if it does not show, would violate the methodological maxim (2).

Another prelinguistic social activity the people of our story could engage in, would be the following; I would like to call it '*natural continuation*'. It is very much like imitation, only this time there is a meaningful succession of *different* actions, not one person 'repeating' what the other has done. An example would be the case in which one person would start cooking, a second one would begin to set the table. Successions like these can become fixed habits, and we might be tempted to say that mother's starting to cook functions as a *sign* for her children to start setting the table.

In a similar vein, we might be tempted to describe the chief goat's sudden move in a certain direction as a sign for the whole herd to flee. Similarly, George Herbert Mead has described how one dog, in getting ready to bite another, lifts his lips from his teeth [Mead

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<sup>6</sup> I am aware that according to Goodman exemplification is possible without there being yet a *specific* predicate for the case in point. I do not wish to deny that; I only want to say that the competence to use predicates at all is a necessary condition for understanding exemplification.

1934]. The second dog sees what the first one is up to (it sees the beginning stage of the action of biting) and can take it as a *signal* to go away. In this case also, such sequences of actions can become quite normal courses of events, so that again we might want to say that the first dog uses the showing of his teeth to scare the other away.

Luckily, our methodological maxims (3) and (4) allow us to avoid speculations about animals in the current context. As the reader might know, Mead proposed that it is the audible character of certain gestures that transforms them to symbols. His idea is that for example a lion hears himself roaring and so induces (on a diminished scale) the same reaction of getting scared by the sound in himself as he does in the animals that hear him (his 'natural' addressees, so to say). Mead seems to think that to be scared of one's own sound is to know the meaning of the symbol one is producing. I am not sure whether this will work as a biological theory of self-awareness; I can easily imagine a machine registering its own productions without by that becoming self-aware. But luckily, the explanation of consciousness is not my subject matter. According to our maxim (3) the characters of our story are 'people like you and me', not goats, lions or robots. But in our human story we have no reasons to speak of signs or acts of signaling yet, although mother's beginning to cook can be meaningfully taken as an occasion to set the table. And colloquially we sometimes treat the expression 'to take as an occasion' as synonymous with 'to take as a sign'.

The next step in my story could be called '*artificial continuation*'. It is just like 'natural continuation', except that the beginning of the chain is an action that (so far) either had not been in the repertory at all, or has now acquired a new role. The standard example for a case of artificial continuation is the first stage of Wittgenstein's builders' language. The act of calling out 'slab!' has no 'natural' occurrence like mother's beginning to cook or the dog's lifting its lips. Instead, in Wittgenstein's story the utterance of 'slab' has the *sole* function of being followed by somebody else's bringing a slab.

Owing to the artificiality of the utterance act one can say that it is meaningless outside the language game; one could even say that it does not exist outside the game because it cannot even be perceived as an action, it can only be a chance event. This is not true for cases of natural continuations. In them, the occurring actions have their particular meanings to them, as acts of cooking or biting, regardless of whether they are followed by their habitual continuations or not. But to say 'slab' outside of any context is no meaningful act in itself. For this reason, in order to

understand an utterance of 'slab' even as an action, we have to ascribe *some* meaning to it, and this we do if we describe it as a part of a language game, as Wittgenstein does at the beginning of his book.

Is the word 'slab' a symbol, then? Did we cross the bridge from actions to symbols? What would it mean at this point to call it a symbol, and what would it be a symbol for? I think that the utterance-act as a move in the language game does have a special status, and one might indeed use the phrase 'symbolic action' to express this status. A symbolic action at this stage would be one that has the *sole* function of coordinating other actions, or, negatively, it has no value in itself. Also, if we have (as Wittgenstein imagines) a number of symbolic actions of the same kind ('slab', 'column', 'brick') we might want to say that they are 'symbols of' different kinds of actions: bringing a slab, bringing a column, bringing a brick. But to say that this relation obtains (i.e. the relation of one action being a symbol for another one), at this point does not mean anything more than that the language game is played as Wittgenstein described it. Consequently, the ability to play the language game cannot be *explained* by referring to the players' knowledge of the symbolic relation. It is not the case that their insight into the symbolic relation enables the builders to play the game. It is the other way round: When we say that an utterance act is a symbol for an act of bringing something, the meaning of the word 'symbol' has to be explained with reference to the language game. To my mind, this changing of the places between the traditional *explanans* and *explanandum*, this 'Copernican revolution' is a central point of Wittgenstein's pragmatic method.

One of the next steps taken by him is especially interesting (I call this kind of step '*contextual transfer*'): He imagines that words of the kind 'slab', 'column', etc. are used for giving 'reports' (*Berichte*; [PI 21]). This step is a complete deviation from what has been customary so far, and it is at the same time something that we, from our perspective, tend to see as absolutely natural, if not as something actually contained already in the first stage of the game, the ordering of building material. But, contrary to this appearance, I would like to insist that to perform the utterance act 'slab' without thereby ordering something is indeed something new. It could even be called a 'misuse' from the perspective of the old language game. But admittedly, it is a highly creative and imaginative misuse, in the right circumstances its point will be as easily understood as the point of a good joke. In our story of possible steps in the development of ever more complicated language games it will figure as an important improvement.

With this step from orders to reports the symbolic character of utterance acts of the type 'slab' has changed considerably. Utterance acts can now be used in the contexts of at least two different kinds of activities, and once the kind of transgression from one activity to another that I have called 'misuse', once the possibility of transfer (or of 'metaphor') has been discovered, many more kinds of such a transfer can be invented. When we now ask what the symbolic act of uttering 'slab' *stands for*, it would no longer be a complete answer to describe just one single language game with only one type of action (like bringing the slabs) paired to the utterance act. It seems that on this level *all* the possible games would have to be described (reporting about slabs, asking for them, warning of them, etc.)

On the other hand, we can imagine a person who knows the language game as far as it has developed so far, including the possibility of transfer, but who happens not to know the use of one particular expression, say 'column'. When we now ask how the (multiple) use of the expression 'column' could be made known to her, it seems natural to say: Just show her the pieces of building material that this particular expression 'stands for'. We want to say: The expression 'column' *stands for* the columns. We can now say that the language game of '*classifying things with the help of words*' has been acquired.

We can see that the relation of an expression standing for something has changed from the primitive to the more advanced language game; it is now closer to what we think of it in terms of our developed language. The reason is that now we are no longer restricted to what I have called natural or artificial successions of actions forming one particular type of meaningful social unity. Instead, the utterance act (the symbolic action) is connected to a variety of different ways of going on. And to somebody who has mastered the rudimentary language game of Wittgenstein's builders, the meaning of the new expression can be explained for example by just handing her a column in a situation in which one is ordered, but she does not know how to respond. We can say: Just show her the material that the word 'column' stands for. Here we come very close to a pairing of words and things (I am aware, however, that so far no difference has been explained between words for kinds and words for individuals).

I hope that it has become clear that the expression 'for person P, the utterance act x stands for objects y' has been legitimately imported into our vocabulary of describing what the characters of our story are doing. This little item of semiotic terminology is no old piece of furniture that has been standing in our living room all along, but it is a really new piece, and it took some work to acquire it. It is



clear now, I hope, that Wittgenstein is right when he says that only with regard to somebody who has acquired a language already does the sentence 'every word of a language stands for something' make sense. For somebody who knows the rudimentary builders' language the word 'column' can be explained by a simple act of pairing it, connecting it to a heap of material, by showing what it 'stands for'. And if I had the time here to treat Wittgenstein's introduction of the numerals as a completely new kind of words, functioning very differently from words like 'slab', and if I could develop a story about how numerals can get to the subject-position of sentences, it could be made clear that an expression like 'numerals stand for numbers' are legitimate, but that again the relation 'x stands for y' will have changed considerably on the way described by our story [cf. Schneider 1995b; 1997].

Speaking of the numerals again gives me an opportunity to come back to the first of the two dangers the pragmatic understanding of language reconstruction has to avoid, the danger of treating language as consisting of many isolated skills and so missing in the reconstruction the unity we mean to express when we speak of the making of 'worlds'. Although I have covered here only the very beginning of a potentially long path of constructions, I think it has become visible, in what sense the process of gradually adding new forms of language results in a net of closely related actions. Even on the level of one-word utterances the steps of 'contextual transfer' that make possible their different uses guarantee their intimate relationship. They form a web or system of language games, not a number of isolated activities. The same can be seen in the case of the numerals; they are modifying other expressions and are in this sense 'enlargements' of the small world of the most simple language game. They are not additions of bits and pieces, and for that reason their systematic connections (that would eventually allow us to speak of a world having been made) will not have to be constructed in an extra step. The construction itself can proceed in such a way that a systematic relation between the parts is guaranteed at all points. Using a well known image of Wittgenstein, constructing a language is like adding new buildings to a city. It is my claim here, that both ways of missing the goal of building a bridge between actions and worlds can be avoided simultaneously, if the pragmatic orientation is taken seriously: By constructing the semiotic furniture (instead of tacitly or explicitly taking it as given) we make transparent the intimate interwovenness of the parts of the language game, where a new part typically modifies the system that has been in use so far.

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