Semiosis & sign exchange: design for a subjective situationism, including conceptual grounds of business information modeling

Wisse, P.E.

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From equating an engineered sign with an engineered cause it simply follows that a sign is an act. In fact, the Schopenhauerean action perspective has contributed to development of the sign's representational structures (see Chapters 7 and 8) that differ widely from what traditional linguistics and language philosophy propose.

Rather than starting from a general action view, that is, a view that at the minimum brackets existing theories of language, the analytical philosophy of language has not radically challenged its own assumptions. It has elaborated into embracing action from the perspective of language. From the basic idea that speech involves either true or false statements about reality, another concept has evolved. The reasoning is that there is also a different kind of speech, i.e., the speech that acts. Built upon the positivist foundation of truth-value, or at least unable to radically deny it, the concept of speech act has arisen.

The anatomy of meaning in this treatise does not uphold a distinction as between, say, truth-speech and act-speech. It holds that every sign is an act.

Speech act theory, as the evolution of analytical philosophy of language is named, is very influential. Well-known proponents are Austin, his one-time student Searle and, labeling his theory that of communicative action, Habermas. Alone or together, their works are also referred to in theories of information modeling as constituting its language action paradigm.

Modeling theories based on the analytical language action paradigm have mostly uncritically appropriated concepts from speech act theory and from related developments such as the theory of communicative action. It is not difficult to see why. For traditional information modeling applies identical assumptions.

Chapters 9 through 12 attempt to fulfill the requirement for critical appraisal of some primary sources. A chapter on Mead, Chapter 11, is added to chap-
ters devoted to the three theorists already mentioned. In itself, MEAD’s ideas are already interesting. He is included here because of his strong influence on HABERMAS. The latter cannot be properly appreciated without first seeing key concepts from MEAD (and from AUSTIN and, to a lesser extent, SEARLE) in their original perspective.

This series of critical chapters starts with AUSTIN. It is especially illuminating to see what the purely linguistic ground of his concept of *illocution* is, a term nevertheless echoed far and wide as a key concept for information modeling. From the perspective of this treatise, it adds an unnecessary distinction. As every sign is a request for compliance, grounds to explain meaning should be cleared from *all* primary propositional assumptions. *All* speech is *act*.

It is not that the language action paradigm does not go far enough. The problem is that it certainly introduces a much-needed theme, i.e., action, but regretfully develops it inconsistently and therefore continues theorizing in a direction that is unproductive for comprehension of variety. Whatever theories of information modeling are derived, they are bound to suffer from similar contradictions. Reviewing such modeling theories, too, has been left outside the scope of this treatise.
Before reviewing some publications by other authors as announced at the end of the previous chapter, I speculate on the general nature of discussion. See the first paragraph below. It first of all contributes to – an appreciation of – the model of the anatomy of meaning presented here in Part ii as an integral part of the ontology of subjective situationism. Secondly, a general background helps me prevent repetition when separately discussing the selected publications. Perhaps most important about § 9.1 is, thirdly, that it demonstrates the need to reach for grounds is serious discussions. Arguments should touch on, and possibly lead to adjustment of, axioms participants hold. Otherwise, issues remain unresolved and conceptual confusion continues unchecked.

After § 9.1, the remainder of this chapter, and by far its larger part, contains an actual review. I choose to start my discussion of different theories of meaning and communication with a publication by JOHN L. AUSTIN (1911-1960). AUSTIN is credited for pioneered a philosophical theory of speech acts. His particular theory is further developed by JOHN R. SEARLE (1932-) whose first book on speech act theory I discuss in the next chapter. Then, in Chapter 11, I introduce and comment upon the explicitly social-psychological view on meaning of GEORGE H. MEAD (1863-1931). The theories of, among many, many others, MEAD and AUSTIN, and to a lesser extent of SEARLE, are integrated by JÜRGEN HABERMAS (1929-) into his social theory of communicative acts. It is taken up in Chapter 12.

Publications of these four authors all directly or indirectly influence theories and subsequently practices of business information modeling. However, their application is usually uncritical in the sense that the conceptual grounds they rest on are taken for granted. I believe they once deserve especially critical assessment. My comments, like those on ECO in Chapter 5, indicate that the
requirements of information modeling for complex business processes are better served by conceptual grounds that radically recognize the subjective individuality – and pervasive situatedness – of every stakeholder.

9.1 in the interests of discussion

In Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung SCHOPENHAUER recognizes basically two types of interpretants: perceptive and conceptual. He adds that a conceptual interpretant, or a concept for short, is ultimately derived from perceptive interpretants. The transition from perception to reason entails, and here I include my own speculations, an abstraction resulting from both specialization and elimination. For it is not so much that properties of a group of perceptive interpretants are eliminated. Rather than having any distinct properties, I propose a perceptive interpretant is still a whole. So, conceptualization eliminates such wholes. It is interest-driven – like perception already is, actually – hence the specialization. The resulting concept, directly or indirectly derived from one or more perceptive interpretants, is now constituted by a limited set of properties. See Figure 9.1.1 for an abstract overview of this admittedly highly speculative idea. But if its ‘reasonable,’ why not?

Figure 9.1.1.
Properties are established by conceptualization from perceptive interpretants, and onwards.

The influence of interests on conceptualization elegantly explains that even from the same collection of perceptive interpretants often very different concepts evolve (just as, in the first place, different perceptive interpretants originate from encompassing reality). For a particular concept reflects one or more particular interests. Figure 9.1.2 captures the interest-driven differentiation in the conceptual realm of the intellect. The resulting concepts may overlap in (some) properties. In Chapter 4 the metapattern has been presented as a mod-
eling technique for ordering such multisituational objects. Examples are not included here.

As perceptive interpretants are necessarily distant from the objects in encompassing reality they stand for, concepts are distant from perceptive interpretants. So, concepts actually stand doubly removed from objects. I repeat, after SCHOPENHAUER and PEIRCE among (many) others, that a sign user never directly knows about objects. He postulates them from signs (and signs are postulated to account for objects). After the sign has served the purpose of initializing and possibly further informing an instance of a sign use process, the resulting interpretants are believed to stand for objects. I add that the mechanism of mind must also be somehow recursive. For how else could a sign user himself experience his concepts differently from when they, too, are deduced from signs that are perceived?

Conceptualization is therefore not a process of eliminating properties but of, rather, eliminating wholes and replacing them by a set of parts, i.e., properties. This explains why a conceptual interpretant is often ‘reasonably,’ and positively, defined by a configuration of properties. However, a perceptive interpretant by definition cannot be conceptually defined through properties. For its essential nature is to be, not so much propertyless, but even entirely void of properties. It simply is not a concept. Again, properties are only established through the transition from perceptive to conceptual interpretant.

Whether or not conceptualization involves removal or creation of properties, as SCHOPENHAUER already points out there are infinite ways to ‘define’ concepts, that is, to configure properties. When persons conduct their discussions on a, literally, reasonable level, they are comparing concepts. It could accidentally happen that their mutual positive definitions in reaction to a particular sign are sufficient for them to – believe to have reached – agreement. But properties are concepts, too. Uncertainty about one concept then invites inquiry after other concepts.
Sooner or later, contradictions necessarily also arise within the conceptual scheme of an individual sign user. For it is unavoidable that an extended derivation finds an earlier concept lacking. Its ‘source’ may not have the required properties, those being either insufficient, or providing an ill-suited classification after all, or both. A concept that has already been derived could even reappear as a property, several steps later in derivation. This all is more likely to happen when interests shift.

My concept of contradiction much resembles what S.D. Ross calls aporia, that is, a perplexing difficulty. In *Metaphysical Aporia and Philosophical Heresy* he proposes (1989, pp 3-4):

By *aporia*, I mean the moments in the movement of thought—excluding but not restricted to metaphysics—in which it finds itself faced with unconquerable obstacles resulting from conflicts in its understanding of its own intelligibility. Such conflicts cry out for a resolution that cannot be achieved within the conditions from which they emerge. The result is either the termination of the thought or heresy: a break in the limits of intelligibility.

I hold it is the function of axioms to serve conceptual development without running into such contradictions too soon. And I consider a contradiction as premature, i.e., appearing too soon, when it occurs somewhere ‘between’ the axioms and the concept which currently is under scrutiny for helping to determine, in a Peircean sense, the conduct of the sign user. Figure 9.1.3 gives a generalized example. Please note that nodes are now indicating concepts. But what, incidentally, is the difference between concepts and properties? Does it not depend on the level of inspection, only? As with object, situation, and behavior in general, I believe it does.

Figure 9.1.3.
Discovery of contradiction in conceptual derivation.

1. Ross distinguishes three main “forms” of aporia (1989, p 4): contradiction, multiplicity and limitation. As one of its forms, his concept of contradiction is subordinated to his concept of aporia. The very point of subjective situationism, however, is that multiplicity need not pose conceptual problems. And with contradiction as my general concept in this respect, I therefore suggest different ‘reasons’ for its occurrence than Ross does for aporia.
The sign user may of course ignore the contradiction. I suppose it happens often enough. For his faculty of reason doesn’t control itself but, as part of the overall intellect, is an instrument of the will. And I don’t want to argue about the degree of self-control, if any, of the intellect/reason as it is irrelevant here. Anyway, when somebody indeed ignores a contradiction his participant in the discussion will rightly feel it is useless to continue the argument.

Now suppose that the original sign user acknowledges at least the possibility of a (premature) contradiction and, given a particular possibility, wants to investigate the opportunity of solving it. It is then useless to look for a solution in further refinement of concepts. On the contrary, a solution can only be found in moving toward his axioms. The starting point of analysis is the node in the hierarchy of conceptual derivations where the contradiction originally becomes manifest. Moving up the conceptual hierarchy one node at a time, the particular node may be discovered that is the cause of the contradictory effect elsewhere. That particular concept should then be changed, provisionally at first. For the new concept may not be a solution. In fact, it may even introduce new contradictions, and even higher up in the hierarchy of conceptual derivation. In addition, contradictions may now occur down other paths in the hierarchy. When the new concept survives the tests, it deserves to be made permanent. It is not paradoxical that such permanence is limited, i.e., it should be maintained until a relevant contradiction is experienced. That sets off a new process of conceptual tuning, etcetera.

All derived concepts must now be correspondingly adjusted. Actually, it cannot possibly happen through exhaustion of all possibilities. For both the rigor of testing and the breadth of adjustment are, again, limited by the intellect as instrument. Please note that the intellect also ‘contains’ motives; they represent interests and, ultimately, the all-encompassing will. As I have indicated in § 8.6 it requires proper motivation to invest effort.

The distance between the cause and effect of a conceptual contradiction — but are there any other contradictions then conceptual? — and the complexity of the hierarchy of conceptual derivations, are measures for the efforts facing the sign user should he attempt to remove the contradiction completely. But again, he naturally will only do what — he feels that — is in his interests. Suppose that somebody else, a so-called other, points out a contradiction to him. Now that is ‘only’ the reflection of an observation by another person. Is that observation correct? Is a belief warranted? As always, a belief results from semiosis and is essentially subjective. Why should self accept what other expresses as a belief? A fundamental obstacle to acknowledging a contradiction is precisely … that very contradiction. But suppose, too, that the sign user overcomes this obstacle through empathy, trust, relative powerlessness, feeling secure, or whatever, and indeed considers the possibility that he himself
entertains a premature contradiction. Why should he remove it? Because somebody else has informed him about it, doesn’t he primarily serve the other’s interests when he works on its removal? For why does the other point it out to him?

Contradictions usually arise from axioms. It is only natural because it is the axiomatic system of the sign user that rules the generation of properties, and thus of concepts. It follows then that removal of contradictions often implies an adjustment of the axiomatic system. And it also follows why such adjustments, at least with major changes involved, are rare, when not practically impossible. For basically changing axioms has consequences for the whole hierarchy of conceptual derivations. With the intellect already attending to its business-as-usual, efforts required for simultaneous fundamental reconstruction of the contents of the reason seem prohibitive.

Conceptual reorganization is throughout possible, though. But in practice it is only feasible on a limited scale. Subjective situationism, especially when situation is seen as a recursive concept, allows for differentiation of axiomatic systems. When the prematurity of a contradiction can be localized, ‘only’ the pertaining axiomatic system and situational hierarchy of derived concepts need adjustment. Of course it can still be a task too formidable for a sign user to consider. But awareness of the situational nature of axioms may help to overcome resistance. His personhood is only threatened when the highest-level situations he has defined for himself – and that would be his overall self-image or -knowledge – require major changes in axioms. Lowel-level situations, with their corresponding lower-level axiomatic systems, can be handled with less consequences for fundamental self-knowledge.

A rational discussion is best possible when partners openly acknowledge the axiomatic nature of their (subsequent) concepts, and are willing to – try to – let their signs stand for especially their axioms. In this respect SCHOPENHAUER conducts his arguments exemplary. His tragedy is that many people are, literally, not interested in such discussion practices. Another obstacle is that many persons don’t consider the behavioral differentiation they themselves so clearly exhibit. Someone may resist to change his concepts because he feels that would wholly change his mind. Any change is already less threatening, however, when it is recognized to apply to a limited situation and corresponding behavior, only.

As I have suggested before, the depersonalization of axiomatic systems has reached its pinnacle in (early) logical positivism (and in fundamentalist religions, of course). Its proponents declare fit for discussion only what can be rationally discussed and, they think, decided upon. And all that should of course proceed strictly according to their own belief of what is rational. An opponent with less power is simply forced into a so-called double bind; what-
ever strategy he chooses, the positivist always finds fault with him.

Axioms are not rational themselves but, more fundamentally, govern the transition to reason. However, logical positivists don’t recognize them as ‘initial conditions’ for conceptual systems. Instead, they emphasize the irrational side of axioms. Thus axioms, metaphysics, ontology, etcetera, are banned from discussion. Whoever wants to discuss those, i.e., whoever reflexively speculates on grounds, is declared being unsystematic, unscientific, etcetera.

With the taboo on speculation lifted, SCHOPENHAUER’s work can again be interpreted much closer to its original perspective. His genius as I see it is to elaborate on axioms, first and foremost. Already in Über die vierfache Wurzel des Satzes von zureichenden Grunde he fully ascribes to their necessarily irrational nature as ground for rational understanding. And precisely how he handles the apparent paradox between irrationality and rationality, foreshadowing empirical discoveries in for example psychology, serves to avoid many (other) premature contradictions. The majority of the text of Die Welt as Wille und Vorstellung contains an elegant display of his conceptual system with world, will and interpretant as its most profound axiomatic concepts, that is, as rules for derivation of (other) concepts from perceptive interpretants, and onwards.

Differences between axiomatic systems explain why discussions often do not result in agreement. Participants who, in theory, can learn most from each other are, in practice, least liable to do so. I suggest a discussion is especially rational when participants at least agree on their disagreement. This should be an invitation for them to compare axioms, first principles, or whatever they choose to call their fundamental concepts. Any additional agreement can only follow from axiomatic correspondence. Where detailed agreement is required, first of all a generative axiomatic system is ‘installed’ in persons. Maybe it deserves to be called induction, rather than education.

Concluding this preparatory paragraph I remark that agreement is always subjective, too. It is one person’s interpretation of the similarity between his relevant interpretants and those of one or more other persons, or even their identity as his essentially subjective interpretation.

9.2 an adolescent’s diary

Subjective situationism immediately directs attention to several properties of AUSTIN’s book How to Do Things with Words. It starts with the fact that AUSTIN actually does not write it himself. In 1955, he gives a series of twelve lectures. The book, originally published in 1962, results from editing of AUSTIN’s lecture notes by J.O. URMSON and M. SBISÀ. This raises the question about the
actual partner in my discussion here. In the light of his (?) doctrine of infelici-
ties, it is indeed a pertinent question. For doesn’t “convention” require for a
“happy” “uptake” of a book that its author is unambiguously known? When
those terms are taken seriously, at least on its own terms the book therefore
seems destined for an unhappy fate. It has, on the contrary, become highly
influential. Can its popularity be taken as anecdotal confirmation that conven-
tion does not deserve the emphasis AUSTIN gives it? Does it mean that it met
with a happy fate because the doctrine of infelicities it explains is nonsense?
But then, maybe that emphasis was not AUSTIN’s in the first place. What are
the contributions of the editors?

Suppose for simplicity’s sake that AUSTIN is the book’s immediate and only
author. Still another reason hampering clear judgment is that AUSTIN theorizes
from what I consider are implicit assumptions. That is, he fails to suggest his
axioms. It means that I, as the reader of his book, have to make such assump-
tions myself. But are they similar enough to those AUSTIN actually holds?

Often in sign exchange, the relevant axiomatic systems of the participants
are complementary enough for unproblematic compliance by the reader to
the interests of the author. Compounding the lack of axiomatic clarity in How
to Do Things with Words is AUSTIN’s own perplexity. My conclusion is that he
shifts his assumptions during his argument. Now that also need not be too
much of a problem for a reader. On the contrary, when deftly applied in an
essay, the writer indeed helps the reader explore a wide range of semioses. But
it is counterproductive, as it is in AUSTIN’s case, when it happens (too) implicit-
ly, and too often. He goes off in recurrently opposite directions, in an allegedly
analytical work. He makes it hard, even impossible, to trace his logic or, for
that matter, his lack thereof.

I am sure it is highly unconventional when discussing concepts but, sensing
the value of a pragmatic turn, I first want to characterize the author from my
general impressions of How to Do Things with Words. I do so by a short
metaphor. My view of the author is that of a highly intelligent person, now in
his adolescence. He grows up and continues to live in a closed, well-protected
and secure community. At the time of his writing he is deeply pondering, as
any adolescent is prone to do, what principles he sees the adult persons in his
community living by. He doubts their important concepts. Several he cannot
accept any longer. He replaces those for his own designs.

It is of course no coincidence that the adolescent writes a diary during this
period of conceptual turmoil. How to Do Things with Words is that diary, with
AUSTIN cast in the role of adolescent. The diary records both his development
and helps him with ‘How to Think Things Through.’ Too soon, however, he
herself declares his period of adolescence consummated. It now appears he
has only superficially modified the conceptual scheme of his elders. The really
fundamental concepts survive unanalyzed and intact. Thus he perpetuates
those in his own scheme. And the few concepts he changes acquire their inter-
mediary positions prematurely, eventually leading to more, not less, contradic-
tions.

Other persons upon reading his ‘diary,’ and many more who only hear about
it, don’t recognize how he is unsuccessful about integrating his newly coined
concepts. As sometimes happens when confusion in conceptual integration
lacks a critical audience, isolated items from AUSTIN’s admittedly hesitant ter-
minology are separately appropriated for other purposes. Without the original
reservations they appear elsewhere as final, uncontestable.

It is a fate that no author’s work deserves. Here I especially refer to AUSTIN’s
terminology of performative, illocutionary and perlocutionary. When my
metaphor of adolescence somehow fits AUSTIN, and illuminates his ‘interest’
in How to Do Things with Words, from the perspective of reception he is a more
tragic figure than SCHOPENHAUER. The latter doesn’t have his integrity com-
promised as the former. One might call it an advantage of neglect.

I next demonstrate how interpretation is facilitated by AUSTIN’s portrait as
an adolescent in a small community, with How to Do Things with Words as his
diary. I definitely don’t want to unduly ridicule or honor him. I acknowledge
his intellectual struggle. But I strongly feel that it could have borne more fruit
through wisdom, rather than mistaken reason alone. My aim is a realistic
assessment of his contributions.

9.3 the lure of action

The ‘community’ where AUSTIN resides is that of so-called language philoso-
phy at Oxford University, England. The ‘adults’ whose views he draws into
doubt must have been other language philosophers of this school. Strongly
related is the community of analytical philosophers. He doesn’t directly say so
but his book supplies several clear-enough implicit references. One of them

2. What certainly augments the confusion is

that AUSTIN’s essay Performative Utterances has
also been made widely available. It is, posthu-
mously too, published first in his Philosophical
Papers (1961) edited by J.O. URSMON and G.J.
WARNOCK. It is later included in collections
such as The Philosophy of Language (1985) edit-
ed by A.P. MARTINICH. As its title indicates,
AUSTIN’s other essay is entirely devoted to
establishing the concept of the performative
utterance. He contradicts it by How to Do
Things with Words where he favors illocution.
Comparing his two texts makes it even clear-
er that illocution is the immediate descendent
of performative.

A dense continuation of AUSTIN’s speech
act theory presents W.P. ALSTON in
It was for too long the assumption of philosophers that the business of a ‘statement’ can only be to ‘describe’ some state of affairs, or to ‘state some fact’, which it must do either truly or falsely.

I believe it to be fair on my part to place AUSTIN within the confines of a small community. Seen from a wider perspective, it must be reasonable to assume that he can only be referring to the “business” of language philosophers. He doesn’t mention philosophers who are not at all primarily interested in matters of statement. Or when they are, who don’t have an orientation at truth value in mind. That SCHOPENHAUER posits the world as subjective interpretant is already evidence enough that philosophers are involved in other ‘businesses’, too. PEIRCE (see Chapter 2) explicitly denies any use for metaphysical truth and falsity; he speaks of beliefs and doubts that are entertained by an individual person to – help him – guide his conduct. In fact, the whole movement of transcendental idealism avoids any questions about what is absolutely true or false. AUSTIN is definitely parochial when he generalizes from the perspective of his own community. Another example is (p 4):

Quite commonly [does an utterance] masquerade as a statement of fact, descriptive or constative. Yet is does […] do so, and that, oddly enough, when it assumes its most explicit form. Grammarians have not, I believe, seen through this ‘disguise’, and philosophers only at best incidentally.

His criticism is valid. But his extremely limited view of earlier philosophy sets the scene for AUSTIN’s attempts at defining an identity for himself. For he is (p 12)

questioning an age-old assumption in philosophy—the assumption that to say something, at least in all cases worth considering, i.e. all cases considered, is always and simply to state something.

It is actually not all that old. It is the tenet of (early) logical positivism gathering force at the beginning of the twentieth century. AUSTIN lectures in 1955. Continuing to specify the target of his rebellion he once more declares (p 72):

One thing, however, that it will be most dangerous to do, and that we are very prone to do, is to take it that we somehow know that the primary or primitive use of sentences must be, because it ought to be, statemental or constative, in the philosophers’ preferred sense of simply uttering something whose sole pretension is to be true or false and which is not liable to criticism in any other dimension.

Because it is really untenable that all philosophers hold such views about the nature of sentences it makes suspicious about AUSTIN’s motives. What is behind his rhetoric? Or does he really believe there exists only one kind of ‘true’ philosopher, i.e., the language philosopher molded at Oxford? Why does he try so hard to convince?
I don’t think I am doing him any injustice by calling attention to the dogmatic extent of determining his so-called opponents. His approach has the hallmark of the adolescent *creating* opponents out of his parents for purposes of practicing his independent existence. It is a natural, even necessary, development. It should prepare a person for dealing with *real* opponents, i.e., with persons who seriously hold significantly different views. But in *How to Do Things with Words* AUSTIN remains within the relative comfort of his closed community.

In passing I offer it as an observation that many language philosophers apply essentially introspective procedures for adding to their knowledge. There is often no report of a constructively critical treatment of work of other philosophers. For example WITTGENSTEIN notoriously abstains from providing references. I believe it actually betrays a singular opinion about the concept of language. *How to Do Things with Words* is completely self-conscious. There is no attempt to build upon, or enter discussion with – the works of – other persons.

Anyway, AUSTIN suggests different purposes or functions for language, besides allowing facts to be stated truly or falsely. Then (p 5),

the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which […] would not normally be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something.

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![Figure 9.3.1](#)

The conjunction of speech and act, followed by disjunction into constative and performative.

The key term, of course, is “action.” And an action is what a person is “doing.” My feeling is that AUSTIN must have been exhilarated by what he may have thought was the discovery of the missing link between speech and

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action. He chooses to name the blend (p 6) a performative sentence or a performative utterance, or, for short, ‘a performative’ […] The name is derived, of course, from ‘perform’, the usual verb with the noun ‘action’; it indicates that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action—it is not normally thought of as just saying something.

There are indications that only later AUSTIN adapts the terminology of speech act.3 Indeed, it is an interesting conjunction of words. His earlier assumptions

3. An example of an earlier use of the concept of speech act, with references to yet earlier uses, provides the intriguingly current two-volume Handboek der Analytische Signifika by GERRIT MANNOURY (1867-1956). The Handboek was published in 1947 (volume I: Geschiedenis der Begripskritiek) and 1948 (volume II: Hoofdbegrippen en Methoden der Signifika). An important earlier publication by the same author is Mathesis en Mystiek: een significieuze studie van communievoet standpunt (1925). MANNOURY states (p 79, my translation from the Dutch): “A word is just a word. Yet, every word has come into being and been born as a living work of human wonder and reality: as human will and act.” Elsewhere in Mathesis en Mystiek, he already articulates a concept of language act.

In 1922 MANNOURY, a mathematician, cofounds the Significs Kring (known in English as the Significs Movement) in the Netherlands. Other founders are psychiatrist F. VAN EEDEN and intuitionist mathematician L.E.J. BROUWER. The Significs Kring takes its inspiration from ideas developed by VICTORIA WELBY (1837-1912) with whom VAN EEDEN has become closely acquainted (MAN- NOURY, 1949, pp 11-20).

In Handboek der Analytische Signifika, MANNOURY takes significs, a term he also derives from WELBY who publishes her Significs and Language in 1911, as synonymous with theory of relational instrumentation (Dutch: verstandhoudingsmiddelen). Productively reasoning from an extremely broad concept of language, he argues that community members conduct their relationships through language acts. Then, a speech-language act (Dutch: spreektaaldaad), or speech act for short, is a special kind of language act. On his terminology he remarks, with some examples included, that it has already become (volume I, p 16) “quite accepted.” AUSTIN is therefore either not aware of earlier work on speech act theory or, when he is, unlike MANNOURY he does not acknowledge any of it in How to Do Things with Words (1962). On the concept of speech act, see for example also Sprachtheorie (1934) by K. BÜHL- LER (1879-1963). It actually makes me wonder, again, what important precursors to my own theorizing I have missed. And what the fate of this treatise is. In all honesty, MANNOURY’s book has been another freak discovery in a second-hand book shop. And I only found, and bought, it after completing my theoretical design that this treatise presents.

MANNOURY’s concept of language act involves (1947, p 16, my translation from the Dutch) “behaviors of living organisms, especially human beings, which they exhibit with the purpose of exerting influence on each other.” There is indeed much in his signifies that returns in my anatomy of meaning. However, his theory lacks the radical orienta-
tion from the Schopenhauerean will resulting in the hypothesis that every sign is a request for compliance. MANNOURY distinguishes three language functions (indicative, volitional and emotive). The scheme of AUSTIN may also be understood as to involve three functions (location, illocution and perlocution). And as Chapter 12 shows, HABERMAS applies a threefold distinction, too (rational, normative and expressive). My proposal is that requesting compliance underlies all sign exchange. MANNOURY holds that (1948, p 19, my translation from the Dutch) “every language act aims to influence the representational world, the distribution of affects or the volitional orientation of the hearer, that is, generally speaking, it aims to produce new psychic associations or reinforce existing associations.” I don’t believe that is principally what the sign engineer aims at. He is not so much interested in changing the sign observer as he is in reaping the benefit of compliance. That is his end, with the sign observer as his means. As I see it, elsewhere MANNOURY already comes close to drawing this conclusion where he writes about (1925, p 76) “a kind of wireless control of my fellow human beings in a direction which they would not have taken on their own accord.” He also does already make the distinction (see here Chapter 8, above, for characteristic representational structures of the sign) between (1948, p 31, my translation) “speaker’s meaning and hearer’s meaning of a language act[.]” Once again, MANNOURY emphasizes that signifies is the science of communication which considers language acts as wholes, especially concentrating on the psychic grounds in both speaker and hearer; it requires an interdisciplinary approach form which, in turn, contributing disciplines can benefit (1948, p 48). Already in Mathesis en Mystiek (1925), MANNOURY inquires (p 19, my translation from the Dutch): “It is not so much the question whether speaker’s meaning and hearer’s meaning are sometimes different. Rather, can they ever be considered identical?” And (p 29): “There are few words of which the speaker’s meaning differs so much from the hearer’s meaning, yes, from the self-hearer’s meaning, as the first person singular does.”

The Zeitschrift für Semiotik publishes on so-called issues. In 1984, nr 4, the issue was European Semioticians between World Wars I and II. The magazine featured the article Searle is in fashion, Mannoury is not: speech and hearing acts in the Dutch Significs movement by H.W. SCHMITZ. As published on the Internet (http://ling.kgw.tu-berlin.de/semi/otik/english/ZFS/Zfs84_4_e.htm#5), the article’s summary highlights the importance of MANNOURY’s theory: “The article compares the semiotic conceptions of Mannoury and the Significs movement in the Netherlands with the approach to the theory of speech acts developed later by Austin, Searle, and British Analytical Philosophy. In contrast with speech acts, language acts in Mannoury’s sense are not mere applications of independently existing word meaning and sentence meaning but the basis for their genesis. Language acts are not restricted to speakers only but include the actions of hearers and the mutual expectations of speakers and hearers.” The analytical signifies of MANNOURY therefore also pre-dates work by, for example, E.T. GUNDLIN (see the bibliography for references).
probably are that a person can only speak a sentence or do an act. What he now draws attention to is a third possibility, i.e., of a person 'speaking an act' (or doing a sentence). Figure 9.3.1 sketches how letting partly overlap two concepts, previously thought totally disjunct, may lead to three adjusted concepts. And from those AUSTIN concludes to two types of speech: constative and performative.

Regrettably, though, AUSTIN doesn’t grasp onto the symmetrical possibilities of his combination. Had he done so, his approach more openly recognizes non-linguistic, action-related concepts. Instead, he chooses to develop his theory of speech acts largely within his familiar – philosophy of – language framework. It is once again VOLOSHINOV who, at an earlier stage, already proposes a more balanced view (1929, p 95):

Any utterance, no matter how weighty and complete in and of itself, is only a moment in the continuous process of verbal communication. But that continuous verbal communication is, in turn, itself only a moment in the continuous, all-inclusive, generative process of a given social collective. An important problem arises in this regard: the study of the connection between concrete verbal interaction and the extraverbal situation[...]. Verbal communication can never be understood and explained outside of this connection with a concrete situation. Verbal intercourse is inextricably interwoven with communication of other types, all stemming from the common ground of production communication. It goes without saying that word cannot be divorced from this eternally generative, unified process of communication. In its concrete connection with a situation, verbal communication is always accompanied by social acts of a nonverbal character (the performance of labor, the symbolic acts of a ritual, a ceremony, etc.), and is often only an accessory to these acts, merely carrying out an auxiliary role. Language acquires life and historically evolves precisely here, in concrete verbal communication, and not in the abstract linguistic system of language forms, nor in the individual psyche of speakers.

And (p 96):

This is the order that the actual generative process of language follows: social intercourse is generated (stemming from the basis); in it verbal communication and interaction are generated; and in the latter, forms of speech performances are generated; finally, this generative process is reflected in the change of language forms. One thing that emerges from all that has been said is the extreme importance of the problem of the forms of an utterance as a whole.

Indeed, AUSTIN recognizes several relevant aspects but, as I will continue to demonstrate, doesn’t succeed in creating a sufficiently comprehensive conceptual scheme underlying meaning and communication.
9.4 mistaken primacy of the language system

How AUSTIN proceeds shows that truth value of what he now, contrasting it with performative, renames constative remains unproblematic to him. The utterance of a constative is what I equate with pure speech. See Figure 9.3.1. It indicates that AUSTIN doesn’t start out to deconstruct the traditional concept of statement, but only to avoid (p 3) “many traditional philosophical perplexities [that] have arisen through a mistake,” i.e., the mistake of taking all statements “as straightforward statements of fact.” A constative utterance states facts, he persists. It does so correctly, or incorrectly. Actually, the success or failure of a constative is a binary measure. But what about success or failure of a performative? AUSTIN recognizes that the concepts of truth and falsity in traditional language philosophy are irrelevant for performative speech (1962, p 14):

Besides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative, a good many other things have as a general rule to be right and to go right if we are to be said to have happily brought off our action. What these are we may hope to discover by looking at and classifying types of case in which something goes wrong and the act […] is therefore at least to some extent a failure: the utterance is then, we may say, not indeed false but in general unhappy. And for this reason we call the doctrine of the things that can be and go wrong on the occasion of such utterances, the doctrine of the Infelicities.

AUSTIN goes on specifying general types of conditions that must prevail at the time of the performative for it to meet with success. I believe this is precisely the point where he starts off creating more contradictions than solving them. As ECO much later after him (see Chapter 5), he essentially sees language independent from its users. Though AUSTIN implicitly renounces the program of logical positivism with its single attention to what he now calls constatives, he still holds on to the sentence as the fundamental unit of access to insight. Nor does he seriously attempt to widen his scope beyond a single sentence. His preoccupation with speech is an obstacle. He acknowledges that “a good many other things” are relevant “[b]esides the uttering of the words of the so-called performative.” But precisely the use of “besides” alerts to what AUSTIN implicitly holds for his axiomatic system.

Concentrating the “happy” result of a performative on just that very sentence itself draws, of course, too heavily upon its necessary and sufficient conditions as properties of the language system. The more general concept of the sign already much simplifies matters. So, why not define fulfilled conditions, taken together, as a sign? It may then consist of partial signs, etcetera. It makes the original performative not the apex of the whole “happiness” but only one of its elements, often even a minor one, at that. And it respects a great variety of signs. It is also overly complex to demand that conditions are
fulfilled a priori. My idea is that the happiness of a sign depends on the a posteriori judgment (also read: interpretation) of the participants in the exchange. A corresponding anatomy of meaning decenters the – importance of the – language system in favor of the sign users.4 The increased – opportunities for

4. Outside the discipline of language philosophy the predominance of language is not at all axiomatic. As J.A.M. MEERLO remarks in Conversation and Communication, a psychological inquiry (1952, p viii): “This study […] tries to direct attention to the forgotten problem of preverbal communication, to the unconscious creative means of communication. Speech is a psychosomatic process and language as such is only a very small part of the human means of contact. Indeed, it is often used as a compensation for loss of more direct communication.” See also for example Kinetics and Context: Essays on Body-Motion Communication (1970) by R.L. BIRDWHISTELL (p 66): “By and large those who have discussed communication have been concerned with the production of words and their proper usage. Communication has been seen as the result of mental activity which is distorted by emotional activity. Thus, the conception has been that the brain, by definition a good producer of logical thoughts composed of words with precise meanings, emits these under proper stimulation. That is, good, clean, logical, rational, denotative, semantically correct utterances are emitted out of the head if the membrane between mind and body efficiently separates this area of the body from that which produces the bad, dirty, illogical, irrational, connotative, and semantically confusing adulterants. Good communication thus takes place if the unadulterated message enters the ear of the receiver and goes through a clean pipe into an aseptic brain. Of course, it is recognized that the brain may be either imperfect or out of repair. The focus upon communication and its measurement from this perspective is dominated by such an atomistic and loaded conception of man and his behavior that research or theory about communication becomes prescriptive rather than descriptive.” E. GOFFMAN writes Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behaviour from the assumption (1967, pp 2-3) “that the proper study of interaction is not the individual and his psychology, but rather the syntactical relations among the acts of different persons mutually present to each other. None the less, since it is individual actors who contribute the ultimate materials, it will always be reasonable to ask what general properties they must have if this sort of contribution is to be expected from them. What minimal model of the actor is needed if we are to wind him up, stick him in amongst his fellows, and have an orderly traffic of behavior emerge? What minimal model is required if the student is to anticipate the lines along which an individual, qua interactant, can be effective or break down? […] A psychology is necessarily involved, but one stripped and cramped to suit the sociological study[.]” See also Conversation Analysis (1998) by I. HUTCHBY and R. WOOFITT who stress that (p 14) “CA is only marginally interested in language as such; its actual object of study is the interactional organization of social activities.”

Of related interest is Pragmatics of Human Communication: a Study of Interactional Patterns, Pathologies, and Paradoxes (1967) by P. WAT-
variety of the anatomy of meaning, presented in this treatise, also helps to
detect flaws in theories such as AUSTIN’s. His theory is not only more limited
as a result but already derived from a significantly different axiomatic system.

His axioms force AUSTIN to explain all variety of language use from proper-
ties of single utterances. To support a realistic account, an utterance is attrib-
uted more and more with properties that actually belong to the persons par-
ticipating in the utterance exchange. He first calls it the doctrine of infelicities,
later the doctrine of illocutionary forces (p 100). However, an anatomy of
meaning is only realistic when participants explicitly figure in it. And they
must play their parts at central stage of the sign exchange.

Another objection is that AUSTIN’s theory is less discriminative than he sug-
gests. It is just as applicable to any other element (p 52) “in the total speech sit-
uation.” Why does the linguistic element of the overall situation receive privile-
leged consideration? The sentence involved may just as well appear as a condi-
tion, with another element ‘bearing’ the burden of the happiness of the
action. It is once again instructive to return to SCHOPENHAUER. In Über die
tvierfache Wurzel des Satzes vom zureichenden Grunde (1813, 1847; p 49) he remarks
on the artificial nature of attributing an effect to a single cause:

[D]ie Kette der Kausalität […] ist nothwendig anfanglos. Demnach also muß jeder eintre-
tende Zustand aus einer ihm vorhergegangenen Veränderung erfolgt seyn. […] Daß, wenn
ein Zustand, um Bedingung zum Eintritt eines neuen zu seyn, alle Bestimmungen bis auf
eine enthält, man dies eine, wenn sie jetzt noch, also zuletzt, hinzutritt, die Ursache κατ’
εξοχην nennen will, ist zwar insofern richtig, als man sich dabeian die letzte, hier allerdings
descheidende Veränderung hält; davon abgesehen aber hat, für die Feststellung der ursäch-
lichen Verbindung der Dinge im Allgemeinen, eine Bestimmung des kausalen Zustandes,
dadurch daß sie die letzte ist, die hinzutritt, vor den übrigen nichts voraus. […]Bei genauer
Betrachtung hingegen finden wir, dass der ganze Zustand die Ursache des folgenden ist, wobei
es im Wesentlichen einerlei ist, in welcher Zeitfolge seine Bestimmungen zusammengekom-
men seien. […] Für die allgemeine Betrachtung darf nur der ganze, den Eintritt des folgen-
den herbeiführende Zustand als Ursache gelten.

[T]he chain of causality […] is necessarily without beginning. Accordingly, every
state that appears must have ensued or resulted from a change that preceded it. […] If a state
contains all the determining factors except one in order to condition the appearance of a new
state, then, when this one ultimately appears, it will be called the cause “par excellence.” This,
of course, is correct insofar as we keep to the final change which is certainly decisive here.
Apart from this, however, a determining factor of the causal state has no advantage over

ZLAWICK, J. BEavin BAVELAS and D.D. JACK-
SON. They emphasize that (p 257) “it seems
obvious to us that to view man only as a
’social animal’ would fail to account for man
in his existential nexus, of which his social
involvement is only one, although a very
important, aspect.”
others for establishing a causal connexion of things in general, merely because it happens to be the last to appear. […] On the other hand, if we consider the matter more closely, we find that the entire state is the cause of the one that follows. Here it is essentially a matter of indifference in what chronological order its determining factors have come together. […] Yet for general consideration only the entire state, leading to the appearance of the one that follows, can be regarded as cause.

The obvious consequence of linking all conditions for performance to the single performance utterance is that those conditions become increasingly general. This is exactly what happens to Austin when developing his conceptual scheme. He apparently doesn’t really see any practical differences between conditions for truth versus falsity on the one hand, and conditions for happy performances on the other (p 20):

And the more we consider a statement not as a sentence (or proposition) but as an act of speech […] the more we are studying the whole thing as an act.

He keeps focusing on ‘act’ but changes his tactics when his distinction between constative and performative no longer appears productive (p 55):

[Is there some precise way in which we can definitely distinguish the performative from the constative utterance?]

What his axiomatic system entails is brought out by the sentences which immediately follow.

[In particular we should naturally ask first whether there is some grammatical (or lexicographical) criterion for distinguishing the performative utterance.

It might be natural from the perspective of language philosophy as practiced at Oxford. It is, however, not natural to everybody who denies that a particular language system – and why should it be English, actually? – provides privileged, even direct, access to knowledge about the world and its structure. All that Austin admits to is to (p 59)

an impasse over any single simple criterion of grammar or vocabulary.

It leads him to change his tactics, a change I comment upon shortly. But I first stress the continued privileged position of language as a system in Austin’s thought.

Nowhere in How to Do Things with Words does he focus on the speaker or the listener. Well, he does, but indirectly so when he writes that (p 143)

the intents and purposes of the utterance and its context are important.

Or (p 61):

The ‘I’ who is doing the action does thus come essentially into the picture. He mentions it, and passes on. Nothing “essentially” changes in his approach. He doesn’t see the need, nor the opportunities, for starting from precisely such “intents and purposes.”

There is actually one important, overall question missing in his inquiry. It is: Why does somebody speak? Looking for an answer might have given him a
‘sense’ of direction. However, he continues to reason from the concept of language as an independent entity. For him a particular language user seems irrelevant for deciding on meaning. His assumption is that the truth value is already contained within the sentence. And by analogy, something that I shall call the felicity types are also considered a priori present within the sentence. At the same time he realizes it is not all that simple. So, he proposes repairs. Failing the proper tools he can never build a (more) consistent theory, though. He persists by completely shifting the meaning of doing to the sentence formula deemed appropriate during action. Why a person is doing something, AUSTIN therefore assumes to be codified within the language system, too. Infelicities, taken to their extreme, are a code for disapproval of conduct. But who decides? And again, why? Does the language system encompass morality, as AUSTIN suggests by his remark that (p 44)

[the whole point of having such a procedure is precisely to make certain subsequent conduct in order and other conduct out of order.]

It is not only a scary notion, but one that I believe on reasonable grounds is utterly mistaken. His doctrine makes language the system for conservation of convention.

I certainly don’t deny that convention may be maintained by the use of language. I even grant that a person urgently needs conventions, habits, methods, etcetera. But they are not ends, but always means. Reliable conventions free a person’s attention for dealing with – the even greater urgency of – uncertainty, surprises, in short with everything that is (still) unconventional to him. My idea is that, characteristically, language is an instrument of differentiation of behavior. For an especially engineered sign can elicit (also read: cause) highly specific motivationally determined reactions (also read: effect). Below, I repeat my own emphasis. Here I first draw attention to AUSTIN’s own suspicion of shortcomings (p 31):

It is inherent in the nature of any procedure that the limits of its applicability, and therewith, of course, the ‘precise’ definition of the procedure, will remain vague. Again, my view is exactly the opposite. Where satisfactory conventions exist, persons involved use language only minimally. Language is first of all not an independent system. It is an instrument of sign users, applied individually for exchange. And, secondly, an individual person makes most characteristic use of language precisely when he feels convention is absent. Language is a tool for excellence to support flexible behavior. The highly ritualized uses AUSTIN mentions are in fact least exemplary for what a person can do with language. AUSTIN admits so himself because (p 146)

[It was […] extreme marginal cases, that gave rise to the idea of two distinct utterances.]

It takes some time to sink in with him. Finally he urges (p 142):

But consider also for a moment whether the question of truth or falsity is so very objective.
He muses on:

Is the constative, then, always true or false? When a constative is confronted with the facts, we in fact appraise it in ways involving the employment of a vast array of terms which overlap with those that we use in the appraisal of performatives.

And (p 143)

[i]n real life, as opposed to the simple situations envisaged in logical theory, one cannot always answer in a simple manner whether it is true or false.

What does AUSTIN choose? Though he says that (p 145)

[i]t is essential to realize that ‘true’ and ‘false’ […] do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say as opposed to a wrong thing, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions[,] all that he relinquishes is his earlier distinction between constative and performatives. Or does he (p 148)?

The doctrine of the performatives/constative distinction stands to the doctrine of locutionary and illocutionary acts in the total speech act as the special theory to the general theory.

I suppose AUSTIN doesn’t want to go through the trouble of integrating his newly found insight into the nature of truth value with his doctrine of infelicities. That is why he leaves those contradictions unresolved in favor of another approach (p 146):

But the real conclusion must surely be that we need […] to distinguish between locutionary and illocutionary acts.

9.5 formulas for failure

What warrants this firm statement as quoted at the end of the previous paragraph? It results from what AUSTIN himself considers a more fundamental analysis of speech acts. Above, I have already announced his change of tactics in the course of How to Do Things with Words. He needs a different approach to keep track of his original goal of compiling a list of so-called performatives verbs. But (p 91)

[now we failed to find a grammatical criterion for performatives. […] It is time then to make a fresh start on the problem.

This shows, once again, the predominant position of language as a grammatical system in AUSTIN’s conceptual make-up. He is like a map maker who expects to explain the full variety of the actual geography, not from his maps, but even from the tool set for making his maps. Because he awards a privileged reality to the tool set – he apparently views language as more real than another reality (?) it handles – “a fresh start on the problem” is more logical than adjusting and refitting the tools. His restart amounts to recognizing that
speech and action are, after all, not disjunct. AUSTIN now argues that speech is always acting, too. Of course it is. He presents (p 92) “the act of uttering certain noises” at the start of doing speech. Aggregating those noises results in words. Then there is the next-level act of configuring words “with a certain more or less definite ‘sense’ and a more or less definitive ‘reference’ (which together are equivalent to ‘meaning’).” This third-level act is the utterance.

As a way of investigating how-to-do-things-with-words I don't recognize it as a profound start, but as a trivial one. It is hardly a novel idea. AUSTIN's conclusion is that every utterance is an act, too. But it surely is not the same ‘doing’ he has in mind when he sets performatives off against constatives. But soon he gets back on original his track. How soon can be demonstrated with the distinction implied in his statement that it will help (p 94)

to consider from the ground up how many senses there are in which to say something is to do something, or in saying something we do something, and even by saying something we do something.

Suppose AUSTIN is sincerely trying to be clear. Then what “ground” is he referring to? Several passages in his book suggest, as I have already indicated before, that he sees “ground” as provided by language, in particular by grammar. After all, it is his preferred tool set. He consistently applies it for guidance. He uses it to decide against the contrast between constatives and performatives (see the second quotation taken from p 146). And now he also makes “a fresh start on the problem” with it.

Only by recognizing that AUSTIN invests such authority in grammar can I arrive at a more or less logical reconstruction of his line of thinking whereby he – thinks that he – works “from the ground up.” He argues now having a grasp on all speech being acting, too. He can now suggest a division. But on what “ground”?

In his second attempt he derives from English grammar three classes of speech acts. The last sentence quoted above, taken from p 94, is really central to How to Do Things with Words. On the surface it only suggests how he wants to proceed with the problem. But then it actually already contains a succinct account of his proposed solution. Though AUSTIN consistently fails to provide unambiguous guidance to such essential shifts in his conceptual system, his italics are an unmistakable indication. Figure 9.5.1 reconstructs his conceptual development. My reconstruction partly consists of retracting the hypothesis made for his first attempt at synthesis of speaking and doing. His second-attempt concept of speech act is correspondingly wider than it is at his first attempt. Before, speech act is the intersection of speech and action. Now it reemerges as the union of constative and performative, mainly because his departure from absolute truth value leaves AUSTIN without criteria to maintain their distinction.
From his assertion that all speech involves action he concludes that, fundamentally, “to say something is to do something.” But this, indeed, is a trivial result. He looks for criteria to recognize different ways of how-to-do-things-with-words. Otherwise he is left without a theory at all. He now hooks upon two grammatical forms as fundamental for classification of speech acts. He calls them (p 122)

the formulas:

‘In saying $x$ I was doing $y$’ or ‘I did $y$’,

‘By saying $x$ I did $y$’ or ‘I was doing $y$’.

He immediately continues, writing in the past tense, that

it was because of the availability of these formulas which seem specially suitable, the former $(a)$ for picking out verbs which are names for illocutionary acts, and the latter $(b)$ for picking out verbs which are names for perlocutionary acts, that we chose in fact the names *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary*.

I find AUSTIN completely believable when he says that he has derived the names from “the availability of these formulas.” In fact, I believe he even derives his entire theory from hardly anything but their availability. *How to Do Things with Words* is AUSTIN’s very “unhappy” attempt to mold (see above for the relevant quotation taken from p 143) “real life” to what he now “envisaged in logical theory.”

His theory covers three types of speech act. He realizes his two formulas are about special types. What is the third, general type? What does AUSTIN pro-
pose for its ground? What is elementary to doing something ‘in saying’ or ‘by saying.’ Customarily applying a grammatical perspective, his answer comes from merely eliminating the prepositions. AUSTIN is now back at where he started from but he doesn’t seem aware of the circularity of his reasoning. He concludes that the third type of speech act implies just saying (p 94):

The act of ‘saying something’ in this full normal sense I call, i.e. dub, the performance of a locutionary act. […] Our interest in the locutionary act is, of course, principally to make quite plain what it is, in order to distinguish it from other acts which we are going to be primarily concerned.

9.6 circular reasoning

AUSTIN doesn’t develop the concepts of illocution and perlocution. Rather, he clasps onto grammatical formulas, labels those and subsequently develops a logical theory to make them fit. For compare the previous description of locution to what appears further on in his book. The performance of a locutionary act, he writes (p 109),

is roughly equivalent to uttering a certain sentence with certain sense and reference, which is again roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense.

The mention, twice, of “roughly equivalent” deserves special attention. What I have called the third-level of doing in every speech act that AUSTIN presents on p 92 doesn’t hold these constraints. The last quotation from p 94 also does not. He now introduces them to make room – again, such is my reconstruction – for the two special types. For at this stage AUSTIN considers his three types disjunct. See also Figure 9.5.1, above. I repeat that he calls a locutionary act “what is roughly equivalent to ‘meaning’ in the traditional sense.” The introduction of the term locution – which is essentially equivalent to sentence or utterance, but with some emphasis on doing – primarily serves to create the impression of a systematic classification of speech acts. Doing speech is locution. This assumption should make it logical that doing in doing speech is illocution. And doing by doing speech is perlocution. But what are the differences, if any, between them, other than allegedly different forms of expression? Does his case rest on anything else? AUSTIN gets carried away by his elegantly simple grammatical construction. Surely then, it must be the solution for an important problem? But he never sorts out his problem, let alone that he demonstrates how his proposed solution actually works.

I completely agree with AUSTIN that his initial distinction between constatives and performatives makes it necessary to inquire more closely into different ways of doing. However, his “fresh start” leads to even more contradictions. This time he doesn’t address them by retracting the distinction between
locution, illocution, and perlocution. Nevertheless, How to Do Things with Words clearly shows that AUSTIN himself is already not convinced about the merit of this second — attempt at — classification. Actually for the remainder of his book AUSTIN is mostly concerned with reporting on contradictions arising from his three types of speech act. However, he can not bring himself to challenge what he thinks is a logic theory of grammar. He gives it precedence over everything from real life that he admits to be in discord. Recognizing contradictions he remarks (p 123):

Will these linguistic formulas provide us with a test for distinguishing illocutionary from perlocutionary acts? They will not. […] Many of you will be getting impatient at this approach — and to some extent quite justifiably. You will say ‘Why not cut the cackle? Why go on about lists available in ordinary talk of names for things we do that have relations to saying, and about formulas like the “in” and “by” formulas? Why not get down to discussing the thing bang off in terms of linguistics and psychology in a straightforward fashion? Why be so devious?’ Well, of course, I agree that this will have to be done — only I say after, not before, seeing what we can screw out of ordinary language even if in what comes out there is a strong element of the undeniable. Otherwise we shall overlook things and go too fast. Maybe he even does what “will have to be done.” But then it must have happened after his book, without known record. Here, AUSTIN sounds definitely desperate. In his confusion he forgets that the illocutionary and perlocutionary types of speech act, respectively, originate from his formulas. So how can they be used for testing his hypothesis, too? It is a straightforward vicious cycle. Again I borrow from WICKLUND (1990) the phrases that a structured background perspective is missing and that AUSTIN has thus literally formulated a zero-variable theory. It is not for lack of recognition of relevant variables, though. As I demonstrate presently with additional quotations, AUSTIN grasps that the meaning of language use cannot be established within the language system. It needs explanation from an outside perspective. As the last quotation makes clear, he feels he should fundamentally change concepts. Regretfully, he cannot reason how. I suppose he especially fails because his existing axiomatic system of language philosophy is still not challenged quite enough so that it can what essentially amounts to replace itself for something more comprehensive. Ultimately, with his unsuccessful challenge he only perpetuates the axiomatic system. It is probably already quite an achievement that he does leave his original idea of absolute truth and falsity. His more fundamental idea of the authority of language over its users, however, remains intact. Comparing him once again to a map maker, AUSTIN understands that it should be impossible to make a map that equals the world. Being of equal size of what it maps, where would it fit, for example? But he cannot bring himself to act that it really is impossible. His self-imposed blockade may be simply deduced from his remark on utterances that (p 89)
it seems absurd to suppose that all they describe or state, so far as they do this or when they do, is something about the speaker’s beliefs or expectations.

According to transcendental idealism it is not absurd at all. In fact, precisely that belief occupies the ultimate ground in the relevant axiomatic system and, as such, for all derived concepts. For by its nature a sign stands for the interests and knowledge of its engineer. As the anatomy of meaning presented in the previous two chapters synthesizes, the scope of every sign actually includes both engineer and observer. A sign is a request by the engineer, made to secure compliance by the observer with one or more of the engineer’s interests. But what the sign stands for “naturally” remain its engineer’s interpretants, only. AUSTIN’s quite opposite belief, i.e., in the absurdity of the personally interest-based nature of signs, effectively blocks any fundamental reorganization of his conceptual system. He does acknowledge that (p 60) “[a]ctions can only be performed by persons.” Then why does he fail to “make a fresh start on the problem”? He still doesn’t take the performers, rather than the isolated performance, really seriously. Because he does not, he never reaches the point where he can ask why performers perform the way they do, and why not the way they do not. As I have already said, AUSTIN is not at all blind to relevant variables. For example, he states that (p 60)

there are very numerous functions of or ways in which we use speech, and it makes a great difference to our act in some sense […] in which way and which sense we were on this occasion ‘using’ it.

All he can say about it, however, is that (p 99) “[t]hese issues penetrate a little but not without confusion into grammar.” So, he regrets their disturbing effect on grammatical logic as he sees it. But he doesn’t see himself called upon to change that logic. Most importantly, he should have radically removed grammar from its axiomatic position in his conceptual scheme. There, in its traditional place, it keeps confusing AUSTIN about “real life” where he now wants to recognize three types of speech. The locutionary act, he proposes, is “the full normal sense” of saying something. Anything different from “the full normal sense” appears now defined as a “new and second sense” (p 99):

I explained the performance of an act in this new and second sense as the performance of an ‘illocutionary’ act, i.e. performance of an act in saying something as opposed to performance of an act of saying something; I call the act performed an illocution and shall refer to the doctrine of the different types of function of language here in question as the doctrine of ‘illocutionary forces’.

There, AUSTIN writes that illocution is “opposed” to locution. He does so by referring to his formula, only. With respect to the relationship between locution and illocution, one page earlier he maintains that

[to] perform a locutionary act is in general, we may say, also and en ipso to perform an illocu-
tionary act.

Is there an opposition, or not? Taking his juggling with senses seriously, locution and illocution exclude each other. Elsewhere he suggests that illocution, when it occurs, is integrated in locution. I comment on this below. Figure 9.6.1 already traces the contradiction. I don’t have a problem with it that illocution should imply locution. But – without specifying relevant different situations – they cannot be opposed, too. Perhaps Austin sees only some properties of locution and illocution integrated, while other properties are opposed. Then he must explain exactly which properties. As I have just indicated, he could have done so by distinguishing relevant situations. Without any such directions his conceptual system is contradictory. “The full normal sense” cannot be, at the same time, be the “new and second sense” that is defined as not “the full normal sense.”

![Diagram of contradictory derivation of concepts]

I repeat as my hypothesis it is his grammatical formula that leads him to state illocution as a concept. It is not an explanation in any serious sense. All he actually remarks is that there are other senses than “the full normal sense” in which language is used. Corresponding to such different senses, he argues, is the class of illocutionary acts. But Austin has yet another formula available. With all other senses than “the full normal sense” already taken care of by illo-
cution, indeed, it is hard to image a third type of speech act. What is possible besides normal and not-normal? AUSTIN suggests (p 101):

[I]et us contrast both the locutionary and the illocutionary act with yet a third kind of act. He does use the word “contrast” but immediately follows with:

There is yet a further sense [...] in which to perform a locutionary act, and therein an illocutionary act, may also be to perform an act of another kind.

In just this single sentence, AUSTIN contradicts the opposition he has just defined between locution and illocution (see the quotation taken from p 99). He also hints that the third type of speech act does not contrast with the other two. My interpretation is that he wants to express that every speech act is locution. When a speech act incorporates not just “the full normal sense,” but in addition one or more different senses — whatever they may be —, it is also an illocution. From such a scheme it is reasonable to expect that, just as the second type is conditioned by the first type, the third type is conditioned by the second. I favor this logic, but what are those additional conditions? They are again impossible to make out. However, I believe AUSTIN is reintroducing his original notion of speech as performance. Plain locution then corresponds to the absence of any performance conditions. I suppose AUSTIN would have defined illocution by the ruling of … illocutionary conditions. In the same circular vein, it leaves perlocutionary conditions to define … perlocution.

In the same paragraph where AUSTIN, as a consequence of the requirement for more conditions, places perlocution as a subset of illocution (which, in turn, apparently must be understood as a subset of locution), he associates perlocution with the production of

certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons […] and we may than say […] that the speaker has performed an act in the nomenclature of which reference is made either […] only obliquely, or even […] not at all to the performance of the locutionary or illocutionary act.

Especially referring to the second sentence of this passage, I find it contradicts the start of the paragraph in which it appears. Is perlocution a subset of illocution, or is it not? If not, what senses different from “the full normal sense” are, after all, not determining factors of illocution but, rather, of perlocution? AUSTIN doesn’t enlighten. My general impression is that illocution emphasizes intention behind the speech act. And a speech act is only considered a perlocution when the intended effect is actually achieved. This suggests AUSTIN is trying to conceptualize discrete stages of the process that the sign is engineered for to mediate. As long as the intention of the speaker is not fulfilled, it is an illocution-in-locution. From the moment the intended effect materializes it is a matter of perlocution-in-locution. But how does it make the speech acts different? Does AUSTIN include even the actualization of effects through speech acts into the language system? Does it rule behavior as far as
the execution of motivational impulses are concerned? And are, after all, illocution and perlocution more act than speech?

The confusion mounts where AUSTIN says that a perlocutionary act is (p 99) “what we bring about or achieve by saying something.” It sounds – another contradiction – like the act is equal to the result of the act. But isn’t the act a cause, and what is achieved its effect? A sensible statement AUSTIN makes about their relationship is that with locution, illocution and perlocution (p 109) “we have three […] different senses or dimensions of the ‘use of a sentence’ or of ‘the use of language’.” His use of the word ‘sense’ I find over-stretched. Nevertheless, from the anatomy of meaning presented in this treatise it is quite possible to make ‘sense’ out of AUSTIN’s types as dimensions of a particular sign exchange. Then, illocutionary about the sign as a request for compliance is that it is a request by the engineer. And perlocutionary about the sign is that it aims at compliance by the observer. However, AUSTIN never reaches such simple integration of concepts. He keeps creating, rather than solving, contradictions. Another example is (116):

[T]he illocutionary act as distinct from the perlocutionary is connected with the production of effects in certain senses. […] Unless a certain effect is achieved, the illocutionary act will not have been happily, successfully performed. […] An effect must be achieved […] if the illocutionary act is to be carried out.

It looks like the description AUSTIN has given earlier of perlocutionary acts. Does the distinction between illocution and perlocution, after all, does not correspond to cause versus effect? Is a perlocution just a happy illocution? But then, what are the “certain senses” of illocution? And what are they of perlocution (p 118)?

So there are three ways, securing uptake, taking effect, and inviting a response, in which illocutionary acts are bound up with effects; and these are all distinct from the producing of effects which is characteristic of the perlocutionary act.

But wherein lies the distinction? I cannot see how it is helpful when AUSTIN states that (p 119)

[...] it is characteristic of perlocutionary acts that the response achieved, or the sequel, can be achieved additionally or entirely by non-locutionary means […] More important is the question whether these responses can be achieved by non-conventional means […] But it is difficult to say where conventions begin and end.

Again, AUSTIN tries to explain by repeating his assumptions. But is he now really arguing that perlocution is not-locution? Or is it just that, in general, there are other – types of – means, besides speech? With every speech act a locution, is perlocution still a speech act? Or is he back to non-speech doing? He also cannot escape from the idea that the language system somehow should incorporate conventions. And what use is convention as a criterion? By the way, even theoretical considerations evaporate when such criteria can-
not be properly specified in practice, i.e., to hold in “real life.”

A few pages further on, AUSTIN sums up. I don’t attempt to go into detail as to what AUSTIN might mean there by “force.” In general, I think it is a new name for infelicity, but now positively formulated (p 121):

[W]e distinguished the locutionary act […] which has a meaning; the illocutionary act which has a certain force in saying something; the perlocutionary act which is the achieving of certain effects by saying something […] Illocutionary acts are conventional acts; perlocutionary acts are not conventional.

AUSTIN himself provides a succinct commentary on his theorizing effort (p 133):

If we are in general always doing both things, how can our distinction survive? In the face of all contradictions he already recognizes himself, AUSTIN should actually not have given his distinctions any change at survival, at all. But he holds on to them with increasingly contrived arguments (p 147):

[In general the locutionary act as much as the illocutionary is an abstraction only: every genuine speech act is both. [...] But, of course, typically we distinguish different abstracted ‘acts’ by means of [...] the different types of nonsense which may be engendered in performing them.

I have no interpretation to offer that might clear such confusion, eliminating any contradictions. Or is a locution what he has earlier called a constative, and an illocution a performative? I suspect this correspondence is far greater than is clear even to AUSTIN himself. With the distinction between constative and performative retracted, he should have done the same with the unhappy distinction between locution and illocution (and perlocution).

One result he achieves is important, of course. It concerns relinquishing the concepts of absolute truth and falsity. But that is hardly an original contribution. Thinkers outside language philosophy have long since held such axioms. But AUSTIN, apparently unaware of conceptual developments elsewhere in time and space, persists in his new-found perspective (p 149):

We may well suspect that the theory of ‘meaning’ as equivalent to ‘sense and reference’ will certainly require some weeding-out and reformulating in terms of the distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts (if these notions are sound: they are only adumbrated here).

5. I hasten to add that other conceptual developments may also be highly relevant, if only I knew about them. Actually, writing this treatise greatly assists me in recognizing ideas from a wide range of traditionally separated disciplines. I could list many publications I have collected especially after completing the manuscript. There is indeed so much more potential for conceptual synthesis; I really feel I have only scratched the surface with my conceptual grounds. In general, without the possibility of being omniscient, a researcher should at least be aware of his – extremely – limited scope. It helps to induce additional semiosis, often resulting in changed interpreters.
I don’t believe his notions to be sound. Actually, Austin’s use of the word “adumbrated” is somehow “happy,” even. Its “full normal sense” is not only that those notions are outlined in his book; another sense of adumbrated is that they are placed in the shadow, i.e., darkened. Certainly his incomplete and contradictory concepts cannot help improve the anatomy of meaning presented in the previous chapters. On the contrary, it may be productively applied to analyze Austin’s examples. Based on the anatomy of meaning from Chapters 7 and 8, the next paragraph shows that other interpretations than Austin used for the development of his concepts are possible, and highly plausible.

9.7 sign user-centered analysis

Of the examples Austin builds his initial case upon, three apply to highly ritualized activities. When a man says “I do take this women to be my lawful wedded wife,” he is not making a statement about the world that is either true or false. Austin has it that the utterance is doing the marrying. He therefore calls it a performative utterance (p 14):

Suppose we try [...] to state schematically—and I do not wish to claim any sort of finality for this scheme—some at least of the things which are necessary for the smooth or ‘happy’ functioning of a performative. [...] I fear, but at the same time of course hope, that these necessary conditions will strike you as obvious.

A.1 There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further,

A.2 the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked.

B.1 The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and

B.2 completely.

(Γ.1) Where, as often, the procedure is designed for use by persons having certain thoughts or feelings, or for the inauguration of certain consequential conduct on the part of any participant, then a person participating in and so invoking the procedure must in fact have those thoughts or feelings, and the participants must intend so to conduct themselves, and further,

(Γ.2) must actually so conduct themselves subsequently.

First of all, a modern business reader can recognize much of workflow management theory in Austin’s conditions A.1 to B.2. But his idea of what makes a performative happy represents a myopic focus to single out one particular sentence to ‘do’ the whole procedure. He relegates everything else to the status of condition. Apparently only the utterance acts as single cause (see § 7.4 for Schopenhauer on the artificial nature of single causes). But a procedure
is essentially a system. While I believe VOLOSHINOV makes an “unhappy” move by introducing the concept of theme besides that of meaning I support his analysis (1929, p 100):

The theme of an utterance is determined not only by the linguistic forms that comprise it […] but also by extraverbal factors of the situation. Should we miss these situational factors, we would be as little able to understand an utterance as if we were to miss its most important words.

All elements are therefore performatives in AUSTIN’s sense. They are not all “the uttering of certain words” but they are, as far as participants need to establish interpretants, all signs. Does the bride have a bouquet? Does she throw it, not before, but soon after the actual ceremony to her favorite potential bride? Etcetera. It might be argued that the performative verbal utterance is particularly important, even critical. Yes of course, when they may be held accountable later, it is important that primary participants show signs of their, precisely, participation. This emphasis is often made by separate signs of identification.

On VOLOSHINOV’s concept of theme I agree that (p 100)

Theme is a complex, dynamic system of signs that attempts to be adequate to a given instant of generative process. Theme is reaction by the consciousness in its generative process to the generative process of existence.

It is precisely with – the distinction between – [a] an engineer-based sign structure and [b] an observer-based sign structure that the apparent complexity is productively modeled and explained. Pertaining to a particular sign exchange, both the engineer and the observer each have an individual, subjective “theme.”

Secondly, returning to my immediate commentary, with conditions Γ.1 and Γ.2, AUSTIN is confusing the procedure for its outcome. The procedure of getting married may run its course happily enough, but the state of the marriage may eventually turn to unhappy. When people get a divorce, this does not make their marriage ceremony any less happy. Or after a ceremony that was fumbled, two people could live happily together.

Thirdly, human relations are only regulated through procedures to a limited extent. The parallel with workflow is informative. It is especially efficient when the structure of work is quite stable. Change, however, must first of all be dealt with effectively. That is when following procedures (also read: conventions) may even be dangerous.

In general, my critique of AUSTIN’s approach is that he holds a static, rather than dynamic, view of human relations. That is too simple, and he immediately encounters difficulties when he needs to adjust his theory beyond procedural ‘classics.’

The only possibility to develop a theory with necessary and sufficient vari-
ety for explanation is to respect “real life” and its variety. That is exactly why individual psychology is underlying the anatomy of meaning in this treatise. So, what does it add to analyze “I do take this women to be my lawful wedded wife” as a request for compliance?

The first question is: Who is saying it? Well, it is a man. For example, the situation is that he is at home, standing in front of a mirror. He is practicing what to say during the marriage ceremony. Actually, he is making a request to himself – why not? – to perform adequately when his performance really matters.

Another situation is that of the wedding room in the local town hall. The man is standing at the side of the woman he wants to marry. An official is present. Witnesses are, too. He gets his cue from the official. Once again he says “I do take this women to be my lawful wedded wife.” At face value, as Austin consistently does in his approach, it seems a straightforward statement about himself. Sure enough, there is what I call a surface symmetry in the procedure because the woman, as spoken to and about, will likely make a similar statement about herself later. My proposal is that it especially pays to look for hidden symmetry. Rather than saying something about his own future conduct, the man is making a request to the woman besides him to comply to his interests by her future conduct. As it is not really very effective at such a moment to openly place his own interests first, he is not required by the procedure to mention them. The woman may likewise refrain from pointing out her very own interests.

The official ceremony serves the purposes of involving a third party in the transaction that getting married is. Though the marriage partners are often not completely aware of it, each of them is also making a request at the personification of society to comply (see for this concept also § 8.4). This is, for example, because their marriage may turn unhappy in spite of the happiness of the ceremony. They may need help to solve their problems, or may need to be forced to accept a solution. In all likelihood it is not the marriage official who will then be helping out. Any authorized representative – with his authorization secured through other ceremonies, of course – may intervene on behalf of the fiction of society. It is a fiction because a community is essentially an aggregate of individual persons. What carries authority as society is nothing else – actually, nobody else – than someone who is believed to hold power in that particular group.

Actually, the whole marriage ceremony is a request for compliance addressed to many persons, present and not present. Better, still, it must be considered an intricate collection of such requests. And different persons will comply differently, in any degree imaginable. It is not ‘just’ that a man and a woman can now officially compound their interests, which already sounds slightly more romantic, but now with the unromantic aspect of finance intro-
duced. Also, several persons will comply by giving a wedding present. Etcetera.

Though analysis as inspired by taking every sign as a request for compliance may appear cynical at first, it effectively throws increased light on the rich fabric of human relations. The fourth of Austin's initial examples reads “I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.” Again, it is useless to judge that sentence true or false. Now, what is the situation? Suppose the sign engineer seriously wants to engage an observer into a bet. It is indeed in this sense that Austin’s ‘workflow’ is still – somewhat – relevant. But taking every sign as a request for compliance adds a more penetrating analysis. The engineer is not so much offering a bet, but soliciting it. He wants the observer to take it. And for efficiency’s sake the engineer includes a description of what he judges the relevant part of his objectified reality. Of course, he could also have said “I bet you sixpence.” That is what a compulsive better might do, expecting somebody else to comply by suggesting what exactly to bet on.

Often, though, the sign engineer is not at all interested in a bet. Perhaps he looks for affirmation. Through a display of insight in weather conditions he may expect the sign observer to comply by responding with admiration. It could also be that there is not a hope in heaven that it will rain. His sign might break the ice, and start the desired conversation going. As Voloshinov argues (1929, p 99):

The theme of an utterance itself is individual and unreproducible, just as the utterance itself is individual and unreproducible. The theme is an expression of the concrete, historical situation that engendered the utterance.

Regarding his own example, Austin only offers some commentary from his perspective of, first, performative and, later, illocution. Apart from lack of criteria on what should be considered a performative or illocution, his analysis is correspondingly limited. The anatomy of meaning, with sign as a request for compliance as its explanatory principle, encompasses all signs. The start of Austin’s last lecture in How to Do Things with Words betrays, once again, that he actually has already convinced himself of the merit of his theory. He admits to (p 148) “have left numerous loose ends.” However, he continues, “we must plough ahead.” That involves (p 150)

sorting out those verbs which make explicit, as we shall now say, the illocutionary force of an utterance, or what illocutionary act it is that we are performing in issuing that utterance.

An unambiguous interpretation of Austin’s concept of illocutionary force still eludes me. It must have something to do with what he finds lacking in “the full normal sense” of an utterance (p 100): [W]e have been realizing more clearly that the occasion of an utterance matters seriously, and that the words used are to some extent to be ‘explained’ by the ‘context’ in which they are designed to be or have actually been spoken in a linguistic interchange.
He is completely right, of course. But he confuses matters by not taking precisely that situational orientation as normal. Just as there is no distinction possible between constative and performative, also locution and illocution (and perlocution) are impossible to distinguish from a situationist perspective. His classification and corresponding terminology serve no purpose. The general term of sign serves requisite variety perfectly well.

But Austin “plough[s] ahead” and suggests a provisional classification of verbs (p 151) “according to their illocutionary force.” The classes he distinguishes are [1] verdictives, [2] exercitives, [3] commissives, [4] behabitives, and [5] expositives. He lists verbs for each class. ‘Promise,’ for example, is a commissive of which (p 157) “[t]he whole point is […] to commit the speaker to a certain course of action.” I agree that the sign engineer will usually describe his own intended action when he makes a promise. A promise, however, is never made one-sidedly. I immediately suspect somebody who comes up to me and promises to give me a lot of money, or even a little money. Why? Perhaps I am wrong but I expect him to expect something in return, usually something that makes him better off after the deal (and myself actually off worse). The – often – hidden symmetry therefore is that he is requesting me to comply to his interest. On the surface, he is ‘only’ explaining his potential commitment to speed up the transaction, to increase his credibility, or for whatever combination of his own interests.

Each of Austin’s classes of illocutionary force is easily reappraised from the perspective of a sign as a request for compliance. What do they add in explanation? And what does the concept of illocution add that prompts his additional classification in the first place?

It makes more sense to start analysis from as general a concept of sign imaginable. The engineer-based and observer-based sign structures provide guidance for detailed interpretation.