Learning to See the Cheese in Front of Your Nose[1]

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In his essay "The Interdependence of Representation and Action," Stanton Wortham breaks fresh ground in the enduring debate about the role that language plays in braiding mind, body, and world into what Hilary Putnam calls "a threefold cord."[2] His central claim is that the referential and interactional aspects of speech are not derived each from the other. Rather, they rely on each other for full and proper functioning. In building his supporting arguments, Wortham draws on both the disciplines of philosophy and linguistics. While this relationship has an honored history in the philosophy of language, it's luster has been tarnished somewhat in the post-Chomskyan period. Thus Wortham's essay provides an important intellectual reminder. It does more than that, however. The emphasis on what people actually do with language, through a focus on a specific case of classroom interaction, takes us back to a way of doing philosophy that has its antecedents in Wittgenstein and J. L. Austin. Wortham returns to a way of doing philosophy in education that does not proceed methodologically from the heights of theory to the plains of educational experience. Rather, his methodology brings interpretive analysis and theoretical constructs into an inseparable relationship; they "take in each other's laundry" — to borrow another felicitous phrase from Austin.

Wortham takes up Michael Halliday's and John Searle's arguments for extending Austin in ways that point to the multiple tasks performed in language. He argues, however, that for both Halliday and Searle the multiplicity of language use is posited as static leaving open the need for explaining whether, and how, different performative acts in language relate one to the other. Drawing on current research in linguistic theory, as in the work of Michael Silverstein, Wortham moves Austinian notions of doing things with words further by noting that in a speech context speakers do not exist by themselves — a speaker entails at least one listener. This would be the case even if the speaker were speaking to herself or himself — as in Hamlet's soliloquy. Wortham advances these developments in linguistic theory in order to recover the referential mode of language often ignored by linguists. On the other hand, it is the interactional aspect of language that has all but dropped out of much of the discussion of reference within the analytic tradition of philosophy of language. In other words, the division of labor in language has been reproduced in the disciplinary division of labor between philosophy and theoretical linguistics. It is important to note, however, that within analytic philosophy there have been those who have done their work keeping both the referential and interactional aspects of language in view. Chief among these is Stanley Cavell who has consistently positioned his philosophical investigations in the Wittgenstein-Austin line of thought; an approach that is making a comeback in philosophy of language as in the recent writings of Hilary Putnam.

The recovery of the interdependence of the double labor of language and the difference that makes to our understanding of how language works in the world is

the burden Wortham places on the participant example in educational research. However, he wishes to make two specific claims. The first of these has to do with the manner in which representations and actions are intertwined. On Wortham's example, in talking about Cicero's dilemma, members of the class act out their own ongoing relationships. That is, representations of an historical event and linguistic action within a classroom discussion are placed in relation. The second of these has to do with the use of language in maintaining delicate and complex identifications with and against other interlocutors present in the speech context. The problem Wortham sets out to address is how to explain the parallel between the content of the discussion and the linguistic labor by which it proceeds. While I am in sympathy with Wortham's line of inquiry, worries pertaining to his explanation remain. These are located particularly in the use of the term "representation" and its relationship to "content" and "how we are" — the real — in his argument. It seems to me that a rethinking of the term representation along Austinian lines would lead Wortham away from holding the mistaken notion of parallelism and hence the need to explain it. That is, the problem of parallelism itself will dissolve. Also, his explanations for the maintenance of complex identifications would flow easily in the rest of the argument.

Two questions frame Wortham's discussion: 1) How should we conceptualize the parallelism between represented content and interactional positioning? The difficulty with asking the question in this way is that it sets representation and interaction apart — in parallel. This problem becomes really clear when later in the argument Wortham raises the second question: 2) "If neither the represented nor the enacted side of the parallel can be reduced to the other, where does such parallelism come from?" With this question Wortham loses the considerable ground he has gained through the example of deictics wherein he shows that reference is fixed extensionally within a given speech environment. In this discussion he slips between the terms representation and reference. Taking a Fregean view this might not be a problem. Typically, however, the first term is used to speak to a situation that is the case and the second to the parts that make up the representation. The example from deictics works when thinking in terms of reference and Wortham is fairly consistent in using the term "referential meaning" in this discussion.

Now consider question one. Invoking the principle of charity in interpretation we can say that in the discussion of deictics Wortham is right after all and it matters little whether he does or does not maintain the distinction between "reference" and "representation." But as we read on we find that Wortham does make a distinction between reference and representation for at the end of the discussion on deictics he wishes to argue — by *analogy* — that the same kind of argument could be made for "language use in general." It is at this point in the argument that he starts to speak of "representations." Deictics are indeed an interesting case; but they are a restricted group of words. However, since they are words, they lend themselves to the kind of referential meaning Wortham wishes to argue for. Such an argument cannot be made for representations in general at least not in the way that Wortham sees representation as standing between concepts and language use. Furthermore, it is thinking of representations in this manner that leads Wortham to posit the gap between

representations and interaction — even enactment — and postulate the problem of parallelism that now needs a theoretical solution.

But what if we turned to an unshadowed account of representation, one that relies on a different way to think of the way language hooks on to the world? On this view, derived from Wittgenstein and Austin, we would suggest that there is nothing mystical about the relationship between language and the world. The relationship, we would go on to argue, has been rendered magical or mystical because our theories of perception often rely on the time-honored distinction between sense-datum and the senses. Thus these theories lead us to take in the world only through representations. But Austin wishes to argue for what he calls "direct realism" — a term that Putnam rephrases as "natural realism." A representation — linguistic action — gathers its sense from the environment in which it stands; is used. If Wortham accepts Austin's way of thinking about language, mind, and the world, his problem disappears. Having dissolved parallelism in this manner he no longer has to raise the question about its origin. More importantly, his argument from deictics and his discussion of identifications become all of a piece and ease the contradiction that appear in the second and final sections of his essay.

Proceeding thus, he would be relieved of having to seek a compromise, as he does at the end of his essay, between psychological and sociometric accounts of "the relational patterns that get both represented and enacted." But this is not the view he wishes to push as his Bakhtinian analysis of the participant example suggests. The aim of his efforts in this essay was to argue that the representational and interactional efforts of language are deeply interrelated through close attention to language use. Once again, he loses the theoretical ground he has gained. By proceeding in this manner I suggest, he would be relieved of having to fall back on the very divisions that he seeks to overcome.

In these comments on Wortham's essay, I have tried to show how an Austinian view of language and the world helps make Wortham's argument stronger. I have not touched here on the problems that his intention to pursue a functionalist view of language might lead him into nor spoken to his invocation of Charles Taylor's suggestion that we take an ontological rather than an epistemological approach when thinking about language. My main aim in preparing these comments was to express appreciation for the insights offered in the essay and to iron out some of the philosophical wrinkles that I thought I saw.

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1. John L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia*, reconstructed from the manuscript notes of G.J. Warnock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 15, fn.

2. Hilary Putnam, *The Threefold Cord: Mind, Body, and World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).