

SIGNS : LANGUAGE

Saussure's "thought-sound." This concept has depth. Saussure's theory isn't quite there yet, but his understanding of the sign as thoughtsound points to understanding of the sign as a meaningfully radiant empirical object.

The spoken or written sentence (which I'll call a "sign") is a thing in the lifeworld. All things are ideal manifolds of their aspects. The sign is an ideal manifold or logical synthesis of its manifestations, of its hearings and seeings.

These "hearings" and "seeings" are NOT INTERNAL. The subject is empty. All things are things in the lifeworld. No things are in the subject. The subject is not a container. But some things are "metaphorically" relatively internal. Internal in the sense of concealed or less obvious than "metaphorically" relatively external (public) things.

For Saussure the sign is a coin with two sides, a fusion of signified and signifier. The signifier is both ideal ("psychological") and arbitrary (we just happen to use this sound for the concept of mother, but other sounds would work.) It is ideal because the classification of a sound as a pronunciation of a word is a categorization. Consider the potential infinity of pronunciations of the same signifier. As Saussure puts it, "form not substance."

Note that Saussure is somewhat dualist here. The ideal or psychological is both the sound-as-heard and

the sound-as-categorized. Not the mathematical model sound waves but their “impression” on the form-installing psychical substance.

But an aspect realist isn’t trapped in the framework of indirect realism.

The lifeworld itself is qualitative and categorical. Signs in the lifeworld are categorically “formed” “pieces” of the qualitative continuum. As a first approximation.

But, as with Plato’s esoteric theory, the whole point is that **the signified is an abstraction**. The “pure meaning” side of the sign coin is a useful “myth.” Plato invents the “fictional” “ingredients” of reality only to point out their absolute entanglement. In other words, this “fusion” is only a fusion in retrospect, post-analysis. And the analysis does not split the sign but only focus on its features. Saussure’s thought-sound, Plato’s unwritten doctrine. The coin has two sides, but it is one coin. The sides cannot be separated. Pure form and pure matter are nothing but speculative abstractions that help us notice and focus on this or that feature of particular objects.

An object is a “speakable unity.” This “unity” is categorical or formal. But all objects (including thoughts) are also qualitative.

You may ask : are thoughts really qualitative ? Aren’t signs the vehicles for pure meaning ?

Following Derrida’s early work, I claim that the memory or imagination of speech in an internal monologue is still phonic. I can’t prove this. Aspect theory is phe-

nomenology. Aspect theory is “nonrepresentational” fundamental ontology. Look into your own existence. Does the voice in your head “sound” like English, for instance ?

“A flesh of breath bare.” This minimal phonemic skin is still “empirical” in the sense of qualitative. But it is (I confess) about as private as one can manage. Yet, for me, the voice in my head is largely a rehearsal for what I might say, or would say, if I could do it over again. The voice in my head speaks English, not the indeterminate tongue of angels.

Traditionally internal entities are “close to the camera” but still in the lifeworld. We are glad that these internal monologues aren’t easily overheard, but some people out there are working on a technology to visualize dreams on monitors. Only a committed dualist, it seems to me, would declare this to be absurd or impossible. Of course the visualized dream on the monitor would be a separate intentional object, but the dreamer, when awake, might be shocked at its successful approximation. I’m not saying that I *want* this kind of technology to exist. But a theory of the empty subject makes it more plausible.

So the sign is an object in the lifeworld. Meaning is there in the lifeworld. As early Heidegger stressed, the lifeworld is immediately meaningful. It’s only a dualist “de-worlding” that sweeps the “mental” to one side and the “physical” to the other side. In such a de-worlding, “significance” and even the qualitative is “scraped off”, leaving a “skeleton” of quantifiable

residue. The practical triumph enabled by this way of looking at things is seductive. But this dualism is incoherent as a fundamental ontology. I've criticized it elsewhere, so I won't do that here.

But what about our use of the word "meaning" ? What is a meaning ? The meaning of a sentence ? In short, sentences have the same "meaning" by belonging to an equivalence class of sentences that meaningfully radiate in the same-enough way.

To translate (despite the dualist etymology of "translate") is to find another lifeworld empirical object that "does the same thing" in a particular lifeworld interpersonal context.

We do not send pure meanings between consciousness bubbles by means of physical vehicles for these meanings. Solitary thinking is (approximately) a creative private monologue. I do my thinking in English, often via imagined conversations.

Is the imagination internal ? Relatively, yes. But without dualism there are only relatively private or internal entities. To be sure, an imagined hippo is "there" in a way that is different from the there-ness of an "actual" hippo before my eyes. Let's consider an edge case too, of a hippo that *may* be a hallucination. An intense hallucination presents an intentional object as "out there" in the sense of seeable-by-others. In edge cases, I have the intentional object before me, and I'm not sure how to classify it. For instance, I take entities in a dream to be "real" in an empirical

sense, but I revise their status when I wake up.

The point is that “pure meaning” understood to be radically internal is a speculative entity, apparently the reification of an equivalence class. Of course “pure meaning” is an intentional object, just like Bigfoot, qualia, and things in themselves. But does this intentional object deserve to be taken seriously ?

If we try to do without this “pure meaning,” then we at least have a simpler theory that circumvents dualism. The empty ontological subject is the presence of the world, which “streams” from the perspective of the associated empirical subject.

Solitary thinking is not “continuous” with “public” sign use. Translation is just finding an equivalent sign, one that “radiates” in a similar way.

The world, here understood as the rich lifeworld, just does include especially meaningfully radiant entities that we call signs or language. Theories of the origin of language are worth discussing, but origin stories don’t belong to explicative philosophy.

Zooming out, aspect theory understands objects to be “constituted” by an “ideality.” The object, as a logical synthesis or ideal manifold, is a “fusion” of its aspects through their being recognized (typically) *as* the object. The aspect itself can be thematized, of course, just as a single perception can be thematized. But we primarily live among and discuss the objects themselves. A recognizing perception of the object is the meaningfully radiant manifestation of that object

as that bounded, definite object. As a unity of *its* fluctuations. We *can* step into the same river twice, because the river is the enduring “form” of the passing water.

But *how* do marks and noises represent or pre-present lifeworld situations ? I don’t know. But I trust that they *do*. Philosophy presupposes the general successful of reference. It depends on a tacit assumption of at least a rough mutual intelligibility.

Since signs are given in aspects, there’s plenty of room for the same sign (a difficult text for instance) to “radiate” very differently for different perceivers. We can agree that we are both intending *Being and Time* and disagree about its “meaning.” The “true” “meaning” of a sign is something like a reification of its manifestation for an ideal perceiver. I use “perceiver” rather than “reader” to stress that a copy of a *Being and Time* is marks on paper, right there in the world, something to read in the bathtub.

For aspect theory (ontocubism), “from-a-point-of-view-ness” is fundamental. So the rules and norms of a language are also given in aspects, grasped always from this or that point of view. We have to live without the crutch of an omniscient 3rd person narrator, whose belief just *is* the “truth.”

Elsewhere I’ve used “belief” to indicate the “speaking structure” of a streaming of the world from the POV of the associated empirical subject. This way of putting it depends on a local representationalism (“picture theory”) that I find appropriate as local, as

the relationship of signs in the lifeworld to situations in that same lifeworld. So my “post-representational” ontology includes an intra-worldly conception of representation. What I reject is the dualist conception of perception as representation. I think it’s reasonable to accept that meaningfully radiant empirical objects, the ones we call signs, represent or pre-present lifeworld situations. Consider eyewitness testimony (re-presenting) and prediction of a scientific theory (pre-presenting).