Poetic Function and Logical Form: Ideal Languages and Forms of Life

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Introduction

This essay is an examination of the ways in which epistemic and semiotic practices—or truth and representation—are inseparably coupled in complex forms of discourse. This coupling is not news to anthropologists who, for the most part, have been acutely aware of the wayward ontological status of their objects of study—be they structures, meanings, power relations, or practices. However, rather than focusing on the political-economy or genealogy of "discursive regimes" which have culture, subalterns, or the Orient as their "effects,"[1] the stance assumed here is logical and aesthetic.

There are two sections to this paper. The first introduces Wittgenstein's assertion that an ideal language cannot express the "logical form" that it has in common with the state of affairs that it represents, arguing that Jakobson's characterization of the poetic trope of parallelism offers one way around this problem by internally articulating this allegedly unstateable common structure. Insofar as a representation tacitly forms the states of affairs it attempts to represent, this poetic circumvention is akin to self-doubt. And insofar as parallelism shows the inability of a single representation or any set of representations to ever fully intend their referent, something I will refer to as "imperversion," this undermines the presumption of ideal languages that truth and representation are prescindable practices.

The second section moves away from these ideal languages and towards the more complicated discursive practices that Wittgenstein called "forms of life." By means of the insights derived in the first section, the second section shows how the criteria of "truth," usually understood to be the *concordance* of representation and referent or assertion and state of affairs, is called into question. This, in effect, demonstrates that our form of life as anthropologists, in other words the *protocol* followed in order to appropriately assert, must be altered not so much in order to include the multiple perspectives, anti-essentialism, and preclusion of closure anticipated by the hermeneutic circle, but instead to account for the "imperversions" that lie on the logic- and life-formed path between represented and actual worlds.

Ideal Languages

In what follows, I discuss several terms introduced by Frege and Wittgenstein that are used in this essay: sense, referent, state of affairs, logical form, the metaphor of a path, and the difference between saying and showing. Using these terms, I consider a problem posed by Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* relating the inability of an ideal language (i.e. a language in which there exists complete isomorphism between sign and referent, representation and truth-checking are mutually prescindable practices, and language's single function is to assert or deny facts) to represent the *way* it represents, or in other words, the idea that though a portrait has something in common with a person, *this commonality* cannot be painted. Several examples are then given, and this problem's relation to skepticism is briefly considered. Lastly, I offer one 'solution' to this problem using Jakobson's characterization of the poetic function of language and its dominant trope: parallelism.

Following Frege (1997), one may take *sense* to be those features of a statement's meaning which are relevant in determining its truth value.[2] In other words, if one knows the *sense of a statement*, one knows how to determine the *state of affairs* in the world, or *referent*, which it represents, and one may thereby check it against reality to see whether it is true or false.[3] For example, the expression "The apple is on the table" has sense in that there is some means of determining its referent (in this case, a real apple atop a real table) which is sufficient for determining its truth value. In a metaphor that will be used

throughout this essay, Frege characterized sense as the "path" that must be taken in order to move from a representation to its referent.[4]

Likewise, Wittgenstein thought that a proposition *shows* its sense in that it shows how things stand if it is true (1961:§4.022). However, he thought that what could be shown in a proposition could not be *said*. In other words, what is in common between reality and a language, or *logical form* (1961:§2.18) cannot be represented by means of the same language (1961:§4.121, §4.1212). To quote Russell: "every language has a structure, concerning which, *in the language itself*, nothing can be said" (1961:xxii). Seen in terms of Frege's metaphor, and moving from the logical form of language to the sense of a single expression, this amounts to the assertion that one cannot internally articulate the path that sense takes to reach its referent.

To illustrate this point Wittgenstein offered an example relating a record, its musical score, and the accompanying physical sound (1961:§4.014). Each of these may be understood as a representation of the others in that they all share a common logical form as seen in the unique relation between niches and grooves on a record, notes and rests on a musical score, and the harmonics of sound. Wittgenstein called this relation "mathematical multiplicity" (1961:§4.04), meaning that a statement must have as many distinguishable parts (and relationships among parts) as does the situation that it represents. *By means of* niches and grooves, or notes on a page, or the acoustics of sound, however, this common logical form cannot be expressed (and is therefore not subject to truth conditions). In sum, that which is shared by a representation and its referent, may not be refered to. This is the problem that confronts us.

To stress the importance of this insight, one should remember that a community's mode of representation (and thus their habitual and tacit adherence to the logical form underlying all their assertions) is an intersubjective intentional relation. In other words, a mode of representation may be related to both a community's subjective formation of an object[5] and a community's doxa (or that which can never be doubted for it cannot even be questioned). Wittgenstein thought that "doubt can

exist only where a question exists, a question only where an answer exists, and an answer only where something *can be said*" (1961:§6.51). In other words, if one can formulate a question clearly, one can answer it, and thus skepticism, understood here as the attempt to overcome one's doxa, is "nonsensical" in that it "tries to raise doubt where no questions can be asked" (1961:§6.51). Wittgenstein's assertion amounts then to a "proof" that one cannot undermine one's own representational production of events, and the inability to begin with complete doubt is therefore akin to having to pass over in silence what one cannot say. This leaves room then for at most an internal and negative critique of the way one represents events.

It is conceivable, however, that one could extricate oneself from this quandary by using another language to talk about the way of representing of the first.[6] Unfortunately, this still suffers the fate of the first because no matter how many meta-languages one uses (each to talk about the structure of the previous language), one is always left with the unexplicated structure of the last meta-language used. (For example, the above use of English to explain the logical form of records, music scores, and the harmonics of sound.) One would like then to have a method for ending this infinite regression before it began, one that would articulate, *within* the first language, what Wittgenstein proposed could only be "shown" and not "said." Or, to couch this in Frege's metaphor, to map out *path-internally* the route that sense takes to reach its referent. Picture, for example, an ant's two-dimensionally-constrained peregrinations over the surface of a sculpture which is embedded in three-dimensions. As the ant, in order to intuit its own limitations, must merely check the geometry of ideal forms, we who would like express the limits imposed on us by our representation's logical form must turn to poetic tropes.

Now Jakobson (1960) noted that each utterance has a "poetic function" insofar as there is an emphasis on the message itself (rather than, for example, on what the message refers to, or the feelings of the speaker towards the utterance, and so forth). He thought that this function, "by promoting the palpability" of the signs that make up the message, emphasizes the inherent tension between sign and referent, or signifier and signified. Lastly, he

thought that the poetic trope *par excellence* is "parallelism"—or the construction of messages that stresses a selection of equivalent signs (i.e., all of the same meter, phonetic structure, semantics, etc.) to be combined along the linear path that the message takes through time, giving then the message its musical quality. This unstated showing, or *articulation*, of the equivalence and thus the discrepancy between the signs that make up a message is exactly that strategy, it will be argued, that gives one a feeling for a representation's inexpressible structure without giving into the infinite regression of multiple meta-languages. I will explain by way of two examples:

1. Imagine that one has blueprints for a building which mark the positions of doors, windows, and walls, and may therefore represent a building up to any possible arrangement of these objects. When the building is completed, an inspector will come over and check the correspondence between initial blueprint and final building. A blueprint may therefore be seen as a simple language able to represent a certain state of affairs. And, as the inspector will check only for windows, doors, walls, and their relative arrangements, not caring, say, if someone dyed the blueprints green, or about the final location of furniture, these objects and their arrangements in two-dimensions constitute the essence of logical form, for they are the aspects of its representation that are salient in the inspector's subsequent checking. In other words, they are what the blueprint holds in common with the final state of affairs.

But how could a blueprint articulate its own logical form? To answer this, imagine not one blue print, but three. The first one is a representation of a certain house, the second is the same, only its windows and doors have been interchanged, and the third one is just like the first but with the windows and doors removed and replaced by walls. This "switch" is the most simple example of parallelism. The new message then is not in a single blueprint, but exists within all the variants, and is only read as one reads across them. Notice that it is only in that one knows how to follow the sense of a blueprint to its projected state of affairs that one sees this. Otherwise, one would not know whether swapping doors and windows was equivalent to dyeing the blueprint green, for

example, whether it changed the sense and thus indexed an aspect of the underlying logical form, or whether it was merely superficial. In sum, this parallel placement of blueprints highlights essential and equivalent semiotic and logical units, their possible variance, and their relation to the sense of a single blueprint's expression and/or the logical form of the blueprint language.

2. Imagine that one has the simple routine of asking the location of objects in a room. A possible response might be: "The apple is on the table and the cat is on the sofa." To begin understanding the logical form of English, as a natural language (albeit rather artificially used here), one could offer a parallel account of the first description: "The fruit is in the basket and Boris is asleep." Assuming Boris is the name of a cat that usually sleeps on the sofa, this offers a parallel description of the same state of affairs but with a separate sense. One follows, as it were, a different path to arrive at the same referent, but one which would offer the same truth value when later checked. Given that, in the case of parallelism, each assertion is consecutively entertained, one is able to "witness" the sense of the first statement—its path, which is a small piece of the language's logical form—from the vantage point of the sense of the second—its path. In other words, one "sees" the same state of affairs from representationally different "sides." This then is an articulation of several aspects of a natural language's logical form: categorical inclusion—"fruit" versus "apple"; ability to locate objects using more that one reference system—"in the basket" versus "on the table"; use of proper names rather than taxa—"Boris" versus "cat"; and the use of habitual activities to reference locations—"asleep" versus "on the sofa."

In each of the above two examples there was an articulation, through parallelism, of the logical forms of two simple languages.[7] Notice, however, that in the first example there were different states of affairs represented in parallel, while in the second there was the same state of affairs reached by different, but parallel, senses. Nevertheless, in both cases the logical form was maintained, and in this sense, they offered "internal" expressions of their underlying logical forms. One could offer instead, however, blueprints of the same house with *different*

logical forms: the first marking walls, windows and doors; the second marking wallpaper and wall hangings; the third marking furniture arrangements, and so forth. This portrayal of the same object using different logical forms—a kind of "meta-parallelism"—undermines the authority of any single logical form. Think, for example, of Wallace Stevens's poem *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird*. What is of essence then is the indexing, using parallel forms, of an expression's specific sense—either of the same state of affairs, or "object," with different logical forms (for in both of the room-arrangement cases the truth conditions are the same), or different states of affairs with the same logical form. In other words, by using the poetic trope of parallelism one may highlight either the logical form of a language, the discrepancies in the sense of its expressions, or the lack of correspondence between any state of affairs and its subsequent representation.

Another way of thinking about parallelism is that the items in parallel are variants, for instance, of a common essence, or tokens of a single type. When one sets items in parallel then, one is expressing both the difference between examples, and the inability of a single example to ever fully characterize its essence—be these examples blueprints, assertions about the arrangement of rooms, "ways of looking at a blackbird," or metric feet speaking of an essential iamb: "I plácèd a jär in Tênnesseé, and roûnd it wâs, upôn a híll." As such, and to conclude this section, parallelism is also a way of relating categories to their contents, an internal and aesthetic, rather than external and analytic, means of articulating the discrepancies or "imperversions"[8] that lie between objects and subjects, sensuous and supersensual worlds, or states of affairs and their corresponding signs.

Forms of Life

In introducing the problem posed by Wittgenstein and offering a solution, or at least circumvention, by way of Jakobson's characterization of the poetic function of language, we have so far only dealt with ideal languages in which there is a clear distinction between the means of representing certain states

of affairs and the subsequent checking of these affairs against "reality" to see whether or not there is agreement, and thus whether an assertion is "true" or "false." Wittgenstein, in moving from the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* to the *Philosophical Investigations*, left off his consideration of ideal languages and moved on to more complicated discursive practices, asking not what is the truth value of a proposition, but rather when may a proposition be appropriately asserted or denied, and what is the role such propositions play in our lives. The question then is not "what must be the case for an assertion to be true," but rather "how is its expression justified."[9] The way such justification procedures and our responses to others' assertions interweave with our activities is what Wittgenstein called our "form of life,"[10]

To briefly illustrate this, one might think back to the example of the blueprint. The scene now, however, is the building-inspector's office. Rather than going out to the construction site in order to check the correspondence between blueprint and building, she wonders instead whether it is really worth the effort. She remembers the contractor's history, her own track record, and the status of the client she is currently serving. She looks out the window to check the weather, and then flips through a datebook to see if it is her night to make dinner. Finally, remembering that she forgot her hard-hat and that she hates the way a construction site's dust always settles on her contacts, she signs the necessary documents. In short, rather than following the blueprint's sense to its referent in order to check it and the constructed building for correspondence, she processes a personal calculus using implicature, odds, history and occupational custom. Her subsequent signature thereby "performs the truth" of blueprint and building, justifying the blueprint's initial assertion. Assuming her own standing among clients, lawyers and assistants is adequate, their seeing and subsequent acceptance of her signature (formalized as protocol, perhaps, in their processing of the document "as per usual") thereby satisfies the criteria of assertion—making "truth" a set of practices that connects members of a community in agreed-upon, or at least tacitly-followed, procedures, while necessarily mixing in clout, whim, weather, and cash.

Now one might attempt to extend the trope of parallelism from ideal languages to these forms of life, and thereby move from the sufficiency of truth conditions to the protocol of assertion. In keeping with Frege's metaphor, this would mean both examining the "path" that is necessarily taken if others are to accede to one's assertions, as well as using the repetition of parallel forms in order to internally mark this path, seen now to be moving through a world of practices rather than a manifold of logic. If studying a form of life is equivalent to studying the totality of complex and processual interactions relating practices and things, inner processes and outward (or "public") criteria, individuals and communities, structures and events, states of affairs and representations, and theories and verifiability procedures, much is opened to investigation. What will be of interest in this section, however, is parallelism's undermining of the ontological status of the "space" within which our objects of study exist, and thus of "truth," conceived as a community-wide judgment of correspondence between assertion and a state of affairs.

This "space" is important because it not only relates subjects to objects via intersubjective agreement, linking both individuals to their community and representations to those who represent, but it also touches on the central question of what happens to the agreement-checking between referent and representation when this referent does not necessarily exist in any tangible and/or "non-imperverted" form. In contrast, one might think of the very tangible objects of study endorsed by a pragmatist like Peirce, who thought that our beliefs (i.e., assertions we either agree are true or never even think to question) should be "determined...by some external permanency" which "affects...every man" and "upon which our thinking has no effect" (1955:18). Of interest then, and keeping within a Peircian idiom, is the relationship between the production of thirds and the subsequent community agreement on the assertability criteria of the existence of those thirds—be they meanings, laws, categories, or classes of repeatable practices: in other words, how shared or intersubjective representations and their subsequent deployment as community-wide assertions, change the contents of possible experience into finalized events (or "facts"), and finalized events

into general categories of understanding (or "facts about facts"). It is productive, reifying, and abstracting processes like these then which have as both their precipitate and presumption the dubious epistemological values of "clarity," "distinction," and "certainty" (necessary for isolation, examination and agreement) with their underlying dependence on unchanging objects and ever-doubting subjects.

To make this discussion more familiar, and as an example of both a logical form and a form of life, one may think of Weber's "Ideal Type" (1949:49-112). This construction of elements abstracted from the concrete and put together to form a unified conceptual pattern is not a hypothesis, a description, an average, or an intersection of common traits. Instead, it is an "unreality" (1949:72) involving the selection and systemization of certain elements of empirical reality (1949:90) in order that investigators be able to coherently and consciously state the assumptions, values, or perspectives underlying their work. As such, its concepts are only a means, explaining nothing, but only stating openly what needs to be explained (1949:53). After the creation of such a construct, it is used by investigators in order to see how much or how little reality diverges from it, and thus to discover whether they are "dealing simply with a conceptual game or with a scientifically fruitful method of conceptualization and theory-construction" (1949:92). In other words, by means of the "confrontation of empirical reality with the ideal-type" (1949:110), the adequacy of the investigators' imagination is judged, necessarily implicating them in the "perpetual reconstruction" (1949:105) of their conception of reality. Putting this in terms of the theory and language introduced here, in urging investigators to make a conscious effort to delimit the logical form of their representations (seen in the conscious and purposeful construction of an Ideal Type) Weber sought to undermine not the reality of their objects of study, but the ontology of the states of affairs they represent, arguing implicitly against tendencies in the human sciences to abstract, irrationalize, and reify. By recharacterizing the protocol of truth assertion used by communities of investigators—as seen in their subsequent deployment of the Ideal Type as a *means* to understand both a

particular social formation and their own imaginative limitations (rather than, say, as an initial assertion to be later "checked")—Weber offered a new form of life for investigators to follow.

In the last section I argued that the trope of parallelism may be used not only to articulate the logical form of a language and the discrepancies in the sense of its expressions, but also the lack of correspondence or "imperversion" between content and form, or referent and representation. In other words, by the parallel articulation of the difference yet equivalence of particulars, one may not reify, and in that essence never fully aligns with example, one may not abstract. Parallelism is therefore one way to get at the "space" of our objects of study because it articulates the alteration, construction and contradiction inherent in the representations of those objects, and thus the semiotic and epistemic complications faced by the life forms desiring to "truthfully" represent. This is because once one articulates a representation's logical form using the trope of parallelism, one loses the single "sense" necessary to navigate one's way along the path towards an unambiguous and logically-determinate referent. Not only does it portray the representing subjects; it changes them, through the looping back of the path that parallelism metaphorically makes, into beings that "see" not just more than one side of an object at once, but the inability to subsequently "blend" these sides into any ideal or even logically coherent structure, thereby undercutting such valued practices and practiced values as "assertion," "examination," and "judgement."

The poetic trope of parallelism may be fruitfully compared to the circle of hermeneutics. As understood here, hermeneutics is more than an injunction to think explicitly about the horizon in which one lives such that one may self-consciously designate one's opinions and try to understand a thing "in itself." Rather, it also assumes that the distance between subject and object is not a chasm to bridge, but rather a productive and necessary "pre-form" for understanding which, having been constructed and reformed by the object, maintains be subsequently confronted and reformed by the object, maintains

a never-ending interaction between those who represent and that to which they refer.11

In other words, the poetic trope of parallelism, like the circle of hermeneutics, offers a temporal unfolding of the many facets of any state of affairs, showing that not only may no single representation or set of representations ever capture its essence, but that "truth value," or community-wide agreement regarding the status of an assertion, must be altered, thereby delimiting and undermining not only the logical form of the assertion, but also the truth-protocol followed by the forms of life who assert.

Conclusion

To briefly summarize and then conclude, this essay used the poetic trope of parallelism as an "aesthetic tool" in order to pry open a few epistemic and semiotic presumptions—first to understand the logical form of representations, and second to foreshadow a new form of life for those who represent. In linking Vienna, Prague and Hermeneutic Circles, I argued that by using the parallel deployment of representations, which differ either in sense, logical form, or referent, subjects may articulate, and thus undermine, not only their representation's underlying logical form and its role in their formation of objects, but also their own form of life. This is due not to the fact that parallelism intends an object "in the round" as it were, but that parallelism shows the discrepancies across examples and the inability of a single example or any set of examples to ever fully intend an object. A form of life which desires to "truthfully" represent needs a protocol of assertion more suited to the imperverse ontology of its referent. Rather than one which shows the many possible perspectives of an object and/or a history of the limitations of its subject, such a protocol would articulate any representational practice's inability to blend multiple perspectives into an object—making "truth," not essence, example, or even essence along with its examples (for surely it is not a mixture of beings), but essence, examples, and their "imperversions"—this lack of correspondence in-between.

But perhaps there is too much closure in this conclusion. One might instead end by offering a parallel strategy for interacting with imperverse ontologies by means of trying to make sense out of Wallace Steven's assertion: "The deer and the dachshund are one." In other words, as dachshund is to deer, assertion is to a state of affairs, and ungainliness is to grace—each seeing its essences, as absence, in the other.

Endnotes

1 - See, for example, Clifford and Marcus (1986), Foucault (1984:54-75), Pemberton (1994:9-19), Said (1978:3-25), and Spivak (1988:3-15).

2 - Sense then is in opposition to Frege's notion of *tone*, which he characterized as those features of an utterance that affect its meaning but are not relevant in determining its truth value (Dummett 1981:81-109). For example, the sentences "She is living" and "She is alive" have different tones but the same sense.

3 - For Frege then, the referent was not a part of an expression's meaning, but was the actual thing or arrangement of things the expression represented. Note as well that "sense" for Frege is a theory of the understanding one must have in order to know what an expression meant. It is the means by which a referent is determined (Dummett 1981: 93). Of course, there may be more than one path terminating in a single referent as seen in the examples of "Chelsea Clinton's father" and "Hillary Clinton's husband."

4 - See, for example, Dummett (1981:96).

5 - Wittgenstein notes that "one thinks that one is tracing the outline of a thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it" (1953, §114).

6 - See, for example, Russell's introduction to the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (Wittgenstein 1961:xxii).

7 - For a more "practical" example, one may note that Pemberton (1994: 9-19) realizes that he as an anthropologist is implicated in the same discourses that constituted the "subject 'Java'" and, in his wariness he decides to not just substitute "practice" for "ritual", but to instead keep using many different terms (practice, observation, occasion, event, etc.) in the hopes of staving off the naturally reifying effects of words—refusing, therefore, to select one of the equivalent and reifying terms, and instead to use all of them by linearly combining them along his narrative's way. This unstated showing of the equivalence (and thus discrepancy) of the signs that make up his message is exactly that strategy that gives one a feeling for a representation's unarticulatable structure, without giving into the infinite regress of multiple meta-languages. (Note that though it is true that Pemberton "told" us about this strategy, its efficacy as a trope lies in its unstated deployment.)

8 - Meaning the inversions and perversions that relate sensuous and supersensual worlds (Hegel [1807] 1977).

9 - Wittgenstein's "forms of life" should be compared to Foucault's "regimes of discourse" which are characterized as "modifications in the rules of formation of statements which are accepted as scientifically true." For Foucault, this too is couched as skepticism, but in this case not of the common-sense conception of a conscious subject, but of humanity's teleological march towards some "truth." In its stead, "truth" is seen as "a system of ordered procedures for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements" (and these systems are subject to change, contra Kuhnian interpretations, etc.). The parallel is even deeper because, for Foucault, these regimes (like Wittgenstein's forms of life) are at the base of our constitutions of ourselves as subjects of what we do, say or think. In this sense, though regimes of discourse are externally derived, they are internally articulated. Of course, this internal articulation of external regimes is an essential nexus of power deployment for Foucault (1984:54-75).

10- In his skeptical refutation of private language (or sensation, pain, meaning, consciousness, conceptions of beetles in boxes, etc.) he asserted the need for public criteria to identify one's own (or individual) sensations. In this light our sense of self is dependent on others' responses to our activities. Thus, he says: "our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because every course of action can be made out to accord with the rule" (1953, §201); and "Hence it is not possible to obey a rule 'privately': otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it" (1953, §202). See also Kripke (1982).

11- See, for example, Gadamer (1987: 82-140).

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Nature, Value, and Rent: Fernando Coronil's *The Magical State*

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In *The Magical State: Nature, Money, and Modernity in Venezuela* (1997), Fernando Coronil sets out to accomplish three interdependent goals: to produce one of the first "ethnographies of the state"; to provide an historical account of the relations between state and nation in 20th century Venezuela, focusing specifically on the interplay between the consolidation of the Venezuelan state and the development of the "national" petroleum industry; and to present a series of critical commentaries on the theories of nature, value, and rent implicit (and explicit) in Marx's vision of the "historical development" of the global capitalist system. This review will interrogate Coronil's suggested "revisions" of Marxian theories and notions, centering on what I will argue is his misinterpretation of Marx's presentation of the dialectical development of the concept of capital, as well as the series of judgements that this misinterpretation leads him to make with regard to the role of nature in the production of value and the importance of "absolute rent" in the Venezuelan state's struggle to gain control of petroleum production and profits.

Nature and Dialectic in Marx's *Capital*

What may be called the international division of nature provides the material foundation for the international division of labor: they form two dimensions of a unitary process. An exclusive focus on labor obscures from view the inescapable fact that labor is always located in space, that it transforms nature in specific locations, and thus that its worldwide structure involves as well a global division of nature

[Coronil 1997:29]