

NYU talks *Acts, Objects, and Attitudes*

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Handout 3

## **The Action-Product Distinction of Twardowski and Further Developments**

### **1. Terms for attitudinal and modal objects**

#### Observation

Nominalizations of psychological and illocutionary verbs generally do not describe acts or propositions but entities of a third sort: attitudinal objects, that is, cognitive products or mental states) and modal objects

#### Cognitive products

Thoughts, decisions, judgments, ideas, proofs

#### Mental states

Beliefs, intentions, desires, hopes, fears, suspicions

#### Modal objects

Possibilities, needs, permissions, obligations

#### Neutral modal nominalizations

- (1) a. the need to improve the construction
- b. the possibility that John will return (epistemic)
- c. the possibility that John can lift the table (circumstantial)

#### Modal objects related to directive illocutionary and mental acts

- (2) a. the permission to leave
- b. the obligation to return
- c. the offer to use the house
- d. the invitation to stay in the house during summer

#### Ability modals

(3) the ability / capability to do V

Other terms for modal objects

- (4) a. the duty to clean up  
 b. rule, law, principle  
 c. the option to live in the country
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**2. The Ambiguity Thesis regarding product terms**

Claims: events or propositions?

- (5) John's claims that Mary likes Bill.  
 (6) a. John's claim made Mary upset.  
 b. Bill overheard John's claim.  
 c. John made the claim yesterday.  
 (7) a. John's claim is true.  
 b. John's claim implies that Mary is guilty.  
 c. John's claim is that Mary is guilty.

Traditional views

Ambiguity / polysemy: *John's claim* can refer both to an event and to a proposition (e.g. Pustejovsky 1995)

Problems for the traditional view

[1] Copredication

- (8) a. John heard Mary's false claim.  
 b. John's obviously false claim caused astonishment.

[2] Part structure

Propositions and acts have different part structures: acts, but not propositions, have temporal parts

Observation:

*Part of* is unambiguous with *John's claim*: can only pick out partial content, not temporal parts!

- (9) a. part of John's claim: partial content !  
 b. part of John's speech act: temporal part !

[3] *John's claim*, *John's request*, *John's promise* etc allow for (readings of) predicates that neither propositions nor acts permit:

- (10) a. John's claim was correct. → What John said is true  
 b. John speech act was correct. → John did the right thing (by perhaps lying).  
 c. The proposition that S is correct. → uninterpretable!
- (11) a. Mary's request for John to leave was fulfilled.  
 b. ??? The proposition that John will leave was fulfilled.  
 c. ??? Mary's act of requesting / Mary's speech act was fulfilled.
- (12) a. John broke his promise.  
 b. ??? John broke his act of promising / his speech act.  
 c. ??? John broke the proposition that S.

### Conclusion

Claims, requests, promises are neither acts nor propositions, but objects sui generis (Ulrich 1976, Moltmann 2003, 2004, 2014)

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### **3. Twardowski (1911)'s distinction between actions and their (non-enduring) products**

Further historical references: Bolzano (1837), Ingarden (1931)

#### Terms for actions and products

thinking – thought, judging – judgment, believing – belief, claiming – claim, promising, promise, requesting, request, deciding – decision, screaming – scream

psychological actions – psychological products

psychophysical actions – psychophysical products

#### Enduring products and non-enduring products

writing – writing, drawing – drawing

#### Physical actions – physical products ?

walking – walk, jumping – jump, dancing – dance

#### Distinguishing characteristics:

Products of the same type are exactly similar iff they are the same in content.

Only products have truth- or satisfaction conditions

(13) a. John's claim / John's belief is true

b. ?? John's claiming / John's act of claiming / John's speech act is true.

c. ?? John's believing / John's belief state is true.

(14) a. John's claim / John's belief is the same as Mary's claim / Mary's belief.

b. John's claiming / John's act of claiming / John's belief state is the same as Mary's.

Sharing the same propositional content: engaging in actions with similar products

#### Action terms with sortals

The activity of thinking, the state of believing, the act of deciding

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### **4. Cognitive products as abstract artifacts**

#### Abstract artifacts

artifacts without physically realization (Thomasson 1999),

e.g. fictional characters, unwritten rules, poems that have not been written down, musical

compositions that have not been performed

#### Further action-product pairs

Law – act of declaring / passing it

Objects of art – act of creation

Objects of art possibly lacking physical realization: poetic, musical compositions

Multiple realizations: books, uncast statues

Artifacts set up apparent polysemies:

(15) a. The book was interesting, but too heavy to carry.

b. There are three different books on the shelf.

#### Characteristics of artifacts

- can bear representational and normative properties,
- can bear a part structure based on partial content

#### The ontology of artifacts (Ingarden 1937 / Thomasson 1999)

Artifacts are agent- / mind-dependent objects and may or may not come with a physical realization.

They are neither actions nor material objects nor abstract objects, but belong to a fourth category of objects.

Cognitive and illocutionary products as artifacts

With physical realization: claims, screams

With material realization: writings

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## 5. Characteristics of actions and products

### 5.1. Truth- and satisfaction conditions

- (16) a. John's belief / claim that that S is true / false.  
 b. ?? John's claiming / believing that S is true / false.  
 c. ?? John's belief state is true.  
 d. ?? John's action (of claiming) is true.
- (17) a. John's request to be promoted was fulfilled / satisfied.  
 b. ?? John's requesting speech act was fulfilled / satisfied.
- (18) a. John's decision to postpone the meeting was implemented.  
 b. ??? John's act of deciding was implemented.
- (19) a. John's command that people leave the building was executed.  
 b. ??? John's act of commanding was executed.
- (20) a. John followed Mary's advice.  
 b. John followed Mary's activity of advising.
- (21) a.. John complied with the instruction.  
 b. John complied with the act of instructing.
- (22) a. John ignored the command.  
 b. John ignored the act of commanding.

Same properties for laws, rules, instructions, entities not tied to particular nominalizations

Side remark about *truly* in English

Aune (1967): English *truly* can act as an adverbial, predicating truth of the described action:

(23) John truly asserted that Mary is French.

*Truly* on a par with *quickly*:

(24) John quickly asserted that S.

Evidence that English *truly* is exceptional:

German and French do not have adverbial counterparts of *wahr* or *vrai* of the same sort  
*wahrlich* and *vraiment* mean ‘really’ rather than ‘truly’:

(25) a. Hans hat wahrlich behauptet, dass Maria Franzoesin ist.

b. Jean a vraiment dit que Marie est Française.

Compare also :

(26) ??? that true act of claiming that S

*Truly* as an adverbial has a derivative meaning, meaning *accurately*.

*Accurate* specifically conveys adequacy of the representational content associated with an action (as well as a product).

## 5.2. Similarity relations and the involvement of force

(27) a. John’s thought is the same as Mary’s thought.

b. ??? John’s thought is the same as Mary’s remark.

c. ??? John’s hope is the same as Mary’s claim.

(28) a. ??? John’s thought that it will rain is also his remark (that that it will rain).

b. ??? John’s discovery that it will rain was also his hope.

c. ??? John’s desire to leave is his decision.

(29) a. John’s thought that it will rain is John’s thought that it will rain.

b. ??? John’s thought that it will rain is Mary’s thought that it will rain.

(30) a. John’s remark is John’s remark.

b. ??? John’s remark was Mary’s.

c. John’s remark was the same as Mary’s.

## 5.3. Properties of understanding and content-based causation and evaluation

(31) a. John’s speaking delighted Mary.

b. John’s speech delighted Mary.

(32) a. John’s answer caused surprise.

b. John’s giving an answer caused surprise.

(33) a. John’s utterance inspired many comments.

b. John’s act of uttering inspired many comments.

#### 5.4. Part-whole structure

‘Part of John’s decision’ cannot be ‘part of the action of deciding’.

‘Part of John’s claim’ cannot be ‘part of the speech act of claiming’.

‘Part of John’s answer’ cannot be ‘part of John’s answering’.

Parts of products: partial content; parts of actions: temporal parts

The parts of physically realized products:

The parts of a book as an information object are distinct from the parts of the physical copy.

The book as a materially realized artifact has two part structures at once:

(34) Mary described a part of the book

either a part of the information object or a part of the physical object.

#### 5.5. Relation to time

Philosophical views about events (and actions)

Events identified with space-time regions or property instantiations in times

This implied that events have their time of occurrence essentially (events as instances of properties in space-time regions or as space-time regions).

Intuition that the time of creation is not essential for (non-enduring) products:

A thought or a scream might naturally have occurred earlier than it did.

A decision could have been made later than it was.

Not so for a process of thinking, a particular act of screaming, or an act of deciding.

Similarly, a law could have been declared earlier than it was, but the declaring of the law could perhaps not have been done earlier than it was.

#### 5.6. Gestaltproperties ?

(35) a. Mary’s dance was unusual.

b. Mary’s dancing was unusual.

Evaluation of a product as a whole vs evaluation of an activity throughout the time it takes place.

→ action product distinction among physical actions?

Better: the two sorts of nominalizations also go along with the mass-count distinction

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#### 6. Kinds of attitudinal objects

Products form kinds / types whose instances are maximal classes of exactly similar products

Carlsonian kind terms:

- (36) a. The belief that god exists is widespread.  
 b. John often encounters the expectation that he should become famous.
- (37) a. The belief that John won the race is true.  
 b. The expectation that John would become famous was not fulfilled.

Sharing of a kind of attitudinal object:

- (38) a. John and Mary share the belief that S.  
 b. John and Mary made the same decision.

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**7. Cognitive products and special quantifiers**

Special quantifiers

- (39) a. John claims / knows / fears something.  
 b. John imagines / expects that.  
 c. John claims what Mary claims.
- (40) a. John said something nice (namely that S).  
 b. John thought something very daring (namely that S).  
 c. John imagined something exciting.
- (41) John said something that made Mary very upset.
- (42) a. ?? John remarked what Mary believes, namely that Bill was elected president.  
 b. ?? John expects what Mary believes, namely that Sue will study harder.  
 c. ?? John said what Mary believes, namely that it will rain.
- (43) a. ?? John's remark was Mary's belief.  
 b. ?? John's expectation is Mary's belief.  
 c. ?? John's claim was Mary's belief.

Special quantifiers range over attitudinal objects or kinds of them.: special quantifiers as 'nominalizing quantifiers (Moltmann 2003a, b, 2004, 2013).

Davidsonian event semantics

Actions are Davidsonian events, attitudinal objects their products

Function of *that*-clauses: predicates of products

(44) a. John thought that S.

b.  $\exists e(\text{think}(e, \text{John}) \ \& \ [\text{that } S](\text{product}(e)))$

(45) a. John thought something nice.

b.  $\exists e'(\text{think}(e, \text{John}) \ \& \ \text{nice}(e') \ \& \ e' = \text{product}(e))$

(46) a. John thought what Mary thought.

b.  $\exists e \ e' \ e''(\text{think}(e, \text{John}) \ \& \ e' = \text{product-kind}(e) \ \& \ \text{think}(e'', \text{Mary}) \ \& \ e' = \text{product-kind}(e''))$

(47) a. John demanded what Mary asked for.

b.  $\exists n \ \exists e \ e' \ e''(R(\text{John}, e) \ \& \ m_1(e) \ \& \ e' = \text{product-kind}(e) \ \& \ R(e'', \text{Mary}) \ \& \ m_1(e'') \ \& \ e' = \text{product-kind}(e''))$

## 8. Mental states

Mental states as artifacts?

[1] The representationalist conception

Beliefs as mental (structured) representation:

Enduring mental artifacts set up by an act of judgment

Beliefs as mental representations on a functionalist account:

Artifacts established as such by their function only, not an act of creation

[2] The dispositionalist conception

Beliefs sustained by (potential) acts of judging

Analogy to other artifacts: unwritten rules, habits, rituals

Artifacts not produced by a single action, but by actions performed regularly.

[3] The interpretationalist conception (Dennett's intentional stance)

'Recognitional artifacts':

Examples from art: Chinese scholar rocks, Chinese Dali dream stones

Products (works of art, cognitive products) established by mere recognition, without actions of creation.

Mental states as prior to intentional acts, not individuated in terms of acts: Searle (1983).

Semantic consequence:

Mental states as Davidsonian arguments, product function *product* applies to mental states mapping them onto themselves.

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