**The Notion of an Artifact in Semantics and in Philosophy**

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This project is about the notion of an artifact in natural language semantics and in philosophy and aims to establish new interdisciplinary research bringing the two traditions of linguistic and of philosophical research together.

Artifacts are entities like chairs, books, symphonies, poems, laws, cities, plans, words, as well as, arguably, claims, thoughts, beliefs, requests, and permissions. Artifacts display a range of peculiarities which make them highly challenging philosophically. They typically are mind-dependent objects that are created at a particular time and go out of existence at a particular time. Artifacts may come with a material realization, which is the case for chairs and sculptures, or a physical realization, as is the case for performances, claims and request. Yet artifacts need not be physically realized. If they are not, they are considered abstract artifacts Abstract artifacts include musical works, laws, thoughts, and plans. Artifacts may also come with multiple material realizations, as is the case for books and cast statues. Artifacts moreover may come with different part structures, e.g. spatial, organizational, and informational part structures. An example is a (particular copy) of a book, which has a material part structure which includes the book’s pages as well as an information-based part structure consisting of partial contents.

Artifacts obviously play a central role in our everyday ontology. But they also play a very important role in natural language semantics. Natural language abounds with terms referring to abstract artifacts. These include the various terms for entities mentioned above, but it go even further. Thus Chomsky has repeatedly argued that what most terms in natural language stand for is individuated by function, not just material composition, which holds even for apparent natural kind terms like *water* (e.g., water is in fact is not H2O because water can be polluted, but not H2O, and sprite is not water, but still H2O). While such observations led Chomsky to abandon the view that natural language involves reference to entities, an alternative conclusion is that a much greater range of terms in natural language stand for artifacts than has generally been assumed and that artifacts are not entities meeting standard conditions on object-individuation.

Artifact terms play also an important role in the theories of lexical semantics, since they give rise to notorious polysemies. For example, *book* allows for both predicates applying to material objects and predicates applying to information objects (*the book is heavy and interesting*). Such polysemies have given rise to formal linguistic theories that posit more complex lexical meanings and revise the notions of reference and predication (e.g. Pustejovsky and Asher), but which do not exploit the ontology of artifacts.

Artifacts finally have been argued to play a central role in attitude reports and modal sentences. In my own work over the past eight years, I argued that clausal complements of attitude reports and modal sentences act as predicates of attitudinal and modal objects, which include things like claims, requests, thoughts, permissions and obligations. The latter are best conceived as abstract or physically realized artifacts, distinct from the acts that may have produced them (speech acts of claiming or requesting, mental acts of thinking).

Artifacts are an important subject of research in philosophical ontology. Recent approaches to artifacts in philosophy include work on the ontological dependence between artifacts and mental acts or states (Irmak) as well as ontological views of them as variable embodiments (Fine) or as multifaceted objects (Vieu).

The further elaboration of philosophical theories would gain enormously from being confronted with the various linguistic observations and issues regarding artifact terms and the semantic role of (abstract) artifacts. Conversely, linguistic research on the various topics involving artifacts needs to be complemented by philosophical theories that are able to clarify their peculiar nature as entities. For example, it is customary in linguistics to distinguish a material-object reading and an information-object reading for apparent polysemous terms like *book*. However, philosophically, regarding a book as a purely material object is highly problematic. Instead, a more promising approach is to pursue a novel ontological theory of a book as a multifaceted object that comes with multiple material realizations that inherit the information-related properties that pertain to the book as an ‘overall’ artifact.

The main philosophical aim of the project is to develop an ontological theory of artifacts as mind-dependent entities based on notions of ontological dependence and variable or multifaceted objects. A subsidiary aim is to elaborate the notion of an abstract artifact when applied to entities like thoughts, plans, obligations, and permissions. Based on such an ontological theory, there are two linguistic challenges the project will take on:

1. Developing an alternative, ontological account of some of Chomsky’s problem cases for a theory of reference.

2. Developing an account of apparent polysemies with nouns like *book* on the basis of an ontological theory of artifacts.