David Lauer

Expressivism and the Layer Cake Picture of Discursive Practice

Freie Universität Berlin

Institut für Philosophie

Habelschwerdter Allee 30

D – 14195 Berlin

Germany

++49 – 30 – 838 – 53691 (Phone)

++49 – 39 – 838 – 56430 (Fax)

dlauer@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Abstract:

Robert Brandom defends the intelligibility of the notion of a fully discursive practice that does not include any kind of logical vocabulary. Logical vocabulary, according to his account, should be understood as an optional extra to discursive practice, not as a necessary ingredient. Call this the Layer Cake Picture of the relation of logical to non-logical discursive practices. The aim pursued in this paper is to show, by way of an internal critique, that the Layer Cake Picture is in fact incompatible with the most central claims of Brandom's philosophy. A way is sketched how to give up the Layer Cake Picture and still hold on to a position that is central to Brandom's philosophical outlook, namely his expressivism about logic.

Robert Brandom defends the intelligibility of the notion of a fully discursive practice that does not include any kind of logical vocabulary. Logical vocabulary, according to his account, should be understood as an optional extra to discursive practice, not as a necessary ingredient. Thus he maintains that there could be »rational but not yet logical creatures« (Brandom 2005: 242), producing speech acts with propositional contents, but not endowed with what he calls semantic self-consciousness. Call this the Layer Cake Picture of the relation of logical to non-logical discursive practices. John McDowell contends that the Layer Cake Picture is untenable (McDowell 2005: 133-135), Brandom says that he does not see why (Brandom 2005: 241; Brandom 2010: 319). I think McDowell's claim is correct, but I will not defend it directly in this paper. The modest aim pursued here is to show, by way of an internal critique, that the Layer Cake Picture is in fact incompatible with the most central claims of Brandom's philosophy, and I will end with the recommendation to discard it for this reason.[1] To do this, I will develop a line of argument that was first put forward by Daniel Laurier (2005). However, I will go beyond Laurier's treatment in three important aspects. First, in my demonstration I will use the analytic-pragmatist terminology introduced by Brandom in his book *Between Saying and Doing* (2008) which makes it possible to state and discuss the problem in a much clearer fashion. Secondly, I will respond to (and reject) Brandom's reply to Laurier's version of the argument. Thirdly, I will sketch how one can give up the Layer Cake Picture and still hold on to a position that is central to Brandom's philosophical outlook, namely his expressivism about logic. This version of expressivism, which runs free of the Layer Cake Picture, will be called »dialectical expressivism«.

I start by outlining two Brandomian notions, autonomous discursive practice and logical vocabulary, which are fundamental for what is to follow.

I. Autonomous Discursive Practice

The central goal of Brandom's *Making It Explicit* (1994) is to understand what Daniel Dennett calls *original* (as opposed to *derived*) intentionality (Dennett 2010: 48-53; Brandom 1994: 60-61). Having original intentionality means being minded or having thought, in the sense of having access to the realm of Fregean thoughts – having mental states with contents expressible by *that*-clauses, i.e. propositional attitudes. The most fundamental theoretical

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[1] Because of this approach and because the discussion covers the subject matter of two of Brandom's most ambitious books, it is unavoidable in this paper to introduce and makes use of quite a lot of Brandomian jargon.

commitment of Brandom's philosophy is his commitment to pragmatism. Pragmatism as a strategy for developing an account of original intentionality transposes the question, »What is original intentionality?«, into a new key and asks, »What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a set of practices to count as instituting original intentionality among its practitioners?«. Within the neo-pragmatist tradition that starts with Quine and Sellars, the core answer to this question has always been that the practices on the basis of which we credit some beings with having original intentionality are discursive practices. Having language, according to this tradition, is constitutive of having thought, while having language itself is to be understood as being capable of taking part in practices involving the use of linguistic signs. So the question becomes: »What are the necessary and sufficient conditions a practice must satisfy in order to qualify as a discursive practice?« It seems to me to be in line with Brandom's thinking to suggest that, in order to answer this question, one should direct one's attention to at least three essential features of discursivity:

(a) *Rationality*. Philosophers like Dennett and Davidson have stressed that to ascribe intentional states to a system is to describe it in the light of the constitutive ideal of rationality. To explain and predict a system's doings in the light of propositionally contentful intentional ascriptions is to rationalise its behaviour, to make sense of it by ascribing states to it that would count as reasons for the system to behave in the way it does. Living in the discursive dimension is therefore the same as living in the logical space of reasons. What constitutes the identity of a contentful expression is not its causal position in the natural world, but its inferential position in a rationally connected web of contentful expressions. A systematic theory of propositional content based on this thought can be called an inferential semantics. The founding stone of inferential semantics is the idea that to be a propositionally contentful speech act is to be caught up in inferences – to be something that can be given as a reason and for which reasons can be asked. For this reason, Brandom maintains that a practice can be understood as discursive and hence as instituting original intentionality if and only if it includes sub-practices recognisable as *inferring* (Brandom 1994: 87-89).

(b) *Objectivity*. Propositional content can be characterised in terms of truth conditions, and even if a pragmatist semantics does not use the notion of truth as its starting point, in the end it has to arrive at the point of being able to explain the representational aspect of propositional content. Nothing that does not display this aspect would be recognisable as expressing a proposition. What is propositionally contentful represents things as being a certain way, such that the world itself is the standard against which we measure whether our representations of it are true or false. Representational content is *objective*: Even if all people agree that some

claim is true, it may still turn out to have always been false. For this reason, Brandom maintains that a practice can be understood as discursive and hence as instituting original intentionality if and only if it includes sub-practices recognisable as putting claims forward *as true*, i.e. sub-practices recognisable as making *assertions* (Brandom 1994: 52-55, 137).

(c) *Autonomy*. The signs displayed in a book or produced on the screen of a computerised informational system are assessable in the light of intentional interpretation and so display propositional content, but not *for* the system displaying them. Hence they are only derivatively intentional. Having original intentionality, by contrast, requires not only that one display, but that one understand contentfulness. A system counts as exhibiting original intentionality if and only if the rationality and objectivity of the contents that are exhibited in its practices are features that do not exist only in the eye of the beholder, but for the system engaging in those practices itself. To interpret a practice as instituting original intentionality among its practitioners, is therefore to interpret it as *autonomous*, where this means that »according to the interpretation, the intentional contentfulness of their states and performances is the product of their own activity, not that of the theorist interpreting that activity« (Brandom 1994: 61, cf. ibid., 629-630).

To sum up, a practice deserves to count as the speaking of a language in the full sense of the term if and only if at least some of the performances caught up in it can be understood by the practitioners themselves as bearing objective propositional content. Following Brandom, I will call such a set of practices an *autonomous discursive practice* (Brandom 2008: 41).

II. The Expressivist Account of Logical Vocabulary

After having laid out the notion of an autonomous discursive practice, I now turn to Brandom's expressivist account of logical vocabulary. The central claim of his expressivism is that the distinctive function of logical vocabulary is to make explicit those features of language use which are implicit in any autonomous discursive practice: »Logic is the organ of semantic self-consciousness« (Brandom 1994: xix). In order to grasp what is involved in this claim, we need to understand better what »making it explicit« means.

Brandom's standard characterisation of the relation between what is implicit and what is explicit is to say that by making something explicit we become able to *say* what before we could only *do*. Further clarification can be gained with recourse to Brandom's *Between Saying and Doing*. I will sketch the idea in four steps.

(a) Brandom's fundamental idea is to define *specification* as a relation between a vocabulary V* and a practice P. I propose to understand the relation in the following way: V* is sufficient

to specify P (it is, in Brandom's terms, »VP-sufficient«) if and only if it allows one to lay down constitutive rules for P, in the sense made famous by John Searle (Searle 1969: 33-42). A constitutive rule has the form »X counts as Y«, or, transformed into a pragmatist key, »Doing X counts as doing Y«. Therefore, there are two ways of making use of the specification of a practice: One may use it to say something instructive either about the »X«-part or about the »Y«-part in the above formula. In the first case, what a specification tells us is *what (which X) counts as doing Y* (where Y is supposed to be antecedently intelligible). In the second case, what a specification tells us is *what (which Y) doing X counts as* (where X is supposed to be antecedently intelligible). Take, as an example, the practice of stating a conditional of the form »if p, then q«. Specifying this practice, very crudely, means saying something like »Treating anybody who is committed to p as *ipso facto* being committed to q, counts as endorsing ›if p, then q‹«. But such a rule may be offered either as an answer to the question, »what does one have to do in order to count as endorsing ›if p, then q‹« (first case), or as an answer to the question, »what does treating anybody who is committed to p as *ipso facto* being committed to q count as« (second case).[2]

We can understand specifying a practice as the most basic case of making it explicit. Note that having a specifying vocabulary at one's disposal is neither necessary nor sufficient for having or acquiring the capacity to engage in the specified practice, as Wittgenstein was at pains to point out. And of course specifying a practice does not in itself amount to engaging in it. The chess teacher who tells the novice what counts as a proper bishop's move, what counts as castling, checking, and winning a match, specifies the practice of playing chess, but she does not, thereby, play.

(b) We arrive at a special case of the relation of V* specifying P if we introduce the further assumption that P, the practice being specified, is itself a discursive practice, that is, a practice which is sufficient to *institute* or *deploy* another vocabulary V. Brandom speaks of »PV-sufficiency« here. P is PV-sufficient to deploy V if and only if taking part in P counts as using V, such that making correct moves within P counts as saying things in V. If we combine the two meaning-use-relations introduced so far (the relation of V* being VP-sufficient to specify

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[2] I note in passing that Brandom only mentions the first way of specifying a practice, the »saying what counts as doing Y«-type (Brandom 2008: 10). I believe this is misleading, as it makes it hard to understand, e.g., logical vocabulary as being in the business of specifying discursive practices. I do not see how we could understand the meaning of conditional locutions, e.g., »if p, then q«, as serving the goal to »say what counts as doing something«. This is cured by introducing specification in the way I propose above, which makes it possible to understand the meaning of conditionals like »if p, then q« precisely as an example of the second way of specifying a practice, as serving the goal to »say what doing X counts as«.

P and of P being PV-sufficient to deploy V), the resultant is a relation between V* and V called »VV-sufficiency«, which means that V* is sufficient to *characterise* V. In that case, V* is what Brandom calls a »pragmatic metavocabulary« for V (Brandom 2008: 10). Brandom distinguishes two types of pragmatic metavocabularies, one type addressing in the first instance the *doings* making up the target practice P, the other addressing in the first instance the *contents* instituted by it (Brandom 2008: 181). He identifies normative vocabulary as an example of the first type, and modal vocabulary as an example of the second type. This distinction can be rephrased in my terms in the following way: Metavocabularies of the first type introduce locutions that allow one to say in the first instance what counts as doing (in our case, saying) something. With their help, one can say what one must do in order to count as using the target vocabulary, and hence to count as saying the things one can say by using the target vocabulary (Brandom 2008: 114-115). The interesting thing is that a metavocabulary of this type, despite its ability to specify a discursive practice, can be strictly expressively weaker than its target vocabulary, which means that things that can be said by using the target vocabulary cannot be said in – translated into – the metavocabulary. This is what Brandom calls »expressive bootstrapping« (Brandom 2008: 11), a semantic relation between two vocabularies that is of a distinctive sort, quite different from reducibility or translatability.

Metavocabularies of the second type should be understood in the first instance as making it possible to say what doing some specific thing in the target practice counts as, for example, saying what treating anybody who is committed to p as *ipso facto* being committed to q amounts to by introducing a locution like »if … then«. This locution can then be used to express in the form of a complex propositional content what was implicit in the goings-on of the target practice (Brandom 2008: 45-46). The principal use of metavocabularies of this type is not to say what counts as doing something, it is rather to say something which counts as doing that very thing – for example, committing oneself to »if p, then q« explicitly by using the newly introduced »if … then« locution (Brandom 2008: 46).

(c) An even more demanding sense of making it explicit is obtained when we add the further condition that the practice to engage in which counts as using the metavocabulary V* (call it P*) be a practice that can be *elaborated* from the basic practice P. This relation between P* and P is called »PP-sufficiency«. It holds »when the capacity to engage in one sort of practice or to exercise one sort of ability is *in principle sufficient* for the capacity to engage in other practices, or to exercise other abilities« (Brandom 2008: 33). The prime example is the way in which the ability to do divisions of very high numbers can be pragmatically analysed into the

capacity to multiply and subtract. Thus, if someone has already mastered multiplication and subtraction, she knows in principle everything she needs to do in order to master long division. All she needs to be shown is how a set of basic abilities has to be exercised in an ordered series of steps so as to constitute a more complex ability.

(d) If a metavocabulary V* is sufficient to specify a discursive practice P, and the practice P* that institutes (deploys) the use of V* can be elaborated from P, then V* is a pragmatic metavocabulary for V of a special sort. It is dignified in a certain way, because everything one needs to be able to do in order to use and understand V*, that is, to engage in P*, is in principle contained in P (in the sense that it can be elaborated from it). This means that, firstly, practitioners can be said to have always already mastered in principle everything they need to be able to do in order to understand the explicitating vocabulary, if they have mastered the target vocabulary at all. The explicitating vocabulary V* does not have to be imported into the practice from anywhere else, it is in principle already contained within it. And this means that, secondly, V* can be developed up to the point where it is powerful enough to specify not only P, but also P* itself, precisely because P* is, after all, just an elaboration of P. At this point of »self-referential expressive completeness« (Brandom 1994: xxii), a vocabulary V* is powerful enough to specify, i.e. make explicit, the practice engaging in which counts as using that very same vocabulary. A vocabulary that is explicative of and, at the same time, elaborated from its target practice is called an »LX vocabulary«, LX being short for »elaborated-explicitating« (Brandom 2008: 47). This is the most demanding sense in which a vocabulary V* can be said to make a practice P explicit.

Now Brandom's proposal is to understand logical vocabulary as LX vocabulary (Brandom 2008: 52). This is the core of his expressivism about logic. It is precisely for its elaborated-explicitating role as sketched above that logical vocabulary is, as Brandom claims, »the organ of semantic self-consciousness« (Brandom 1994: xix). Logical vocabulary, in the broad sense that Brandom introduces in *Making It Explicit*, not only comprises logical vocabulary proper (logical operators, quantifiers, etc.), but also normative and modal vocabulary. According to his expressivism, all these vocabularies are to be understood by reconstructing them as LX vocabularies.[3]

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[3] Two more remarks are in order: First, in the terminology of *Between Saying and Doing*, the term »logical vocabulary« is reserved for logical vocabulary in the narrow sense, which is just one species of the genus of universal LX vocabulary. I will stick to the broad use of *Making It Explicit* unless otherwise indicated. Secondly, Brandom's official position is that it is not every LX vocabulary, but only *universal* LX vocabulary which deserves to count as logical vocabulary, i.e. vocabulary that is LX for *any* autonomous discursive practice whatsoever. I

III. The Layer Cake Picture

Let me sum up the discussion so far by attributing the following two claims to Brandom, which I take him to officially endorse:

(1) A practice P qualifies as an autonomous discursive practice (a language) if and only if at least some of its performances can be understood by the practitioners themselves as bearing objective propositional content.

(2) A practice P* qualifies as deploying a logical vocabulary V* if and only if V* is VP-sufficient to specify a basic discursive practice P (deploying a basic vocabulary V) which in turn is PP-sufficient for the elaboration of P* (i.e., from which P* can be elaborated), hence if and only if P* deploys an LX vocabulary.

I can now use these elucidations of the notions »autonomous discursive practice« and »logical vocabulary« in order to introduce another of Brandom's central claims: that there could be an autonomous discursive practice – a language – which does not include any LX vocabulary, i.e. logical vocabulary. This thesis expresses what Brandom calls the »two-stage or layer cake picture of the relation of logical to non-logical vocabulary« (Brandom 1997: 206). Logical vocabulary, according to the Layer Cake Picture, only makes explicit features of a basic discursive practice whose discursiveness, i.e. contentfulness, was, so to speak, always already there, independently of the availability of logical vocabulary. Therefore, logical vocabulary forms an optional superstratum of language whose expressive role can be understood in terms of making explicit features of propositional contents that were already instituted in ground-level discursive practice. Autonomous discursive practice must be intelligible as being discursive *before* logical locutions are elaborated from it. There is, Brandom writes, »nothing incoherent about a language or stage in the development of a language in which the only vocabulary in play is nonlogical« (Brandom 1994: 383). Thus:

(LCP) It is possible for a practice to qualify as an autonomous discursive practice without deploying any logical vocabulary.

As I announced in the beginning, my aim is to show that Brandom cannot be entitled to this claim because it is incompatible with a set of some of Brandom's most fundamental commitments, (1) and (2) among them. It will be shown in the following sections that according to his own best insights, a practice without logical vocabulary could *not* qualify as

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will bracket this additional condition here. For my purposes, the weaker claim that every logical vocabulary is LX vocabulary is sufficient.

an autonomous discursive practice, because no practice without at least one certain type of LX vocabulary would be PV-sufficient to institute objective propositional contents for its practitioners. In order to show this, I will now turn to Brandom's conception of objectivity.

IV. The Perspectival Nature of Objectivity

As I have argued in section (I), understanding a practice as an autonomous discursive practice amounts to specifying a set of practices which confer propositional contents on performances *for its practitioners*. Understanding a practice in this way means attributing to the practitioners a grasp of objective discursive commitments with representational content. They must therefore have the capacity to *do* something that warrants our ascribing to them the grasp of content of that kind. What could that something possibly be? This is the question to which I will now turn. To answer it, we need to take a closer look at Brandom's notion of scorekeeping in a language game.

In the pragmatist metalanguage Brandom develops for specifying discursive practices, he introduces two types of so-called normative statuses, namely commitments (to do certain things) and entitlements (to do certain things). The concepts of commitment and entitlement are loosely modelled on the more traditional normative concepts of obligation and permission (Brandom 1994: 160). Taking the practice of playing games according to certain rules (norms) as a model of discursive practice, we may say that the normative statuses a practitioner has earned are what commit her to certain moves within the practice and entitle her to other such moves. Normative statuses are supposed to serve as the normative-pragmatist substitutes for what is traditionally thought of as intentional states (Brandom 1994, p. xvii). Where do these normative statuses come from? As an answer to this question, Brandom introduces normative attitudes, of which again there are two: undertakings and attributions. Undertakings and attributions are doings, moves within a normative practice. Attributing a commitment or entitlement to someone is taking or treating her as having that normative status. Undertaking a commitment is licensing others to attribute that commitment to oneself. Normative statuses are to be explained as being instituted by normative attitudes, that is, by the practices of taking or treating practitioners *as* committed or entitled to certain moves within the game (Brandom 1994: 25, 626-628). Practitioners in a language have a certain know-how that consists in their being able to calculate the consequences of each move in the game for the normative statuses of every player, licensing or ruling out certain further moves. These calculations are what their understanding of the moves in the practice consists in. Brandom's metaphor for this process is *to keep the score* of the game. The notion of

scorekeeping is supposed to serve as the pragmatist explainer of the traditional notion of intentional interpretation (Brandom 1994: 508).

Now, according to Brandom, a necessary and sufficient condition for a practitioner to understand the contents of her commitments as objective in practice is that she takes these normative statuses as outrunning each and every one of the attitudes that she or anyone else – or even everybody else – may have towards them. She would have to take it that it is in principle always possible to find out that the inferential consequences of a given commitment are different from what she or even everybody took them to be. This would secure that such scorekeepers would take it as being in principle always possible to detect that, although they took themselves to be entitled to a certain commitment, they were in fact not so entitled. And this is just a reformulation in scorekeeping terms of the familiar point that a certain belief, even if everybody had good reasons for holding it true, still could turn out to be false. In other words, it is just a reformulation of the distinction between (global) warranted assertibility and truth, which is indistinguishable from the very notion of objectivity.

So how could this capacity to understand contents as objective be manifested in a scorekeeping practice by something the scorekeepers *do*? Brandom's answer, in a nutshell, goes like this:[4] He proposes to reconstruct the objectivity of discursive commitments out of two basic features of any discursive scorekeeping practice, first its holism, second its perspectivity or social articulation. The first feature can be derived from the fact that in a scorekeeping practice, normative statuses are holistically defined in terms of each other. The identity of a normative status is constituted by a set of collateral statuses: those to which one consequentially commits oneself by attaining the status in question and those from which that status itself can be consequentially derived. This means that making a change anywhere in a holistically structured system or set of normative statuses – e.g., replacing one commitment with another – alters the entire system and so the identity of every status within it. The second feature is a simple corollary of the very idea that in a scorekeeping practice *every* player is also a scorekeeper who keeps the score of the game on everybody else. There is in general no umpire who has the authority to decide what the real score of the game is – who is committed to what. Rather, a good deal of the game *consists in* the players' comparing and negotiating their respective score tables, trying to straighten out differences, and doing so is, *ipso facto*, a continuation of the game itself.

In such a practice, mastering the game – understanding what the moves of one's fellow players mean, and what they have committed themselves to by making them – becomes a

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[4] The best in-depth account of the story that I am aware of is Loeffler 2005.

matter of navigating the different scorekeeping perspectives. For in order to assess the normative consequences of some practitioner Z acknowledging a commitment p, a scorekeeper Y has no other option to calculate these consequences than to embed p into her own set of collateral commitments (Brandom 1994: 509-517). She might thereby reach the conclusion that she is henceforth entitled to treat Z also as committed to q, since – from her perspective, within her holistic set of commitments – q follows from p. But Z herself might not acknowledge any commitment to q, because her own acknowledged collateral commitments include a commitment to non-q, and she does not acknowledge any connection between these commitments such that commitment to one of them would preclude entitlement to the other. Now, in order to make sense of Z's performance as a player – which is, after all, the point of scorekeeping – Y has to keep a double set of books for Z. She has to attribute to Z a commitment to non-q. After all, this is a commitment Z acknowledges, which is a move in the game. But on the other hand, Y must also – if she is in the business of calculating significances, of making sense of Z's performances at all – attribute to Z a commitment to q, for this is, among a string of other holistic consequential relations, what constitutes the very identity – the content – of Z's status p in the first place. Seen from Y's perspective, q is what Z is in fact committed to because of Z's acknowledging p, whether Z acknowledges this consequential commitment or not.

Attributing a commitment to q as well as to non-q might look either like an irrational attitude of the scorekeeper or like an attribution of irrationality to the player, but in fact it is neither. What is required is rather that one take into account the perspectivity of the game and accordingly distinguish two kinds of attributions of commitments: The first, which Brandom calls *de dicto attribution*, is the attitude of attributing commitments to a player *as acknowledged* by that very player, attributing commitments as seen from that player's perspective, so to speak. The second, called *de re attribution*, is the attitude of attributing commitments to a player *as consequentially undertaken* by her, whether acknowledged or not, as seen from the perspective of the scorekeeper – calculated on the basis of her set of collateral commitments. It is crucial to see that both ways of keeping the score are essential for mastering the game, for if one does not attribute commitments *de re* style, one cannot assess the very identity, the normative significance, of moves in the game at all; and if one does not attribute commitments *de dicto* style, one cannot calculate what another player is actually likely to do next (Brandom 1994: 584-608).

Take, as an example, our two Fregean friends, Rudolf Lingens and Leo Peter, who are having a conversation about their common acquaintance, Dr. Gustav Lauben, who, as we all know,

has been wounded. So both Lingens and Peter are committed to the claim that Dr. Lauben has been wounded. But, additionally, Lingens believes that Dr. Lauben is the only academic living in Jena who graduated from Göttingen, whereas Leo Peter believes that Dr. Lauben obtained his degree from Heidelberg and that the only academic living in Jena who graduated from Göttingen is a hapless mathematician called Gottlob Frege, who is unharmed. Thus, according to Lingens, Leo Peter, by committing himself to the claim that Dr. Lauben has been wounded, has committed himself to the claim that the only academic living in Jena who graduated from Göttingen has been wounded. Of course, Leo Peter does not acknowledge this commitment, and given his set of collateral commitments, he has reasons for not doing so. What Rudolf Lingens has to be able to do in order to manifest his mastery of the objective aspect of the normative statuses he attributes to Leo Peter is to do two things at once: First, he must attribute to Peter in *de re* style a commitment to the claim that the only academic living in Jena who graduated from Göttingen has been wounded, because that is what, according to Lingens, Leo Peter's commitment actually comes down to. But secondly, he must also attribute to Peter in *de dicto* style a commitment and entitlement to the claim that the only academic living in Jena who graduated from Göttingen has *not* been wounded, even if, seen from Lingens's perspective, this is false, because this is what Peter actually and, given his set of collateral commitments, quite rationally believes and will use to guide his further judgements and actions.

In a practice with such a structure, scorekeepers treat each other as being bound by normative statuses outrunning in principle any set of normative consequences that anybody who has these statuses – including the scorekeeper herself – is prepared to acknowledge. From every scorekeeper's perspective, anyone and everyone can be wrong about what the normative statuses they acquire actually demand, about what someone acquiring a certain commitment is *really* committed to (Brandom 1994: 636). Brandom proposes to understand the objectivity of normative statuses – statuses which deserve to count as commitments with representational propositional contents – as instituted by practices in which participants master this kind of differentiation between two ways of attributing commitments to their fellow practitioners or to themselves. On this account, the objectivity – and hence the representational character – of propositional content appears as a function of the irreducible interplay of perspectives that necessarily make up the structure of any set of social practices which suffices to institute any semantic content at all, as »a feature of the structure of discursive intersubjectivity« (Brandom 1994: 599). For Brandom, being able to make a difference in practice between attributing what someone is ready to acknowledge being committed to (from his own perspective) and

attributing what she really is committed to (from the attributor's perspective), is a necessary condition for engaging in anything that deserves to count as an autonomous discursive practice – a practice which institutes objective propositional contents for its practitioners. We can call this, adopting his terminology, a PP-necessity relation. PP-necessity holds if »it is not possible to engage in or exercise one set of practices-or-abilities unless one also engages in or exercises another« (Brandom 2008: 39). I therefore consider myself entitled to understand Brandom to acknowledge the following claim:

(3) Sub-practices that count as attributing commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style are PP-necessary for any autonomous discursive practice P.

V. Normative Attitude Attribution Performances

I now come to the decisive step of my argument.[5] I will explain why I think that a practice can only contain sub-practices of attributing commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style if it makes what I will call normative attitude attribution performances available for the practitioners. Thus I am going to argue for:

(4) Normative attitude attribution performances are PP-necessary for any sub-practice (within a discursive practice P) of attributing commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style.

While all the three claims I have attributed to Brandom so far are claims he officially acknowledges, he does emphatically *not* endorse this one. My aim, however, will be to show that he is nevertheless consequentially committed to it. This will turn out to be crucial for my claim that, given this commitment, Brandom could not be entitled to his commitment to the Layer Cake Picture.

The most important point to note for the following discussion is that when we talk about the capacity to attribute normative statuses in two ways or styles, *de re* and *de dicto*, we are talking about the capacity to attribute (that is, to take a normative attitude towards) not normative statuses, but other normative attitudes. For, as I have shown, attributing a commitment *de dicto* style is attributing it as a commitment that the interpretee has acknowledged. Attributing a commitment *de re* style is attributing it as a commitment that the interpretee has consequentially undertaken (without necessarily acknowledging it). So attributing a commitment *de dicto* style is attributing the attributee's acknowledgment of the commitment while attributing the same commitment *de re* style is attributing the attributee's

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consequential undertaking of the commitment. But attributing, undertaking and acknowledging are normative *attitudes*. So in attributing commitments in *de re* or *de dicto* style, we attribute acknowledgements and undertakings, thereby adopting normative attitudes towards normative attitudes. Therefore, a practice manifests the attribution of commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style only if it manifests the adoption of normative attitudes towards normative attitudes.

Keeping this connection in mind, let us now go back to the following question: What could a scorekeeper possibly *do* in order to warrant our ascription to her of the capacity to adopt normative attitudes towards normative attitudes by making a difference between attributions of commitments another scorekeeper has acknowledged and those he has consequentially but unknowingly undertaken? My decisive claim is that this is something that cannot be done implicitly in a scorekeeping practice. It can only be achieved where scorekeepers have at their disposal a special performance type that counts as *making* that difference. Attributing normative attitudes is only possible where special means for such attributions have been elaborated, in other words, if a practice includes sub-practices which can be specified as *normative attitude attribution performances*.[6]

To see this, we must remember that scorekeeping in Brandom's sense is, on the fundamental level, not an activity that practitioners would be engaged in *over and above* treating others and themselves as being committed and entitled to certain moves in the game. Rather, scorekeeping is *implicit* in the way practitioners engage in the game practice itself. The way the score is kept by a player manifests itself in nothing else than what normative attitudes she adopts towards her fellow players, what moves she takes them to be entitled and committed to (Brandom 1994: 629; cf. Brandom 2005: 241). For example, let us imagine a simple, pre-logical scorekeeping practice in which undertaking a certain commitment is manifested by making a certain move in the game, say, playing out a yellow card. Let us also assume that the rules of the game state that anyone who plays out the yellow card must, as the game continues, be ready to play out the blue card, but is precluded from playing out the green card. The players then can implicitly treat a certain player S as being committed to whatever commitment is undertaken by playing out the yellow card (call it the »yellow-card-commitment«) by treating her as committed to (that is, protesting against her refusal to) playing out the blue card, while not entitling her to (that is, protesting against her) playing out the green card. As one can see, these scorekeeping activities proceed implicitly – they consist

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[6] Normative attitude attribution performances in my terms are what Laurier calls »higher-order practical attitudes« (Laurier 2005: 153).

in simple cheering and booing. In a more sophisticated case, they could consist of more cards being played out. Let us imagine that the playing out of the yellow card by S commits her fellow players to play out the red card (if they have it). This would turn playing out the red card into another way for them to attribute the yellow-card-commitment to S. In such a case, scorekeeping involves the making of more moves in the game, but is still implicit, not explicit scorekeeping. For what scorekeepers in such a purely implicit scorekeeping practice could *not* do is to explicitly *ascribe* the yellow-card-commitment to S by presenting the yellow card themselves. In the practice as it has been described so far, that move would not be understandable as the explicit ascription of the yellow-card-commitment to S, but only as the simple undertaking of the yellow-card-commitment by the other players.[7] In the absence of the means to explicitly ascribe said commitment to S, they could neither mention nor re-use S's means of undertaking that commitment in order to explicitly ascribe it to her. If there were an explicit scorekeeper among these players who tried to use the yellow card for an explicit ascription of a commitment to a fellow, she would encounter problems very similar to the one encountered by the high priest in Monty Pythons's *Life of Brian* who, famously, wants to ascribe the crime of uttering the name of the Lord to a convict, but in doing so unfortunately quotes what the convict had said and so mentions the very same forbidden name: he gets punished in the convict's place by a crowd of implicit scorekeepers who cannot see the difference.[8]

But now it is easy to see that implicit scorekeeping, as exemplified in our fictitious card game, could not suffice for players to manifest a grasp of the difference between *de re* and *de dicto* attributions of commitments – as it must, if the practice is to count as instituting objective propositional content for the practitioners. Grasp of such content, as we have seen above, consists in scorekeepers standardly attributing to their fellows commitments to p (*de re*) *and* commitments to non-p (*de dicto*) at the same time. But how to do this if – like in our example – the only means to keep the score are implicit in the moves one has at one's disposal to go on with the game, like cheering and booing, or playing out more cards? In that case, scorekeepers

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[7] It is no use here to appeal to the intuition that the other players could flash the yellow card and *point* it at P, or similar things, in order to ascribe the yellow-card-commitment to her. If the meaning of the pointing gesture is to be understood as „The player I am pointing at is committed to whatever commitment is undertaken by playing out the card I hold in my other hand", then the introduction of the pointing gesture into the practice *is* the introduction of a normative attitude attribution performance, i.e. a piece of explicit scorekeeping.

[8] I do of course apologise for not being able to resist the inclusion of such an example in a scholarly article. It is, however, a quite Brandomian example, even if it features throwing with stones instead of beating with sticks (cf. Brandom 1994: 43).

would have to cheer *and* protest against S's playing out the green card, and to accept *and* protest against S's refusal to play out the blue card, or to play out *and* not play out the red card, all at the same time. How to rescue this practice from collapsing into mere arbitrariness? The only way out is to introduce a performance type which signals the way in which the attribution is to be taken, which manifests that, e.g., a certain commitment is attributed *de re* style, but not *de dicto* style. But this is equivalent to introducing a performance type which counts, not as attributing a certain normative status *simpliciter*, but as making the difference between attributing that status *as* acknowledged and attributing it *as* consequentially undertaken, which is the same as *attributing* the *acknowledging* or the consequential *undertaking* of the status in question. Since, as I showed above, attributing, undertaking and acknowledging are normative attitudes, this is equivalent to introducing a performance type which makes it possible to differentiate, in the behaviour of scorekeepers, towards which normative attitude on the part of the attributee the attributor's own normative attitude is directed. In other words, it is introducing a performance type which *counts* as adopting a normative attitude towards a normative attitude – a normative attitude attribution performance. Therefore, without normative attitude attribution performances, there is no autonomous discursive practice, because, by Brandom's own lights, being able to manifest the adoption of normative attitudes towards normative attitudes is what manifesting a grasp of the objectivity of propositional content consists in. Introducing normative attitude attribution performances, however, is introducing means of explicit scorekeeping, i.e. explicit *ascription* performances. Brandom himself asserts that »the capacity to attribute attitudes, rather than statuses (…) depends on the availability of explicitating ascriptional locutions« (Brandom 2005: 244).

This completes my case for ascribing claim (4) to Brandom. How would Brandom react to this ascription? In his response to Daniel Laurier, he accepts that in order to manifest a grasp of objective propositional content, a practitioner would have »to be able to make (*in practice*, since *ex hypothesi* no ascriptional locution is yet available) a distinction between what he takes someone else to be committed to and what this someone takes himself to be committed to« (Brandom 2005: 245). However, he denies that this would require engaging in normative attitude attribution performances, i.e. mastering different attitudes towards normative attitudes. According to him, mastering different attitudes towards normative *statuses*, e.g. between attributing and undertaking commitments and entitlements, suffices for exhibiting a grasp of the contents of one's commitments as objective. He writes: »[I]t is enough that I can distinguish between the commitment I attribute to X and what X is in fact committed to. Thus

attributing *knowledge* is doing three things (corresponding to the three elements of the justified true belief account of knowledge): attributing a commitment (…), attributing an entitlement (…), and *undertaking* the commitment myself (…). These are all attitudes towards *statuses* (of commitment and entitlement), not towards *attitudes*. Since each interlocutor can adopt all these statuses, each one can take it that someone else is committed to something that, though they may be entitled to that commitments, is not *true*« (Brandom 2005: 245).

But this line of defence will not do because it misses the point of the argument as I have rehearsed it. I have no quarrel with Brandom's claim that we can capture the distinction between attributing a *justified* belief and a *justified true* belief (hence knowledge) in terms of the complex normative statuses he describes (for more on this account, cf. Brandom 1994: 199-205). But that account only works on the basis of presupposing exactly what was called into question – namely, that the commitments in question are recognisable as *beliefs* in the first place. The account is therefore question-begging if offered as an answer to the question what might entitle us to count the commitments undertaken and attributed in a certain practice as beliefs at all. For the hybrid normative statuses Brandom outlines could obviously be realised in a pre-conceptual, non-discursive scorekeeping game like the fictitious card game I sketched above. Evidently, in such a game, a player could exhibit the capacity to take it that some other player is entitled to undertake commitments (like the playing out of certain cards) to which she is not entitled and which therefore she cannot undertake, while in other cases, she could attribute a certain commitment plus entitlement to another player and undertake the same commitment herself. This, it seems to me, is a fair description of the complex normative statuses we find in many *real* card games. But this of course does not make it the case that we would be entitled to count the moves in those games as being propositionally contentful speech acts. If we want a story to spell out what would entitle us to do *that*, we would be thrown back to the story told above – a story about what would manifest a grasp of the difference between *de re* and *de dicto* attributions of commitments, which would lead us back to normative attitude attribution performances, which are explicit normative attitude ascriptions.

VI. The Necessity of Logical Vocabulary

If what I have argued in the preceding section is correct, it follows that, by Brandom's own lights, any practice which is intelligible as an autonomous discursive practice necessarily includes a set of subpractices which count as *explicit* normative attitude ascriptions. And this brings me to the final step of my argument. For it is another official acknowledgment of

Brandom's that explicit normative attitude ascriptions form a species of logical vocabulary, in the broad sense introduced in *Making It Explicit*: »the capacity to attribute attitudes, rather than statuses (…) is a logical capacity« (Brandom 2005: 244; cf. Brandom 1994: 639-640). More precisely, normative-attitude-ascribing locutions form a type of normative LX vocabulary, that is to say, their function is to make explicit what subjects *do* when they make certain moves within a basic discursive practice.

Brandom has a worked-out account of which real-life vocabularies are instances of such explicit logical scorekeeping devices, namely intentional and representational vocabulary. By »intentional vocabulary«, he refers to the kind of locutions we use to engage in the explicit intentional interpretation of speakers and thinkers, i.e. propositional attitude ascription vocabulary like »says that«, »believes that«, and so on. Intentional vocabulary allows practitioners not only to treat others as being committed to certain things in practice, but to *say* that they are, and »[i]n virtue of this explicitating expressive role, propositional-attitude-ascribing locutions deserve to count as logical vocabulary« (Brandom 1994: 499). By »representational vocabulary«, Brandom refers to expressions like »of« and »about«, as they are used in *de re* ascriptions of assertions and beliefs like »He says *about* Gustav Lauben that he has been wounded«, or »He believes *of* Gottlob Frege that he obtained his degree from Heidelberg«. These expressions make explicit the representational aspect of propositional contents precisely by manifesting the difference between *de re* ascriptions and *de dicto* ascriptions of such contents (Brandom 1994: 546-547, 584-586).

I therefore take it that Brandom acknowledges the following claim:

(5) Normative attitude attribution performances are PV-sufficient to deploy logical vocabulary.

So let me sum up my argument. I have attributed the following five claims to Brandom:

(1) A practice P qualifies as an autonomous discursive practice (a language) if and only if at least some of its performances can be understood by the practitioners themselves as bearing objective propositional content.

(2) A practice P* qualifies as deploying a logical vocabulary V* if and only if V* is VP-sufficient to specify a basic discursive practice P (deploying a basic vocabulary V) which in turn is PP-sufficient for the elaboration of P* (i.e., from which P* can be elaborated), hence if and only if P* deploys an LX vocabulary.

(3) Sub-practices that count as attributing commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style are PP-necessary for any autonomous discursive practice P.

(4) Normative attitude attribution performances are PP-necessary for any sub-practice (within a discursive practice P) of attributing commitments in *de re* and *de dicto* style.

(5) Normative attitude attribution performances are PV-sufficient to deploy logical vocabulary.

I take Brandom to be committed to all these claims – officially so in the cases of (1), (2), (3) and (5), consequentially so in the case of (4). However, from these five claims a sixth one evidently follows:

(6) Sub-practices that count as deploying logical vocabulary are PP-necessary for any autonomous discursive practice.

In other words: It follows from Brandom's own commitments that there could not be an autonomous discursive practice which would not include sub-practices which are PV-sufficient to deploy at least a certain type of logical vocabulary. If Brandom, however, is consequentially committed to (6), he cannot be entitled to the Layer Cake Picture, because

(LCP) It is possible for a practice to qualify as an autonomous discursive practice without deploying any logical vocabulary.

is strictly incompatible with (6). And this is what I set out to show.

VII. Dialectical Expressivism

So what is to be done in order to resolve this incompatibility within Brandom's commitments? Faced with this question, I part company with Daniel Laurier.

According to the Layer Cake Picture, an autonomous discursive practice should be intelligible whose practitioners could be understood as saying something even though they could not say that they say something. Brandom is admirably clear about that: »The logical locutions whose expressive role is to make the adoption of such pragmatic attitudes explicit in the form of claimable contents – propositional-attitude-ascribing vocabulary such as the regimented ‚…is committed to the claim that …' or its vernacular correlate ‚…believes that…' – form an optional superstratum whose expressive role can be understood in terms of what is implicit in ground-level linguistic practice, but which is not required for, or presupposed by, such practice« (Brandom 1994: 629; compare Brandom 2005: 241). Since in Brandom's view grasping a concept is equivalent to mastering the use of a word, endorsing the Layer Cake Picture is tantamount to claiming that one could have beliefs without having the concept of belief, or rather, that one could be the bearer of a propositionally contentful normative status without having the concept of such a normative status. Laurier and I agree that this commitment puts Brandom in sharp opposition to Donald Davidson's slogan that »in order to

have any propositional attitude at all, it is necessary to have the concept of a belief, to have a belief about some belief« (Davidson 2001: 104). However, contrary to Laurier, I do not see the anti-Davidsonian commitment to (LCP) as a »most welcome feature of Brandom's theory« (Laurier 2005: 149). Laurier's recommendation is to secure entitlement for it by making appropriate adjustments among Brandom's other commitments. By contrast, it is not the lack of entitlement for (LCP), it is this commitment itself which I find regrettable. In other words, I think that Brandom, who has always presented his philosophy of language as being broadly Davidsonian in spirit (Brandom 2002: 6-7), in clinging to the Layer Cake Picture, is not yet Davidsonian enough. My recommendation, therefore, would be to give up the Layer Cake Picture as being incompatible with his own best insights. That would be tantamount to embracing Davidson's slogan. It would also be tantamount to embracing the Kantian idea that if you want to account for full-scale objectivity, you need to account for full-scale subjectivity, too. There can be no propositional thought, no thinking of objects, without the conceptual capacities needed to attach the »I think that« – and, of course, as Davidsonians would add, the »she thinks that« – to one's thoughts.

I do not have the space to even begin to explain why I believe that this way of resolving the incompatibility between claims (1) to (6) and the Layer Cake Picture is to be preferred. Instead, I want to close by pointing out what would follow and – equally important – what would *not* follow from this move for Brandom's pragmatist account of original intentionality. Rejecting the Layer Cake Picture *would* imply the rejection of at least two of Brandom's official claims: »Can there be *inferential* practices that do not include the use of *logical* vocabulary? (MIE: Yes.)« and »Can there be implicit conceptual norms (including practical ones) without the *normative* vocabulary needed to make them explicit? (MIE: Yes.)« (Brandom 2005: 241). It would also imply the rejection of his claim that there could be »rational but not yet logical creatures« (Brandom 2005: 242). A scorekeeper can only be credited with a grasp of the objectivity of her commitments if she is engaged in logical practices of explicitly keeping the score, capable of using explicit ascriptions of attitudes and statuses. Brandom suggests that practitioners in a hypothetical »discursive practice that is rational but not yet logical«, granted that they »would have no way to reason or resolve disputes about their inferential practices«, still could »claim that things are thus-and-so, even though they were deprived of this dimension of critical self-consciousness« (Brandom 2010: 319). But, as I have shown, in the light of Brandom's own commitments we could *not* understand practitioners without semantic self-consciousness as grasping *that things are thus-and-so*, if this formulation is taken to mean that they understand their own performances as

being endowed with propositional contents. Therefore we could also not understand such creatures as *claiming* such things.[9] So contrary to what Brandom suggests, it is not in the first instance the lack of logical vocabulary that keeps these hypothetical practitioners from reasonably resolving disputes about their »inferential practices«, but rather the fact that they are *not engaged* in any inferential practices – given that, as Brandom sensibly maintains, inference and assertion (i.e., making claims *that things are thus and so*) come as a package (Brandom 2005: 235). Pace the Layer Cake Picture, there could not be a grounding layer of pre-logical autonomous discursive practice, instituting propositional contents, while the second, logical layer merely made explicit features of discursive practice implicitly constituted on ground level. Rather, before the advent of logical vocabulary, the norms on ground level could not be understood as instituting propositional contents at all. On the view I recommend, there may have been norms on ground level, but no conceptual norms (not even implicit). Thus it is neither ontologically true – speaking of reference –that there can *be* an intentionality-conferring autonomous discursive practice without logical-intentional vocabulary, nor is it expressively true – speaking of sense – that we could *understand* what an autonomous discursive practice is without understanding what logical-intentional vocabulary is.

What would *not* follow from the rejection of the Layer Cake Picture, however, is a rejection of the expressivist account of logic – if that account is adequately modified. I want to stress this point, as it might make the proposal to reject the Layer Cake Picture palatable to expressivists about logic. Expressivism about logic, as I have introduced this concept here, maintains that a practice P* qualifies as deploying logical vocabulary if and only if the vocabulary is explicative of (VP-sufficient to specify) a basic discursive practice P from which P* can be elaborated. Now the Layer Cake Picture might appear to be a simple and unavoidable corollary of expressivism in this sense. For, if logical vocabulary is a vocabulary deployed by practices that must be elaborated from a basic *discursive* practice (which it is then used to specify), doesn't this simply imply that the basic practice, from which the logical-vocabulary-deploying practices are to be elaborated, must have *already* been discursive, independently of the introduction of logical vocabulary? But although I admit that this is a natural way of understanding the expressivist claim, it is not mandatory. Let me call

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[9] *We*, as fully discursive, i.e. rational and logical interpreters, could *use* the vocalisations of such creatures as constituting empirical evidence for *our* claims that things are thus-and-so. But this puts the creatures in question exactly on a par with rusting iron bars, thermostats, and parrots trained to reliably detect the presence of red things, all of which are emphatically *not* in the business of making claims, according to Brandom's own standards.

this version of expressivism which goes hand in hand with the Layer Cake Picture »simple expressivism«. Simple expressivism is the thesis that logical vocabulary makes explicit features of a discursive practice whose discursiveness, i.e. contentfulness, was, so to speak, always already there. I want to argue that one can understand expressivism in a way which is compatible with the rejection of the Layer Cake Picture.

Here's how. First, even after rejecting the Layer Cake Picture, we can still hold that the practice P* is *elaborated* from a more basic normative scorekeeping practice P. We only would have to conceive of P as originally consisting of *pre*-conceptual normative statuses and attitudes. But, secondly, if we assume that it is precisely the introduction of the elaborated practice P* into the basic practice P which is necessary and sufficient to turn the complex practice consisting of P *and* P* into an autonomous discursive practice, we can also still hold that in the very moment (call it T_0) in which the elaborated practice P* is introduced into an otherwise sufficiently fine-structured basic practice P, *the whole thing turns discursive*. Thus, thirdly, at any time *after* T_0, we can also still say that the basic practice P from which P* was elaborated, now (because of what happened at T_0) indeed deserves to count as a basic *discursive* practice (which it was not before T_0). Therefore, fourthly and finally, we can also still hold, at any time *after* T_0, that the elaborated practice P* deploys a logical, i.e. explicitating *metavocabulary*, for we can now (after T_0) understand the normative statuses instituted in what before T_0 used to be the non-discursive basic practice P as being propositionally contentful, and the normative statuses instituted in the elaborated practice P* as *specifying* normative and other relations between the basic statuses of P. This entire way of talking is compatible with taking it that the very same basic normative statuses, before T_0, i.e. before the elaboration of the logical possibility of specifying them, could not have been understood as what we take them to be now – propositionally contentful states.

There is nothing mysterious about such a story of the evolvement of discursive practices out of the non-discursive. Consider an analogy: Think of how the birth of a child at a certain moment in time (T_0) transforms the status of a man and a woman into being a father and a mother, in a way which makes it quite correct to say that the parents – *as* parents – were born on the very same day as their child, even though they pre-existed it and are responsible for its nascency. This is just to say that before the birth of the child they were not a mother and a father. But there is nothing paradoxical or unintelligible about the fact that the child (once it has grown up and learned to talk) can say things like »My mother, 10 years before I was born, travelled to India«, even though it is clear that at the time of the voyage or at any time before T_0, nobody could have understood the very same person which would come to be the child's

mother *as* being the child's mother. In a similar way, I would like to suggest, practices deploying an elaborated-explicitating vocabulary, rather than *simply* specifying a basic practice that was discursive in itself, should be regarded as a necessary element of a set of practices which *as a whole* counts as instituting what the LX sub-practices, in the same move, count as specifying, but what without that specification would not yet have been what it can be specified as now.

Let me call this way of understanding the notion of »making it explicit«, with a vaguely Hegelian ring, *dialectical expressivism*. Dialectical expressivism is expressivism without the Layer Cake Picture. It is a version of expressivism which does not assume that the process of making something explicit leaves the thing being made explicit unchanged. Dialectical expressivism embraces a thought that should be welcome to holists, namely that the introduction of new elements into a system (be it a set of normative practices or a family) cannot be understood as an event which simply adds a second floor to a building, so to speak, leaving everything on the ground floor as it is. Rather, it has to be seen as an event which transforms the status of *all* the elements of the system. Therefore, rejecting the Layer Cake Picture is not to deny that light dawns gradually over the whole. It just acknowledges that more of the whole than simple expressivism assumes has to be lit in order to count as enlightened.

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