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Indexicals and Communicative Affordances

Abstract

Various data from communication that does not occur face-to-face are taken to be problematic for Kaplan's account of indexical expressions, as is the case with the so-called answering machine paradox. One fix, developed by Sidelle (1991) and Briciu (2018), is the remote utterance view: recording artifacts are means by which speakers perform utterances at a distance, just as by means of other artifacts agents performs other types of actions at a distance. This view has faced an important objection, namely that remote utterances lead to Moorean paradoxes. In this paper, I defend the remote utterance view against this objection and further develop the view. I argue that worries about Moorean paradoxes can easily be dispelled if we take into consideration the artifactual nature of recording devices, their materiality, and the communicative affordances they bring about. In the first section, we'll present the answering machine paradox and give a brief overview of the remote utterance view. The second section presents the objection against the view, while the third gives a detailed rejoinder to the objection. Answering this objection is important also because it allows us to explore some underdeveloped aspects of the remote utterance view. First, I will discuss how the theorist calibrates her model with the data she seeks to explain and predict. Secondly, I will argue that speech acts performed via recording devices have different felicity conditions than their oral counterparts. I conclude with a short discussion of some semantic and pragmatic consequences of the view.

Key words: Indexicals; Kaplan, Answering machine paradox, Artifacts, Moore's paradox; speech-acts.

1. The paradox and the remote utterance view

It has been long noticed (for example by Vision 1985, Sidelle 1991, Predelli 1998) that Kaplanian semantics gives unsatisfactory predictions when it comes to intuitions regarding the use of

recorded sentences. More precisely, the following three theses that Kaplan is committed to give rise to what Sidelle (1991) has dubbed the answering machine paradox¹:

(A) The referent of indexical expressions, relative to a context of utterance, is determined by evaluating their character at that context of utterance,

(B) The character “I” is a function that yields the agent of the context of utterance, the character of “here” is a function that yields the location of the context of utterance, and the character of “now” as a function yields the time of the context of utterance

(C) The agent is always located at the context of the utterance at the time of the utterance.

Consequently, (1) is true at every context of utterance.

(1) I am here now

However, given standard semantics for negation, it follows that there is no context of utterance at which (2) is true.

(2) I am not here now.

Contradicting Kaplan's claims, the widespread use of recorded messages suggests that there are indeed true uses of (2). For instance, if we find a post-it note on someone's office door with (2) written on it, we deem (2) to be true if that person is not in her office at that time. Similarly, if we call that person's office and (2) is played back by their voicemail or answering machine, we judge it to be true if that person is not in the office at the time of the call. So, contrary to Kaplan's claims, there are true uses of (2), assuming that intuitions about the truth value of (2) when employed via recording devices carry semantic significance.

We use recording devices² when face to face communication is not possible. There are two types of situations where the use of recording devices is handy, and these situations give rise to two different types of data that must be accounted for. In one, the speaker wants to communicate something about her *time* and *place* to an absent audience, as in when a tourist video-records herself in front of a famous landmark and utters

(3) I am here now! I am really impressed.

¹ Predelli (2005) and Briciu (2018) provide a more detailed exposition of the puzzle

² I use “recording device” as an umbrella term for any kind of artifact used in recording linguistic expressions: writing, video and audio devices, etc.

In (3) “here” and “now” refer to the place and time of her recording.

The second situation occurs when the speaker wants to communicate something about a time and place at which she is absent to an audience present at that time and place, as when one inscribes (4) on a post-it note and puts it on her office door while she is away:

(4) I am not here now. Come back later!

In (4) “here” and “now” refer to the time and place of the decoding, irrespective of where the recording was made.

Notice that whether indexicals are interpreted as referring to the time of recording or to the time of decoding has nothing to do with the nature of the recording device used, as opposed to what some authors claim³. Consider the following example (adapted from Recanati 1995, p. 38 and Sherman 2015, p. 599)

(5a) Today, I met with my lawyer to go over all the details before making this tape
(recorded in a video testament)

(5b) Today, you all received a phone call from my attorney. I am dead, my dear children,
and you are now rich (recorded in a video testament)

In (5a) “today” refers to the day of the recording, while in (5b) it refers to the day of the decoding. Accounts that predict that indexicals should be interpreted exclusively to the context of recording or to the context of decoding, depending on the nature of the recording device, give wrong predictions.

The solution proposed by the remote utterance view (Sidelle, 1991; Briciu 2018) is to give up (C) – the agent need not always be at the time and place of the context. Briefly put, the remote utterance view makes the following claims. Recording devices are artifacts by which speakers communicate

³ Corazza, Fish and Govertt (2002) claim that there are several non-linguistic conventions associated with the use of each type of recording device. There is a social convention associated with writing letters and postcards, according to which we interpret indexicals occurring in letters and postcards to refer to the time/place of the recording. There is a different social convention associated with the use of answering machines and voicemails according to which we interpret indexicals recorded on such devices to refer to the time of the playback. As (5a,b) show, this gets the data wrong. For more examples supporting the claim see Briciu (2018).

with remote audiences, that is with audiences that do not share their location and/or time. They manage to do so because recording devices allow speakers to perform communicative actions at a distance, more precisely they allow speakers to perform utterances at a distance. With respect to the paradigmatic example, the remote utterance view claims that when one leaves a post-it note with (2) written on it while out of office, every time the note is read she utters (2). Thus, according to this view, if a speaker *S* records (2) on her office voice mail and programs it to be played when someone calls while she's out of office, every time someone calls and (2) is being played *S* utters (2) via the voicemail. This matches our intuitions: if (2) is being played while *S* is out of office, (2) is true. The indexicals in (2) are to be evaluated at the context of utterance, as it is standard in Kaplanian semantics. But, one might wonder, why should we claim that an utterance of (2) occurs when (2) is being played in the intended time interval (the context of decoding) and not when (2) was recorded by *S* on the voicemail (the context of recording). The distinction between mere tokens and utterances is important here. When *S* records (2) so to be played at a later time, *S* doesn't utter it, but merely produces a token of (2). Tokens are physical realizations of expression types, more precisely, they are concrete particulars: noises, inscriptions, gesture, etc. Utterances are intentional acts, more precisely communicative acts, performed by agents at particular times and locations. For example, when someone crafts a sign used by the traffic police that reads STOP she is not uttering "Stop", but merely produces a token of it. Now, if the sign is later used by a traffic officer to direct vehicles, in using that token the officer is uttering "Stop"⁴. The distinction is highlighted also by the fact that one token can be used to perform multiple utterances, as when different traffic officers use the same stop sign on multiple occasions to direct the traffic.

Utterances are *communicative acts*, they enact communicative intentions and it is up to the speaker when and where they are performed. Then, likewise, when *S* records (2) on her office voicemail and programs it, she is not uttering (2) but merely produces a token of (2). If later on, someone calls the office and the voicemail is activated while *S* is out of office, *S* utters (2) with the help of the recording device. What is relevant for the semantic profile of "here" and "now" is not the context where they are merely tokened, but the context of utterance: (2) is to be semantically evaluated at the context of utterance. Recorded tokens have a certain permanence that allows them

⁴ The distinction between tokens and utterances is common in the literature. For more examples and discussions see Searle (1977, p 200), Perry (2003, p 378; 2006, p 317) and Korta and Perry (2011, pp 71-73).

to be used to produce utterances at a distance (as is the case with some uses of recording devices) or to produce multiple utterances (as is the case with the stop sign). As Searle has pointed out, „this permanence distinguishes the written from the spoken word” and it is this “what makes it possible to separate the utterance from its origin”. (Searle 1977, p. 200).

The view can explain the multitude of data coming from the use of recording devices and it can easily account for the difference between (5a) and (5b).

(5a) Today, I met with my lawyer to go over all the details before making this tape
(recorded in a video testament)

(5b) Today, you all received a phone call from my attorney. I am dead, my dear children,
and you are now rich (recorded in a video testament)

Intuitively, when one records (5a), within the scenario described above, one intends to speak about events that occurred that very same day, so “today” refers to the day of the recording. We can make sense of this in the following way: one utters (5a) and records the utterance so it reaches a future audience. In the second scenario, when one records (5b), in a video testament, one intends to speak about a future event: an event occurring after one’s death. In this case, „today” doesn’t refer to the day of the recording, but rather to that day when the video is being played according to the speaker’s wishes and preparations. In this case, when one records (5b) one is merely producing a token of (5b). When this token is later used, according to her preparations, she utters (5b). I’ll make sense of this difference by saying that in (5a) one records her utterance to be remotely entertained by an absent audience, while in (5b) one performs a remote utterance at a time and place she is absent. Once the distinction between tokens and utterances is in place, it naturally follows that they can be employed in recording devices in distinct ways. We can record our utterances, as for example when, a politician’s speech is recorded in newspapers to be read by audiences not present at her speech. Or, we can inscribe or record tokens so we can use them with the help of recording devices at times and places we are absent.

As it is the case with recording devices, complications arise. Imagine that the speaker’s wishes are not respected and someone plays the video before the speaker dies (or, after she dies but not on the day her inheritors met the lawyers). The view would predict that this is a mere tokening of (5b) and that the *S* did not utter (5b) on that tokening. The speaker did not intend for the video to be played on *that* day, and she did not intend to speak about events occurring on *that* day.

Admittedly, intuitions are not very strong. But the case is similar with that of lost notes (Sidelle 1991, p. 537). Consider the scenario where *S* leaves her office and inscribes (2) on a post-it note which she pins on her office door. Right after she leaves, a strong wind blows the note off before anyone can read it and the note is lost. Years later it is found miles away from *S*'s office and read. Our intuitions tell us, in this case, that *S* did not utter (2) at the time and place where the note was found for she had no intention to speak about that time and location. Nor did she utter (2) when she inscribed it on the post-it note: she merely tokened (2).

When and where does an utterance take place? Since utterances are intentional acts of communication, they occur only at the time and place where the speaker intended them to, if all goes according to her plan. That is, when *S* records (2) at time t_0 with the intention to inform the audience about her whereabouts at time t_1 , and prepares the device to token (2) at time t_1 , then *S* utters (2) at t_1 if the recording device tokens (2) at t_1 . But if, in the meanwhile, the recording gets destroyed and (2) isn't tokened at t_1 , then *S* doesn't utter (2) at t_1 . Likewise, if there is a glitch in the system and the recording device tokens (2) at times not intended by *S*, then *S* did not utter (2) at those time moments. The latter count as mere tokening of (2), just like the case of lost notes. This bodes well not only with our intuitions, but also with our knowledge of what recording devices are: artifacts that we can set up in motion to perform actions at a distance. If they work as the agent intends them to, then she successfully acts via them. If not, then her communicative acts misfire. The view, I must emphasize, is extremely conservative with respect to Kaplanian semantics. First, sentences are to be evaluated at the context of utterance, and not at other contexts, as in Predelli's proposal (2002, 2005). Secondly, the semantic profile of indexical expressions and their semantic evaluation remains standard Kaplanian: there is no need for multiple characters and meta-characters (Michaelson 2014), no need to posit lexical ambiguity (Smith 1989), no need to posit different type of uses for indexical expressions (Ciecierski 2023), no need to relativize semantics to special conventions tied to specific recording devices (Corazza, Fish and Gorvett 2002).

2. Remote utterances and Moorean paradoxes

As (5b) shows, the remote utterance view entails the possibility of truthful post-mortem

assertions⁵. Sorensen (2007) argues that truthful post-mortem assertions are impossible, which means that the remote utterance view gives wrong predictions about (5b) and has some untenable consequences. In his own words: “a speaker can only assert what he intends others to take him to believe. This explains the self-defeating nature of ‘It is raining but I do not believe it’. Although the sentence is consistent, one cannot consistently assert it. In general, you cannot assert a proposition that plainly implies that you lack the psychological state you aim to evince. A person who is dead plainly has no beliefs. That is why it is self-refuting for someone to say ‘I am dead’,” (Sorensen 2007, p. 163). Briefly put, one cannot truly assert “I am dead”, as in (5b), for in order to do that, one must believe at the time of the assertion the proposition asserted, namely that one is dead. But dead people have no psychological states.

Sorensen’s objection is, in fact, twofold. First, it claims that the remote utterance view involves an implausible, or even self-defeating, view of assertion. Secondly, it claims that the remote utterance view cannot account for the intuitive truth of (5b) when recorded in a video testament. An essential assumption for a Moorean paradox to obtain is to claim that the felicity conditions of assertion require that if *S* asserts *p*, then *S* must believe *p* at the time of assertion. As Moore himself put it “when a man asserts anything that might be true or false, he implies that he himself, *at the time of speaking*, believes or knows the thing in question” (Moore 1942, 541, emphasis added). Why are truthful postmortem assertions self-defeating? If the speaker truthfully asserts the content of “I am dead”, then she implies that she believes she is dead. Given that her assertion is truthful, then she is dead. But if she is dead, she has no beliefs, therefore she doesn’t believe that she is dead. It seems that truthful postmortem assertions lead to a Moorean paradox of the ommissive form: *p* and *I don’t believe that p*. There is a long line of authors who take Moore to have shown us something about the nature of assertion, namely that one asserts that *p* just in case one purports to express a belief that *p* (see Williams 2015, p 14-15). If truthful postmortem assertions are self-defeating, while the remote utterance view entails that they are not, then the remote utterance view is committed to an implausible view of assertion⁶.

⁵ Not all utterances have illocutionary force, that is, not all involve a speech-act. Nevertheless, many of them do. If so, Sorensen is right to point out the the remote utterance view entails the possibility of post-mortem assertions.

⁶ As one reviewer has pointed out, this assumes that Moorean assertions are not acceptable. But one *can* accept Moorean assertions if one is ready to accept certain philosophical positions. Hájek (2007) has argued that a number of philosophical positions are implicitly committed to Moorean assertions: for example, if one claims that there are no beliefs, or if one claims that there is no truth, or that there are truth-gluts (sentences are both true and false), or that

The second part of the objection follows straightforwardly: if truthful postmortem assertions are impossible because they are self-defeating, then the remote utterance view doesn't really solve the answering machine puzzle because it cannot account for the intuitive truth of (5b) when recorded in a video testament. More precisely, according to the remote utterance view, in the described scenario (5b) is true because it is uttered via de recording device by the agent after her death. But if such utterances involve self-defeating assertions, as Sorensen claims, how is the intuitive truth of (5b) to be explained? Hence an alternative proposal for (5b) is needed, claims Sorensen: one that can account for the intuitive truth of (5b) in recorded messages, but where such uses lack illocutionary force.

If it is for the remote utterance view to remain a plausible position, the objection must be addressed. I will argue that once we understand the artifactual nature of recording devices and how we use them to communicate, recorded sentences like (5b) can be used to perform truthful assertions without paradox.

Answering Sorensen's objection is important also because it allows us to explore several underdeveloped aspects of the remote utterance view. First, it allows to explore the artifactual nature of recording devices and to explain the way in which face-to-face communication differs from communication that takes place via recording devices. More precisely, it allows us to see how speech acts that are performed in face-to-face conversations have slightly different felicity conditions than their counterparts which are performed with the help of recording devices. I will argue that the felicity conditions of the latter are sensitive to the artifactual nature and the materiality of the device. This, to my knowledge, is an underexplored area in philosophy of language but the claims made here align with results regarding how certain speech acts depend on the medium in which they occur (Kukla *forthcoming*).

Moreover, analyzing this objection gives the opportunity to explain why the proper solution to the answering machine puzzle lies not in complicating the semantics, but rather in the pre-semantic

there are truth-gaps (sentences lack truth-values), etc. In a sense, adopting any such position would offer an easy way out of the charge, but it would be a heavy price to pay, just as Hájek points out. As I will argue in the next section, there is no need to accept Moorean assertions. Once we understand how recording devices are used in communication we understand that recorded sentences like (5b) do not lead to Moorean paradoxes.

stage. In doing this I will discuss several methodological issues often overlooked in semantic theorizing: how the theorist calibrates her model with the data it seeks to explain and predict.

3. Rejoinders to the objection.

3.a Theory and data: sentence-context pairs vs. utterances

So far I have talked about utterances but they have no place in Kaplan's semantic machinery. More needs to be said about how and where they fit in. Kaplan's theory aims both to be descriptively adequate (i.e. to give predictions that match speakers' intuitions) and to give a logic of indexicals and demonstratives (i.e. to show how validity is preserved in languages that contain indexical expressions). Given these purposes, utterances might come about as an unnecessary complication, so instead, within his theory, truth-values are assigned to sentences at contexts. As an example of complication, consider that utterances take time, but the validity of a long argument might depend on the context being the same for all of its premises.

On one hand, Kaplan's theory ascribes truth-values to sentence-context pairs, and thus its predictions are about the truth-values of sentences at contexts. On the other hand, our linguistic data are speakers' intuitions about instances of language use, more precisely intuitions about the truth-value of actual and possible utterances. Thus, the theory must be sensitive to and predict intuitions about instances of language use.

Then the task of the theorist, before any proper semantic work is done is to match sentence-context pairs with utterances. At this *pre-semantic stage*, she must decide which *sentence* has been uttered and in what *context* the utterance took place. Consider data from face-to-face conversations, given that they are the paradigmatic example of language use and native speakers have reliable intuitions about the truth-values of utterances in such conversational exchanges. To identify the sentence, the theorist must resolve homonymy (decide which of the several words that sound alike is being used), must resolve structural ambiguity (decide which of the several sentences that have the same surface/audible form is being used) and resolve lexical ambiguity (decide with which meaning a word is being used). Secondly, she must identify the context in which that sentence was uttered.

Since utterances are events, and for every actual or possible utterance (world) someone (agent) is uttering a sentence somewhere (location) and at a certain time (time) we can abstract away a quadruple $\langle a, t, l, w \rangle$ consisting of an *agent, time, location and possible world* that correspond to that concrete situation of language use. So for a theory to be descriptively adequate the theorist must be able to match sentence-context pairs with possible or actual utterances of sentences of that language. Predictions about the truth value of sentences at context should match intuitions about the truthfulness or falsity of corresponding utterances.

Once we move away from data provided by face-to-face conversations it is worth asking what other instances of language use are relevant for semantic theorizing: do sentences found on inscriptions, recorded messages, public announcements, epitaphs, and so on, count as relevant for semantic theorizing? More precisely, if speakers have intuitions about their truth or falsity, are such intuitions semantically relevant? If yes, the theorist must, again *before any proper semantic work is done*, match recorded or inscribed sentences with sentence-context pairs in her theory. In this case, the hard part is this: what corresponds to the context? The remote utterance view has an elegant answer: the situation is no different than that when the theorist handling data from face-to-face communication. The context must abstract away the concrete situation in which the sentence is uttered. In order to decide in which context a sentence has been uttered, the theorist must look at what Kaplan calls “the vagaries of action” (Kaplan 1989b, pp. 584 -5). She must take into consideration where and when the speaker intends to utter the sentence, and if the recording device, once set into action, works as intended by the speaker (i.e. tokens the recorded sentence at the time and place intended by the speaker). If everything goes as the speaker intended, that is if the sentence is tokened by the recording device at the time and place intended by the speaker, an utterance is performed at that time and place by the speaker by means of the recording device. In which case, the context as a quadruple has the time and the location of the remote utterance as its temporal and spatial parameters, and the speaker as its agent parameter. Given that often the speaker is not present at that place at that time, these are, in Kaplanian terms, *improper contexts*.

Famously, Kaplan banished improper contexts from his semantics – what thesis (C) amounts to (Kaplan 1989a, p. 509). His rejection of improper contexts as semantically relevant, that is, as contexts of semantic evaluation, is motivated by two facts. The first has to do with the descriptive adequacy of his theory: contexts are intended to represent concrete situations in which an utterance

of a sentence takes place. Prima facie, only when the agent is at the given place, at the given time, and the given world does the corresponding quadruple of agent, place, time and world qualifies as a context. For example, a quadruple $\langle a, t, l, w \rangle$ where the agent a doesn't exist at the world w is not a proper context, since a cannot utter a sentence in w . The second motive has to do with the logic of indexicals. As Kaplan puts it, "intuitively [1] is deeply, and in some sense, [...], universally true. One need only to understand the meaning of [1] to know that it cannot be uttered falsely." A theory which doesn't reflect this, he claims, "has bypassed something essential to the logic of indexicals" (Kaplan 1989a, p. 509). In other words, (1) is, prima facie, analytic, and its analyticity is modeled by having (1) as true at every context of utterance. A consequence of this modeling choice is that for every context the agent must be at the time, location and world of the context⁷. But, contrary to Kaplan's claim, there are false utterances of (1), and true utterances of (2), which casts doubt that (1) is analytic. Kaplan's second motive for restricting semantics to proper contexts is, thus, unsound. But the first one stands: not every possible quadruple is a context of utterance. Thus, only those improper contexts are to be allowed into semantics that represent actual or possible concrete situations in which a sentence is uttered⁸.

In brief, the view offers a principled way to determine how to match assignments of truth-values to sentence-context pairs with data provided by the use of recording devices. In a sense, the view claims that the solution to the answering machine paradox lies not in complicating the semantics of indexicals, nor in trying to explain away the intuitions by appeal to pragmatic processes, but in the *pre-semantics*: before any proper semantic analysis starts, the theorist must decide what

⁷ Kaplan calls (1) a logical truth.

⁸ One alleged benefit of treating (1) as a logical truth is that it provides an example of a sentence that is *contingent a priori*. The proposition expressed by (1) at any context of utterance is only contingently true. But, given that logical truths are known *a priori*, and that an *a priori* truth is known independently of any empirical import, allegedly one can know that (1) is true without having to know anything about the agent, location, time and world of the context. But notice that *there* is something that one must know: whether the agent is at the time and location of the context, which casts doubt that (1) is a priori. Assuming that there are contingent *a priori* sentences this is not lost if we allow improper contexts into semantics. This feature is captured by the fact that in Kaplanian semantics sentences are double evaluated: their character is evaluated at a context of utterance (this captures a priority), and the resulting content is evaluated at circumstances of evaluation (this captures their modal profile). But for strong skeptical arguments against the existence of contingent a priori sentences see Stojanovic (2009).

sentence-context pairs will be fed into the semantic theory⁹. When it comes to data from recording devices only those sentence-context pairs are to be semantically evaluated that correspond to, or represent, possible or actual utterances. Once the sentence-context pairs are identified the semantic evaluation runs its Kaplanian course. When it comes to recorded or inscribed sentences, the context must abstract away the parameters of the concrete situation in which the sentence is uttered. The remote utterance view, gives us the tools to identify when and where a sentence is remotely uttered. And I should stress again that considerations about the vagaries of action, about when and where an utterance is performed, do not enter into the semantics of indexicals, which are still concerned strictly with the verities of meanings, but *precede* any semantic analysis.

I would like to point out that the remote utterance view can also account for indexicals other than temporal and spatial ones when used in recorded messages. Consider “I” in several thorny cases. Suppose that Mary is the executor of Jill’s will and the sole user of documents signed by Jill legitimizing various funerary arrangements. Within these trust documents there is the following request by Jill: “I wish that my body be given to science”¹⁰. When, after Jill’s death, her executor uses the documents, in various social interactions, to carry out the wishes spelled out in there, “I” in “I wish that my body be given to science” does not refer to the executor but to Jill. The remote utterance view can easily and straightforwardly account for this. In writing her will, and other trust documents regarding her funerary arrangements, Jill utters “I wish that my body be given to science” and records this utterance (in writing) for future audiences. “I” refers to Jill for she is the one who uttered it - or formally put she is the agent at the context where the utterance was produced. This is an example of a recorded utterance.

⁹ I should point out that the remote utterance view bears certain similarities with Predelli’s (2005). He also claims that any solution to the answering machine paradox must pay attention to the presemantic decisions that the theorist makes to regiment utterances in a formally tractable way - he calls them „preparatory operations” (2005, p52). But Predelli believes that remote utterances are impossible and denies that when it comes to recorded sentences only those sentence-context pairs that correspond to utterances are semantically relevant. Thus, he decides to complicate the semantic evaluation of sentences: sentences are to be evaluated at a *context of interpretation* which can be distinct than the *context of utterance*. As I have shown somewhere else (Briciu 2018), Predelli’s view gives different predictions than the remote utterance view.

¹⁰ The example is due to de Gaynesford (2006, p 41), and is also discussed in detail in Ciecierski and Rudnicki (2023, p 1105)

There are more complicated cases, though. Consider the following one from Corazza and his co-authors (2002) “Joe is not in his office one day, and Ben notices that a number of students keep approaching his door and knocking. They then stand around and look bemused for a while before leaving. Taking pity on these poor souls wasting their time, Ben decides to attach his ‘I am not here today’ note to Joe’s door. The trick works; the students, instead of knocking and waiting, take one look at the note and then leave.” (Corazza, Fish and Gorvett, 2002 p. 5)

According to Corazza and co-authors, and also to Ciecierski and Rudnicki (2023, p 1105), Ben successfully refers to Joe by the use of that token of “I”. I disagree with their intuitions: it is Ben and not Joe who is the reference of “I” in this context, even though Ben intended Joe to be the referent. According to Kaplan, the character of “I” is a rule by which “I” refers to the agent of the context. Then, in order to establish whether “I” refers to Ben or to Joe, in this context, we must establish which of them is the agent of the context. This is, in fact, part and parcel of what the theorist must do in the pre-semantic phase of her analysis. That is, when the theorist matches sentence-context pairs in the model with (actual or possible) utterances, in order to identify the context, she must identify the agent of the context. Who counts as an agent? I believe that Ciecierski and Rudnicki (2023, p. 1107¹¹) offer a good starting point to decide, one which is compatible and aligns well with the remote utterance view. According to their proposal, the agent of a context is the person who takes responsibility for the speech act performed in uttering a sentence at that context. Or more precisely, the agent of the context at which a sentence *S* containing “I” is evaluated, is the person “responsible for the speech act of which that use of ‘I’ is a part.” (Ciecierski and Rudnicki, 2023, 1107)¹². We can ask ourselves: who is responsible for the use of (2) in the above scenario? The obvious answer is: Ben, and not Joe. In every situation, Ben has to take responsibility for (2) while we can imagine situations in which Joe doesn’t. For example, he returns to his office, finds the note on his door, is unhappy that his students were informed that he was away, denies that he posted it and denies that he wanted to inform the students

¹¹ Although Ciecierski and Rudnicki believe that this is part of the semantic rule for “I” (its character), I believe that we need not necessarily go so far. One can claim that the semantic rule for “I” is just the general Kaplanian one (i.e. “I” when used in a context refers to the agent of the context), while this is a pre-semantic heuristic rule that the theorist uses to identify the agent of a context.

¹² They make this more precise in the following way: “The referent of the use of ‘I’ is the object (person) responsible for the satisfaction of the felicity conditions of the speech act of which that use of ‘I’ is a part as being the speech act of the particular illocutionary type.” (Ciecierski and Rudnicki, 2023, p.1107)

that he wasn't in his office. In fact, even in situations where Joe doesn't explicitly deny it, it is still Ben who is responsible for the use of (2). The fact that Joe's students interpreted "I" in (2) as referring to Joe, just as Ben intended them to, is no argument that Joe is the referent of "I". The proposition that Joe is not in the office at that time is not the semantic content of (2). Rather, this proposition is the result of a fortunate misinterpretation: the audience misinterprets (2) because they misidentify the referent of (2), and their misinterpretation converges with Ben's communicative intentions. Ben managed to convey that proposition because his trick worked: he knew that Joe's students would misinterpret (2) by misidentifying the referent of "I" believing that it was Joe the one who posted the note.

There are similar scenarios that can fortify my interpretation. Imagine that Joe is on a scene giving a public speech, while Ben is in charge of the sound system. As Joe speaks, Ben tinkers with the microphone and, with the help of a voice modulator, intercedes himself in Joe's speech saying "I think you're deplorable". Joe can reasonably claim that he didn't say that, and deny that those were his words. Dodd and Sweeney (2010) discuss a similar scenario and share my intuitions. Imagine that "Crispin dictates a paper to Sharon, his secretary, who then writes it up for him. Although there is a natural sense in which it's Sharon who writes the paper, there's another sense in which it's really Crispin". Crispin is the agent of that context at which the written sentences are to be evaluated. But now imagine that "Sharon didn't just stick to dictating Crispin's paper, but put some of her own content in it too through her own initiative. Say it was this stuff that Sharon added on her own that people found offensive. Now it would be Crispin who could correctly complain "I didn't say that!"". The sentences added by Sharon at her own initiative are to be evaluated at a context that has Sharon as agent (Dodd and Sweeney 2010, p 344-345).

Another case worth considering is the following from Dodd and Sweeney (2010). They claim that "when a king sends his sentry to another king, who delivers his message 'I surrender; let's discuss terms', it may be the sentry who is speaking, but the king is the agent of the context and the one who is really communicating with the receiving king. That's why the receiving king doesn't think it's the sentry who is surrendering, but the enemy king" (Dodd and Sweeney, 2010, p 344). I believe they are right: intuitively, the referent of "I" in "I surrender; let's discuss terms" is the king and not the sentry. The remote utterance view claims that this too is a situation where the theorist must decide who is the agent in the context where "I surrender, let's discuss terms" was uttered. And the heuristic rule in determining the agent of a context, gives the correct results: it is the king

and not the sentry who is responsible for the speech act (i.e. surrender) performed in uttering that sentence. Hence, it is the king and not the sentry the agent of the context at which “I surrender” is to be evaluated¹³.

3.b. Remote utterances and speech acts

Now to the crux of Sorensen’s objection. I will argue that remote utterances, more precisely post-mortem utterances, do not lead to Moorean paradoxes. For a start, consider the case of a lone train station master whose job is, among other things, to announce the incoming and departing trains. She records (6) and pre-programs the station’s PA system to play it whenever it is appropriate according to a pre-established train schedule. She doesn’t learn the train schedule by heart and she doesn’t know when the PA will token (6). One day when she is out of the station and sleeps, the PA system plays (6) according to the pre-established schedule.

(6) The fast train *now* approaching platform one does not stop *here*. Stand back from the platform edge

Did she inform the passengers about the incoming train? Did she warn them to stand back from the platform? Intuitively, yes. If so, she performed several speech acts at a time and place she was absent and she lacked the relevant mental states at the time of the utterance for she did not believe (6) at that time. This is no different than post-mortem assertions and, yet, we find them

¹³ How about “I am ecological” inscribed on an electric bus? I confess that I lack strong intuitions about the correct interpretation of this sentence in this context. According to one possible interpretation, favored by Ciecierski and Rudnicki (2023, p 1113), the sentence is about the bus: the bus, and not the person responsible for the inscription, is ecological. In which case, the inscription is decidedly odd: “I” refers to the bus, but buses lack agency and simply do not utter sentences. In this interpretation, “I” can be treated as involving deferred reference, where “I” is used demonstratively by an agent not to refer to herself, but rather to the bus. Alternatively, the inscription can be understood to be not about the bus, but about the agent responsible for the inscription. The agent, in virtue of running a low-emission bus is ecological. In this case, in “I am ecological” it is the predicate that undergoes meaning shift. “I” refers to the agent (whoever is responsible for the inscription) and the predicate has a transferred meaning. In virtue of running a bus that has the property of being ecological, the agent inherits a secondary property that can be rendered as having-a-low-ecological-footprint. Such an analysis would be along the lines of that proposed by Nunberg (1993, p 38-42). To see that both readings might be available, think about a bumper sticker with “I am ecological” put on a privately owned EV. Does it express the proposition that the car is ecological, or the proposition that the owner has a low ecological footprint, or both? But I should stress that the complications brought about this example have nothing to do with the fact that an inscription was used, as similar examples (of either deferred reference or meaning transfer) also appear in face-to-face conversations.

uncontroversial and their use quite common. That's because recording devices are artifacts by which we communicate with an absent (and sometimes future) addressee. That is, they are intentionally created to serve a certain *function* and that function is precisely to afford communication with an absent addressee. Someone who doesn't understand their function will fail to understand the recorded sentences. If one acts via a device, the success of the action depends on whether the device works as is expected or as intended. Likewise, if one performs a speech act via a recording device, whether her speech acts succeeds or fails depends on whether the recording device works as expected or as intended. Because of this, using recording devices to perform various speech acts introduces certain complications in the felicity conditions of these recorded speech acts when compared with their oral counterparts¹⁴. The lone train station master will succeed in *informing* and in *warning* the passengers only if the PA system works, otherwise her communicative intentions will misfire.

Consider the complications that the use of recording devices brings for assertions. It is well known that Austin (1962, pp. 14-15) argued that speech acts have two types of felicity conditions: on one hand, some that might be labeled social and institutional, on the other hand some that might be labeled psychological¹⁵. In order for a speaker *S* to felicitously assert *p*,

- (a) The speaker must have the authority to make the assertion, and her authority be recognized as such (social and institutional conditions), and
- (b) The speaker must believe that *p* is true at the time of the assertion (the psychological condition)

Recording devices introduce certain complications in the felicity conditions of assertions performed via them. First, social and institutional conditions must take into consideration the

¹⁴ By oral counterparts I mean speech acts performed in face-to-face conversation. I take it that many speech acts (e.g. assertions, requests, orders, etc.) are what Kukla (*forthcoming*) calls medium-independent speech acts in that they can be performed orally, in writing, in sign language, over electronic media or via many other mechanisms.

¹⁵ By social and institutional felicity conditions I have in mind those identified by Austin's remarks according to which in order for a speech act to be felicitous there must be an accepted (quasi) conventional procedure involving the utterance of certain expressions, a procedure which has certain conventional effects if it is executed in certain circumstances by people with the appropriate authority, and so on. By psychological conditions I refer to his observations that in order for a speech act to be felicitous the speaker must have the right thoughts and/or feelings. Austin argued that the two are qualitatively different and even used different typographic letters to distinguish them.

materiality of the recording devices and the affordances that they bring about¹⁶. That is, they must take into account that one is acting via certain artifacts, and that these artifacts have certain functional, structural, material, perceptible, and even intended normative properties, and these properties determine how the device is to be used¹⁷. For example, the recording must last; the recording device must work as is intended by the speaker (e.g. it should token the expression at the time and place intended by the speaker, it shouldn't be repurposed for other uses, etc.); the addressee must understand the function of the recording device (otherwise the speaker will fail to secure uptake), the authority of the speaker to assert must last over time, and so on. Secondly, because recording devices are artifacts that afford communication at a temporal distance, they introduce a different temporal framework than that of face-to-face communication and this affects the psychological condition. It is not surprising that felicity conditions are affected by the artifactual nature of recording devices. Once recording devices (for example, writing) are introduced in a community, its members can do things with words in ways that were not affordable before. For example, via letters one can communicate privately with people absent at the time and place of writing. Similarly, one can pass information via recorded transactions or receipts to future audiences. Not only that recording devices have this recognizable social function, namely that of affording communication when face-to-face conversation is not possible, but many of them are also subject to specific social norms, in the sense that they are to be used in some ways rather than others (Thomasson 2013, p. 52). Then, the felicity conditions of assertions performed via recording devices are given along the following lines:

An agent *S* asserts *p* via a recording devices if

- (a₁) *S* sets up in motion a device by which to token a sentence that expresses *p* at an intended time and place
- (a₂) The device works as intended by the speaker: it tokens that sentence at the location and time intended by *S*
- (a₃) the speaker has the authority to make the assertion and her authority is recognized as such

¹⁶ I use “materiality” and “affordances” as is more or less standard in social sciences. By the first I mean that the physical properties of an artifact have consequences for how the object is used and by the latter I mean the opportunities to action made possible by the physical properties of an artifact (see McDonnell 2023, p. 201).

¹⁷ See Thomasson (2013) for this perspective on public artifacts.

(b) *S* believes at the time of recording that *p* is true at the intended time and location of decoding and doesn't believe non-*p* at the time of decoding¹⁸

Where (a₁) - (a₃) constitute the social and institutional conditions and (b) constitutes the psychological condition for asserting via recording devices. These are general conditions that apply to any type of recording devices, but depending on the type of recording device used, some materiality conditions might be more specific. Contrary to Sorensen's claims, remote assertions, including post-mortem assertions, are possible with the help of recording devices. To illustrate: when *S* records (5b) for her children she will assert at the intended time of the playback that she is dead and that her children are rich if

(a₁) *S* records (5b) and sets up in motion a device that tokens (5b) at the intended time and place

(a₂) the device works as intended she intended: it tokens (5b) at the location and time intended by *S*

(a₃) the speaker still has the authority to make the assertion and her authority is recognized as such,

(b) *S* believes at the time of recording that (5b) is true at the intended time and location of decoding and doesn't believe at time of decoding that (5b) is false.

When someone uses a recording device to assert the content of (5b) at a time and place she is absent there is no need that she believes the content of (5b) at the time of the assertion. Rather, if *S* video records (5b) at a time *t*₀ with the intention to be played at time *t*₁, then *S* must believe at *t*₀ that (5b) is, or will be, true at *t*₁¹⁹. Precisely because of this, Moorean paradoxes are avoided. For in order to have a Moorean paradox (either in the omissive form *p* but *I do not believe that p*, or in its commissive form – *not p* and *I believe that p*) we must assume that when one asserts something,

¹⁸ One might wonder: why the clause that *S* doesn't believe non-*p* at the time of the decoding? To account for the following situation. Imagine that I record (2) on my office voice-mail and preprogram the machine to play it when I'm not in my office according to my schedule. Suppose I change my schedule, come back to my office but decide to let the machine go and play (2). Did I lie to the caller? Intuitively, yes. In Austin's terms, I have committed an abuse.

¹⁹ Someone might wonder what happens when one video records (5a) in front of a famous landmark and then sends her recording to other people. I take it that in this case she utters (5a) at the time and location of the recording and, in a sense, records her utterance to be remotely entertain by an absent audience. Semantically, (5a) is to be evaluated at a context that has the time and location of the recording as temporal and spatial parameters. Pragmatically, the speaker performs a speech act at the time and place of the recording. Her speech act is not performed via the recording device and it has the same felicity conditions as orally performed speech acts.

one believes the content of the assertion “at the time of speaking” as Moore put it (Moore 1942, p 541). But this is precisely what recording devices enables us to circumvent: when we use recording devices to perform temporally remote assertions we need not believe at the moment of assertion the content asserted. Rather, we must believe at the moment of recording that the asserted proposition will be true at the intended time of decoding. In other words, Moorean sentences are paradoxical because the psychological condition of assertion is that if *S* asserts *p*, then *S* must believe *p* at the time of assertion. But, as I have explained, the psychological condition for assertions performed via recording devices differs in its temporal framework from that of assertions performed in face-to-face conversations.

Is there a danger that recording devices, under the current proposal, render any Moorean sentence assertable. The answer is “no” because felicity conditions of remote assertions require that the speaker believes at the time of recording that the asserted content is true at the time of decoding. But in some circumstances, Moorean sentences are assertable both in face-to-face conversations and by employing recording devices. Williams (2015) points out that when we are in epistemically bizarre situations we have good practical reasons to express epistemically irrational beliefs in order to inform others about our situation. To borrow his example, imagine that you discover that, as a result of a condition, you have the belief that you mistakenly believe that people are following you. You report this to your therapist by saying “People are not following me but I still cannot help believing that they do”. (Williams 2015, p 15). The uttered sentence is a Moorean sentence (*not p and I believe that p*) but there is nothing problematic in uttering it in this condition. Likewise, if we find ourselves in such a condition we can use recording devices to inform others about it. To borrow an example provided by one reviewer, imagine that you take some experimental medical treatment that you know has a strange side effect: it causes you to not believe that's raining when it is raining. Since you know this, in order to alert any passerby of your epistemic condition, you decide to get a face tattoo that says "It's raining but I don't believe it" using special ink that only appears when it's raining. This is also a Moorean sentence (*p and I don't believe that p*), but there is nothing problematic about uttering it in this situation.

The appeal to remote utterances not only insulates Kaplanian semantics from recalcitrant data stemming from the use of recording messages but can also explain why some recorded messages have illocutionary force, as is clearly the case with (6). This is a bonus for the view, when compared with a family of proposals that claim that recorded messages are mere displays

(Sorensen 2007) or pretended utterances that lack illocutionary force (Stevens 2009, 2020, Voltolini 2006). For example, Sorensen claims that recorded messages of are mere displays and lack illocutionary force (Sorensen 2007, 172). According to Voltolini (2006), the answering machine paradox is to be explained in terms of socially shared make-belief games. When a speaker records (2) on a recording device at a time t_0 she is playing a make-belief game in which she is pretending not to be at the time of the recording but at a different time, namely the intended time of decoding t_1 . That is, at time t_0 she pretends to utter (2) at time t_1 . Semantically, (2) is to be evaluated not at what Voltolini takes to be the context of utterance (the context that has t_0 as its temporal parameter) but at a fictional context that has t_1 as its temporal parameter, where t_1 is the pretended time of the utterance of (2). In this account, the context relevant for the semantic interpretation of (2) is a fictional context (i.e. a context which has at least one fictional parameter: a fictional agent, or fictional location, or fictional time, or fictional world). There are numerous problems with this view, but suffice to point out two. First, it unnecessarily complicates the semantics by appeal to fictional contexts (distinct from the contexts of utterance). Secondly, since the speaker only pretends to utter something at t_0 , the view cannot account for how her utterance has full illocutionary force at t_1 , that is how she can inform, warn, assert, etc. In his turn, Stevens (2020) claims that recorded messages behave like open quotation. For example, when one records a message, one is “taking an indexical sentence and recording it ready to be mentioned in a new [context] at a later date” (Stevens, 2020, p. 607). Allegedly, this is no different than how “Nobody likes me, I am miserable” occurs in “Stop that John! ‘Nobody likes me, ‘I am miserable’ ... Don’t you think you exaggerate a bit?” where it is merely displayed for demonstrative purposes, but not used. In recording a sentence to be tokened a context from which she is absent, the speaker is recording an instance of herself performing the speech act she would have want to make at that context if she would have been there. She is preparing the recorded sentence to be to be displayed at that intended context: “she simply prepares a string of linguistic material that mimics the intended performance and then exploits the various media which permit this mimicry to be planted in advance ready to be deciphered when encountered” (Stevens, 2020, pp. 616-617). The problem

with this view is that it can't account for the illocutionary force of (6) when used in PA systems, and for other similar examples²⁰.

I have commended the pros of this account, so it is only fair to mention some of its limitations. Being very conservative, the account presented here inherits some shortcomings of the Kaplanian semantics that stem from some other features of the framework. As one reviewer rightly points out, in Kaplan's semantics an expression, even a complex one like a sentence, is not evaluated to more than one context. Then each indexical expression from within a sentence is interpreted relative to a single context of utterance. This has long been recognized, including by Kaplan himself (Kaplan 1989b, p. 586), to be problematic in some cases. To use Kaplan's example, consider "Today is my birthday, but today it isn't" where we start the sentence just before midnight and speak slowly enough such that the second occurrence of "today" refers to a different day than the first occurrence because it is uttered in a different day. This is problematic, says Kaplan, only because the context has changed, and the context has changed because utterances take time. He claims to avoid this problem by studying expressions-in-a-context and not utterances and "by tricks like writing it out ahead of time and then presenting it all at once." (Kaplan 1989b p. 587). But this amounts to an admission that the semantics cannot handle intra-sentential change in context.

This problem is inherited by the remote utterance view. Consider a variation on (5a) and (5b):

(5a*) Today, I met with my lawyer to go over all the details before they are presented to you here in her office which you are now seeing for the first time. (Recorded in video testament made on a beach)

(5b*) Today, you all received a phone call from my attorney, who is standing here next to me as I record this now. (Recorded in video testament)

If we are to stick with Kaplan's insistence that indexicals in (5a*) are to be evaluated at a single context of utterance, then "today", "here" and "now" are to refer all either to the context when the sentence was recorded, or to the context of decoding. Likewise, for indexicals in (5b*). But this would give wrong predictions: in (5a*) "today" refers to the day of the recording, but "here" and

²⁰ (6) is used in announcements in some train stations in United Kingdom. "I am not here now, so come back later" is another example whereby one performs a speech act (a request) with the help of a recording device.

“now” to the place and time of the decoding. I would like to point out that this is a problem not only for the remote utterance view, but for all proposed solutions to the answering machine puzzle since all adhere to Kaplan’s restriction that all indexicals in a sentence are to be evaluated relative to a single context.

Now, various solutions that are compatible with the remote utterance view have been proposed to this problem. For example, McCullagh (2020, p 113) claims that we should regard utterances like (5a*) as distributed utterances: “utterances that are more than usually spread out in time, location [...] in such a way that makes a difference to their proper interpretation”. The basic idea is that sentences are to be evaluated at a complex context, where complex contexts are a conjunction of simple contexts (i.e. quadruples of agent, time, location, world), that differ among each other with respect to at least one parameter. This makes it possible for a sentence containing multiple indexicals to be evaluated not at one simple context, but at a complex one: the first indexical is evaluated at a simple context, the second at a different simple context. For example, sentences like “Now I’m starting this sentence and now I’m finishing it” or “Now you see it, now you don’t” are to be evaluated at a complex context that is a conjunction of two simple contexts that differ in their temporal parameter $c_1 \langle a, l, w, t_1 \rangle$ and $c_2 \langle a, l, w, t_2 \rangle$. The first occurrence of “now” is evaluated at c_1 while the second occurrence at c_2 . Likewise, (5a*) and (5b8*) are to be treated as temporally and spatially distributed utterances, where different indexicals are evaluated at different simple contexts. Whether McCullagh’s proposal is a convincing one is open to debate. This complication points out, though, to something more important. Despite its elegance, its descriptive power (in that it gives mostly correct truth-value predictions) and the fact that it gives a logic of indexicals, there seems to be a host of difficulties that Kaplanian semantics faces. Most of them come from rather unusual data like recorded messages or “slow” utterances. Does this accumulation of problems suggest that we should abandon Kaplanian semantics and its logic of indexicals, or can these problems be ironed out by piecemeal modifications? This is an important and legitimate question, but answering it goes well beyond the scope of the present article. Its modest aim was to show that one such problem can be accommodated within Kaplanian semantics.

4. Conclusions

If the arguments presented here are correct, the answering machine paradox and other similar data coming from the use of recording devices do not pose a threat to Kaplanian semantics. They can be easily accommodated within Kaplanian semantics with minimal alterations, namely allowing *some* improper contexts to be available for semantic evaluation.

I have argued that in dealing with such data we need to take into consideration the artifactual nature of recording devices: that they are public artifacts that have a certain function and certain material features that afford modes of communication beyond face-to-face conversations. When a recording device (for example, writing) is introduced in an oral society it allows for new possibilities of communication that were previously unaffordable. Such devices allow us to do at least two things. One is to record our utterances so they can be remotely entertained by an absent audience. Another is to perform remote utterances: to utter sentences at times and places we are absent.

The appeal to remote utterances has several consequences. Semantically, it insulates the theory from apparently recalcitrant data: recorded sentences are to be semantically evaluated at the context of utterance (if any). Formally speaking, this is to say that in dealing with recorded sentences the theory assigns truth-values only to those sentence-context pairs that formally represent actual or possible utterances. That is, the theory should not assign truth-values to any sentence-context pair that corresponds to a mere tokening of the sentence, given that intuitions about mere tokens do not carry semantic significance. Moreover, the remote utterance view gives us the tools to identify when and where a sentence is remotely uttered vs. merely tokened. As I have explained in section 3, the theorist must look at the intentions of the agent (where and when she intends to use a token to utter a sentence) and at the workings of the recording device (if the device once set into action works as intended or expected by the agent). This work by the theorist precedes any proper semantic analysis, and thus any appeal to speaker intentions doesn't affect the semantic profile of indexical expressions – that is, speaker's intentions do not determine the meaning of indexical expressions.

Pragmatically, the appeal to remote utterances allows us to explain how some utterances carry illocutionary force, as when we make a request by writing (4) “I am not here now, so come back later” on a post-it note left on our office door, or when the station master informs and warns passengers about incoming trains by uttering (6) with the help of the PA system. Furthermore, I have argued that remote utterances do not lead to Moorean paradoxes. To see this, we need to take into consideration, again, the artifactual nature of recording devices: that their function is to allow

us to communicate when face-to-face communication is not possible (or not desirable) and that they have material features that allow precisely that. I have further argued that the same type of speech act (e.g. assertion, warning, etc.) can be performed both orally and with the help of recording devices, but that the use of recording devices introduces certain complications in its felicity conditions. When a speech act is performed via recording devices its felicity conditions need to take into consideration the artifactual nature of the device, its materiality and the communicative affordances it brings about.

The view presented here stands, together with a few other views (e.g. Ciecierski 2023) as very conservative with respect to Kaplanian semantics, as opposed to most other competing views: it doesn't posit ambiguities (Smith 1989), nor multiple characters (Michaelson 2013), nor other conventions associated with different uses of recording devices (Corraza, Fish and Gorvett 2002), it doesn't complicate the mechanism of semantic evaluation by introducing contexts of evaluation distinct from the context of utterance (Predelli 1998, 2005). Moreover, in contrast with a family of other views (Sorensen 2007, Voltolini 2006, Stevens 2020) it can easily explain how we can make requests, give warnings, or assert with the help of recording devices.

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