Pointing at Jack, Talking about Jill: Understanding Deferred Uses of Demonstratives and Pronouns

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to explore the proper content of a formal semantic theory in two respects: clarifying first, which uses of expressions a formal theory should seek to accommodate, and, second, how much information the theory should contain. I explore these two questions with respect to occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns—the so-called ‘deferred’ uses—which are often classified as non-standard or figurative. I argue that, contrary to initial impressions, they must be treated as semantically identical to ordinary, perceptual uses of these expression-types, and that this finding has important repercussions for our view of the scope and limits of a semantic theory.

One problematic area for formal semantic theories concerns non-standard or figurative uses of language, and the problems here concern not just how we deal with bona fide cases of figurative language but also how we initially carve up the territory. That is to say, how do we go about deciding which bits of language are the non-standard, figurative parts in the first place? A key feature in this respect often seems to be something quite brute, like intuition or first impressions—faced with a given use does it just seem to us to be doing something out of the ordinary? In this paper I want to argue that this kind of ‘first impression’ decision is not altogether to be trusted, for there are many uses of expressions which are prima-facie noteworthy, but which, on closer inspection, we shall find we can and should treat as semantically unexceptional.

The cases I want to concentrate on here are those Quine (1968, p. 194) labelled ‘deferred ostension’ demonstratives and pronouns. These are cases where a surface form demonstrative or pronoun (e.g. something which, in
English, looks like ‘that’, ‘this’, ‘he’ or ‘she’, etc) is used in a context where an object is indicated or otherwise made salient, but the subject of conversation thereby comes to be not the indicated object but some further, related thing. For instance:

(1) In a conversation about the activities of various boy’s sisters, I point at Jack and say ‘She’s going to law school’.
(2) Pointing at a set of footprints, I say ‘He must be a giant!’
(3) Holding up Hard Times, I say ‘This is my favourite author’.3

In all these cases, it seems clear that the object talked about is not the object indicated: in (1) I point at Jack but apparently succeed in talking about his sister, in (2) I speak not about the indicated footprints but about their maker, and in (3) I don’t pick out the book but its author. How, then, does this surprising phenomenon come about? Well, one assumption we might naturally make is that, whatever is going on, it must be something quite different to what is going on in the kinds of occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns which have traditionally exercised theorists in this area.4 (1–3), it seems, are not be understood in the way that demonstratives and pronouns are when these expression-types are used in their standard way to refer to a currently perceived and made salient object (uses I’ll call ‘perceptual’). This, however, leaves open the question of exactly where to locate this dimension of difference: is it that there are (at least) two types of demonstratives and pronouns (i.e. that the difference is a semantic level one) or is it that there are (at least) two uses of these expressions (i.e. that the difference is accommodated at the pragmatic level)? In this paper I will argue for the latter position by showing that attempts to posit a distinct semantic type for deferred occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns fall prey to serious objections. Instead, what these expressions demand is semantic treatment exactly on a par with ordinary refer-

3 Throughout, I will concentrate on what we might call ‘bare demonstratives’, i.e. occurrences of ‘this’ or ‘that’ without concatenated predicates, since these are standardly accepted as terms of direct reference. On the other hand, opinions concerning complex demonstratives (like ‘that cat’) differ. Some (cf. Braun, 1994, Borg, 2000) treat them as terms of direct reference, while others (cf. Lepore and Ludwig, 2000) treat them as quantified phrases. However, as can be seen from (3) above, since bare demonstratives may be either deferred or perceptual, issues concerning the correct analysis of complex demonstratives are orthogonal to our current debate.

4 For examples of those who explicitly make this kind of assumption see Kaplan, 1977, f.n.10, p. 490, and Evans, 1981, p. 199; more recent examples include Grimberg, 1996, p. 424, and Luntley, 1999, p. 335. However, not everyone makes this assumption of deviance, compare Nunberg, (1993), p. 30: ‘[S]omeone [may naturally] suppose that it is possible to circumscribe a group of ‘core’ uses of indexicals that excludes deferred uses, and tell a coherent story about these. So it’s important for us to be able to show that a distinction between deferred and non-deferred uses can’t be justified on theoretical or intuitive grounds’. As we will see below, I want to argue that it is Nunberg, as opposed to Kaplan et al., who is right here.
ring terms. However, if this is correct, then there are important implications both for how we characterise certain apparently figurative uses of language and how we deal with ordinary referring terms within our semantic theory.

The structure of the paper is as follows: in §1 I will explore the phenomenon of deferred uses in more detail, looking at exactly how perceptual and deferred cases might be thought to diverge. Then, in §2, I will introduce an apparently very appealing account of deferred expressions which does indeed treat them as semantically divergent from perceptual demonstratives; specifically, it will suggest analysing deferred expressions as quantified phrases. However, this account will be seen to face internal difficulties and, crucially, in §3, it will be argued that its basic assumption—that deferred occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns deserve a non-referential semantic analysis—is mistaken. For it will be seen that perceptual and deferred expressions behave alike in certain key contexts, motivating a semantic analysis of these expressions which treats them both as members of the same semantic category. In §4 two such accounts will be put forward, one of which retains a semantic division between perceptual and deferred cases and one which does not. It will, however, be argued that only the latter is feasible and thus that we must reject our initial assumption that deferred and perceptual demonstratives are semantically distinct. In conclusion, in §5, the repercussions of this finding for the boundaries between the figurative and the non-figurative, and the semantic and the non-semantic, will be explored.

1. Distinguishing Deferred and Perceptual Occurrences of Demonstratives and Pronouns

Given the intuitive recognition of some kind of difference between cases like (1–3) and cases where the referent of the utterance is the currently perceived object, our question now is: ‘in exactly what respect do deferred expressions differ from ordinary perceptual occurrences?’ One initial suggestion might be that in deferred cases, unlike perceptual ones, there is no ostensive gesture to the referent (though there is an act of pointing, it is not to the subject of the utterance). However, this alone can’t be the defining feature of deferred cases, for there are many examples of apparently paradigm perceptual demonstratives where there is no ostensive gesture to the referent (though there is an act of pointing, it is not to the subject of the utterance). However, this alone can’t be the defining feature of deferred cases, for there are many examples of apparently paradigm perceptual demonstratives where there is no ostensive gesture to the referent (for instance, an object may make itself salient in the context and thereby become the referent of an utterance of ‘that’ without any need for an ostensive gesture); while so-called ‘memory’ demonstratives, like ‘that girl I saw with you yesterday’, do not seem happily classed as deferred demonstratives, yet no ostensive gesture to the referent is possible. So, there must be something more to the phenomenon of deference than just this.

There does, however, seem to be something right about the above proposal: for although there is an ostensive gesture in the deferred case, what seems to matter is not primarily the indicated object but some further object lying in
a recognised relation to this first object. That is to say, in deferred cases we seem to be picking out an object to be talked about just in case it lies in some appropriate relation, or satisfies the appropriate relational predicate, individuated in part by the object being pointed at. For instance, imagine that you and I are in a bookstore and we come across a copy of *Primary Colours*, the political novel published anonymously. Let’s suppose that, though I don’t know who wrote the book, I nevertheless feel that publishing it was a crazy thing to do—perhaps I think it must have been written by someone with an intimate knowledge of life at the Whitehouse, and when the author’s identity is discovered their political career will surely be over. So, I point to the book and say ‘That author is insane!’ Here it seems clear that I don’t mean to say that the object I’m pointing at is an insane author, rather I mean to say (and it seems you will take me as saying) that the *author of that* is insane. I seem to be making a descriptive claim to the effect that whichever object satisfies the predicate ‘is the author of that’ also satisfies the second predicate ‘is insane’. Furthermore, it seems clear that in this case, that the object satisfies this conjunction of predicates may be all that I know about the object in question; I may have no more substantial or non-descriptive way to identify the subject of my utterance at all. Yet this seems very different to perceptual uses of demonstratives and pronouns (consider the same type of utterance as above, but this time made at a literary festival where all can see the indicated author cavorting before us) where there is an obvious, non-descriptive route to the object.

Perhaps, then, deferred demonstratives differ from perceptual cases because they are, in some way, akin to descriptive phrases rather than referring terms. What we are trying to convey when we use a deferred demonstrative is not a referential proposition but a quantificational one, which contains a demonstrative element only for the object actually being pointed at. This intuitive idea surfaces in the following remark from Evans:

> [W]e use demonstratives and pronouns very widely to effect what Quine calls ‘deferred ostension’, as when we indicate a man by pointing to his car. ‘That man is going to be sorry’, we say, pointing to a car burdened with parking tickets. Here, surely, the identification is by description.\(^5\)

Schiffer, too, makes the connection between a deferred pronoun and a description:

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Upon encountering a huge footprint in the sand, you might exclaim, “He must be a giant!” and arguably what you would mean is that the man whose foot made the print, whoever he is, must be a giant.6

However, even if there is a connection here between certain occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns and descriptive phrases, we still face the question of what kind of relationship this is; i.e. is it a semantic connection or merely a pragmatic phenomenon. On the first approach, a sentence like (3) will have its literal meaning given by a descriptive proposition like:

(4) The author of this is my favourite.

Alternatively, however, we might allow that, whatever the correct semantic analysis of sentences like (3), a descriptive proposition like (4) is the one pragmatically conveyed by such utterances. Of course, this latter claim does not as yet make a positive claim as to the correct semantic treatment of deferred expressions; so, although it is a suggestion we will return to below (at the close of §3), let us leave it to one side for now, and consider the stronger proposal that deferred demonstratives and pronouns are semantically akin to descriptive phrases. If such a proposal were to prove attractive, our initial assumption that deferred cases are non-standard would be vindicated, for we would see that, despite surface appearances to the contrary, the correct semantic analysis of these expressions would be as quantified phrases—they would belong alongside expressions of the form ‘the F’ or ‘an F’. Deferred demonstratives and pronouns would belong to an entirely different semantic category to ordinary occurrences of demonstratives and pronouns. So, is this analysis feasible?

2. A Quantified Treatment of Deferred Expressions

The proposal is that deferred demonstratives and pronouns group semantically with descriptions: we should understand these utterances as literally meaning something non-referential or quantificational, despite the surface presence of the word ‘that’.7 Spelling out this idea in any kind of detail, however, immediately creates problems, for we need to know which particular description gives us the literal meaning of the deferred utterance on any given occasion, and it is quite unclear how this matter can be decided. The problem is that there

6 Schiffer, 1995, p. 123. It should be noted that in this passage Schiffer is discussing attributive uses of pronouns, so his suggestion that they be understood along descriptive lines may extend only to these cases; see fn. 15.

7 So deferred demonstratives belong, together with ‘referential’ and ‘incomplete’ descriptions, and anaphoric demonstratives, to the long list of occurrences which allegedly support the claim that surface form is a merely defeasible guide to semantic category.
are multiple, semantically non-equivalent, descriptions which could play the role of the deferred demonstrative in any context, and we need to know which one the deferred expression is supposed to mean. Yet the advocate of the quantificational approach can give us no answer to this question.

The initial plausibility of this quantificational approach comes (at least in part, I believe) from thinking about cases like (3) (‘This is my favourite author’), where there does seem to be an obvious descriptive statement available (arrived at by utilising descriptive information which occurs elsewhere in the utterance, i.e. transposing ‘author’ from the second clause of the sentence to form the restriction of the opening noun phrase). Yet even in this case we should need to know what kind of semantic mechanism privileges this surprising re-ordering of the sentence’s constituents over-and-above other plausibly fitting descriptions like ‘the creator of this’, ‘the person who wrote that story’, or even ‘the individual pictured on the back of this book’. Furthermore, cases like (3) shouldn’t blind us to the myriad of other uses of deferred demonstratives and pronouns where no obvious description suggests itself. So, consider:

(5) ‘She’s gone’, said while indicating an empty chair.

Here, since there is little or no overt descriptive material (depending on one’s favoured understanding of the gender constraint), a maximum amount of work will be required to deliver a description, but this opens the door to an even wider range of possible descriptive replacements. For instance, ‘the previous occupant of that’, ‘the person sitting in this chair five minutes ago’, ‘the female owner of this piece of furniture, ‘the woman who usually sits there’ – all these seem to be entirely possible descriptive replacements for (5), and what we require of the descriptivist is some way to decide amongst them.

One thought might be that we could appeal to the description the speaker had in mind to convey: yet there seems no reason to believe that the speaker must actually have had any particular one of these descriptions in mind prior to her utterance (indeed, there seems to be no requirement that a speaker has any description in mind prior to the use of a deferred demonstrative or pronoun). Also, even if the speaker did happen to have one such description in mind, we have no guarantee that it will be a true description: the speaker may falsely believe that the individual who previously occupied the chair she is now pointing at was the Queen of England, yet this mistaken belief seems quite irrelevant to the truth or falsity of what is expressed.8 Finally, these problems concerning the description used by the speaker are compounded once we realise that, whatever description we suppose the speaker to be utilising (if any), we lack any guarantee that the speaker’s audience will join her in their

8 The utterance of ‘She’s gone’ seems to say something true of the previous occupant, though if this utterance were literally equivalent to ‘The Queen of England has gone’ it would be false.

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selection for this privileged description. Yet without this kind of guarantee the possibility of communicating using deferred expressions seems to be placed under considerable threat. If I utter ‘That is G’, literally meaning by this that ‘The F is G’, but you take me to have literally said ‘The H is G’, it seems that we have simply failed to communicate properly; but on a disguised definite description view there is no obvious way to preclude this divergence from occurring every time someone uses a deferred expression.

So, the existence of a multitude of possible descriptions (and the concomitant difficulties in providing a single compositional rule for taking utterances of deferred demonstratives to the correct description), together with the possibility of false descriptions and the lack of guaranteed agreement in choice of completing description by speaker and hearer, serve simply, I believe, to rule out this proposal as it currently stands. The idea that deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns are semantically anomalous in comparison with ordinary perceptual uses of these expressions cannot be accommodated by treating the former as semantically quantificational (at least, not unless the quantificationalist can show us how to avoid the problems raised in this section). However, perhaps there are other ways to accommodate the apparently non-standard nature of these occurrences: perhaps we can treat perceptual and deferred cases as members of the same semantic category, i.e. referring terms, but do so in different ways. That this manoeuvre is a good one is reinforced by closer examination of the way that deferred expressions behave in certain contexts. For it seems that, even if deferred expressions are anomalous in some respects, the kind of behaviour we expect from them reveals these expressions to be more closely akin to ordinary referring terms than quantified phrases. To see this, let us look at how deferred demonstratives and pronouns appear to behave, first, in contexts which give rise to the possibility of scope distinctions, and, second, in contexts which lack an object for the expression to select.

3. Key Contexts for Deferred Demonstratives and Pronouns

The suggestion of §2 was that what was picked out by a deferred utterance of ‘that’ was just whichever object satisfied some given predicate (like ‘being the author of this’). However, when we look at how deferred demonstratives behave in modal and other embedded contexts, and in empty environments, we can see that this suggestion appears to be mistaken; for deferred demonstratives pattern most naturally in these contexts alongside ordinary referring terms and not alongside descriptions.

First, consider modal claims: as is well known, descriptions (in general) are permissive in changes in extension across possible worlds. That is to say, they are happy to pick out different objects at different worlds, just so long as those objects satisfy the predicates in question. Referring terms on the other hand are much more strict: they demand the same extension across worlds, regardless
of the properties the referent possesses at those other worlds. So, consider the following:

(6) The Prime Minister of the UK in 2000 could have been a Conservative.
(7) Tony Blair could have been a Conservative.9

(6) expresses an object-independent proposition about whoever is Prime Minister at a certain time, it is made true by any world where the Prime Minister in 2000 is a Conservative. So, e.g., it is made true by world, w1, in which Margaret Thatcher is the longest serving PM in history and is still clinging on to power as the leader of the Conservative party and the country at the turn of the Millennium. It is also made true by a world, w2 (perhaps a very close possible world), in which Tony Blair is Prime Minister in 2000 and he is also a Conservative. Now (7) is also true in w2, but this has little to do with how things stand with the Prime Minister and everything to do with how things stand with Tony Blair. (7) expresses an object-dependent proposition about Tony Blair: it will be true in any world where this very man, be he politician, policeman or pig farmer in that world, is a Conservative. (7), because it contains a genuine referring term, can never express a proposition about any object other than the one it picks out in the actual world.

Now, then, consider modal claims involving deferred demonstratives and pronouns:

(8) ‘That might have been my favourite author (if I had read him as a child)’ said whilst pointing at a book.
(9) ‘She’s gone but she might be back’ said while indicating an empty chair.

If (8) or (9) contains a covert descriptive phrase, as was the suggestion of §2, we should expect them to pick out different objects at other worlds.10 On this proposal, just as with (6), the worlds which would make an utterance of (8) or (9) true would be worlds where whichever object has the first property mentioned also has the second. So, in (9) assume that the previous occupant of the chair in this world was A; turning to other possible worlds, we need to concentrate, not necessarily on A, but simply on whoever was the previous

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9 The ‘could have been’ here is meant to express metaphysical, not merely epistemic, possibility.
10 Of course, on some accounts, books have their actual authors essentially (though not on all, cf. Dummett, 1981, The Interpretation of Frege’s Philosophy of Language, Appendix 3, p. 563). If this were correct, then we would not expect (8) to pick out a different object at different worlds, even if it were understood along the lines of the descriptive phrase ‘the author of that’. If such an approach is adopted, (8) should be altered to an example not involving essential features of objects, like (9); I’m grateful to Kirk Ludwig for pointing this out.
occupant of the chair in that world. (9) is made true, on a descriptive reading of deferred demonstratives, by a world in which B sat in the chair, left and then returned. Yet this is simply not what (9) claims: the speaker who utters (9) is concerned with a particular individual, the actual person who vacated the chair, \textit{viz.} A. What matters for the truth of (9) is that there be some world in which A returns to the location of the speaker; regardless of whether A did or did not previously occupy the relevant chair in that world (indeed, (9) is made true by a world in which A returns to the location of the speaker even if A has never sat down in that world!). The same holds for (8): say my favourite author is Hemingway and the book being demonstrated is \textit{The Great Gatsby}. (8) is not made true by a world in which \textit{The Great Gatsby} was written by Hemingway, it is made true by worlds in which Fitzgerald, as opposed to Hemingway, is my favourite author. Contrary to the descriptive interpretation deferred utterances are not made true by specifying how things stand with individuals other than the ones picked out in the actual world. So, the modal behaviour of deferred expressions reveals them to be akin to ordinary referring terms and not descriptions.

This intuitive evidence that deferred expressions are referential can also be reinforced by recognising that, unlike descriptions, deferred expressions remain rigid across changes in temporal dimensions, as well as across modal alterations. So, for instance, suppose I point at an office and say ‘He’s the author of \textit{Concepts’}. If this is interpreted as meaning ‘the occupier of that office is the author of \textit{Concepts’} then this could pick out Jerry Fodor relative to one time of evaluation and someone else, say Ernie Lepore, at a different time of evaluation (on the assumption that Fodor and Lepore trade offices at some point). Yet, intuitively, this sort of general, property-based claim, which allows for a different object to be picked out at different times, is \textit{not} what I intended to express. I didn’t intend to say anything which could \textit{at any time} pick out Ernie Lepore, rather I wanted to say something referential about Jerry and used those objects which were available to me in the perceptual environment to help me do this. But using such things to help me doesn’t seem to entail that I can’t say something referential about the person I want to.\textsuperscript{11}

\textsuperscript{11} So, could deferred demonstratives be elliptical for modally and temporally rigid descriptions, like ‘the actual occupier of that office now’? Clearly this manoeuvre avoids the current challenge, though it would still fall prey to the problem of how this complex description gets selected over and above other fitting descriptions, and guaranteed in common between speaker and hearer. It would also be open to the scope and vacuity charges to be explored below. The general worry with such a move, however, concerns the motivation for it: if we accept that deferred expressions are rigid in the way suggested above, then why try to accommodate this fact by constructing some complex description which mimics the rigid behaviour through the special nature of the predicate in play? Such rigidity is very good evidence that what we have, when we are dealing with a deferred expression, is something which is, as its surface form indicates, genuinely referential; trying to gerrymander a non-referential explanation for this behaviour, simply in order to preserve an otherwise flawed descriptive theory, seems quite unwarranted.
The second (related) test to be looked at involves other complex contexts which give rise to scope ambiguities when one of the object words involved is a quantified phrase; e.g. contexts with multiple quantifiers, negation operators and intentional verbs. For instance, compare:

(10) The tallest spy is not happy.
(11) Bill is not happy.

In (11) there is no scope ambiguity for the negation operator, it can only attach to the predicate phrase ‘is happy’, yielding the simple subject-predicate sentence which tells us that Bill is unhappy. However, as Russell (1905) was at pains to point out, things are very different with sentences like (10), for here there are two readings we can get from the original sentence depending on the scope assigned to the negation:

(10') (∃x)((∀y) ((Ty ↔ y=x) & ¬Hx))
(10'') ¬(∃x)((∀y) ((Ty ↔ y=x) & Hx))

(where ‘Tx’ means that x has the property of being a tallest spy; ‘Hx’ that x is happy).

In (10') we have the narrow scope assignment to the negation, which tells us that the tallest spy is unhappy; but in (10'') we have the very different interpretation that there is no tallest spy who is happy. So, unlike (11), there is a reading on which (10) can be true even where there is no object picked out by the opening noun phrase. The question then is whether deferred demonstratives behave like (10) or (11); do they yield multiple readings in conjunction with negation operators or not?

Consider (12):

(12) ‘That boy is not happy’ said whilst pointing at the door which Jack has just slammed behind him.

If the deferred demonstrative here goes proxy for some description like ‘the boy who just slammed that door’, then we should expect (12) to behave like (10) and give rise to two distinct scope readings, e.g.:

(12') (∃x) ((∀y) (Sy ↔ y=x) & ¬Hx))
(12'') ¬(∃x) ((∀y) (Sy ↔ y=x) & Hx))

(where ‘S’ stands for the predicate ‘x is a boy who has just slammed that door’).

On the first reading we have the claim that whichever unique boy just slammed the door is not happy; whereas, in (12'') we have the wide-scope negation claim that there is no unique door-slamming boy who is happy. However, it seems that (12'') is not an acceptable interpretation of the original
sentence (12); (12), unlike (12’), will not be made true by there being no object which has the property of slamming the (relevant) door in the domain. Rather what (12) claimed, just like (11), was that some particular object has the property of being unhappy. Yet this failure to give rise to two different scope readings in these kinds of complex contexts points again to the fact that deferred expressions demand analysis as genuine referring terms and not as disguised descriptions.

The idea of contexts in which there is no appropriate object brings us on to the final kind of context I want to consider: empty cases. Descriptions which fail to secure an extension still retain their usual content (since the claim they make concerns the relation of properties and not specific individuals which instantiate those properties); but empty uses of referring terms are vacuous. It seems that when a referring expression is used where there is no referent (say, the speaker is hallucinating) we simply cannot assign a truth-value to the utterance. Yet, once again here, deferred cases seem to pattern with referring terms and not with descriptions. Consider the utterance of:

(13) ‘She’s gone’, pointing to an empty chair, in which the speaker has been hallucinating the presence of a woman, whom he now believes to have left the room.

Here the utterance seems devoid of all content, it is vacuous in exactly the same way that pointing at an empty region of space (while hallucinating) and saying ‘She’s happy’ is vacuous. The mere use of an intermediary object to try and pick out the hallucinated object does not result in any content for the utterance, specifically it does not result in interlocutors taking a descriptive proposition like ‘the previous occupant of that chair has left’ as the literal content of what has been said.

So far the findings of this section have not lent any support to the assumption that the best way to handle the difference between deferred and non-deferred expressions is to treat the former as in some way akin to descriptive phrases. For we have seen that deferred expressions do not behave in a way akin to quantified phrases, but consistently pattern alongside referring terms. However, before we move on to examine the kind of semantic analysis of deferred expressions which can accommodate these findings, I would like to pause to consider a potential objection to the above lines of argument. The general complaint is that appealing to modal, scope and empty contexts is, ultimately, a matter of appealing to our semantic intuitions (judgements of which readings we find admissible and which are ruled out) and though the examples focused on above may prompt our semantic intuitions in the way suggested, there are other cases we should consider which seem to prompt us in the other way. That is to say, there are some examples of deferred expressions in the contexts in question where the most natural reading is the
one we would expect if the deferred expression were really a descriptive, quantified phrase.

For instance, in the modal case, consider the cynical movie-goer who, on all previous trips to the cinema has been surrounded by irritating people. Taking his seat for what he fully expects to be another two hours of torture at the hands of Joe Public, he points to the currently unoccupied chair in front of him and says:

(14) It is possible that he wont talk through the whole of the film, but I doubt it.\textsuperscript{12}

Here we might think that not only are there two readings available (one where the description ‘the next occupant of that seat’ takes wide-scope with respect to the modal operator, and one where it takes narrow scope), but, furthermore, that it is the narrow-scope reading which is most easily recovered. The speaker is then most naturally heard as saying:

(14')\textsuperscript{\Diamond} [the x: next occupant of that, x] <quiet during the film, x>

(where ‘\textsuperscript{\Diamond}’ is the (metaphysical) possibility operator).

But being able to recover this kind of narrow-scope descriptive reading goes against the claim that deferred expressions behave like referring terms in modal contexts. The same point can be made with respect to the other scope contexts considered, for instance:

(15) ‘Every intern wants to have an affair with him’ said whilst pointing to the podium reserved for the President of the USA.

If the speaker here continues with ‘Even if he is deceitful, like Nixon, or boring, like Carter, at least it’s something to tell the grandchildren about!’; it seems clear that we would take them as having conveyed a proposition not about Clinton directly, but just about whoever it is who has the property of being the President. Yet again this is just to say that (15) has a narrow-scope descriptive reading at odds with the idea that deferred expressions are referring terms.

Finally, concerning the empty cases, it seems again that intuitions may vary. For instance, imagine an utterance of:

(16) ‘That’s a bear’ said whilst pointing at what looks like a set of paw prints in the sand.

\textsuperscript{12} Examples (14)–(15) stem originally from conversation with Peter Ludlow.
But now suppose that the marks in the sand were not made by a bear but are natural depressions or the result of a freak wind. Here, it might be suggested, the speaker has asserted a perfectly reasonable proposition, though one which turns out to be false. Specifically, they have said:

\[(16') [\text{the } x: x \text{ is responsible for those}] <\text{is a bear, } x>\]

This proposition is false, not because \(x\) is not a bear, but because the quantified expression has an empty extension (there is no such \(x\)). So, the proponent of a quantificational approach to deferred expressions might contend, although in some cases it is hard to recover the readings indicative of descriptive status, there are other cases involving deferred demonstratives and pronouns where the appropriate readings are much easier to come by (indeed, where the uniquely descriptive reading—i.e. the narrow-scope readings—are the most natural).

However, although the quantificationalist is right to point out that matters here are more complex than our initial arguments presumed, nevertheless I think we should not be led to reject the insight that deferred expressions are semantically referential. One initial point to notice is that, even if the quantificationalist can find some cases where we seem able to retrieve a suitable descriptive reading as the most natural interpretation, they still stand in need of an explanation of the vast range of cases where the referential reading predominates. If there really are two perfectly acceptable semantic interpretations for sentences involving deferred expressions, then the advocate of a quantificational interpretation owes us an explanation of why, in so many cases, there seems to be no ambiguity, with the referential reading suggesting itself to the exclusion of any (narrow-scope) descriptive interpretation. Furthermore, not only does the predominance of the referential reading require explanation here, we also need an account of those cases where the (narrow-scope) descriptive reading seems not just hard to recover but genuinely illicit: to interpret (9) (‘She’s gone but she might be back’) as expressing a narrow-scope descriptive proposition seemed not just slightly perverse but genuinely, semantically mistaken. Thus the quantificationalist owes us an account both of the prevalence of one kind of reading for deferred expressions and of the illicit nature of peculiarly quantificational readings in at least some cases.

Matters are also more complex as far as the empty case is concerned, for it may be that the intuition that a proposition is expressed, though one which is false, can be accommodated without rendering the deferred expression quantificationally. There are at least two options the advocate of a referential reading might pursue here: on the one hand, she might claim that the cases where it seems natural to take a proposition as expressed are those where (unlike the use of a demonstrative or pronoun to talk about a hallucinated or imaginary object) there really is an object to be referred to, though not one that has the property being ascribed. So, for instance, in (16), the ‘paw print’
case, the speaker might succeed in referring to the thing responsible for the indicated object (in this case, the wind or the process which created the natural depressions) and mistakenly say of it that it is a bear. Here the speaker does succeed in expressing a proposition which refers to the object standing in the appropriate relation to the object of ostension, but because she is mistaken about the identity of this object, her utterance is false. Or again, suppose that I point to what I take to be a Jackson Pollock and say ‘That is my favourite artist’, but unbeknownst to me the canvas is paint-splattered merely due to its being placed too near to a rather messy paint-mixing machine. Then we might think I say something referential about the object responsible for the canvas (the machine) but what I say is false since it is not my favourite artist (indeed, it is not an artist at all).

The second option for the advocate of a referential analysis would be to hold that cases like (13) or (16) are akin to standard uses of demonstratives and pronouns to talk about imaginary or hallucinated objects, but maintain that in all these cases there is a referential, though false, proposition which gets expressed. This would be to adopt the kind of position on mythical, imaginary and hallucinated objects defended by, for instance, Kripke (1980) and Salmon (1998): the objects in all these cases can be the subjects of referential propositions, though sentences which ascribe them properties possessed by non-mythical, or non-imaginary, objects will turn out to be false. So, when the hallucinating Macbeth says either ‘That’s a dagger’ or ‘He’s gone’ (indicating the chair previously ‘occupied’ by the ghost of Banquo), he succeeds in expressing a proposition, though one which is false since the hallucinated object is not, in the first case, a dagger, or, in the second, a man.¹³

Finally, let’s return briefly to the scope contexts and the idea that, on at least some (rare) occasions, a narrow-scope descriptive interpretation is possible; is there any explanation of this phenomenon the referentialist can give? It seems that there is, for she might maintain that, while the referential reading gives the sole semantic interpretation of the utterance, a further, pragmatically conveyed reading is available in these cases; so, for instance, though the speaker who utters (15) in the current context literally says that every intern wants to have an affair with Bill Clinton, he may thereby convey the proposition that ‘every intern wants to have an affair with the President of the USA’ as an instance of speaker meaning. In this case, though we would view the speaker as having made some kind of mistake in his choice of sentence, we can still

¹³ There are, I think, two further options I will not pursue here: one would allow that a proposition gets expressed, though one which is not truth-evaluable. Alternatively, we might simply resist the claim that a proposition gets expressed in any of these cases; though we might be temporarily confused (e.g. thinking that there is some creature which was responsible for the ‘paw prints’) once we discover the mistake—once we realise that the case is parallel to saying ‘This is a bear’ pointing into empty space—we see that no proposition has been expressed. The intuition that something is said would then be thought to be premised on the idea that we are ignorant of the speaker’s error.
follow what he is trying to say—as good and charitable interlocutors we interpret him in such a way as to make the best sense possible of his conversation (within reason) and thus preserve communication, even though we might here censor him for speaking loosely or not quite properly. Furthermore, we should notice that exactly the same phenomenon appears to arise for ordinary (non-deferred) uses of demonstratives and pronouns. Consider:

(17) ‘I am traditionally allowed whatever I want for my last meal’ said by a condemned prisoner (Nunberg, 1993).

(18) ‘You shouldn’t have done that, she might have been a dangerous criminal’ said to the child who has just let her sweet, grey-haired grandmother in, but without checking first to see who it was.

Here it seems we have exactly the same kind of phenomenon: the use of a pronoun to talk not directly about the object the expression refers to but about some appropriate description under which the referent falls (‘condemned prisoner’, ‘person at the door’). Yet here I think the tendency is certainly to treat the agent as speaking loosely, as literally expressing one proposition, though conveying another. In all of these cases, it is quite clear that we know what the speaker means but it is quite unclear that this leads us to offer a different analysis of what her words mean. ‘Person at the door’ is not one of the literal meanings of ‘she’, though sometimes an utterance of ‘she’ can be used to talk in general about people at the door; similarly, it is no part of the meaning of ‘he’ said whilst pointing at a given podium that it literally expresses ‘the President of the USA’, though uses of ‘he’ in the right situation can pragmatically convey propositions about Presidents in general.

What this amounts to is the claim that the referential/attributive distinction, first brought clearly into focus by Donnellan for definite descriptions, and viewed here as a pragmatic and not a semantic phenomenon, applies across

14 The sort of explanation envisaged here runs along familiar Gricean lines: attributing the literal meaning of the sentence to the speaker would involve seeing them as flouting some general principle of communication, thus we accommodate them by assigning some more suitable proposition as the one pragmatically conveyed (i.e. the general reading is treated as an implicature). However, this is not the only possibility here: an alternative pragmatic explanation involves seeing demonstratives and pronouns as semantically underdetermined, requiring features of the context to play a role in order for a proposition to be expressed by utterances containing the term. This kind of approach is, in general terms, familiar from ‘Relevance Theory’ (see Sperber and Wilson, 1986), in which a procedure of pragmatic enrichment may be required prior to the recovery of a proposition expressed (i.e. in order to recover the explicature). In the case of deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns, we might allow the pragmatic enrichment to result in either a singular or a general proposition, depending on whether the salient features of the context introduce an object or a property into the proposition expressed. Such an approach (in broad terms) can be found in Rouchota, 1992; Bezuidenhout, 1997 and Powell, 1998. It is not endorsed in the text because of independent worries I have about such semantic underdetermination; but, as far as this paper is concerned, non-Gricean pragmatic solutions remain live alternatives.
the board to utterances containing demonstratives and pronouns, as much as
to those containing definite descriptions.\(^\text{15}\) Sometimes, in a given context, a
speaker can succeed in communicating a proposition which diverges from the
literal, semantic value of the sentence uttered, but (for all the reasons given
in Kripke, 1977) this does not show the standard semantic analysis wrong, it
simply demonstrates our ability as charitable and creative interpreters.\(^\text{16}\) If this
move is correct, then it leads to an important clarification of the border
between figurative and non–figurative language use: for, if we are relying on
nothing more than a brute intuition of difference to recognise standard versus
non–standard uses it would seem that examples like (14)–(18) would clearly
get classified as non–standard (indeed, such cases often appear as examples of
figurative language use). Yet imposing the referential/attributive distinction at
a pragmatic level allows us to cope easily with cases like these without straying
from our normal semantic treatment for expressions of the given surface type.
Or at least it does provided we can deliver a workable referential semantic
analysis for deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns; so, it is to this crucial
task that I turn next. In §4 we will explore two different ways to accommodate
the idea that deferred demonstratives and pronouns are semantically referential:
one which retains a semantic level distinction between perceptual and deferred
expressions, and one which does not. I will argue that only the latter approach
is ultimately feasible and thus that it should be adopted. Finally, however, we
will see that adopting it has some important consequences for the boundaries
of a semantic theory.

4. Two Referential Treatments of Deferred Expressions

Recall what seems to be going on in a deferred demonstrative occurrence:
there is an ostensive gesture (a pointing, a looking, a head tilt, etc) to a percep-
tually present object, but this object does not thereby become the subject of

\(^\text{15}\) Thus the debate about whether a given occurrence of ‘that’ or ‘she’, etc, is perceptual or
defered is orthogonal to the question of whether it is attributive or referential: we may
have referential, deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns (examples (1–3)), and attribu-
tive, deferred uses (example (15)). This is not a novel claim; see, amongst others, Bezuiden-
hout, 1997.

\(^\text{16}\) This idea, that certain occurrences of deferred demonstratives and pronouns may result in
the communication of a pragmatically conveyed, descriptive proposition is in agreement
with Recanati’s (1993) suggested treatment for these cases; however, I disagree with him
over when this pragmatic alternative comes into play. Recanati maintains that any occur-
cence of a deferred demonstrative or pronoun where the interlocutors lack acquaintance-
style knowledge of the referent must result in a descriptive proposition being communicated,
as agents will have only a partial grasp of the referential proposition literally in play. I would
argue that a quantified proposition gets communicated whenever it is clear that speakers
wish to privilege some particular feature of the object referred to, and this may or may not
be the case when speakers lack acquaintance with the referent. Certainly, I think nothing
in the lack of acquaintance per se requires the rejection of the referential proposition as the
one communicated; see §5 for a somewhat fuller discussion of this point.
the utterance. Instead some related object, not available for direct indication, is picked out. There are, I believe, two ways in which we could seek to accommodate this behaviour within a general referential semantics. Both proposals require the recognition that in deferred cases there are two distinct elements in play: the object of ostension (e.g. thing pointed to or looked at) and the object referred to (the final ‘subject of conversation’, as we might say). Following Nunberg’s (1993) terminology, we might call the first object the index and the second the referent. The difference between our two referential semantic proposals then emerges with respect to how we accommodate the relationship between the index and the referent, and (following on from this) how we construe the relationship between perceptual and deferred demonstrative. On the one hand, we might try to incorporate the relationship between the two entities within our *semantic* rule for deferred expressions (this will be the first suggestion explored below); while, alternatively, we might locate it within the *pragmatic* domain. On the first approach a clear semantic distinction will be retained between perceptual and deferred demonstratives: our language will be thought to contain (at least) two distinct semantic types of demonstrative, each of which will be properly understood utilising a different semantic rule. On the second approach, however, a single semantic rule will suffice for both occurrences; in this case our language will be thought to contain a single semantic type of demonstrative, which has (at least) two distinct uses. Initially both these moves look feasible; however, I want to suggest that the former quickly runs into difficulties.

An initial reason for opting for the former approach, whereby the relationship between the index and the referent receives semantic level accommodation, is to avoid an obviously inappropriate semantic rule for deferred demonstratives along the following lines:

\[(D) \text{ In any context } \epsilon, \text{ if } d \text{ is a directly referential term and } \delta \text{ an act of demonstration picking out } x_1, \text{ then } d \text{ refers to some other object } x_2.\]

As it stands, (D) is clearly inadequate, for it places no constraint at all on the relationship between the demonstrated object and the referent. Conceivably, on (D) we could refer to *anything* by pointing at *anything*, and there would be no way to discern a genuine mistake from an odd or peculiar instance of deferred reference. This totally unconstrained account cannot be right for deferred occurrences, however, for deferred expressions require a quite particular kind of contact between the object perceptually present and the object referred to. Though the relationship may be quite complex in certain contexts, it is clearly not the case that just anything goes. So, it seems the kind of rule we need is the following:

\[(D') \text{ In any context } \epsilon, d[\delta] \text{ is a directly referential term that designates an}\]
object appropriately related to the demonstratum, if any, of \( \delta \) in \( \epsilon \), and that otherwise designates nothing.\(^{17}\)

For this semantic rule to be admissible, however, we clearly need to spell out what is meant by ‘appropriately related’—when are two objects, \( x_1 \) and \( x_2 \), related in an acceptable way, and when are they not?

Perhaps the most obvious move here is to expand \((D')\) to build in the kinds of relations which count as appropriate for acceptable instances of deferred reference. But how are we supposed to do this? What are we to put into our semantic rule? One thought might be that we should require a causal relation between \( x_1 \) and \( x_2 \); for clearly this is the relation we want on at least some occasions.\(^{18}\) For instance we might think that the relation between a painter and a picture is a causal one, or that between an author and their book; but equally, the causal relation cannot be the only acceptable relation for deferred reference. For there can be no causal relationship between abstract objects like numbers and their inscriptions; nor, on a more mundane level, does the causal relation seem to be the right one for indicating people via parts of their body, or via their past locations, or via their possessions. Nor, it seems, is the relationship between an elephant and the painting of an elephant a straightforwardly causal one. So, though a causal relationship is one kind of relationship which permits deferred reference, equally so must be mereological relations, type-token relations, spatio-temporal relations, and pictorial relations. So what the advocate of this kind of proposal now needs is a rule like \((D'')\):

\[
(D'') \text{ In any context } \epsilon, \quad d[\delta] \text{ is a directly referential term that designates an object which is (correctly) causally related to; or mereologically related to; or stands in a type-token relation to; or is (correctly) spatio-temporally related to; or is pictorially related to, the demonstratum, if any, of } \delta \text{ in } \epsilon, \text{ and that otherwise designates nothing.}
\]

Yet this kind of rule seems completely hopeless as an account of the meaning of deferred demonstrative or pronoun expressions, for there is no clear end to such a disjunctive specification of how the index and the referent must tie up. It is not as though we have, in some sense, ‘got to the end of language’ and all the ways in which objects have come to be used as indicators of other objects can be finitely listed; rather, the ability to use one object to draw attention to another is an on-going process. Whether pointing at one object to pick out another is admissible depends not on some predetermined list of ways in which objects can relate, but on highly contextual and variable fea-

\(^{17}\) This is a version of an original rule in Kaplan, which will be given in its unadulterated form below.

\(^{18}\) We might recall that the causal relationship was the one Schiffer deemed intuitively correct for the footprint case.

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tutes, like social conventions, the common knowledge between interlocutors, their conceptual framework and the salient features of objects. We can always tell a story which makes an apparently outlandish act of deferred reference possible, even where two objects are not related in any way which previously appears on our list. Yet, prior to such a convention growing up, how were we to know whether the relationship it appeals to could underpin an act of reference? Furthermore, if our semantic rule takes the form of this indefinitely long disjunct, we will still need the context to come into play to tell us which disjunct is operative on any given occasion. An indicated object will stand in a plethora of causal, mereological, type-token, etc., relations to different objects, thus the context will prove crucial in determining which one of these relationships the audience should pay attention to on any occasion. Yet if the context has to play this role anyway, we might now begin to wonder whether the putative semantic information is actually providing any useful service at all.19

What considerations like these begin to reveal, I would suggest, is that how we get from one object to another in deferred cases goes far beyond the meagre resources of linguistic meaning (where this is understood as the kind of rules for understanding language envisaged by formal semantics). The sorts of features which govern the move from the indicated object to the referent are simply not the sorts of things we can hope to make our semantic theory sensitive to, but nor, I think, should we want to. Understanding how objects relate to one another is a complicated matter, involving a great deal of world knowledge, which goes far beyond the merely semantic. Knowing that pointing at a picture is a good or acceptable way of making the painter of that picture salient, or that the referents of a deictic use of the word ‘she’ can sometimes be called to attention by indicating a chair, is not something we should expect an analysis of the linguistic meaning of referential words to give us. To repeat, what determining these kinds of facts requires is rich and complex world knowl-

19 So, could ‘appropriately related to’ in (D’) be spelt out in some other way than this kind of indefinitely long list? Well, one suggestion (as made by a referee for this journal) is that we introduce an appeal to pragmatics directly within our semantic rule at this point. In this case ‘appropriately related to’ would serve as a ‘placeholder’ for whichever relationship was deemed contextually salient in a given context of utterance. Two points on this: first, the suggestion is very close in spirit to that embraced below—specifically, it would, I think, allow a single rule to cover both perceptual and deferred cases (making this distinction one of use not meaning), since the contextually salient relationship might in some (i.e. the perceptual) cases simply be that of identity. Secondly, however, to the extent that the two proposals now differ, I think we may have some reason to prefer that to be advocated in the text. For the picture under consideration here seems aligned with accounts which posit wide-ranging semantic underdetermination, i.e. the idea that pragmatic enrichment is often required prior to the recovery of an expressed proposition, so that pragmatic features are essential in the recovery of both implicatures and explicatures (see Sperber and Wilson, 1986; also fn. 14). Although this is not a topic I can address here, it may be that there are independent worries with this kind of semantic approach, which would reflect on the acceptability of the current proposal.
edge concerning how objects in our environment relate to one another; we need to look to the beliefs and desires shared by interlocutors, socially salient or conventional relations between objects, previous conversational topics, and probably much more besides. But these features go beyond what we need to understand in order to understand the meaning of utterances containing words like ‘that’ or ‘she’.

So, then, if we need to treat deferred expressions as genuine referring terms, yet we cannot hope to capture the complex and context-bound relationship between the indicated object and the referent within a semantic rule for them, where does this leave us? Well, perhaps surprisingly, it leaves us able to account for all deferred utterances without straying very far from the standard, direct reference analysis of demonstratives—so long as we are careful about how we spell out the technical notions which this theory utilises. To implement this proposal (i.e. to deliver a single semantic rule which fits both deferred and non-deferred uses of demonstratives) it turns out that all we need to do is to separate the notions of ostensive gesture, e.g. pointings, head tilts, etc, from the notion of demonstration, allowing that one object may be pointed at, etc, while another is demonstrated.\(^{20}\) Liberating demonstration from an equivalence claim with ostensive indication allows us to adopt a quite standard rule for all demonstrative expressions: simply, for a sentence containing a demonstrative expression to be true, the object demonstrated must satisfy the predicate mentioned. Thus:

\[(D^*) \text{In any context } c, d[\delta] \text{ is a directly referential term that designates the demonstratum, if any, of } \delta \text{ in } c, \text{ and that otherwise designates nothing.}\] \(^{21}\)

Simply, ‘This is my favourite author’ is true just in case the object demonstrated is the speaker’s favourite author; what changes here is that the object demonstrated may not be the object pointed at (though, of course, the object

\(^{20}\) Though I have opted for different terminology, this proposal is extremely similar to that put forward in Nunberg, 1993, pp. 23–5, which involves distinguishing an index and a referent. The index is picked out by a demonstration, together with the locative component of the expression (e.g. the fact that ‘this’ indicates an object near to the speaker, while ‘that’ indicates one at some proximal distance). The referent is then ‘any individual or property that corresponds to their indices in some salient way’ (25), with what counts as a ‘salient way’ being determined by appeal to common knowledge in a given context. My account does differ from Nunberg’s in certain respects; for instance, he is concerned to reject the Kaplanian distinction between pure indexicals and demonstratives, and he suggests pronouns such as ‘he’, uttered without an accompanying ostensive gesture, cannot be used to make deferred reference (neither of these claims are endorsed here). In general, however, I view the arguments of §§2–3 as giving further reasons to endorse the kind of approach Nunberg put forward.

\(^{21}\) Kaplan, 1977, p. 527.
pointed at may be *identical* to the object demonstrated, as is the case in perceptual uses of demonstratives). 22

A rule like \((D^*)\), because it extends to both deferred and non-deferred uses of demonstratives, satisfies any putative learnability constraints: we do not have to posit a separate rule which is possessed or acquired by the infant in order to account for their ability to use deferred expressions. Rather, the child who is competent with perceptual demonstratives *already* possesses all the semantic information they need to use deferred expressions (what they may be lacking is sophisticated enough world knowledge to put to use the semantic tools they have at their disposal). The predominance of perceptual demonstratives in the vocabulary of small children would then be explained, not by their having to learn a special rule for deferred cases, but by their limited grasp of the (non-semantic) relations between objects in the perceptual environment and objects beyond it. A second important benefit of adopting a rule like \((D^*)\) is that it does not require us to draw a sharp boundary where, on reflection, it seems none exists. Once we recognise that I can refer to you by pointing at your arm, or at the part of your head visible over a wall, or at the tail of your coat as you leave the room, or at your reflection in the water, or at your photograph, or at part of your shadow, etc., the idea of drawing a semantic distinction at any point on this scale comes to seem quite hopeless. What the current proposal recognises is simply that there are *lots* of ways to draw an object to attention to facilitate the use of a referring expression, and pointing directly to the object is just one way amongst others—other ways which include pointing at a related object.

5. The Repercussions of the Referential Analysis of Deferred Expressions

\((D^*)\) works because it is conservative about the amount of work it expects our semantic theory to do. Specifically, it takes the task of a semantic analysis of demonstratives and pronouns to be to yield the conditions under which sentences containing these expressions are true; what it does not undertake to do is to specify how interlocutors identify the objects in question in these cases. According to \((D^*)\) there may be an awful lot of information relevant to our full understanding of a communicative exchange (i.e. a grasp of what is said) which nevertheless is not semantically relevant. Though we will, in

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22 One potential objection to the current proposal is that it is in conflict with some sort of pre-theoretical notion of demonstration we have, whereby it is simply identical with ostensive gesture. However, even if we accept the role of pre-theoretic intuitions here, it is quite unclear that we do have such a notion anyway. Talk of ‘demonstration’ in natural language usually involves doing proofs or illustrating actions, and *not* ostensive gestures. We should recognise that the notion of demonstration being deployed with respect to demonstratives is already a semi-technical one, which abstracts from the locutions of ordinary speakers; cf. Kaplan, 1977, p. 490.
most cases, expect the competent interlocutor to be able to gather from features of the wider context precisely which object is being demonstrated by the speaker, such information is not guaranteed by the semantic analysis of demonstrative or pronoun expressions. Yet, if this is right, then there are serious repercussions for semantic theories.

If deferred expressions are treated as semantically referential, then any semantic analysis of referring terms which treats it as constitutive of referential status that agents be able to identify the referent non-descriptively must be rejected. It is clear that I can use a deferred expression when I know very little about the object I aim to talk about: I can point at a book and talk about its author, or a painting and its painter, or a coat and its owner, yet in all these cases I can certainly lack the kind of ‘up-close-and-personal’ knowledge of the subject of my utterance which has so often been taken to be a prerequisite for the use of a referring term. So, adopting the referential model of deferred expressions must, it seems, lead us to reject the kind of epistemological constraints on referring terms instigated by Russell’s ‘acquaintance’ constraint, and reiterated by many subsequent theorists. Deferred demonstratives demand semantic analysis as ordinary referring terms yet they flout any acquaintance-type principle. Thus it seems a proper understanding of deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns helps to drive home the point (stressed by Crimmins, 1992, amongst others) that knowing which object is referred to (in some substantial sense), though it is an extremely common feature of uses of demonstratives and pronouns, is not an inherent or necessary part of what it is to be semantically referential: in this respect we should keep our epistemology out of our semantics.

The second important repercussion of this view of deferred expressions concerns the limits of a semantic theory in accommodating all our sensitivities to linguistic features. For although we began with a firm idea that deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns were in some sense different to standard perceptual occurrences of these same expression-types, what we have now come to see is that this difference is properly accommodated outside the semantic realm. Speakers can differentiate between deferred and non-deferred demonstratives, but when they do this what they are sensitive to are non-semantic features. For instance, they may be sensitive to the fact that in deferred cases the relationship between the object pointed at and the object referred to is more oblique, and that broader world-knowledge is required to identify the referent than is required by straightforward perceptual cases. Or again, they may be sensitive to the fact that, since no perceptual identification of the referent is presumed in deferred cases, they can be less informative than other uses of demonstratives, where such acquaintance knowledge of the referent is presumed. Yet this is just to recognise again that not everything concerning our understanding of communicative linguistic exchanges can or should be attributed to the semantic realm.

Finally, the recognition that the information required for grasping what is
said by a particular utterance can extend well beyond what is properly captured in our semantic theory holds out the promise of a novel explanation of other apparently problematic ‘non-standard’ uses of language. One such case might emerge with respect to metaphorical speech, for here too it seems that we may want to allow that the crucial information needed to understand a metaphor is itself non-semantic; i.e. that understanding metaphor is not strictly (or solely) a linguistic process at all. In this way, what is required to understand a metaphorical use of ‘Peter is a wolf’ would not be merely semantic information about the meanings of the words and their mode of combination, but substantial world-knowledge about the kinds of things wolves are.23

To conclude: I have argued that, even if we wish to respect the pre-theoretical intuition that deferred uses of demonstratives and pronouns differ in some (substantial) way from perceptual uses of the same expression-types we cannot, as some have initially suspected, treat the former as semantically akin to quantified phrases; rather, their behaviour in complex scope and vacuity contexts reveals that analysis as ordinary referring terms is to be preferred. I have suggested that the only feasible way to spell out this insight is to treat deferred expressions as entirely semantically synonymous with ordinary perceptual demonstratives, and one simple way to do this is to separate the notions of ostensive gesture and demonstration. As long as we are prepared to divorce demonstration and indication, the standard mechanisms of direct reference are opened up to deferred uses of expressions; our intuitions about the difference in these roles for demonstratives can then be accommodated outside the semantic realm, in considerations like the relative cognitive usefulness of the utterance. How pointing at a chair succeeds in raising an individual to salience is of course an interesting question, as is the issue of the kind of contact required between agent and object for referential expressions to be of optimal cognitive value, but they are simply not questions we should expect our semantic theory for demonstratives and pronouns to answer. Thus a correct understanding of deferred expressions helps to reveal the scope and limits proper to a formal semantic theory.

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23 This topic is explored in more detail in Borg, 2001.

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