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*Inferentialism and Singular Reference*¹

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I

In *Making It Explicit* (1994) Robert Brandom claims that we may distinguish those linguistic expressions with object-representational purport — the singular terms — from others merely by the structure of their inferential relations. A good part of his inferentialist program rests on this claim. At first blush it can seem implausible: linguistic expressions stand in inferential relations *to each other*, so how could we appeal to those relations to decide on the obtaining of what seems to be relation between linguistic expressions and objects in general (viz., *x purports to represent y*)? It is perhaps not surprising then that Brandom's proposal fails. But it definitely is surprising *how* it fails. The problem is that in order to specify the sort of *generality* there is to an expression's inferential role, one must appeal to some version of the traditional distinction between extensional and nonextensional occurrences of expressions, and there appears to be no way to draw anything like that distinction in inferentialist terms. For the inferential proprieties governing the different occurrences an expression can have are so varied that they do not determine a binary partition of those occurrences. (The closest we can

1 For comments on conference presentations of some of this material I am grateful to Philip Robbins (2001 Central States Philosophical Association) and John Vickers (2002 Pacific APA) and to audiences at those talks; for comments on previous versions of this paper I am grateful to Robert Brandom, Douglas Patterson, Jonathan Sutton and Tadeusz Zawadzki.

get is to discern degrees of extensionality, and that is not close enough.) As Brandom is unable to characterize it in inferentialist terms, then, he must eschew the notion of singular referential purport. Thus his view is even more radical than advertised.

Brandom's theory is not the only one that is challenged by the result that we can't talk about inferential roles without talking about denotation. The point bears on so-called 'two factor' theories of content as well, insofar as they conceive of inferential roles as specifiable without reference to facts about denotation. Moreover, it suggests that an individual speaker's *grasp* of the inferential role of an expression rests on — thus cannot explain — her ability to distinguish 'purely' object-representational occurrences of linguistic expressions from occurrences of other sorts.

II Background

Some remarks are in order concerning the importance to Brandom's project of the claim that is our topic. *Making It Explicit* is devoted to showing that there is a notion of semantic content — centrally, the content of an assertion — that can be characterized in terms of inferential proprieties. Brandom holds that if some performances are governed by inferential proprieties that are structured, and change, according to the 'scorekeeping' practice he describes in ch. 3 (especially on 190-3), then they have semantic contents — for they can be the upshots of perceptual episodes (ch. 4), they admit of attributions of truth values (ch. 5) and they admit of characterization in *de dicto* attitude ascriptions (ch. 8). To show that would be to do a great deal of the work required to justify using the label 'semantic content.' But not all of it. For as Brandom himself notes,

[the phenomenon of our] talking about something (characterizing an object) ... is too central to our understanding of what we are doing when we think and talk simply to be ignored. Unless it accounts for the possibility of representing particular objects, a semantic theory will not address the concerns that many have taken to define its topic. (338)

Accordingly he acknowledges that he is 'obliged to offer a reading of singular reference' (*ibid.*) in inferentialist terms. Such a reading is also required for important parts of the project. Both the treatments of anaphora (ch. 7) and *de re* attitude ascription (ch. 8) — which Brandom calls 'the fundamental representational locution of natural languages' (499) — require that singular terms have been distinguished.

With a 'reading of singular reference' in hand, Brandom could still say with the rest of us that we talk about objects and their properties. But

rather than saying that what makes this possible is, say, the obtaining of causal relations between particular objects and particular tokenings of linguistic expressions, he would say that what makes it possible — indeed, what it consists in — is that the inferential relations that those expressions stand in are structured in a certain way. He would make no *explanatory* appeal to any relation between objects and expression-tokenings.

In offering an inferentialist construal of representational purport, then, Brandom is not just putting his theory through its paces to show us something interesting that it can do. He is trying to vindicate its claim to be a theory of ‘what we are doing when we think and talk.’ He wants to give us a ‘an alternative to familiar ways of talking about intentional phenomena’ (xxii), including object-representational purport.²

III Brandom’s proposal

A crude statement of Brandom’s proposal is this: the singular terms are those expressions all of whose inferential relations are symmetric. While predicates, say, stand in some asymmetric inferential relations — think of ‘is red’ and ‘is coloured’ — singular terms stand in none. This thought dates back at least to P.F. Strawson (1970), and in germinal form perhaps to Aristotle’s claim that substances do not have contraries (*Cat.* 5).

Strawson did not take this as a way to *characterize* singular terms; he thought that it is an adequate characterization to say that the singular terms are those expressions whose role is to specify particular objects (104). He then offered an *explanation* of their inferential symmetry, basing it on an unobjectionable metaphysical principle about objects and properties.³ Brandom, on the other hand, does not think that we so much as understand what singular terms *are* until we have specified what is distinctive about their inferential roles. He eschews all assumptions, no

2 Brandom (360-1) follows Quine (1960, 96) in maintaining that what is distinctive of singular terms is their *purporting* to represent individual objects rather than their actually doing so, for there are empty singular terms and there are general terms that, as it happens, pick out only one object.

3 Namely, that properties ‘come in groups the members of which are related by relations of mutual exclusiveness or (sometimes) of one-way involvement *vis à vis* any and every particular they may be assigned to’ whereas objects ‘do not come in groups the members of which are related by relations of mutual exclusiveness or of one-way involvement *vis à vis* any and every’ property they may have. Strawson considers this ‘as obvious and (nearly) as fundamental as anything in philosophy’ (1970, 103).

matter how uncontroversial or obvious, about the relation between singular terms and objects, or about the nature of objects. (Indeed, in his book “‘self-evident’ is not a word whose use is encouraged or endorsed’ [577].)

No matter how it figures in one’s account of singular terms, however, the basic thought just described invites the objection that not all a singular term’s inferential relations are symmetric. Jerry Fodor and Ernie Lepore press this objection, claiming, for example, that “‘Father was at Magdalen’ implies ‘Father was at Oxford’ but not *vice versa*’ (2001, 476). Here it is two singular terms — ‘Oxford’ and ‘Magdalen’ — that stand in an asymmetric inferential relation. There is a ready reply to this objection, which Brandom (386-7) and Strawson (107-8) both make. It is that such inferential relations are not instances of *general* patterns, and by ‘inferential relation’ the proposal should be understood as meaning inferential relations that are instances of general patterns.⁴ (I discuss this objection more fully below, §VI.)

Fair enough, but this raises the question of the *sort* of generality these patterns have. As concerns Brandom’s proposal, we can tackle this question only after we have understood his notion of a ‘simple material substitution-inferential commitment,’ or SMSIC, which I discuss in the next section. My claim will be that there is no way for Brandom to answer this question, so he cannot characterize the singular terms in terms of their inferential roles. The problem is that there is no way to describe the generality of inferential roles without talking about the denotations of expressions; and explanatory talk of denotation is precisely what an inferentialist wants to avoid.

IV SMSICs

Any inferentialist must work with some notion of the inferential role of an expression. Brandom thinks of inferential roles in terms of proprieties governing the *substitution* of one expression in a sentence for another. It is not obligatory to think of inferential roles in this way. One could see the move from ‘George is happy’ to ‘Someone is emotional’ as directly warranted by the inferential roles of the expressions involved, even

4 Granted, some of Brandom’s statements are misleading on this score, e.g. ‘Predicate substitution inferences may be asymmetric, while singular-term substitution inferences are always symmetric’ (372). But his overall strategy clearly does require that his claim concern those inferences that are instances of patterns of some generality; this is also explicit in his reply (386-7) to the objection just described.

though it is not a substitution inference since there is no component expression in the first sentence, substitution for which results in the second. But it is not a very objectionable approach. For a great many of the inferences that do come to mind under the heading 'inferential role' are substitution inferences, and it is plausible to hold that the propriety of those that are not derives from the propriety of those that are. (Substitute 'Someone' for 'George,' then 'is emotional' for 'is happy.')

Brandom holds that substitution-inferential proprieties are determined by 'simple material substitution-inferential commitments,' or SMSICs. A SMSIC is a commitment to the propriety of substitution inferences⁵ that are instances of some general pattern. Brandom's SMSIC concerning the definite descriptions 'the first postmaster general of the United States' and 'the inventor of bifocals,' for example, commits him to the propriety of 'a great many substitution inferences materially involving⁶ those expressions,' such as the inference from 'The first postmaster general of the United States spoke French' to 'The inventor of bifocals spoke French' (373). Similarly, his SMSIC relating the predicates 'walked' and 'moved' commits him to the propriety of such inferences as that from 'Benjamin Franklin walked' to 'Benjamin Franklin moved' (371).

A speaker's SMSIC relating two expressions *e* and *f*, then, commits her to the propriety of certain substitution inferences. As substitutions can go either way — that is, either *f* can be substituted for *e* or *vice versa* — each of these inferences falls into one of two sets: the first includes all such inferences that are from an *e*-variant to an *f*-variant, while the

5 Brandom's syntactic scheme (introduced on pp. 367-70) allows for both a strict and a broad notion of substitution; he presents the notion of a SMSIC in terms of the latter (371). Here I will follow Brandom in using 'substitution' to refer both to substitutions proper (e.g. the substitution of the sentence-part 'Rousseau' for the sentence-part 'Kant') and to what Brandom calls 'frame replacements' (e.g. the replacement of the frame ' α admires β and α admires α ' with ' α writes about β and α writes about α '). (Sentence frames are best thought of as sets of substitutionally variant sentences [that are closed under the variance] — see 407, where Brandom writes of frames as such sets.) Correspondingly, when I say that a SMSIC relates two 'expressions' this should be taken generically to refer either to sentence-parts (if it is substitution-variants that the SMSIC relates) or to sentence-frames (if it is frame-replacement-variants that the SMSIC relates).

6 Brandom tells us (370) that a substitution inference does *not* materially involve some expression if 'it is possible to replace that [expression] with others without affecting the correctness ... of the inference' (370). Excluding these substitution inferences — ones that are *formally* valid — from consideration means that we're restricting our attention to substitution inferences whose propriety depends on the particular meanings of the expressions that differ between premise and conclusion.

second includes all such inferences that are from an f -variant to an e -variant. Since our central concern here will be with the issue of the *generality* of a SMSIC, it will be helpful to have a term for these sets of substitution inferences; I'll call them the SMSIC's **ranges**. Each range has a **direction** in the obvious sense of specifying either the $e \rightarrow f$ inferences or the $f \rightarrow e$ inferences; I'll call the former the **forward** range and the latter the **reverse** range. A SMSIC is **symmetric** just in case for each substitution inference in one of its ranges, the reverse substitution inference is in the other range; otherwise it is **asymmetric**.⁷

Brandom's claim is that each singular term is governed only by symmetric SMSICs while each predicate expression is governed by some asymmetric SMSICs:

The SMSICs that determine the material-inferential significance of the occurrence of singular terms are symmetric: a commitment to the correctness of the inference that results from substituting A' for A is also a commitment to the correctness of the inference that results from substituting A for A' . The set of SMSICs that determine the material-inferential significance of the occurrence of any predicate, by contrast, include asymmetric ones.... (375)

To continue with Brandom's example: the symmetry of the SMSIC relating 'Benjamin Franklin' and 'the inventor of bifocals' consists in such facts as that the membership in one of its ranges of the substitution inference

"Benjamin Franklin walked" \rightarrow "The inventor of bifocals walked"

is accompanied by the membership in the other range of the substitution inference

"The inventor of bifocals walked" \rightarrow "Benjamin Franklin walked."

And the asymmetry of the SMSIC relating the predicates ' α is red' and ' α is coloured' consists in such facts as that the membership in one of its ranges of the substitution inference

"George's car is red" \rightarrow "George's car is coloured"

7 These claims about the sets with which we can represent the substitutional properties that SMSICs *determine* does not conflict with Brandom's (372) claim that there are assertions with which SMSICs *are made explicit* (e.g. that the SMSIC in the first of the examples just given can be made explicit in the claim that Benjamin Franklin is the inventor of bifocals [372]).

is *not* accompanied by the membership in the other of the inference

“George’s car is coloured” → “George’s car is red.”⁸

This, then, is the claim on which I shall focus: that we can distinguish singular terms from predicates in terms of the structure of the SMSICs that govern them.⁹

A SMSIC’s being symmetric or asymmetric, however, does not settle *which* substitution inferences are in its ranges. Thus we face the question of the sort of generality involved in a SMSIC. When Brandom tells us that a SMSIC governs ‘a great many’ substitution inferences, to what sort of generality does he allude? In trying to answer this question we will discover the problem with Brandom’s claim to have distinguished the singular terms according to the structure of their inferential relations; but first we will need a couple of points about his notion of ‘material inferential propriety.’

V ‘Material’ Inferential Propriety

For Brandom, the sort of inferential propriety determined by a SMSIC is not *formal* inferential propriety — the sort that an inference has in virtue of its membership in a class of inferences, all of which are in some sense formally identical and none of which fails to be truth-preserving. Rather it is what he calls ‘material’ inferential propriety. An inference is materially proper, according to Brandom, just in case its propriety ‘essentially involve[s] the conceptual contents of its premises and conclusions’ (97).

8 This is not to say, of course, that the second range is empty; it is not. It includes such substitution inferences as

‘George’s car is not coloured’ → ‘George’s car is not red’

and

‘If George’s car is coloured, then it attracts bulls’ → ‘If George’s car is red, then it attracts bulls.’

As Brandom notes (380-2, 398-9), negation and embedding in the antecedent of a conditional reverses the ‘inferential polarity’ that a predicate has in simple subject-predicate sentences.

9 Brandom claims (376) that we can *also* distinguish the singular terms in terms of their ‘substitution-structural roles’; but since (for reasons I explain in the Appendix to this paper) I don’t understand how that is supposed to work, I do not try to evaluate that claim. For related reasons I shall not here attempt to assess Brandom’s argument (376-99) that any language with conditional or negation operators must contain singular terms. See Graham 1999 for a discussion.

In the context of a project employing a Fregean notion of conceptual content, on which it 'is explicitly construed in *inferential terms*' (95), this formulation has things running in a pretty small circle. It does tell us that for Brandom, an inference is 'materially proper' just in case it is 'proper in virtue of conceptual content'; but we may still ask (with Fodor and Lepore 2001, 468) which inferences these labels apply to.

Recall Brandom's example of his SMSIC concerning the expression 'the inventor of bifocals.' On Brandom's view, the propriety of his substitution inferences involving that expression is *not* underwritten by the presence in such inferences of identity statements that would make them formally proper (e.g. 'The inventor of bifocals is the first postmaster general of the United States'). Rather, it is underwritten by Brandom's commitments, e.g. one relating the expressions 'the inventor of bifocals' and 'the first postmaster general of the United States.' Thus, the 'conceptual content' of the expression 'the inventor of bifocals' changes 'when I discover or decide that the inventor of bifocals is the inventor of lightning rods' (375), thereby acquiring a commitment relating the expression 'the inventor of bifocals' to the expression 'the inventor of lightning rods.' The answer to the 'Which inferences?' question, then, appears to be: *all* of those, to the propriety of which the speaker is committed.¹⁰

Many philosophers will wonder what use there is for such a notion. For one thing, it appears not to allow us ever to characterize two asserters as meaning the same thing when they assert some sentence while differing in some of their beliefs.¹¹ If material inferential proprieties are constitutive of those sentences' contents, and those proprieties are determined by speakers' commitments concerning the layout of the world, then, since each of us has a different set of such commitments, no sentence in one speaker's mouth can mean what it means in another's. Yet many philosophers, thinking that people do often mean the same thing when they assert the same sentence, will maintain that a semantic theory should assign such occurrences the same content. Secondly, it appears not to underwrite a distinction between inferences that a speaker merely takes to be materially proper for him, and those that actually are materially proper for him, which casts doubt on the idea that this is worth calling a sort of *propriety*.

10 Fodor and Lepore (2001, 468-71), on the other hand, claim that Brandom 2000 does not supply an answer to this question; presumably they would say the same of *Making It Explicit*.

11 But see (at least) his pp. 484-7 and 586-92 where Brandom addresses this issue.

I shall explore neither of these issues here, as the problem I wish to discuss arises regardless of whether these objections are well-founded. But there is another point that will be important in what follows. Brandom claims that ‘when the material substitution-inferential commitments that govern the use of singular terms are made explicit as the contents of assertional commitments, they take the form of identity claims’ (372). This is no doubt true of a large class of commitments governing singular term-substitution inferences. But if it is meant to cover all of them it appears not to be true. Consider the frame ‘ α is in Argentina.’ Just as the inferences

“The inventor of bifocals was a printer” \leftrightarrow “The first postmaster general of the United States was a printer”

are materially proper to someone who is committed to the inventor of bifocals’ being *the same person as* the first postmaster general of the United States,¹² so too, it seems, the inferences

“Mary is in Argentina” \leftrightarrow “Tony is in Argentina”

are materially proper to someone committed to Mary’s being *at the same place as* Tony. Here it is not a *copersonhood* commitment but a *colocation* commitment that determines the material propriety of the inferences.

One might object that I am mistaking a propriety determined by a commitment concerning the predicate ‘ α is in Argentina’ for one determined by a commitment concerning the singular terms ‘Mary’ and ‘Tony,’ on the grounds that ‘Mary’ \rightarrow ‘Tony’ inferences don’t go through for most other predicates. This is not so. While a commitment concerning the application of the predicate might settle it that inferences of this sort go through when the singular terms denote things that are in the same place, no commitment concerning the predicate can settle it *which* terms those are; only a commitment concerning the singular terms themselves can do that. The propriety of the inference, then, is determined both by the speaker’s commitments concerning the singular terms and by her commitments concerning the predicate. In other words, *both* the singular

12 ‘Same person as,’ not ‘same thing as,’ is the relation Brandom should invoke given his claims (438-40) about the categorial restrictions that govern identity claims. This raises an interesting question about explicitation: does the full explicitation of the commitment that determines the propriety of singular term substitution inferences require that it be made explicit *which* categorially restricted identity relation is being invoked? Perhaps it is not just logical vocabulary, then, but metaphysical (categorial) vocabulary as well, whose primary function is explicative.

term and the predicate are 'materially involved' in the inference (see above, n. 6).¹³

I am not claiming that this is a problem. There is nothing in Brandom's general remarks about material inferential propriety, or about material involvement in a substitution inference, that motivates a restriction according to which the only commitments that can underwrite material inferential proprieties governing substitutions of singular terms are ones that can be made explicit as (categorially restricted) identity claims. Moreover, Brandom's oft-repeated claim about logical vocabulary is that its primary function is to allow us to express in assertions the substitution-inferential commitments that show themselves in our linguistic practice; this claim does not even suggest that the logical form of such explicating statements is uniquely determined merely by the syntactic category of the expressions whose governing commitments are being made explicit. Nor, finally, does there appear to be anything intrinsically objectionable about the claim that the material proprieties of *some* substitution inferences among singular terms are made explicit otherwise than in (categorially restricted) identity claims.¹⁴ In some of the examples I will be discussing below, material inferential proprieties relating singular terms are determined by commitments that are not explicatable in (categorially restricted) identity statements relating those singular terms. That, I have argued, is no reason to deny that those commitments are SMSICs. Brandom is very clear that the SMSICs governing the component expressions in a sentence (except for those whose occurrence

13 Another objection: Can't we say that there *is* an identity commitment that supports the inference, namely, a commitment to the identity of *Mary's location* and *Tony's location*? Yes — but the singular terms here related are not the ones occurring in the inference, which is plainly what Brandom has in mind. (All his examples are like this.) There are, then, two directions in which Brandom can go in treating such cases. Either he can say that the propriety-determining commitment is made explicit in an identity claim, only it is an identity claim that relates terms other than those that occur in the inference; or he can say that this commitment isn't made explicit in any identity claim. Neither route seems objectionable on the basis of anything in Brandom's introduction of the notion of a SMSIC.

14 Indeed, consider the following explication of the inference I used as an example.

Mary is in Argentina

Mary and Tony are at the same place

$(\forall x)(\forall y)(\forall z)((x \text{ is in } y \wedge x \text{ and } z \text{ are at the same place}) \rightarrow z \text{ is in } y)$

Tony is in Argentina

Just as with Brandom's examples, here the material propriety of the original inference is reduced to formal validity, but this is achieved only with a triply-quantified conditional even though the original inference is between sentences that vary only in their singular terms.

is not 'primary' in the sense discussed below (§VI), which doesn't exclude the examples I've been discussing) determine *all* the proprieties governing the use of that sentence as premise or conclusion (374).

VI The Generality of a SMSIC

Now to our central question about SMSICs: what sort of generality do they involve? Putting Brandom exegesis to the side for the moment, a prudent methodological conservatism suggests seeing whether the simplest sort of generality supports a satisfactory account, and departing from that only as is needed to arrive at one. The simplest sort of generality is that in which each of the two ranges in a SMSIC relating two expressions is the set of *all* the substitution inferences (of that range's direction) that materially involve those expressions. (Call such a range **maximal**.) So we should consider that as an initial suggestion.

This suggestion obviously won't work for predicates because they stand in asymmetric inferential relations, and for a SMSIC to specify asymmetric inferential relations, one of its ranges must contain a substitution inference the reverse of which is not a member of the other. That means that at least one of the ranges does not contain *all* the substitution inferences (of that range's direction) that materially involve the items that the SMSIC relates. However, since our topic is singular terms, we can put this fact to the side. It doesn't do anything to rule out the possibility that each range of each SMSIC *that governs a singular term* contains *all* the substitution inferences (of that range's direction) that materially involve the terms related by that SMSIC.

One might think that there are many examples showing that this suggestion will not work for singular terms either. This was the Fodor-Lepore objection I mentioned in §III: that some singular terms stand in some asymmetric inferential relations. The reply was that this is irrelevant to the claim being made, because the claim concerns inferential relations that are instances of *general* patterns and the patterns instantiated by the asymmetric inferential relations in the examples are not general patterns.

That seems a sound reply. While we should include the substitution inference

"Father was at Magdalen" → "Father was at Oxford"

in the forward range of the SMSIC relating 'Magdalen' and 'Oxford,' there are very few others that we could include in that range: very few other cases in which an inference from a 'Magdalen'-variant to a 'Oxford'-variant are proper (and in which those expressions are materially

involved). Thus the SMSIC relating these two singular terms would indeed be asymmetric, but its ranges would be far more restricted than those of the SMSICs that relate singular terms symmetrically; the asymmetric inferential proprieties are not members of a set of 'a great many' inferential moves whose propriety is determined by the same SMSIC. 'Magdalen' and 'Oxford,' in short, are expressions that 'fail to be *systematically* asymmetrically substitution-inferentially significant in the way predicates are' (388).

A more careful statement of Brandom's claim, then — without which there is no avoiding the objection just considered — is that there is *some* sort of generality, such that an expression's SMSICs of *that generality* are all symmetric just in case it is a singular term. (The corresponding claim about predicates is that they are related by at least *some* SMSICs of comparable generality that are asymmetric.) The question is whether it is possible to specify this sort of generality in inferentialist terms.

The suggestion we are considering is that it is maximal generality: that an expression is a singular term just in case each of the SMSICs *with maximal ranges* that governs it is symmetric.

One virtue of this proposal is that it ensures that the SMSICs governing singular terms meet an unobjectionable projectibility requirement. Brandom recognizes that 'the need to explain the possibility of projecting proper uses for many sentences from those for a few is a constraint on accounts of language learning by individuals' (365). So a SMSIC's range must itself be projectible: one's practical acknowledgements of the propriety of inferences from *e*-variants to *f*-variants, for some finite subset of a range of the SMSIC relating those expressions, must enable one to tell which other substitution inferences are in that range. Only when one has that ability can one be said to practically grasp the SMSIC in its full generality. Having the range of each SMSIC governing singular terms be the set of *all* substitution inferences (of that range's direction) ensures that it is projectible in this sense.

The initial problem with this proposal, though, is that the condition is vacuously satisfied no matter what the expressions are, because any SMSIC with maximal ranges is symmetric by definition. (Being maximal means having *all* substitution inferences of some direction in that SMSIC's range for that direction of inference; hence for each substitution inference in one range, the reverse inference is in the other — in other words, the SMSIC is symmetric.) To get a non-trivial condition we should require that *if* a SMSIC relating two expressions has one range that is maximal, *then* the other range is maximal as well.

But now we have a condition that no SMSIC satisfies: there is no SMSIC that has even *one* maximal range. Any but the most impoverished language allows expressions to occur within direct quotations; and in Brandom's account there is no restriction built in to the very idea of one

sentence's being a substitutional variant of another that prohibits us from seeing the sentence

Bart wrote "My homework was not stolen by a one-armed man" on the board

as a substitutional variant of

Bart wrote "I am not authorized to fire substitute teachers" on the board.

Yet it seems that *no* inference from any variant of the frame

Bart wrote " α " on the board

to another variant is proper in both directions.¹⁵

Moreover, there are contexts of indirect quotation and attitude ascription; here too, there is no restriction built in to Brandom's notion of substitutional variance that prohibits us from seeing

Nixon believed that Deep Throat betrayed him to the press

as a substitutional variant of

Nixon believed that Mark Felt betrayed him to the press.

But on most views about inferences among variants of 'Nixon believed that α betrayed him to the press,' very few of them, if any, are proper. Indeed, given any two distinct expressions there is probably some context of indirect discourse or attitude ascription within which inferences from a variant involving one to a variant involving the other are improper.¹⁶ And that too is enough to rule out the possibility of a SMSIC's having the sort of generality we are considering.

This shows that there are *no* expressions *e* and *f* such that *every* substitution inference from an *e*-variant to an *f*-variant is proper (even if only ones in which the expressions are materially involved, as they are in the indirect discourse examples). So there cannot be *any* SMSIC,

15 There are substitution inferences that are asymmetrically proper, namely those in which one substitutes for the quoted expression some expression that is a part of it: 'Bart wrote "Bart rules" on the board' entails 'Bart wrote "rules" on the board.'

16 Brandom (342) claims this on the basis of the example 'S now thinks that α '; the point is familiar from the literature on Mates's (1950) examples of expressions multiply embedded within attitude verbs.

symmetric or not, whose generality consists in its having even one range that is maximal.

By the conservative methodology mentioned above, these considerations should prompt us to look for a distinction in terms of which we can rule out examples of either of the two sorts just discussed, while preserving as much generality for SMSICs as we can (and while satisfying the projectibility requirement).

That is the purpose for which Brandom introduces his notion of 'primary substitution-semantic occurrence.' (Here our exegesis resumes.) He introduces it in order to clarify his claim about SMSICs:

A [simple] material substitution-inferential commitment regarding A and A' is a commitment to the effect that for any B such that AB is a sentence in which A has primary substitution-semantic occurrence, the inference from AB to $A'B$ is good. (374, emphasis added)

I take it that in this passage Brandom is stating the condition a SMSIC must meet in order to be what I have been calling a *general* SMSIC. Some remarks on this interpretation are required.

- Brandom here writes as if a SMSIC relates two expressions only in one direction; my elaboration of the notion of a SMSIC (§IV) was based on his statements suggesting that a SMSIC relates two expressions in each direction (i.e. it has two 'ranges'). To avoid confusion I wish to stick with that interpretation, which was based on Brandom's introductory remarks about SMSICs; so I take this passage to be stating a condition on each of a SMSIC's ranges rather than a condition on the SMSIC as a whole.
- In this passage Brandom must intend to be making a claim only about *general* SMSICs, as the claim is clearly false concerning the non-general SMSICs that relate some singular terms asymmetrically (as in the Fodor-Lepore examples discussed above, §III).¹⁷
- It is unclear whether there are any SMSICs relating predicate expressions that are general in this sense, given the existence of 'polarity inverting' occurrences (see above, n. 8). As our concern

17 It may be that Brandom would not count those as proper SMSICs. Although I cannot see anything in Brandom's general remarks about what SMSICs are that would justify that, the point is here of only terminological consequence: even if we did refuse to count those inferences as determined by 'proper' SMSICs we could still ask what distinguishes the proper SMSICs from the those commitments — whatever label we put on them — that relate some singular terms asymmetrically.

here is with Brandom's claim about the general SMSICs governing singular terms, however, I put this issue to the side.

Put in the terms we laid out in §IV, then, the claim made in this passage is that a SMSIC relating two expressions *e* and *f* is **general** iff at least one of its ranges contains *all* the substitution inferences in which the expression being substituted-for has primary occurrence. (A **symmetric** general SMSIC, then, is a SMSIC *both* of whose ranges meet this condition.) Thus we may state Brandom's proposal as follows.

An expression is a **singular term** if and only if each *general* SMSIC that relates it to another expression is symmetric.

The qualification 'general' is required here because the claim is not that *all* SMSICs relating two singular terms are symmetric — recall (§III) that this was the reply to the Fodor-Lepore objection. With the primary/non-primary distinction in hand we can cash out 'general' as follows:

A SMSIC relating two expressions is **general** if and only if at least one of its ranges contains *all* the substitution inferences (of that range's direction) in which those expressions are materially involved and in which they have primary substitution-semantic occurrence.

Brandom clearly states the crucial role of the distinction between primary and non-primary occurrences in his proposal:

if a particular substitution transformation that corresponds to substituting one singular term for another preserves some semantically relevant sentential status ... *when only primary occurrences are involved*, no matter what the sentence frame, then the inverse transformation also preserves that status, regardless of frame. (400, emphasis added)

With the restriction to primary occurrences thus in place, we can disregard cases involving asymmetric inferential proprieties, or direct quotation, or attitude ascription — rather a grab-bag, that — because substitution inferences involving such occurrences are not governed by SMSICs either of whose ranges has the generality just specified.

So we know something about what sorts of occurrences the restriction to primary occurrences is meant to rule out: it is meant to rule out occurrences in direct quotations or attitude ascriptions. And we know something about what sorts of occurrences it is meant to allow in: it is meant to allow in many more than just those in the examples of asymmetric inferential relations (otherwise the proposal falls to the Fodor-Lepore objection). But we do not know what the distinction *is*. We do not know, or even know how to find out, *where* it cuts. So we cannot yet claim

to understand Brandom's proposal. The question isn't about the notion of a substitution inference, or that of material involvement in such an inference: it is about the distinction between primary and non-primary substitution-semantic occurrence.

Brandom does tell us (690n.37) that he intends the distinction to be a version of the familiar distinction between extensional and nonextensional occurrences. The usual explanation of that distinction is straightforward. As concerns singular terms, we draw it by saying that in some of their occurrences, substitution of codenoting singular terms ensures identity of truth value between the variant sentences. These are the extensional occurrences. In other occurrences, codenotation does not ensure intersubstitutability *salva veritate*. These are the nonextensional occurrences. (Of course we can distinguish further within each of the two kinds of occurrence — e.g. among the nonextensional occurrences, between quotational and intensional ones.)

Our question, however, is not whether the philosophical tradition is entitled to this distinction; it is whether an inferentialist such as Brandom is entitled to it. He is entitled to it only if it can be drawn in terms of his explanatory primitives. If he's *not* entitled to it, then we don't even have a characterization of singular terms on the table, let alone an unsuccessful one, because we don't have a specification of the generality of those SMSICs whose symmetry is being proposed as the mark of singular termhood.

VII The Primary/Non-Primary Distinction

It is worrying, then, that Brandom's explanation of the primary/non-primary distinction is circular:

For an occurrence of an expression in [the] syntactic sense to count also as having primary substitution-semantic occurrence in a sentence, the substitution inferences to and from that sentence, in which that expression is materially involved, must be governed (their proprieties determined) by the set of simple material substitution-inferential commitments [SMSICs] that link that expression with [others]. (374)

This passage is meant to explain the distinction in terms of which Brandom specifies the generality of the general SMSICs that govern singular terms, but it presupposes that we already know what settles membership in the ranges of such a SMSIC. (As I noted above, on p. 374 Brandom is here writing only about what I have been calling the 'general' SMSICs.) It tells us that what makes an occurrence of an expression *e* in the sentence *Fe primary* is that the propriety of substitution inferences to and from *Fe* is determined by the general SMSICs relating *e* to other expressions. But whether *that* is the case depends on whether those substitution inferences

are in the ranges of those SMSICs. And that, in turn, depends on how the qualification Brandom introduces — the restriction to substitution inferences in which the varying expressions have *primary* occurrence — constrains membership in those ranges. That is, it is settled whether those substitution inferences are in the ranges of those SMSICs only if it is *already* settled what it is to be a primary occurrence.

For example, suppose we want to know whether the expression ‘John Kerry’ has primary occurrence in the sentence

Bush strove to portray John Kerry as unprincipled.

Brandom tells us that this depends on whether an inference from that sentence to, say,

Bush strove to portray Teresa Heinz Kerry’s husband as unprincipled

is proper in virtue of the SMSIC relating the expressions ‘John Kerry’ and ‘Teresa Heinz Kerry’s husband.’ This depends on whether that substitution inference is in the forward range of that SMSIC. Since this is a general SMSIC, and symmetric, an inference is in one of its ranges if and only if the substituted-for expressions have primary occurrence in its premise and conclusion. And now we are back at our initial question: whether the occurrence of ‘John Kerry’ in ‘Bush strove to portray John Kerry as unprincipled’ is primary.

Things become even more worrying when we see that Brandom cannot appeal to the traditional way of drawing the distinction. As I noted, ordinarily we explain the distinction in terms of denotation. But denotation is not among the notions to which Brandom wishes to appeal in explaining singular termhood, for he is an inferentialist. His goal is to establish that for expressions to have their inferential role determined by SMSICs all of which are symmetric ‘is *what it is* for it to be (particular) objects that [those] terms purport-to-refer-to’ (375, emphasis added). So he cannot draw his distinction by appealing to the notion of denotation. Far from it: It is denotational purport that the distinction, and thereby the account of singular termhood, is supposed to help us to understand.¹⁸

18 It might be thought that earlier in his ch. 6 Brandom does succeed in drawing the distinction, namely when he points out that we can call a sentence-embedding context extensional either in the sense of its being designatedness-value-functional or in the sense of its being inferential-role-functional (350). But our concern is with *subsential* expressions and the contexts that take them as arguments. Could we call such a context extensional just in case it is inferential-role-functional? (As Brandom notes [392], designatedness-functionality is a non-starter, since subsen-

The problem that has emerged is that Brandom's inferentialist characterization of the singular terms rests upon a distinction that he does not appear to be entitled to draw. At least, he is not entitled to draw it either in the traditional way, since that employs notions whose explanatory use Brandom forbids himself, or in the way he attempts to draw it when explaining it, since that is circular. Who would have thought that in order to talk about inferential roles we would have to talk about something as oldfangled as *denotation*? Yet that is a fair description of the problem that has emerged. I shall argue that there is no way for an inferentialist to overcome it.

VIII Is There Another Way For The Inferentialist To Draw The Distinction?

I have not yet argued that the distinction Brandom wants is unavailable to him; all I have argued is that his explanation of it doesn't show it to be available. Perhaps there is some other way to draw it in inferentialist terms.

One might think that there is a very straightforward way to proceed, which is to take the substitution-inferential behavior of some paradigmatically extensional occurrence — say, that of 'Robert Zimmerman' in 'Robert Zimmerman is Bob Dylan' — as a standard. The idea is that if a given substitution inference is proper within this frame but not within some other, then that frame should be counted as one whose argument expressions do not have primary substitution-semantic occurrence. This could seem to cut things at the right joint.

But this approach is not available to an inferentialist. (And even if it were it would be arbitrary for reasons I explain below, pp. 209-10) For one can be justified in picking out some occurrence as such a standard only if one is justified in a prior commitment to *its* being primary. Such an entitlement one could arrive at in the traditional manner, by comparing the inferential behavior of that occurrence with what we already know about the codenotations of expressions. We have already seen that this is not open to an inferentialist. For the same reason, an inferentialist cannot appeal to a distinction between those sentences that can, and

tential expressions don't have designatedness values.) We could, but then we'd have to say that *all* contexts are extensional, since in languages with attitude-ascriptive locutions, probably *no* two subsentential expressions share their inferential roles (see above, n. 16); and then we would not be drawing any distinction, let alone one that helps here.

those that cannot, be used to ascribe propositional attitudes: that distinction too is drawn in terms of the denotations of expressions (here, that of the verb governing the 'that'-clause). Such an approach would only dubiously be of help anyway, inasmuch as philosophers have long recognized that some attitude-ascriptive sentences can be read *de re* — indeed, that some such sentences can *only* be so read. When read *de re*, an attitude-ascriptive sentence has some expression within its component 'that'-clause for which the substitution of codenoting expressions *does* ensure preservation of truth value. That occurrence of that expression is therefore extensional, despite being within the syntactic scope of a verb used to ascribe propositional attitudes. So even if an inferentialist were entitled to appeal to a distinction between attitude-ascriptive and non-attitude-ascriptive sentences, he couldn't use it to draw the primary/non-primary distinction.

Could he draw it by appealing to a distinction between occurrences in sentences that are within other sentences, and occurrences in sentences that are not within other sentences? That might seem a purely syntactic criterion by which to rule out the attitude-ascriptive occurrences. But that doesn't do the job either. For one thing, it is *ad hoc*. Plausible stories have been told about *why* occurrences within 'that'-clauses in attitude sentences should be nonextensional; there doesn't seem to be any story to tell about why mere syntactic embedding should have that effect as well. (Indeed, there are simple examples of embeddings that necessarily *don't* induce nonextensionality: 'It is true that ... ') Another problem is that it rules out too little, for there are attitude verbs that don't take sentential, or even clausal, complements: 'trusts,' 'believes,' 'loves,' 'is thinking about' — all of these take singular term complements, and all of them have certain uses, at least, on which the substitutional proprieties governing occurrences of expressions in their complements differ from those governing paradigmatically extensional occurrences of the same expressions. Finally, there are many occurrences within direct quotations that this criterion does not rule out, e.g. 'Bart wrote "Kowabunga!" on the board.' So a separate criterion would be needed for these, and in short order the proposal would be very arbitrary-looking.

IX A Promising Idea?

As far as I can see, the only way for an inferentialist to draw something resembling the traditional distinction between extensional and nonextensional occurrences is to discern a binary partition among occurrences that is determined *solely* by the inferential proprieties governing sentences containing those occurrences. He needs to discern a Continental Divide among those proprieties. Then he could appeal to it as part of his

specification of the generality of those SMSICs whose symmetry is characteristic of singular terms.

Presumably one would begin to discern such a divide by noting that for a given speaker, some occurrences are such that there are very many proper inferences to and from substitutional variants, while for others there are very few. At least at this sketchy level of generality, this approach appears to be on the right track. For according to it we would put the occurrence of 'Dick Cheney' in 'Dick Cheney has a mass of 65 kilograms' in the former category — of inferentially liberal occurrences — since for a given speaker who asserts that sentence, there will be many variants inferences to which that speaker takes to be proper, such as inferences to either of:

Lynne Cheney's husband has a mass of 65 kilograms
The Vice President of the United States has a mass of 65 kilograms.

On the other hand, we should incline towards putting the occurrence of 'Dick Cheney' in 'George believes that Dick Cheney has a mass of 65 kilograms' in the latter category, of inferentially stingy occurrences, since a speaker could assert that sentence while endorsing very few inferences to distinct variants.

If this idea could be satisfactorily elaborated, there would be no basis for claiming that Brandom is not entitled to his distinction between primary and non-primary occurrences. I shall argue that it cannot.

X **Stinginess Variations Among *Extensional* Occurrences**

The idea under consideration is that we discern a binary distinction between those occurrences that are substitution-inferentially stingy and those that are substitution-inferentially liberal. The problem with this, I shall argue, is that there is such a great, and fine-grained, variety of substitution-inferential behaviors that there is no particular type of behavior of which the inferentialist could have reason to say, '*There substitution-inferential stinginess ends, and liberality begins.*'

To show this it will be helpful to define one precise notion — not the only definable one, to be sure, but a natural one to work with — of one occurrence's being substitution-inferentially stingier than another for a given speaker.¹⁹ (Note: in the definition, by 'inferences between' two

¹⁹ Brandom (342) mentions this relation, but he does not discuss it, nor its bearing on

sentences I mean inferences from the former to the latter *and* inferences from the latter to the former.)

A particular occurrence of an expression e in a sentence S is **stingier than** a particular occurrence of it in a sentence T , for a given speaker, if and only if:

- (i) for any expression f : if inferences between S and $S[e/f]$ (i.e. the sentence resulting from the substitution of f for the particular occurrence of e that is in question) are materially proper for the speaker, then so too are inferences between T and $T[e/f]$; and,
- (ii) for some expression g : inferences between T and $T[e/g]$ are materially proper for the speaker, but inferences between S and $S[e/g]$ are not.

That is, all substitution inferences that work for e 's occurrence in S also work for e 's occurrence in T , *but* there are substitution inferences that work for e 's occurrence in T that don't work for e 's occurrence in S . (I'll use **more liberal than** as the opposite of 'stingier than.'). This relation induces a partial (but not linear) ordering of the frames in a speaker's language.²⁰

The first sign of trouble for this proposal is that there are great differences in stinginess even among the occurrences that count as paradigms of extensionality on the traditional way of drawing the distinction. Any speaker of English will consider an inference from 'Serge is the tallest man in France' to 'Michel is the tallest man in France' to be proper just in case they take 'Serge' and 'Michel' to name the same man; here, materially proper intersubstitutability does coincide with codenotation. But this is a peculiar feature of the predicate ' α is the tallest man in France'; it is not a general feature of those occurrences that count as paradigms of extensionality on the traditional way of drawing the distinction. The predicate ' α is two metres tall,' for example, is such that a speaker will take an inference from an e -variant to an f -variant (and *vice versa*) to be proper not only when they take those expressions to denote the same object but also when they take them to denote objects of the

the obstacle I have argued he faces in specifying the 'primary' occurrences. See also Partee (1973) for an interesting discussion of what she calls the varying 'quotativity' of different attitude constructions.

20 Why not define an ordering in terms of substitutability rather than intersubstitutability? Because we're trying to specify the generality at which the *symmetry* of singular terms' inferential roles shows itself.

same height. That is, the proper inferences to substitutional variants of 'Henri is two metres tall,' where the name 'Henri' is being substituted for, is a proper superset of the proper inferences to variants of 'Henri is the tallest man in France.' By our definition then (since the same applies to inferences in the other direction), the latter occurrence of 'Henri' is stingier than the former. But on the traditional way of drawing the distinction, the former occurrence counts as extensional just as much as the latter does, since a term's codenotation with 'Henri' ensures its intersubstitutability *salva veritate* with it in either occurrence.²¹

The example just discussed suggests a general recipe for constructing frames either less stingy or more stingy than almost any given frame that is extensional according to the traditional way of drawing the distinction. Consider the occurrence of 'Charlotte' in

Charlotte is two metres tall and has a mass of 65 kilograms.

The intersubstitutability (*salva material inferential propriety*) of an expression with that occurrence of 'Charlotte' is determined not by a commitment concerning only the heights of the two objects named by the terms, but by a commitment concerning their heights *and* their masses. The occurrence of 'Charlotte' in that sentence, then, is stingier than its occurrence in 'Charlotte is two metres tall.' Clearly by conjoining more predicates we can get occurrences that are stingier still.

One might object that the inferential behavior of such occurrences is derivative, and that our attention should be restricted to occurrences whose inferential behavior is not derivative. One could say, for instance, that the substitution-inferential behavior of 'Charlotte' in 'Charlotte is two metres tall and has a mass of 65 kilograms' is determined by the behaviors of the occurrences of that name in 'Charlotte is two metres tall' and in 'Charlotte has a mass of 65 kilograms'; and these (it is easy to verify) do not stand to each other in the stingier-than relation we have defined. But all that drives the example is the fact that the extension of the predicate 'is two metres tall and has a mass of 65 kilograms' will be taken by a speaker to be a proper subset of the extension of 'is two metres

21 At this point the same objection could be made that was made in §V to my claim about the material inferential proprieties governing the 'Argentina' sentences: that what we have here is a fact about the proprieties governing the predicate, not a fact about the proprieties governing the singular terms. The reply, which applies here too, was that while commitments concerning the predicate might determine which relation two terms must stand in in order to be intersubstitutable *salva material inferential propriety*, only a commitment concerning the terms themselves can determine *which particular pairs of terms* the speaker takes to stand in that relation.

tall'; and many syntactically simple predicates stand in this relation. For example, the predicates 'is scarlet' and 'is red' stand in this relation; the occurrence of 'Charlotte' in 'Charlotte is scarlet' is intersubstitution-inferentially stingier than in 'Charlotte is red.' Intersubstitutability in the former is underwritten by commitments concerning which pairs of things are the same finely-individuated hue; in the latter, it is underwritten by commitments concerning which pairs of things are the same coarsely-individuated color. The general point is that the more fine-grained the commitments are that underwrite the (symmetric) propriety of a given form of substitution-inference, the stingier the occurrence of the expression being substituted-for in inferences of that form.

That means that given an occurrence of an expression in some sentence, we can generate another that is intersubstitution-inferentially stingier than it, and similarly for that stingier occurrence too, as long as the language supplies us either with finer-grained predicates or with means of constructing them.²²

Similarly, by working with predicates that cut things more coarsely we can arrive at occurrences that are *less* stingy than almost any given occurrence, yet which still come out as extensional on the traditional way of drawing the distinction. This method can take us towards occurrences that support extraordinarily many materially proper inferences among substitutional variants. For example, just as the propriety of the inference from 'The inventor of bifocals was a printer' to 'The first postmaster general of the United States was a printer' is made explicit in an identity statement, the propriety of an inference from 'George's favourite thing is an abstract object' to 'The number π is an abstract object' is made explicit in a statement that George's favourite thing and the number π are objects of the same ontological category. Here again, we must remember (§V) that for the inferentialist there are no grounds on which to maintain that inferences whose material propriety is made explicit by identity statements are somehow *more* materially proper than those whose material propriety is made explicit by statements that two things are both members of the same ontological category.

It is not fatal to the proposal being considered, however, that there are differences in stinginess merely *among* the frames that count as extensional on the traditional way of drawing the distinction; and this is the only sort of difference we have uncovered thus far. We have not yet, for example, found a frame that is stingier than ' α is the tallest man in France' that also comes out as extensional according to the traditional distinc-

22 Strictly speaking I've shown this only for atomic sentences and conjunctions thereof, but obviously the point applies across the board.

tion. For all we have shown thus far, then, there could still be a *gap* in stinginess, on one side of which are a variety of stinginesses among (what according to the traditional way of drawing the distinction are) the extensional occurrences, and on the other side of which are whatever varieties there are of stinginess of (what are traditionally) the nonextensional occurrences.

So in order to fully assess the proposal, we need to examine the varieties of stinginess among those occurrences traditionally counted as nonextensional. The paradigms here are occurrences within the 'that'-clauses of sentences that ascribe propositional attitudes. We should want to see whether the stinginess of any of them approaches, or even matches, that of some occurrences that count as extensional on the traditional way of drawing the distinction. If so, then there is no 'gap' — so no way for the inferentialist to draw anything like the extensional/nonextensional distinction using such an approach.

XI Stinginess Variations Among *Nonextensional* Occurrences

In this section I shall explain why for normal speakers there will almost always be occurrences within the 'that'-clauses of *de dicto* attitude-ascriptive sentences whose substitution-inferential behavior is either as liberal as, or even *more* liberal than, that of occurrences that come out as extensional on the traditional construal. Whenever this is the case for some speaker, then that speaker's substitution-inferential commitments are *not* such as to determine a binary distinction that corresponds to the traditional extensional/nonextensional distinction.

In order to pursue this avenue of inquiry we must first get clear on what determines the propriety of inferences among substitutionally variant attitude-ascriptive sentences (where the variation is within the 'that'-clause). As was noted (§V), Brandom's *general* view is that whether a substitution inference is 'materially proper' for a given speaker is determined by that speaker's set of commitments concerning the layout of the world. Since the sentences we are discussing are attitude-ascriptive, the part of the world that is relevant is the mind of the subject of the ascription. This motivates Brandom's proposal that it is a speaker's *commitments concerning the commitments of the subject of the attitude ascription* that determine the propriety of such substitution inferences. "Thus," writes Brandom,

my assessment of the propriety of the inference from "Carlyle believed that Kant ascribed to each of us a duty to make ourselves perfect and others happy" to "Carlyle believed that the author of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* ascribed to each of us a

duty to make ourselves perfect and others happy'' does not depend on whether, according to me, Kant is the author of *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*. But it is governed by some (symmetric) SMSICs — namely those I attribute to Carlyle, rather than those I undertake myself. (389)

Although this proposal is well-motivated by the observation that the purpose of *de dicto* attitude ascription is to characterize the subject's mind, it is not fully justified by it. The reason is that it presupposes that each speaker who uses *de dicto* attitude ascriptions *actually follows* the approach that (according to Brandom) is best suited to achieve that purpose. This presupposition may be false, for it is possible, at least, for some speaker *A* to try to characterize *B*'s mind using *de dicto* attitude ascriptions while *not* endorsing all and only those term-substitutions that she takes *B* to endorse — that is, while adopting a non-Brandomian approach to *de dicto* attitude ascriptions. (Say, *A* is a Russellian on the question of which substitutions are truth preserving in attitude ascriptions.) Perhaps that would be suboptimal, even irrational; but it is possible. And if it is possible, then it is not the case that substitutions within 'that'-clauses in *de dicto* attitude ascriptions are *always* governed by those SMSICs that the ascriber attributes to the ascribee.²³

Nonetheless I shall not pursue that objection; perhaps the right reply to it is that whatever such a speaker would be doing, it's not *de dicto* attitude ascription. So let us take it that Brandom is right about what determines the propriety of substitution inferences among *de dicto* attitude ascriptions.

The view we shall work with, then, is that the material propriety, for a given speaker, of inferences among substitutionally variant attitude-

23 It is worth noting that in the discussion just quoted from, Brandom also claims that occurrences within 'that'-clauses in *de dicto* attitude ascriptions are not primary 'because the SMSICs relevant to the assessment of the propriety of inferences are not the SMSICs associated with the one assessing those inferences [*viz.* the ascriber's SMSICs]' (389, emphasis added). Here we seem to have an appeal to a very different way of drawing the primary/non-primary distinction from that explained on p. 374. But it is circular too. For as Brandom himself acknowledges a few lines later, it is the ascriber's commitments that determine substitutional proprieties, namely, his or her *commitments concerning the SMSICs of the subject of the ascription*. To maintain that these mind-concerning commitments of the ascriber do not determine these substitution-inferential proprieties, while the object-concerning commitments of the subject of the ascription *do* determine them, is simply to *presuppose* that the distinction between primary and non-primary occurrences has already been drawn in such a way as to allow us to distinguish between mind-concerning and object-concerning SMSICs. For again, it is not open to Brandom to distinguish these SMSICs by the denotations of the expressions they relate, as I am doing with the labels 'mind-concerning' and 'object-concerning.'

ascriptive sentences is determined by that speaker's commitments concerning the commitments of the subject of the ascriptions. If I assert 'George believes that Eric is the tallest man in France,' the substitutions for 'Eric' that I take to be proper, on this view, are those that are proper according to the SMSICs that I attribute to *George*. If I take it that George recognizes only two expressions for that man — say, 'Eric' and 'Pierre's father' — then I will take it that when I assert

George believes that Eric is the tallest man in France

the only materially proper substitute for 'Eric' is 'Pierre's father.' The material propriety (for me) of this substitution inference is determined by my commitments concerning those of George's commitments that can be made explicit as identity statements involving the expression 'Eric.'²⁴

Now, suppose that the SMSICs I attribute to George concerning the expressions 'Eric' and 'Pierre's father' match mine. That is, suppose that I, too, recognize only those two singular terms for that person. In that case, inferences from my utterances of

George believes that Eric is the tallest man in France,

to a variant in which some expression is substituted for 'Eric' are materially proper *just in case* inferences from my utterances of

Eric is the tallest man in France

to the variant arising from the same substitution are materially proper. That is because on Brandom's view, the situation we are discussing — in which my SMSICs concerning the relevant expressions match George's — is one in which it is *identical commitments* that determine inferential proprieties in each case. Thus there is no difference in stinginess between the occurrence of 'Eric' in the attitude-ascriptive sentence and its occurrence in the non-attitude-ascriptive sentence.

It may be objected that this sort of example is rare; seldom will two speakers' beliefs about the world match up in this way. Most often they will differ. But that objection does not help the proposal. For one common way in which two speakers' beliefs can differ is such as to result in occurrences (within 'that'-clauses of attitude-ascriptive sentences) that

24 My sketch gives the impression that this approach cannot handle cases in which one speaker ascribes an attitude to a speaker of a different language. See 534-42 for Brandom's account.

are even *less* stingy than some of the paradigmatically extensional occurrences. In these cases, the substitution-inferential behavior of expressions within attitude-ascriptive sentences encroaches significantly into the zone of extensionality as traditionally conceived.

What are those cases? They are ones in which the speaker's commitments concerning a given singular term license inferences that form a proper subset of those licensed by the commitments of the subject of his attitude ascriptions. Suppose that I take it that George has a false belief about Eric: I take it that he falsely believes that that person is also Susan's driving instructor. (Suppose also that this is the *only* difference in our SMSICs involving the expression 'Eric.')

Here we are not supposing that our SMSICs match (in the relevant way). This better reflects the usual case, in which different speakers have different views of the world.

But now look what results from this. On Brandom's view of what determines the material propriety of inferences among attitude-ascriptive sentences, my inference from

George believes that Eric is the tallest man in France

to the variant in which 'Eric' is replaced by 'Susan's driving instructor' is materially proper, for it reflects my commitments concerning George's commitments concerning the expressions 'Eric' and 'Susan's driving instructor.' But the corresponding substitution inference from

Eric is the tallest man in France

is *not* materially proper (for me). Thus — given that on our assumptions, any materially proper substitution inference (for 'Eric') from the latter sentence is also materially proper from the former — the occurrence of 'Eric' in the latter sentence is stingier than its occurrence in the former.

Here we have what is the last thing we should have expected: an occurrence that is paradigmatically nonextensional on the traditional construal but is nonetheless *less* substitution-inferentially stingy than an occurrence that is a paradigm of extensionality as traditionally conceived.

We defined the notion of substitution-inferential stinginess using only conceptual resources that are available to an inferentialist, principally that of 'material' inferential propriety. What we have found is that there is no 'gap' in stinginess, thus defined, between those occurrences traditionally counted as extensional and those traditionally counted as non-extensional. So there is no way to discern in the 'stingier than' ordering a distinction corresponding to the traditional extensional/nonextensional distinction.

(This result poses another serious problem for the approach I discussed at the start of §VIII, on which we pick some one occurrence, say

that of 'Robert Zimmerman' in 'Robert Zimmerman is Bob Dylan,' as our standard of primary-ness. For if there is an indefinitely fine-grained variety of inferential behaviors differing only slightly from that of any given frame, then that frame's status as a standard is arbitrary.)

I do not claim to have a general proof that there is *no* way to draw the distinction Brandom's approach requires solely in terms of substitution-inferential behavior. We cannot survey all the possible concepts one could use to distinguish occurrences in such terms. But the variety, and fineness of grain, of the differences we have uncovered surely point towards the same answer concerning any other proposal that aims to do what we tried, and failed, to do with our 'stingier than' ordering: that there is simply no distinction to be drawn *solely* in terms of material substitution-inferential propriety, that corresponds to the traditional distinction between extensional and nonextensional occurrences.

We have discussed Brandom's entitlement to the primary/non-primary distinction because his strategy for demarcating the singular terms requires an appeal to such a distinction. Without it, we are faced once again with the question of which set of SMSICs it is, of which it is true to say that an expression is a singular term just in case the SMSICs *in that set* that govern it are symmetric; and to this question no answer in terms of Brandom's explanatory primitives suggests itself.

I should emphasize that the problem is not that the attempt to draw the primary/non-primary distinction in inferentialist terms falls afoul of the projectibility requirement noted above (§VI). My claim is not that the distinction is one that no finite mind could grasp; it is that there is no principled basis for anyone, even someone capable of performing infinitely many cogitations in a finite period of time, to draw such a distinction in terms of Brandom's explanatory primitives. Nor, I should note again, does this problem afflict the philosopher taking the traditional, representationalist route in the philosophy of language. As I noted above (§VI), such a philosopher has a perfectly straightforward way of drawing the distinction Brandom wants. She does not eschew appeals to facts about the denotations of expressions, so she can use such facts as her touchstone in deciding whether to count a given occurrence of an expression as primary (i.e. extensional).

XII Can The Inferentialist Do Without This Distinction?

One reasonable reaction to the argument thus far is to wonder whether there is an inferentialist way to define singular terms that does not require anything corresponding to the traditional extensional/nonextensional distinction. Of course we cannot survey all possible proposals.

But there is one move that suggests itself as a way to accommodate the data we have discussed, and it is worth seeing why it is no help to any proposal along the lines of Brandom's.

The move is simply to give up on trying to specify the generality of the general SMSICs — those SMSICs, that is, whose symmetry is being proposed as the mark of singular termhood. Why not try to formulate a criterion that applies to *all* of the SMSICs that govern some expression, rather than trying to specify some special class of SMSICs — what I have been calling the *general* ones — and formulating a criterion that concerns only those ones? This is a natural response to some of the data we have discussed. A typical speaker's SMSIC relating the expressions 'John Kerry' and 'Teresa Heinz Kerry's husband' will have in its range *all* substitution inferences in which those expressions have extensional occurrence (as traditionally conceived). Yet almost of all of these will have no counterparts in the ranges of a SMSIC relating 'John Kerry' to an expression for something that the speaker merely takes to have the same mass as John Kerry: the latter ranges are much smaller. Smaller too, but very different, are the ranges of SMSICs relating 'John Kerry' to expressions for things the speaker takes merely to have the same height as John Kerry, or to those for things she takes merely to speak the same languages as John Kerry. The expression 'John Kerry,' then, is related to some expressions by SMSICs with relatively large ranges, and to others by SMSICs with relatively small ranges. Similarly for differences arising due to attitude-ascriptive verbs: George's SMSIC governing 'Eric' and 'Susan's driving instructor' includes in its ranges inferences that are not included in my SMSIC relating those expressions. The idea, then, is that we give up trying to distinguish between general and non-general SMSICs.

Motivated by the data though it is, this proposal is of no use in anything resembling Brandom's approach to characterizing the singular terms; only a wholly different approach could incorporate this idea. Recall (§VI) that it is part of the point of the distinction between general and non-general SMSICs to *exclude* SMSICs that relate singular terms asymmetrically (such as that relating 'Magdalen' and 'Oxford'). As we noted, they must be excluded if anything like Brandom's proposal is to work. Yet the proposal we are considering is to treat them as on a par with all others. When we refuse to distinguish among such great variations in generality we undercut the very idea behind Brandom's proposal, for we have to say that singular terms *and* predicates (etc.) are governed by some symmetric SMSICs and some asymmetric SMSICs (of greatly varying generality); thus there would seem to be even less prospect than before, of being able to elaborate in inferentialist terms the core idea behind Brandom's proposal.

XIII Where Does This Leave Brandom?

Brandom's proposal for characterizing the singular terms is based on the idea that they are distinguished by their *inferential symmetry*. Whatever we may think of the general ambition to cash out representational locutions in inferentialist terms, it should surprise us that there seems to be no way to specify in inferentialist terms the generality at which this distinctive symmetry shows itself. Yet this is what we have found.

This has serious consequences for Brandom's project. One of his principal ambitions in *Making It Explicit* is to offer inferentialist ways to understand what he calls 'representational' locutions — 'is about,' 'refers to,' 'is true' — and thereby to vindicate his inferentialism's claim to be an alternative way to think of familiar intentional phenomena. Doing this requires characterizing the singular terms, for it is with them that many of the representational locutions have their paradigmatic applications ('is true' being an exception). If the project comes to a halt in its attempt to do this then the vindication fails, and we must hold that whatever other virtues it may have — and they may be considerable — it cannot claim to be an alternative way to think about intentionality in general.

I should emphasize again that I have *not* argued that there is *no* way for the inferentialist to characterize the singular terms. What does follow from my argument, if it is sound, is that a successful inferentialist strategy for demarcating the singular terms must have a very different shape from Brandom's.

XIV Other Implications: 'Two Factor' Theories of Content and the Projectibility Requirement

The central point I have argued for is that we cannot conceive of the *generality* of inferential roles except in terms of the extensional/nonextensional distinction and that we cannot conceive of that distinction solely in terms of inferential proprieties. I have explained why I believe that this is fatal to Brandom's project of distinguishing singular terms from other expressions solely in terms of their inferential relations. There are two other issues to which the point is also relevant.

First, consider the influential 'two factor' theories of content (Field 1977, McGinn 1982 and Block 1986 are perhaps the most often-cited expositions). On these theories, each propositional content has two components: one 'wide,' one 'narrow.' Very roughly, the idea is that the wide component is denotation and the narrow component is inferential role, somehow conceived — though in each case the similarities with Brandom's notion of 'material' inferential propriety are manifest. The

wide component, it is held, determines truth conditions and the narrow component, it is held, renders contents suitable to figure in psychological explanations. Now apart from their differences concerning exactly how the two factors are to be conceived, one thing that some proponents of such views have in common is the idea that a content's 'narrow' component is in principle specifiable without reference to its 'wide' component.²⁵ Indeed, this is not a commitment that has struck any of them as objectionable.²⁶ Yet if what I have argued is correct, there is a straightforward sense in which inferential role is *not* specifiable independently of denotation: any specification of the *generality* of an expression's inferential role will probably have to rest on a distinction corresponding to the traditional extensional/nonextensional distinction, but (I have argued) no such distinction can be drawn except in terms of denotation. Thus these theorists are in a position similar to Brandom's: they must either tell us why we don't need to specify the generality of inferential roles in a way that incorporates something like the extensional/nonextensional distinction, or they must give up on the idea that a content's narrow component is in principle specifiable independently of its wide component (and the wide components of many others besides — recall the logical structure of the traditional distinction, which involves quantification over *all* substitutions of codenoting expressions).

One might think that there is an easy way to dismiss this problem:

The "two factor" theorist maintains that we use "that"-clauses to specify contents, where each content has a truth condition component and an inferential role component. So he has told us about *one* way in which we specify inferential roles. Why

25 McGinn: 'These components [of content] and the concerns they reflect are distinct and independent' (1982, 211). Block: 'Conceptual role [one of the two factors of meaning, for Block] abstracts away from all causal relations except the ones that mediate inferences, inductive or deductive, decision making, and the like' (1986, 628; see also 643, where he asserts that the conceptual role factor is 'primary in that it determines the nature of the referential factor'). My claim is that there is a dependence in the other direction, making the 'primary' designation problematic. The commitment isn't explicit in Field, although it is suggested by the way in which he talks about the two components. (He does recognize a 'constraint' on two-component contents, but it is not one that has to do with the *generality* of their inferential-role components. Rather, the constraint is a supervenience claim: that 'no two names or predicates that have the same conceptual role (for a given speaker at a given time) can refer (for that speaker at that time) to different things' (1977, 396).)

26 It has attracted some complaint, however. Fodor and Lepore ask, 'What prevents there being an expression that has an inferential role appropriate to the content *4* is a *prime* but the truth conditions appropriate to the content *water is wet*?' (1992, 170)

require him *also* to tell us about some other way? In particular, why must he tell us how to specify the *generality* of inferential roles?

Why indeed? Well, one reply is that in order to make it at all plausible that it is their narrow components that give contents their roles in psychological explanations, the 'two factor' theorist has to tell us *something* about how they are individuated. Just saying that the narrow factors are (along with the wide factors) specified by 'that'-clauses is of course question-begging: the question of the individuation of the narrow components *is* the question of the codenotation-conditions (as concerns the narrow components) of the 'that'-clauses that specify them. It may, nonetheless, be the case that the 'two factor' theorist can demonstrate that the narrow components *are* individuated in a way that supports psychological explanations, without specifying the sort of generality they have.

But even if that can be done, it is not possible for individual speakers of a language to avoid the issue: for each of them must be able to *project* an expression's role in novel inferences from its role in inferences already performed or encountered. The *theoretical* problem of *characterizing* the generality of inferential roles shows up for speakers themselves as the *practical* problem of *projecting* novel inferential relations. Johnny takes it that Susan is the teacher, so that from 'Susan is tall' he may infer 'The teacher is tall.' Should he therefore take it that from 'Susan is tall' he may infer 'Adam believes that the teacher is tall'? If there is such a thing as grasping the inferential role of the expression 'Susan,' then there should be an answer to this question (and it looks like it's No). It is hard to see how Johnny could behave accordingly except by (at least tacitly) distinguishing between those sentence-frames that are extensional and those that are not. My argument has been that there is no way to conceive of that distinction except in terms of denotation (although it is possible to conceive of a cognate *ordering* in non-denotational terms). A speaker's tacit recognition of it, then, must rest upon a tacit recognition of a distinction between discourse about objects and discourse of other kinds — quotational discourse about statements or words, or attitude-ascriptive discourse about beliefs, thoughts, etc. A speaker's grasp of an inferential role, in short, rests upon her *prior* grasp of such a distinction. In that sense the distinction between discourse about minds and language, and discourse on other matters, is fundamental to us as speakers.

A full discussion of these two issues is not in order here. (It is not clear, for instance, whether the result about the 'two factor' theories of content should be counted as a *problem* with those views; there might be no obstacle at all to their giving up on the claim that inferential roles are specifiable independently of denotation.) I bring them up merely to show that what we have found about the generality of inferential roles

is probably an issue for any theory that works with a notion of inferential role, not just Brandom's theory. The concept of inferential role needs handling with more care than it at first appears to require — more, even, than the unusual care that Brandom has exercised.

Appendix: Brandom's Syntactic Distinction

In this appendix I explain why I do not understand Brandom's claim that we can distinguish singular terms from predicates not only by their inferential roles — which is the claim I have discussed in this paper — but also by their 'substitution-structural' roles. Some explanation of Brandom's syntactic scheme is required.

Substituted-fors and substituted-ins

Brandom points out that on the assumption that we can discern *parts* of sentences²⁷ and can speak of the *substitution* of one such part for another, as it occurs in some sentence,²⁸ we can justify talking of *syntactically significant* parts of sentences. For these resources suffice to define syntactic categories, of a sort, according to the criterion of preservation of sentencehood under substitution. We can say that two sentence-parts 'belong to the same syntactic or categorical category just in case no well-formed sentence in which the one occurs can be turned into something that is not a sentence merely by substituting the other for it' (367-8). A sentence-part is syntactically significant, then, just in case it is a member of some syntactic category, so defined.²⁹

27 This assumption does not figure in Brandom's paper 'Singular terms and sentential sign designs' (1987). But that does not mean that that paper makes do with a proper subset of the explanatory primitives of *Making It Explicit*, as Brandom seems to claim at one point (688n.26) For its demarcation of the class of singular terms in terms of inferential proprieties presupposes that we can discern which inferential proprieties are determined by 'identity commitments' (152) and which are not; and the notion of an identity commitment is not among the explanatory primitives of *Making It Explicit*. The 1987 paper and the 1994 book start from different sets of assumptions.

28 This is the basis for Fodor and Lepore's (2001, 473n.12) claim that the notion of substitutional variance is an unacknowledged explanatory primitive in *Making It Explicit*.

29 Well, not quite. Each sentence-part is, of course, a member of the set whose *only* member it is, and each such set is, vacuously, one all of whose members are

Relative to a given substitution there are two ‘substitution-structural roles’ that Brandom claims sentence-parts can play (368). (Brandom actually claims that there are three, but as we shall see, the third role is not one that a sentence-*part*, strictly speaking, ever plays.) First, there is the role of being the sentence-*part* (which could be an entire sentence) *in* which the substitution takes place — this is the role of being the **substituted-in** sentence-*part* for that substitution. Second, there is the role of being the **substituted-for** sentence-*part* for that substitution. Thus, substituting ‘totem’ for ‘bean’ in ‘Jack climbed the bean pole’ gives ‘Jack climbed the totem pole’; here, the sentence-parts ‘totem’ and ‘bean’ are playing the role of substituted-fors and the sentence-*part* ‘Jack climbed the bean pole’ is playing the role of substituted-in. (Henceforth I will use ‘expression’ instead of ‘sentence-*part*,’ thus ceasing the generic usage explained above, n. 5.)

One expression *a* is a substitutional variant of another expression *b* just in case there is a pair of expressions e_1 and e_2 , such that the substitution of e_2 for one (or more) of the occurrence(s) in *a* of e_1 , results in *b*. What *a* and *b* have in common in virtue of being substitutional variants is something that they have in common with other sentences as well, namely, their transformability into each other by such a substitution. This feature Brandom reifies as a **substitutional frame**. A substitutional frame is ‘what is common to two substituted-in expressions that are substitutional variants of each other’ (368). Notationally, the variance is marked using a schematic letter, as in ‘ α is red-haired.’ (The schematic letter can occur more than once, marking the simultaneous substitution of different occurrences of the same expression.) But substitutional frames are not expressions in the strict sense — that is, they are not *parts* of sentences:

To discern the occurrence of a substitution frame — for instance “ $\alpha \rightarrow r$ ” in “ $p \rightarrow r$ ” — is to conceive of “ $p \rightarrow r$ ” as paired with the set of all its substitutional variants, such as “ $q \rightarrow r$ ”. (368)

intersubstitutable preserving sentencehood. Syntactic significance should require more than just membership in such a set. Indeed, it should also require more than membership in a set of sentencehood-preserving intersubstitutables that has only *two* members. (E.g. on the assumption — true as far as I know — that in English the string ‘troact’ occurs only in the word ‘retroactive’ and the string ‘barbat’ occurs only in the word ‘rebarbative,’ the set {‘troact,’ ‘barbat’} meets it as well: for each of this set’s members is always a sentencehood-preserving substitute for any other. But it would be ridiculous to maintain that ‘troact’ and ‘barbat’ are syntactically significant sentence-parts.) So, what *does* suffice? A good question, but I will not complain about Brandom’s not having answered it.

A substitutional frame is best thought of, then, as a maximal set of substitutionally variant sentences (407), and the sentence-parts that are invariant under the substitution as items that are merely ‘used as marks for’ (394) that frame. Our sentences differ according to what is substituted for ‘ p ’ in ‘ $p \rightarrow r$ ’; so the frame that includes them must include any sentence that is obtainable by such a substitution and no sentence that is not. (Since frames are not expressions but rather sets of substitutionally variant expressions, strictly speaking being a frame is not a role that an expression can play, contrary to Brandom’s listing it as such on p. 368.)

One final point. When thinking of examples of substitutions we tend to think of ones in which the variance concerns a singular term, or terms. But as Brandom points out, there are many substitutions relative to which *predicate* expressions are substituted-fors:

If “Kant admired Rousseau” has “Rousseau admired Rousseau” as a substitutional variant when the category substituted for is singular terms, does it not also have “Kant was more punctual than Rousseau” as a substitutional variant when the category substituted for is predicates? Indeed, does not talk about predicates as a category of expression presuppose the possibility of such replacement of one predicate by another, given the substitutional definition of “category” offered above? It does. (369)³⁰

Thus the substitutional variation exhibited by the sentences ‘Henry is tall,’ ‘Henry is happy,’ and ‘Henry is an ectomorph’ is one relative to which ‘is tall,’ ‘is happy’ and ‘is an ectomorph’ play the role of substituted-fors; the frame these sentences exhibit is ‘Henry α .’³¹ In grammars of the general category in which Brandom places his, namely ‘broadly Fregean functional-categorial grammars ... any categories can be chosen as basic, not just terms and predicates’ (361). Brandom takes himself to be presenting not so much a particular grammar but a ‘general mechanism ... whereby (an infinite number of) further grammatical categories can be derived from the basic ones’ (ibid.).

30 This statement is followed by a ‘however...’ that notes something immaterial to my point here. It notes that there is an analogue of substitutional variance (Brandom calls it ‘frame replacement’) that obtains between substitutional frames rather than between expressions *per se*. Obviously this does not amount to a retraction of the claim I quote, any more than noting that there is a difference between borrowing and stealing amounts to claiming that things that can be borrowed cannot be stolen.

31 Brandom doesn’t discuss such examples in his text, but this is because (as he declares on 376) his concern is with an application of the substitutional machinery in which it is singular terms that are the substituted-fors.

The picture thus far, then, is that there are sentence-parts of each syntactic type, any of which can be taken as basic (that is, play the role of substituted-fors) in a particular application of the functional-categorical 'mechanism.' Correspondingly, for each syntactic type there are substitutional sentence-frames that take substituted-fors of that type as arguments. This seems a simple and straightforward enough scheme; whatever we may think of its congruence, or lack of it, with syntactic schemes recognized by linguists,³² it does at least have the virtue of being well-defined.

'Predicates are substitutional frames'

Brandom claims that in terms of his syntactic apparatus we can, following Frege,

characterize the roles of singular terms and predicates. Frege's idea is that predicates are the substitutional sentence frames formed when singular terms are substituted for. (369)

It is easy to think that here (and elsewhere³³) Brandom is claiming that the substitutional mechanism somehow *must* be employed by having singular terms play the role of substituted-fors, thereby having predicates show up as items of a derived category, *viz.*, substitutional frames. This seems contrary to the idea he expresses when introducing his syntactic concepts: that the substitutional 'machinery' can be employed in different ways depending on which items serve as the substituted-fors.

The appearance of conflict is illusory. When he mentions 'Frege's idea,' for example, Brandom makes it very clear (albeit in an endnote 319 pages later in the book) that by 'predicates' he means predicate frames (e.g. ' α is tall') rather than predicate sentence-parts (e.g. 'is tall').³⁴ And

32 Fodor and Lepore (2001, 473-4) point out that the categories defined according to Brandom's criterion do not correspond to those recognized by traditional grammar or contemporary linguistic theory.

33 E.g.: 'Predicates are substitutional sentence frames' (384); '[predicates] are not expressions that are substituted for — indeed, as substitution frames, they are defined explicitly by their contrasting and complementary syntactic substitutional role' (393); '*syntactically*, singular terms play the substitution-structural role of being substituted *for*, while predicates play the substitution-structural role of sentence frames' (400).

34 He makes this point using Dummett's (1973, ch. 2) terminology of 'simple' and 'complex' predicates, which maps onto his own.

he states on 376 that from that point forward, by ‘singular terms’ he should be taken to mean, singular term substituted-fors — which are *parts* of sentences — and by ‘predicates’ he should be taken to mean, predicate sentence-frames — which are *sets* of (substitutionally variant) sentences. So there is no reason to see Brandom as claiming in any of the passages just cited that it is only by taking singular terms as substituted-fors that that apparatus can be applied to generate a functional-categorical grammar for some set of sentences. This is just as well, as that claim is inconsistent with his explanation of his syntactic scheme.

What then are we to make of these claims, so interpreted? They seem to be saying that we can *distinguish* between singular terms and predicates according to the substitution-structural roles they play (of substituted-for and substitutional frame, respectively). We’ve seen that when he says ‘predicates’ Brandom should be taken (anywhere after p.376, at least) to mean, ‘predicate sentence-frames.’ But to take these statements this way is to make them vacuously true; for then, the claim is that *when the syntactic mechanism is started with singular term expressions being substituted-for*,³⁵ singular terms are substituted-fors and predicates are, correspondingly, substitutional frames. As the machinery could be started differently, however — with *predicate* sentence-parts being substituted-for — a corresponding tautology is also true, namely that when the substitutional machinery is started with predicate expressions being substituted-for, predicates are substituted-fors and singular terms are, correspondingly, substitutional frames (e.g. ‘Henry α ’). Brandom clearly does not intend to be propounding a tautology; for him, the claim is interesting enough to be worth repeating. But I cannot see what non-tautological claim he *is* making in these passages. Accordingly I haven’t discussed this claim in the paper. I don’t think that anything in my discussion of Brandom’s proposal for distinguishing singular terms by the structure of their *inferential* roles turns on how it is to be interpreted.

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35 That is, ‘*when singular terms are substituted for*’ in the passage quoted from 369.

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