

Towards a Practical-Poietic, Materialist, Philosophical Point of View

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Abstract: In this short essay I offer the sketch of a practical-poietic, material point of view in philosophy, in critical dialogue with what I consider the linguocentric neo-pragmatism of Jürgen Habermas and Richard Rorty, as well as with the practical historical, critical materialism of Karl Marx. The new point of view is articulated around notions such as practical-embodied intentionality, reality and ourselves as material activity, human action as eminently poietic, involving appropriation and objectivation, and finally linguocentrism as a bad idea. It also underscores the role of objects in our practices, in our own constitution as subjects and in that of society. Last, I briefly indicate some of its possible positive, practical implications of it, for society and politics.

Introduction. Practical Turns: Pragmatism, Marx, Modernism

What I present here are elements for a new paradigm of production, what I call a poietic-pragmatic point of view or a practical-poietic materialism – poietic from *poiesis*, production and creation, human makings and doings in general. A point of view that can be understood as situated amidst and beyond pragmatism and Karl Marx, neo-pragmatisms (such as Habermas' and Rorty's) and Hegel. The multiple elements of this practical-poietic point of view are here only briefly drafted, some of them merely indicated, since the aspects under which it can be developed are too broad and varied for a short paper.² After this general introduction to our topic / argument, to what I take the new paradigm to be, I move to a critical dialogue with Habermas and Rorty (section I), and then with Marx (section II), as a means of constructing and delimiting my own position, which is then further and more directly, even if very briefly, presented at the end of this essay in terms of some of its basic concepts and possible practical consequences (section III).

The consideration of a few authors and positions in this presentation (such as Habermas, Rorty, Marx, Hegelianism, Pragmatism, Positivism) is then first of all an expedient for a dialogical exposition and legitimation of the aforementioned paradigm, but also an opportunity for a first probing into its explanatory and critical potentials. Otherwise I would simply begin with its general principle, what I call our practical, productive, material entanglement with the world, objects and people, and proceed without further authorial allusions to the development of its consequences, in the manner of Marx with his *allgemeines Resultat* and *Leitfaden*.³

Ours is essentially a practical point of view marked by an emphasis on the material, productive, creative dimensions of human action, and on the consequent kind of involvement we have with world and people. All that articulated by means of notions such as *poiesis*, practical material meaning-endowing intentionality, reality and ourselves as sensuous (*sinnliche*) activity, the world as artifact, society as an ensemble of practices, relations, objects and objectivations. Notions that

may imply a reconsideration and re-articulation of some traditional philosophical ideas, about ground, meaning, correspondence, experience, knowledge, language, normativity, society, etc. Culminating in a paradigm that can be called a materialistic historical holism, and in certain practical, ethical, aesthetic and political, emancipatory, consequences for it, though neither that reconsideration nor those consequences will be here developed.

We are here talking about a practical point of view which in some ways remains close to, among other things, basic elements of classical pragmatism, extracting from them new consequences - thicker and more radical. Elements such as Alexander Bain's sentence: a belief is a habit of action or disposition to act - for me also the other way around. Charles Peirce's famous pragmatist maxim (a certain ontological-anthropological dimension added): the notion of an object is that of its effects of practical reach, that is, its behavior when interacting with us and our conduct in interacting with it. The Protagoreanism / humanism of Ferdinand Schiller and William James: "The trail of the human serpent is over everything" - more than either of them suspects. Dewey's point of view of the agent, to be historically improved, together with his expanded notion of experience, and that of reality as having a practical character. In our paradigm, though, entailing a certain precedence of the notion of - productive - activity over that of experience, which would presuppose a productive-appropriative activity and be shaped by it.

Outside the pragmatist field in a strict sense, I can still mention, on this list of convergences and corroborations, the pragmatist element in Heidegger, his account of *Zuhandenheit* as a basic way of relating to things, artifacts and the world. Also various suggestions of human-beings' practical-active, even objectual nature, from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and from Left Hegelianism. The Darwinian, non linguocentric constructivism of Nietzsche's *Truth and Lie in the Extra-Moral Sense*. Developments in French idealism/voluntarism as a philosophy of action and creation, v.g. Blondel and Bergson. And, last but not least, Brazilian modernism and cultural-historical essayism, in particular Oswald de Andrade and Gilberto Freyre, the pragmatism of Anísio Teixeira and INEP, and Brazilian "developmentalist" Hegelianism of the 1960s (ISEB) and of Roberto Mangabeira Unger today.⁴

I. Post-Metaphysical but Non-Linguocentric Pragmatic Philosophy. Beyond Redescriptive and Kantian Pragmatisms

My main idea here is that we can better accomplish, with the notion of sensuous / material (*sinnliche*), productive *practice* (as, among other things, social, world-disclosing and interpreting), what many (here Habermas and Rorty) think can be mostly accomplished or only accomplished with language, on the way to an improved contemporary philosophical critical-practical, non-dogmatic, paradigm. As more recent developments along this last line, following the well-known linguistic turn, we typically have the - in many ways, promising - neo-pragmatism of Rorty and Habermas,⁵ both aimed, as we understand and approve, at improving upon Karl Marx, for many still the practical-critical, alas dogmatic, absolute Champion. I also take Rorty and Habermas as aiming at recovering and enhancing some virtues of classical pragmatism, and at adding to them a few more, new ones. Virtues that may be quickly condensed here in some critical, post-metaphysical "-isms" (pragmatism is basically good post-metaphysical thinking) that challenge much of previous classical philosophy as well as of most typically modern.

We mean *negative* "-isms" such as non-representationalism, non-foundationalism, non-transcendentalism, along with, in the practical sphere, non-authoritarianism, non-paternalism, etc. We also mean *affirmative* "-isms" such as pluralism, activism, meliorism, inclusionism, normativism, that have to do with non-isms like citizenship and democracy. All those possible critical gains acquired, in the case of Rorty, Habermas and like-minded others, by means of contributions of the

afore-mentioned linguistic, discursive, turn or paradigm. For the benefit of a pragmatism further removed from naturalism, dualisms, positivisms, dogmatic underpinnings, normative-deficits and uncritical consequences. That is, in what interests us, for the benefit of a pragmatism no more dependent on the objectivist paradigm of the natural sciences, even if a non-positivist one. But, on the contrary, a more contextualist and perhaps even historical or historicist pragmatism, more attentive to social, intersubjective implications and open to a more decisive reference to social practices.

That is what we find in good quantities both in the positions of Jürgen Habermas and perhaps still more typically and radically in those of Richard Rorty, despite the differences between the two, even if they are both neo-pragmatists. The first, more Peircean, Kantian, the second, more Deweyan, Hegelian and transformative. On both sides, likewise, a non-correspondentism as to the conception of truth, and a commitment to the socialization of reason. Thence a justification-alism in epistemology (truth as justification to an audience), and thence a displacement of the traditionally modern notion of objectivity and reason as centered on the subject. Thence practically entailing advantageous (in our terms) consequences for solidarity and political and social inclusiveness, as well as more generalized social protagonism. Both Habermas and Rorty then, as we would like, inter-subjectivists, non-logocentric, non-dogmatic, non-Cartesians, non-mentalists. Their neo-pragmatism enveloping besides, on Habermas' side, universalism and unconditionalism, even if moderate, and, on Rorty's side, contingency and creation. Let's then look a bit more closely and critically to their neo-pragmatist paradigm, from our own point of view of what might interest us in terms of convergences and distinctions. In the cases of Habermas and Rorty, we have two neo-pragmatist philosophers, one coming from Marx (Habermas), the other from analytical philosophy (Rorty), although also from Marx if considered Rorty's familial circle, youth formation and original ideals. The two, on the other hand, often thought of as antipodes to one-another, one serious and rationalist (Habermas), the other relativistic, frivolous, post-modern (Rorty). That in spite of the two equally claiming pragmatism, democracy and the linguistic turn of philosophy in its analytic and post-analytic shape. That is, in spite of their both claiming Wittgenstein II and the gradual, self-dogmatizing movement of analytic, logical-linguistic empiricism.

Both Habermas and Rorty claiming the linguistic turn in its more typically continental, hermeneutic version, that of language as world-disclosing. The two, finally, coinciding in the interesting notion (non-metaphysical, non-transcendentalist) of truth as justification to the concerned audience, at the same time there including some idealization - universalist in Habermas but not in Rorty.⁶ Significantly, though, in the debate between them, not only Habermas explicitly assumes to be a pragmatist and sees himself as affiliated with a particular Kantian pragmatist family (which includes for instance Hilary Putnam). He also criticizes Rorty for not being pragmatist enough, for not recovering what the German philosopher calls the realist intuitions of the lifeworld as pragmatically demanded by everyday human practices. Apart from this promising measure of realism, Habermas's pragmatism is also keen to claim a measure of unconditionality and universality for allegations of validity and truth. While Rorty's prefers to give up on that in order to supposedly collect more benefits on the side of practical (pragmatic) effectiveness, but also, which is very good, on the side of openness to creation and novelty - Rorty's romantic, Nietzschean side. He does that believing that truth as justification and reason as persuasion - for him in favor of a progressively more open community, although still particular and always somehow still "his" - are sufficient to effectively sustain a normative democratic point of view. That is, sufficient to exorcise new falls into relativistic "anything goes" and then into violence and exclusions in the sphere of human affairs - for Habermas, and I think he is basically right, a risk that may still threaten us and our societies.

Both Habermas and Rorty, so they say, are opposed to subject-centered reason and to the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness. As a result, they conceive of a considerable change

(and in that we considerably coincide with them)⁷ in the traditional role of philosophy. In Rorty, almost an end, at least for philosophy with capital P. For Habermas, a change for philosophy from the role of "transcendental judge" of the rest of culture, to that of an internal participant in it, as mediator between specialized areas of knowledge, also between those and the lifeworld. While, at the same time, philosophy for him should still remain, even if uncomfortably, the guardian of rationality.

For Rorty, on the other hand, philosophy can now assume a transformative, however modest, role in the sphere of culture, without any transcendental privilege, in favor of conversation, tolerance and solidarity (for him, rationality's adequate garments). Philosophy also assuming, for him, the role of emancipatorily offering alternative vocabularies and redescriptions, as well as the role of supporting efforts at personal self-creation. Although for Rorty that should not be understood as an intervention in favor of truth or objectivity (as correspondence), both considered by him reifying and alienating reminiscences of the paradigm of Truth of Revealed Religion. But, instead, that should be understood as an intervention, in cooperation with literature and poetry, in favor of imagination and creation. That, apparently, for Rorty, even in the case of efforts for public solidarity and justice.

As we have already suggested, the two neo-pragmatists, those of Habermas and Rorty, have claims for some transcendence of context but not of the same kind. In Habermas, a Kantian transcendence; in Rorty, a romantic, imaginative, particularist one. In addition, they both claim to be anti-logocentrists (Rorty more radically), i.e. to give priority to practice over theory, which is our claim too. Even if, and that has to do with my main point in this essay, they had better do it less linguocentrically; in other words, they had better do it by clearly taking practice as something sensuous, embodied, material. Instead of taking it just or so centrally as the use of verbal language, as if that were, in isolation, what has supreme epistemological and practical-normative interest, thus being the only, main or proper concern for philosophy. After all, linguocentrism and logocentrism, etymologically so close, might not be so far apart philosophically as Rorty and Habermas think, both logocentrism and linguocentrism being perhaps equally intellectualist and abstract - something pragmatists would usually want to avoid, and perhaps historical materialists should want too.

While Habermas, when he distinguishes his position from that of his friend and close ally Karl-Otto Appel (who claims an absolute transcendental normative foundation, implicit in discursive / argumentative practices, for ethics and democratic politics), seems to do so by pragmatist, contextualist, empirical and detranscendentalizing concessions to Rorty, he (Habermas) is still decidedly unwilling to accompany his American peer to the end in this one's historicist, nominalist and naturalist (even if non-reductionist, non-scientistic) venture. Rorty, on the other hand, claiming to fight bad Platonisms and Cartesianisms still remaining in contemporary philosophy and culture, argues that what he does is not anything post-modern but simply to follow Habermas to the end of his path towards a complete socialization of – communicative - reason. A socialization of reason as simply a practical disposition and as good habits towards mutual understanding and non-violence, a disposition that, for Rorty, is neither universal nor purely rational in the traditional sense.

The fact of the matter is that Rorty, with his intersubjective, social turn in the notion of rationality, a turn which he shares with Habermas, wants to open more room for anti-Platonism than a strict Habermasianism would like to grant. He wants to open more room not only for a non-reductionist, detranscendentalizing, Darwin-inspired, quasi-naturalism, nor just room for a historicist contextualism. He also wants – as we also do – to open more room for a radical contingency of the social bond and of one's individuality, and thus for more space for a poietic, creative, imaginative, experimentalist innovationism, public, and for freer poietic, ironist self-creation, private. And he wants to accomplish all that without leaving solidarity aside, but, on

the contrary, setting it above and in the place of Modernity's craving for objectivity – as well as for universality.

All those developments ultimately upheld, in the work of the two philosophers, by means of a Wittgensteinianly inspired linguistically / linguocentrically practical paradigm. With its marks, including what we think are limitations, stamped all over the various aspects of their (Rorty's and Habermas') neo-pragmatisms. At the cost, as I see it, of a full acknowledgement of what is sensuous-material – and emancipatorily decisive - in the human world and in our relations with it. Also at the cost of a better acknowledgment (which our paradigm wants to underscore) of the role of things / objects sensory in it and in our own being-in-the-world. At the cost of a thicker, more effective understanding of practice, intersubjectivity, context, forms of life and so forth – and therefore of emancipation, too. Also possibly at the cost of our own corporeality, and from there, at the cost of a better (non-relativist etc.) non-dogmatic post-metaphysical understanding of knowledge, normativity and the philosophical emancipatory implications of our doings and makings. Thereby entailing a disembodied and dematerialized, even ascetic reduction of agents, experience and practice, now conceived as essentially linguistic – speech, discourse, vocabularies, redescrptions, communication, etc.

Following that path, it is my understanding that Rorty and Habermas risk slipping into unnecessary idealisms and relativisms, agnosticisms and skepticisms, also into discursivism in what concerns intersubjectivity and context, and into a notion of society as basically a sort of forum. Although Rorty tries to be, in all that, more anti-dualistic (which we strongly approve), in the way of Hegel, and more transformative-creativist, in a Nietzschean-pragmatist way than his colleague. While Habermas, it is true, as I have already mentioned, cares to rescue, without denying an internal relation between justification and truth, the realist intuitions of the lifeworld, as best he can conceive of it. As the belief in the world being basically the same for all language users, despite their different cultural and personal ways of understanding it.

It is in opposition to such deficiencies arising from what I call linguocentrism that I suggest a turn from practice understood as mainly discursive, to practice understood as necessarily involving – what both Habermas and Rorty disregard – our sensuous-material-active entanglement with the world and people, as well as practice understood as pervasively material, productive, and creative to some degree. Actually, a turn from praxis to *poiesis*, that is, to human action as always in some way productive, inevitably materially intertwined with world and objects, entailing appropriations and objectivations, and presupposing our own active sensuous corporeality.

This new turn can then be accomplished, in philosophy, I believe, with the full development of a poietic-pragmatic, material viewpoint by means of what could be well considered a return to the so-called paradigm of production, a return that can well present itself as a particular, new reconstruction of Marx. From whose practical materialism, taken as instrumentalist in a bad sense (all dependent on “instrumental reason”), both Rorty and Habermas, and a lot more people, seem to simply – even if unnecessarily and imprudently - want to completely desert. As if that materialism (and a paradigm of production) were helplessly involved with determinism, dogmatism, reductionism, objectivism, with Cartesianism, metaphysical foundationalism, authoritarianism. And finally with an illegitimate, dehumanizing dominance of a positivist paradigm of natural science and of technology, not to say, alas, domination, exploitation and violence of Modernity as Capitalism.

While, as to myself, in relation to Marx's deficits and excesses, I would be more concerned with his crippling dogmatic, speculative essentialism and substantialism (in the context of Hegelianism, opposed to *Selbstbewusstsein* as active, creative, free). Unduly mixed on one hand with his nicely practical, interactionist and contextualist materialism, and, on the other, unfortunately combined with, a definitely warping hypertrophied mentalism. Ultimately, a paradigm that, among other bad things, might practically nullify the possibility of a notion of human action as

creation and self-creation, as truly innovative and as somehow transcendent of context and effectively historical. On the contrary, our understanding of a fully human material entanglement with world and people, implied by human action, is fully supportive of – actually a requirement for – both good anti-dogmatic and non-relativist epistemological virtues, and to practical emancipatory developments.

The fact, however, is that Marx's point of view, as that of a more Hegelian-Feuerbachian rather than Kantian or linguocentric philosopher, is more attentive to our sensuous interaction with the world, in comparison to Habermas and Rorty neo-pragmatisms, not to say Wittgenstein's linguistic pragmatism. Actually, stripped of his bad substantialist, essentialist, speculative and dualist ontology and anthropology, and of his overlooked epistemological mega-mentalism, Marx's thought converges with – and could also potentiate – the practical, activist positions of other nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers, like left Hegelians, Nietzsche (actually a typical young Hegelian), classical pragmatists, French voluntarists, etc. As well as converges with the already mentioned developmentalist and modernist, anticolonial essayist thinkers of our Brazilian national construction, which also inspire us here, such as Oswald de Andrade, Gilberto Freyre, Guerreiro Ramos, Álvaro Vieira Pinto and now Mangabeira Unger – however critically appropriated. These are thinkers that hardly anyone, in mainstream philosophy or what is so considered knows or takes into consideration in our Brazilian philosophical community not to say abroad. And that is why I will leave them alone for now, in this very short introductory account of my point of view, not without taking the opportunity, though, to claim them as much better than much of what is stylishly de-constructively called de-colonial nowadays.

II. Developing a better Practical Historical, Material Point of View in Dialogue with and Opposition to Marx

Let us now, then, turn finally to Marx's general philosophy (often disregarded by Marxists and Critical Theorists), in keeping with the idea of recovering and advantageously reshaping, within a materialistic, productive paradigm, what is best in the pragmatic, social, antidogmatic, democratic intuitions of Habermas and Rorty in their promisingly post-metaphysical, non-foundationalist, practical, contextualist neo-pragmatisms. Recovering, reshaping what is interesting in them, now no more within a linguocentric paradigm that runs the risk of ultimately being relativist or agnostic, as well as non-transformative and idealist in a bad sense, but instead within what we are calling a pragmatic-poietic, practical-materialistic paradigm. Further developed now by means of a dialogue, not just with classical pragmatist intuitions, or with other earlier, pre-linguistic-turn, Darwinian/Hegelian influenced practical points of view. But with Marx's practical-historical materialism, and also, in connection with it, elements of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* and of young Hegelianism.⁸

I mean a critical dialogue with the best of Marx, where he is better than Habermas and Rorty for our purposes, taking him as a philosopher who is trying to accomplish a materialistic and practical-transformative, activist conversion of Hegel. A return to Marx, then, with prospects of a better reconstruction / development of a paradigm of production, in updated, contemporary terms. Beyond both linguistified pragmatism, romantic or Kantian, and beyond traditional metaphysical correspondentist realism as well, such as that of dogmatic, positivist, analytical empiricism. At the same time, however, including a refusal of Marx's from religion-inferred, speculative-millennialist, end-of-times substantialist-essentialist Communism, that particularly warps the whole of his normative claims, political instructions and ample diagnostic of our times and social reality, to effectively foster social, material change.

It is, first of all, a matter of setting aside what seems to me to be Marx's quite unpractical /

unpragmatic (although still, to some extent, in our days, mobilizing), theoreticist, Hegelianly apriorist, transcendental-normative, anthropologically speculative background dogmas. In favor of his, most of the time neglected, never developed, yet to be reconstructed, practical-contextualist, non-mentalist materialism. Undressed of essentialisms and substantialisms,⁹ as much as of dualisms, both classic and modern, Platonic and Cartesian. Rid of traditional metaphysical philosophical tropes that Max was keen to translate into reality and reiterate with added Might: essence vs existence, essence vs appearance, ground vs. surface, infrastructure vs superstructure, science vs ideology and interpretation, subject vs object, real vs ideal, intelligible vs sensible. All that deliverance for the benefit of a non-determinist development, in favor of creation, autonomy and democracy, say, human emancipation, now to be better materially understood and tentatively, experimentally realized.

Along these lines and with such intentions, we must pay a visit to Marx's atelier or backstage, in search for the most productive, practically-materialistically plausible suggestions in his general, overlooked background philosophy, such as his notion of practice as *sinnliche*, as labor, as *poiesis*, as social – to start with. On the other hand, even as to practice, we will have to reject, for instance, his contempt for the practices of common human beings, for him all hopelessly *schmutzig-jüdischen*, lost in appearance, hopelessly alienated, when contrasted with his theoretically informed, superior, universal, critical-revolutionary (in Marx's terms) practice, as the only truly human (see Marx's First Thesis *ad* Feuerbach). Instead, we will want to recover, for instance, his interesting suggestion for us to understand social reality (together with ourselves) as objective-subjective, sensory practice/activity (*sinnliche Tätigkeit*) – not just as object or passive sensory intuitions (*Anschauungen*). We will also want to follow Marx's central interest (although still extremely reductionist) in the relevant role of material means/objects and in their uses in the constitution of our relations and practices, therefore of ourselves, society and our world. Together with partially following his claim (Manuscripts of 1844, 3rd. manuscript, section 5), directed against Hegel, that human beings create / posit objects, but do that “because they are posited by objects.” After getting rid of that bad Spinozean-substantialist, determinist, “because”.¹⁰ And more is to be recovered as well as repaired from Marx, that we will look into here, if we want to take him, after Habermas and Rorty, as another dialectical ladder on the way to constructing our pragmatic-poietic, materialist point of view.

For our purposes, what stands out in Marx's “atelier” (among his manuscripts, unfinished and unframed) as his most precious sketch - because so frugal, thus potentially plastic-protean, full of possibilities for development and correction - are his Theses *ad* Feuerbach. According to Friedrich Engels, the Theses are precisely the concise ingenious embryo for Marx's entire new worldview, i.e. historical materialism, then perhaps also for other possible philosophical developments, like that of a more practical poietic, historical, materialist, *sinnlich*, point of view (*Standpunkt*). A very telegraphic text, the Theses, that can be read as including some very interesting interconnected moments of Marx's Theory, elements to be found scattered along the ensemble of his work, both young and mature. Together with some well-known and approved, indeed ambiguous when looked from closer, of his shibboleths. About philosophers now having to change the World (thesis 11), about proving the truth/power of one's thought only in practice instead of scholastically (thesis 2), and – contradictorily - against material doctrines that epistemically divide society in two parts, rising above society as a whole and raising one such part, their supporters, above society as well (thesis 3) – which seems to apply to his own doctrine in the first place.

Anyway, to proceed with a closer look into Marx paradigm, some of his most effective practical-material, post-metaphysical, contemporary, philosophical moments, mostly in Theses *ad* Feuerbach, include:

1) The overcoming, by his new practical-materialist point of view, of dogmatic empiricism or positivism (“previous materialism”), apparently foundationally intuitionist-passive, Cartesian-

mentalist, representationalist, therefore not constitutively practical-transformative at the social level. Also, on the other hand, a rejection of subjective idealism, a philosophical position that, more or less like present linguocentrism, in spite of its acknowledgement of the human-active side of reality, ignores most of the time real human transformative activity (v.g labor, in very broader terms) as having an inescapable material dimension. (Thesis 1)

2) An understanding of social reality and ourselves as one and the same material (*sinnliche*) activity, that implying the overcoming of a dualist conception of the human world and the human subject as basically static, separate, external to one another. Together with Marx's already mentioned refusal of a conception of the second (the subject) as only or mainly thinking activity, and of the first (social reality) as basically thought, too, or simply an object *an sich* (Thesis 1). Therefore, Marx's new materialism suggesting a Deweyan-like displacement of the "spectator point-of-view" by the point of view of the agent, as well as demanding a refusal of the objectivist-representationalist fixation of the Real, which is now by Marx considered as process and history – that is, as practice, sensuous practice.

3) A disqualification of the abstract, pre-social individual of abstract empiricism's perception. A negation of the fictional representation of the individual as dissociated from the ensemble of her social relations as well as from a particular social life-form and from particular social practices (Thesis 6). That, on the other hand, unfortunately together with a full reduction and essentialization of those relations and practices, cut down by Marx to a single particular kind and sphere, as the all determining relations "of production" or "of labor" – labor being our essence and, in its industrial form, the true all determining activity.

4) As to objects, an explicit, practical, materialist consideration of the social role of – human, material-spiritual – objects or artifacts is missing in the Theses, in spite of Marx's emphasis on our activity as material activity and of objects as absolutely exterior to our knowing and representing them. An explicit emphasis on the role of objects in general, objects as posited by man, will have to be found elsewhere in Marx's Feuerbachian sensualism and naturalism in the so called *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, in his critique of Hegel's (and Bauer's) idealism of Self-Consciousness. Where, as we have already mentioned, Marx, in his nineteenth century German ways of being scientistically materialist, insists, against Hegel, that we indeed create/posit objects, but *because* we are created/posited by them. He insists that, therefore, in such positing activity it is not the subject as self and his alleged self-activity that is affirmed but instead the object and its full objectivity and objective causation. That in spite of Marx's apparent admission, elsewhere, in *Das Kapital* (v. 1, chap. 7) of a decisive role for intention, purpose, will and *modus operandi*, that is, for "*die Kopf*", as well as for human instruments, in our labor of positing objects, that is, in human labor as such. I mean, in his famous example of the architect, apparently intentional and creative in his labor, in opposition to mere instinctive, mindless, animal "labor" such as the bee's when building the beehive.

5) All such practical poietic materialist "moments" (in the Theses, but also throughout Marx's whole historical materialism, as I see it), combined, seem to entail a social-epistemological suggestion of some sort of congruence between general beliefs or points of view and social positions as practical-relational situations or *Standpunkten* (Thesis 9 and 10). That is, they seem to entail a *material contextualism* and *perspectivism*, to which Marx, however, is not fully faithful himself when it comes to regarding his own views or beliefs about Reality, which assume a strong epistemologically solipsist ambition, of *mirroring*, in one's (his) single head, the total movement of social-historical reality as it is in itself. A totalizing correspondentist mentalism, hypertrophied with the help of Hegelian dialectical categories (cf. Marx's notorious Introduction of 1857), in a way I believe Hegel himself, notwithstanding all his idealism (and by Marx alleged subjectivism), would not support.

Finally, beyond Marx's general refusal, in the Theses *ad Feuerbach*, of bad, typically bourgeois-

modern, XVIII century ways of knowing and understanding the social, historical Reality, *Sinnlichkeit*, as object (not as practice), the ways of “precedent materialism”, we come to the big Question, the challenging Normative Problem. We come to his critical diagnostic of the social Real as at the same time *essentially* split, also atomized, by the definitely bad, all-prevailing, conflicting, social relations and practices, ultimately (capitalist) relations of production. We come to what for Marx leads to an also all-prevailing duplication and hypostatization of the World, which will then be reflected in religion’s, philosophy’s and ideology’s idealism and dualism, as its symptom. That is, we come to what Marx understands as Alienation (Thesis 4) and Fetishism (*Das Kapital*, first chapter, section 4), present throughout the entire History (of Man) but supposedly brought to its acutest and final expression in Marx’s own time, in Max’s own Theory, by Capitalism. Communism being, then, History’s resolved (by Marx) final enigma and only true Solution and Outcome, according to such all-embracing, seemingly very speculative and essentialist Diagnostic. Starting here, things get quite complicated, unpragmatic and un-political in Marx’s Theses ad Feuerbach and in historical materialism altogether, with the presentation of this fundamental critical-normative Presupposition and Proposition. A big Diagnostic which, being such a central part of that admirable embryo, also colors, as it could be expected, the whole of his monumental *Werke* of a lifetime.

I get briefly into these controversial matters here because I believe that so called Critical Theory usually wants to move beyond Marx apparently keeping whatever normativity it wants to keep from him, especially the famous, far-reachingly normative, radically critical, bewitching and bewildering notions of *fetichism* and *alienation*, without taking a closer, critical look at that in Marx himself, starting with the notion of *Gattungswesen* as their foundation. Something (such closer look) which is missing, for example, in Habermas’s ambitious reconstruction of historical materialism, in spite of his doing general philosophy in part of his work, which apparently others do not. While for Rorty, on the other hand, such things as alienation and fetichism should just be taken as provocative metaphors, as literature, to be considered in their practical effects, not as Theory. Let us then proceed on this topic for a short while more.

In order to support his strong normative communist position, Marx (following on Feuerbach’s footsteps) operates a kind of deduction of a supposed human Generic Essence (*Gattungswesen*), from Christian religion. Religion now supposedly atheistically well understood (where *Gattungswesen* allegedly appears idealistically refracted) as Alienation, or rather, for Marx, as its most typical and central *Symptom*. In other words, Marx commits himself to the Feurbachian translation of Christianity into humanism / altruism, developing it into a for him far more consequent anti-individualist/anti-egoist communitarian humanism-naturalism, which is Communism (cf. Thesis 4 and 6). A deduction of Man as Generic Essence, now as Foundation / Ground also, for his critique of Modern political economy, society, ethics and culture. As a seemingly worldly, *diesseitige* – even empirical, materialist - normative Foundation, but truly an essentialized and transcendentalized *Telos* that should preside over our practical actions, beyond their present egoist, *schmutze* real-apparent form.

We could imagine all that has only to do with the young Marx, but it is this fully social-generic man who will appear again as the measure for Critique in Marx’s latest critique of political economy, under the guise of labor as truly and inescapably social, and, more prosaically, in the shape of centrally planned social production as its realization. There, labor still tacitly appears as our essential-generic activity by excellence, our in-capitalism-by-fetichism-spoiled/hidden being-for-one-another, which operates at the bottom of economic relations (in Capitalism), that is, at the level of essence. Therefore, in Marx, the level of *Science*, as against that of *appearance*, “real appearance”, at the *surface*, as represented then, for Marx, in *ideology*, the Eden of freedom, human rights etc. That is the foundation that will determine, by necessity, the course of the practical overcoming of the essential social / human contradiction in Capitalism, as the end of

the supposed self-alienation, again, of Man. That End opening the way then, beyond the selfish *Standpunkt* of animal-like Civil Society, for the realization of the point-of-view of the Human / Humane Society of tomorrow: Socialism and Communism (Thesis 10). First opening the way for the need and the (categorical) imperative of its realization, which Marx reiterates in more than one part of his work, a fantastic move in which is what is categorically imperative is also what is materially imposed.

Marx thus maintains a dogmatic transcendentalist normativism in support of his critical social point of view. Be it (a) with the humanist-communitarian, collectivist, materialistic, Feuerbachian translation of God (of Christianity) into Man as our true Supreme Being. Be it (b) by the alleged demonstration of the basic, essential, determining, entirely social, nature of labor (in a narrow sense), in Marx's mature criticism of political economy. A true nature allegedly invisible to the involved social actors themselves, to all of us ordinary men indeed, at the level of the deceptive social surface, that only Theory would allow one to see through. (See *Capital*, vol. I). Anyway, after these not too pragmatic, seemingly speculative moves, Marx, as a result of such essentialist ontology/anthropology, will hierarchically distinguish, we have mentioned, two absolutely opposed kinds of human Practice. The human (*menschliche*), communist kind, on one side, and all the rest of practices, of ordinary human beings, on the other, as belonging to the "phenomenal", selfish, private, "dirty-Jewish" kind. That is, the common practice, of ordinary men, in civil society, as contrasted to the virtuous, model practice – revolutionary, theoretically enlightened, critical, universal (cf. Theses I).

Finally, Marx, notwithstanding the practical-material-contextualism that we have presented, seems indeed fully unpragmatically captured by a variant of the Cartesian, mentalist-correspondentist epistemological, also XVIII century materialist, conception. When, after stating that existence (particular, practical-relational, material-active) "determines" consciousness, he resorts, in picturing the ideologically (un)knowing mind, to the metaphor of the *camera obscura* (that reflects Reality in an inverted way), in his critique of idealism and of ideology (*German Ideology*, cap.1). But Marx seems even more so captured when he claims that his own thinking/knowledge, as scientific/theoretical, fully replicates/transfers, into the individual mind (his own), no less than the whole Movement of the Real, with the help of the synthetic categories of Hegelian dialectical logic, by means of which he can articulate sensory, factual, empirical data (Marx's Introduction of 1857, to the *Grundrisse*). So much so that – Marx suggests - original absolute Hegelian idealism obtusely thinks that this is the process of Thought actually crating Reality itself. Although we could contend that this whole process is in Hegel much less subjectivist and "reflexivist" – very likely more practical/pragmatic and historic - than it is in Marx's present account.

III. Conceptual Articulation and a Hint at Practical Consequences for a New Poietic Materialist Point of View

So much about Marx himself, his virtues and vices, from our pragmatic-poietic point of view? What may result from both a conceptually and practically oriented - de-transcendentalizing, de-essentializing, de-substantializing – correction of Marx, and from an at the same time material-sensual correction of Rorty's pragmatic-creative, and of Habermas's pragmatic-normative, universalist, linguocentrism, is, for us, an understanding of things that should be first of all be built on the admission of *our practical-material-productive, social, intentional, entanglement with the world and people*.

And that towards a material-cultural, dialectical holism, that, without essentialisms, allows for a consideration of contingency and creation, in the human world and in our own personal existence. That being a practical, material, creative, intentional, *object-positing and object-mediated*

entanglement, which is also, at one and the same time, cognitive, aesthetic, technical, political, material and intentional. This notion of a *sinnlich practical-poietic entanglement* here to have, as we mentioned in the beginning of this paper, an heuristic function comparable to that of that of Marx's *allgemeines Resultat* and *Leitfaden*, as well as to that of Peirce's pragmatist maxim, together with Alexander Bain's principle. Preferably, for us, all the three combined – in our point of view.

That entanglement as the basis for a practical-poietic materialism (not in a metaphysical sense of the word, of course), which wants to put in close and re-interpretative interconnection, in a new way, as already mentioned in the beginning of this paper, people, reality, action, experience, knowledge, normativity and so forth. That will not be developed here but has been developed elsewhere.¹¹ But I can here say that in a way that must be distinguished from that of empiricist realism, understood here as uninteresting for the realization of the free, practical-creative disposition of human beings and for the promotion of social change. As much as it must be distinguished from a purely linguistic anti-representationalism, which has practical, undogmatic concerns – post-metaphysical - similar to our own, but which we see as insufficiently open to the material-poietic side of human action and condition, and therefore uninteresting for real emancipation and social change. In spite of this pragmatism's and anti-representationalism's anti-positivist and anti-authoritarian suggestions, and of its recognition of the social, non foundationalist in a traditional way, dimension of our relations (also the cognitive ones) with the world.

I further articulate the philosophical point of view, which I here offer as likely more appropriate to our times and context (especially the Global South), as possibly more fruitful and effective for both individual and social-emancipatory developmentalist purposes, by resorting, at its basic level, to a few basic notions, such as:

1) The notion of a meaning-endowing practical-material intentionality, as part of our basic involvement with the world by means of our deliberate initiative to actively address things, that is, by taking and using them one in way or another, thus giving them a meaning or another. And, by thus proceeding in our practical dealing / coping with the world, forming of them, the things, practical notions as if “before” any appeal to concept or language. Although such practical notions (and corresponding behavior) become socially sedimented, shared and sustained within and by means of practices of which language is a relevant part.

2) This notion of a *sinnliche* intentionality, as an intentionality that we seem to share with other moving living beings, amounting a first recovery, within a practical-poietic materialist paradigm, at its most elementary level, of a notion of self-initiative, an element of *Selbstbewusstsein* in the manner of classical German philosophy, apparently refused by Marx as the quintessence of subjective idealism – therefore (yes, that is what is at stake) of Ego-ism or Selfish-ness. A notion, *Selbstbewusstsein*, here, however, to be conceived in a naturalist, non-metaphysical, non-dualistic, non-idealistic way, but instead as embodied and socially and historically shaped or informed, as an eminently active, creative and “transcendent” trace, fully “emerged” in living beings of the human, social, kind. One notion that Marx's position strove to completely neutralize with his ubiquitous materialist-scientistic critique of the notion of consciousness (as amounting to “anything”). His causal-naturalist (but cryptically normativist) understanding of human action, and of us, human beings, as essentially generic, absolutely social beings – together with deeply passive (*Leidend sein*), too.

3) The notion of both us and the world as *sinnliche Tätigkeit*, material activity, practice, and of human action as, descriptively and prescriptively, ubiquitously and eminently, Poiesis, as labor in a broad sense. But, for us, also creative labor, a creative acting / making, be it social or individual, that introduces objects and objectivations in the world that were not there, that posits the human world itself and that makes us and the world historical. Objects and artifacts here taken in the widest sense, which includes practices, forms of association, institutions, etc.

Thus, we come to the notion of human reality as "subjective" (compare with Marx's First Thesis), anyway of reality as not objective in the traditional, Cartesian sense, independent and separate from us from the start.

4) The notion of objectivation of knowledge and imagination, by action, by men, as an objectivation of ourselves. Indeed, an objectivation of human beings and their attributes and capacities, externalized/extended – ourselves extended - in the world, in artifacts, things, objectivations. Ultimately as something comparable to Hegel's notion of Objective Spirit, for us, however, stripped of metaphysical transcendental ambitions, commitments to a metaphysical idea of Subject. A notion that, more materialistically, is also echoed in the later Marxist, extensionalist, notion of a "general intellect", collective, social, objectified in machinery, in the industrialized world (cf. *Grundrisse*, Notebook VII, Fragment on Machinery and Living Labor). Nowadays also echoed in an idea of material culture and in an *enactivist* notion of mind, that underscores the human material and active, objectual and motor-sensory interaction with and construction of our environment.

5) Finally, we would get to a notion of a normativity, to put it very briefly, not just based on an isolated reflexive subjectivity, nor, in the other hand, on discourse, communication, on an intersubjectivity without world, eminently linguistic. But, instead, a normativity found in our own social practices, of productively / successfully interacting with the world, simultaneously with people and things, oriented by our purposes and interests. That in distinction to the idea of a normativity a) imposed/deducted, in a foundationalist, dogmatic manner, from religion (Christianity), b) dogmatically and ingenuously read from Reality, by Science, by a Theory of History, by a value-laden Critique of Political Economy or of Modernity, or c) postulated by an abstract rationalist universalism, of the Kantian type, even if to some extent detranscendalized and socialized, such as in Habermas. Our suggestion of normativity and emancipation resorts, instead, pragmatically, to the idea of a democratic/material flourishing, empowerment and protagonism, of an absolutely superior nature. To the idea of autonomy now better understood both authorially, productively and materially, and that being what emancipation and de-alienation should be about.

Further proceeding on the path of a poietic-pragmatic materialism, we come to a practical holistic, process, materialist conception of world, culture, society and people, in which human beings' permanent creating, positing and using new objects and artifacts, in the broadest sense, are a relevant part. While at the same time acknowledging that they, human beings, are also posited / constituted / created by such objects and objectivations, and by practices and relations that such production both presuppose and, together with artifacts, engender and give support to. We come to a conception of society as an assemble of practices, objects and objectivations, that is, of practices involved with the use and production of objects and objectivations, as a form of production and life indeed – *Lebensformen*, *Produktionsweise* as *Lebenweise*.

Those practices equally turning into objectivations, which have in – non-evanescent - objects their support, and all that entailing both the reproduction of society and the development of new objects, new relations and other, new, practices, therefore, entailing the transformation of the world and of ourselves. Regular practices that could then show themselves do be privileged spaces of self-transformative – citizen, political - action. More than just another separate practice, conceived as a sort of Super-Practice, Praxis, theoretically informed, placed above society, anyhow conceived as of an entirely different nature (cf. Marx's Theses One and Three). Be it a humane-critical-revolutionary practice (Praxis), be it collective material production *stricto sensu*, "down below", conceived as the automatically determinant sphere for the movement and change of the whole of society. Or be it the two things joined together.

To now more clearly paraphrase and move away from Marx, the general dialectic in this new materialism could perhaps be thus summarized: In the course of using and producing objects and

thus sustaining their own lives, human beings permanently develop among themselves a set of varied and changing relations, which have to do with the role and development of such objects, as human beings, develop new practices and produce new objects – and a new life. The creation and development of new practices, objects and uses allows for – or induces, sometimes even forces – new relations, therefore new forms of interaction and of subjectivity among human beings. All that constituting in the end a world of ours, historical, human, thus also constituting what we call a particular way of life and a particular cultural world.

It is not necessary no convenient to assume that this mentioned dialectic is only given and active in the use of a particular type of objects and objectualities, the classical means of production, in industry, by a particular, singled out, set of human individuals, those directly related to them, thereby turned into a collective being, into collective beings, into natural communists. And all that only in society's supposed material, still industrial basis, by the productive use there of a particular, especially large-scale and concentrated kind of objects, for large-scale, immediately collective, social, labor.

The dualism of traditional Marxist (economic) infrastructure vs. cultural superstructure must then fall, as well as the reductionist, again dualist, classification of objects / goods – now so ostensibly multiple and more and more diversified - in simply two large genera, as well as only two basic kinds of use, consumption and production, clearly distinct and separate. Neither should we anymore understand that there is, separately, a superstructure as a sphere of pure or even idle thinking, with no relevant productive and sensuous-material dimensions, no entanglement with or role in production *stricto sensu*. As opposed to a totally spiritless, automatic infrastructure, where only production happens, and where thinking and acting in perverse instrumental sense reigns.

There is no need to understand that in the two cases we have thought and action of two entirely different and separate natures: comprehensive (consciousness: ideology, religion), in one case, the first, vs. technical, instrumental thinking and sheer automatism in the other, the second. The two spheres then contrasted with a third, marked by an absolutely different form of thinking, of an absolutely superior nature? Science as Truth-Theory and Superior Worldview, such as a Scientific Philosophy, or as *Vernunft* at its best, the very Theory of Marx himself, corresponding to the only practice humanly meaningful and truly emancipatory. On the contrary, now for us thought will always be, in all those cases, what occurs in and for *action*, that which guides our *conduct*, our dealings and copings with the world, always ultimately *sinnliche* and productive. That which corresponds to conduct and accompanies it, that which matches our purposes and contributes to solve our social problems and to change our social arrangements – as well as to change our ideas and concepts.

As for other practical social, also political consequences, here to be very briefly indicated: both in Marx, contradictorily, and in pragmatism, tacitly, there is a certain kind of congruence, between general philosophical views, such as historical materialism and pragmatism themselves, ultimately involved with *idealizations*. Between such views and certain *social contexts*, that is, the practices to which those are associated, their political and social consequences. In the first case (historical materialism), the great idealization is a truly human / humane society and the development of a new man, fully social and therefore fully everything else. In the second case (pragmatism), democracy as a way of life, and the personal flourishing of all. In our case, a poietic-pragmatic point of view would give support to a practical-materialistic notion of full citizenship, as material and creative empowerment by capabilities and means. Without necessarily implying, among its consequences, neither collectivism nor classical liberal individualism. Neither a flattened, “statized” society, nor an atomized one, both ultimately monopolistic, concentrationalist. Neither an idealized all-cooperative and all-harmonious society, nor an all-competitive and conflictive. In our case, anyway, then, all at the end amounting to an eminently civil, democratic, citizen,

together with material, point of view.

In a society thus understood, we can conceive in a new, broader and diversified way what has been called productive forces (people, competences, practices, artifacts), the relevance and role that they may have, the relations that they constitute, reproduce or condition. Also the power they provide and deploy, which can favor or limit those relations, conflict with them and demand new relations and practices. Productive forces that are first and foremost individuals and human groups, with their powers and resources. And relations with objects, resources and competences that can reflect or determine asymmetries, such as unbalanced relations of power, wealth, property and knowledge. For reasons of space, we will not deal with that important aspect extensively now. We just want to underscore that democracy can then be a material, productive, creative way of life, and a particular economically inclusive material development, that includes the material empowerment and protagonism of all, as we have said, both in individual and associated ways, both in cooperation and in competition, by skills and practices, means and resources.

Thus, we return to the association of justice, progress and democracy to material advancements and social material changes, to the general production of material wealth and commerce, and thus to the idea of a material, productive democratization of societies. To a project, besides, less willing to admit certain practices – intellectual, political or scientific – as transcendental and superior, of a totally different nature, to the detriment of the ways of the common woman, man, and of their actions and activities, usually blamed, in superior philosophical visions, as inferior, irrelevant, degraded or alienated. A project, finally, less willing to circumscribe the practice of critical thinking, its horizon, to discursive life, farther removed from a concern for concrete social problem-solving and for real material-social change, even if this is not our favorite nor usually thought of as our more familiar sphere of life.

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Notes

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sphere.

²For a more extended presentation of this point of view, even if still a work in progress, see a number of texts I have published in recent years, in which it is developed, such as: a) "Marx and Feuerbachian Essence", in *The Left Hegelians*, Cambridge U. Press, b) *Philosophy as a Civil and Worldly Thing*, c) my introduction to *Filosofia, Racionalidade e Democracia: o Debate Rorty-Habermas* (Unesp). And specially papers more recently published in *Cognitio* (PUC-SP) ns. 13, 16, 18, 20): d) "Considerações sobre o (Não-)Pragmatismo de Marx", e) "O Mundo Bem Nosso", f) "Acerca do que Pode e não Pode um Ponto de Vista Prático em Filosofia", this one a discussion with Waldomiro Silva Filho; and, last, g) "Nota sobre Linguagem, Realidade, Práticas e Coisas". For an overview of that whole philosophical development towards my present point of view, see my homepage www.jcrisostomodesouza.ufba.br/

³I here refer to what Marx calls his historical-materialist "general result" and "guiding principle" in the Preface of his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. As far as a more detailed, systematic account of my point of view in its own terms, without any references to other authors or philosophical literature, see my *O Mundo Bem Nosso*, already mentioned in note 1.

⁴ISEB stands for Superior Institute for Brazilian Social Studies, active from 1955 to 1964, INEP stands for National Institute for Educational Studies and Research, founded in 1937, both of them Brazilian governmental think-tanks.

⁵I do not now have room here to specifically consider deconstructionism's linguocentrism. However, considering the large and lingering influence of so-called deconstructionism in the humanities and human sciences departments nowadays, I will just suggest here, risking over-simplification, that it is a post-metaphysical philosophic position that improves upon former paradigms by being – even if inconsistently - more social and contextualist, non-positivistic, historicist. At the same time, on the bad side, it gets stuck, among other things, in a theoreticist, intellectualist negation of the metaphysical subject, and therefore in a general negativity of no use politically, especially outside North-Atlantic, developed contexts.

⁶About that, see my *Filosofia, Racionalidade, Democracia: Os debates Rorty-Habermas* (São Paulo: Ed. Unesp, 2005), in particular my introduction, from which I extract some of the arguments I use here. It is on the texts of the Rorty-Habermas debates, in this book, that this part of my discussion of the two is based. See my *Philosophy as a Civil & Worldly Thing: From a Brazilian Critical-Historical Perspective*, KDP/Amazon, 2019.

⁷See my *Philosophy as a Civil & Worldly Thing: From a Brazilian Critical-Historical Perspective*, KDP/Amazon, 2019.

⁸We can definitely extract a better materialism than Marx's from Hegel's philosophy, especially in relation to what the latter says about labor in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (chaps. IV and VII), *Civil Society* in his *Philosophy of Right*, and animality in the *Encyclopedia* (pgf. 337).

⁹About essence in Marx see my "Marx and Feuerbachian Essence", in *The New Hegelians*. Douglas Moggach (org.), Cambridge University Press, 2006.

¹⁰Cf. Marx, *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Third Manuscript, section 5: Critique of Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy in General.

¹¹For an account of that re-interpretative interconnection and of some of its results, see my *Considerações sobre o (Não-)Pragmatismo de Marx*, as well as, and especially, *O Mundo Bem Nosso* (cf. endnote 1), of which an English translation should soon be published. The full title in English gives a better idea of what it is about: *A World Very Much Our Own: Poietic-Pragmatic, Non-Linguistic Anti-Representationalism*.

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