

A World Of Our Own: A Pragmatic-Poietic, Transformative Perspective, Conversationally Developed¹

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Abstract: This essay proposes our social, active-sensuous, creative, artefactual entanglement with the world as a guiding reference for understanding, in a new, interconnected way, action, reality, meaning, knowledge and normativity, in distinction from both a positivist realism, and a relativist, linguistic anti-representationalism. The non-representationalist practical-productive, transformative perspective which follows from it is based on notions such as 1) meaning-endowing, intentional activity, 2) reality and ourselves as material activity, 3) meaning and normativity as constituted in our practice of dealing purposefully with the world and people. Its unfolding, in a colloquial and exploratory way, follows five main steps: a) a critical presentation of the mentalist, representationalist side of traditional, dogmatic empiricism, b) a critical presentation of linguistic, relativist anti-representationalism, contrasted to the first, and here construed as overly linguocentric and disembodied, c) an outline of a material-creative pragmatism as practical-realist and transformative, and, in conclusion, d) the suggestion of a materialist-holistic, objectual understanding of world, culture and ourselves.

Introduction

The paper offers what is understood as our basic practical, material, creative entanglement with the world as a guiding reference for our ways of conceiving knowledge, agency, reality, language, and normativity. It does so by distinguishing its standpoint on such topics from two main alternatives. First, a certain empiricist, positivist representationalism, here conceived as less interesting for the fulfilment of the free, practical-creative dispositions of us human beings. Second, a linguistic, anti-dogmatic anti-representationalism, which although with some concerns similar to ours, is here criticized for being inattentive to the sensuous, material and productive side of our practices. Our essay develops these criticisms whilst outlining a practical-transformative non-representationalism, together with a practical, object-oriented materialism, which is proposed as more defensible and appropriate to the circumstances and demands of our time and context.

For our dialogical/dialectical construction, we resort to notions such as: a) practical-material intentionality, as meaning-endowing and world-disclosing, b) reality as first of all sensuous, material activity and artefact (*i.e.* man-made things), which includes us too, c) human action as constitutively productive, creative doings and makings that introduce new things (in the broadest sense) into the world, and finally d) the notion of meaning and normativity as constituted within our social, material praxis of transformatively dealing with the world and with one another, oriented by purposes which also spring from and are modulated within that praxis.

In a colloquial and exploratory way, we will start by presenting what is claimed by the first

two above-mentioned positions here criticized, construed as paradigms and ideal types, initially in their own terms: positivist empiricism as realism, and then, in opposition to it, linguistic, hermeneutical or pragmatic, anti-representationalism. In our conversation about them, we will slide – by a sort of immanent critique - from one to the other, but also from each of them towards our new, aforementioned practical-productive, material position. Until we finally present our approach as completely new, a third position in its own right, in direct contrast with the two previous ones. However, it is still a position that nonetheless keeps and develops some of the intuitions of the first two, appropriately transformed: something from the empirical realism of the first and something from the social non-foundationalism of the second.

Along these lines, our essay will proceed by four main steps: 1) an exposition of the representationalist, abstract-mentalist side of the above-mentioned empirical realism, 2) an exposition of the “linguocentric” anti-representationalism and anti-realism opposed to it, and, as an alternative to those constructs and in opposition to both of them, 3) an exposition of sensuous pragmatism as a practical, objectual materialism. We will conclude with 4) a productive materialist-holistic understanding of world and culture. Since the essay wants to be more colloquial-dialectical than systematic, the elaboration of those different positions, besides intertwined, will be somewhat groping and reiterative. After all we are talking here about what we intend to be a real paradigm-shift.

As readers will certainly notice, what the essay construes as abstract, empiricist, representationalist realism can be roughly compared to developments of classical empiricism, towards continental European materialism, in the 18th and 19th centuries, and, later, towards the analytic neo-positivism of our days. And what it conceives as linguocentric anti-representationalism roughly coincides with contemporary neo-pragmatist and hermeneutical philosophical developments. In more general terms, the second approach can be found in Continental, post-structuralist philosophy as well, also diametrically opposed to the realism and positivism from which we start. What we construe as poietic-material pragmatism and objectual-practical materialism then emerges as a sort of dialectical overcoming of the two previous general positions, in their opposition to one-another. The three stages then compose what appears as a dialectical progression, in the form of affirmation, negation and negation of negation.

The use, at a certain point in our argument, of a set of technical philosophical labels aims at encompassing a lot of philosophical ground more quickly, to outline in broad terms the contours of the discussion within which our alternative is offered, positioned and can be, therefore, better understood. Those philosophical labels may seem at first a bit enigmatic but will have their meaning clarified as we proceed with their use in our exposition. Finally, instead of citations and specific references, the reader will find in the text generic allusions to the philosophical positions and representative philosophers that we understand have something to do with our own construction: the practical-materialist side of Nietzsche or Marx, the basic elements of Peirce’s pragmatism, and notions of Hegel and Hillary Putnam, for example. Accordingly, the “References” at the end of the paper will display what simply amounts to some representative sources which cover the philosophical context in which our thematization belongs and not particular works directly used.

Positivist, Dogmatic Empiricism and Representational Realism vs Language and Practices as Non-Correspondentist World-Disclosing

How are objects given and known to us? How do we come to form our beliefs about them and about the world? Through our senses, certainly; without them, nothing could be known. So we

come to form representations or images of objects in our minds, through the sensations we get from them. Thus, we identify them as being this or that, through the general concepts or representations that we develop as appropriate to fit them. And we do it according to the attributes that they display as given to our senses, that is, as collected through experience. That way we will be able to say things about them, and say that we know them; without concepts, as well as without sense-data, there would be no such knowledge. All that thanks to a mind that is the place where sense-data arrive, where our representations are thence composed and where they can be screened; the place where we can find the concepts and where the faculty of forming and applying them, which is human understanding, resides.

We then stamp the object with a name, which may be short or long, thus verbally expressing the concept that fits it, the kind of thing it is. With that, the object gets de-signated, by a linguistic sign, and knowledge and recognition of that object become shareable – if the sign and our way of using it make sense to the other party of course. At the same time, once we know what the object is, we can successfully do something with it, and that is often what we have to do if we are not satisfied with simply knowing or thinking we know what it is. Thus, in a world made up of objects, full of them, we go about applying the concepts we have formed from several samples of similar things, through reasonable and useful generalizations. And we get to that by taking into account their sensuous attributes or properties (for which we also have representations and respective terms), according to the chunks and pieces of the world that seem appropriate for us to cut out and distinguish - for that is apparently what our concepts are and what our judgments refer to. We have now properly formed our beliefs, through experience, and can aptly deal with things and go about the world in an appropriate manner, knowing what to do. Isn't that what we develop knowledge for, and isn't that what knowing is all about?

But then again, thinking it over, in most cases this knowledge of things and world seems to be passed on to us socially, since early childhood, in the course of language learning and simultaneous practical familiarization with the world and with proper ways of behaving in it, *i.e.* the words and the respective chunks of the world that they signify or mean. That is, the terms and concepts we use to adequately cut out and apprehend reality, and then to coordinate ourselves with others about it, in practice. Therefore, all our learning, knowing and conceiving is now something social, something that belongs to language, to each natural language, those usings/concepts certainly reflecting the proved and approved practices and conventions of the culture that makes use of them. All of this according to what is relevant to such a culture, to social experience; language thus displaying the stamp of its human context and history, human uses, ways and valuations.

Proceeding further with our account, we can now understand that, in the expedient and socially agreed use of language, which is learned socially, *i.e.* in practice, we have the world as it is for us. There we find the conditions to know and describe it, and to communicate appropriately with our fellow speaking-beings about it. Which is to say that we now have something like a shared background worldview, a particular way of seeing and grasping the world and the things in it. We have the particular way of a certain culture and community, in a certain moment in time, even the more particular ways of smaller groups, of particular social conditions and activities. Together with this, speaking more generally, we have the kind of view of the whole human species, which corresponds to the constitution that human beings share: their mental and bodily attributes, their bodily and mental capacities, as well as their particular needs, tastes, purposes, fantasies. In the end, language may show itself to be far more than a neutral means for passive, objective apprehension of the world as it would be in itself – but to this particular point we shall return later.

We can for now stick to the idea that the terms in a language evoke the concepts that frame the objects according to their properties or attributes, the bits and pieces of the world to which they correspond, as given to our senses. Then, the notion of an object in its generality is the meaning of the word, and that according to what can be called a “museum conception” of meaning and language. That is: as in a traditional museum, in language every object in the world (or any object simply conceivable) finds a small label, which is kept in our minds, that says what it is, according to its specific, combined bunch of attributes. And for each of those attributes there are signs or labels, too, that always end up referring to concepts and then to their supposed original content: the data of the senses. With the label for each thing, if you have the concept it expresses, you get to know what the thing is, you can then make assertions about it, about the attributes it does and does not have. And you can thus be ready to display that knowledge through language, and to apply it to the correct, useful handling of the referred thing, which again is perhaps what matters most, or is the only thing that matters. And that handling, by the way, would be the definitive proof that you really know what you are talking about and what you are dealing with – the proof of the pudding.

Language would thus basically convey relevant information about the world, which is already a great deal, even if it may sometimes involve inaccuracies and give rise to confusions in the process of its apprehension and communication, and therefore in the process of coordination among ourselves to act. To be sure, in the world we live in, in the so-called lifeworld, language and its words might not be, or simply end up not being – perhaps even should sometimes not be – very accurate or semantically stable. Nor will the combination of words in sentences and more encompassing judgments, narratives and explanations always be arranged in the best way, from the point of view of logical consequence. For when you think or speak, when you use a term or resort to a concept, most of the time you do not simply designate objects one by one, which would not be saying much, but you make at least short statements about them as they are conceived, conferring attributes and properties upon them. Then you further compose sentences in which more words are put together, and you finally combine those sentences in succession – as we are doing here.

Now, in case one needs greater clarity, accuracy and generality, without the direct hints of a meaningful immediate situation or context, which may be lacking for instance in the particular case of science, in the case of its particular kind of practices and explanations, language would have to be purified and stabilized on the grounds of strict uses and definitions. And its expressions would have to be ordered in a particular, entirely clear, logically well-constructed, consistent way, with careful transitions from one well-grounded-in-facts statement to another, and then to the right conclusions, in a specially careful way in the case of a large number of assertions, that is, of a long chain of them. All that could even require reformulating the usual, lifeworld ways of naming and classifying things, of using certain words and concepts; it could even require creating completely new ones, fit for different kinds of dealings with things and the world, for certain groups of people, involved in certain particular practices.

Even in the well-contextualized, daily, lifeworld uses of language, however, and this can happen in any regular conversation, your interlocutor may ask you to explain what you are really saying and what conclusions you are really drawing. He may ask you to compare and adjust what you are saying to what she or he understands, till you both can be sure that the two things coincide, you both now being able to practically coordinate your behaviour, which is certainly what matters most, what happens and is demanded all the time in daily life. You may also need this kind of clarity and coincidence when you try to understand, follow or give instructions for

someone to do something entirely new for here or solve a completely unfamiliar problem, which is the case with the author and reader of assembly guides and technical manuals. Without clarity, plus adequate, objective information, we may not know what to do, and that will often frustrate and disrupt life, dealings with the world and coordination between people. Of course, it may also be the case that, if we were stuck in the reiteration of fixed conventional standards in the use of language, we might never express something new, in spite of that being perhaps required by our fast-changing, innovative world. But that is something else.

Anyway, language, now as whole vocabularies, with its many expressions and phrases, does not just have the function of representing and reporting reality, not just a circumscribed semantic, informative dimension. Its function is not merely that of signifying/ designating sensuous objects one by one, or of reporting on the world according to its physical properties, the world supposedly as it is in-itself, independent from ourselves and our practices, purposes and fantasies. However, that is not the point which will concern us now, but rather one regarding the way we have so far conceived of language and representation in relation to action. The point that I want to make now is that, if we go by the account we started with, successful acting can only come *after* adequate mental representation. That account understands that *before* action there comes the apprehension of sense-data and the constitution of mental concepts appropriate to the object and the world. And understands that this is the only thing that can tell us how to approach them (object and world), the way they really are, according to what is recorded and organized in our minds about them, objects and world. That is for us a central point of a so-called representationalist-mentalist, thence perhaps ultimately theoreticist, logocentrist way of understanding things in relation to action, an understanding that could perhaps be of less interest beyond a certain circumscribed use. It is a static and dualistic manner of understanding knowledge, because of its striking subject-object separation and fixation, to which we would like to counterpose a more practical, essentially activity-oriented and creative manner.

This other, practical approach, let's anticipate it a bit, would precisely be, instead, a way of understanding things for which it is through the *action* of dealing with the world – not just passively through senses, then representations, then language – that we apprehend it and that it reveals itself to us. All appropriation of the world in knowledge depending, instead, on ourselves as active and corporeal beings, on our material-creative activity, also on our imagination and on other elements seldom assumed to be part of understanding and knowledge. That is a point of view for which our knowledge is first and foremost a *knowing how*, how to do, make and act; a standpoint for which, in more than one sense, knowledge is precisely constituted in action and through action. That is to say, knowledge is not primarily constituted as intellectual knowledge of how to represent the world independently of and prior to our practical interaction with it and our purposes for it. Accordingly, it is not first and essentially a matter of knowing *what* or knowing *that*, for which what comes first in knowledge is the sensory-mental apprehension and the perhaps predetermined (by very general, a-priori ideas in our minds) ways of mental-conceptual representation of things, that then must preside over action.

For a more general framing of this topic, however, let us now look more directly at the construction and recent evolution of alternative ways of understanding such things in philosophy today, since, for our purposes, we cannot do without some of that. We have to move now to some more technical terminology, for which you have been prepared, even if a bit hastily, by our earlier conversation. And that in order to avoid extending the essay too much, but, none-the-less, hopefully, making that terminology more clearly understandable as we proceed with our presentation.

Much of recent contemporary philosophy, with its turn to language, brings in a very different perspective from the plain empiricist realism we have started with. And it does so whether by way of what are considered “hermeneutical” and “post-structuralist” paths, in the case of predominantly Continental European philosophy, or by the dominantly Anglo-Saxon path of a “pragmatist” self-critique of so called dogmatic empiricism. This second way, too, in the end, develops as hermeneutical and as possibly convergent with the first, in what we could call interpretationalism, by a self-critique of what started as “logical empiricism” and “analytic philosophy of language”. Whether by one road or the other, a good part of contemporary philosophy seeks to escape from the classically modern, representational-mentalist view of knowledge, which we have presented above, in order to rid itself of practical and theoretical problems it may get stuck with, such as discrete dualisms, scepticism, epistemological individualism, etc. And that art of contemporary philosophy does so – let us simplify it a bit – by resorting to the idea of the pervasiveness of language and of its world-formatting and world-disclosing character. That is, by ultimately resorting to the idea of language as, let us put it this way for now, an inescapable “mediation” between us and the supposed world-in-itself. A perspective that goes against the notion of a pure and absolute objectivity for knowledge, against the notion of a fixed external objectivity of the positivist or materialistic realist type, and the notion of an entirely separate subjectivity or mind with its supposed mirroring capacities.

Those new philosophical perspectives go against the idea (correlative to that of representation) of truth and knowledge as being in literal, even pictorial *correspondence* with the world. A correspondence between what we have in thought or language (both, here, as representational), on the one hand, and the object, the facts, the data, the represented world, on the other. Representational knowledge in this sense begins with a supposedly observable correspondence between bits of language (simplest propositions) and bits of the world (the most elementary, observed facts). And then proceeds to an extensive aggregation of bits of language, well grounded in facts, with a view to exhibiting larger portions of reality, through increasingly more general and complex discourses or broader theories. In opposition to that sort of “correspondentism”, a lot of the new linguistic or linguocentric ways of seeing things, which we will now explain, prefer to appeal to a “wholistic” and “coherentist” account of truth and meaning, where each proposition or particular belief always refers to another, and that to yet another, and so forth, never directly referring to something that is non-linguistic, independent and external to language.

It was in anticipation of and as a compliment to this alternative way of considering things, that we gradually included, after our initial paragraphs in this paper, some allusions to the possibly non-neutral participation of language, and thereby of society and culture, in the formation of our beliefs about the objective world. But we tried to do so in a way that pointed, from the start, beyond language itself, because we think that anti-representationalist and anti-correspondentist linguocentrism (let us call it that), which exaggerates the participation of language in our knowledge and appropriation of the world, still keeps something of the realist-empiricist perspectives it pretends to overcome, with which we intentionally began flirting.

In their place, that is, in place of a dogmatic empiricist realism but also of linguocentrism, we would like to end this section by suggesting a more effectively practical view of knowledge and language, by starting with our broad, rich and varied relationship with the material, sensuous world, which also testifies to the wealth, variety and interest of our experiences of it, from the point of view of our material, creative activity, and of ourselves as such activity. This is precisely a perspective that places sensuous, material action “ahead” of the supposedly immediate (therefore foundational, for positivism) sensuous intuitions (of empiricism), as well as “ahead”

of the apparently autonomized, merely intersubjectively sanctioned, linguistic apprehension and description of the world, typical of what would call linguocentrism. We suggest a perspective that goes beyond both dogmatic, positivistic realism, on one hand, and, on the other, the idealistic “linguistification” of a world supposedly trapped within the insurmountable magic circle of language. We want to make this suggestion without, however, introducing the practical-sensuous as a new, dogmatic foundation, but merely as a notion whose use-value and heuristic worth we should test.³

We shall see whether this approach can work, but first we will try a further reconstruction of the “linguistifying” thesis about how the world is given or revealed to us, first of all, or indeed exclusively, by language, taken as “the” relevant, inter-subjective context. For we want to leave that position completely behind, albeit without giving up on its best elements, *e.g.* its dialogical, anti-dogmatic, non-mentalist, non-foundationalist aspects, together with its possible openness to contingency and creation. We also want to help you further understand and clear up the new hyphenated technical terminology here introduced.

Beyond Positivism. Hermeneutic-Pragmatic, Linguistic Turn, and Ascetic, Anti-Empiricist, Relativist Linguocentrism

In the new, linguistic-turn, linguocentric paradigm, neither sensory intuitions, supposedly first, immediate, therefore foundational, nor the correlate solipsistic subject and her isolated, self-sufficient knowing mind, with its possible logical or categorial a-priori schemes (dialectical or otherwise), would fall outside natural language and linguistic, social, cultural contexts. Neither of those two realms, objective and subjective, would fall outside historical, contextual, conditioning injunctions, alongside those such as power, interests etc., which, they also, within that linguistic paradigm, would tend to be “dissolved” into injunctions of language and discourse – and that is one of the reasons why, in the next section of this essay, we will try to fully move beyond it.

For now, at first glance, linguistic anti-representationalism seems simply to proceed with the older idea that there are no uninterpreted data, which is a very popular notion in the hermeneutical, historicist realm of humanities and human sciences. A realm where people may be more concerned with asserting a critical commitment for knowledge, in the service of a good cause, than with being guided by the intention of positive, scientific, knowledge, that is, by the allegedly uncritical empirical ways of the natural sciences, which then would supposedly serve more immediate, particular, instrumental, less-edifying interests and aims. The linguistic turn goes beyond that, however. According to the new hermeneutical, interpretative and post-positivist ways, not only are there absolutely no uninterpreted data, as dogmatic realism/empiricism think there are, but also there is no single fixed, non-contingent, mental, categorial schema, a priori or almost, as many rationalists think there are, for the analysis or construction of reality. In fact, the two things, empirical, sensory data, and mental schemas, analytical or dialectical, could never be separated from one-another since they would always-already determine one-another from the start.

Despite the fact that, and now this is our personal concern, in any investigation of things in the world, it is most advisable to seek the relevant data, to choose and interpret them with plausible justifications, not to dispense the consequent conclusions from being measured not only against experience but also against alternative explanations, competing theories and opposing arguments, from other stakeholders involved in the subject. For it is only collectively, in an open community of enquiry, debate and verification, that we can reasonably agree or disagree, test and produce knowledge that is recognized as such. That is, if you do not want to run the risk of, with the best

of intentions, but ultimately in a dogmatic and solipsist way, thwarting the realization of your possible good intentions of making the world a better place. Well, so much for my – hopefully our – non-dogmatic, empiricist side, here.

Anyway, for linguocentric philosophers, it is primarily language that interprets data, it is language that, better yet, already “resides” in alleged empirical, purely objective data, everything coming to us through language, since we always-already are, for all cognitive effects, completely immersed in it. Thus, in their view, our way of perceiving the world is also always-already contextualized and historical, because it is unavoidably linguistic and because language is what it is: practical and world-disclosing. Again, one could still imagine that, at the bottom of such an idea, there is just the not so linguistic understanding that knowledge is always interested (or otherwise conditioned from the outside), always marked by interests, the etymology of this word giving precisely the sense of being in the middle of things and inside the world. However, now, in the new, linguocentric paradigm, interests, like power also, cannot escape being linguistically or discursively constituted either, and so we would go back to language as world-constructing or world-disclosing. In any case, it would no longer be a matter of resorting to the old notion of ideology as false knowledge, secretly determined by private personal or group interests, to be then challenged and unmasked by good Theory, from the standpoint of real Truth, or of the true Universal, of true, human-generic, emancipatory Interest, etc. That is, challenged from a standpoint which would coincide with that of a real or at least virtual generic, universal, historical human Subject – *l'Humanité*, well understood. All that supposedly well-founded by a superior, all-encompassing, totalizing Reason, by means of a Super Science or Super Critical Theory, that would replace both traditional philosophy and the positivist ideal of empirical science.

Now, in the prevalence of the sort of understanding that we call linguistification and linguocentrism, abiding by the Gospel of John, in the beginning was the word. An idea which, it is true, may bring us not to an isolated, representational, Cartesian mind, but to language, communication, discourse and intersubjectivity, even to context and community. It may bring us to nothing really inside us, nothing purely private, nor anything way beyond ourselves, but to the human community, a community to be, for this very reason, for the most optimistic of us, potentially or at least hopefully democratic. A community perhaps to become one day approximately utopian, as we would all like, and as would mostly matter in the end, in case we want to mention, at this point, our practical, critical, political concerns behind our would-be epistemological bickering. Actually, after linguistification, nothing would be left of completely fixed and objective, nothing of absolutely first for knowledge – and that is what we may call non-foundationalism. Nothing would fall outside language, but also nothing would reach above or below society, and nothing would happen purely and separately between the mind and the object taken by themselves, in knowledge, as in mentalist, so called dogmatic empiricism. There would be no fixed foundation for knowledge, nor perhaps for normativity, ethics or politics, either; nothing that would be considered fully objective or fully interior and subjective, nothing that would be transcendental, nothing outside the world and the human community, nothing outside context and time.

Generally speaking, now there is nothing outside or beyond our linguistic practices⁴, but just a changing social, cultural, intersubjective “foundation” (or non-foundation) for knowledge and norms – absolutely ours. There is nothing effectively “hard” for the role of a definitive ground for knowledge, nothing given without a linguistic meaning-endowing “mediation” – a metaphorical, plastic, creative one. That being the case, the supposedly foundational sense-intuitions, of the empiricists and neopositivists (therefore in some way realists), are not intuitions at all (as Peirce had said, before the linguistic turn), not first nor founding for our beliefs; there is no sense for

claims of their being the real, solid basis for true knowledge. Neither they nor any other immediate, non-empirical intuitions, be they mental, universal-subjective, such as those of the rationalists and idealists. No unwavering schemes, no special, non-empirically derived representations, no first principles supposed to be always-already present within our knowing minds, innate or something of the sort, to be somehow then universal and totally preceding in relation to what is empirical. No schemes and principles that supposedly govern all our experiences, and to which we would have direct, non-empirical access, an access therefore not mediated by language, by historical and contextual linguistic meaning-endowing activity.

In the absence of any of this, in order to establish the meaning of anything after the linguistic turn, we would proceed from sign to sign, without ever finding a final, transcendent, external element, without finding anything that is not also an interpreted sign, which would instead be something that signifies without being signified by another sign. Thence, any proposition or belief can only be explained, justified or sustained by another, and that by still another, and so on, holistically and coherently, without ever reaching a hard anchor-point for it outside or beyond language and its uses. Apparently, neither beyond the uses already socially established, nor any other uses that would in time come to establish themselves as such by proving to be more effective, persuasive, seductive or whatever. All that then recommending a merely “coherentist” understanding for our notions of truth and knowledge. Both now in close association with – or even in reduction to – the notions of “justification” and “warranted assertibility” – in place of a good old realist, pictorial, hard “correspondentism”, whether empiricist, positivist, materialist, Kantian-transcendentalist, Marxist or anything of the kind.

After all this, we may be left with the idea that the “nonhuman world”, which is to say, the world that is allegedly beyond us and our signs, beyond language or mind, only exists as obscure, physical, causal resistances and impulses; only as pushes and shoves which affect us, that are registered by our senses, but that by themselves do not say or tell us anything. After the linguistic turn, the nonhuman, “exterior” world may still exist all right, is probably really there by itself, but its descriptions, as being this or that, this way or that way, are not; those descriptions of it would by no means be in it or of it in any strong sense of being entirely given or caused by it. For, indeed, reality itself does not speak, does not say or tell us anything, not directly, not without our cooperation, not without our linguistic addition, from which nothing could then be separated.

Thence there would be no language or description of the world itself, in the metaphysical sense, one and objective; no language or description which, for many people today, people not convinced by the new linguistic paradigm, would ultimately be that of science. Of science then taken as an equivalent of the old Revelation, having a superior Authority over our so-called natural beliefs. Scientific discourse then being, for these positivist or rationalist perspectives, the Supreme Judge, the highest Court for the rest of the various expressions of the entire culture. Expressions which would then be, in the face of Science, degraded as imperfect or imaginative, or simply entirely false, illusory and noxious. Precisely from the scientific standpoint, thus viewed as supreme and as that which is classified as first and nobly human par excellence, even constituting our own very essence.

Instead, now, from the anti-positivist, linguocentric philosophical viewpoint of our days, if we are the only ones who speak, then descriptions of the world are entirely ours, in the sense that they are now social, historical and invented, at least more invented than discovered: they are just language. More or less like the case of Kantian or Hegelian categories before, although not as neatly, it is now the available, natural vocabulary that defines the world, that determines our apprehension of it, how it exists for us, and perhaps even the ways of its transformation by us.

This does not necessarily mean, as we have already said, that we do not have a reality *out there*, but that, in our descriptions, whichever they may be, we do not have the world as something in itself, predetermined and predetermining, independent of us, with supposed intrinsic qualities. Which is to say that we do not have reality in a separate way, distinguishable from the terms at our disposal to apprehend and represent it, so that it could then be taken only this way and not otherwise. Now, in the construction of knowledge, as we have said, it is impossible to distinguish a contribution coming from ourselves, *i.e.* from our language, from another contribution coming from the world or reality itself. Both sides now being reciprocally influenced and imbricated from the start: the sensory empirical, and the interpreting intelligible, inventive, the two being always-already combined, socially produced, and also, at the end, so sanctioned.

For this new perspective, what would then be left, we may be ready to ask now, of the traditional, realist standing of truth? For those imbued with a traditional realism, scientific or not, or with some other version of so-called “metaphysics of presence”, it seems that, truth now unanchored on a sufficiently exterior foundation, it is apparently left to our decision. We would no longer really have truth, not in linguocentrism, not in any sense close to the traditional sense of this term. Linguocentrism prevailing, it seems we would all become relativists, to the dismay of our traditional ambition and interest, classic or modern, for objective or apodictic standards for knowledge. Now there would be no one-and-only way things really are, in themselves, but only the ways we take or could take things to be in language, according to the terms established by the community of which we are part, or negotiated with it, even occasionally, maybe, changed by some sufficiently general movement within culture and society. That perhaps combined with the criteria of what, in practice, in the way of belief, better helps us deal with things, in keeping with our varied and changing purposes, as well as with our multiple and changing practices.

Truth now cannot be clearly distinguished from well justified belief, well justified in shared terms, shared among the people or audience involved, according to established standards of seriousness of a certain time and society, even of some particular group or of a certain kind of activity. And we are talking here about standards as they already are, or about others that may be established with time by a process of spontaneous change or by a movement of creative transformation, which would perhaps require – not to mention power – good, persuasive, strategic arguments or evidences. To make things more complicated, these would be arguments or evidences which, in case of conflict, would have to be evaluated by standards that would also be under dispute and transformation. Standards not in any way neutral and above the disputing parties, as also would not be neutral or objective the procedures that should preside over the ways of disputing and of possible solutions. Thus, the idea of truth taken as literally involving a pictorial, specular correspondence with reality as fully objective, together with the idea of epistemology as based on such presuppositions, would now be placed under full suspicion. We would be done with the idea that language, as series of noises and scribbles that we use to communicate about the world and coordinate our actions among ourselves and in respect to our dealings with things, could ever be the literal “reproduction” of something so entirely different in nature from it as the world with all its attributes, supposedly intrinsic to them and independent from us – such as in the so-called “correspondentism” or “correspondence theory of truth”.

There would no longer be any validity in the mentioned realist, empiricist claim that every descriptive, elementary bit (or “atom”) of language, properly formulated, can and must correspond, as a pictorial copy, to an elementary bit of objective reality in itself, a reality that is then conceived as correspondingly segmented. Particles of language that would then be combined with several others, in discourse, just as particles of reality are supposedly also combined (exteriorly,

hence separably) in the world itself. It may seem that for elementary, isolated statements (like “the cat is on the mat”), the image of correspondence may still be a plausible approximation. But, in the case of broader understandings of things, like worldviews and theories, which in many cases have varied so much historically, according to time and also place, it would seem less plausible to absolutize some worldview or theory as the one and only faithful copy of reality as it is. Or to plausibly take their variation and succession in history as a linear progression that would target, by asymptotic approximation, a single final Figure, already objectively existing, to be simply discovered by us. One Figure which would ultimately impose itself on us, we do not know exactly how or why, or rather we do: through an inescapable material pressure and imposition of facts, instead of ever new ways of understanding things, which could never be anticipated, which would develop according to new purposes, in ever-changing circumstances, also never foreseeable.

A trenchant manner of verifying whether thought or speech pictorially corresponds, as its mirrored reflection in our minds, to what is out there, so that we could then choose, based on that verification, between competing descriptions, would have to presuppose a third position from which we could compare the two things. It so happens, however, that we do not have such a third position, that there is no way for us to get out of ourselves, that is, out of language, to then make the required comparison, from the viewpoint of a *tertius*, the so-called point of view of God, situated between language and the world, actually outside of the world indeed. That seeming impossible, another path should then be recommended for understanding knowledge and truth, perhaps more on the side of the idea of coherence among our various assertions or beliefs, which should then support and clarify one another, our vocabulary then having a more holistic rather than segmented character. Otherwise, again, our varied beliefs could only receive additional support, inseparable from the former, from their successful use in the practices in which they are involved, in our struggle to cope with the world and to coordinate ourselves with one another to do so. Is that then where we must end up?

Beyond Linguocentric Relativism. A Sensuous Pragmatic-Productive Point of View, and a Practical, Historical, Object-Oriented Materialism

Perhaps now enough has been said about and for linguistic anti-representationalism, in its non-foundational developments. A few of its practical consequences, some more interesting than others, have been hinted at as well, although not further explored. Anyhow, it seems that, all things considered, we might want to keep and develop some of its positive suggestions, by means of their reconstruction on different, more comprehensive grounds. For, in contrast with linguocentrism, my claim is that practices, action, production and creation, while sensuous, material, not just linguistic, are what first places us in close, non-representational relations – cognitive but others as well – with the world, still in an equally non-foundational way.

I call those relations our practical-productive, or practical-poietic, sensuous, material, entanglement with the world, and take it to be the basis for a point of view that can overcome the traits of idealism and dualism, scepticism and relativism, besides asceticism, in our opinion often counterintuitive elements, which still plague the linguocentric position, even when in some way pragmatic. For it is in relation to our actings, doings and makings, as I will try to show, that the world is neither external nor independent, and it is them that permanently signify and re-signify the world, constituting and reconstituting it in accordance with our purposes and interests, and also in accordance with the world’s own attributes. For certainly none of that would take place in the world’s absence or in spite of it, but precisely, we suggest, only by those modes of use and appropriation, creation and re-creation of the world, which we may or need to resort to, in our

interaction with it, that we are calling here our doings and makings. In response to this, linguistic, communicational signification can then develop, can be added and must adapt, in a certain way indeed “co-responding” both to them and to the world. All those practical-sensuous dealings with the world always being also somehow social (as much as language is), inclusive of other human beings, as well as of material things that in many ways are not exterior to us nor to culture.

We put ourselves in relation to these material things, while putting them in relation to us, in varied ways, within practices that are among themselves holistically articulated. Such things, things in the broadest sense, include those that are more entirely human, such as institutions and associations, together with other, more *stricto sensu* artefacts, other more material things. And all of them are surely steeped in and with human meaning, with human thinking and, especially, with human labour. Things that result precisely from our transformative, meaning-endowing actions, orientated by our calculations, evaluations, purposes and uses. These things are themselves the materialization of these latter, besides being support for the actions they demand and promote.

For the world, indeed, for us, is not, as it is for an extreme scientific realist, some sort of purely physical, non-human, beyond-language, reality – thereby, for that sort of realist, entirely beyond us. It is not a reality that, at a certain point of recent anti-realist, anti-dogmatic, philosophical developments, is then completely lost for us, according to a new, post-positivist way of seeing things, or of never seeing them. A way of seeing things for which the real world would appear only as a succession of raw, brutish, causal impacts, only as some hard, inflexible obstacle that affects and hinders us, mostly as an undesirable and uninteresting resistance in our path. From our point of view developed here, instead, reality is, in the first place, a material-sensuous thing like ourselves, a set of qualities and appeals, as well as risks, resistances or threats, but also a set of resources and possibilities. Reality, the world, is, even at its most primordial, basic, natural level, a set of properties, qualitative sensations, tastes, colours and more, to which we react this or that way, in interaction with it. It is bundle of things and experiences that we can seek or avoid, desire or repel, according to circumstances, capacities, interests, needs and purposes – even fantasies. A world of things that we take, use, consume, enjoy and transform, that, in so many cases, we invent and make from scratch, according to those tastes, needs and fantasies. But also - this we want to underscore – a world of things that we take, use, consume, enjoy and transform according to the properties and characteristics it exhibits. Of things that we want to *get right* (as Hilary Putnam suggests), in order to deal successfully with it as well as with those things that compose and inhabit it.

It is, in fact, a world – in the case of us, human organisms, at this point of history – constituted by a ensemble of holistically interconnected human practices, and by human artefacts which find their place in them, which give them, as we have already mentioned, necessary or enhancing support. Practices, then, that involve the social interaction of human creatures simultaneously with each other and with things, through a contact now perceived in a more practical, concrete, rich, sensuous, material and open way, than in dogmatic realism, or in relativist, agnostic linguocentrism, for that matter. Much more than in the case of the abstract, impoverished sensory realism of empiricism, and much more than in linguocentrism as its opposite, which presents itself as historicist, hermeneutical and (neo-)pragmatist – as our position would also like to be. For, actually, it is through our practical interaction with the world that things become signified (endowed with meaning), by us and for us, as well as are, in so many cases, simply invented and made from the start, as this or that by us, for this or that purpose. That is, invented and made with this or that meaning, materially imposed by us, on the so-called outside world, according to our strengths, skills, invention and experimenting. Thus, we do not have, as we still do with linguocentrism,

on the one hand, a properly human, essentially linguistic, symbolic, historical, social sphere, and, on the other hand, a material, physical, non-human sphere – a fixed, non-historical (non-)world, without any meaning, ultimately unspeakable, obscure and not-ours.

Certainly, for those who start out in philosophy with a dogmatic, abstract empiricist realism, with a representationalist/ correspondentist approach to knowledge, and with a pure logical-analytical treatment of language, it is a major discovery and an auspicious development to arrive at a hermeneutic and/or pragmatist conception of language, thus transcending the narrow Cartesian-positivist notion of knowledge which that approach originally served. As a matter of fact, there is no reason to disparage the liberating contribution that may come from that development, that is, from a renewed description of the role of language as an instrument and practical mediation with the world. That is, there is no reason to downplay the benefits that may come from an emphasis on the practical, intersubjective, social, therefore historical dimension of thought and knowledge – of language itself.

We should certainly celebrate that we have thus arrived at, among other things, a post-metaphysical, deflated, non-epistemologically centered, non-foundationalist image of the role of the philosopher and philosophy in culture. Whether this be that of the philosopher as a field linguist, rather than an apriorist armchair linguistic analyst, or, much better yet, that of the philosopher as a modest interpreter and mediator within the realm of culture. Or still that of the philosopher as a craftsman, deliberately and consciously the artisan of new formatting vocabularies and redescriptions, to help promote changed, more favourable, social-cultural circumstances and practices. For in all these cases, the philosopher no longer cultivates the alienating image of a super-theorist of Reality, and a super-judge of the entire Culture and its claims to knowledge, relevance and legitimacy. Indeed, in modern, reasonably developed, democratic societies, the aforementioned new roles may amount to more effective contributions, hermeneutical and creative, of philosophy and philosopher, to people, culture and society. Although, on the other hand, a transformative role for philosophy and the philosopher should not be conceived as operating some ultimately free-wheeling mechanism, in a supposed solely linguistic, disembodied realm. A realm operating in some basically immaterial context, basically reduced to a purely discursive, epistemic intersubjectivity, even if, to a certain extent, a reasonable regulating context. In distinction with that, we think that philosophical activity should be conceived, instead, as participating in the same whole and the same world to which more typically material-sensuous transformative practices belong. It should be conceived as at some point interacting with the more material, sensuous world, the world as we apprehend it in those practices, and as we practically produce and constitute it, whatever our sphere of activity may be.

It is true that the logical-positivist interest in language as possibly neutral, an element of the initial project of neo-empiricism, has advantageously given way, in the development of the analytic movement itself, to a progressively more pragmatic and hermeneutic, practical and contextualist approach to language, freed from its original dogmatic vices. That, however, should not necessarily lead us to an absolutization of language and linguistic practice, and allow for the philosopher to remain there once the myths of the given, of the analytic-synthetic separation, etc. have undergone a, say, Hegelianly or pragmatically inspired self-criticism, after which the absolutization of language would unrestrictedly reign in philosophy. An absolutization which would then entail that the real world be supposedly given up as forever lost, when in fact only atomistic sensory intuitions as supposedly immediate, foundational, have been lost for positivism. Lost and debunked together with anything that, on the other hand, would belong to a pure a-priori sphere, as positivism and some of its variants dogmatically presupposed.

The gradually more hermeneutical and pragmatizing development of analytical philosophy of language, starting from the initial logical-analytic empiricism and going beyond it, indeed composes, as some have noticed, a reasonably dialectical narrative. It pictures a plausibly immanent and necessary development set in motion by its own contradictions, by an internal logic that can be now reconstituted, and ends up in what appears to be its radical opposite, anti-positivist extreme, a new language-centered philosophy. Opposite as it may seem, such development, however, does not by itself exclude that the new, post-analytical philosophy is still lost in a display of technicalities, and above all that it still retains, in its very radicalism, some of the limitations of the original empiricist paradigm that marked its point of departure so decisively and indelibly. In other words, and this is our suggestion, the end-result to which such a development arrives may not have entirely left behind what has been negated by it, however so radically. That end-result may have still been reached within the limits of its initial presuppositions, may have stopped short of jumping out and beyond them, that is, stopped short of a leap to sensuous, social, material, productive, not just linguistic, practice, as our basic, determining, entanglement with the world – as we here suggest.

This leap should include a more decisive assimilation of suggestions from outside the analytical movement, *e.g.* from earlier Pragmatisms as well as from Hegelianism, also from post-Darwinian Continental philosophy, *e.g.* Nietzsche and Marx. For these suggestions may well be, in a different, non-linguistic way, both better anti-representational and more fully practical/pragmatist. Their anti-metaphysical naturalism may very well know, in many respects, how to better distance itself from classical and modern dualisms and dogmatisms. That is, to distance itself from philosophical flaws which may still prevail in the North-Atlantic twentieth century mania of, still now, well into the twenty-first century, openly or tacitly linguistifying philosophy and world, as well as still keeping philosophy rationalistically abstract, as if by a new, both modern and Platonic, version of anti-sensuous asceticism.

Along these lines, the new, practical-material standpoint that we suggest to help contemporary philosophy leave behind what we understand as its classically modern original sins, would also like to challenge the new hermeneutical, interpretationalist, and neo-pragmatist linguocentrism, including its so-called poststructuralist, French version, with some preliminary questions, beginning with a central one, followed by others: Do we really need to dwell on an ascetically and idealistically linguocentric philosophical paradigm which impoverishes our sensuous, creative relationship with the world, in order to go beyond the representationalist/correspondentist limitations of bad, solipsist mentalism, and of so-called dogmatic empiricist foundationalism? Why not go, instead, for an effective, radical, practical-poietic, “post-Cartesian” and “post-Platonist” non-logocentric turnabout in philosophy? One that might ensure, on the practical realm, greater democratic and pluralistic gains, also “romantic” creative ones, favourable to a desired flowering of material culture and to progressive, inclusive politics? Why not be in that respect more completely, materially, practical-creative?

In our view, it is first of all an emphasis on sensuous-material, creative practice (or on human practice as involving such a dimension) that will best leave all the bad – dualist, relativist – elements of the linguistic turn behind, as well as will practically enhance its good – practical-creative – ones. It is above all through a material, pragmatic and holistic understanding of the “precedence” and “omnipresence” of such practice – sensuous and poietic – that we can better arrive at the more desirable consequences (social, political, economical included) of an overcoming of modern dualisms and abstractions, for which a pragmatist, non-representationalist conception

of language is just a particular complement. It is above all through that standpoint that we can better reach those consequences as we move away from its remaining shadows of idealism, agnosticism, scepticism and relativism, while also liberating philosophy from an abstract and ascetic description of the world and of ourselves. That is, while freeing ourselves from a representation of our relationship with the world as an impoverished, abstract, ultimately only cognitive, besides mentalist, relationship, as in the original Cartesian empiricism/positivism. According to our poetic-pragmatic view, practical-sensuous-creative interaction, as an inescapable “mediation” with the world and other human beings, would accomplish all that much more and much better than linguistic practice by itself would – even if pragmatically understood.

Practical Empiricism and Realism of Things. Practice, Materiality and Objectuality, instead of Language. Our Practical-Sensuous Corporeal Intimacy with a Material, Objectual World⁵

It is true that, as users of verbal language, which among other things we are, we always-already inevitably move, as regards our descriptions of the world and an important part of our communication and coordination with others, with and within language – that relevant component of most human practices and interactions. Therefore, we move, although not because of language alone, in an intersubjective, cultural, social world, with which we indeed must interact and negotiate. A world that, at this point of our history, has already been many times told and retold in words, and is already populated by an infinite wealth of signs; a world where our interactions are enhanced and diversified with the support of language in its various forms. Which, however, leads us back to the question: Does all that mean we have not also always-already moved, as practical-sensuous beings that we are, within the world while both practical and material? Haven't we always already moved within it as *our* world, us and it being just as sensuous and practical-active? Do we not move around all the time within a material-sensuous world created by us, one which bears more and more the marks of our material activity and is an inseparable part of it? Do we not move within a world that is mainly populated, not by strange things that mean or express nothing, but things as embodiments, expressions and support of our actions and purposes? A world constituted and composed by our practices, and, within them and for them, by all those prostheses and mediations created by us, humans, that is, the objects, taken, produced and posited by us? Much more, and more literally than in the old pragmatist-humanist-Protagorian saying, registered by William James, that “*the trail of the human serpent is over everything*”, the world is in many ways made and mapped by us, just as much as it is for us materially and meaningfully maker and mapper.

Therefore, between language and its soft realm as what is supposedly truly human, on the one side, and, on the other, the realm of abstract impoverished sensory intuitions of positivist empiricism, supposedly the physical or hard inhuman domain, we can now suggest a third standpoint: that of sensuous, material, embodied practice, of social, meaning-endowing, world-disclosing, holistically interconnected productive practices – and of artefacts. We can do this by starting with the notion of an integral entanglement of a progressively more human-sensible-material world, on the one hand, with, on the other, us as mundane human beings who “correspond” to it – now in a much fuller and interesting sense of corresponding, for we are modelled together with it as we also model it. Again, it is sensuous-material (sensory-motor) practices of all kinds that produce, reproduce and reinvent the world, and so first signify it, and are at the same time what we *are* as much as what the world *is*. And by this I here mean our doings and makings while they involve an ineliminable bodily and material, as well as poietic, productive, dimension.

Within that practical entanglement and within our new conceptual framing, an assertion and belief about the world is indeed a disposition for practical, purposeful action, always born from and tested in sensuous-material practice, that is, in sensuous-material interaction with the practical-material world. A belief which may then become a habit in and through action, and certainly not only and primarily a linguistic habit. But perhaps we can go still a bit further and turn around the suggestion of Alexander Bain (about a belief being a disposition to or a habit of action), of which Charles Sanders Peirce said pragmatism was just a corollary, by claiming now that a habit or disposition to act is already a belief about the world, a meaning-endowing one, even when still not linguistically formulated. In a similar way, and still paying tribute to some original pillars of classical American pragmatism (but not to them alone), we can claim that the appropriate notion of something, or true belief about it, is that of the sensuous effects we can expect from it in the context of a material interaction with it, as in the famous pragmatist maxim of Peirce himself. That is to say: the appropriate notion of something is that of the thing's behaviour, as well as of ours, when in interaction with one-another, in the context of our activity of dealing with it, ultimately of using it or transforming it, based on previous sensuous, practical, creative experiences that we may have had of it. For indeed such a notion or belief is a projection from prior experiences of it and with it, a projection most of the time guided by purposes, past information, comparable results etc., now as the anticipation of future behaviour and future results. Finally, we can add to Bain's and Peirce's suggestions that even the meaning of words and sentences, the meaning of an assertion or belief, the meanings conveyed by language in general, will only be fully known or grasped when we try to enact them – in practice. We shall come back to this point further ahead.

Why, we can go on asking, couldn't non-linguistic, sensuous (*sinnlich*) reality be non-passively taken and appropriated, now by embodied practice, in a non-abstract, as well as non-correspondentist, non-foundational manner, no longer as simply a source for pictorial representation in our minds, and no more as something immediate, given and atomized, *i.e.* sensuous intuitions? Why shouldn't it be taken, first and foremost, as mediated *by practice*, that is, by our meaning-endowing material-sensuous interaction with it, involved with purposes, interests, tastes, fantasies, whims and projections? Wasn't language dissociated from the original dogmatic logical-empiricist paradigm, by the linguistic turn, to assert itself as what is first, and as something practical and non-representational, supposedly without thereby being assumed in a traditional foundationalist, dogmatic way? If thin, vaporous language (although certainly not immaterial nor non-artefactual) could acquire all that centrality, if it was turned into that supposed unavoidable first (as sensory intuitions were before), without thereby appearing as a new dogmatic foundation (unless it is a foundation for a radical, relativistic anti-foundationalism, which we think should not be the case either), why not practice as irreducible to something simply linguistic? And why, as the correlate of – productive – practice and experience, the worldly, mundane, sensuous reality should still be taken in an anti-historicist, positivistic way, a merely cognitive, narrow, dogmatic foundationalist way? Why couldn't reality be taken, instead, as something open and plastic, but still also – *nota bene* – material and therefore in some ways unyielding, defiant, rebellious, as well as resourceful and appealing, though still posited and re-posited by intentional, sensuous, creative, human activity as *our* reality and *our* world? Taken as perhaps it is also posited, for that matter, by the activity of any other living organisms, without verbal communicative skills, as *their* world, *meaningful* world?

Well, there might be a simple, challenging answer to all these questions: – Because the sensuous-material practice, as *sinnliche* interaction and use, still does not by itself signify anything, does not have or give sense and meaning to anything. Because human sensuous practice

alone, in and of itself, can only rightfully deal with things *after* verbal language, since only verbal language can be meaningful, meaning-carrying and meaning-endowing. Otherwise human practice would be reduced to an animal or even mechanical acting, completely different from our own inherently cultural, historical, free, intentional, intelligent, deliberate dealings and copings with things and world. Well, against that, the new perspective is willing to claim that, on the contrary, it is really human beings and their social practices that endow world and things (even words, too) with meaning, through constant and renewed use, manipulation, fruition of them. Which does not mean to say, only and in the first place, humans as language users, nor to say strict linguistic signification, which nonetheless is hardly separate from the former. It means human beings as sensuous, social, practices; and practices as uses in the broadest sense of the term. Which includes appropriation, fruition, creation, and finally material (human, material-spiritual) production – of things and world.

According with the new standpoint, we insist, it is our practices, our uses, our inventive doings and makings, while not purely nor primarily linguistic, that first effectively signify and re-signify the world, things and even people, and offer the basis for further signifying them (as in verbal language). For, as we suggested in the beginning, it is our practices that will first “cut the world out” into things and kinds, take things as this or that, therefore making them be this or that, as aptly having this or that practical meaning, for our benefit, delight, empowerment or whatever. Otherwise, just as for any other living organism, we may again ask, where would our signification of the world come from, as much as the meaning of things in any living organism’s particular world, if not from ours or that organism’s practical-sensuous activity within and upon it? This is why something is then taken or signified as good or bad, advantageous or harmful, as having this or that attribute, as this or that kind of thing, a means for survival or a threat to life, an object of gratification or of aversion, a particular kind of food or shelter, something solid or liquid. We should therefore come to the conclusion that meaning is in use, not only in the case of words, as in the famous maxim of the linguistic turn (Wittgenstein), but also and primarily that it rests in the practical use of the world and things themselves, both in the case of us and other living organisms. That is why we say that the full meaning of words, propositions and beliefs, even theories, will only be fully grasped when we try, not only to analyse them, but to enact them in practice, in the world. We will return to comparing humans and other living organisms, in this respect, further ahead.

Now, if it is *sinnliche* practice that is meaning-endowing, then, for a good anti-representationalist (as linguocentrists would like to be), describing and re-describing the world cannot merely amount to saying, in certain words, what the world is “for us” in an absolutely free interpreting and re-interpreting way, aiming, with simply that, for supposedly new and better results, to change reality in any positive measure. For that very describing and re-describing can only be part of our practices of, in a material and sensuous way, effectively creating it, constituting and reconstituting it. The correlate of a redescription not being the world pictorially represented, it would, first of all, be a course of action that the redescription promotes, to which it would a-posteriori correspond. That being the case, and precisely because it is not a matter of taking the new description as simply an improved reflection of the world, *i.e.*, as its mirroring mental representation, the non-representationalist must see herself in the position of apprehending or considering things and the world “the right way” to start with. She will deal with them in practice, in the best way she can, before she will adopt any redescription of what can be considered good for certain results concerning them, things. She must see what will effectively lead things to another, new, different figuration, what will make it be this or that, in a way that only experience, again material-sensuous conduct itself, can test, verify and establish to start with.

A new vocabulary – not wanting to be a new mental image of what the world is in itself but surely of what it can become and of what can lead us towards that change – refers or responds first to a type of behavior and transit within the world, rather than to some kind of free dissociation from world and circumstances as they effectively are for all practical, transformative effects. It would be naïve to imagine that a new, better vocabulary does much in advance and independently of appropriate action and practical familiarization with the world, mistakenly taken as something that merely follows them, more or less as in abstract-empiricist representational realism and logocentrism, and in intellectualisms in general. Finally, neither can we understand how a linguocentric redescriptionism can lay claim to entailing a loss of the world (for us, for knowledge), when any relevant description we have of it is only part of our practical-material encounter and engagement with it, is only part of our effectively positing it and of our possibly successful acting in and on it according to new purposes and towards new figurations.

Then, again, that the world might be well lost for us as knower is a problem only for the previously presented empiricist-realist view, already having been lost from the start as a world entirely by and in itself, therefore a world of no one, reduced to atomized, abstract sensory intuitions. In fact, in this respect, redescriptive linguocentrism, whatever the redescription, cannot prevent the world from escaping once again, and from again being lost from whatever good descriptive image of it we might have, because the world, like people, is ever changeable and changing. Reality changes again and again, all the time, without doing so by a disembodied and de-situated founding logopoiesis alone or firstly. That is why we say we do not understand how discourses that must deal with reality can fail to be interested in what reality is, how it really behaves, in how not to lose sight of it, how to take it right. We do not understand how linguocentrists – or, for that matter, anyone else – could neglect sustaining, indeed improving and potentializing it, that is, our practical contact with reality in the broadest and most varied sense.

What remains to be emphasized is that we have always-already lived in a productive, poietic interaction with a changing world, and that it is largely because of us and of such interaction that the world is historical, that it does not cease to change, to change us also (who are thus historical too), and to permanently, materially “reinterpret” itself. It also remains to be emphasized that, for this reason, the world does not cease to demand and allow new verbal descriptions, while certainly not prescribing or imposing them - if that is what the linguocentric anti-representationalist fears most. That is why it is necessary to consider that overcoming dogmatic and positivist empiricism is not only a matter of historicizing or poetizing the side of the subject, as the human-spiritual side, but is also a matter of doing the same to the side of the object, the side of the human-material – obviously, therefore, also spiritual – world, as a practical-sensuous, artefactual reality. And we certainly here mean subject and world as two sides that are only very partially distinguishable, to a very relative and circumscribed extent and purpose. Indeed, we resort to those terms while being aware that we should go beyond the simple and traditional idea of two sides in interaction, to that of all sorts of multiple interconnected sides, in all sorts of multiple interactions – as we shall see in our own paradigm.

Sensuous, Embodied Intentionality. Men, Animals and Things. From People as Embodied Act to the World as Artefact

Even for those who, being linguocentrists, think it is fundamental to say that what we say about the world, as true about it, is “merely” how we describe it, and that such a description is neither the world itself nor caused by the world, but is language and ours, it should still be the case to

recognize that such a description could not be in any way external to the world as sensuous and material, especially not external or prior to our action and experience in/of it. To a great extent that description, as we have already said, will also be part of our practical-sensuous behaviour of dealing with the world and things “as they are” – better yet, dealing with things as they behave and can become. Certainly not a part of dealing with things as they are in themselves, whatever that means, but still, nonetheless, as they are or may be for us. That is, dealing with things according to our interactions with them, according to our practices and purposes for dealing with them, and to the results to be collected from such dealing. That is, it is part of dealing with things as they are, according to practices that bring them about, and, at least in the case of humans, practices of interaction and coordination with other people (as much as with the world and things), which is why language is such an important part of those practices. In this respect, there seems to occur with us something similar to what happens with so many other complex living organisms as they deal with the world, even if in our case that dealing entails a richer exchange of signs, precisely as part of a much more complex form of cooperation among us (of conflict, also), as well as part of a sensuous-material interaction with the world which is much richer, more varied and more open, not the least because it involves so many more artefacts. It is such an exchange of signs that we call language in a broad sense, an element of behaviour that is apparently much more developed among us than among other living beings. Although that should not necessarily mean a kind of behaviour so distinctly and absolutely ours, nor so separate from other things human, such as our practical involvement with other kinds of artefacts, other than words and language for that matter.

Human coordination of actions and practices, apparently to a considerably greater degree than those of other animal species, finds an important instrument in the exchange of signs, while other animals stand out for other aptitudes and talents. But, nonetheless, even in the case of humans, it is an exchange of signs still based on what is already to a great extent conveyed and signified by and in the social (socially shared and developed) behaviour of dealing directly and materially with the world. In this respect, the behaviour of human animals and that of other animal species still seem to be “encompassable” together, to a large extent, by basically the same description: that of an intentional practical material activity, of an interaction with the world that is, at the same time and inseparably, both “particular” (subjective) and “realist” (objective). It is an interaction that is intentional, without being purely mental, and is guided by dispositions, interests, needs, appetencies and objectives, as well as by attributes of the world itself, as experienced in that interaction. That being the case, no matter how absolutely human a phenomenon it might be, language – like consciousness before – would not necessarily be able to account for all relevant competences of humans and non-human, non-verbal animals alike, in their behaviour as agents. Besides, all those species are very different from one another in many relevant ways other than linguistic competence, without that necessarily entailing their constituting, each of them, an entirely or absolutely separate realm, that many philosophers unnaturally hurry to find for humans in an unnecessarily idealistic, disembodied manner.

The opposite should be the case at least for a post-metaphysical, de-transcendentalized, non-logocentric, material, contemporary understanding of ourselves and our world, an understanding that wants to be largely reconcilable with what can be called Darwinism – but not only with that. One way or another, this should also be the case for those views which are part of what we would more broadly call a practical-natural turn in philosophy, in nineteenth and twentieth century Europe. This turn includes not only pragmatism, and not just its U.S. version, but any other non-contemplative philosophical position that strives to reject unnecessary dualistic divides between human beings and other living beings (*e.g.* Hegelianism, Feuerbach, Stirner, Marx, Ni-

etzsche up to a point), while also rejecting other typically modern dualisms, such as mind-body, to start with. For, as we have suggested, it may well be sensuous-material action, it may be use, interaction, appropriation, invention, production, creation, by embodied beings, not as separate, contemplative minds, that basically signify and constitute the world, a world full of signs just as much full of other meaningful objects. As we have suggested, it is that sort of action which in the first place “takes” – apprehends, grabs – world and things, and makes them be this way or that, which may also be, give and take, the case of the action of many or all other living beings. It is the practical initiative of a living organism that first says/interprets what a thing is; it is its practical initiative that makes a thing be this or that, by imposing a use, therefore an interpretation, upon it, to the extent of its dispositions, capabilities, powers, likes and dislikes, as well as its imagination. And that seems to happen both in the case of an organism considered in relative isolation and of organisms associated precisely in and for that practice, in which case some form of signalling or language will be involved, as is our human case. Even in this case, however, it will always be in the manner of an accessory and supervenient element, particularly in the human case, of *verbal* language.

Apparently with the aim of claiming for human linguistic competence, now in secularized terms, the ontological place which was in earlier days reserved for mind, if not, in openly idealistic, religious terms, for the soul, there are philosophers who claim that it is not enough for a nonverbal being to demonstrate the capacity to actively respond to the environment in a discriminating way, for it to be considered comparable to us as a truly intentional, active, knowing being. For the display of that practical, environment-responsive capacity could also be found not only in infants, amoebas and other non-verbal living-organisms, but even in some human automatic artefacts, and perhaps even in natural non-living things, like minerals of certain kinds. Well, to confront such a claim, one could suggest that not to recognize a difference between, on the one hand, the conduct of a thermostat, a photoelectric cell or an old automatic record-player, and, on the other, that of a dog or human baby, simply because they are in both cases non-verbal, non-language-users, is to make a great effort to implausibly, contra-intuitively, equate all of them Cartesianly together as *res extensa*, through the radical contrast of “all the rest” with us while superior, adult, speakers, thus also, in the traditional way, with us alone as thinking, knowing beings. This is actually revealing of how the linguocentric view, along with everything else counterintuitive with which it is unnecessarily entangled, does not take us so far from more classically modern, dualist philosophy, with its unnatural distinctions and odd epistemological and ontological speculations, having as consequences such sceptical, agnostic vagaries about the non-existence of a world out there, about all-deceiving malignant geniuses, absolutely dominant cognitive illusions, and, in the end and especially, an amazing relativist, intellectualist penchant of its own.

It seems a rather blatant misconception to introduce, as relevant to our discussion, as a means of leaving everything to language, approximations between the behaviour of little children, also animals in general, and that of thermostats, photoelectric cells and record players, which would allegedly also respond discriminatorily to environmental stimuli. These are approximations at which the non-philosophical human understanding would simply laugh, for anyone can tell Descartes that she knows she is not dreaming or being deceived by an evil genius, that Mount Fuji is really in Japan, that there is a world “out there” with certain characteristics. Actually, anyone could also say that she would normally not be inclined to interact with her thermostat or tamagotchi in the same way as she does with a child or a pet, or even with the potted plant in her living room. This is because, in the first place, these non-verbal organisms relate to and interact with the world and with us in a very different, much more interesting way, than thermostats or tamagotchis do. As

a matter of fact, organisms like us and them are able to use the world for their own purposes, subject the world to these, and take an interest of their own in different things – that is, they are capable of intentionality. Whereas a thermostat and a photoelectric cell do not act or move in any interesting and interested ways that seem to involve what we call practical-sensuous intentionality, nor do they seem so far to do anything comparable to real problem-solving, not to say inventive, real creation.

Anyway, it may be appropriate to mention here nonhuman animals and human babies as pre-verbal organisms, and to take non-verbal organisms as we usually conceive of them, that is, as animals with no language, to then imagine our humanoid ancestors at a time when the use of what we call language was not yet part of their condition. And that even if we could also imagine here organisms that are much farther away from us, both in linguistic capacities and other characteristics of ours, such as a simple amoeba. All we need is to ask ourselves if we would not extend to them skills, comparable to ourselves today, of knowing or familiarizing themselves with the world, of discriminatory, therefore, meaning-endowing, action in/on it, together with successful practical problem solving, and even a certain level of moral conduct. We can thus extend to them the ability for what we refer to as practical-sensuous intentionality, that is, intentionality conceived in a non-mentalistic way, as the capacity, whether of an amoeba or of a human being, to practically address the world and things as this or as that, with this or that purpose. World and things then placed in relation to such beings themselves by the practical behaviour of use and consumption, oriented by need or taste, purpose and interest, whether these are of survival, adaptation, fruition or other. And we could then say that all this involves for them a specific type of interaction, possibly also of cooperation and communication, and even a certain world of their own, according to their discriminating bodily dispositions and specific aims – amoebas, other animals, children, and adult human beings alike.

Going against this approximation between human and non-human beings, an approximation that we do not propose here in the service of any kind of reductionist naturalism, however, the “autonomization” of language by what we have been calling contemporary linguocentrism will conceive of language, just like earlier philosophy conceived of mind and consciousness, as something which all by itself places us, human beings, in a completely distinct realm. Linguocentrism thus upholds, as it seems, a new version of the classical idealist division and duplication of the world, proper to what we may call Platonism and Cartesianism: between, on the one hand, human beings and what they are capable of apprehending and doing, and, on the other hand, things and all other animals, perhaps to some extent even some human beings too. These animals are then put together, now in a truly strong reductionist way, with gadgets and even the “animal remainder” in human beings themselves as well: our bodies. That is, once again, the Platonic, idealist, intellectualist dichotomy between the sensuous, material, as nonhuman, and the human (the human, proper) as residing in the non-sensuous, in the intelligible, in something entirely different and incomparably superior, the soul, exactly because absolutely non sensuous-material, indeed opposed to it.

This results in something not only dualistically separated, but also hierarchically discriminated, implying a new version of the classical opposition between mental and material, intelligible and empirical, between the truly human and the inferiorly mundane, between the soul as first and the body as second. However, for our philosophical perspective, in our preference for the “centrality” of practice as pervasively material-sensuous and productive-creative, as well as in our preference for the “centrality” of the sensuous-practical world of which we are part, there would be no interesting sense in which there is first language (or mind, or consciousness) and then the

world. And this simply because for us (now recovering our earlier considerations) there would be no representation or language coming first and “on top”, for action, then followed by conduct or practice below, in the world and by the world. And because, in our opinion, human behaviour, like any other animal behaviour, is “essentially” sensuous-material interaction with the world (including others), an always-already inherently intentional bodily interaction, also inevitably signifying, *i.e.* meaning-endowing, besides poietic.

Now we should be in a better position to more fully understand that the meaning of a belief is precisely a particular conduct, a way of dealing with the world, in such a manner that its linguistic expression comes after the conduct, as well as after the consequent signification of the world by it. For, outside of a narrow mentalism, even the alleged conscious purpose of an action, which supposedly presides over and directs it, actually constitutes, develops and redefines itself in the course of the action, as much as the signification and appropriation of something – it could not be otherwise for an experimentalist position. After understanding this, it should appear as a linguocentric, intellectualist nonsense to imagine that language alone, being just another type of human practice and artefact, would do more to bring about any desirable transformation of the world, in terms of conduct or practice, than would, for example, the introduction of a different type of human artefact (broad sense), such as a new social practice, a new institutional form, a new instrument or means – *e.g.* the automobile, the contraceptive pill or the electric guitar. The same with the introduction of railways, mobile phones, new applicatives, but also rock-and-roll, funk, support groups, television series, a new church, a new political party etc, for small or extraordinary changes in the world, in our relations, in our behaviour, in our possible empowerment, and in language too.

Actually, we do not need to overlook the possibility that the introduction of new artefacts and practices, in general, in the world, can help but also be helped by the introduction of changes in language and vocabulary – and we have nothing against admitting this. It would be nonsense to disregard all that can be jointly understood as occurring in the same human realm, for creation of new human possibilities. All things considered, it would be a waste of time, typical of an impractical way of thinking, to get stuck in the opposition “things material vs. things spiritual (words)”, as a result of old metaphysical and theoreticist inclinations, dualist, reductionist traps, in the manner of a “chicken or egg” dilemma, about which really comes first: the material or the vocabular, the more material or the more linguistic artefacts, the sensual or the spiritual. For, finally, they are both just varieties of artefacts of human ingenuity, similarly signalling and meaningful, developed in practices and for practices, giving support to practices in so many ways; they are varieties of human artefacts that may often have at one and the same time, in whatever proportion, those aspects, spiritual and material.

Let’s now recall and conclude, then. In regard to our relations with the world and their consequences, we are not interested in an option for sense-data, supposedly passively collected, taken as unmediated and foundational, along the lines of positivist, dogmatic, abstract empiricism and representational materialism. This is to a certain extent, we believe, the option transmuted and prolonged, in the supposedly anti-positivist linguistic mode of understanding things and world, in the form of a causal “beyond-language”, brutish and blind, conceived as just having a restricted, mechanical action on us, humans, an understanding that still seems to extend the dualistic-

abstract image about knowledge, developed in European seventeenth-century philosophy. On the other hand, we are not interested, either, in an option for language in a linguocentric way that conceives of human creative, transformative, emancipatory action as a disembodied logopoiesis. In this second view, language is tacitly promoted to ultimate context, alone or self-sufficiently, rather than being seen as itself contextualized and embedded in what is material-sensuously more than language. Here, a free social-cultural creation, basically conceived as linguistic, ultimately takes the place of a poor, fixed and ahistorical material background, actually conceived as a non-context and no-ground. We are interested instead in the alternative of a broader consideration for free and sensuous-material creative practices, *i.e.* poiesis, which is centrally proper to us as agents, as well as to the world as itself practice and artefact.

Even if it is true that verbal language necessarily accompanies and adds to that practical, vast, unfolding activity of humans, as a part of our means of cooperatively and conflictingly transiting through the world, enhancing it and ourselves, as more than simply a means of representing it, its possible transforming role does not cease to necessarily be, in the final analysis, closely associated with sensuous, corporeal, human practice and world. That is, it should remain associated with the general practice of skilfully dealing and creatively coping with a material-sensuous (even if always also spiritual), artefactual, human world; a practice by itself significantly transforming and inescapably creative, therefore poietic. It remains associated in a way that simply ranks all of us dominantly logopoets and philosophers alongside other doers, makers and creators in general, such as artists, civil workers, politicians, entrepreneurs, artisans, laborers, scientists, engineers – in their respective practices. It is worth returning now for a last time to the question: Where do worldly meanings with which language operates come from if not in the first instance from sensuous-material practice, meanings always associated with it and translatable therein? Where do they come from if not from our interactions with the world, interactions which, even when material and non-linguistic, are involved with purposes, needs, possibilities, choices, demands and tastes, on one hand? Interactions which, on the other hand, even if linguistic, must also be confronted by the sensuous-material attributes of the world, with which we inevitably must engage all the time, in practical-material dialogue and negotiation, as obstacles and threats that they are, as well as also resources, appeals, etc., starting with our own qualities as also material-sensuous beings?

Again, before language offers us signifying/translating metaphors of a supposedly raw reality, before it maps in human terms a reality that some would have us believe we will never reach (as if it were not for the most part made by us), it is *sinnliche* creative, intentional action, practice, therefore poiesis, that does it, whether in our case or in that of other animal species. It is, we suggest, poietic practice that grasps, grabs and transforms things in/from reality and world (which, for all effects, was never at all independent, never a reality in itself, neutral, nor external or separated) – towards a reality ever “materially-spiritually” reinvented, and practically, contextually re-signified. In the case of human beings, to put it in evolutionary terms: the practice as the encounter between the becoming human beings (like us) of certain animals (our anthropoid ancestors) and the corresponding becoming our world of things and nature. A world of things made and remade in our image, being therefore historical, while also, to a certain extent, a world that makes and remakes ourselves and that image.

This means that it is practice in the first place that reveals and discloses the world to us, revealing things as this way or that, by us and for us. This also means that the world, in its meaning-endowing revelation, is not solely nor primarily given to us in the language with which we say it, a language that cannot even make sense apart from our sensuous realities, contexts and

practices. This means that it is primarily the - material, sensuous - use that we make of the world, the (material) discriminating practice with which we grasp or grab it, that constitutes it or finally makes it as if from scratch. Therefore, to sum up, the world is not given to us passively through the senses as in the tale of abstract empiricism, nor is it primarily given or posited by language as in the idealist, agnostic, ultimately relativist, ascetic, linguocentric paradigm. It is given and posited by our own ultimately corporeal activity, of non-metaphysical, social, historical subjects, just as it is transformed, produced and permanently innovated by it, as much as we ourselves are. In other words, for us, as materially intentional sentient beings, in the beginning is the deed, that is, the act, and then, especially for us as humans, the artefact. That is realism and empiricism as well as contextualism and historicism enough for us. And that is what we understand as an effectively transformative basic philosophical perspective.

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Notes

¹I thank Ralph Ings Bannell for improving the English besides discussing the content of this paper. I must also confess that the implicit concern behind its philosophical argument is change from the perspective of the Global South, a transformative, emancipatory, neo-developmental perspective, convergent with that of Brazilian philosopher and social theorist Roberto Mangabeira Unger, and congruent with Boike Rehbein's consideration of the relevance of a *material* emergence of the Global South for an improved, non-Euro-American-centric Critical Theory.

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³It is about time I explain that what I have been calling sensuous and material runs together within the semantic field of the German word *sinnlich*, such as used for instance by Marx or Feuerbach. For Marx, too, human practice – for him, labor, work, in a very restrict sense - is essentially *sinnliche* and poiesis.

⁴To simplify our development, we will not further consider, for now, the idea of an – also non-foundationalist - pragmatic turn, different from but in some ways intertwined with and even prior to the so-called linguistic turn. We will later talk about practice and use as much more than just linguistic practice and use, and about poiesis as much more than logopoiesis (creation of new words, discourses, vocabularies) taken as something separate.

⁵At this point, it might be suggestive to notice that empiricism is derived from Greek *empeiria*, which is close to German *Sittlichkeit*, for reality as sensed/experienced. *Empeiria* is what is learned from experience, from acting, such as in practical crafts and arts (*techné*) – medicine, for instance. As to realism, it is derived from real and that from Latin *res*, thing, there too in the broad sense of object, matter, stuff, issue, deed, affair (such as in republic,

res-publica, public affairs), the Latin *res* in turn derived from proto Indo-European *rehis*: wealth, goods. These are all convenient associations for our proposed new practical-sensuous, artefactual paradigm.

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