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A PRACTICAL-PO(I)ETICAL PHILOSOPHICAL POSITION¹

Pragmatic Po(i)etics is the abbreviated name I give to my philosophical, practical, social, material, and historical point of view: a philosophy of praxis as poiesis. A point of view that is attentive to action and the social-real as sensory (*sinnliche*), relational-interactive, productive, and artifactual. A philosophical position that aims to be, among other things, non-transcendental, non-essentialist, non-substantialist, non-metaphysical, non-dogmatic, and historical. Outside Brazil, in English, it has appeared in a couple of texts in the *Transcience's* Journal [Souza 2019b; 2020a]. Such a position also wants to be a case of what I call “philosophy as a civil thing”, as I have explained in *Philosophy as a Civil & Worldly Thing* [2019].

Since there are already so many easily accessible materials on the internet about the proposed position named above, I have chosen to present a more or less dialectical, comprehensive, and opinionated walk-through, with a dose of metaphilosophy. A conversational, illustrative journey through well-known international, European, and North American philosophical positions, familiar to many more readers and colleagues. A tour *around* positions related to what I am proposing, through comparisons and distinctions, convergences and oppositions, with the former. Along with this, I also present considerations about our national, academic, and Brazilian contexts, which frame, explain, and justify our position, *and*, finally, questions of metaphilosophy about what philosophy is and what we can do with it.

In this sense, always in relation to our practical-poietic position, which is also civil and de-transcendentalized, we will mainly examine representatives of Critical Theory, Marx, and Hegelianism, go through references to Pragmatism and Neo-Pragmatism, and examine various intersections among all of these. We will discuss talk about philosophy in Brazil and the Brazilian philosophical community, and briefly mention philosophical movements of our own, involving our historical essays, our modernism, the anti-

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¹ This text is based on a conversation I had with fellow philosophers Linda Alcoff and Goyo Pappas, published as an interview: [Souza et al. 2022]. Throughout the paper, I will be using the Greek noun *poiesis*, meaning “creation” or “production,” in both art and industry, both “spiritual” and “material”. I will also be using its derived adjective *poetic/poietic*, that is, concerning creation and/or production. Besides, *poiesis* is the root of modern words such as poet, poetic, poetical, and poetry. When I write *po(i)etic* or *po(i)etical*, I want to more clearly evoke, simultaneously, both art and production, creating and making.

colonialist contributions of the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (Instituto Superior de Estudos Brasileiros / ISEB: founded in 1955 and abolished in 1964) about philosophy and (under)development, as well as the University of São Paulo's (USP, founded in 1934) structural Marxism, etc.

1. BEYOND THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN JÜRGEN HABERMAS AND RICHARD RORTY

A few years ago, I published a book on the Rorty & Habermas debates [Souza 2011], as we shall see, for good reason and with good intent (one of these historic debates took place in Warsaw in 1996). As I understand it, these two outstanding philosophers represent, in addition to two continents, two great, bold, reconstructionist turns in their respective national matrices and traditions of thought, with distinct philosophical profiles, but at the same time in line with a remarkable inner convergence between them: a deflationary, pragmatist convergence. Jürgen Habermas represents the “end” of classical German theory/philosophy, and Richard Rorty the “end” of classical, Anglo-Saxon analytical philosophy. The former via Peirce, the latter via Dewey, two North American pragmatist philosophers from the New Continent. Although in both cases, not only that, both were also informed, in a cosmopolitan, ecumenical way, by contributions from various other currents of thought and spirit of our time. In any case, Rorty and Habermas represent two bold, exemplary paths for the development of thought. They are both philosophers who want to be pragmatists, de-transcendentalized, post-metaphysical, non-foundationalists, each in their own way. One more “Hegelian”, the other more “Kantian”, both also representing something of a somewhat deflated “Critical Theory”.

For me, they are two great “dialogical philosophers”, two outstanding and central gravitational poles of the philosophy and life of spirit of our time, in the West, of what I call “civil philosophers”, who respond expressly to their time and context. They are not thought leaders (*maîtres à penser*), but instigators of thought, as two neo-pragmatists should be. They are honest philosophers, who do not make themselves oracles, who do not make themselves gods, nor do they lend themselves to deification, to any blind affiliation, to subjection. It is true that Habermas still writes in dense German, but that is not all; Rorty, while being sophisticated and technical, has a pleasant prose that is both colloquial and refined. As Harold Bloom, the literary critic, says, Rorty has the best prose of any philosopher of our time. In any case, both have booklets, articles, essays, dialogues, interviews, and newspaper articles, all accessible and enlightening—representing “our time grasped in concept”. Both democratic, they do philosophy and metaphilosophy, as well as the history of appropriating, interpreting, and philosophizing philosophy.

For all these reasons, the publication of their debates in Brazil, in Portuguese, could have a productive impact on our national academic philosophy community, which has yet to make greater progress in *doing philosophy* authoritatively. The book, with its debates between the two, as a showcase of living philosophy in movement, had, by the way, an immediate, generous welcome from the most prominent Brazilian university publisher [Souza 2011], was widely spread, and is still widely cited. At the time, the publisher was planning to bring the two philosophers to Brazil (who had already been here separately), together with the launch of the book, to celebrate the anniversary of UNESP (São Paulo State University, founded in 1976), when, sadly, my friend Rorty reported to me the illness that would lead to his death. While Habermas, who had also very amicably given me suggestions for the book, was reluctant to cross the Atlantic for

the desired event, which then came to nothing. Afterwards, many people here in Brazil tried to explore this neo-pragmatist dialogue, and our book, which our late French colleague Jean-Pierre Cometti intended to publish in France, and of which Richard Bernstein, from the New School, insisted on a copy. In fact, I put together a book with careful translations of the sources, and my introduction also had a lot of repercussions, as a particular framing of the debate, and was effusively welcomed by the dear Oswaldo Porchat (1933–2017: a Brazilian professor at the University of São Paulo) on its fourth cover. I refer to this introduction because it develops, in a well-founded way, what I said above about his thinking, which many people may wish to explore further.

2. PRAGMATISM *LATO SENSU*, HEGELIANISM, POST-METAPHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY

As for the practical turn and pragmatism, I work with my own broad notion of pragmatism, which includes a broad perspective of its sources and versions. And now the idea of a pragmatism of our own, somewhat “continental” (European), but entirely Brazilian. I understand North American pragmatism as part of a much larger philosophical turn—practical-active, post-metaphysical—of which I also want my own elaboration of a practical-poietic, artifactual, materialist, historical point of view to be part, nourished by Hegel, Marx, and others. That is why I recognize and celebrate, despite its epistemological bias, the particular American pragmatist contribution, Peirce’s anti-Cartesian essays and conferences, and the philosophically revolutionary (*sic*) contributions of James, Dewey, and Mead. I celebrate the audacity, even petulance, of a young country, from the New Continent like us, with no philosophical tradition, the USA, to bet early on philosophizing with its own head, with its own forces, in its own way, with its own style. Thus, developing and “imposing” what is today a globally recognized philosophical contribution, picked up even by new, critical developments in the philosophy of old, perhaps tired, Europe, in France, Germany, England, Italy, etc.

What I call the “pragmatist suggestion” is there for those who want to take it. At the same time, there is also a great deal of prejudice (perhaps even stronger among educated Brazilians) and vast ignorance (*sic*) about it, thanks to the unfortunate contribution of the first Frankfurter Critical Theory. A rejection that was later reversed by more recent Critical Theory, which, however, a large part of our theoretical-critical staff in Brazil has tried to ignore for decades. It is worth noting that John Dewey himself was first a Hegelian (an influence he absolutely did not abandon), that American pragmatism was born in dialogue, among others, with “French idealism” (also quite ignored in our philosophically Germanophile Brazil), that the founding text of pragmatism was initially written in French by Peirce, who knew long passages of Kant in German by heart. In fact, according to the history I am reconstructing, the term pragmatism may have been used publicly for the first time not by Peirce or James, but by the French philosopher of action, Maurice Blondel, who later gave it up for his own thinking. More than that, under the suggestive title of *Un Romantisme Utilitaire* (1911), pragmatism in the broad sense was extensively presented by René Berthelot, through its various European representatives, as a European thing, mainly affiliated with Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lies* [Nietzsche 2007], in my opinion, well worth reading in a European context.

When dealing with the philosophical discourses of Modernity, Habermas understands, and I too, that we are all still contemporaries of the Young Hegelians. As for Young Hegelianism specifically, about which I have written and published a lot, it is

today assumed to be the root of German Critical Theory and to coincide with pragmatism in its rejection of the typical Cartesian dualisms of classically modern thought. It is a modernism that starts from the idea of the world, of reality, as humanly *constituted*, in radical transformation, and from the idea of the concept as the support for this practical activity of creating the world in history. Although without the identical democratic, entirely down-to-earth (de-transcendentalized) character of American pragmatism, the first Hegelian philosophies of action or praxis, and of a humanity (hence historicity) of the real/world, date back to before Marx, precisely within the Hegelian left-wing movement of the 19th Century. Critical Theory has been slow to place itself within this larger movement openly, and even today it does not quite know how to do so—how to take it on, despite contributions from Habermas, Rahel Jaeggi, and Robin Celikates. Critical Theory suffers the weight of its dead “on the brains of the living”. At the same time, we Brazilians, without being “narrow” and “naturalistic” like the Americans, do not have to suffer from this inertia. We are modernists by nature, something that pragmatists and neo-Hegelians, as we can see, also tried to be.

3. LINGUOCENTRIC PHILOSOPHY AND PRAGMATISM, CONVERGENCES AND LIMITS

Despite its anti-dogmatic and transdisciplinary intentions, I do not think the Frankfurt School’s Critical Theory is the best practical-critical philosophical development from Hegel and Marx. It is a development fixated on critique as extreme negativity, and on the seductive, hypnotic, critical keys of Marx’s more speculative humanism. It is particularly fixated on the uncriticized notions of alienation and commodity fetishism, which it takes in presumptuous, superior, intellectualist terms. Of these Frankfurtians, I have more sympathy for the vitalist, vibrant, non-depressed Hegelian-Marxism of Herbert Marcuse’s *Reason and Revolution* [2008]. So, when it comes to critical Theory and pragmatism, I wouldn’t exactly advocate a reconciliation between the two traditions, but, first of all, their reconstruction, radically self-critical, as attempted in different ways by Habermas, Honneth, and, most notably, finally, by Rahel Jaeggi [2015], a text I recommend. In fact, I have published some texts by Jaeggi, always in a dialogical but autonomous, critical-appropriating spirit, most of which she has included on her official website at Humboldt University, Berlin. In Jaeggi’s work, Marx and Hegel appear from a practical, materialist, non-speculative side; they appear from a less negative, more ontological-sociological, even interactionist and empirical side, which is more in line with my position.

The Frankfurt School still seems to me to have a mystical, not very secular affiliation, to which its most recent generation still feels it must pay tribute. It is something that obviously has cultural interest, but does not have the same critical-social interest. I mention this because I like to expose the contingent, particular side of philosophical developments, which we mystify so much, and to recover its dimension of radical reform. I do not take kindly to the proverbial intellectualist obscurity exemplified by Adorno in Critical Theory, fortunately absent in Jaeggi and also in Nancy Fraser. In the same way that I do not see it that way, I willingly say what I consider to be its philosophically and politically uncritical reception of Foucault as “French critical theory”, perhaps to affect cosmopolitanism. For me, Critical Theory needs to become more political, democratic, constructive, and secular, which means more effectively (not metaphysically) practical materialist. On the other hand, in its recent evolution, it is positioning itself beyond rhetori-

cal discourse, linguocentrism, mere intersubjectivism, without world or matter, without economy, which I believe is conditioned, among other things, by its traditional repudiation of everything else as “instrumental reason”.

In fact, in place of language as the sole and absolute totality-mediator, that is, in place of the linguocentrism that has affected practically all contemporary Western philosophy/theory, I offer our human, material, *sinnlich* entanglement as a guiding thread for a new theory. An entanglement with the sensible world, and of us with each other, as I propose in my general critique of linguocentrism, also those of Rorty and Habermas, and, of course, that of Foucault. It is not through this linguocentrism route that we will positively overcome the dualistic, deterministic, representational, and dogmatic defects of Marx’s historical materialism or of modern philosophy in general. In terms of Critical Theory, I would like to propose something else that recovers a more interesting aspect of Marx (and Hegel). So, let’s go for a “Brazilian Theory”, a reconstructed critical theory, ours, for the world, and on this subject, at this point, I can recommend reading Souza [2012], where I approach and distinguish the two traditions, Marxism (and therefore also Critical Theory) and pragmatism, to come out with something else. I do not know of anyone who has done this correctly, including Sidney Hook [2012], about whom I have already written. Hook was an American Marxist, a beloved disciple of John Dewey, and a close friend of Rorty and his leftist New York family.

4. THE PRACTICAL TURN AND CRITICAL THINKING IN THE BRAZILIAN CONTEXT

As I said above, in Brazil, we have been the last (we in academic philosophy, I mean) to dare to touch any metropolitan framework of thought, even though, as a new and very diverse country, we have a vocation to do so. We do little to consult or approve of ourselves or our “place”. We were formed as a country dominantly within a scholastic, colonial tradition, and then within a Eurocentric, classicist standard, more than that of the Europeans themselves. Our idea of “being cultured”—and of intellectual culture, often seen as something pedantic, bachelorism—overdetermines our very idea of being critical, including our ideas of criticism and critical philosophy, even that supposedly “of praxis”. Such a spirit, which is generally very favorable to a certain Eurocentrism, would not favor North American ways of thinking, which we in philosophy see as philistine, practical, utilitarian, as well as too deflated, trivial, to deserve the holy name of Philosophy. Symptomatically, with the French, we learned to be absolutely German, “frankly” German, with Marx upstream and downstream of what should matter most in the history of philosophy. Marx himself is then taken as a super-canonical philosopher who, after all, stands in the wake of Plato, Aristotle, Spinoza, Kant, and Hegel, as the apex of this entire path of classical Western thought. As such, left-wing, critical, Brazilian intellectuals and academics often do not care about practicality or pragmatism in philosophy. They want to exercise, vicariously, only vicariously, by repeating a great canonical philosopher, their higher-critical, pure, abstract role, and without any particular consideration of deflation, civil, context. Pragmatism, for its part, does not give much support to pretensions of superiority, of a superior, denying, arrogant look at what is its other, common sense, for example. This situation worsened several decades ago with the widespread institutionalization of philosophy in our universities, as well as with the so-called “Western” development of Marxism (including the Frankfurt School), which deserved a different fate, in a democratic spirit, rather than an elitist-intellectualist one.

Naturally, here I am criticizing atavistic dominant modes of thought among us in Brazil. I'm not ignoring our possibilities and potential for the practical work of philosophy, of doing philosophy, of creating thought, which many of our historical essayists and more movements among us have sought to honor. Nor am I diminishing the importance of taking up Critical Theory. Here, it is opposed to pragmatism as a term of dialogue and reference, from our reworking, precisely in the field of a practical-transformative, creative, productive turn in philosophy.

5. PROMISES OF A PRACTICAL-POETIC TURN FOR BRAZILIAN PHILOSOPHY

Returning to contemporary Western philosophical currents, as far as I'm concerned, I do not like to talk about "pragmatism" so much as thinking about a particular kind of pragmatism. In other words, I want to think from a practical, material, construction, and creation point of view. Let us stick with that, as a point of view that is also progressive, democratic, popular, and national. Of those who, as in our case, have a country to build, even materially, symbolically too, new, original, a country to integrate, whose national formation has yet to be completed. A practical point of view, which dialogues with the foundations of certain North American philosophical developments, yes, but also with more contemporary thinking in general, with a practical-democratic turn, epistemologically, ontologically, aesthetically. Without transcendental, abstract, anti-political norms, a way of thinking that is *science-friendly*, without being scientific or positivist; a way of thinking that is reconciled with the artifactuality of the human world. That opens up space for the humanities in the exercise of good critical thinking, not as something opposed to—above—the world and people, or to the relationship of others with the world, but as consciously involving our own, of us philosophers.

In other words, we're not going to go chasing after—yet another—philosophical current or paradigm, ready-made, imported, saying "now that is it!" But of a way of thinking that, from the outset, dialogues with our historical, social, and cultural background; and even, if you would excuse me, a way of thinking that loves this country, this people, that shows solidarity with them and their problems. That one tries to get to know it, to learn from it, from our own history, our own experience, our own culture. This goes for critical Theory and the humanities in general: "Theory," how? How much? "Criticism," how? How much?—Theory without theorizing, and criticism as a solution to problems, as a practical construction, not as an intellectualist, anti-popular, negative, crypto-nihilist thing. To be critical is to have a disposition of independence and autonomy, to be reflective, free, and creative. Critical thinking is thinking that modestly examines itself first, its presuppositions, and its jargon. It is not negative thinking, it is not the "power of negative thinking" that Marcuse spoke of positively, it's a way of thinking that is first and foremost "against". A thought that is against only because of what it affirms, produces, promotes in practice, and that, in doing this, opposes what is crushed as an obstacle, an arbitrary impediment.

On the other hand, to be pragmatic is to be post-metaphysical, as gains of wisdom and de-transcendentalization; it is to be deflationary, reasonable, which is not the opposite of being ambitious, even divine and sublime. There is not only a potential for this practical approach as an alternative to critical thinking in Brazil. But there is also an absolute need for it, given the political, cultural, and intellectual exhaustion of the negative, imported, supposedly left-wing modes that have now reached their bizarre limit of nega-

tivity among us, and perhaps even throughout the Western world. We need a new model of the practical-critical intellectual. Critical Theory seems to be essentially constituted by a great disdain for the everyday world, for the ordinary human being, decried as obtuse and obliterated, more so by these theorists than even the ruling class. Among us, this is now revealed in the “critical” execration of the supposed stupidity and nullity of the “poor right-winger”, the ordinary person, to be illustrated, literate, enlightened by us, in the style of the worst authoritarian Enlightenment, even when it is supposedly anti-Enlightenment. For me, this is a fiasco and a dead end, wherever it comes from, in whatever language, with whatever authority. Something similar also happens on the “anti-Western” philosophical side, which I call “roots”, primitivist-cult, also schizophrenically dissociated from what is actually at stake in the real, material world, and from any productive, autonomous disposition of thought.

6. PRACTICAL, DECOLONIZING, EMPOWERING PHILOSOPHICAL TURN

I do not see why, in Brazil, we should have a vocation for repeating German thought, French thought, American thought, critical or otherwise. Or even to repeat so-called “Amerindian” or “African” thought, a recent foreign, metropolitan fashion, uncritically assimilated here, once again as an excuse not to think for ourselves about the themes and issues of our own time and place. Or to resurrect Iberian-scholastic mimicry, like some “French department overseas” (as Foucault said about the philosophy of the University of São Paulo). Nor to become a branch of Anglo-American analytical philosophy, or of the Franco-American deconstructionist, identity school, promoted here by the American Ford Foundation, or by other neo-colonial matrices. The practical, contextualized Brazilian point of view, on the other hand, is an open and plural path that can be followed in dialogue with all those influences, without fooling around. Nor does it need to become something picturesque, exotic, folkloric, or an “anti-everything” activist pseudo-philosophy that does not honestly elaborate on central thematic issues such as reality, knowledge, action, normativity, art, science, religion, and technique. This should be done in such a way as to contribute to the life of culture, politics, science, etc., in this country—and the world beyond. With better, more enlightened responses than the traditional metropolitan ones, without this meaning only pseudo-denouncing elaborations, only “morally” justified as superior, as if they were particularly critical, shrewd, and emancipatory.

Fortunately, in addition to the scholastic, colonial-forming model and thoughtless fads, Brazil has also historically seen valuable experiments in its own thinking, influential movements of ideas, as well as experiences of “international” thinking that have been well nationalized, well used, and well appropriated. Thoughts made effective here, alive, with greater and lesser implementation, life and history, impact on politics, culture, natural science, and the social sciences. As in the case of Socratic thought, naturalism, positivism, Thomism, eclecticism, Marxism, even post-structuralism, analytical philosophy, etc. Along with more general expressions of the spirit of great philosophical interest, ours, in literature and social Theory too. Movements and schools of thought such as the Brazilian Institute of Philosophy, Modernism, the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies, and political Marxism, academic Marxism, Tropicalism—in the wake of which I put my own efforts.

I see my own theoretical-critical, poietic-practical thinking efforts in the wake of these movements, as well as the “international” philosophical developments of our day, which cannot fail to be critically accompanied (including a dominantly structuralist-linguocentric practical turn). After all, we are doing thinking for this world and this time, not parochial thinking, and there’s no reason why we shouldn’t try to make a stand there, in the international context. To do this, we have to face, as much as their linguocentrism, the systematic, habitual blockade and disdain, tacitly espoused by ourselves, and also espoused by our dearest foreign friends, for anything that comes from this side of the world. In this field, as I have already said, I think it is up to us to have *our own practical-critical, material turn*, our own philosophical agenda. It is a shame we do not have one, and the fault is ours alone, for our systematic avoidance of philosophy. As in the rest of the world, we submit to the traditional, colonizing international division of labor: they produce, we consume. We do this even when we think we are critical of the “System”, of capitalism, imperialism, colonialism, authoritarianism, patriarchy; even when we feel we are rebelliously Nietzschean, Marxian, Foucauldian.

7. JOHN DEWEY AND A BRAZILIAN PRACTICAL-POIETIC PHILOSOPHICAL TURNAROUND

As we know, John Dewey, an exemplary pragmatist, was recently discovered and adopted by post-Habermasian German Critical Theory (Honneth, Jaeggi), while European sociology was also discovering Herbert Mead. We can imagine that Habermas became a Peircean and Meadian Kantian (of Herbert Mead) only because he did not find the author of *Reconstruction in Philosophy* [Dewey 2017] in time. It is Rorty—first and foremost a Hegelian neo-pragmatist—who has been the great re-launcher of Dewey in our time. Well, some time ago, we created a Dewey Center in Brazil, which sought to exchange with pragmatists in the United States and, always horizontally and dialogically, everywhere in the rest of the world, to set up something like a “network”, since we have a vocation for these things, for “constellating”, for moving, for nationalizing and internationalizing at the same time. But Dewey, in Brazil, at least until recently, wasn’t really of philosophical interest; you would only find Deweyans in education, which naturally changed after even old Europe discovered and legitimized him. It is true that in Brazil we have an outstanding pragmatist Deweyan, Anísio Teixeira (1900–1971), an extraordinary figure from the second half of the last Century, who left us a lot of practical, theoretical, political, and institutional work in education. We also have another excellent Deweyan: Roberto Mangabeira Unger (born in Brazil in 1947), whose thinking and proposals I suggest everyone should get to know better, both inside and outside Brazil.

During his lifetime, John Dewey traveled widely and had an impact far beyond the United States; even Mao Zedong, still a teacher, was first reasonably Deweyan. As a young man who started making a living as a primary and secondary level school teacher early on, I sought to understand the thinking of the representatives of our extraordinary Escola Nova movement, inspired by John Dewey and Anísio Teixeira. Their work not only taught us how to teach, but also how to study and how to learn. Dewey, as a style, is not an exciting read. Still, I always suggest that everyone study his *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, and then *Experience and Nature* and *Art as Experience* (both from 1985). That is what we did as a group—my students and I—as part of our Dewey Center activity; those were formative texts for us. As we know, Dewey became “the” national philos-

opher of the United States at a time when it was a country in the making. He was a democratic and engaged philosopher, a radical progressive, a modernist, with something of a democratic Marx, contributing to the creation of movements and institutions in favor of social and democratic progress, just as our Anísio Teixeira did. We move beyond the Dewey Center when we embark on our own philosophical development, as a group, circle, or movement—what we call Pragmatic Poietics—from a Practical-Poietic Materialist point of view. But that does not mean that Dewey has lost interest in us.

8. ARTIFACTUAL PRACTICAL MATERIALISM AND HUMAN CREATIVITY

At this point, I refer to what I consider the two cornerstones of pragmatism for its reconstruction. Firstly, the so-called “sentence of [Alexander] Bain”, Stuart Mill’s Scottish partner, which gives us food for thought and may well serve us: “A belief is a disposition to act”. I can not elaborate on this idea here, which I take for myself in my own way: translating belief/meaning into conduct in the world. Peirce rightly said of it (something many people ignore) that the whole of pragmatism is nothing more than a “corollary”. The other cornerstone of classical pragmatism, very similar to the first, is the so-called “pragmatist maxim”, by Peirce himself, which I would call the “guiding thread” of (North American) pragmatism, which throughout the work of this “founding father” has found various formulations. So, I can offer a formulation of my own: The notion we have of a thing is the set of its practical, sensible effects, as they appear in our interaction with it. That is to say, it is the notion of its “behavior” in interaction with us, and by extension also of our behavior in satisfactory, purpose-driven interaction with it, as if by a “dance”, when we take someone out to dance. Marx would undoubtedly have been much more and better a materialist (practical, not metaphysical) in matters such as knowledge, truth, signification, representation, and even normativity, if he had gone that way. He would have been a better (post-) Darwinian too, realizing the philosophical implications of Darwinism in this field much better than he actually did—as Nietzsche and Dewey did, and even Rorty, despite his post-analytical linguocentrism. With my practical-poietic materialism, I intend to be in this family, with my own profile, as you already know.

What distinguishes such materialism from classical North American pragmatism is that I give Peirce’s claims a primarily “ontological” sense rather than a merely logical or epistemological one. That sense now concerns our practical way of being-in-the-world and with each other, and our inevitable activities of creating and using things/artifacts, which play an active, mediating role in our actions and relationships. In other words, that sense concerns our practical-sensible, productive “entanglement” with the world. Traditional pragmatism has an idea of our being-in-the-world that understands the world as environment, as nature: we human beings, organisms, on the one hand, and nature, as environment, on the other. Our activity is conceived of as basically adaptation, not creation, in response to our “experience” of the world in the world. This, of course, in a non-deterministic, non-passive way and, more than that, in such a way that experience (due to the influence of Hegelian *Erfahrung* on Dewey’s thinking) is not what classic British empiricism calls abstract, atomistic, “contemplative”.

Let us note: Our interactive movement with the world is, from our perspective, also a movement of production/creation of it, and so our environment/world is, rather, not nature, but a set of “social things”, made by us: a set of artifacts, means, objectifications,

and more. In other words, our interaction implies a movement of “directing ourselves” (through a sensory, free intentionality of our own) towards things and the world. A capacity to “take it”, but also to “put it” (in German, *setzen*)—socially and interactively, not as a metaphysical subject. In conclusion, allow me to say: for us poetic-pragmatists, “in the beginning is the act”; in other words, experience itself takes place in *our* action and through *our* action. And right after the act, “there is the artifact”: that is, our action is essentially material-sensible, creative; it “takes” things and “puts” artifacts, which gives our world/environment, and even ourselves, a certain artifactuality. Artifacts condition modes of interaction and even subjectivation. Please take a look at what I wrote about this [Souza 2016], which was criticized and discussed by several colleagues.

9. THE PRACTICAL-POIETIC RECONSTRUCTION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

I have already said a few things about this, but let us return more directly to Marx, because it is always from a critique of him that I think critically about Critical Theory. That is to say, I assume that a good reconstruction of Critical Theory must first be a good reconstruction of the Marx that constitutes it. A “reconstruction” that then questions that particular bias of Marxism, of corrective intentions, of debatable consequences, as well as already being a lapsed bias. In fact, compared with Marxism, I understand that pragmatism, as a “practical” philosophy, has its own problems (a specific type of naturalism and a Theory of knowledge). Still, it is not essentialist, substantialist, transcendental, theoretical, representational, or dualist-determinist. Moreover, these are problems that we can directly address to Marx, which I have exhaustively shown where they are, in the terms in which Marx himself happily admits them—in *The Inside of Marx* [Souza 2024], for example. So, you can understand Marx’s reconstruction as a kind of “pragmatist” turn. However, I prefer to speak here not of pragmatism but of a “practical materialism”—something less German, more Brazilian, and more contemporary. I like to avoid unnecessary affiliations, since pragmatism must also be reconstructed, and Marx has some advantages over it that need to be recovered. Advantages such as his historicist, materialist disposition, his artifactual form, etc., are to be taken up and radically improved and reconstructed. So, yes, our practical-poietic point of view wants to be a third thing, another thing, in relation to both Marxism and pragmatism.

Consider this. Marx clearly has a *Leitfaden* (a leitmotif, he says—his term), a starting point, a base, a cornerstone, a mainstay. He has a general “footprint”, something I like to look for in the philosophies that interest me, with which I dialogue, and “diagnose”. It is something I myself also try to bring to what I construct/articulate conceptually, always in a way that does not involve “foundationalism”—dogmatic, metaphysical, exclusionary. In Marx’s case, the guiding thread or footprint is precisely the principle of his materialism, practical, social, although also, in the end, “transcendental” (or empirical-transcendental). Marx, as he himself says, begins with human beings—specifically, their particular bodily constitution—who enter into certain relationships with each other and with the world. They do this in the unavoidable (sensible) activity of providing for their subsistence and reproduction, according to the degree of development of their capabilities and means, the artifacts, and the productive forces. Marx is concerned with establishing this material interaction as involving a dynamic, a dialectic, an objective, an autonomy outside human consciousness, independent of their self-representations, determined by artifacts. Representations and ideologies come afterwards, as a second, “spir-

itual”, determined sphere (passive, even reflexive), almost as if only sensible, material making existed on the first level or sphere, and that is it, practically without thought. And as if only thought existed in the second sphere, without actual doing, without sensible activity, without a material, productive dimension. This, of course, can be reduced to a few lines.

We have here, in any case, two spheres, infrastructure and superstructure, a fundamental dualism, not at all inessential, but constitutive, for his totalizing Theory. As for me, I also start from our corporeal constitution, as something that shapes our active involvement with the world (our *Umwelt* or “own world”): social, practical, sensory, productive, and therefore historical. However, an involvement marked by a free, active intentionality: sensory, corporeal, creative, material, meaningful, which, to quote Darwin, *pace* the linguocentrism, we have more or less in common with other animals. An original involvement (sic), which, as I said, is also free and creative, thoughtful, cognitive, sensory, a making-a constituent of the human world, at all levels, without dualisms. This is our being-in-the-world as much as our being-with-others; human beings put objects and are set by objects and objectifications—as Hegel would say, an objective idealist, and Marx, a “passive” materialist. Whether they recognize themselves as creators or not (some more so, others less so, Nietzsche would say), human beings carve out the real through the sensory (poietic), socially significant, appropriating, also thinking, and linguistic practice of dealing with it.

Dewey’s position, a pragmatist with an instrumentalist and experimentalist emphasis, also biological-Darwinian, with traces of a Hegelian background, is more or less in line with this, taking experimental natural science (according to a notion of science that is more up-to-date and less German than Marx’s) and “problem solving” as central and paradigmatic, with the relationship between man and nature as the framework. And you can tell if I’m being too fast and quite panoramic here, with seven-league boots. In any case, it is in the midst of this that I find a place for my poietic-pragmatic point of view, synthetically outlined [Souza 2016]. I should stop there. One more thing: It is from this very entanglement, let us say ontological-anthropological, and back to it, that our epistemic and normative values spring, are established, and evolve, as well as our relationships.

10. PRACTICAL-POETIC PHILOSOPHY AS A CIVIL, MUNDANE THING

The study of and interest in philosophy is not an idle cultivation of erudition, a flow-er of culture, of civilization, just for our personal distinction and intellectual enjoyment, so that we can say that we do (in fact, we do not) like the French and Germans or the British. They play a role, whether more direct or more mediated, in the development of the institutional, cultural, etc. life of a country, in fact its educational, scientific, political, moral, artistic, religious life, with which philosophy, in a way, dialogues, which it also to some extent expresses, codifies, articulates. It does so not with a monopolistic pretension, but conversationally and pluralistically, in the debates in which it asserts itself, in the whole that it completes and can enrich. Consider, for example, the significance of Hume for England, Dewey for the USA, Comte and Spiritualism for France, Kant and Hegel for Germany. At different times, according to different conjunctures, social contexts, and geographical areas—all constituting traditions that become formative in turn. Movements such as Scholasticism (in its context/time), then rationalism, empiricism, romanticism, analytical philosophy, existentialism, and German idealism. In Brazil, phi-

losophers such as Luís António Verney (1713–1792), Silvestre Pinheiro Ferreira (1769–1846), Miguel Carlos Correia de Lemos (1854–1917), as the valuable historical research by our colleague Paulo Margutti (born in 1946) shows us, played a role in shaping the intellectual, spiritual and scientific life of the country, which had recently become more urban and civilized.

Today, national philosophical communities in different countries depend less on towering figures, exceptional, supposed geniuses, filtered, canonized, and disseminated by metropolitan historical contexts and their narratives. Instead, they are communities of investigation and elaboration on themes and questions posed by the times and contexts of the respective periods, their concerns, crises, debates, and challenges. In our case—the philosophical one—there is absolutely no question of waiting for the “Brazilian Kant” so that the life of thought here can flourish and fulfill its role in growth, autonomy, and emancipation. A philosophical community in a vast country in terms of territory and population, which is Brazil, with an impressive social and institutional base, even though it is a country without a great and heavy philosophical tradition. This is also an advantage, as it favors cosmopolitanism, openness, creation, innovation, and experimentalism. In any case, a vast, costly, and very expensive community must necessarily serve society. A new community, which is in the process of being formed, must also exercise itself more, for the same reasons, necessarily in metaphilosophy, that is, in the thematization of what philosophy really is and what it really means to do philosophy, worthy of the name, with meaning and effectiveness. I do not think any is escaping our obligations and responsibilities, opportunities and accumulations, in this field.

Philosophy is one of the humanities, a discipline close to the human sciences and in dialogue with them. But I would not like to give up on developing it in dialogue with the natural sciences, techniques, engineering, and applied disciplines of all kinds. And with politics. As the embodiment of the University’s very spirit, it plays a role in this general interconnection/communication among knowledges, and in their operationalization. Brazil needs to overcome its lack of ambition and self-confidence in the field of thought—this may help the country as a whole to do so in all other spheres. Germany, backward in the 19th Century, first became a contemporary of the most outstanding countries in philosophy, is not that what they say? Well then, not as unimaginative repeaters, of course. Let us follow in the footsteps of our previous efforts in philosophy, Theory, expression, and spirit-building in general. I consider our position to be poetic-pragmatic to be a development that starts from and critically dialogues with contributions from the Higher Institute of Brazilian Studies (ISEB), USP Marxism, Brazilian modernism, Brazilian essays, Brazilian social and political Theory, the brave colleagues of the National Association of Postgraduate Philosophy (Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação em Filosofia: ANPOF, created in 1983) and beyond, people of thought who look at Brazil in general. This also includes the most relevant contemporary developments in philosophy and spirit outside Brazil. Even if we’re not very impressed by many of them, because I think we can do a lot better here than Judith Butler, Giorgio Agamben, and Byung-Chul Han, in any case.

11. CIVIL NORMATIVITY AND PRACTICAL-POIETIC DIRECTIONS

To conclude the exposition, I want to briefly say something about one last point: the normative dimension of the critical point of view I am proposing. In this field, traditional Critical Theory, which, for me, is not very political and not at all positive, for reasons of

its origin, and others that are aggravated, has left us with habits of thought that make it difficult to move forward in solidarity, and which should be tackled, even if very briefly here. So, let us say something about remaining critical—about actually being better at critique: more vital, more political, more practical, and more transformative. The practical-poietic, material point of view has, on a political and social level, a progressive position, in favor of a cumulative “institutional constructionism”. This is a transformative, popular, democratic position, with political and cultural scope, but also economic, material, inclusive, productive, creative, and in the end, structurally transformative. Speaking of institutional constructionism, property is also an institution, as is the market, both of which are historical and can be configured in many ways. Our practical-poietic “anthropology” wants to sustain commitments to inclusion, association, cooperation, emulation, dignification, and fulfillment, generalized of material, protagonist citizenship, which demand increasing structural transformations.

On the other hand, we consider it indispensable to include a national, particularized framework that our dominant Brazilian left-wing critique of the last few decades, which ranges from welfarist to academicist and is not very popular, has not achieved. This is a framework that our left-wing critics, now in crisis and much more accommodated to the larger system than they imagine themselves to be (while imagining themselves to be “radically anti-capitalist”), have not assimilated, even out of a certain prolonged political infantilism, due to their original Trotskyite-Catholic-academicist identity. It ends up handing over this national framework to the farce of the worst right-wing (now in high tide), due to the difficulty of finding and formulating the notion of a Common Destiny (of a comprehensive Community), less remote and transcendental than, for example, “the Revolution” and “Communism”.

In fact, this is something that the recent Brazilian experiences of a fascist presidency and a calamitous pandemic should have taught us sufficiently in practice, and which has rightly affected the country as a whole, as a common destiny in the most relevant and objective sense. In addition, I believe that the crisis of the current World System, the new Cold War 2.0, the overwhelming dominance of Geopolitics, the end of Globalization, and Trumpism have all brought back the leading role of nation-states in an obvious way, and in practice, they inevitably impose the reference of thought to this national dimension. I can not say more than that here, but that’s enough to give social sciences, economics, philosophy, and Theory a lot to do in the country, at the Brazilian University, and in thinking in Brazil. And it’s not possible to remain in the same mold of importing Frankfurtian theoretical-critical thinking, or Franco-American structuralist thinking, of total subordination to the current international division of intellectual labor. All this can invite a fruitful dialogue with foreign colleagues, particularly from philosophical communities in peripheral conditions.

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A Practical-Po(i)etical Philosophical Position

Pragmatic Po(i)etics, not another “-ism”, is a nickname for the practical philosophical, social material, historic, point of view that I propose: a philosophy of praxis as poiesis, attentive to action and social reality as material/sensory (*sinnlich*), interactive/relational, productive, artifactual. A detranscendentalized, non-representationalist, civil, philosophical suggestion, here presented through a conversational itinerary, about some familiar, related, European and North-American philosophical trends, to explain it by comparison and distinction, convergence or opposition. From this set of elements, I will demonstrate an understanding of philosophy as materialist discourse, public act, and civil normativity.

Хосе Крісостомо де Соуза

Практико-пойетична філософська позиція

Прагматична по(й)етика, а не черговий «-ізм», – це прозвання для практичної філософської, бразильської, соціально-матеріальної, історичної точки зору, яку я пропоную: філософія практики як пойезису, уважна до дії та соціальної реальності як матеріальної/чуттєвої (sinnlich), інтерактивної/реляційної, продуктивної, артефактної. Детранс-ценденталізована, нерепрезентаційна, цивільна філософська пропозиція, представлена тут через розмовний маршрут, про деякі знайомі, споріднені європейські та північноамериканські філософські тенденції, щоб пояснити їх шляхом порівняння та розрізнення, конвергенції чи протиставлення. Виходячи з цього набору елементів, я продемонструю розуміння філософії як матеріалістичного дискурсу, публічного акту та цивільної нормативності.

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