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**A study of the notion of medium through the  
philosophy of American metaphysician Wilfrid  
Sellars**

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Summary:

The chief aim of this thesis is mobilizing parts of the work of Wilfrid Sellars in order to reconsider the notion of medium in relation to the ones of language and thought and, per extension, conception and mind. Indeed, the account of the notion of medium is constructed as a generalization of the case of language, as described in its rapport with thought, in Sellarsian philosophy. The thesis tries to position the medium as a pivot point of articulation between epistemology and ontology, mostly by using as a blue-print the Sellarsian articulation of the two through the Manifest and Scientific Images.

We consider Sellars' project of accounting for the normative character of language independently from conception, with his dismissal of the instrumentalist-dualist reading of the relation between language and thought as well as the purely materialist reading of the same. We then introduce the notion of thought as inner mental episodes with a treatment of the methods of postulation and observation. This finally leads us to zeroing in on the notion of medium qua an extension of the notion of language as presented up to this point, taking move from the thesis that Johanna Seibt draws out of Sellars' work that language is the medium of conception rather than its expression.

Finally, we articulate three chief characteristics of the notion of medium: synthetic function, actuality and observational capacity, each referring to terminology introduced in the course of the thesis. In the process of introducing the three features, we also face three preoccupations underlying the research from the beginning: the question of translatability or specificity of a medium, the problem of communication and the notion of empirical truth. Especially this latter point will lead us to the sketching of a natural-history of mediums based on the notion of medium-series.

Works by Wilfrid Sellars cited with the year of publication and correspondent abbreviation as used for reference in the thesis.

Aristotelean philosophies of mind. 1949. APM

Language, rules and behavior. 1949. LRB

Empiricism and abstract entities. 1950. EAE

Inference and meaning. 1953. IM

Some reflections on language games. 1954. SRLG

Is there a synthetic a-priori? 1956. ITSA

Truth and correspondence 1961. TC

Abstract entities. 1963. AE

'Ought' and moral principles. 1966. OMP

Language as thought and communication. 1969. LTC

Actions and events. 1973. A&E

Reply to Marras. 1973. RM

Meaning as functional classification. 1974. MFC

The adverbial theory of the object of sensation. 1975. ATOS

Kant's transcendental idealism. 1976. KTI

Behaviorism, language and meaning. 1978. BLM

The role of the imagination in Kant's theory of experience. 1978. RIKTE

Foundations for a metaphysics of pure process: The Carus lectures of Wilfrid Sellars. 1981. FMPP - including 'The Lever of Archimedes' LA, 'Naturalism and Process' NP, 'Is Consciousness Physical?' ICP.

Sensa or sensings: Reflections on the ontology of perception. 1982. SS

Science, perception, reality. 1991. SPR

Science and metaphysics, variations of Kantian themes. 1992. SM

Naturalism and ontology. 1996. NAO

Empiricism and philosophy of mind. 1997. EPM

Kant and pre-kantian themes. 2002. KPKT



## Introduction

This thesis is an attempt at thinking through the notion of medium. What motivates the task is the simple intuition that, by reconfiguring this one concept, others may fall into place. The gesture is similar to composing a puzzle, where no piece finds its place, until when, and only exactly when, several others find their respective places. Clearly, this thesis, far from solving large portions of the riddle, only contributes some reflections that may be of use for further attempts at guessing at it. It focuses on a notion, the one of medium—a rather modest and relatively neglected concept at this point in time—from a specific point of view, and seeks to orientate it such that its possible connections to the neighbouring pieces of the puzzle may be smoother and easier to fit. There will be no final measure of success for this attempt in terms of whether or not it augments the explanatory powers of the concept of medium in relation to other concepts. The intuition will remain an intuition, it will not find its image, for to find that image would require that we unfold a complete conceptual map of reality. However, by the end of this thesis, I hope to have explained and argued for the plausibility of articulating the concept of medium in relation to those of language and thought—and, by extension, to those of conception and mind—by deploying part of the philosophical work of Wilfrid Sellars (1912-1989), and to have shown the main characteristics proper to the notion of medium, so considered. What will remain somewhat implicit, in other words, is the argument as to why this partially revised notion of medium is preferable over all others.

The notion of medium currently available to us is characterised by its apparent lack of conceptual unity, as it takes on diverging functions in the various contexts where it features. A few examples extrapolated from various theoretical domains can easily make the point. The medium may be a means of communication and a system of message transmission, within the domain of communication and information studies, which still fundamentally draws upon Claude Shannon's mathematical theory of communication (1948). In the art domain, the notion of medium is commonly referred to as that in which something is made, often referred to as 'material', and that, for as abstract as that very material can be, will inevitably come attached to an artistic canon, minimally speaking the history of that which has been created in the past. We

can take this to be the case across the board in the common way of speaking about medium-based art, conceptual and post-conceptual art. In the philosophical context of post-structuralist affiliation, the medium is conceived as middle term, that which is in between, the name of a relation or, in an attempted reconciliation with the theory of communication, the linking term upon which communication itself relies and is first engineered (Serres, cf. 1980). In neighbouring philosophical contexts, the notion of technique is treated as commensurable with the one of medium (Stiegler, cf. 1994). Indeed, due to the perceived historical neglect for *technê* and preference for *episteme* that has characterised Western philosophy, reclaiming the notion of technê/medium is taken to be akin to a radical move to be marked with its own specific name, media philosophy (Kramer, Stiegler, Fuller, etc.). In yet other contexts, usually grouped together as science and technology studies (STS), technology is not necessarily intended as communication technology, but rather aspires to a much broader conceptual domain, and, again, often appears to be aligned with the notion of medium (here we refer to STS as a broad category that groups together Latour, Stengers, Haraway, to name only the more famous thinkers). Here, technology is usually in continuity with the discourse on techniques, where technical and technological extend into one another, either because technology brings the theoretical dimension of technical skills of all sorts to the fore, and hence its connection to science, or because technology is framed as a novel type of technique, i.e., the application of science.<sup>1</sup> Clearly, STS has a critical approach to both implicit junctions of technology and science. It is easy to imagine various types of critique, spanning from highlighting the qualitative differences existing between techniques and technology to expressing concerns over modern epistemology *tout-court*. Either way, the point remains that the four concepts, technology, technique, theory and science, so arrayed or otherwise, are thought in relation to each other. In both contexts concerning techniques, STS and media philosophy, programmability has become a key character of the technological/technical apparatus, this being an alternative way of discussing the notion of medium, and pointing towards a form of autonomy, more or less conspicuous, depending on the author writing. Moreover, the notion of medium is increasingly linked to its recent digital character, even if digital inscription is only one

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<sup>1</sup> Agazzi offers a brief and clarifying discussion on the topic, cf. 'From Technique to Technology: the Role of Modern Science', 1998, retrieved from <https://scholar.lib.vt.edu/ejournals/SPT/v4n2/AGAZZI.html>

of the traits common to the objects over which the definition ranges. In this long list of definitions, we ought not to forget the notion of medium as media, a socio-cultural-political cross-breed that has been keeping scholars busy for the past six or seven decades, congealing into structural notions such as mass communication, public, audience, message, and information, this last one seemingly not in the mathematical sense, but in the sense of what is happening during a determined temporal interval in a putative community of any size, from city neighbourhoods to the galaxy. As such, the use of the term is almost inevitably confusing, and not necessarily because of its richness, but rather because it is employed as an implicit, yet hardly questioned, placeholder in the field of media and communication.

By virtue of this seeming lack of conceptual unity, a field such as media theory not only transcends disciplinary boundaries, but necessarily interfaces with existing disciplinary domains in order for its object of study to get the necessary traction. The notion of medium seems to have many faces—mass media, technique, technology, material, means of communication and transmission, relational link, intruder, pest, messenger with its various incarnations—and its theorisation departs each time from one of these faces and from there follows a specific path, not always easy to reconnect to the others that could have been equally followed. What seems to be missing, or perhaps partially present only in the media philosophical approach, is a discussion of medium qua medium vis-à-vis the whole of reality. For as much as this is true for a variety of other concepts, the risk we might nonetheless incur is of a deficit of conceptual necessity, or, minimally speaking, rigour. The various conceptions of the notion of medium gain formal unity thanks to their apparent relation with something else, against which they are defined and that would supposedly be what actually matters, unless the mattering is meant in a strictly literal sense, so that a certain form of literality has become the revenge of the medium. My suggestion here is that we take these broad-stroked and general reflections on the notion of medium from the more philosophical point of view in order to tell an apocryphal history of its revenge. In a certain style of theorising, we seem to have made a virtue out of the literal reading of each and every entity named a medium, but without asking what that literality bears upon or what it indexes. The semantic and philological analysis of terms (Galloway, cf. 2013), here, is paired with the study of a medium in terms of its supposedly more ‘physical’ features as done, for instance, in the trend of media archaeology: wired nets

of cables rather than the messages encoded or even the encoding digits, let alone the bureaucracy of internal communications. This is not necessarily a mistaken approach, but it becomes mistaken if we do not carefully account for the ways in which these three different levels—cables, codes, bureaucracy—can be differentiated and why it would be helpful to do so. If the difference among the three is clearly not qualitative in ontological terms, in which terms is it epistemological—after all cables, codes, bureaucracy are all concepts underpinned by specific outlooks on reality, all three easy to connect—and how can it be established? This is a question that the later stages of the thesis will come back to, although in different terms.

One notorious attempt, also inspired by post-structuralist philosophy, at thinking the notion of medium per se, comes from the domain of literature, and specifically German literature scholarship turned media theory. In this case, the medium with its instrumental quality, as also set up in Stiegler's introduction to the first volume of *Technics and Time*, re-joins language, suggesting a programmatic continuity between the two, precisely in order to appreciate the vast implications of the apparatus of mediation. In its original formulation, Frederick Kittler's suggestion for developing what will then become 'media philosophy' was, so-to-say, philosophically anti-philosophical, and insisted on the necessity of studying media rather than literature, or at best studying language but, indeed, only insofar as it can be considered as a medium. More recently, Sybille Kramer (2015), one of the possible heirs of Kittler's project, has suggested that we read questions concerning the medium in continuity with ones concerning language, and in fact that we parallel the 'medial turn' in cultural studies to the 'linguistic turn' in philosophy, precisely in order to shift the notion of medium from the peripheries of philosophical debates to its core (Kramer, 2015, 28). Kramer specifies how, on one side, the linguistic turn in philosophy was possible because language was no longer considered only as a medium, which was previously understood mostly as a means of transmission, and how, on the other side, the discourse on media has comparably shifted from the paradigm of transmission to the one of instrumentality and productivity (29). Clearly, this second joining of language and medium is quite different from the standard Kittlerian one, and if carefully explored could turn out to be even radically different, but if we take it at surface level we can appreciate similarities in principle. What is enticing about Kittler's programme is its being akin to a radical de-naturalisation of

language, showing the non-necessity of the apparatus shaping subjectivity and hence of subjectivity itself (Kittler's Foucauldian inspiration comes to mind). The subject is historical and forged, and there is nothing immutable or necessarily the case about it, and for this reason, one could argue its particular instantiations are dispensable. Grouping the diverse apparatus that whip the subject into shape under the notion of medium—bearing in mind the kinds of media that Kittler was looking at (gramophone, typewriter, film, and only later on computational means)—made an excellent case for this type of anti-naturalist argument. What is appealing about Kramer's proposal is its attempt at repositioning the notion of medium in continuity with philosophical debates, building on the already occurring debates on language.<sup>2</sup> The trait common to both Kittler and Kramer, although Kittler would have probably never put it in these terms, is the commitment to another kind of naturalism, or rather to the philosophical macro-project of naturalisation of the mind, whereby the notion of a one-world reality requires that nothing exists other than what is in *this* world, the one of immanent reality. One could think the late XX century interest in the notion of medium as being prompted, among other issues, by a shift from a paradigm of the necessity of so-called 'natural qualities' of the subject, to a different necessity proper to the media shaping the subject, but only because media are themselves part of nature, *this* one-world reality. Now, this tenet, inspiring though it is, could easily go astray if some clarifications are not in place. The road from the supposed natural qualities of the mind to the naturalisation of the mind, and then as we will see briefly in the closing part of this introduction, onward to a theory of nature in general, is open and even commendable, but all that is in between ought to be theorised and, albeit that there is no one-way to do it, much changes according to the path we take. As we will try to show, one way to move across what seem to be vastly distant domains is by grappling with the notion of medium. This is not due to the banal middle-function often attributed to mediums, but rather to the fact that the medium—properly conceived—articulates the junction between ontological and epistemological issues, located at the core of the operation of first criticising the natural (in the sense of eternally bound) character of the mind, and then of setting up a project of naturalisation, whose aim is

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<sup>2</sup> Kramer makes specific reference to Platonic philosophy to talk about the notion of medium in relation to appearance, although this treatment remains still under-developed in the available English translations of her work (2015, 30 ff).

the discovery of the fundamental structures of reality, to which the mind, just like everything else, belongs.

A first note then should be made about language itself. The claim that language is an immanent part of the world is not, in itself, committed to very much, yet, due to the rapport we may strike between language, thought and mind, it is often seen as holding the key to the naturalisation of the latter two. Precisely due to this rapport, a theory of language cannot reduce its object to the point of depreciating its complexities, flattening it on to the world. Put in terms that are commensurable with media theoretical discourse, a theory of language cannot turn into the promise of a simplistic formalism. The problem with this type of promise is that it clearly does not appreciate the legitimate productive implications of a language, as well as of a medium, but instead skims language down to some presumed so-called 'formal' or 'structural' backbone, the identification of which will have to comply to justifiable criteria, and only then appreciates its productive, if not at this point determining, function. Importantly, here, it is the relation between language and our epistemic access to the world, or to thought and mind for the more metaphysically inclined readers, that, I sustain, gives language its complexity—something that in itself is hard to reduce, as we will see, lest we give in to a quite implausible rendering of language—and not a putative notion of content or subject matter.

To further clarify the point at stake: the programme of the naturalisation of the mind always constitutes a self-reflexive fold in the study of reality, unless, that is, it gives into reductionism and, from there, to positivism. This is precisely because the desideratum of carrying out this programme in a non-reductive manner commits us to the appreciating that the mind—or, more generically speaking, the 'organon of thinking'—is what we conduct our programme of naturalisation *with*. To this we should add that, for this reason, we also need to be wary of any temptation to parallel the mind with the world, as though they mirrored each other.<sup>3</sup> In other words, when naturalising the mind, we cannot avoid taking epistemology on board with all that comes attached to it, chiefly the question of validity. Therefore, again, the complexity (rather than complicatedness<sup>4</sup>) of language is due to the fact that its special relation to

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<sup>3</sup> Ray Brassier makes this point very clearly in “Transcendental Logic and True Representings” (2016). After all, we would not ask any other part of the world to mirror another, so it would seem to be unreasonable to do that with the mind.

<sup>4</sup> In the framework of complexity theory, complexity marks a qualitative difference, while the common sense way of talking about complication only marks quantitative difference. The goal here

what we call thought and mind brings to the fore its epistemological function, something that is not necessary in the sense that it is not immutable. Language is not only that which is part of the world and produces other parts of the world, but is also that through which we interact with the world: a point, or rather a web, of access and, clearly, an obstacle of sorts that the naturalisation programme is trying to surmount, but will not simply short-circuit.

To the epistemically minded reader, weary of the potential drifts of materialism, much of this that I am writing may sound as mere good sense. However, it is still worthwhile to examine the existing ways to account for a full-blooded notion of language, and with it of medium, without recourse to anything that is not part of reality, precisely because the way of epistemology could easily reopen the door to all that we were trying to stave off. It is a good exercise of conceptual clarification to see what is necessary in order to account for, on the one hand, the limitations of knowledge (as well as its non-ontological aspects within a limited world), and, on the other hand, the potency of thought within a changing immanent reality. Ultimately, the term naturalist, nowadays, is not particularly informative either, and much boils down to the consistency of the system that we put into place to claim the title.

So, here are my propositions. The work of analytic philosopher Wilfrid Sellars—who has also increasingly been read in continental philosophy over the past decade or so—deals with similar conundrums, and tries to establish with precision the relation between language and thought, so as to articulate a notion of language, as well as of thought, that does justice to its sophistication, without falling into mentalism. My suggestion is that we follow Sellars' lead on this inquiry and see where it brings us, so as to then extend it to the notion of medium and see how also this latter notion, far from being a simplified language, a means of transmission, or an instrument, needs to be assessed in its full complexity in relation to thought and mind. Therefore, the study I propose, on the one hand, tries to extend the 'case' of language to that of medium, generalising the findings concerning language, a task that will occupy a large part of the thesis. The motto partially inspiring this part of the research inverts the Kittlerean suggestion to take language as a medium (1985) and tries to see, in their full extent, the consequences of truly considering all mediums as languages. On the

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is, then, to grasp the complexity of the epistemic level, recognising its non-necessity, but without attributing to it any ontological qualitative difference.

other hand, the generalisation from language to medium will still recognise a partial specificity to the language-medium as opposed to other mediums, hinging on the fact that language will be considered here as *the* medium of conception, that in which we can postulate the ‘existence’ of thoughts and through which we get to know them, to establish their validity. Hence, when considering the rapport between medium, thought and mind, we will acknowledge the fact that we must still go through the language-medium. The programme of study that we are setting forth wavers in between ‘medium *as* language’ and ‘medium *and* language’. It will thus follow a sort of arc, from medium to language and then from language to medium. The underpinning goal, as seen at the very beginning of the introduction, is to come out from the other side of our investigation with a general notion of medium, of which language will be a particular case, and to which we can ascribe specific characteristics. By the end, some of the references will make clear that the notion of medium here at stake is to be paralleled with the good-old Platonic one of *chora*, the material receptacle, through which the demiurge shapes the world according to unmovable ideas, as per the tale told by Timeaus in the pseudonymous dialogue. One of the implicit aspirations of this research is to reflect on how media apparatus shape modes of thinking and prosthetically extend our apprehension of reality into actions, but to do so from the perspective of human knowledge in the process of reality, rather than from the neurological point of view of wired brain circuits (excellent examples of the latter approach can be found in the work of N. Katherine Hayles, cf. 2012).

The project will unfold over three sections, subdivided in parts. The method marshalled in the first section is rather savage, and requires us to enter the house of Sellarsian philosophy and simply take what we need. The authorisation to do so comes from the fact that extensive and brilliant commentaries of Sellars’ work do exist and treat the topic from various interpretative angles: Johanna Seibt’s writing (1990) and the indispensable lecture transcriptions edited and published by Pedro Amaral’s Atascadero Press for the more metaphysically minded, James O’Shea (2007, 2016) and Robert Brandom (‘Study Guide’ in Sellars, 1997) respectively for the more behaviourist or pragmatist ones. To those we must add critical reviews by Jay Rosenberg (1998, 2007) and edited collections by C.F. Delaney, Michael J. Loux, Gary Gutting and W. David Solomon (1977). Seibt’s *Properties as Processes, a Synoptic Study of Wilfrid Sellars’ Nominalism* will work as a sort of study guide or

blue print to which we will go back every time a thorough Sellarsian explanation is needed. Indeed, Seibt describes in her work the entire arc of Sellars' philosophy, from the theory of language to the metaphysics, without pruning the latter and more interesting part, which is instead usually omitted by other well-known Sellarsians, i.e., Brandom, Richard Rorty (1980 and 'Introduction' in Sellars, 1997)<sup>5</sup>, John McDowell and Churchland. Moreover, Seibt's volume is published with the stamp of approval of Sellars himself, in the form of a very favourable introductory note.

In the first section, we will frame Sellars as responding to two interlocutors of his time, especially during the 1940s and 50s: formal behaviourism and sense-data empiricism. This framing is necessary, otherwise it would be difficult to understand why Sellars would so vehemently rage against things like the 'myth of the given', which we can take to be primarily a problem of mid-century American analytic philosophy. We will first look at Sellars' critique of the psychological behaviourist description of language, and will zero in on what it is about this theory that Sellars found appealing to the point of embracing it methodologically, while rejecting it philosophically. We will then begin to outline Sellars' response to behaviourism by looking at his nominalism, briefly showing how it differs from other nominalist positions, and identifying its main feature as its normative character. It will become clear that Sellars' programme entails a clarification of the relation between conception, thought and language, but beginning from language alone. Therefore, much of this section will grapple with the problem of having to account for normativity from the side of language, showing how it is possible that a norm takes hold of language users without requiring of them a knowledge of the correspondent meta-language, and without introducing notions related to conception, which would then surreptitiously underpin this meta-language. In order to do so, we will look to Sellars' theory of semantics, his functional-role model of semantic meaning and his writings on language acquisition. Here, we will begin to sharpen some Sellarsian tools, which will then be re-deployed in the second and third sections: his account of representation, explained in terms of representing and represented, and his analysis of experience, explained as *sensa* or sensation (non-conceptual) and epistemic experience. To round up the notion of experience, we will examine Sellars' attempted

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<sup>5</sup> Not incidentally, Rorty constitutes a huge influence in the contemporary field of pragmatist media philosophy, see the work by Thomas Sandebothe for an example.

reconciliation of the rationalist and empiricist traditions in his early writing on logic, and specifically the notions of the synthetic *a priori* and material inference. His defence of both concepts, with due modifications, will position him in an uncomfortable relation vis-à-vis both philosophical traditions, but will clarify his notions of experience, rule and the normative sphere. In the conclusion of this section, we will see precisely how this brief excursus in matters of logic connects to our discussion of the notion of medium, which will more explicitly take hold of the thesis from the second section onwards. However, it ought to be clear that this initial section sets the ground for what comes next by affirming Sellars' norms-infused nominalism as the key to a naturalism that is non-reductive, and that shows language to be the medium of conception.

Sellars being a Kantian philosopher, we can think of the first section as trying to show a re-configuration of questions that Sellars seems to ask of Kantian philosophy from within the context of mid-twentieth century Analytic academia. Sellars challenges the Kantian dualism of intuition and understanding and, as we will see (particularly in our closing excursus on matters of logic), insists that the relevant distinction is not the one between formal rules of logic and experience, with the latter construed as the subject or content of these rules. The relevant Kantian distinction is rather the one between real and transcendental levels, hence the necessity of a non-reductive programme for the naturalisation of the latter. Importantly, this section will show how the dismissal of the first distinction (the one between the form and content of experience) is necessary in order to overcome the regress possibly implicit in the concept of normativity—which is yet another classical Kantian problem, the relation between theoretical and practical reason—by inscribing norms and their acquisition in linguistic form within social activities. Here, Sellars will need to make clear the role of language vis-à-vis norms, without immediately falling into a more Hegelian/pragmatist model, and to reposition the notions of both meaning and experience. Once again, language will do a lot of work to account for conception and our task, from the medium side of things, will eventually be to reflect on the reasons why language *specifically* is the medium of conception, and what it means to recognise this.

If Section I is dedicated to accounting for normativity within language without appealing to notions related to conception, and therefore to reconsidering the rapport

between experience and language, Section II is focused on understanding the nature of linguistic episodes, and advances a crucial differentiation between the notion of act and the one of action, following which most linguistic episodes will be seen to fit the former rather than the latter category. Here, we will be setting up the idea of language as the medium of conception, as that through which the world appears to us, in order to then draw out a more developed notion of medium. To justify the necessity of a re-description of the medium, we will first show how the rapport between language and thought is neither dualist nor materialist, and we will instead describe the relationship as one of mediation. In order to do so, we will cover further Sellarsian territory, and look at ‘Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind’ in order to finally introduce the notion of thought, as well as the notions of Manifest and Scientific Images. As we will see, these conceptual gains contribute to setting up the rapport between language and thought in terms of two perspectives, one that holds epistemological authority (the Manifest Image) and the other one ontological authority (the Scientific one). The splitting of these two fields will give us some clarity as to the theoretical heart of the notion of medium, which we will try to zero in on during the last third of Section II, where we will advance what we consider to be the three prevalent characters of the medium: synthetic character, observational access, and actuality.

Finally, Section III will open with a review of the attributes of the medium introduced in Section II, in order to ground two discussions that appear to be inevitable when talking about the notion of medium: communication—a vastly and, we will argue, laudably understated aspect of language in Sellarsian philosophy—and empirical truth. The discussion of these two topics will lead the way towards our more speculative conclusion. We will examine the possibility that mediums other than language could be the fundamental one for our species. In this context, we will advance the idea of the possibility of multiple medium-series, each characterised by a first medium that functionally structures reality for other mediums to appear in it and to make appear other mediums, a position that is merely *in our case* occupied by language.

Before moving on with the actual ground work for our discussion, there is a little more to be said. If a doctoral thesis has to fit within the parameters of a genre of its own, the introduction at least can take license for a paragraph or two and spell out

up front, as clearly as possible at this point of the process of thinking, the forces secretly at work, the questions that matter and that, from far remote, have been guiding the research. Contrary to the impression we may have given so far, at the centre of it all stands the question of nature, and more specifically—with reference to the recent resurgence of interest in rationalist philosophies of nature—the trajectory that, descending from the late Platonic dialogues, crosses the history of Western philosophy at the junctions that go by the names of Spinoza, Schelling and the Romantic project of Naturphilosophie, Whitehead, Simondon and Deleuze, to mention only the most familiar intersections. The concern with nature fully participates to the re-opening of the metaphysical quest in Continental philosophy, intensified in the last years of the 2000s, and onwards. In this vast domain, one of the more immediately manifest questions pertains the possibility of a philosophy of nature that is not analogical. The latter would only be an anthropomorphic rendering or, to be more precise, if philosophy of nature, broadly speaking, takes nature to be *what is in itself*, then an analogical philosophy of nature will not suffice, precisely owing to the requirements that analogy, by definition, enforces. This is also to say that a philosophy of nature that is as ambitious as its name sounds ought to traverse the circle of epistemology without breaking it at any of its points, an enterprise the final horizon of which is necessarily unknown, and yet is easier to imagine than the starting point. Where to begin? The present choice of looking at the notion of medium, in connection with those of mind and thought, has little to do with an attempt at ‘beginning from the middle’, and more to do with the conviction that the medium happens to locate one of those points (since there may well be many other conceptual points), at which the knot between ontology and epistemology, the question of what is and the question of how do we know, is especially and perhaps deceptively tight. By exceptional tightness, one may end up meaning either that with the medium-knot the two separate threads, ontology and epistemology, become one, or that focusing on the medium makes it plausible to ask whether and how they were ever really separate. Is there a point at which they become separate and, regardless of that, why is this separation indispensable or, more simply, helpful, and are we to weave the two threads back together once the transversal cut, artificial or not, has been made? According to which pattern?

To say that one of the more immediate issues in the philosophy of nature is its rapport with epistemology may sound odd, or at least we need to acknowledge that this is a contemporary formulation of the problem, framed within a post-Kantian terminology. There may be other frameworks, more native to philosophies of nature, which would draw a line of continuity that crosses transcendental philosophy, linking what comes before Kant to what comes after him (and implicitly reconsidering Kantian philosophy itself through the *Opus Postumum*). In this context, the knot that I have described parallels, albeit with due caution, the set of issues concerning the binomial nature/ideas. Here, the contemporary linguistic use does not play on our favour, since not only the term ‘idea’, but also the term ‘nature’ may have become rather elusive. Nature is not meant here in the sense of what is ‘natural’, as unmovably and eternally necessary, nor is the notion of Idea specifically linked to human activities of mental projection or of representing reality. Indeed, if those were the respective meanings assigned to the two terms, there would be nothing natural about ideas. However, according to another way of reading the binomial nature/idea, in a one-world reality, ideas necessarily participate to nature, and we are faced with problematic questions such as those concerning the causality of ideas.

Speaking in between two philosophical apparatus in this manner may be confusing, and a quick way to qualify the contemporary context of philosophy of nature is to go straight to one of its recent protagonists. Iain Hamilton Grant dedicates a whole chapter of his *Philosophies of Nature after Schelling* (2006) to Schelling’s youthful writing on the *Timeaus*, Plato’s late dialogue on cosmology (non-incidentally, it is this dialogue that introduces the notion of *chora*). Grant’s volume is a study of Schelling’s philosophy through his early project of Naturphilosophie. Therefore, it breaks with much existing Schellingian commentary, by reclaiming Schelling as a naturalist and writing his name in the philosophical lineage of the naturalisation of the mind. In the chapter dedicated to the *Timeaus*, Grant raises the notion of a *physics of ideas*, offering a reading of Platonic philosophy as a *physics of the All* that counters the Aristotelian model of somaticism (Grant, 2006, 34). The *physics of ideas* is presented as a necessary project not only to the enterprise of overcoming Kantian correlationism, but also of affirming a one-world reality, in which ideas are also nature. Minimally speaking, a statement such as this last one, together with the plan of extending physical inquiry to ideas, complicates the

standard—that is, epistemologically-shaped— notion of nature. The key Schellingian critique of Kant’s conception of the transcendental is that the transcendental itself ought to be naturalised, whereby physical and metaphysical quests become hard to parse out from each other. Complicating a notion, however, cannot mean striking it out: the project of accounting for the way in which ideas participate in nature and, from that standpoint, advancing the line of the naturalisation of the mind as well as thought, cannot be naïve (constructing ideas in analogy to our perceived experience of thoughts), nor can it be reductive (a neuro-physics of ideas).

If writing about the medium counts as the first choice taken in this thesis, the considerations just offered may shed some light on the second choice taken, that of studying the work of Wilfrid Sellars. The motivation comes in the form of the plausible<sup>6</sup> suspicion that, albeit that nowhere in his writings does Sellars explicitly talk about a *physics of ideas*, something akin to it is to be found in there, as part of the stakes of the project. Starting from less controversial aspects of his philosophy: much of Sellars’ writing on the Manifest and Scientific Images and their inter-locked functioning can be read as a way of arraying the relationship between ontology and epistemology, by parcelling out responsibility over the two domains to two modes of looking at the world, the Scientific Image having ontological priority and, as we will see, holding to the methodological standard of postulation, and the Manifest Image having epistemological priority and holding to the standard of observation. Crucially for Sellars, these two modes of looking ought not to be flattened onto each other—we are neither with left nor with right Sellarsianism—nor are the two images antagonistic or competing: in fact, they have to *hang together*. This project ought not to effectively translate into a *pax augustea* between disciplinary domains reaching out to each other across temporary bridges, but should rather suggest the completion of a programme of knowledge, where concepts fall into place in a puzzle that bears no disciplinary label. In this, the metaphor of a stereoscopic vision should be taken literally—in the sense that all good metaphors should be—because no existing concept can make its meaning plainer than the expression already does: we look at the world through two eyes, but there is only one world to be looked at, and what we should see *is* one world.

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<sup>6</sup> At least two young scholars have attempted already the parallel between Sellars and Schellingian philosophy, Khemis, 2015 and Woodard, 2015.

Then, entering into a slightly more controversial area of Sellars' work, his dualist methodology is underpinned by a monist ontology, inspired by scientific realism, for which our explorations of the world will gradually converge towards one, unified theory, elucidating the structures of reality. In advance of this convergence, philosophy does not need to wait, and can already work on a metaphysics of processes, where the notion of process constitutes a minimal commitment to a fundamental unit of reality. In this context, the work of naturalising the mind takes a perilous Kantian path in the form of transcendental logic, only to then come back to an ontology of processes, with the help of a subtle distinction between the status of *appearing* and the one of appearance. This reference to appearance is, again, Platonic in character, but more specifically seems to point towards parallel notions, such as 'representing' and, more importantly, 'doing', which are not located in an individual subject and yet actualise the world reality that we are a part of. 'Thinking' will turn out to be one of these doings, ontologically instantiated by real processes that postulated entities may hold the place for. These postulated entities can be integrated in a realist rendering of the world if and only if the scientific explanation that is usually given of them in a 'thing-like' model is transposed into a framework that monistically sees every entity as an 'event-like absolute process' (Rosenberg, 1998). This being our concern, we can also ask 'what are ideas, after all, if not the *appearing* of appearance that never itself appears?'<sup>7</sup> And, via this rhetorical question, we can trace our way back to the proposition for a *physics of ideas*, which will, of necessity, be undistinguishable from a metaphysics of ideas, a non-disciplinary enterprise that, whatever its shape, will have to be cunning and sophisticated and run across all existing domains of knowing.

Before we set off on the path proposed, we shall sketch a few points to signpost the main discursive areas we intend to influence and what we would like to contribute to them with and to clarify the philosophical choices we have operated.

We have hinted already at the fact that the project of media philosophy remains insufficient from our point of view. We have yet to clarify where, we believe, it lacks. To elucidate this point, we can consider the case of media archaeology, one of the more popular contemporary manifestations of media philosophy, and some of its related methodologies,

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<sup>7</sup> This quote is to be attributed to Brassier (Brassen Meeting, taken place in July 2017 at the Performing Arts Forum, St-Erme, France), who in past interviews has declared his interest in Grant's project of a physics of ideas (Grant, 2006, 45). The link between this quote and Grant's work that I propose here was not suggested by the context from which Brassier's words are taken. All I am trying to suggest is an affinity of intents that has yet to concretise into real alliance.

which are taken up also by scholars who would not necessarily subscribe to this trend. Indeed, what connotes an archaeological method is the ‘excavating’ character of the practice that grounds the attempt at a historical reconstruction and not only said reconstruction. In the context of media studies, we find a Foucault-influenced, ‘excavating’ mode of writing about the notion of medium and mediation appears to pivot around notions of concreteness and materiality. We study electric wiring and the transmission posts bridging the distance between one stock market and the one further to the West to comprehend the working of contemporary finance (Mackenzie, 2018), or we observe the physiology of luminescent sea-organisms to talk about the concept of light (Zielinski, 2006), or the singularities of software platforms to show how certain social phenomena take place (Fuller 2005, Goriunova 2012). In this research, we do not intend to criticize the very intuition that said descriptions are indispensable to grasp what happens in the world, we only wish to problematize the reasons behind their necessity. If, when describing a phenomenon, we choose to describe the genealogy or development of what we would usually describe as the medium of that phenomenon rather than anything else, we ought to explain why and to appeal to the medium’s apparent materiality or concreteness is not enough, unless we find a satisfactory account of these two descriptors. Without this account, nothing would be barred from being a medium. Also this latter eventuality is not, in itself, an issue. The problem is conceptual and the aim here is avoiding the levelling of the explanatory power of the concept at stake.

One of the goals of this thesis is the identification of specific aspects capable of explaining why a certain something is *evidently* the medium of something else and not the other way around. How do we speak of this evident fact and, perhaps more importantly, how do we account for it being evident? In the last segment of the second section and in the third section of this thesis, we will isolate three key aspects: synthetic character, observational access and actuality. The reasoning leading up to these concepts begins by considering a duplicity inherent to the notion of medium. A medium is both a part of reality and a part of reality through which we relate to other parts of reality. This is to say, as mentioned above, that any question concerning a medium entails an ontological and an epistemological dimension. We have stated already that this duplicity of questions elects the notion of medium as a pivot point to understand the relation between epistemological and ontological domains. Now we can say that, in turn, a clear articulation of ontology and epistemology is crucial to understanding what value to give to the notion of medium. Reasoning through Sellarsian philosophy, we will come to state that neither a purely materialist approach nor a dualist one (which, as we will see, can

only constitute an instrumentalist understanding of the notion of medium) will be able to comprehend the rapport between a medium and what it mediates because the two approaches cross the distinction between epistemological and ontological domains unevenly, risking to lead us to a disregard of ontology, at best, and its conflation with epistemology, at worst.

As already suggested, in Section II we will try to position the notion of medium half-way between materialism and dualism. The latter is clearly untenable from the ontological perspective, i.e. a medium is not a medium because there exists a correspondent ontological category. As we will try to show also the former, the materialist, approach to mediation falls short. While the fact that the epistemological rapport medium/mediated can only be described in materialist terms shall never invite a conflation of the merely epistemological with a possible ontological aspect of the rapport, we shall maintain precisely the possible character of the latter. This means that, if we do adopt an epistemological materialist position, we should also leave the door open for the existence of an ontological determination of sort, which is in no way straightforwardly deduced or even minimally related to the epistemologically connoting one. In this way, we can maintain that there is an ontological necessity to the relation between two specific parts of one-world reality, but this necessity operates at a level that is autonomous and not linearly linked to any epistemological rapport, which informs in its entirety our conceptual access to the world. We argue that the door left open to this ontological necessity, not to be confounded with any relation of appearance, constitutes a metaphysical option. In the last instance, it is because we can warrant the necessity of a non-directly graspable ontological rapport between two entities of our one-world reality, that we can not only narrate the genealogy of a process of mediation, but guarantee the possibility of ‘verifying’ (although at best *we* will be able only to disproof) the tale. What we are calling for, then, is a return to metaphysics in the field that, historically, seems to have more decidedly rejected it, media philosophy.

Further from this point and considering all that we said in terms of the need for a return to a thorough and non-analogic philosophy of nature, it is legitimate to ask why, if the commitment to metaphysics is thus strong, not electing a self-declared philosopher of nature as our theoretical guide? Indeed, in the course of the research, the work of Schelling did take a central stage for a significant portion of time. However, two shortcomings, which then turned out to be related as well as characterizing of the Schellingian programme for Naturphilosophie and of any potential use of it in the present project, became apparent. First of all, there is no real articulation of the notion of medium in Schelling’s canonical nature-philosophical work –

if one wanted to work on this very notion via Schelling, the better source would likely be the later lessons on myth. This being the case, a reconsideration of the concept of medium in the seams of Schelling's work on philosophy of nature demands an exegesis of the latter as pre-requirement. The issue is not simply the length that this process may take, but that, if the intended research is on the notion of medium, then any Schellingian methodology would be far too undercooked to be used, if not vastly reworked. It would be one of those cases in which the tools are far too odd for the task at hand, increasing the chances of going amiss. The second misgiving, vis-à-vis our project, was the fact that Schelling's Naturephilosophie lacks a robust epistemological articulation, not to say that it exists in open contempt of Kantian epistemology.

As we insist, the notion of medium is and ought to remain chiefly epistemological, but with the distinct capacity to interface with ontological questions and so link the dots that may draw a complete image of reality. It is through this path that we can re-appraise the role of metaphysics, since the discipline of physics is not presently sufficient to achieve said image, and that we can argue for its necessity. In terms of any relation of the present project with Schellingian philosophy, we can affirm a strong sympathy, but no more than that, since the need for an epistemological framing of the issue of the medium renders his work risky to adopt.

If we care to specify 'why no, Schelling', it is all the more relevant to ask 'why Sellars', since Sellars may be equally unsuitable. The former is too alien to the epistemological language we will need to speak, but the latter and the more common readings of his work may collide with our metaphysical intentions. Precisely this intention has led us to take up Seibt's reading of Sellars, as opposed to Brandom's, Rorty's or O'Shea's. Seibt treats Sellars' metaphysics as the core of his project by showing its logical necessity within Sellarsian philosophy. A quote from Seibt that we will reference at different points in the course of this thesis shows how Sellars aims at producing a philosophical purview that is systemic by necessity. The theory of language and the treatment of language acquisition will solve the incongruences of a purely quantificational nominalism, but will generate other issues that, first, the epistemology and then the processual ontology will have solve. Therefore, by taking this position, we join the ones who read Sellars first and foremost as a metaphysician, due to reasons internal to his philosophy. To emphasise Sellars' work only within the remits of epistemology and neo-pragmatism risks providing an incomplete image or at best an image that is instrumental to the philosophies of its readers. It certainly oversees, also in terms of the temporal development of Sellars' philosophy, how the germs of metaphysics were present in his work since the mid-1950s and definitely from 'Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind'.

Therefore, if it is true that our encounter with Sellars is profoundly indebted to his recent adoption within continental philosophy (Brassier, Wolfendale, Negarestani, Wilkins, Gironi), we remain sceptical with regards to the means of this uptake, which has often sided with Brandom and positioned Sellars within a rather conventional Kantian territory.

The points we have just made on our theoretical affiliation are therefore further indicators of two perspectives that we hold dear. The first one is that a thorough reconsideration of the notion of medium, while contributing to an articulation of the link between the ontological and the epistemological domains, is a preliminary task to a contemporary quest into philosophy of nature. The second perspective considers a version of Kantian philosophy as necessary to carry out this work, although a Kantian philosophy that overcomes the simple dichotomy that opposes Kant to metaphysics tout-court.

As a last point, for as much as our research has found in Sellars a more amenable ground to re-consider the notion of medium, the reconsideration itself is our contribution, since neither Sellars nor Seibt ever develop the topic. To be clear, Seibt does use the notion of medium in one of the 15 maxims that she draws out of Sellarsian philosophy—to be precise, maxim number five: *Language is not the expression but the medium of our conceptualization* (Seibt, 119). As mentioned already, this statement will work as a lynch-pin to position the notion of medium in a territory altogether different from the more common materialist and dualist approaches. The necessary conceptual work to appreciate the import of the notion of medium in Seibt's maxim and in general is a contribution proper to this thesis, although with a conviction that Seibt's use of the term is not a happenstance only incidentally benefiting our project. The use of the term is necessary to differentiate a specific relation between conception, thought and language, which could not be named otherwise. A medium will not be a material nor a tool nor an entity ontologically determining of that which it 'simply' mediates and does not so-to-say produce. To clarify these distinctions, we will also identify possible misgivings present in Seibt's discussion of the materialist approach, mostly meant by Seibt as a synonym for identity theory. We will show how this imprecision, if amended by considering the materialist approach as a purely epistemic position (rather than an ontological hypothesis, such as the one of the identity between mind and brain), returns to us a better appreciation of materialism, a clarification of Seibt's discussion on Sellars and a powerful reading of Sellars' work on the two images as well as of the notion of medium.

Finally, as we mentioned already, the general principle we will follow is the one of a generalization, from the case of the language-medium to the notion of medium in general. First,

we will try to understand what does it mean to say that language is the medium of conception, in terms of the relations between language, thought and conception, and within a framework that repositions the epistemic and ontological domains, along the lines of the rapport between scientific and manifest images. Then, we will show how this case can be extended and contribute to a notion of medium at large. This work will lead us to the notion of medium series. The latter constitutes an attempt at accounting for the evolutionary dimension of our epistemic domain and hence opens up to the possibility of a conceptual sphere appearing in mediums other than language, except that, in those cases, precisely due to the notion of medium that we will have put forward, it will be hard to describe said sphere as ‘conceptual’ in any meaningful sense of the term. The idea of medium series will only be introduced in conclusion to this thesis. It will work as a preliminary to further studies of the process of mediation and the question of appearance that sees language as the chief medium, currently leading the medium series that our species has evolved with and therefore making appear, within our episteme, other mediums and other mediums and other mediums, providing us a specific appreciation of reality. This, however, does not bar the fact that other mediums could be heading other medium series which, through alternative paths of mediation, may be leading other kinds of subjects to other appreciations, more or less relevant to reality.

We will come to all this in due course and clarify the seemingly idiosyncratic points mentioned in this introduction. For now, we will begin from more pedestrian problems, as dealt with in stuffier debates over language and behaviour, and taking place in the context of mid-twentieth century American academia.

## **Section I**

### **1.1 Introduction: Sellars’ critique of behaviourist psychology**

One way to read Sellars’ work is in response to the philosophical currents prevalent in the analytic context during the 1940s and 1950s. Among those, we find sense-data empiricism and behaviourist psychology, which, though originally a psychological theory, had a profound influence on philosophy as well. I will quickly look at the relation between the latter and Sellars, in order to set up the problem of language in Sellars’ work and introduce his take on nominalism.

Logical behaviourism of the classical type, now long outmoded, constituted one of analytic philosophy’s first solutions to the body-mind problem, and counted among its chief proponents Gilbert Ryle and Rudolph Carnap (c.f. Crawford, 2013).

The main tenets of behaviourism were countered and largely overcome by the 1960s, mostly to be replaced by another of analytic philosophy's solutions to the mind-body problem, identity theory, which—albeit vast in its spectrum—is generally summarised as the hypothesis of identity between mind and brain (see Searle, 2004). The ways in which identity is thematised vary quite radically, and do not exclude metaphysical readings of the problem. A note of interest for our inquiry is that Herbert Feigl, a long term collaborator of Sellars'—for instance, they collaborated on *Readings in Philosophical Analysis* (Feigl & Sellars, 1949) and worked together as founding editors of the journal *Philosophical Studies*—is recognised as one of the main identity theorists. Clearly, the point here is not to rehash the debate around behaviourism in order to once again list its pitfalls, but rather to locate Sellars' position and introduce the elements of his thought that, in the latter part of our discussion, will contribute to our considerations on the notion of medium.

Sellars appreciated the incredible revolution brought about by behaviourism and recognised its methodological value, however, from the get go, he deemed the behaviourist project to be incomplete. The spirit of the analytic programme is empiricist at its core and one can easily see the naturalistic tendency implied there, as well as comprehend the galvanising stir that behaviourism may have provoked within it. What Sellars points out is that, if methodological behaviourism can lead the way in the naturalisation of the mind, philosophical behaviourism ('Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind', EPM, 98-102) risks going too quickly and bypassing the epistemological knot altogether.

Without entering into the details of its various formulations, a behaviouristic approach argues that we should deduce one's cognitive processes by looking at her behaviour, the conditioned responses to environmental inputs. In more familiar and perhaps trivialising communication-theory terms, behaviourism holds that we can black box the mind, inside which nothing special is to be found, and consider only the signals, for instance the noise sounds and the graphic signs, going into the subject and the ones coming out as consequences.

Sellars re-reads early-days behaviourism in a late paper, written at the end of the 1970s, the first section of which shows the insights of behaviourism, its more sophisticated formulation, what of the theory Sellars finds agreeable, and the point at which instead things went astray. Sellars frames behaviourism mostly as a

methodological choice, one that did not exclude so-called substantive commitments to naturalism and even physicalism, but that was mostly characterised by conviction about a specific scientific method proper to psychology ('Behaviourism, Language and Meaning', BLM).<sup>8</sup> The latter recognised that each and every individual has privileged access to their own psychological states, but insisted that that access was mostly confused and unreliable. It further insisted that this form of introspection was 'a *conceptual* response to psychological states and the concepts included in this response [were] common sense psychological concepts' (BLM, para. 9), which had no proper scientific role and were potentially circular.

A canonical example of the inadequacy of the common sense psychological framework was the one of language acquisition in children—something that Sellars himself will have to account for, for his critique of the excesses of behaviourism to stand on its own feet. Behaviourism rightly pointed out that, in the common sense psychological framework—Sellars goes on to explain in the same paper—the child ends up being expected to already operate with concepts and logical forms in order to learn the language. Happy to add just as many concepts as would seem to be needed, for the common sense psychologist, 'the acquiring of a language is [usually] explained by postulating un-acquired (innate) languages-like structures' (BLM, para.18). This may even go without saying for an innatist—anyone who supports the idea that fundamental conceptual structures are innate—but certainly not for a behaviourist, whose programme is based precisely on the attempt at avoiding any form of mentalism. In many respects, one could read this as one of Ryle's main observations: language acquisition cannot be based on the classical epistemological view of the acquisition of abstract norms. Therefore, what was good about behaviourism, according to Sellars, was its attempt at being economical with concepts, the 'binding principle [of not simply borrowing] from the framework of introspective knowledge' (BLM, para. 25). What, instead, was undesirable was the *a priori* limitation over 'the kinds of concepts to be introduced into psychological theory' (BLM, para. 25) and the

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<sup>8</sup>At this point in the same paper (para.5), Sellars also argues that the behaviourist defence of the original contribution of psychology to the empirical sciences was correct in claiming that a method necessarily frames the concepts in use in a given discipline and that, for this reason, one should refrain from a rushed unification of the sciences that does not take into consideration their methodological peculiarities, these often being what chiefly distinguished the sciences in the first place. For as much as this claim is commendable, one of the implicit intuitions of this thesis is that there is a possibility of, if not exactly *unifying* different scientific methodologies, at least showing how the discontinuity of methods is not impassable, once we consider them as languages differently arrayed according to their capacity for functional articulation.

drift that this restriction led behaviourism to. Indeed, this conceptual restriction, Sellars argues, had led behaviourism to take cases where introspection is usually considered as unlikely or, to remain as unassuming as possible, undocumented by humans, for instance the case of animal learning, and treat them as exemplar. The mode of explanation of animal behaviour was and still is based on stimulus-response-reinforce theory, and the hope was that, if one could explain animal behaviour via external observations of responses, then this could work in the case of humans, starting from the ones who still cannot really use language, children, all the way up to explaining language itself. According to Sellars, this faith placed on external observation, the descriptiveness of behaviourism, was mistaken. Moreover, in terms of historical developments, the excessive *a priori* restriction on the types of concepts one can introduce, limiting them to observational entities, eventually became implausible in comparison with other scientific disciplines, i.e., physics (BLM, para. 24). Indeed, a good portion of this thesis will be devoted to trying to show the plausibility of postulating certain non-observational entities.

Sellars had already explicitly argued against the excesses of behaviourism in 'Language, Rules and Behaviour' (LRB), a paper written in 1949 and published in 1951 in a collection of essays on the work of pragmatist philosopher John Dewey, who would become increasingly important in Sellars' work in the 1960s and 1970s, when Sellars devoted to Dewey the series of lectures collected in *Naturalism and Ontology* (NAO). In LRB, Sellars introduces the issue in terms of the opposition between what he calls the 'descriptivist' approach and the rationalist tradition, and tries to detect a third way of sorts. The rationalist tradition sees 'concepts and problems relating to validity, truth and obligation [as] significant, but not [belonging] to the empirical sciences', and hence it admits the existence of a non-empirical domain of qualities (LRB, para. 2). The descriptivist stance, instead, entails that no non-empirical objects or qualities of any type exist. Hence, either the aforementioned concepts and problems fall within the remits of empirical sciences, or otherwise they are only pseudo-problems, pseudo-concepts (LRB, para. 2). Against both options, Sellars' third way 'assert[s] the existence of concepts and problems which do not belong to empirical science, without admitting the existence of a domain of non-empirical objects or qualities together with a mental apparatus of acts and intuitions for cognising them' (LRB, para. 2). In other words, the 'descriptivist' approach of the

empirical sciences is insufficient, if not reductive, and we ought to find a different way to explain the behaviour of sapient beings, while still denying any exceptional ontological status to thought and mind, which would compromise our commitment to naturalisation. Therefore, we can begin by spelling out two key considerations: first of all, if, in search of an alternative option, we argue against the limitations of behaviourism, the critique cannot simply hinge on the latter's empirical simplifications, lest we indict behaviourism of doing only what it promises to do, but it can be phrased in terms of language and the fact that, if we adhere to the behaviourist method of explanation, the picture of language that we obtain is ultimately implausible. This is what Sellars tries to do in LRB. The second consideration is that, as it will become clearer in the course of the thesis, for Sellars to map his syncretic solution, he will have to show a sort of asynchrony between the domain of the empirical domain, the only existing one, and the empirical sciences. The above quote from LRB that summarises the Sellarsian alternative to descriptivism or rationalism means that we cannot take the domain of the empirical to be comprehensively treated by the sciences that supposedly bear its name. This is a simple consideration, and yet it cuts deep in terms of the disciplinary position of philosophy vis-à-vis the empirical sciences.

Sellars' argument in LRB boils down to behaviouristic psychology's lack of an account of the way in which we establish criteria of correctness and validity in language and linguistic expressions: how do we decide that a certain linguistic expression is a sound judgement? (LRB, para. 8). The reductionism typical of behaviouristic psychology, equipped solely with descriptions of tied responses (or conditioned behaviour) to the environment, cannot account for the 'non-tied' symbolic activities, as Sellars differentiates them, which we clearly display. Said activities are a result of the holistic and general character proper to language, and broadly speaking of all the extra-referential—that is, not referring to the empirical reality we intake as a psychological fact—components of inference. Sellars could cut this short and state that psychology does not account for the Kantian synthetic *a priori* (LBR, para. 10), however, given the third way option that Sellars is trying to marshal, more many specifications will need to be in place before developing this strategy.

Being more specific on the question of linguistic expressions, language happens to be both a fantastically complex stream of noises that we learn to associate

with concrete entities in the environment, according to the inputs we receive, *and* the system of rules that turns those same noises into symbols, that is words. Clearly, the question is how to coherently explain the meaningfulness of the latter aspect without resorting to anything transcendent. Let us quote at length a central paragraph from LRB, which already states the twist that the implication of rules brings to language. This passage includes, *in nuce*, some of Sellars' core ideas:

In the first place, we must distinguish between action which merely *conforms to* a rule, and action which occurs *because of* a rule. A rule isn't functioning as a rule unless it is in some sense internal to action. Otherwise it is a mere generalization. Thus, if I train an animal to sit up when I snap my fingers, the animal's behavior conforms to the generalization 'This animal sits up when my fingers snap,' but we should scarcely say that the animal acts on the rule of sitting up when I snap my fingers. Clearly the type of activity which is rule-regulated is of a higher level than that which is produced by simple animal learning procedures. One way of bringing this out is to say that most if not all animal behavior is tied to the environment in a way in which much characteristically human behavior is not. Certainly, we learn habits of response to our environment in a way which is essentially identical with that in which the dog learns to sit up when I snap my fingers. And certainly these learned habits of response—though modifiable by rule-regulated symbol activity—remain the basic tie between all the complex rule-regulated symbol behavior which is the human mind in action, and the environment in which the individual lives and acts. Yet above the foundation of man's learned responses to environmental stimuli—let us call this his *tied behavior*—there towers a superstructure of more or less developed systems of rule-regulated symbol activity which constitutes man's intellectual vision. (LRB, para. 22)<sup>9</sup>

The simple point is that the noise 'blue', to keep on referencing Sellars, is what we learn to utter when seeing objects of a certain colour, in a way not entirely dissimilar from a dog learning to respond to the noise 'bone'. However, 'blue', for sapient beings, is also a function within a structure, bound by coordinated rules, and it is in virtue of the fact that the grapheme or sound 'blue' is a mediating point between noise-to-respond-to-accordingly and function-to-calculate that we define it as a word (LRB, para. 28). The more significant point is that the two guises of the same term mesh in a specific manner that will become relevant for understanding in which sense a rule is *internal* to action, rather than simply being drawn out *a posteriori* or enforced *a priori*,

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<sup>9</sup> Here we can signal the use of two notions of 'action', which will become critically differentiated in the course of Section II. The difference that we will try to strike between act and action will shed some light on the normative force of rules, the power thanks to which a rule is active in the world rather than being enforced as a God-given command.

and how this comes to be the case. This internal character of rules, we will see, is hardly reconcilable with a behaviouristic approach. A few paragraphs later, Sellars writes:

The noise "blue" becomes a mediating link between what can suggestively be called a rule-regulated calculus, and a cluster of conditioned responses which binds us to our environment. Here we should note that the rules which inter-relate these mediating symbols qua linguistic symbols **must mesh** with the inter-relationships of these symbols qua tied symbols in the causal structure of tied sign behavior. (LRB, para. 22, my emphasis)

Language has a Janus-faced character, two profiles welded together, Sellars insists. The systemic aspect accounts for non-tied, symbolic rules, which we use to establish validity within each and every language of expression. These rules are nothing but what makes each language into a holistic system of representation, *from within which* we grasp the outside environment, and that carries with it a function of *a priority*, not in the banal sense that it is a temporally *prior* representational apparatus, but in the sense that the coordinated acquisition of rules relies on it being in place (hence why they cannot be straightforwardly empirical), that is, according to Sellars at this point, its being meshed with the causal structure of tied environmental responses. This latter condition does not entail at all that we naturally connect with the environment, as that would be to fall into what Sellars will later call the Myth of the Given (we do not have immediate access to reality, otherwise we would be always 'right') but, in fact, it simply entails that our tied responses are to be epistemologically appraised just as much as their meshed, rule-bound counter-parts are. Once again: epistemology—with all of its conceptual issues, and chiefly the one of the *a priori* quality of concepts, with their apparent 'temporally ambiguous' relation to action—is in fact ineliminable, and cannot be worked around, we can only work through it.

Sellars' version<sup>10</sup> of nominalism orientates his overall attempt at meshing tied and non-tied responses and constitutes the starting point for solving the conundrum of language. It remains compatible with the behaviourist approach, for it denies that meaning is an abstract entity. However, it does all this by injecting nominalism with normativity, something which will require a lot of work to explain.

Before looking at Sellars' nominalist approach, we can think of the problem

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<sup>10</sup> The main sources of explanation for Sellarsian nominalism will be, from now on, Seibt (1990).

of language, and the relation therein between tied and non-tied responses, in terms of the discourse on media and mediation, so as to not lose sight of the various threads we are trying to hold together. Moreover, the latter discursive domain, the various theorisations of media and the medium, developed in direct proximity to behaviourism. Indeed, many cyberneticians (Friedrich Wiener and Nicholas Negroponti, for instance) were self-declared behaviourists and cybernetics, which is still one of the main reference points for theorists interested in mediation, fed into and off of the theory of psychological behaviourism. A simple way to re-situate the issue is to think of language as a system, and then to ask whether it reasons in terms of signal or symbol. To mobilise the work of Sellars for a theory of the medium means to highlight the fact, *per se* banal, that if mediums are material tools of mediation, then the question of the holistic and *a priori* character of representational systems—their formal component, for lack of better terminology at the moment, the rules that they are organized with and their meshing with the behavioural patterns through which we respond to reality—necessarily returns every time that a medium is produced, worked with, utilised or analyzed. To mobilise Sellars' work thus also means trying to understand in detail how these symbolic systems operate, what makes them characterising in the first place, how it is that symbols and signals are 'meshed' together, admitting that the verb chosen, 'to mesh', is not the most suitable, since it presumes their initial independence. In more crude terms, Sellars forces us to insert the ineliminable 'mind function', with all of its problematic baggage, back into the medium, giving us the chance to speculate again on what a medium does and can be. Indeed, if Sellars' version of nominalism delivers on its promises, if it reduces abstract entities without eliminating their meta-level function from language, and returns to us a viable epistemology that, through the naturalist project, contributes to seeking the connections between the reality of the world and the accuracy of what we can state about it, then we can seriously re-appraise the medium in relation to knowledge as something that strives to achieve what is true. This could constitute an actual critique of representation, not in the sense that the concept of representation is disavowed, but in the sense that representations can be critically appraised.

With regards to what we have crudely defined as the re-inscription of the mind in the medium, the programme initially intended to orientate this thesis was that for a naturalisation of mediums, for which the project of the naturalisation of the mind was

to supply a blueprint. There is one gain, easily-explainable and not entirely banal, to be achieved with this programme: again crudely put, while media and mediation act as vectors and instantiations of ideology, it is unclear at exactly which points said instantiations occur, or how to trace their genesis in a medium. Therefore, it may be worth clarifying what actually belongs to the order of causes<sup>11</sup> and what does not, what can be naturalised and what can and must be challenged. This supposed gain leads us to questions over the durability of such clarification, which will have to be revisable, lest we forget again about epistemology. The other, possibly more theoretically interesting, stake of the naturalisation of mediums is the general re-evaluation of the rapport between medium and mediation, through the co-ordinated efforts of a Scientific and a Manifest Image of medium, a-la-Sellars. Clearly, mediation and medium are names of concepts with a fully conceptual dimension, completely enmeshed in our use and production of media themselves, which are in turn increasingly intertwined with perception (which, in this thesis, is itself fundamentally conceptual) and other capacities often taken to be inherent to sapient beings. Thus, no eliminativist approach will do, if what we want to explain are not merely the tools that we normally call 'media', but also the characteristics and functions that make them extensions of the concept 'medium'. Having realised that a mind-function is entailed in each and every medium, as it will become clear by the end of the thesis, the project of the naturalisation of the medium lost its specificity, since the crucial point of tension in this second kind of naturalisation would, again, be the naturalisation of the mind. However, I suggest we keep this original proposition at the back of our minds, if only as a pointer for the general direction towards which we are moving.

## **1.2 Non-naïve and not simply quantificational nominalism and non-relational semantics**

Sellars' argument that to explain non-tied symbolic activities in language, and hence make full sense of linguistic behaviour, we need to recur to talking about what 'ought to be' rather than what 'is' (which is to say that we need to talk about the notion of norm), is implanted in his version of nominalism.

Once again, nominalism has a lengthy history, and covers a plethora of

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<sup>11</sup> We are aware that the notion of 'cause' at play here is under-determined and could raise questions, for it develops from within an epistemological context in which its differentiation from the concept of 'norm' is not straightforward. We will say more about this in the course of Sections II and III.

different articulations and traditions usually bracketed into two—historically connected—macro-groups, medieval nominalism and modern nominalism. Commonly speaking, the first is referred to the attempt at explaining universal concepts (Boethius, Duns Scotus, Henry de Ghent), while the second one has the chief goal of reducing abstract entities to general names (Berkeley, Hume and J.S. Mill and onward to contemporary versions). It is fair to say that, in Sellars, the two tasks are not distinct. Sellars seems to be trying to explain how something might operate as a universal concept, notwithstanding the fact that only concrete particulars exist, where this latter conviction is probably the more concise way to summarise the position of strict nominalism in its modern form.<sup>12</sup> Importantly, Sellars’ nominalism is not simply quantificational (Seibt, 12), and requires the formulation of a novel theory of non-relational semantics (or, rather, novel at the time when it was formulated), which deploys the notion of a functional role-model to complement its claims. For this reason, we will treat the two, nominalism and role-model semantics, in continuity with each other. To be clear, when saying that Sellars’ nominalism is not simply quantificational, we are again borrowing from Seibt, wherein quantificational nominalism simply refers to ‘quantificational logic with quantificational restrictions’ (*Ibid*).

First of all, what do we mean by abstract entities or what aspects typical of the abstractness of abstract entities, writes Sellars in the pseudonymous paper (Abstract Entities, AE, 629), render them implausible and requires reduction? In her book on Sellars’ work, Seibt phrases the problem of nominalism in terms of conceptual economy, in a way aligned with what we have rehearsed concerning behaviourist psychology. A nominalist sees no reason for using terms that refer to either singular or general entities that are not concrete. Obviously, concreteness is easily misplaced, and the notion should not be abused. In fact, much of this thesis implicitly attempts to qualify the term: what is it for something to be ‘concrete’, or to be more concrete than something else? Banally speaking, if the notion of ‘chair’ is already conceptually infused, as we will eventually see that it is, then we certainly must be wary when

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<sup>12</sup> Before introducing Sellars’ nominalism, Seibt offers a brilliant treatment of alternative nominalist options recurrent in modern philosophy, including the one of particularism, which is an incomplete form of nominalism committed to both abstract and concrete particulars (Seibt, 16 and 30-36). From this standpoint, she is capable of describing Sellarsian nominalism as not merely quantificational in character. In the same treatment she rehearses also Carnap’s theory, which Sellars responds to in the paper ‘Empiricism and Abstract Entities’ (1950).

talking about its supposed concreteness. As we will show, the notion of observation, and its distinction from postulation, will somewhat re-orientate the distinction between abstract and concrete, making a plausible, if constantly *in fieri*, differentiation appear between the two notions. Yet, there is a very non-committal sense, for which we can say that a chair is quite concrete rather than abstract and, for the moment, this differentiation is limited to the fact that the names of universals, qualities, kinds, relations and propositions (Seibt, 30) are *not* tangible and are literally just names, which do not refer to anything the existence of which, if admitted, would have some other, abstract form of existence. Now, if language is our site of research, meaning if language becomes the ground from which we can explain cognitive activity, this conceptual economy immediately poses a problem: what can the *meaning* of words, the sounds in the air and graphemes on the page, possibly be?<sup>13</sup> The chair may even exist, but in which sense does the meaning ‘chair’ exist? According to a quite conventional nominalist strategy, any sentence that contains abstract terms should be dissolved, or rather reduced to one that contains only concrete singular terms, without altering the meaning of the sentence overall (Seibt, 32). To clarify her explanation, Seibt lists a number of examples, all showing that the ‘troubling’ entities are usually the ones identifying a commonality between two non-identical objects, for instance, in the cases of ‘redness’ or ‘triangularity’. The Platonist realist is ready to eventually concede that something such as ‘redness’ has to exist, even in a minimal sense, otherwise how could we explain general conceptual representations, present across different linguistic and cultural communities? Seibt goes on to explain Sellars’ response and how it differs from more mainstream, that is to say quantificational, options (32): first, he tries to turn talk of abstract entities into talk of type-expressions (sounds and graphemes), preserving the layered character of language as organised in

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<sup>13</sup> I have just remarked on the fact that Sellars’ nominalism comes hand in hand with his non-relational theory of semantics. However, by that I did not mean that the latter being non-relational is sufficient for an efficient nominalism. Indeed, both relational and non-relational theories of semantics can easily run into the problem of abstract entities. A relational theory attributes a rather problematic one-to-one relation between word and object in the world. A non-relational theory recognises language as a system of representation through which we access reality: our concepts are already a way to partition up reality, which may not have anything to do with what reality is. In this second case, which is clearly prevalent in contemporary philosophy and affirmed by Sellars, as much as in the first one, meaning could still be an abstract entity attributed to words and concepts, which would be seen as gaining their general character precisely through this abstraction. All this to say that embracing a non-relational theory of semantic meaning does not by default solve the problem of abstract entities: we first need to make a nominalist choice. It is for this reason that the explanation provided here begins with Sellars’ nominalism, rather than with his theory of semantic meaning.

meta-levels, and then distributes these types, now seen as *normatively* operative within their specific system of representation, across concrete singular terms. We will see precisely how these steps operate in the next sub-section. For the moment, we want to register that Sellars argues that, differently from the translation of sentences containing abstract terms into sentences containing only singular concrete terms,<sup>14</sup> the desired reduction of an abstract term can be performed only *contextually* to the language in use, and that any attempt at a one-step reduction from a class to all of its concrete members will not suffice. Seibt cites a very useful quote from AE:

Both the idea that qualities, relations, kinds, and classes are not reducible to manys, and the idea that they are reducible to their instances or members are guilty of something analogous to the naturalistic fallacy. (AE, 236, Seibt, 36)

We can recognise the Platonist option in the first position and the naïve nominalist option in the second one, while the naturalistic fallacy—that both positions fall into from their respective sides—refers to any reductionist naturalism that eventually requires that we assume an immediate access of the mind to the world. Once again, what Sellars suggests is a third-way that de-ontologises abstract entities, but acknowledges the workings of the normative force that contextually organises their role within the system of a language.<sup>15</sup>

Now, Sellars' attempt remains exposed to at least three lines of questioning, if not criticisms, which are already quite predictable if we consider what was said when discussing behaviourism. The first one is whether the notions of norm and normativity (with the historico-philosophical baggage that they carry) are really the only appropriate ones to identify whatever it is that is ineliminable about language, what it is that is needed to reckon with the layered structure of non-tied symbols that language, as the model of our cognition as well as our conceptual capacities, is taken to be. The second question is even more daunting, and concerns whether any normative aspect can legitimately participate to a nominalist and naturalist project. Does normativity not require the existence of at least one abstract entity at some point

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<sup>14</sup> The example offered is how the expression “Red is a colour” can be translated in this manner, going through a number of options the first one of which is simply “Each red object is a coloured object.” (Seibt, 32/3)

<sup>15</sup> Here we can easily spot the analogy with the other Sellarsian third way we indicated in our introduction, that between rationalism and descriptivism. As we will see in Section II, to de-ontologise abstract entities will not necessarily entail that we deny the existence of thoughts. In fact, much of the Sellarsian project hinges on the possibility of separating the two tasks.

down the line, which we could call similarity or analogy, in order for the language users to be able to follow the norm?<sup>16</sup> The third question serves mostly to spell out problems entailed in the previous two: as we will see, within Sellars' nominalism, language will turn out to be constituted by norms, but for a norm to work as such it needs to be *intentionally* followed. Now, does this not confront us, minimally speaking, with a possible regress of a type all too similar to what behaviourism had already detected in the common framework of psychological explanation of language acquisition?

The answers to these queries are to be found in Sellars' systemic philosophy, borrowing Seibt's words again, not from one specific part, but from the whole contraption, where each segment of Sellars' work seems to solve one problem and move along a remainder. Within Sellars' philosophy of language, the nominalism and the role-model semantics will produce a picture of language that reduces abstract entities, but entails a form of normativity; the epistemology will then try to deal with the question of normativity, but eventually pose a question concerning the status of thoughts. This latter riddle will require an ontological intervention, in response to which Sellars will adopt the notion of process, as the sole conceivable option for his metaphysics (Seibt, 135).

We begin from here not only because we are following Seibt's lead, which orders the arc of Sellars' philosophical activities beginning with his nominalism. The nominalist enterprise as recapitulated above echoes the preliminary note we made on behaviourism, and would seem to easily line up with our introductory observations on the rapport between language and thought, as well as the project implied therein for the naturalisation of the mind. However, we should be careful about such lining up at this stage in our discussion. Clearly, we are not yet talking about thought or mind. Those will come into play later, while discussing language, but in an orthogonal position with respect to the discussion. The order of the argument matters in the sense that, for it to be sound and not surreptitiously assume notions related to the conceptual sphere, we ought to begin with language and only with language, momentarily assuming a purely materialist position, which we will mitigate later on. Otherwise, the risk would be to discuss a notion of language in which we would eventually be able

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<sup>16</sup> This would have been Bertrand Russell's critique (Seibt, 56). As we will see, what the Sellarsian system will require is not an abstract entity corresponding to analogy, but the postulation of thoughts as un-observable entities.

to locate the one of thought only because we had silently planted it in there from the beginning.<sup>17</sup>

### **1.2.a A summary of Sellars' nominalism and functional role-model theory of semantics**

I will keep the description of the argumentative steps brief, for they may sound banal outside of the specialised context of philosophy of language, where specific exemplar cases require a painful amount of argumentation and finally pay off in novel disputes and advances in a field different from the one in which this thesis is positioned. I will take care to highlight the more interesting and, non-incidentally, intertwined aspects: the introduction of normativity in linguistic expressions and the holistic character of systems of representation, both of which are then framed within a strictly non-relational theory of semantics.

The argument begins by focussing on words that supposedly constitute abstract terms with a singular referent, and that, although not matched with singular concrete instances, could be taken as singular terms with distributive reference. Seibt uses the example of the name of an animal species: the term 'lion' could be seen as a singular abstract term, as it does not refer to any concrete singular item. However, we can easily apply it to all cases in which it is considered 'appropriate' to utter the term 'lion'. Sellars' considerations are somewhat elementary and yet crucial: this alternative option is viable only because there exists a criteria for application of the utterance 'lion', and all instances satisfying this criteria are the ones across which we can distribute the term (Seibt, 37). As anticipated, much of the argument for a role-model semantics hinges on the fact that the role of concrete distributive terms, taken as practically indispensable for language to function, requires a normative stance, and criteria-enforcing norms are clearly not drawn *a posteriori*. Otherwise, we would have an account in which the normative force of a criteria-enforcing norm such as 'use the word 'lion' to refer to lion-like-things' is only drawn from a case-by-case survey of every possible instance in which we would use the word 'lion', a position that would not only be non-sensical, but ultimately circular, not to mention that it commits us to an infinite task in order to understand the most everyday uses of singular terms.

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<sup>17</sup> We will come back to this in the following sub-sections, and when discussing the accusation of instrumentalism addressed to Sellars by Marras.

Therefore, what seemed to be a singular abstract term is now a distributive singular term that we associate with plural manifestations of the same concreteness, that is all of the instances in which we would use that type expression. The point that we want to make is that the singular terms with distributive reference are distributed, so to say, prior to their empirical use. If we momentarily bracket the introduction of the normative aspect, this procedure is easy enough, and highlights the meta-level involved in linguistic expressions. However, it does not help with terms that clearly cannot refer to anything concrete, such as ‘triangularity’, ‘redness’, or ‘natural kind’. Why would we ever even use these terms? Indeed, although the term ‘lion’ is to be distributed across all of its instances of use, one very clear instance of it is when pointing at something that we agreed upon naming ‘lion’ in the world. In other words, we may have settled on 'lion' but not on 'lionness'.

To address these other cases, Sellars moves to the inter-linguistic level and makes the example of translation sentences, in which the foreign language translation of a type expression of an abstract entity, for instance the Italian 'tipo', is said to stand for the English term that supposedly names the abstract entity, in this case, ‘kind’. Now, for the nominalist, ‘tipo’ is just a sound and a grapheme, and, using a translation manual, it can be equated with the correspondent grapheme in yet another language, including the ones that are unknown to us, such that our capacity to keep track of the translation will eventually be lost. This loss of tracking capacity is illuminating in itself. What we carry across from English to Italian, from ‘kind’ to ‘tipo’, is the average, practical use of the former term within the known, English, language. We are not merely matching visual and aural inputs across two idioms, we are matching their common use.

Clearly, this is already what we do when translating from language to language and we only need to make it explicit: we usually match the use of a term in a language of our knowledge with an unknown grapheme and sound. '•kind•' means “‘tipo’” testifies to the fact that the *use* of a term in a known language is transposed into another language via a different sound and grapheme, which only then becomes itself a known term. Having acknowledged this, we can understand terms with known uses as type expressions that distributively refer to their tokens, i.e., all of those instances that satisfy the criteria of application of •kind•. We do not need the abstract entity ‘meaning of kind’, we just need to know how to use the term ‘kind’ in an English

speaking community. In the Sellarsian notation, we simply need to know •kind• as a dot-quoted term, something constant or at least comparable across all of the languages that have a correspondent grapheme/sound and use it in that same way in each respective language. Therefore, to use Seibt's terminology, •kind• is a metalinguistic illustrative function sortal: it classifies concrete objects, the graphemes/sounds of different languages, as entities that share the same function within different contexts (Seibt, 41). With another example, 'triangular' is a term, and its semantic connotation is the make up of its function within the English language. In other words, it does not need to exist as an eternal shape. As Seibt summarises: 'the linguistic function of 'abstract' singular terms (...) appears in the Sellarsian analysis as a *distributive* reference to something *interlinguistic*, to expressions of different languages with the same function.' (Seibt, 42)

There are quite a few aspects to take note of here. Sellars' argument, seen in its general traits, addresses, first, the question of the holistic generality of language, and explains it through the existence of norms understood as *a priori* criteria of applicability. These are holistically coordinated within each and every language, *intra-linguistically*. The alternative would be to reduce a term directly to all of its concrete manifestations, something which is not only inconvenient but also impossible. Then the argument demonstrates that when it comes to classical abstract terms, such as universal forms, we can understand them as operating in an analogous manner *among* languages, *inter-linguistically*. This is perfectly in line with non-relational theories: semantics is not a matter of language to world relations, semantic meaning is assigned solely intra- and inter-linguistically, on the basis of the functional role of a term within a language or across multiple languages. The meaning of an expression is solely constituted by its function within a holistic representational system. It is only within the holistic apparatus that a language is, that a term has meaning, and 'nowhere' else. This is also to say that the meaning of a term has little to do with its extension, in the more traditional sense. Or rather, its extension is the totality of its instances of use according to certain criteria. 'Lion' is a concrete phoneme and sound, which we use in certain circumstances, its functional role for the language is all there is to its meaning, which clearly does not exclude (and in fact explicitly includes) that we utter 'lion' also when we point towards a specific animal. This is also to say that the first case explained by Seibt, the one of 'lion' or other

concrete distributive terms, is weaved (to maintain the textile metaphor, since before we said meshed) into the second case, the one of 'type'. What matters for the moment is to recognise, first, that the double life of words, as already presented in the introduction, is encompassed in the functional role of the term, signified here by the dot-quoted term. Second, the arbitrary connection that we develop the habit of making between the word 'red', for example, and the colour of a certain red object, does not signal *in and of itself* that the latter, the visual input, is the meaning of the former, the word.

As it will become clear, after we have introduced notions pertaining the conceptual sphere, the tied response to the visual input 'red' will be demarcated from the conceptual meaning of the word (c.f. Sellars' paper 'Is There a Synthetic A-Priori?', ITSA). At best, we can say that the word 'red' 'invokes' a certain colour that we see when looking at something or towards somewhere, in specific standard conditions (Inference and Meaning, IM, 334/5). The relational aspect, albeit slim, that we could have taken Sellars to attribute to semantic meaning, at least according to the quotes from LRB in our introduction, is surely part of the definition of the notion of meaning (IM, Ibid., ITSA), but not in a manner that coincides with the conceptual dimension of language. What we would call the conceptual dimension is held up by the normative element, which is not to say that it is the normative element itself: it is based on the functional-role of each and every term. It is fundamentally contextual and not extensional. Inverting the order of reasoning, this is equivalent to saying that the normativity that Sellars injects into the nominalist reduction of language brings back to the fore discussions concerning the conceptual sphere (something that empirical psychology risks sacrificing or suspending any significant assessment of), with its relation to action, experience and particulars. However, to say this at this very point is only a way to acknowledge what the issues at stake are, and how Sellars is trying to work out his third way around them. The problem of normativity that Sellars' nominalism leaves us with is the one usually solved by invoking conception and thinking. There is a clear linkage between normativity and conception. Yet, as already hinted at in our discussion of early-days behaviourism, for Sellars' argument against logical behaviourism to work, we cannot jump the gun and sneak in notions related to conception in order to explain the workings of the functional role-model semantics. To explain the latter, we will have to account for the more immediate paradoxes that

the normativity entailed in Sellars' nominalism brings to the surface, before introducing any notions concerning thought or conception. This will require that we work with speech episodes rather than with mental episodes, the relationship between which we will begin to look at in this section, but will not settle on a plausible account of until Section II.

With regards to the non-relational character of Sellars' semantics, as Seibt rushes to clarify, this does not mean that, for Sellars, language and the world are not related to each other, but only that their relation is not a matter of semantics or philosophy of language proper. As we will see, the language-world relation is a fundamental, *epistemological* relation, while, within philosophy of language and according to the functional-role model, the notion of truth only corresponds to what can be said within a linguistic system. Writing about models of knowledge, Sellars insists that neither the model based on the picture of an elephant resting on a tortoise nor the one based on the great Hegelian serpent will do (EPM, 78-9). However, Sellars' philosophical project is implicitly based on the borrowing and integration of elements from these two models. We can take the theory of language to be the snake-shaped part of Sellars' work.

Proceeding from this aspect concerning non-relationality, we find, as a second one, the fact that the functional-role model effectively articulates the notions of 'to mean' and 'to refer to' as particular cases of the copula 'to be'. This is an issue of central importance that surfaces at different points in Sellars' work, including in explicit discussions of representation, because, as transposed from the theory of language, the verb 'to represent' (when more explicitly talking about thought and conception) will also be equated with a special case of the copula (see for reference ch. III and IV in SM). As it will become increasingly clear, this is another way for Sellars to affirm that concepts are not abstracted from objects in any classical sense of abstraction. In this respect, Locke's conceptualist empiricism, with its related theory of concept formation, occupies the position of the villain in Sellars' narrative of pre-Kantian philosophy (see KPKT, 215-226).

As a further aspect, it is worth taking note of the fact that most linguistic formulations, most sentences one would normally utter, convey their functional-role, the use, of each of their terms, or of sets of terms in a block, rather than stating it. The usefulness of this distinction will mature in the next sub-sections when talking about

language acquisition. For the moment, we shall clarify that, for Sellars, in language there are statements that *assert* information, for instance the meaning of a term, its use, and statements which instead *convey* this information. In a relatively early paper, “Is There a Synthetic A-priori?” (ITSA), which we will look at more closely before the end of this section, Sellars insists that no amount of explicating of a statement conveying information will turn it into a statement asserting *that same information*. A conveying statement holds information in an implicit mode and any unpacking of it will always withhold some necessary information. An asserting statement, instead, shows information explicitly, which still does not mean that it furnishes its terms with values that relationally tie them to extra-linguistic entities. The importance of conveying statements as not expressing a 'what' of meaning but a 'how' of use reflects the non-relational and non-foundational character of Sellars' theory of semantics.

Now, still proceeding from the first aspect, we can finally flesh out the issue of normativity and its possible incompatibility with nominalism. Do we not have to introduce the implicit universal of resemblance in order to recognise similarities and follow the norms of a term? following the norm of use? (Seibt, 56) How else would the normative injunction work? The circularity that our argument risks, as seen above, is embedded in the circularity of normativity itself in the context of the theory of language. The circular reasoning of the argument goes more or less this way: we introduce normativity to explain non-tied, symbolic activities in language and in order to be able to talk about validity, hence we obtain a bit more than merely analysable structures of cognition and call into play what we would properly name conception, but this seems to require something other than mere speech episodes. Indeed, if for a norm to actually work as a norm—that is, for it to be the motivating reason for a behaviour—one needs to *intentionally* follow it, to recognise it and apply it, insofar as intentionality is clearly related to conception, are we not getting ahead of ourselves and relying on the same presuppositions that behaviourism was originally introduced to avoid? What would it even mean to have knowledge of what a norm is without violating our commitment to avoid introducing reference to some domain of abstract or mental entities in order to shore up this concept? Or, borrowing from Seibt, again, for clarity:

How, then, is it possible to circumvent the regresses which are apparently implied by the assumption that speakers intentionally follow a rule, and yet

describe language as a phenomenon constituted by rules? How can one explain that we have intentions, convictions etc., without giving up nominalist principles, i.e., postulating mental episodes whose ontological status is quite different from speech episodes? (Seibt, 112)

Now, if we could say that one does not need to *know* a norm and follow it *intentionally* for the norm to be at work, our argument would no longer be circular, but we could still fall into some theoretical muddle with respect to the establishment of norms vis-à-vis language, how it is that a norm comes about as a norm. However, if we managed to explain this regress and this muddle, we should be in the clear. This appears to be the way that Sellars takes and that we will try to piece together. We need to first explore the knot of normativity and the non-transcendent ‘provenance’ (for lack of a better term) of norms. For that, we will need to look at the learning and use of terms within ‘embodied’ patterns. As we are about to see, to avoid the regress of constituting/intentionally followed rules, Sellars shows how rules can be valid only if they are already embedded in the social fabric where they do, trivially speaking, make sense of reality. Therefore, we should not comprehend norms simply in terms of abstract rules that govern a language, but as existing activities that already set up the context in which a language user comes to use the terms of her language, that is in which she comes to give them non-relational meaning. It is within this context that, first of all, the notion of experience is necessarily repositioned and, second, that we will have to reflect upon the notion of activity in relation to linguistic episodes: in which sense are linguistic episodes activities? To be clear, I am using the term activity in the most neutral way possible here, as opposed to act and action, which I will use with more specificity, where action will turn out to be based on conscious decision making. We could take activity to simply and neutrally mean doing.

Not to lose ourselves among the terms that we are accumulating, we should make explicit some preliminary distinctions, before we proceed with our task. The distinctions to make at this point are the ones among dot-quoted terms, rule and behaviour. The latter is more a method than a subject matter: behaviour is each and every activity that an observer can detect in another individual from the outside, as a putative response to environmental stimuli. By rule, we mean a sentence, a linguistic output, that states an ‘ought to’ (or in negative formulation ‘ought not to’), an activity that in certain circumstances ought to be the case. The dot-quoted term, the Sellarsian invention, instead, is what encompasses all possible uses of a term in each and every

circumstance of use. This includes also all of those cases, that are not ‘in use’ but that could be, meaning those cases that could be feasible as according to the current norms of use. The dot-quoted term is an imaginary container of sorts, the size and dimensions of which are unknown, and that we could hardly imagine any amount of rule formulations would saturate. Indeed, although Sellars does not really state it in so many words, the notions of rule and dot-quoted term cannot really be considered as commensurable, as they entail two different kinds of relations among language, meaning and behaviour.

Concerning the discussion on the notion of dot-quoted terms, an aspect that we ought to note, and which we will further develop in the course of the thesis, is that Sellars' notion of meaning pivots on the existence of multiple languages. This has consequences for the use of the notion of analogy and, all the more importantly, for the possibility of translating notions and concepts across languages or, more generally speaking, mediums. The question of the translatability and specificity of a medium will come back in the course of Sections II and III, but we can already anticipate that Sellars may be flipping the problem onto its head: it is *because* something is translatable that we attribute meaning to it. It is because a form of analogy between two terms has been recognised that we talk about their *meaning*, and not necessarily because a fundamental, universal *concept* stands at the centre of two systems. Clearly, this proposition will be further complicated by the kind of naturalist commitments that Sellars holds to the eventual postulation of entities, among which are thoughts, and to the impassionate search for real, fundamental structures of reality. However, whatever these fundamental structures will turn out to be, we can exclude the possibility of them being linguistic meanings. The fact that meaning relies on translatability says more about the make up of our perceptual apparatus than about what fundamentally exists, it says more about the way we go about finding what the structures of reality are, than what reality is.

Finally, and in continuity with this last point, we shall try to hold together the threads we are following, among which is the notion of medium. We can already anticipate that the present task is to look at language with the ultimate goal of showing how the characters of intentionality and meaningfulness, usually attributed to conception and thought, can be accounted for with language alone. To bring our point home, we have to see how the normative component of language—that is, the

imparted norms of use of linguistic terms—does not require a knowledge of concepts in order for norms to be at work, just as much as we will need to see in *which* way this normative component is present *in* language, at work *in* it. This also contributes to an account of validity, or at least it begins to explain why and how we say that a certain terminological use is valid, although perhaps it does not explain the full picture. As we saw with reference to Seibt (135), Sellars may be able to solve a particular aspect of the problem of validity with his theory of language, namely the role of norms in regulating the use of terms, but other crucial aspects are deferred to further epistemological and metaphysical discussions.<sup>18</sup> In the overarching context of this thesis, to show that intentionality and meaningfulness come from the side of language means to recognise that there exist characteristics of a given medium, in our case language, which, *once the medium mediates something*, become manifested and are imported onto what is being mediated. In this, we ought to bear in mind that our example of a medium, language, is a very particular one, precisely because it mediates our conception of the whole of reality and because we literally cannot envision the world without intentionality and meaningfulness. However, the attempt at extending the case of language to the broader one of mediums in general is a way to question the indispensability of intentionality and meaningfulness, and to ask whether other characteristics, proper to different mediums, would do a different job. The answer to this question is somewhat predictable: even if the response were 'yes', we would still only *know* these characteristics through language, for the medium of our conception is also a matter of our evolutionary path, something which may change, but has yet to do so.

As a final comment, to attribute intentionality and meaningfulness (and, as we will see later, predication) to language rather than to thought and conception can also be seen as part and parcel of the Sellarsian perspective according to which, as Seibt explains, uniformity of rule following is *only* reflected in uniformity of behaviour (Seibt, 188). Using the notion of medium more explicitly, one of the reasons why there is no linear transmission from the level of rule, or non-tied response, to the one of behaviour, or tied response—and *vice versa*, hence preserving an autonomy of the conceptual sphere—is because these two levels are mediated and engendered by

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<sup>18</sup> Indeed, in the closing section of SM, Sellars sees the necessity to solve a fundamental knot that remains pending in his work, how do we go from 'what is' to what 'ought to be', cf. Seibt, 240.

slightly different mediums. More than language goes into making behaviour appear, albeit that language may seem enough to describe behaviour. Tied response and non-tied response are meshed together and not linearly matched.

### 1.3 Language acquisition and experience

I suggest we study the treatment of normativity and its putative regress starting from Sellars' work on language acquisition. Far from constructing a scientific theory, which would have required more profound reference to existing research on child development, Sellars offered a philosophical reconstruction—a likely story—of what seems to be happening when we learn a language. This reconstruction—although explicit future refutations from scientific domains may require its revision—is presented through various examples and across a host of different papers by Sellars. That is to say, it is not really presented as a theory of language development *per se*, but only as a plausible way to explain how normativity is a part of language, without circularly appealing to conception. In this sense, Sellars is taking stock of behaviourist insights, but is also sticking to the mandate of philosophy and to the observational tools that it provides. It is not philosophy's job to experimentally show with precision what happens when a child learns how to speak. It *is* its job to explain normativity in a way that does not contradict, but, in fact, is compatible with the findings of experimental psychology. After all, Sellars' case is not so dissimilar from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's treatment of phantom-limb disorders in *The Phenomenology of Perception* (1962). The philosophical issue at stake there was not the specific nervous wiring that causes a World War One veteran to hallucinate an amputated arm or foot, but rather the rapport between first and third person perceptions of the self, where the self is a notion that experimental psychology can hardly account for in its non-nervous-wiry character, the character through which it has relevance in our common socialites. Interestingly enough, what Sellars would end up saying in terms of introspection is somewhat similar to what Merleau-Ponty says, and there is at least anecdotal proof of Sellars' knowledge and respect for Merleau-Ponty's version of phenomenology.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> The unconfirmed anecdote is that one of the reasons for Sellars' departure from Yale was institutional opposition to the English translation of *Phenomenology of Perception*. For a more serious study of the relations between Sellars' and Merleau-Ponty's philosophies, C.B. Sachs has offered interesting insights.

Looking at language acquisition in Sellars will require some ground work, starting from the notion of experience, or, as we will see, the double-notion of experience. Once again, much of Sellars' project is an attempt at reconciling the rationalist and the empiricist programmes. I would sustain that it is precisely the bipartisanship of Sellars' work and his attempt at keeping his feet on two grounds that prompts what is, in fact, a quite sophisticated notion of experience.

### **1.3.a Experience #1 and introduction of the logic of *-ing* and *-ed***

Sellars appears to have two notions of experience (see also Seibt, 122). This sub-section will concern the first one: conditioned experience, in which a certain physical input comes to be associated with a certain word, a sound and a grapheme. In order to explain the coordinated matching of physical inputs with words at the level of tied behaviour, and without for all this embracing a relational semantics, Sellars postulates the existence of *sensa*. These are non-conceptual, ontologically relevant, non-intentional sensory items that match with the sense-data we supposedly receive from the environment, and allow us to hypothesise that the shift from one sense-data to the next is somewhat reflected in the shift from one *sensa* to another (Rosenberg, 'Ontological Perspectives', 1998, para. 6). Each shift is then associated with a sound/grapheme, an association that we acquire through patterns of behaviour.

For the moment, it is important to stress that, physically existing in themselves, *sensa* are ontologically relevant. Sellars often refers to them as 'states', where a state is differentiated from a doing and from a particular (Delaney et al., 1997, 1-43 and 105-127). A person looking at a red square is in a specific state, that is the state of red-square-sensing—we will later come back to this expression, and appreciate how complex it actually is, by connecting it with Sellars' adverbial theory of the object of sensation, and by noticing the differences between saying that someone is in a state of 'red-square-sensing' and saying that someone is in a state of 'red-sensing' plus 'square-sensing'. As a further point, *sensa* are one of the entities postulated by Sellars and are, at first, not observable. Finally, it is worthy stressing the fact that *sensa* assure the consistency of our portrayal of and interactions with reality. Once a *sensa* is linked up to a perceiving, through which this *sensa* is then conceptually articulated, the link cannot be contradicted by linking the same perceiving to an entirely different state. If the state I am in when the electromagnetic waves that correspond to blue hit my retina

is, through behavioural patterns, associated with the perception of blue, then if a second behavioural pattern tries to associate it with the perception of red, I would receive conflicting messages, from which I would eventually grasp, in further stages, that the pattern of acquisition is in fact not pointing me towards blue *or* red, but rather towards *something else* that is common to those two sensations.

While the paper 'Sensa and Sensing' (SS) is the standard Sellarsian reference when talking about *sensa*, some trace of the same topic is to be found in other texts, and special mention goes to the first two chapters of *Science and Metaphysics* (SM, 1992, lectures originally collected in 1967). There, Sellars argues against what he considers to be an imprecision of Kant's: the insufficient distinction made between what is conceptual and what is not. Sellars draws this latter point from Kant's description of intuition as non-conceptual, whereas in Sellars' account intuition is conceptual and aligns with the normative aspect of cognition, although, clearly, an intuiting is not a judging. This remark, far from holding that nothing is non-conceptual—indeed *sensa*, as physical states, are not conceptual—is there to refine a distinction that Kant, according to Sellars, blurs over, the one between *representing* and *represented*. The difference between what exists physically, *simpliciter*, and what exists in the conceptual sphere is, still according to Sellars, better articulated if we also differentiate the notion of representation into *representing* and *represented*. Once this second distinction is in place, we can reckon with a four-fold classification. There are: non-representings *qua* existing *simpliciter*, representings *qua* existing *simpliciter*, represented non-representings *qua* represented and represented representings *qua* represented (c.f. SM, 39 and Brassier, 'Transcendental Logic and True Representings', 2016, para. 4). This is to say that the classification is based on the intersection of two axes, each interpolating a distinction: transcendental and real levels and *representing* and *represented*. Non-representings *simpliciter* are particulars in the world. Representings *simpliciter* are representings in the world, they are particulars with the capacity to represent other particulars (we will clarify this point in just a few paragraphs). Then there are represented non-representings, which are particulars for the way they exist *in* representings. Finally, there are represented representings, that is representings for the way they exist *in* representings. The first two groups partake to the real level, the second two to the transcendental or epistemic or formal level. The second and fourth group have the capacity to represent, that is to carry out 'doings'

like representing and to be in specific states, the first and the third one do not.

Following this schema, the sensing inputs described just above would be non-conceptual representings, which exist 'between the physical impact of the sensory stimulus and the conceptual representations [...] which find verbal expression, actually or potentially, in perceptual statements' (SM, 22). Our learning of terms and consequent building of cognitive structures, as well as the adequacy of our relating to the world outside of us, is due to the existence of combined, but somewhat autonomous, modes of that relating. '[T]he impressions of receptivity [our sense impressions] [...] guide minds, endowed with the conceptual framework [that Kant] takes us to have, to form the conceptual representations we do of individual physical objects and events in space and time.' (SM, 34) As Sellars continues in a quite clarifying passage:

[...] on a certain occasion, we come to have an intuitive conceptual representation that this green square adjoins that red square, we do so by virtue of having a complex of non-conceptual representations which, although non-spatial and without colour, have characteristics which are the counterpart of square, red, green and adjoining, and make them such as to account for the fact that we have this conceptual representation rather than that of there being a purple pentagon above and orange ellipse. (*Ibid.*)

All this to score a few important points and make some clarifications. First, rather banal but always useful as a core to come back to, there exists a non-conceptual sphere, which the conceptual sphere ought to coordinate with as we apprehend how to use terms. This process, minimally speaking, steadily leads to the establishment of an apparatus of cognition that is ordered in sets of norms. Second, this non-conceptual sphere is not itself in seamless continuity with the world outside: our impressions of something blue are not themselves blue (SM, 23).

The other more general point that we should record has to do with the notion of representation itself, and here specifically of representing, which, going by Sellars, is not necessarily transcendent and simply marks that in which entities exist as represented, that is, not *simpliciter*, not in themselves. Sellars' four-fold classification in SM comes after a discussion of the model of contained/container that the notion of representation was classically—in Cartesian philosophy, for instance—associated with. In many ways, Sellars disavows this model, but here he brings it up to remind

the reader that the Kantian notion of the thing existing in itself is introduced in contrast with the one of 'existing *as represented*, i.e., existing 'in' a representing' (SM, 39), another aspect the exploration of which will run all the way through this thesis. As we have just seen, a representing can be non-conceptual, hence it need not be transcendent and, in case we are afraid of contradicting the non-relational aspect of functional role-model semantics, a conceptual representing is that in which something exists as represented. This is also to say that the notion of representation is one to hold on to for reasons that are quite simple after all, as Ray Brassier (Brassier, 2013 and 2015) has built up a good case for in altercating with the critique of representation traceable in some of the drifts of cultural theory. Insisting on the representational level grants us the capacity to distinguish between reality, what things supposedly are, and our not-unchangeable ways to both know them and operate with them, lest we concede an avalanche of (predictably) untenable positions: such as that we do have direct access to reality (the Sellarsian mythical given), or, worse, that conception and empirical reality are immanent, but in that special way for which ideas cause reality, all the way to saying that, whatever our perception of reality is, it is correct (thus finally arriving at a port where, in order to bash representation we, alas, fall back into experiential positivism). One of the urgent issues, in other words, is to not flatten the question of validity onto the one of reality, nor to establish any straightforward link between reality and conception, as though the latter 'came out' of the former.

I suggest we read the distinction representing/represented in simple grammatical terms: representing is what represents at a certain moment and represented is what is being represented, without necessarily implying any one-to-one relation between the two. Representations *capture* (for lack of a better word) a particular occurrence *in* representings, the particular *qua* represented in the representing, again, not in the sense that it is contained in something, and also not in the sense that a certain particular *as* represented in a certain representing necessarily takes the form that it does. We shall say that untangling and re-qualifying these not one-to-one, not necessary and not interchangeable rapports is another of the underlying interests of this thesis: what remains constant and why? This concern will re-appear in the form of the question of translatability from one medium to another.

Looking at Sellars from this side of things, we can already appreciate a Spinozist influence on his work, where one of the theses to be sustained is that, as

Rosenberg states, 'the distinguishing mark of the real is the power to act or be acted upon' (Rosenberg, 'Ontological Perspectives', 1998 para. 3). This ultimate ontological distinction reflects Sellars' commitment to naturalism and enforces, Rosenberg continues, the nominalist stricture, according to which the mind will eventually have to find its non-transcendent, fully naturalised role, and where any activity of what we may call the mind—mental acts for instance—will have no dealings with abstract entities. Criss-crossing the presumed ontological distinction—if we follow Rosenberg's lead—between representing and represented, then, is the epistemological distinction between the real and the transcendental level, where the latter corner of the square, the one occupied by represented representings, is the one we are trying to account for.

### **1.3.b Notion of experience #2, patterns and rules**

There would seem to be a second kind of experience, experience 'proper' or full-fledged experience, one could say. For the moment, it is difficult to qualify this latter type other than by saying that it is constructed, or that it is part and parcel of our epistemological apparatus and its conceptual dimension, something we will account for by the end of this section, together with its relation to language and behaviour. The empiricist root of the notion of experience as the path to knowledge is evident here. However, I sustain that experience in the Sellarsian context is meant as any form of inhabiting the world that affects us, making no difference between experience as experiment and experience as what is commonly named lived experience. This would be another way to show the almost banal intrication of knowledge with all of human activity. In this sub-section, we will piece together some of Sellars' resources for overcoming the temporal regress of norms and their supposed institution, and, in so doing, we will also begin to flesh out this second notion of experience. As we will see, the problem of the institution of norms will slowly lose its purchase, meaning that it will make less and less sense to use the notion of institution when talking about norms.

Sellars efficiently states the regress that the normative aspect of his role-model semantics threatens to introduce in the first two pages of 'Some Reflections on Language Games' (SRLG, 321, pagination corresponding to the one in *Science, Perception and Reality*), initially published in 1954. If we consider language in terms of role-functions, and the meaning of a term corresponds to its use in a language (and

not an extra-linguistic entity), then learning to use a language would be equal to learning to obey to the rules of that language. However, the rule for the use of a term would take the form of a sentence containing that term, a sentence in the meta-language of the relevant language. This equates to saying that to use a language one would first need to know its corresponding meta-language, something which is patently impossible (see also Seibt for a similar clarification, 107 ff). In another paper from the same period, 'Inference and Meaning' (IM), published in 1953, a similar reasoning leads Sellars to declare the non-existence of rules of semantics understood *as rules* connecting linguistic with extra-linguistic items, and that one obeys with intentionality and awareness. Otherwise, in order to use the term 'red', one would need to know in which circumstances the rule that described the use of the term 'red' applies, which would be equal to saying that one would need to already *have* the concept of red, which the rule itself is supposed to determine (IM, 336). The two aspects, the fact that semantics does not relate linguistic and extra-linguistic items and the fact that one cannot know the rule asserting the use before one is committed to obeying it, explicitly go hand in hand here.

Sellars' first step towards undoing this regress is to split the knowing-aspect—which is to say the epistemic aspect—of the normative from its abiding-aspect, across the line of the distinction he already made in LRB between rule-complying and rule-following. There exists a mode of 'abiding' to a rule that does not require the knowledge of what it asserts. This abiding is a form of activity that in no way requires that one is capable of stating the rule apparently regulating it.

In LRB, we saw how Sellars isolates a rule-complying behaviour and a rule-following behaviour in relation to the rules of language. The first points towards the psychological behaviourist approach, and is exemplified by conditioned responses to an injunction out of the repetition of habitual associations between simultaneous inputs. The second is, according to Sellars, the key element at work in the languages of sapient beings, the element that we recognize as peculiar to languages. The latter corresponds to the self-aware and intentional abiding to a norm, which, in and of itself, constitutes the justification for that same behaviour. There is then a third type of behaviour, Sellars would argue, characteristic of the *language learner*, which is different from the mere parroting proper to the first type of behaviour, but has not quite achieved the supposed full awareness of the second type. In other words, there

is a behaviour typical of one who is beginning to learn the rules of a language as they are prescriptively instantiated in reality, someone who is just about to start to use terms *as though*, we may say, they were concepts (Sellars defines concepts as meaningfully used predicates (IM, 334)). Now, to understand how the introduction of this learning stage is going to help us at all, we need another distinction.

Rules, for Sellars, are of two types: first, required-state-rules, ought-to-bes or rules of criticism, and second, required-action-rules, ought-to-dos. We can take these two kinds of rules as two types of relations with language, two ways of dealing with linguistic inputs and adopting linguistic behaviours. To again draw on Seibt's explanation (Seibt, 113/4), we can hypothesise that the learner begins by associating a term to a repeated stimulus. This is then slowly apprehended as an ought-to-be: *X* ought to be uttered or one has to be inclined to utter it, or be in the state of uttering it, in case *Y*—or, for instance, if I receive the stimulus I usually receive when my language-teacher says 'red', then, 'red' ought to be uttered, or I shall be inclined to utter it, in that circumstance. Complementary to this first kind of rule, there is a second one, the ought-to-do rule: one *shall* bring it about that members of the linguistic community utter 'red' in a circumstance similar to this one just described. The shift is from speaking of which (particular) psychological state one is supposed to be in, when taking in a certain stimulus, to the fact that one ought to 'make it so' that the entire community utters, albeit quietly, the same word 'red', when in similar circumstances.

Put in these terms, it is relatively easy to see how ought-to-dos imply the ought-to-bes: banally speaking, it is because, according to the ought-to-do rule, one has to bring it about that the entire community is in a certain state when seeing a certain colour, that the language learner learns to be in that very state, although she may be unaware of this fact. On a more profound level, ought-to-bes imply ought-to-dos, because once the learner becomes aware of the rules that govern the pattern she has apprehended, she can reconstruct the pattern in order to then teach it. The two positions are complementary: learning rules as rules, and no longer as habitual patterns, means being able to piece together the patterns themselves through which one can pass on this training, and manipulate the terms involved as something other than merely consistent repetitions. Being adventurous, one could think of this as Sellars' way of explaining social reproduction. As Sellars writes in 'Actions and Events':

The child begins at the 'pattern governed' level of verbal behavior but subsequently becomes a full-fledged member of the linguistic community and thinks thoughts (theoretical and practical) not only about *non-linguistic* items but also about *linguistic* items, i.e., from the Verbal Behaviorist point of view [Sellars' version of behaviorism], first level thoughts. At this later stage, he can not only reason *in accordance with* entailments, he can reason *about* entailments. And since entailments are principles of criticism, he has now developed from being the object of training and criticism by others to the stage at which he can train and criticise himself and even develop new and more complicated standards in terms of which to guide his own development. (A&E, para. 32)

One learns terms through patterns, then learns how to reconstruct these patterns, having grasped the norm that regulates them. This achievement implies two aspects. First, that one can also criticise that norm, hence why we can now fully appreciate ought-to-bes for what they are: rules of criticism. Incidentally, this also means that the third in-between type of behaviour, that of the learner, is the one that we usually occupy, the one that makes a crucial distinction between two undesirable positions: the parroting of instructed behaviour and the uncritical abiding to a norm *as* immutable norm. Second, that the simultaneous learning of the use of multiple terms is what will make them appear as reciprocally articulated, and will facilitate the positioning of the use of other terms in constellations, which pertain to a highly mobile level of use, without appealing to foundational knowledge.

Now, to be as clear as we can be on the process of learning: the learner will have to first acquire various terms via learning ought-to-bes, through the correspondent habitual patterns of behaviour. Learning at this stage is a matter of sheer imitation and, not incidentally, imitation of uses of the terms in language, through the imitation of sentences that convey that use more than sentences that assert it. Indeed, from the side of the language trainer, rules will not necessarily be imparted in an open manner. They will not be imparted *as* rules, but the effect of the process of transmission will still be one of 'normativising' behaviour, in the sense of producing a standard behavioural response, as we said, uniformities of behaviour will reflect uniformities of norms.

The process of language transmission will entail both positive and negative uniformities, where the latter are more significant than the formers, in the sense that the training will mostly work by setting boundaries to the functional use of

expressions, rather than positively isolating their meaning. In a similar manner, a language trainer will not factually bring about a *certain* behaviour, she will reinforce conforming behaviours and discourage non-conforming behaviours. Slowly, terms will begin to link up with each other, and with the experience of reality that the teacher, and slowly also the learner, have in a manner that facilitates the overcoming of a threshold—the ‘jump’ so unacceptable to behavioural psychology (Kukla, 2003) or any descriptive, scientific approach—past which the learner will begin to use those same terms as mutually bound to each other, in a way that she could even describe with more or less simple rules that assert their use.

To return to our example, the acquisition of a rule does not merely require that one is capable of saying ‘red’ when seeing something she has seen many times and has heard her language teacher call ‘red’. To know the rule means that one knows *how* to use the word ‘red’. To isolate this latter aspect, one will need to know how to use more many terms than just ‘red’. Hence, to know a rule means to know *that* the word ‘red’ is normally used in various ways in connection to other words, among which is also the case of something of a specific colour showing up in one’s field of vision. This clearly means that the language learner will have to possess a broader set of ‘recognitional capacities’ (Sellars is borrowing here from terminology forged by his philosophical contemporaries, c.f. ‘Language as Thought and as Communication’, LTC, 508, a paper title that is somewhat programmatic of Sellars’ overall plan). As such, the trainee will also know how to use the term colour (according to the same procedure), and perhaps many other terms, like object, pencil, paint, box, and even light, in order to begin to use the word ‘red’ according to the rule that governs its use and not simply as a mere behavioural response to a repeated pattern of association between a sound and a visual input. We could extend the example and see how the term is used to qualify political affiliations, which requires access to much more sophisticated levels of intra-semantic connections, but the point remains pretty much unchanged. We weave nets of terms to catch concepts.

The difference between patterns and rules is therefore qualitative from the side of the one who apprehends them. We learn the use of terms through patterns of associations, while we are ignorant of the rules governing them. When we develop awareness of how tokens are structured into material and formal functions, we also achieve something akin to a split capacity of use and criticism. Know-hows, pertaining

to the uses of terms, will not simply be iterations of circumstantial similarities. They will appear as pointing towards relations with their analogical prescriptions that can be permuted in disparate circumstances and that the trainee finds in place as making sense of the reality that they cognitively organise for her—something that is neither natural nor necessary, but that forms the basis of what we will eventually come to call our conceptual structures. In this way, one becomes aware of a norm as a norm. No foundational institution is necessary.

The fact that the capacity to call these structures 'conceptual' is one that may eventually arise, and the fact that it is not necessarily there, is something worth emphasising, also because the passage referenced above mentions the notion of thought and could be, in this respect, confusing. What Sellars stresses in other papers (RM, SRLG, MFC), and will take central role at the beginning of the second section, is the fact that to say that the language trainer knows a rule of use does not mean that the language trainer has notions related to concepts, or to the meta-language. Indeed, for what matters, the language trainer is not even necessarily aware that she is responding to an ought-to-do rule. What the trainer *is* aware of is how to use the term 'orange', for instance, in certain situations, in relation to other terms in the language, including non-observational terms (for example, words like 'not' or 'hence', grammar connectors that cannot be tied to anything extra-linguistic). The trainer also knows that a certain 'colour' is named 'orange', where the two terms intra-linguistically contribute to reinforcing their mutual use. The trainee, at the beginning of her development, is capable of none of these associations. All that she can do is imitate the use of language, and only eventually does she lock in how to use the word 'colour', probably close in time to when she locks in how to use 'orange'. What we cannot over-emphasise is that what is transmitted as the meaning of a term is its use in language, and not a final extra-linguistic meaning. Indeed, if she were asked questions over the validity of the use she is transmitting, the trainer may not have all of the answers—and who would, really, in a non-foundationalist model?—or, rather, all that she will be able to appeal to will be the use of other terms and the taking place of other activities, linked to the use of further terms. Importantly, again, the trainer will not even need to mention the notion of a meta-level to language, as her use of the language will already be socially adequate without recurring to it.

Here, it is important to mention that the ought-to-do rules we have been looking

at are specific to language training: the setting up of a certain portion of reality in such a manner that, with the combined effort of linguistic inputs, one can apprehend the use of terms. However, there do exist other cases in which we can talk about action-required rules. These will either be cases of *transformational* interventions that hope to instantiate a new use of a term, or of *preservational* activities that maintain current usage. For instance, if we say that for a post-card to be a post-card it ought to be sent, the sending of it will be an action that is somewhat required by the commitment we have taken to name it in the way that we have. However, recognising that a piece of laminated paper of a certain size, that bears a stamp and is sent off through the postal system, is a postcard, is not really an action. We will return to this distinction in Section II.

### **1.3.c. Some considerations on language acquisition**

To stop the normative regress, Sellars tries to show how one does not need to know a rule in order to follow it. The aspect that makes a rule a rule, i.e., the fact that it is known and applied, is split across two positions, occupied by the language trainer—if not the whole of society—and the language trainee. As the two positions are somewhat circumstantial, Sellars marks them with the identification of different verbal behaviours, i.e., ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules, whereby we arrive at Sellars' very own kind of behaviourism, dubbed 'verbal behaviourism' (as opposed to philosophical or formal behaviourism, along the lines of what was described above, and of Skinnerian radical behaviourism), which is then complemented with his theoretical mentalism. We will come back to these Sellarsian positions when we will postulate notions related to concepts and thoughts. The fact that Sellars' mentalism is said to be 'theoretical' will then make sense with reference to Sellars' notions of theory—or, more precisely, postulation—and observation, and their respective associations with the Scientific and Manifest Images. For the moment, we suggest that we take stock of our terminology and get acquainted with the fact that, for Sellars, there exist two types of norms, those requiring states, that one is in a certain state when in a certain circumstance, and those requiring action, that one performs a certain action, i.e., bringing it about that the members of one's society are in a certain state when in a certain circumstance. The first type of 'ought-to' does not require that one has a language at any other level than that of reaction-to-input. The second type, instead,

requires that one comprehends the recurrences and similarities of patterns to which terms are then associated. This second position also specifically requires actions. The learner complies without knowing, the trainer nudges the learner into complying. These two positions communicate through sentences which convey the use of terms, sentences in which the use is implicit, as was mentioned above. We have also mentioned how conveying sentences are especially characteristic of the notion of meaning that Sellars has set up. Indeed, this is the other split that Sellars remarks upon, and that is relevant to stopping the normative regress: the distinction between sentences that convey information and sentences that assert it. As mentioned already, the difference between the two kinds of statements has to do with how they transmit information. A sentence asserting information usually provides a definition, e.g., 'All A is B' or 'This is green'. A sentence conveying information instead implies information that cannot be traced back to the sentence itself. In Sellars' example, 'Paul should do X' implies that Paul can do X, however 'it is a mistake to assume that a definitional unpacking of the former would reveal a sentence asserting the latter' (ITSA, para. 54). Ultimately, what Sellars is trying to suggest is that all sentences are also somewhat conveying information that no definitional unpacking could equally assert.

What we want to make sure of is that the language trainer is also not expected to have awareness of conceptual activity (RM, 487). Once again, from the perspective of the integrity of Sellars' argument, if the intention of Sellars' theory of language is to explain the concept of conceptual activity through the concept of linguistic activity, then to say that following an ought-to-do rule implies having the concept of conceptual activity would be circular (RM, 487 ff), considering that the concept of ought-to-be rules is explained through that of ought-to-do rules (since as we saw, ought-to-bes imply ought-to-dos). In other words, to know a rule for the language trainer cannot require having notions related to epistemic knowledge (i.e., concepts, thoughts, intentionality, etc.). In which way can the distinction between conveying sentences and asserting sentences help us avoid this threatened circularity? Because the language trainer may use, in a socially adequate way, sentences that *convey* a certain piece of information, which one could assert at the meta-level of the language in use, but that the trainer themselves is not *asserting* when they use that sentence, and that no possible definitional unpacking of that same sentence will lead her to assert. After all, this is

exactly what the trainee, as we said, already does: using sentences, probably at any level, which convey meaning, but without being able to make it explicit for themselves that they are following a rule that can be asserted in other types of sentences.

Conveying sentences are crucial to the Sellarsian model of semantics and, with it, to stopping the normative regress. This is because so long as we take all sentences to be either asserting information or reducible to sentences that assert information, where the latter can be construed as rules stated in language, then we will not be able to see how one may be following a rule that attributes a certain use to a certain term without knowing how to assert that use. This is because such asserting sentences would only be rules of *conduct* that one normally uses with the function of assertion only after having understood them. To be more explicit on Sellars' non-relational model, we will always find a remainder use of a term—a remainder meaning—in semantic expressions, which is conveyed in a sentence, any sentence, but not asserted.

To further probe this point, I would like to recapitulate this discussion in terms of knowing-how and knowing-that, since one of Sellars' comments from which we can derive that it may be too much to say that a language trainer's behaviour is one of obeying to rules with full awareness, is his statement that the language trainer is, in a sense, always in a know-how mode (MFC, 429). This way of grappling with the issue of ought-to-be/ought-to-do and following/obeying, can flesh out not only Sellars' theory of language and language acquisition, but eventually also the value to be attributed to the theory of dot-quoted terms vis-à-vis the notion of rule, and the peculiar relations that dot-quoted terms instantiate between language, meaning and behaviour. This work is still preliminary, but consistent with the notion of medium that we will discuss, which will hinge on the concept of dot-quoted term.

Notoriously, the debate over the rapport between knowing-how and knowing-that dates back to Ryle's second chapter of *The Concept of Mind* (1949), 'Knowing How and Knowing That' (25/62). There, Ryle attacks the intellectualist position according to which knowing-how can be reduced to knowing-that, meaning that the former can be formulated in terms of knowing that a proposition is true, or that some fact obtains or not (for clear and relatively recent expositions of the various positions on this debate, see Snowdon, 2003 and Penco, 2014). For Ryle, and the subsequent anti-intellectualists, knowing-how cannot be reduced to knowing-that, and maintains a status autonomous from the propositional form. Sellars did not take an active part in

the debate between more or less sophisticated versions of intellectualism and anti-intellectualism that followed the publication of Ryle's volume and which is, to a certain extent, still ongoing. However, it is worthwhile trying to comprehend on which side of the front Sellars would stand. We can state that, for Sellars, knowing-that is formulated in propositional form and appears to refer to a definitional capacity, whereas knowing-how, instead, equates to knowing how to 'use' a term, and in which circumstances. Therefore, knowing-how would correspond to being able to correctly deploy a term, as according to its socially recognised role-function, without necessarily knowing that role-function itself, nor, clearly, having a notion of 'role-function' at all. Knowing-that, instead, would correspond to knowing how to state that function, and, if we take the non-relationality of functional-role semantics seriously, that statement will not involve a non-linguistic 'knowing the meaning' of what one utters. As is immediately apparent, knowing-that is also defined in terms of knowing-how, and, also in this case, the notion of role-function itself is not required.

Furthermore – Sellars writes – the relevant sense of 'knowing the meaning of words' (which is a form of what Ryle has called *knowing how*), must be carefully distinguished from knowing the meaning of words in the sense of being able to talk about them as a lexicographer might—thus, defining them. Mastery of the language involves the latter as well as the former ability. Indeed, they are *both* forms of *know how*, but at different levels— one at the 'object language' level, the other at the 'meta-language' level. (MFC, 429/30)

If this is the case, then knowing-that is rather unimportant for Sellars. The 'that' which the language trainer knows is still the 'how' of stating the functional-role of a term and doing so with the formulation of a rule. The language trainer formulates a rule of stating, an ought-to-be, to which the language trainee responds, and by doing so, the language trainer herself is following an ought-to-do rule. The question we raised before is whether it would be accurate to say that the language trainer is not only following, but in fact obeying an ought-to-do rule, intentionally following that rule. The fact that knowing the meaning of words is still a matter of knowing-how would seem to already problematise the intentionality and awareness implied by obedience. It is likely that the language trainer does not know all of the reasons why a term is used in a certain way as opposed to another. In other words, the trainer does not necessarily obey to the plethora of ought-to-be rules that are implicit in the ought-

to-do that she is responding to.

In all this, we can take stock of the fact that one may be using a sentence that conveys or asserts meaning without having any grasp of what one is doing. One could be using a sentence that conveys meanings that one cannot explicitly assert. This is to say that *we can identify* a level of knowing-how, in the sense that we have defined within Sellars' work, only because a knowing-that, at a certain point and in a certain form and possibly by someone else, *can* be stated. However, knowing-that is, in the last instance, also only a knowing-how, and therefore the final knowing-that of knowing-how of knowing-how of knowing-how and so on is a far remote vanishing point. What matters is to say that, first of all, this vanishing point will have to fit into the broader project of figuring out the whole of reality, a project that, as we will see, will fall under the remit of Sellars' commitment to scientific realism. Second, in terms of rules or norms or laws—three terms that Sellars does not spend much time differentiating (LTC, 506/7), signaling the fact that the specification of their status is not of the utmost importance to his project—we shall spell out one aspect, partially mentioned already. The fact that we, so-to-say, 'wake up' to rules that are already in place—meaning that, for one to take a rule as a rule, that same norm needs to already be in place and make sense within the reality that the person is observing—does not mean that those rules are founded or established, or that they found our behaviour *as* rules, first God-given, and then applied. It only means that, eventually, we manage to formulate certain statements as rules for the contextual use of a term in relation to another term, rules with and through which we can make sense of behaviours. Here, the relation rule-behaviour is mutual. The two are co-constituting, and semantic meaning is both the output and the compass, through which they orientate us in the reality that we inhabit. If anything resembling a foundation does exist, then it would be in nature, the world out there, which we cannot access in terms of epistemic knowledge.

From this standpoint, we can say something more about the notion of the dot-quoted term, for it would seem to instantiate a relation to norms that is structurally comparable to the one we have sketched out between knowing-how, successive know-hows and knowing-that, but it also seems to complicate the matter at hand. Let us think through the metaphor of the web of terms, which we brought up in this subsection, and which is clearly bound to become a proper conceptual web. We can

think of the dot-quoted term as an intersection of the web, a shifting place-holder, where the functional role of a term is articulated, whereas the norms that a language trainer follows are the threads that that articulation makes possible. However, there may be a whole variety of threads that are less visible, or entirely invisible, or visible only from certain perspectives, which the same articulation also makes possible. This construction of threads does not sit on a flat plane. It is in space, and has at least three dimensions, such that, from certain perspectives, one plausible thread cancels out another, which is itself plausible from a less comprehensive perspective. Experience, then, is the *differentiated point of access* to the threads, from which we assign meaning to terms.

As a further note, we should add that Sellars' notion of the dot-quoted term, for as much as it is in language, is there to articulate all sorts of activities. There is a whole variety of activities that contribute to the isolation of the notions 'stamp' or 'postcard' and to grasp their use, and, clearly, what Sellars is saying is that we do not simply apprehend how to use these terms in language. Instead, the terms, which we initially parrot, come attached to related activities and, in fact, it is these activities that do most of the thread-weaving of functional-roles and term-uses in language. A postcard is a postcard mostly, although not only, because it is posted. Having said this, it is because we could appreciate the terms' role-positions in language, that we could specify how to use them in language, or that we could isolate them in a linguistic form that we conform (or decide not to conform) to social behaviour, *also* in cases where we are not physically uttering those terms. It is because a rule *could* be asserted that we *epistemically* grasp terms in use, despite not necessarily knowing that we are doing so. Language, as the main means of representation for the human species, leads the way, and it is not incidental that dot-quoted terms are linguistic terms. In learning language, in going from ought-to-bes to ought-to-dos, we weave a map to organise the world and our activities within it. That map then stays, or one could say remains, active, at work, whenever we do anything. If we *behave* in a certain way, it is because it could be stated in language, although not necessarily by the subject of said behaviour, and this fact is due to the definition of behaviour that we have outlined. Here, it is worth noticing once again that, by behaviour, we only mean activities that can be observed from the outside. A rule supposedly directs or governs—both in the sense that it causes or that it motivates, according to the subject's awareness of the

rule—a behaviour, also in the sense that it makes it traceable. One can then say that dot-quoted terms validate rules, linguistically and behaviourally, one supposedly being the interface of the other. However, precisely according to the schematic rendering of dot-quoted terms that we have just offered, using the metaphor of a web of threads, not all behaviours are equally legible, and— since it embeds possible unperformed or under-performed behaviours and activities—the dot-quoted term hugely complicates the alignment between behaviour and meaning as role-function. What we see from outside is really not the whole story. One could be attributing a use to a term that does not cash out in any visible behaviour, or at least not in any behaviour that is visible so far. In all of this, language operates only as a streamliner of our activities into terms, one that remains active, but is usually not appealed to— also in the sense that it is not put into question or challenged—as we move and operate in the world.

To round up this explanation, let us examine a legitimate and expected counterpoint: what about those activities that no amount of rule articulation in language will be able to encompass, for example, what about painting? Or, what about cycling, to stay on the simpler side of things? It might seem that the concepts we have constructed here, such as 'rules' and 'role-function', drawn as they are from the domain of linguistic explanation, are simply ill-suited to accounting for such *bodily* activities. But, we should remember that what we are trying to understand here is not how words magically turn into activities, and is certainly not how explaining the rule that regulates the use of certain type expressions makes it so that one uses the word in that very way, nor are we aiming to explain how the rule that ties a behaviour, an activity, to a certain term *makes it* so that one assumes that behaviour. Indeed, the argument is precisely that this is not the way in which a language trainee is trained. A language trainee is trained through repetitive, exemplar patterns, until a threshold is reached where the recurring conformity on behalf of the trainee ceases to be simply automatic, but instead becomes to some degree self-aware or reflexive. Only then can the language trainee herself give an inferential account of these initial patterns, an account given in the form of a rule that states *how* to use a term. Therefore, the point is precisely to say that the case of learning a language is not so dissimilar from the one of learning how to paint or how to cycle, which one learns respectively by painting and by cycling. All we are trying to highlight is that language, as the more developed

system of representation among humans, remains the one that chiefly orientates our activities in the world. Without so far being able to map step-by-step, one-to-one, all that goes on in a body that cycles, language can name some of the steps—sit on the bike and peddle—that can be observed from outside. Indeed, Sellars' theory of semantics is non-relational also in this sense: it aims to account for the production of a systemic structure that strives to map reality and our activities in it, but that is not in any way equal to reality or figurative in the trivial sense of the word (Sellars would call this a form of 'pictorial thinking' and add that it is 'childish', KPKT, 281), it is only equal to itself.

This may be a good moment for a little recap, to keep our focus on the reasons why we are going through this discussion in a thesis that aims at talking about the notion of medium. Before plunging into Sellars' account of language acquisition and linguistic upbringing, we tried to clarify how showing that intentionality and meaningfulness—as well as the aspect of normativity associated with them—are thoroughly linguistic may help us to develop a notion of medium. Now, we can add something further. Not only is one's linguistic upbringing responsible for her intentional capacities and her distribution of semantic meaning, but that upbringing occurs in a manner such that intentionality and meaningfulness, when they do become manifest, operate and hold sway on one's judgment *as though they had always been there*. *Mutatis mutandis*, a similar case will be made for mediums other than language. The characteristics that are imported from a medium to that which is mediated by it, that is, the *structures* of a medium, will be at work in and will hold sway on one's capacity to observe what is mediated through—or, as we will see, *in*—that medium. Now, especially when the medium in question is as pervasive—or, as we will see in the later stages of the thesis, as *primary* as language is—the upbringing in question will have to be such that the rules one is eventually capable of appreciating are coordinated with one's overall immersion in reality, with one's experience. The latter will not simply be over-determined or ruled over by those rules, as we could already guess from what has been said so far. One's experience will be structured by her way of approaching reality through language, but only because the use of linguistic terms apprehended in language can plausibly make sense together with her experience. Rules and experiential access to reality will be seen only as two modes of the same inhabiting of the world. For certain rules to work, the material reality we move in will

have to be arrayed in such a way that they make sense to our experience of reality.

#### **1.4 Integrating notes on the questions of the synthetic *a priori* and material inference as according to Sellars**

We can think of Sellars' suggestion on how to circumvent the normative regress as a thorough appreciation of what norms actually are: not simply linguistic or logical formulations, but social activities. In LRB, Sellars writes that a rule is not a rule unless it is '*internal* to action' [my emphasis] (LRB, para. 21). That norms are *in* social activities means that they are socially embedded. When we open our eyes to conception (even without knowing of conception), when rules of use come to count as rules that one can formulate for oneself, the blocks that make that conception possible are already there in the type of society we have been growing accustomed to, and they make sense because they are coordinated with our daily experience of it. This clearly does not exclude that language, as that through which the thinking happens, as we will see, also maintains a partial autonomy from actions, the distance one may take for a critical moment.

As already pointed out, this way of comprehending norms entails a repositioning of experience as the point of material access to conception. To add some more on this front, I suggest that we conclude this section by looking at Sellars' take on two topics related to formal logic, and much discussed in the 1940s and 50s: the synthetic *a priori* and the existence of material inference. Sellars' treatment of both topics can be indexed under the agenda of embedding formal logic in the material complexity of reality and, in so doing, provincialising standard views on classical logic with respect to the normative force of language, its rulishness, as a vector of cognitive development. We can consider this excursus into logic as a way to extend the cursory reflections presented above on the rapport between language and its acquisition, and the multifarious variety of activities that one carries out in the world. Both the discussion on the synthetic *a priori* and the one on material inference once again recast Sellars' work as an effort to reconcile the rationalist and empiricist traditions. Alas, in the case of these two notions, Sellars insists on terminological revisions and methodological reconsiderations that would leave both the empiricist and the rationalist dissatisfied. The point to stress is that these two philosophical notions are indispensable in order for Sellars' theory of language and his role-model

semantics to work, and they bring to the fore the value that the second notion of experience, full-fledged or 'proper' experience as we called it above, has for Sellars. What is somewhat counter-intuitive is that this supposed re-appraisal of the archetypally empiricist notion of experience, as embodied being-in-the-world that ought to be wired into any linguistic upbringing we undergo, comes through the affirmation of notions such as material inference and the synthetic *a priori*, which are often associated with the rationalist tradition. However, we will see that Sellars' explanation is far from being classically rationalist.

As an additional bonus, looking at these two topics will further pave the way for us to introduce Sellars' theory of predication, which we can understand as a consequence of his commitment to nominalism combined with his role-function model of semantics. The theory of predication will become crucial to reconnecting the theory of language, the more idealist part of Sellars' work, with the theory of empirical truth, in which the notion of object-language and therefore the grapheme-and-sound character of language will come back to the fore. We will discuss in detail the theory of predication in Section II and the theory of empirical truth in Section III, where it will become easier to imagine how we can extend the case of language to the broader notion of medium. Hopefully, the fact that we will approach these problematics from the side of language will clarify, if not necessarily the notion of concreteness itself, at least the reasons why it is plausible to distinguish medium from mediated, and according to what parameters we can do it, if only in order to facilitate our inquiry of reality.

The main sources for looking at the questions of material inference and the synthetic *a priori* are two papers published around the same years. Non-coincidentally, we will look again at the already-mentioned 'Is There a Synthetic A Priori?' (ITSA), originally written in 1951, and published again in 1953 and 1958, and 'Inference and Meaning' (IM) from 1953.

#### **1.4.a The synthetic *a priori***

Sellars sustains that something akin to a synthetic *a priori* is at work in one's cognitive faculties, but rejects its being permanent and unchangeable. Cognition gets off the ground thanks to an intersection of representations, and rules can be stated around those intersections. However, to make things clear, Sellars' defence of the

synthetic a priori in ITSA begins with the revision of some of the terminology that the notion is usually framed by.

The paper opens with a reconsideration of the notion of analyticity, to which Sellars ascribes both a narrow and a broader definition. The broader definition considers analytic statements to be those that are true by virtue of their terms, while the narrow definition considers analytic statements to be either logically true or a truth of logic. The latter two are equal to each other because to say that something is logically true means that, if we substitute the defined terms with the defining ones, we obtain a truth of logic, where a truth of logic is taken, for the purposes of Sellars' essay, to be either one of the propositions stated in Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* (ITSA, para. 1) or any other proposition logically derivable from that work—the latter still being at the time of Sellars' writing the accepted compendium of rules of logic. The logicians who deploy the broader definition of 'analytic' would argue, says Sellars, that to say that a statement is 'true by virtue of its terms' equates to saying that it is either logically true or a truth of logic, while what Sellars wants to show is precisely that this equation does not stand, for there are statements that are true by virtue of their terms, but are nowhere to be found in the compendium of propositions from *Principia Mathematica*, and which also cannot be reduced to any of them (ITSA, para. 2). This is a quick way to corroborate the summary description of this part of Sellars' project as a provincialisation of classical formal logic and the notion of rule generally accepted therein, as though it could be thought as detached from natural languages and their being one with social practices. In the rest of the paper, Sellars uses the narrow sense of analytic, and therefore defines the synthetic as its opposite, meaning that which is neither logically true nor logically false.

The presentation of classical logic here given, and what it is that Sellars would intend to provincialise, may sound trivial, if we do not flesh out what seems to be the underlying reasoning behind Sellars' operation. As we will also see in the following sub-section, Sellars appears to sustain that, it is only in the narrow context of application to formal or otherwise artificial languages that formal logic can make good on its claims to do away with the synthetic *a priori* and material inference (IM, 320). In other words, minimally speaking, if the object of study is to be natural language, formal logic will require special tools that, for the way that Sellars explains them, end up valuing the contribution of embodied experience to one's epistemic access to

reality. On further reflection, however, if logic is derivative of natural language and linguistic use, as all conceptual structures are for Sellars, then even in cases when it is applied to formal languages, formal logic will still embed aspects that its derivation from natural language has furnished it with. We will come back to the question of formal/artificial and natural languages in the later stages of the thesis. For the moment, we can say that, from a Sellarsian perspective, no *use* of language is natural, but that there is a natural aspect to human language that pertains to the evolution of the species. This is also to say that only if we saw bodies as technical apparatus could natural languages and artificial languages be put in complete continuity with each. However, to see bodies as technical apparatus may lead to an excessive simplification of the matter and, as we will see, the continuity we might aim at is far from seamless and, in fact, rather than a continuum, shall be explained in terms of evolutionary blocks organised in series of languages or of mediums.

Since we are talking about synthetic knowledge, this is a good point at which to insert a small note on one of Sellars' biggest influences, W.V.O. Quine, who happened to be working on closely related matters around the time when ITSA was written. Here the reference is to one of Quine's better known papers, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism' (1953a). The two dogmas are described in Quine's paper as unfounded beliefs recurrent in the empiricist mode dominant in early analytic philosophy: first, that there is a fundamental distinction between analytic truths (construed as truths grounded in meanings independently of facts) and synthetic truths (which are instead characterised as those which are dependent on facts); second, that there is a one-to-one relation between 'a statement and the experiences which contribute to or detract from its confirmation' (Quine, 1953a, 47). In other words, the second dogma is accused of reductionism by Quine, as it explicitly implies a direct relation between 'meanings' and a logical construction based upon terms referring to immediate experience (Quine, 1953a, 31). Sellars, as much as Quine, rejects both dogmas, and indeed Quine demonstrates that to reject one implies the rejection of the other. The more profound reason why to bring up this point is that both Quine and Sellars, in their rejections, seem to point to a similar problem in the analytic philosophy of their time. We could state this problem as the unholy matrimony between the analytic and empiricist methods. This can be phrased as the supposed possibility of apprehending reality by analysing the inputs we receive from experience, as though our analytic faculties and

the observational faculties connected to our experience were not always interdependent. The same problem can also be seen as arising from the pairing of two methods (analytic and empiricist) used as though they were the same, where one could be applied to sentences in language and the other to empirical experience, after which they could be mapped onto each other such that the findings of the latter could verify those of the former (Quine, 1953a, 45-50). Quine traces the roots of this problem to sense-data theorists and the legacy of the verificationist theory of truth, as does Sellars (EPM).

Now, back to ITSA and Sellars' appraisal of the synthetic *a priori*. Sellars' essay goes on to clarify what we are to mean by '*a priori*'. Here Sellars offers four definitions and shows how they all collapse, one onto the next and finally converge onto the fourth and last one. By *a priori* we may mean: the knowledge of a necessary truth, a knowledge which is certain, a knowledge that is independent of experience or—and this is the definition that the rest of the paper espouses—the knowledge of truth *ex vi terminorum*, meaning true by virtue of its terms or true by definition. Therefore, the question as to whether there exist synthetic *a priori* is rephrased as: are there statements which are not necessarily logically true, but are still true by virtue of their terms? (ITSA, para. 9).

When saying 'true by virtue of its terms', what we mean is true by definition, also in the sense of implicit definition. Now, we know of the existence of statements which carry implicit definitions, statements that convey information such that, as we noted, no amount of unpacking will finally assert that same information. We can describe these kinds of statements as synthetic, for they are not necessarily truths of logic. Further, if we go by Sellars' accounts of semantics and language acquisition, we know not only that conveying statements exist, but also that they are the ones through which we eventually observe that a situation is thus-and-so: those statements that already involve the existence of a conceptual framework (ITSA, para. 50), which is to say precisely the one that the language trainer has been supplying to the language trainee. For those who can use them, these statements are necessarily true.

In the tenth and last section of the paper, Sellars retraces his steps, and questions the certainty of the knowledge granted by synthetic *a priori* statements of the type that he has been defending, as well as their relation to experience. There, Sellars also recognises that his synthetic *a priori* would probably be scoffed at by the true

rationalist 'believers' in the synthetic *a priori*, who would judge his as some warped form of *a posteriori* (ITSA, para. 61). Indeed, at this point, Sellars openly talks about experience, which we could have taken to be side-lined in his account so far, and makes the case for it with unmistakable clarity. If epistemic experience is conceptually shaped through language, then if 'in our language "all A is B" is one of the propositions which implicitly define the predicates "A" and "B" so that it is true *ex vi terminorum* that all A's are B', then we can say that '[t]his knowledge is independent of experience in the perfectly straightforward sense that it is a function of the very concepts with which we approach the world.' Clearly, this is equal to saying that '[a]s long as we [...] use these words in the same sense [...] we can never find an instance of A which fails to be B.' However, if our *knowledge* that all A's are B's is 'independent of experience, there is another sense in which it most certainly does depend on experience.' (ITSA, para. 63) We apprehend a conceptual frame according to rules, both logical and extra-logical, and, chiefly on the basis of *sensory stimuli* inside specific social environments, which value certain recognitions and dismiss others. Cognitive frameworks are many and changeable, hence Sellars' ensuing problematisation of the certainty of the synthetic *a priori*, rather than of the necessity of the knowledge they grant. Once a framework is set, knowledge within it has the force of necessity, but nothing warrants its perennial certainty—thence why Sellars refers to the more hard-core supporters of the synthetic *a priori* as 'believers'— since it competes with many others for its adoption on 'the market place of experience' (ITSA, para. 69).

Within this adjusted framework, synthetic *a priori* propositions are propositions the normative force of which the language learner eventually becomes aware of. These propositions assume normative meaning as soon as we become aware of the terms' meaning in a coordinated fashion. Once again, Sellars is trying to keep his feet on two grounds. Language is acquired step-by-step, in a manner that, methodologically speaking, behaviourism can potentially account for, but, precisely in order to not fall into the trap of a kind of blatant dogmatism—that is, the naïve naturalistic fallacy—knowledge cannot be taken to be *only* descriptive. Its rule-boundedness, in the places where it is developed, societies, ought to be acknowledged. In this respect, the notion of synthetic *a-priori* knowledge is indispensable to explain how we relate to the world, although the dogmatic notion of *a* unique and irreplaceable

synthetic *a priori* is itself a 'myth and a snare' (ITSA, para. 69) –and we should always pay attention to the points at which Sellars uses the word 'myth', for, as we will see, it has a rather specific value.<sup>20</sup>

#### 1.4.b Material inference

If we accept the existence of synthetic *a priori* truths and consider that material inferences are basically authorised on the basis of synthetic *a priori* truths, then it should almost go without saying that Sellars agrees with the approach that holds that material rules of inference are not only valid but indispensable for semantics. However, it is worth going through the motions of the argument, especially because the conclusion to which it leads us is highly consequential, and extends beyond the import of the questions on material inference *per se*.

Starting from the preliminaries, by inference, we mean the cognitive process through which we move from premises to consequences, within an established framework. Sellars borrows the distinction between formal and material rules of inference from Carnap. In *The Logical Syntax of Language*, Carnap identifies two kinds of syntactical rules: logical and extra-logical transformation rules, where a transformation rule, specifies 'the circumstances under which one expression of a language is the direct consequence of another' (IM, 318). Sellars maps logical and extra-logical transformation rules onto formal and material inferences, respectively. '[W]hereas *logically* valid inferences do not, *extra-logically* valid inferences do depend for their validity on the fact that they contain a certain set of descriptive terms' (Ibid.), or, borrowing this time from Quine, 'descriptive terms occur *vacuously* in logically valid arguments; *essentially* in extra-logically valid arguments' (IM, 319). The classic example of material inference—'it is raining, therefore the streets will be

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<sup>20</sup> The implication of experience and the mutability of the synthetic *a priori* could indicate an alliance between Sellars and the Neo-Kantian project (Cohen, Natorp and their prevalent group at the University of Marburg in the last twenty years of the 1800s), an alliance which has already been suggested (Renz, 2011). However, this would overplay the notion of revisability in Sellars and underplay the one of experience. Starting from the latter, experience for Sellars is not only scientific experiment, but all of experience. Further, albeit that Sellars insists on the revisability of norms, it is important to consider what the changing of a synthetic *a priori* would actually take, if we go by Sellars' theory of language: the changing of one's entire conceptual framework, including the material historical upsets necessary to make a different conceptual scaffolding plausible. Another key difference, the one that possibly encompasses these previous two, is the central role that language takes in Sellars vis-à-vis conception and thought, a position that no Neo-Kantian had envisioned, with the exception perhaps of Cassirer, whose work would indeed be difficult to simply classify as Neo-Kantian proper.

wet'—offers a good illustration of an extra-logical transformation rule. As Sellars explains, Carnap goes on to specify the distinction, by matching logical transformation rules (our formal inferences) and extra-logical rules (our material inferences) with L-rules and P-rules, where the L stands for 'logics' and the P stands for 'physics'. To put things plainly, L-rules are valid as according to the rules of logic, and P-rules can be *made logically valid*, if we add to them a major clause borrowed from the realm of physics, that is from the laws of nature (IM, 319). What we have seen with the theory of semantics, and in our brief discussion of language acquisition, could already have led us to intuit that Sellars is trying to demonstrate that material inferences are essential to meaning, or at least just as essential as formal rules (IM, 317), and that they are therefore indispensable, and not some sort of second class type of rule, as Carnap instead would seem to relegate them to. Now that we have a workable, albeit concise, definition of material inference, let us see how Sellars' argument unfolds.

At the time of Sellars' writing, in this case the late 1940s and 1950s, many an empiricist philosopher would have seen the classic it-is-raining-the-streets-will-be-wet example *not* as a case of material inference, but as an *enthymeme*, that is an inference the validity of which is a purely logical question, something which may escape us only because an enthymeme is defined as an inference missing its major clause, in this case: that whenever it rains, the streets will be wet. Therefore, if we were to unfold the supposed enthymeme in its full form, according to this empiricist account, we would have: 'It is raining. Whenever it rains, the streets will be wet. Therefore, the streets will be wet'. Now, the circularity of this formulation is patent, and confirms that material inferences are not mutilated formal inferences: they are valid arguments, only they are based on material rather than logical principles.

This initial clarification does not yet demonstrate that material inferences are necessary to meaning, it only makes it difficult to state their non-existence, to reduce them to the established rules of logic or to mere habit. Especially on this latter point, Sellars insists—jumping the gun on his conclusions—that if we are to dismiss material inference as habit then we ought to demonstrate in exactly *which* sense 'formal' logical inference is *not* habit, that is on which non-self-referential grounds is it based.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> In Lewis Carroll's short story, 'What the Tortoise Said to Achilles', this point is made quite well. After their impossible competition, the Tortoise and Achilles entertain each other by discussing logic and the hypothetical function. The Tortoise insists that one is not required to accept the hypothetical proposition for which if 1) A equals B, and 2) B equals C, then 3) A equals C. One could accept 1) and 2) separately, but still reject the hypothetical statement that if 1) and 2) are true then 3) must also

Another way to comprehend the classical empiricist account, Sellars goes on, is to see it as based on a form and content schema, where formal rules of inference are indispensable to talk about concepts, language and thought, the so-called formal part of cognition. Content, meanwhile, ends up—on this picture—being defined negatively as an abstraction from experience in the form, again, of concepts (IM, 316/7). It only takes a moment to realise that none of this will work with Sellars’ theory of language—nor, for that matter, with his epistemology in general—since the latter, being non-relational, clearly dismisses the conceptualist account of the abstraction of concepts from the inputs of experience, and is unsympathetic to the content-form model.

Following Sellars’ reasoning, there are four remaining possibilities as to the status of material rules of inference:

(1) Material rules are as essential to meaning as formal rules, contributing to the architectural detail of its structure within the flying buttresses of logical form. (2) While not essential to meaning, material rules of inference have an *original authority* not derived from formal rules, and play an *indispensable* role in our thinking on matters of fact. (3) Same as (2) save that the acknowledgement of material rules of inference is held to be a *dispensable* feature of thought, at best a matter of convenience. (4) Material rules of inference have a *purely derivative authority*, though they are genuinely rules of inference. (IM, 317)

In the rest of the paper, Sellars works towards demonstrating that (1) is the only acceptable possibility. Briefly going through the steps: first, Sellars disproves (4) and (3), and demonstrates that material inference is indispensable to languages that include subjunctive conditionals, which, according to the discourse on logic current at Sellars’ time, rules of logic could not express. Therefore, minimally speaking, if a language includes subjunctive conditionals, it will require rules of material inference. However, are these indispensable for semantic meaning? (IM, 327) At this point, and this is the more interesting part for us, Sellars decides to look at the relation between the meaning

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be true. Achilles, uncomprehending and baffled by the tortoise’s stubbornness, takes pain to explain the necessity of the hypothetical to it. However, all that the explanation offers are attempted ways at grounding said necessity on more hypothetical sentences. The story ends up showing, instead, the necessity of logic’s normative force, which Carroll highlights in literary terms with the recurrent use of the terms ‘force’ and ‘forcing’. The only way logic, or Achilles, has to get the Tortoise to accept the validity of the hypothetical is literally to *force* it to do so. (see Carroll, 1895 as well as for the treatment of the story Trafford, 2017).

of descriptive terms and material inference, in order to establish whether the latter are essential to the former. If we rehearse once again what the meaning of terms is according to Sellars' theory, that is, what it is conveyed, then material inference becomes necessary to it. Sellars demonstrates this, again in dialogue with Carnap, showing that there is a rulishness, an implicit ought, in both his logical and extra-logical transformations—Sellars comments that Carnap uses the notion of rule as if it did not always imply that something ought to be done. Then, Sellars shows again how meaning, qua functional role, is what is conveyed rather than asserted in, for instance, the translation sentences referenced above (i.e., “rosso” means “red”). *This* meaning is what matters about linguistic meaning, as opposed to parroted associations. Whereas the latter are fundamental for the acquisition of observation terms, those that we can easily match to particulars, they are insufficient for a competent use of those terms, and are certainly useless for the acquisition of terms such as 'not', 'therefore', and 'if', which cannot be matched with any particular. All this is to say that the apprehension of meaning in language—qua functional use, or descriptive meaning—requires a normative component external to supposedly purely logical implications. This normative component is conveyed in every sentence in which the term is used, as the implicit use of the term, its logical function, and is therefore expressed in the form of material rules and not conventional rules of logic.

#### **1.4.c Some reflections**

This excursus on Sellars' inferentialism intends to connect the theory of language, language acquisition and specifically Sellars' semantics, with the discourse on logic ongoing at his time of writing, and to show how the theory of semantics truly cuts across the debates on formal logics and gives priority to material rules of inference. The point is to show how language acquisition, from simple conditioned responses to the apprehension of corner stone rules of use, slowly shapes cognition. In this respect, Sellars would seem to suggest that formal rules of logic are only a limit case of all of the rules that we learn, so-to-say, materially. We find trace of Sellars' stakes in terms of logics towards the end of the IM:

[M]aterial transformation rules determine the descriptive meaning of the expressions of a language within the framework established by its logical transformation rules [...] In traditional language, the 'content' of concepts as

well as their logical ‘form’ is determined by rules of the Understanding. The familiar notion (Kantian in its origin, but present in various guises in many contemporary systems) that the form of a concept is determined by ‘logical rules’, while the content is ‘derived from experience’ embodies a radical misinterpretation of the manner in which the ‘manifold of sense’ contributes to the shaping of the conceptual apparatus ‘applied’ to the manifold in the process of cognition. (IM, 337)

This quote helps us to clarify two points. The first one is that, again, to say that material inference is crucial to meaning does contribute to saying that the acquisition of a language is a fully embodied affair, it happens in the world, it is based on experiential observations, and it has to be wired up with our *sensa*. Epistemic experience is conceptual, it is something that we apprehend, just as every aware interaction with reality is shaped conceptually, since to use concepts is part of human activities, what the human species does. However, conception, or if we want to be more conservative—considering that at this point of the thesis we have yet to introduce notions related to concepts—cognition is also shaped in co-operative accord with *sensa*, the manifold of sense. The process of language acquisition is synthesised in experience and the apprehension of rules of use, which we can perform and then become gradually more and more aware of, must synch up with sensations. Conception cannot contradict the inputs of experience, which, for as much as it is made sense of through conceptual representings, maintains a certain kind of autonomy thanks to the ontologically relevant character of *sensa*. This synching up is also temporal: we have sensations and we acquire terms and rules all at the same time, there is a mutual shaping going on. The upshot of our research is thus that this process of synching up does not pertain only to language, but to any medium that we could imagine taking its place in structuring our holistic representations of reality.

More generally, in terms of Sellarsian philosophy, it would really seem as though, for Sellars, experience, although conceptually infused, is not a ‘passion’ or a passive element, with no part to play in knowledge. We know the world or, more minimally speaking, we interact with the world, through a complex and multi-layered set of ‘representations’ of it. These are representations not in the sense that they relate to the world as if it was their content—although we do experience our thoughts as contentful—that is then abstracted as a representation, but in the sense that they are not real in the way that empirical reality is real. Experience, our fully-embodied being

in the world, contributes to the shaping of our conceptual apparatus and hence to the production of these representations, entertaining a relation with the formal traits of conception that is simply not the relation a 'content' would supposedly have with its 'form'. In other words, the binary relations of content and form, experience and the language of its expression, and, one could add, mind and intuition, are all equally inadequate. Knowledge is truly an experiential affair within the existing framework that is already in place before each and every individual experience begins, and conception is not abstracted from experiential inputs. The role of experience is appreciated here, rather than as foundational to knowledge, as co-participating in it and, importantly, compensating for the inconsistencies that a conceptual framework usually reveals.

We can take this as a mid-twentieth century account of the rapport between understanding and intuition. Sellars' way of talking about experience is a way to dissolve this untenable dualism, but without for all this having experience be simply *produced* by conception. This theme crosses all of Sellarsian philosophy, and the preceding excursus into the domain of logic may already bring some clarification to the brief mention we previously made of the notion of intuition.

We will come back to all of this in the second section, where more will be said concerning intuition as intuitings, that is as always already conceptually infused, and as doings of a sort. For the moment, we can pause with a simple consideration on the re-alignment of distinctions that this section has tried to bring to the surface. The relevant distinction is no longer the one between intuition and understanding, or between experience as content and the form-providing rules of which it is the content. The relevant distinction, put in Kantian terms, is the one between real and transcendental levels. This crosses another distinction, which we can instead retrieve in Spinozist terms, the one between doing and not-doing or, as we have seen so far, representing and represented or, for maximal generalisation, -ing and -ed.

The normative dimension of our activities as a social framing of reality is pervasive, and yet it has to uphold the 'market' standards of experience. This transcendental level ought to be distinguished from the real one, because it is not physically bound in the same way that the other one is, although whatever it is that makes the transcendental 'jump' occur, we will *also* have to be able to account for in physical terms. Importantly, as we will see in Section III, the physical bindedness of

entities, which we apprehend within the transcendental level, will also vary, giving us some leeway with which to assess the efficacy of our perception, but without for this reason assuming any direct access to reality. All we will be able to do will be to move and shift our view as our picture of reality congeals into coherent rapports.

All this being the case, the non-necessity of the transcendental level means that conceptual frameworks may change within a certain measure, for as epochal as that change may be. It also means that their material manifestation congeals into a medium which is ontologically relevant—hence why the change is restricted to being within 'a certain measure'— to the manifestation itself, although the medium is clearly not ontologically exceptional in this respect.

Following on from what was just said, we can then consider the second point we wanted to make. Sellars tries to naturalise what we associate with the transcendental level, showing how its representational dimension can be explained through the working of language, through the way it is used and acquired in the world—rather than appealing to a sort of 'pure' or 'lived' experience that, for some reason, would be especially connected to worldly reality, e.g., the notion of experience to be found in sense-data empiricism (EPM, 13-4). The suggestion put forward here is to imagine this explanation not only in terms of language as a medium for conception, but in terms of the notion of medium itself: taking the Sellarsian insight into language as a cornerstone to unify the notion of medium, as sweeping across the entire cognitive and conceptual domain. Indeed, referencing back to the citation made above, for as much as this last Sellarsian quote states something that is simply common sense in much of contemporary philosophy, it still points towards the stakes behind the study of the notion of medium that we propose here. When discussing the notion of medium, the content-form model will be dismissed. At the same time, the fact that the rules of logic may still constitute a framework within which it is convenient for us to move, hence marking them out with a specific status, will be explained in terms of the characteristic features of the notion of medium itself, which implies no ontological discontinuity, and will be differentiated in its status according to what we will define as observational access and actuality. These aspects will make it so that we can simply describe a medium as that in which something else can be postulated and recognised as synthetically present.

## **Section II**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Most of Section I was dedicated to explaining the normative character of Sellars' nominalism. We had to work out how to not fall into a possible regress, without resorting to the easy fix of introducing mental entities. While the latter could indeed be an easy solution to embrace for a metaphysician, it would reintroduce the whole host of ontological problems that we were trying to stave off while accounting for the validity of linguistic episodes. This does not mean that eventually something akin to mental activity could not be introduced, but as long as we are trying to account for validity in language only through linguistic episodes, it would be a sham to

presuppose mental episodes or, importantly, any awareness of the notion of concept itself (SM, 69). Therefore, if Section I was concerned with explaining how a rule comes to be a rule for a person, bearing in mind our fundamental theoretical commitments, and hence using only speech episodes—describing a movement that we crudely conceived as going from the level of natural language out towards a meta-language yet to be reckoned with and, eventually, possibly known, rather than from the level of linguistic episodes inward, towards a meta-language of conception that would then plant itself at the dubious point of origin of linguistic expression—Section II will try to account for the status of these speech episodes themselves or, as we roughly described them, 'tendencies to utter terms'. Can we further categorise them? In which sense are they speech episodes and only speech episodes?

We will now build on the considerations put forward in the previous section, and introduce a further distinction, which will inform the rest of our research: that between *act* and *action*. Sellars initially highlights the difference between the two notions within the context of his theory of language and language acquisition, in order to clearly respond to the accusation that he had simply devised yet another instrumentalist theory of language. The clarifications that Sellars makes in order to show how his work is not even implicitly committed to instrumentalism will become central to the first stage of our discussion in this section. Indeed, the declared goal of this part of the thesis is to describe language in relation to thought in a way that is neither instrumentalist nor materialist, this being one of the peculiarities of Sellars' work. To validate this description, we will first define a vast subgroup of speech episodes as acts rather than actions.

Past this initial discussion, a definitional statement by Seibt will stand as pivot point to the rest of the thesis: for Sellars, 'language is not the expression but the medium of conceptualization' (Seibt, 119). Once we have managed to position language in relation to mental episodes in a way that is neither instrumentalist nor materialist, by appealing to this quote, we will extend the particular case of language to the more general one of medium. In other words, the notion of medium itself will also find its place equidistantly from materialism and instrumentalism. Departing from this position, we will deduce some of the chief characteristics of the notion of medium so reconsidered, not only in relation to thought and conception, but, more generally, in relation to what we usually identify as that which is mediated by a medium. To do

this, we will need to examine some more aspects of Sellars' work, starting from the way in which he introduces the notion of mental episodes, the double definition of thought, the Manifest and the Scientific Images, and the related notions of observation and postulation, all the way to the theory of predication and the adverbial theory of the object of sensation. This material is vast and complex. We will try to limit our explanation to the key, indispensable passages, and refer to the commentary already available for further research.

## **2.2 Linguistic episodes as acts rather than actions**

In sub-section 1.3.b, we referenced the point at which Sellars declares the non-existence of rules of semantics as relating linguistic to extra-linguistic entities. Following from that passage, we find another commonly referenced one, which articulates a complementary insight: 'uniformity of behaviour is rule-governed not *qua* uniformity, for then all habitual responses would be obeyings to rules—which is clearly not the case—but *qua* occurring, in a sense by no means easy to define, because of the conception of the norm enjoined by the rule' (IM, 336). Not only it is impossible for one to abide to each and every rule (meaning applying it), which supposedly settles the use of a term in language, but, if that were really the case, if all of our comportments were forms of obeying to a rule that can be stated, even moving a single step would be an impossibly complex operation. The regress that we saw was at stake, and tried to counter in the context of language acquisition, runs parallel to the fact that even if one already knew a rule of use, what counted as their verbal behaviour would not necessarily be constituted as though it was an aware and deliberate application of it. In most of occasions, it would not be. As we have already mentioned, uniformity of behaviour is the product not of the fact that we all apply the same known rules, but of the averaging effect of our representations of the world and of how the latter co-constitute our behaviour—we already saw this with the co-construction of experience and how it also draws on the apparatus of sensations.

The above quote from IM spells out the fact that, when it comes to verbal behaviour, there is no direct application of rules that state the use of terms in language. The quote is also highly compatible with what was said concerning dot-quoted terms, which increase the complexity of the relations between rules of language and observable behaviour. We can read it as a complementary comment to the core

argument advanced in IM, where Sellars affirmed the role of material inference and showed the non-existence of 'rules' of semantics conceived as laws of one-one correspondence between language and reality, but it also constitutes a good point of entry into the issues still pending with regards to the distinction between ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules, and its incompleteness. Or, rather, the comment gives us a further chance to explain what that distinction is *not* about.

### **2.2.a Acts and pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour, the introduction of a third category**

In Section I, we emphasised the position of the language trainer as one of competence, but then tempered this aspect. In order to assume a verbal behaviour of the type that responds to ought-to-do rules, one needs to be aware of the rule-bound ways in which we have to use words when being present in the world, i.e., knowing how we use the word yellow, when we are supposed to be in a yellow uttering or almost-uttering state. However, little was said with regards to how one relates to those rules *once* one knows how to state them, or knows how to translate them into rules with a know-that form. Is the ought-to-do set of rules—those requiring actions and key to the transmission of verbal behaviour in the form of ought-to-be rules—only a matter of training someone else in a language, as a way to enshrine the critical dimension enacted by ought-to-be rules? If that is the case, does one *really* bear in mind what a rule is and reflect on what it means when transmitting it through repeatable patterns? Or is one simply following a teaching pattern? In the latter case, is one intentionally obeying a rule, or merely reproducing its effects? Alternatively, can we say that ought-to-do rules ever become reflexive, meaning does one, once she knows the rule according to which she ought-to-be in a certain state, apply this ought-to-do rule to herself in order to bring that state about upon herself? If the answer to this question was positive, then what status would we attribute to the episodes that one has when in a certain state? Would they still be solely linguistic? Are we not still in danger of saying that some of these states will have to correspond to mental entities?

Back in Section I, we also left the discussion on the rapport between knowing-how and knowing-that on hold, waiting for a more satisfying development. Back then we noted that language acquisition and transmission is based on know-hows, but that for a know-how to be such and to be in place, a know-that also needs to be in place in

a way that it could eventually be stated, although the person who is going about reality fitted with that know-how may not have, nor be able to state, the corresponding rule in the know-that form. As already seen, the know-that is hardly ever final and, due to the non-relationality of semantics, it always implies a use, it is a know-how of sorts, ultimately a pseudo-know-that. Yet, the latter does hold sway on the knowing-how that we follow, willingly or not. Therefore, it may seem legitimate to ask whether there exists a solid level, where one could locate something akin to the knowing-that formulation of a rule, whether someone has it, whether it is to be found anywhere at all? Clearly the latter is nowhere, if the where-question was to be answered with a place. Further, we must abstain from any sort of foundationalism, or any assumption that rules come first and are not, instead, further formulations that one may eventually be able to state. We ought not to fall into the temptation of thinking of rules as 'prior' in any ontological sense. However, we also know that a knowing-that is at work in the form of know-how. Can we also say that the knowing-that is 'present' in some form, and if yes, in which one? Again, there are many ways in which we can re-state the notion that knowing-that—whatever its eventual formulation may be—relies upon knowing-how, but what is the source of the cohesiveness that the latter would seem to imply, if the 'knowing' part of the expression holds up to the epistemic value it claims, and is not simply the artefact of a way of speaking?

Rule-application resembles a bottom-less series of boxes-in-boxes, in which we can hardly say that we ever get a grip on the so-called 'actual' rules of language in their full scope. We only apply methods, temporarily plateauing on variably storable rules in a know-that form. When we begin to criticise the latter, we ought to reorganise the entire picture we have of reality, in a way clearly allied to Quine's field of knowledge, with its interdependent logical connections (Quine, 1953a), starting from the more variable and experiential peripheries of the mesh, all the way to its centre, the changing of which will require much consideration, as it may demand a complete makeover of one's world view. All material instantiations would then need to be re-aligned accordingly to make it plausible for one to accept the new reading we have of reality.

Now, to begin facing this host of problems, we can return to the above-stated set of questions concerning the rapport that a possible language trainer has with rules. Why do those questions matter? Minimally speaking because the account of language,

and of how it structures our cognition to the point that we could explain it through linguistic episodes, needs to be a plausible one, and—as Sellars hints in IM—to say that every single activity we do is the consequence of consciously obeying to a storable rule would be implausible. More importantly, we do not want to end up saying that linguistic episodes, considered as speech episodes within the process of language acquisition, are all necessarily *actions* that we intentionally ponder and deliberate upon. This cannot be the case, not even for the language trainer, who *does* respond at various points to required-action rules, and hence carries out actions in language at those moments— such as when she is transmitting the uses of terms—but does not carry out such an action *every* time that she is using terms the patterns of which are known to her. The reason why this would be undesirable is, again, easy to spot: if we do take all linguistic episodes as actions, then the obvious path would be to classify them as expressions, but expressions of what? These actions would entail decisions over something and in relation to something. They would be the expression of a reasoned intention, where the intention cannot be identified with linguistic episodes, but decided over and then expressed through action-like linguistic episodes. We would then have to admit the existence of non-action like entities, but what could those be? Since all linguistic episodes would already be defined as actions, the non-action like ones would not be linguistic. That would be our problem. For a whole set of linguistic episodes, we would reopen the door to mentalism. Minimally speaking, mentalism would be reintroduced for those linguistic episodes that are part of one's verbal behaviour and make it so that one recognises that the blue book on the table is blue coloured. Then, on the one hand, we could be accused of ontological dualism and, on the other hand, we would offer an instrumentalist theory of language.

To tie things together, we can see the problem at stake from the point of view of language upbringing. We ought to make sure that we do not commit ourselves to a reading where the language trainer has to have the notion of 'concept', for instance 'the concept of blue', in order to pass the use of the term 'blue' on. As mentioned already, Sellars was accused of sustaining precisely this position, and a quick run through this accusation might help us to clarify things. To expose this *querelle*, we should first point out, again with Seibt, the Sellarsian route to guarantee that not all linguistic episodes are willed actions.

This time, Seibt detects two simultaneous moves, both necessary, and one validating the other. On the one hand, Sellars will have to clarify that the distinction between *pattern-governed behaviours*—non-deliberated upon, usually related to the language trainee position—and *rule-governed behaviours*—usually related to the position of the language trainer, but mostly in the sense that, if they are responding to an ought-to-do or action-required rule, it means that they know what the use of a term is—is not refined enough to fully capture the relations between language (including its various norms) and observable behaviour, the latter being any type of observable activity, including the actual uttering of a word. The introduction of a third category appears to be necessary. On the other hand, we ought to stop considering language as the expression of mental episodes, and instead see language and linguistic episodes only as what mental episodes are *modelled on*: 'the relational conception according to which language (more or less directly) *expresses* mental events must be converted into a non-relational conception that, in the sense of heuristic or model, identifies mental episodes with linguistic episodes.' (Seibt, 112) This second injunction will then lead us to a definition of language as the medium of conception and not as its expression. For the moment, it is sufficient to say that this injunction cements the dismissal of a programme that sees language as an instrument of expression, something the only purpose of which is to express what goes on *in foro interno*.

Proceeding in an orderly manner, the third category of behaviour is labelled *pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour*, and is meant to name the majority of behaviours that one develops within a linguistic community (Seibt, 113-116). The introduction of this category directly addresses the concerns with which we began this section: knowing a rule does not mean that when we are using the term as indicated by the rule, we are effectively using (or one could say applying) the rule. In other words, as soon as one conforms to the use of a term, regardless of how much she is aware of the term's functional role, that conforming already contributes to one's overall behavioural structure, which in turn orientates all sorts of movements in space, all sorts of behaviours, overt or not, most of which will not be voluntary. The fact that, at a certain point, someone more fully comprehends the scope of use of a term within a cognitive net, to the point of being able to both criticise the use of the term and to teach it to someone else, does not mean that when she herself uses it, she does so *because* she is applying the rule. For this to make sense, one must remember that by

'use of a term' we not only refer to its use in *actual utterances*, but also *the propensity to utter* that we discussed in Section I: how that propensity names portions of reality, particulars, and organises our movements in space when that particular we have come to refer to through that term is part of the ongoing scene, like an obstacle that, by walking according to a certain trajectory, I may hit or avoid. This type of propensity to utter terms, the notion impressed in the net of our cognitive activities, is not an action, it is an act (see MTC, RM, LTC, SRLG). In Sellars' well-worn example, one can decide to look in the room next door, but one does not deliberately take there to be a burglar in the room next door (MTC, 420, RM, 489).

To be clear, we should take the distinction among pattern-governed behaviour, rule-complying behaviour and pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour as showing, in a theoretical mode of speaking, the shades of three possible relations between behaviour and rule. This means that the three categories highlight the possible rapports between an observable comportment and the rules that could be formulated as what that very behaviour is adhering to, whether the person whose behaviour we are observing happens to know them and chooses to follow them, or simply parrots them—and of course, we ought not to forget in terms of behavioural uniformities *only* reflecting rule uniformities. In this, the last category comes in handy for complicating the picture of what it means to be truly aware of a rule and consciously comply to it.

We can immediately appreciate how the category of pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour avoids the linear translation from ought-to-be rules into ought-to-do rules—once I know the rule, I am going to make myself apply it—in which ought-to-do rules would be entailed, in an instrumentalist sense, by ought-to-be rules. This third category of behaviour, still framed within language, irrevocably alters this schema, and leverages the introduction of a distinction between *actions*, as voluntarily intentional and aware, and *acts*.

This distinction is as tricky as it is crucial for understanding Sellars' theory of language, linguistic episodes and the further introduction of mental episodes. An act is, so-to-say, *at work* in the webs of linguistic rules, regardless our knowledge of them. It is present and, in turn, contributes to those same linguistic structures, regardless of our decisional capacities. An act is the manifestation of a commitment that we have because we are already implicitly committed to certain rules. More specifically, since here we are working with linguistic episodes, as per Sellars' mobilisation of them in

his theory of language, a linguistic act would be the inclination to utter a term, not for the sake of naming something or invoking something, but simply because we recognise something as something and could not recognise it as something else, within the structured context of our daily experience.

An interesting example in this regard comes from the history of philosophy. During the study of Sellars' work, it was brought to my attention by a peer (Mr. Austin Gross) that a good 'test case' for Sellars' distinction between act and action would be a fictional reconstruction of Gottlob Frege's reading of Bertrand Russell's infamous missive, in which Russell pointed out to Frege that his recent work on the formalisation of logic was undermined by a paradox discovered in the theory of sets. The consequences of admitting the paradox were devastating for Frege's life-time project of logicism. Frege eventually responded to Russell, but rather than arguing back, he acknowledged the paradox, invalidating probably the more significant part of his philosophical efforts. The project was simply terminated. Was Frege's recognition that Russell was right an action? In which sense of the word? Or was it instead an act? It clearly was an action within the extent that answering correspondence is an action. The realisation of a commitment that Frege was blind to, and that was invalidating his argument, was also an action of intentional critical reflection through a problem. A voluntary going through the argument once again and fighting off its disputation. However, the inevitability of admitting his mistake, when taking into consideration the structural commitments that his theory was premised on, signals that an *act* was at work already in the theorisation and it only needed to be made manifest in words, an *act*, a certain kind of representing, that, unfortunately, was silently working against the rest of the theory (for the correspondence, see Gottlob Frege, *Philosophical and Mathematical Correspondence*, 1980, 130-133).

Now, going through the reading of Sellars that indicts him of instrumentalism and expounding the accusation is a good way in which to further elucidate Sellars' non-instrumental model, and show how it forms the basis for a coherent introduction of private, inner episodes. The argument against Sellars is founded on an erroneous reading of the reasons why the distinction between ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules is introduced in the first place, and is therefore blind to the third category we have just introduced.

In 'Sellars' Linguistic Theory of Conceptual Activity', Antonio Marras argues that Sellars' distinction between ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules is indispensable to his theory, because if language was constituted only by ought-to-do rules that one must obey, it would be impossible to explain concepts in terms of rules of language (Marras, SLTCA and Sellars, Reply to Marras, RM). In his response to Marras (RM, 485), Sellars insists that the distinction between ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules was not *itself* introduced to demonstrate that concepts can be explained in terms of rules of language, although that very rapport between concepts and rules of language is one of the cornerstones of Sellars' work. The distinction between the two types of rules was really a distinction between two kinds of linguistic behaviours, and was introduced *only* to explain how rules of language are acquired and performed without being known, and further without one already needing to have notions related to knowledge as an epistemic affair, i.e., concepts, thoughts (SRLG, 322).<sup>22</sup>

Clearly, if Marras were right, Sellars' position would be instrumentalist from at least two points of view, a technical one, meaning his argument would be instrumentalist, as well as a theoretical one, in that his idea of language would be instrumental according to the reasoning that we rehearsed above. In Marras' reading, ought-to-be rules carry the burden of explaining conceptual activity—the stated goal of Sellars' theory—and are explanatorily prior to ought-to-do rules. Therefore, Marras' argument continues, the notion of conceptual episode is explanatorily prior to the one of linguistic episode, when our intention was to explain the former via the latter, meaning that Sellars' argument is as circular as it is banally instrumental. One would need to have concepts of mental activity before teaching a language, which is incoherent with the fact that Sellars has yet to introduce concepts of mental episodes in his theory of language (RM, 486-7).

The second kind of instrumentalism is the more relevant one, the one that comes with a Cartesian flavour: Sellars, according to Marras, still sees language as an

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<sup>22</sup> The reference here is to SRLG, where the notion of game and game playing, in full Wittgensteinian vein, is used to explain the difference between know-how and know-that, having the notion of concept at the linguistic meta-level and operating as according to it, but without always recurring to it. In this thesis, we do not use this example for the simple reason that Sellars himself dismisses it with regards to the aspects of his work that we want to highlight (SM, 147). Of course a person playing chess is following a rule without always rehearsing it to herself, but, more importantly, she is taking decisions as according to that rule, actively engaging with the ins and outs of the rule in order to achieve the specific goal of making the other player less and less capable of productively harnessing the same rules. There is a profound sense in which thinking-out-loud, and further, we will say, perceiving, is not like playing a game.

expression of mental activity in the sense that ought-to-be rules linearly translate into ought-to-do rules. Put in these terms, it is easy to see that the reason why Marras misreads Sellars is to be traced back to the fact that Marras seems to take all of linguistic activities as actions, and hence cannot register Sellars' third category of pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour. Instead, as already pointed out, one of the keys to Sellars' explanation of what we would attribute to conception exclusively through linguistic episodes—therefore putting the notion of conception into place through language and not vice versa—is precisely to state that there exist linguistic activities, which are fully linguistic, but which are not action-like. In fact, if all non-action-like activities were not linguistic, then they would again become un-explicable mental entities (MTC, 420).

Indeed, for Sellars, most probably the vast majority of linguistic episodes are not actions: perceptual takings, inferences, volitions and, obviously, feelings. In LTC, Sellars treats the example of feelings, such as showing sympathy, which is certainly not something that one brings it upon oneself to do (LTC, 509). The example is well-suited not only because it makes the point that non-action like episodes can be taken as linguistic episodes. It is also useful to show that what Sellars is trying to account for are not only mental episodes *qua* thoughts, but all possible episodes that we would qualify as inner episodes. If we go by the example used in LTC, then all types of so-called inner activity are to be modelled on linguistic non-action-like activity. It is implanted, so to say, in one's way of framing of reality through a process of upbringing that is streamlined by linguistic episodes, tendencies to utter terms. The specific type of inner episodes, so explained, that we label 'thoughts' will then be differentiated from other types of inner episodes because of the way in which thoughts can be evaluated, that is, the way in which they find structural positions within the systemic ordering of conception in its relevant medium, language.

As a way of wrapping up, first of all, all this does not exclude the existence of action-like inner activities that are not said out-loud, such as thinking through a mathematical problem or critically considering the use of a term in a certain context.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Another case we can think of is the one of speech acts, as theorised by J. L. Austin in 1955 (Sellars mentions Austin, his disciples and their attention to linguistic episodes as actions, LTC, 510). If we used the Sellarsian distinctions here in place, an Austinian speech act would be an action that participates to other actions and not an act-like type of speech episode *à la* Sellars. Interestingly, the classical examples of Austinian speech acts— marriage, betting, expressing a will, officially naming something or someone etc.— are connoted by an institutional and procedural tone, for which the action of uttering out loud a specific term is integral to a protocol of actions to be followed in order to

Second, the difference between ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules is there to differentiate two classes of verbal behaviours, two modes of relating to language, its terms and its commitments, and it is internal to language: both behaviours are verbal. Operating with language in an action-required mode, as in the case of ought-to-do rules, pertains to linguistic activities, and is comprehensible in terms of speech episodes, just as much as ought-to-be, state-required rules can be seen as purely linguistic states, states that are linguistically connoted. The distinction is *not* a way to differentiate concepts and conceptual activity on one side from language and the expression of conceptual activity on the other, with the latter as the domain of actions responding to required-action rules and the former as the domain of mental episodes. Indeed, to confirm the differentiation between the two types of verbal behaviour, ought-to-be rules and ought-to-do rules do not have the same subject at the same time. If one has a verbal behaviour that is responding to an ought-to-do rule, that is a behaviour the function of which is to bring it about that other people are in a certain state a certain point, one is not single-handedly bringing that state about upon oneself, neither in the case when one *is* actually in that state—because then the force of the ought-to-do rule would be nil—nor in the case when one *is not* actually in that state—because one does not simply talk oneself into a certain recognitional state, in the sense that mere talking would not be enough. *A whole re-wiring of historical pattern responses is necessary.*

Commitment to a representation is a commitment to act, rather than to action, but an act is still more than a mere saying. The cut into material reality goes deeper. Without diverting from the reflection at stake here, and in fact giving it the right weight, the case of perceptions of class and the coding of accents within social contexts is a good example to bear in mind. In this case, it is particularly important to appreciate the notion of act and its dimension as a *doing* fully at work, even when discrimination is not intended, and especially when amends to social behaviours are promoted, but only in terms of superficially changing the use or valuation of words,

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make something be the case. This does not seem to be the kind of speech episodes that Sellars mostly refers to when illustrating various types of verbal behaviour. We will not look at the rapport between Sellars and proceduralism in this thesis, but it would certainly be an interesting and challenging question for the Sellarsian to show how, albeit based on a verbal notion of behaviourism, Sellarsian philosophy does not necessarily espouse a procedural model, but in fact could account for the reasons why protocols that are not, first of all, embedded in the material cogs of reality as something other than mere protocols, are bound to decay. In this sense, the proposed pairing of Sellars with Habermas may need revising (Rorty, 'Introduction', in Sellars, 1997).

rather than the internal acts that underpin those behaviours. The re-wiring of one's behaviour may lead to different perceivings, which would commit one to different activities: that when one is aware of the rule in effect, one may decide to comply with it or not. In all this, not only the language trainee, but also the language trainer, is mostly in non-actioning states, behaving in a pattern-governed rule-complying mode, the latter being the further distinction that is necessary to refine our description of types of behaviour. Most linguistic activities, such as takings, inferences, volitions, will always remain pattern-governed and never become obeyings to ought-to-do rules, action-required rules, for which one's volition would become actions (MFC, 424).<sup>24</sup>

There certainly was a shorter and perhaps easier way to make the same point. There exist two verbal behaviours, which one assumes at different times, within the schema of a theory trying to account for the validity of language use only through linguistic activity. This being the case, language cannot be considered as an instrument, as much as linguistic activities are not always actions, and this is what the differentiation between the two initial classes of verbal behaviour was meant to show. We have spent quite a bit of time on this point, however, because it is necessary to stress how language has a non-instrumental relation vis-à-vis conceptual activity, and to show how this is a consequence of the commitments we have taken to a non-dualist interpretation of the rapport between language and thought. This is also a way to lay the ground for the introduction of mental episodes from *within* language and not from *behind* it. The two aspects here emphasised will then be extended to the case of the medium, where non-instrumentality and the postulation of what is mediated will be key aspects of the discussion.

At this point of our explanation, we can recognise in Sellars' languagings, the linguistic episodes that would be enough to eventually account for the function of conception, Ryle's thinking-out-louds. The latter are at the centre of Sellars' most famous and most referenced paper, 'Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind' (EPM, 1956). There, we find an explication of the fact that, although sufficient to explain

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<sup>24</sup> Here again, the comparison with Merleau-Ponty's final pages of *Phenomenology of Perception* may come to mind, where, in the words of Saint-Exupery, the notion of freedom of action or free decision is transformed into an acting as according to what, effectively, is the only possible path within a certain situation (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 530). In the lead up to the conclusion of the book, Merleau-Ponty weaves a Spinozist-sounding notion of freedom in terms of 'an exchange between the situation and the person who takes it up', where 'it is impossible to determine precisely the "share contributed by the situation" and the "share contributed by freedom"' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 527).

how conceptual structures may come into place, languagings, thinking-out-louds, are still not enough to give an account of a specific aspect of thinking that we seem to display. For as much as the introduction of non-action like linguistic episodes allows us to argue that what we call thinking and conceiving is socially structured from the outside through language, it still cannot explain why we experience what we call 'thoughts' as private, why our thinking apparently comes from inside, rather than outside. However, before moving onto a discussion focused on this aspect of EPM, let us draw out some considerations on Sellars and instrumentalism.

### **2.2.b Some reflections: function and functionalism, the question of communication and Sellars' pragmatism**

Sellars' work on language, with its appeal to speech episodes to account for what are then introduced analogically as mental episodes and his functional-role model of semantics, is often referenced as a forerunner of functionalism. The latter is still one of the prevalent views on mental episodes, tied with a double-knot to behaviourism, as well as to the cognitive science approach and the computational theory of mind.<sup>25</sup> The roots of functionalism go back to early computational theories, which were hugely influential on the development of behaviourism, and specifically to Alan Turing's 1930s work on the notion of abstract machines and the ensuing research on, first, computing and then artificial intelligence. Functionalism, although inclusive of a causal and normative version (Beisecker, 2012, traces the normative version back to Sellars), broadly speaking, sustains the view that what we usually name as mental states—thoughts, emotions, desires—depend on the function that they have within the apparatus of cognition, and not on their inner qualities or on their internal constitution. There is nothing proper to a thought that makes a certain mental state a thought other than its way of functioning, its role, in the complex system of other cognitive activities in which it can be located. This is also to say that, if the systemic function of a purported entity is traceable in various context, so is the entity itself. If we take functionalism to have come about in the context of research on the possibility of machinic thought (c.f. McDonough, 2014), such a position would seem at odds with more emergentist readings of Sellars, and specifically with Sellars'

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<sup>25</sup> See Putnam, Fodor, Black, Lewis, to reference just a few classical names, as well as, for instance, Churchland, among Sellars' students.

reading of Kant as seen in the latter part of section I. If the specificities of an organism are ultimately not superfluous to its capacity for certain mental states, then to say that 'a given "program" could be realised in virtually any material' might sound like a misstep. In this respect, we will, in the next subsections, have to consider Sellars' relation to materialism, in order to better appreciate the extent of the compatibility between Sellars' notion of meaning as role-function in linguistic episodes and the basic maxim of functionalism. As McDonough also states, there may be a role for functionalism in this philosophy, so long as functionalism is not wedded to a mechanistic notion of physical entities (McDonough, 2014, 50). We already begin to see how Sellars' rapport with materialism is key to understanding his work, as much as it is complicated to do so. The translatability of functional roles is crucial to determining these very functional roles, and yet there is no immediate transposition that can easily cut across the specificities of different systems. We will come back to this point.

As a side reflection on this point, I would like to suggest, if only in passing, another not-so-dissimilar direction that the Sellarsian notion of function could lead us to. The notion of functional role, how we use a term, is not directed towards a localised aim, the carrying out of an objective. However, it fits within an overall framing of reality, which implies acts of perceiving, states that one is in when in certain circumstances—seeing that there is a door in front of me, something that puts me in the position of being inclined to utter the term 'door'—which also imply consequential actions. These perceivings extend into acts, as well as actions that they commit us to, and one may decide to comply to or not—treating that which I perceive to be a door as a door or, or deciding not to. This is to say that the functional role of an entity or a term is not meant as its function with respect to an aim, but its function with respect to an operative system, which itself may have a goal, but, in the case that interests us would be the one of imaging, organising, setting up the whole of reality. Now, for as much as a teleological dimension is already at work at the linguistic level,<sup>26</sup> it would

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<sup>26</sup> Rottschaefer (1983) raises the topic of the inherently teleological quality of functional classification, with specific reference to Sellars, and in response to Marras' critique. The defence here is against the fact that, in a further critique, Marras finds it unjustifiable and contradictory of Sellars' to attribute to semantic discourse a normative and non-descriptive character often at work without the speakers being aware of it, while the function of semantic discourse is to describe how verbal behaviour stands in relation to other verbal and non-verbal behaviours. Rottschaefer demonstrates that Marras' attack is based on a restriction of explanatory discourse to simple mechanistic explanation (Rottschaefer, 1983, 519/20).

obviously be mistaken to say that the subject of perceivings is perceiving in order to achieve a goal. However, although it sounds like a stretch, to say that the subject of actions is acting to achieve a goal is not incorrect, once we admit that the subject may only be aware of immediate goals. There is a structurally ordering capacity that is implied in the functional role model, the holistic dimension of which cannot be overemphasised. This mode of structural construction, with its preservation of rapports, points towards a mathematical notion of function, rather than a goal-based one. If we were to accept the interpretation that emphasises a mathematical notion of function—as opposed to, for instance, the one recommended by Peregrin (2001)—then we would probably trace it back to the work of Cassirer in his challenge to Aristotelean logics in *Function and Substance* (1910). In this context, Cassirer takes up the notion of function from continuous mathematics, devising holistic models in which all elements suitably fit with each other, having gone through a dialectical process. What appears to be important here is to stress the difference between function and instrument and, further, between functionality and instrumentality. For this task, tracing back Sellars' philosophical project to previous elaborations of the notion of function may be useful, if only to build a more robust genealogy, since Sellars makes little reference to the provenance of the notion of function that he mobilises.

As yet another side note, this time taken directly from Sellars' writing, communication is an aspect of language that is largely underplayed in his philosophical work. While Sellars acknowledges that language is also a communicational tool, he dismisses the idea that it is only or even chiefly a communicational tool (LTC, 511). The reason is again to be found in the argument against instrumentalism: if we see linguistic activity as communication transmission and understand that transmission as an action, then it is impossible to sustain the explanation of what supposedly goes on *in foro interno* via analogy with linguistic activity. Therefore, the communicational account of language is mistaken if it is the only one, but for Sellars to even consider language mainly as communication would be to grasp the matter from the wrong handle and lift it up upside down (NAO, 121). Indeed, pattern-governed behaviours show how language is not chiefly a matter of communication, since they are not directed towards an interlocutor: in fact, thinking-out-louds are not directed in any sense of the word, not even towards oneself (LTC, 517). In this model, if thinking was introduced as a form of internal dialogue, it would

only be in the style of the Platonic dialogues of the soul, conversations that happen not for the purposes of exchanging already known and comprehensible ideas, but in order to activate inner dialectical movements.

A theorist committed to communication could respond to Sellars by arguing that his theory does not disprove that language is primarily a tool for communication. Indeed, language may be organising our conceptual structures in a manner that admits the existence of non-action-like linguistic episodes, and that those episodes, albeit not in themselves directed towards an audience, are structured within a holistic system, whose global function is also communication, mutual transmission of information, and not only the conceptual picturing of reality. The trouble with this way of speaking is not really its emphasis on communication, but the fact that it is premised on the possibility of untangling the shaping of one's cognitive and conceptual structures from one's existence in a community where that process of shaping takes place, with communication defined as that which bridges across community members.<sup>27</sup> We require a more profound distinction between communication and what we normally call 'transmission'. The transmission function, which commonly facilitates social reproduction via linguistic training, is a relevant feature of language, but it does not coincide with communication itself. Moreover, if communication needs to have a role within the theory of language we have been looking at, it cannot have the role of being the goal of language. We will return to the question of communication in Section III, where we will try to repurpose our findings in Sellarsian philosophy in order to reconsider the notion.

As a last note, and as a way to round up this series of comments on the status of the majority of speech episodes as acts—which becomes the reason why it is plausible to use them as analogous to and for the explanation of inner episodes—it is worth looking at a comment on pragmatism that Sellars includes in SRLG. Said comment is all the more relevant at this point, considering the tight relation between pragmatism and functionalism.

Notoriously, Sellars is often classified as an American pragmatist philosopher, part of an older generation of scholars working at the Pittsburgh school, usually seen as the centre of American neo-pragmatism, and Sellars' debt to Peirce has already

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<sup>27</sup> Here again and, as we will see more closely in Section III, we highlight yet another discontinuity between Sellars and Habermas.

been mentioned.<sup>28</sup> In the introduction to *Naturalism and Ontology* (NAO), Sellars spends a few words on his relation to pragmatism. NAO collects lectures dedicated to John Dewey given in 1974, where Sellars explains how Dewey's influence on his work was a rather late realisation. Early in his career, 'pragmatism seemed all method and no results' to Sellars, not a strand of philosophical inquiry that one could get one's teeth into, asking questions about mind and substance, the reality of time, etc. (NAO, 9). From the point of view of this thesis, mostly holding that commitments to realism and naturalism are the power engines at the heart of Sellarsian philosophy, pragmatism does come across as a method, albeit a crucial one. However, Sellars' theory of meaning is a coherence theory through and through, and shows the more idealist side of his philosophy, the one that more clearly develops along the lines of pragmatism. Meaning is a matter of systemic coherence, and the notion of semantic truth is an affair internal to language: truth is what a language can afford to state. We mentioned already in Section I that Sellars' work tries to dismiss both the Hegelian serpent and the foundationalist tortoise, and yet seems to strategically adopt parts of both. The theory of language mobilises the figure of the snake biting its tale. As we will see, Sellars' theory of predication and empirical truth will somehow mobilise the figure of the tortoise holding the world on its shell, not because Sellars will ever argue in favour of the existence of either the tortoise or the world, as conceived in the mythical image, but because there may be a point, after all, in being able to state that something is *on* something else, where the preposition *on* is the word with philosophical relevance here.

All this notwithstanding, for the purposes of the current introduction of the notion of act, it is worth spending some words to comment on one of Sellars' explicit references to pragmatism, the one we find in SRLG, a paper from 1954:

Pragmatism, with its stress on language (or the conceptual) as an instrument, has had hold of a most important insight—an insight, however, which the pragmatist has tended to misconceive as an *analysis* of 'means' and 'is true'. For it is a category mistake (in Ryle's useful terminology) to offer a definition of 'S means p' or 'S is true' in terms of the role of S as an instrument in problem solving behavior. On the other hand, if the pragmatist claim is reformulated as the thesis that the language we use has a much more intimate

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<sup>28</sup> We can riff again, as per Quine's prediction, that once it abandons its two dogmas (the possibility of distinguishing between analytic and synthetic knowledge and reductionism), empiricism heads towards both pragmatism and a blurring of the boundaries between natural sciences and speculative metaphysics. We will see that Sellars' philosophy does exactly that.

connection with conduct than we have yet suggested, and that this connection is intrinsic to its structure as language, rather than a 'use' to which it 'happens' to be put, then Pragmatism assumes its proper stature as a revolutionary step in Western philosophy. (340)

This long quote works as a good summary of what we have tried to elucidate. Linguistic terms and their meaning do not operate as tools, instrumentally put to use for the resolution of a problem, which we figure out and respond to by assuming the needed behaviour. It is also to note the italicisation of the term 'analysis', which seems to stress the dubious analytical character that the pragmatist method ends up claiming for itself, as one risks presupposing the possibility of analysing a term's meaning and its role in problem solving by isolating it as a logic unit. Language and behaviour are internal to each other and holistically organised in such a manner that a so-called problem solving behaviour may already be its implicit solution. Whereas the pragmatist maxim recommends us to 'trace out in the imagination the conceivable practical consequences of the affirmation or denial of the concept [to find] the *whole* of the purport of the word, the *entire* concept' (Peirce, 1997, 56-57), Sellars insists that the linguistic episode in which we utter or are inclined to utter a term, even prior to any affirmation or denial, already carries the commitment to those traced boundaries, the extensions of which are not always entirely available to us, that is that we can decide to commit to them or not. The moments when we do deliberate over the use of a term are the ones in which we consider and criticise the activities it already commits us to. Then, we may decide not to comply with them, use a different term, take different commitments. However, if I decide not to treat as a door what I perceive as a door, I might also end up crashing against it—or so I may be inclined to believe, for that belief is implied in the term 'door'. Clearly, no judgement is made over the fact that certain doors may be worth or even necessary to crash against.

### **2.3 The introduction of inner episodes**

The problem of appealing to linguistic episodes to explain the workings of language, including the ways in which validity is assigned, posed the challenges of accounting for the function of its normative aspect and, in relation to that, for what kind of knowledge of the norms one can and ought to have in order to follow it, as well as for the status of linguistic episodes. As it turns out, the point is that as much one may know the use of a term, one does not need to know that that use is regulated

by a norm that is conceptual. We can now explain how language is used and learnt, and how its acquisition contributes to—or, one could begin to say, coordinates or even *regulates*— the structuring of one's overall behaviour, which amounts to actions and, mostly, acts, according to the distinction that we have drawn. Dealing with these two aspects has prepared the way to introduce what we would call inner episodes, having made sure that they were not presupposed to linguistic episodes, but that the latter could plausibly be a model for the former. Yet, why should we introduce inner episodes at all? Sellars demonstrates that inner episodes are not reducible to sentences about behaviour (Seibt, 131-2), and motivates the necessity for their introduction with a simple observation. For as much as, being analogous to speech episodes, inner episodes are publicly shaped and primordially intersubjective (Seibt, 132), we still need to account for the fact that what I call 'my thoughts' are characterised by their pertaining to me, as though they emanated from an inner perspective:

[The] immediate problem is to see if [one] can reconcile the classical idea of thoughts as inner episodes which are neither overt behavior nor verbal imagery and which are properly referred to in terms of the vocabulary of intentionality, with the idea that the categories of intentionality are, at bottom, semantic categories pertaining to overt verbal performances (EPM, 94).

The importance of inner episodes for Sellars cannot be overemphasised, and the necessity to account for them is part of a problem that he saw as recurrent in the history of philosophy. The idea that conception is analogous to speech is an old philosophical move, to be traced back to Plato, but every time this move has been attempted, it was confronted with a problem paradigmatic of the discourse of that time. For each and every attempt, the analogy of inner episodes with speech has taken the name of a contemporary quibble, and, writes Sellars, 'to our generation, it has been that of the public and private, the conceptual relationships and in particular, priorities involved in the existence of epistemic privilege in the public domain' (SM, 65). In the passage that this quote is taken from, Sellars is referencing the sceptics' problem of the justification for the existence of 'other people's minds', in light of the impossibility of observing other people's mental states, ending up in the solipsism of only being able to contemplate 'one's own case'. These were frequent topics of debate in the behaviourist-infused environment Sellars was working in. Now, if not in terms of scepticism towards the existence of other minds, at least in terms of one's privileged

epistemic access to one's own thoughts, we can agree that the problem paradigmatic of Sellars' time of writing is still our own. At bottom, if we say that inner episodes, from conceptions to beliefs to feelings—Sellars' work witnesses to the fact that the case of thoughts is but an exemplar case of a variety of inner episodes—are to be understood by analogy with language, then we are dealing with a version of the perennial problem of the one and the many. Even the fact that inner episodes are *experienced as inner*, and not exactly as tendencies to utter words, as we have tried to analogically account for them up to this point, is enough to require further explanation.

Clearly, the introduction of inner episode is also crucial from the perspective of the interests at the centre of this thesis. The way in which thoughts, according to a double-notion of thought that we will soon examine, are postulated by analogy with linguistic entities is the aspect that we will try to extend to the case of the medium and what is supposedly mediated. The order of the argument that is now leading us to the introduction of inner episodes will also preserve its importance in the case of this latter extension. Further, also in the case of the medium and the rapport that each and every medium entertains with language and thought—the fact that it 'passes' through language in our medium-series, as we will see further down the line—the question of the one and the many is of crucial relevance as an articulation of the relation between public and private in the context of investigating the *actuality* that characterises processes of mediation.

### **2.3.a The introduction of inner episodes and the 'Myth of Jones', genius of our Rylean ancestors**

'Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind', Sellars' most widely read paper, originally published in 1956, hosts some of the key ideas of Sellarsian philosophy within a deceptively simple structure, which can be split into the telling of three myths. The last third of the text, the one of interest here, is occupied with the story of genius Jones and serves the philosophical purpose of introducing the notion of inner episodes. The declared goal of EPM is to fight a myth with another myth: Jones' story fights off the Myth of the Given, one of Sellars' central preoccupations in the 1950s and 1960s. Later in his career, Sellar admits both that the question of the Given remained a crucial topic throughout his career (Carus Lectures) as well as how, at some point, it moved to the background of his philosophical project (NAO). There are two facets to the

Myth of the Given: the myth of the epistemic given and the myth of the categorical given. The critique to the epistemic given is directed mostly at mid-century Analytic empiricist theories of sense-data, and boils down to denying that we have any direct access to reality through our sense-data, through our sensations. In its most basic formulation, the categorical given states that '[i]f a person is directly aware of an item which has categorical status C then the person is aware of it *as* having categorical status C' (LA, 11). Hence, to reject this latter statement and those that come in a similar form is to reject that 'the categorical structure of the world—if it has a categorical structure—imposes itself on the mind as a seal imposes an image on melted wax' (LA, 11/2). Categorical structures are constructed, and what we perceive, we perceive through these constructions, but clearly the world out there does not exist *as* we know it through them. The two facets of the myth are two sides of the same coin. On the one hand, we do not have sensation-based direct access to reality, which, on the other hand, means that mutable categories filter our access to it. Sellars' very Kantian critique aims at disbanding the naturalistic fallacies of positivism and naïve empiricism. We could insist again on the fact that the Myth of the Given is appended to the two dogmas of empiricism that Quine tries to debunk, if one is committed to the two dogmas, which for Quine come together, one is also committed to the Sellarsian given (Quine, 1953a, 47).

According to the Myth of Jones, Jones is a member of an ancestral community, the Ryleans, who just as in Ryle's theory of behaviour, do not have concepts related to mental episodes and whose linguistic behaviour corresponds to what we (but obviously not they) would describe with the notion of thinking-out-loud. The Ryleans have spontaneous verbal responses to perceptual situations, but do not have a sense of what we, in our contemporary age, would describe as conceptual episodes that sometimes culminate in thinking-out-louds. Whenever what we would describe as an inner episode of the taking in of reality occurs, the Ryleans simply speak or, so to say, think-out-loud, as though their behaviour was 'threaded on a string of overt verbal behaviour episodes' (EPM, 102). These linguistic episodes are not actions, but acts, for the way we have differentiated the two, and, for the Ryleans, they are simply linguistic, existing alongside other linguistic episodes that for us are actions and can only happen out loud, such as deliberating, stating, promising (SM, 72). This means that when a Rylean is about to do something, she thinks-out-loud what we, in our

current times, would describe as her intentions. All this also implies that the Ryleans are unfamiliar with what Sellars comes to define as the language of theory, which postulates the existence of entities that, in virtue of their existence, render observations of a phenomenon coherent.

At some point in history, a particularly brilliant member of the community, Jones, realises that in those cases when his fellow Ryleans are about to do something, he is capable of telling what they would think-out-loud. This ground-breaking intuition leads him to formulate the hypothesis that these thinking-out-louds—as well as movements in space and various other behaviours—are the culmination of inner episodes that he could potentially reconstruct in language, model on language. This modelling constitutes a theoretical way of speaking, it is based on a postulation, thanks to which Jones can hypothesise reliable descriptions of the content of the Ryleans' thinking-out-louds, by observing their behaviour. Once he has introduced inner episodes, Jones teaches the people of his community how to speak about them, considering that they still cannot be observed in any way, via teaching them how to use the theoretical language that he has devised to report on their thoughts. For instance, when moving in a certain manner, a member of the community will learn how to say 'I am thinking that...' and complete the sentence by positing a cause consistent with that movement, consistent as according to the rules she apprehended when acquiring linguistic competences and that orientate her behaviour. By observing one's behaviour (all sorts of movement in space) one can guess what she would think-out-loud, which she may then confirm or refute, a refutation that itself could also be challenged through hypothesising other plausible paths of thinking-out-loud. The Ryleans become aware of the fact that they can not only guess but also report on what they would think-out-loud and what their fellow community members would think-out-loud. The latter thinking-out-louds or acts, now simply named thoughts, are reported in language: thoughts are entirely (re)constructed within the language side of reality, at a representational level, as concepts articulated in language. Jones and the Ryleans are now off observing and questioning their own thoughts. Indeed, the theoretical language gradually becomes observational as the practice of perusing one's thoughts becomes readily available and no longer requires that one pays too much attention to manifest behaviour and infers each and every inner episode from it. Clearly thoughts become observable not in themselves, but in language, in what comes

to be defined as concepts, due precisely to the way in which they have been postulated. In his theory, Jones postulates the existence of inner episodes, *which we do not have immediate access to*, but that we come to know in their discursive counterpart, through the language on which they are modelled.

### **2.3.b A comment on the function of the notion of myth in EPM**

There are reasons to believe that the use of the notion of myth to label givenness first, and Jones' story later, is not simply an idiosyncratic word choice. Rebecca Kukla (2000), as of today, is the only Sellarsian scholar to have correctly pointed out that the word 'myth', for Sellars, is not neutral, but theoretically significant.<sup>29</sup> Myths are not simply fantastical tales. They *function* in a performative way in relation to the society that hands them down from one generation to the next. When Sellars finally postulates the existence of 'thoughts'—the remainder from the early discussion on normativity within the framework of epistemology (Seibt, 135)—the process of integration of the newly postulated entities into daily activity is equally important.

There exists textual evidence of Sellars' interest in the specific valence of the notion of myth, from his review of the English translation of Cassirer's *Language and Myth* (Sellars, 1948/49). We take myth to be a method of naming for which there is no difference between the name used for an entity and the entity itself: the two are one, not merely in the sense of correspondence, but in the full sense of being the same thing. In myth, there is no distinction between an entity and its name. To be more precise, for Cassirer, myth is a cultural form based on the separation between the sacred and the profane. As Ursula Renz summarises, in Cassirer, myth is connoted by ignorance of the distinction between representing and represented—in this sense it is different from scientific thinking and, as we will see, this is an important aspect to bear in mind—and by an all-encompassing character: myth does not recognise the existence of other cultural forms (such as art or science, for instance), nor the crises that constitute their respective scopes, nor the semantic distinctions that respond to those crises (such as beautiful and inconspicuous or truth and appearance). As a

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<sup>29</sup> Although Kukla's contribution is an inspiration for this sub-section and we owe to it the recognition of the performative aspect of myth in Sellars, we also wish to take distance from it. Kukla appears to overlook the critical character that the notion of myth has in EPM, and its possible use to shed light on Sellars' notion of normativity as what could be otherwise, although its being different from what it is would require the same effort of switching from one myth to another, requiring the telling of a new, effectively performative, story.

consequence, myth is that 'form of cultural consciousness which deceives itself *systematically* about its own roots. [...] [I]t has no insight into its own cultural character' (Renz, 2009, 147).

Sellars' critique of the Myth of the Given is based on the fact that conceptual awareness is not direct, as much as none of our interactions with the world are, and that immediacy is not a character of epistemic knowledge. To state the opposite risks affirming either a naïve kind of naturalism, in which mind and nature are in seamless continuity with each other, or a reductive, positivist naturalism, usually the mask of dogmatism. Considering all of this, it should be relatively easy to see why the Given is mythical in the sense of myth just described. Givenness is founded on the flattening of concepts or senses onto the world. This is founded on the elimination of the third epistemic dimension—or whatever way we want to call it—that is needed, according to our argument, to talk about knowledge in a manner that is neither dogmatic nor naïve. The myth of the given is a myth not simply because it is a false story, or the fruit of human imagination, or an ancient tale that we ought to no longer believe in. Givenness is mythical because it shares the very quality, proper to myths, of indistinction between something existing in the world and its name. We appeal to concrete, empirical objects by calling them by what we assume to simply be their divine names. Sellars' objective in EPM is to install a myth of non-givenness in place of the one of givenness. However, in this, we ought to notice that Sellars describes also the one of non-givenness, enacted through the story of genius Jones', as a myth.

For what concerns this second recurrence of the notion, we can deduce the specific value of telling Jones' story as a myth by looking at Jones' development and his ensuing teaching of his theoretical language. Once Jones has introduced his theory, he also proceeds with a sort of educational campaign for its sustained application. This application consists of tracking non-observable thoughts through overt language, and its operation is to be embedded in conduct and behaviour. Soon enough, the Ryleans begin to report on their thoughts for anything that they do that could count as behaviour, such as seeing that something in one's field of vision is red. Owing to the way that thoughts are introduced, as entities that are not immediately *accessed*, they are first *inferred* through behaviour but eventually *become* one and the same thing with the concept-laden language through which they are reported. This type of activity would seem to eventually take on mythical features in the sense explained above.

Naming Jones' story as a myth serves to highlight the function of training through which one learns how to verbalise one's thoughts, making them subsist in the recognisable form of discursive articulation. In the first instance, this articulation requires awareness of action from the individual: the training entails that we use language, in its particular role as orientating and generally structuring of behaviour overall, to bring thoughts up to a level at which they can be observed. However, the training would not be completed until, at some point, the mechanism regulating the rapport between thoughts and language was inverted, and what we had come to call thinking was experienced as though it was prior to language and one's linguistic episodes were simply its more or less frequent, overt culmination. In this sense, the notion of myth appears relevant and appropriate to rendering a process of internalisation that explains how something which is merely an 'ought to be', rather than being a 'what is', becomes inherent to our overall behaviour, that is it becomes causal and 'inner', and establishes itself as a sort of *a priori* to further activities. The story of the Myth of Jones would therefore operate in inverse historical order vis-à-vis what we usually name myths. If the latter are presented in the history of culture, for instance, as predecessors of later theoretical formulations that would eventually disband the notion of divine names, taking us from immediacy to non-immediacy, the Myth of Jones goes the other way around, and shows how the non-immediacy of postulated thoughts became, in its own way, a form of immediacy of thoughts in language.

As a relevant point, the story of Jones is presented as 'likely', in the same manner that Timeaus' three stories of the genesis of the cosmos are likely, in the eponymous Platonic dialogue (Plato, 1888). The story is likely, in the sense that it is a possible explanation of language learning and the way in which we come to know our thoughts, but also in the sense that it is not certain. Rather than providing an official and confirmed version, it offers a tale with performative capacities that observationally makes sense, in relation to the way in which we usually explore the non-observational dimension known as 'thinking'. Once again, the pieces of theory and common daily activity ought to each fall into place, in order for one to accept the introduction of thoughts and, in this sense, it is fundamental to Jones' story that the Ryleans begin to report on their thoughts. These will not remain merely theoretical entities, but they will begin to be found *in* representings. The reference to the Timeaus,

here, is particularly pertinent for two reasons. The first one is because, somewhat similarly to the story of Jones, the Platonic text aims at rendering a comprehensive account, which can only be postulated, but ought to be so, in order for any further philosophising to take place. The second reason is the fact that, via recalling the *Timeaus*, we can circle back to the questions broached in our introduction concerning the philosophy of nature, and give ourselves a reminder of the broader project that may stand behind the adoption of a myth of the global origin of thought. The point, clearly, is not to affirm and set on the historical map a proved moment of origin, but rather to provide one plausible account, the necessity of which does not rest on the verification of its narrative, but on its existence as an account with the aspiration of a global purview.

The above considerations are consistent with Brandom's account of Sellars' use of the notion of myth in the 'Study Guide to EPM' (1997), where Brandom picks up on a reference that Sellars himself states. The Myth of Jones is said to operate as other fictional stories available, for instance, in the history of political philosophy. The comparison that Sellars proposes is with Hobbes' social contract, a fictional contract that nobody ever signed, and yet we discuss as though we all did. The commitment to one's community is regulated by an imaginary horizon that a group of people could plausibly reconstruct, where the point is precisely that said reconstruction can be carried out separately by multiple individuals. In this vein, we could draw a parallel between the fictional quality of Jones' story and the fictional character of the law or rule or norm that we reconstruct as a knowing-that, at the intersection of a conceptual network, but that we mostly enact as a knowing-how. We said that knowing-thats quietly operate, but are neither founding nor grounding of our practices, both acts and actions, they work as a horizon that we may eventually be able to formulate and, as soon as we can formulate them, criticise.

#### **2.4 A double-notion of thought and the framework of a stereoscopic vision**

The introduction of thoughts as per Jones' hypothesis, and through the theoretical language that he teaches to the other Ryleans, is complemented by the idea that those same inner theoretical entities, non-empirical and not observationally definable, could also exist as 'physical' entities of some sort. In other words, their non-theoretical, physical existence is nowhere precluded, nor does it need to be for any

methodological reason (EPM, 104/5). The only aspect that we can be sure of is that, to be able to treat these inner episodes, we ought to initially hypothesise their *theoretical* existence and then proceed to model them on linguistic episodes as a way to initially observe them.

What we find in the Myth of Jones is a two-folded notion of inner episodes and, specifically, thoughts. Thoughts are postulated entities, which, on the one hand, *could exist* physically, as processes yet to be uncovered, and, on the other hand, are *known* in and through language, through the concepts used in Jones' reporting language, the latter being the model on which they are inter-subjectively shaped. Having made this point, we can finally state that the rapport between language and thoughts can be defined from both an epistemological and an ontological perspective. From the former perspective, language is prior to thoughts, while from the latter perspective, thoughts are prior to language, where, by thoughts, we do not mean mental entities proper, both because we would probably not talk about them as entities and because the attribute 'mental'—if we do think thoughts as processes among all of the other processes of reality—begins to lose its purchase.

In epistemological terms, the question is how do we know thoughts, how do we access them according to rules of validity, and the answer for Sellars would be in and through language. In ontological terms, instead, the question is over the existence of thoughts themselves and their being in one way or another *inner* episodes, this latter point being one of the more controversial aspects of Sellarsian philosophy. This disjunction also structures the rapports between the Manifest and Scientific Images. We will later return to a closer analysis of the two Images. For the moment, it suffices to say that the Scientific and Manifest Images index two different modes of looking, and any facile mapping of them onto different disciplines, the humanities and the hard sciences for instance, would be misleading. They are two *methods*, the one of observation, for the Manifest Image, that is non-inferential knowledge, and of postulation for the Scientific Image, that is inferential knowledge. The Scientific Image is sometimes also named as the Theoretical Image, with a slight conflation therein between postulation and theorisation, possibly leading to a mistaken deflation of the theoretical import of the Manifest Image, which is far from being based on mere opinions. Indeed, the Manifest Image is also theoretical, not in the technical sense that

it uses postulation, but in the sense that it is a theory of sorts, in the more colloquial way of speaking, which means that it must be coherent and internally justifiable.

In her account of the Myth of Jones, Seibt comments that Sellars' epistemology manages to avoid both dualism and materialism, as concepts about thoughts cannot be reduced to sentences about behaviour (Seibt, 131/2). Bearing in mind what was mentioned in the introduction to this section, this latter comment assumes a key role in the analysis we are advancing here. We have seen already how Sellars avoids the dualism of language and thought by avoiding an instrumentalist theory of language. The notion of linguistic episodes as acts, as differentiated from actions, is fundamental to this avoidance. Now, what value are we to give to the notion of materialism in Seibt's commentary? In this case, materialism would seem to refer to the equation of inner episodes with linguistic episodes. This point does not suggest that conception comes from anywhere other than the existing structures of language, or that thoughts, in the form in which we get to know them, truly exceed those structures. It would only seem to suggest that there is no real, physical identity between mental entities and their material embodiment (Seibt, 131). Hence, materialism, in this case, would seem to stand for reductivism.<sup>30</sup> However, considering that this terminological quibble would have simply moved us from 'materialism' to 'material embodiment', I would suggest that the objective of Seibt's commentary on Sellars' equidistance from dualism and materialism alike goes beyond the mere rejection of reductivism, and is instead motivated by the intention of constructing a bridge to the metaphysics of processes that underlies Sellars' philosophy.

When considering Sellars' work within the frame of his rejection of materialism, we could either read the latter as ontological reductivism, and support the thesis that thoughts could not be any of their embodiments, or we could take the materialist stance of reading thoughts exclusively as formal entities, momentarily captured only by the conceptual, rule-bound form in which we know them, and of which no further ontological question is asked. We would argue that staying away from a materialist approach, in Sellars' case, means avoiding equating thoughts to either the concepts available in the domain of the natural sciences or to linguistic

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<sup>30</sup> We can imagine Seibt's object of critique, when talking about ontological reductivism, to be some declinations of identity theory in the analytic context.

instances and, precisely by virtue of this latter disambiguation, keeping open an ontological option. Let us look a little closer at this point.

#### **2.4.a The question of materialism**

The Sellarsian project of naturalisation, of understanding how everything belongs to the one world of empirical reality, will culminate with the convergence of scientific theories and progressive discoveries leading us to observe the fundamental structures of reality. Albeit currently unobservable, we could suppose the latter to be akin to what we call processes. This choice of terminology is not arbitrary, and is due to the fact that the way in which we may describe the notion of process appears to be the least ontologically committal (PSIM). In this scientific-realist vein, *à la* Peirce, Sellars would seem to attribute descriptive authority to the Scientific Image over the reality of the world and over the Manifest Image, albeit while recognising the incompleteness of our current scientific knowledge and the necessity of speculatively pinning down what appears to be its plausible future development. Due to the interrelation of the two Images, the Scientific Image is not simply presented as the one which will eventually beget definitive ontological answers. To move and operate in the world and think through it, it is necessary that we do not wait around for those results to be found, but that we posit, along the lines of a likely outcome, a perspectival point, which, not yet being physically confirmed, can only be metaphysical.

As already mentioned, this is one of the more speculative aspects of Sellars' philosophy. The problem at stake is not simply *when* future science will be able to turn the theoretical entities known under the name of thoughts into properly observational ones, but also *whether* the scientific programme—or the hard scientific and physical disciplines—will lead us to a satisfying response to the matter: for instance, whether the detection of neural circuits would constitute an adequate answer, considering that this would still be, at best, an observation based on a postulated entity within a certain scientific discourse.

The so far ontologically unstable status of thoughts is clearly not abstract, and ought to be reconnected with Sellars' scientific realism. However, we can speak of a metaphysical stance, precisely because thoughts cannot be described according to the existing laws of physics. Seibt comments on this, stressing how Sellars' ultimate

commitment is to naturalism, that is to a monist and physicalist ontology (Seibt, 131, see also Sellars, PSIM), but that the nature of this commitment is speculative.

To better flesh out this position, we can quickly consider two alternatives that Sellars seems to stave off. The first option would be to emphasise the physicalist character of Sellars' monism, at the expense of leading to a purely neuro-physiological account of the nature of thoughts, which would thus be declared autonomous from language, but reliant upon the biology of neural circuits. In this reading of Sellars, mental episodes would be reduced to neuro-physiological entities in the same way that language is reduced to graphemes and phonemes in the context of a reductive naïve nominalism (Seibt, 131). This option would be plausible only within the context of a scientific framework lacking in epistemological consciousness.

The second option would be to read thoughts as ontologically indifferent and exclusively as formal or epistemic entities, whose appearance is inevitably conditioned by language, which materially enables our access to them in conception.<sup>31</sup> We can take this option to be quite popular among Sellarsian pragmatists, who choose to sheer off the metaphysical underpinning of Sellars' philosophical efforts. This option entirely omits the possibility for thoughts to 'physically' exist, regardless of whatever not entirely 'physicalist' connotation we might want to give to them. To take this interpretation is to effectively turn Sellars into a pragmatist epistemologist, rather than a realist metaphysician, and to selectively read his work, ignoring most of his writing from the 1970s. This second reading commendably affirms the conceptual dimension of language, the fact that if we do have access to our thoughts then it is within conceptual webs structured according to the rules of language. However, this position precludes the possible final reconciliation of this epistemic dimension with a physics that would acknowledge the necessity of stretching its boundaries *beyond* what is usually accounted for in the domain of the 'hard sciences' and is today indexed under the name of 'Physics', and into the realm of *speculation*, where we could hypothesise that what we call thoughts are instantiated as real, event-like processes.

To say that thinking is modelled on languaging is to say that language and thought are not the same, albeit, as we have repeated over and over, language is also not a mere means of expression for thoughts. Not only is no tongue of the mind moving while one is thinking, as Sellars writes in EPM, but we can also sustain that

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<sup>31</sup> This reading is more popular among Brandom (2000), Rorty (1980), and their followers.

thoughts are, in themselves, somewhat autonomous from their linguistic mediation. What is the philosophical import of this statement? For the moment, it is sufficient to say that, if language is what we model thinking on, then some of the aspects that we usually associate with the concept of thought can be explained through the workings of language, removing ontologically dubious commitments that might otherwise be associated with the concept of 'thoughts'. As Sellars explains extensively in SM, there are at least two classical philosophical issues that, if un-resolved, harbour unquestioned forms of dualism, but that, in the context of Sellars' theory, can be explained through language, rather than attributing them to aspects of thinking itself: intentionality and predication. We saw how intentionality was accounted for through language, while accounting for the normative dimension of language. We will see in the next sub-sections how predication can also be rescinded from notions related to thinking and, instead, transferred onto the structures of language. Now, if these philosophical objectives constitute the main stake of EPM, then the point of the essay is to delineate the rapport between thinking and language along epistemological lines, and to distinguish it from the different rapport that the two entertain along ontological lines. Clearly, this distinction is itself operated epistemologically. On the one hand, thoughts are somewhat 'materialised' in and through language, within the structures that we may describe as conception, our way of knowing thoughts. Different languages provide these structures, through which we can know thought and socialise it, that is through which we can deal with thinking in the specifically rich manner that makes it worthwhile. On the other hand, we still need to account for the ontological aspect of thoughts, the register—so far unexplored—in which thoughts are distinct from language.

Here, stating that thoughts are, in themselves, independent from any of their material manifestations—and not only from language—is a way to stay on the safe side of future explanations of reality. Indeed, if we commit ourselves to naturalist monism as well as to a systemic understanding of reality, in which different disciplinary domains should not contradict each other, physical findings will have to apply to whatever it is that, within philosophy, we would name 'thoughts' and that, most certainly, do not exist *as* thoughts in the world (to hold the latter would clearly be an example of the myth of the categorial given). In this context, it seems plausible that the safest commitment we can make with regards to the structures of reality is to

the fact that we can approximately describe them as processes. At this point, the question concerning the ontology of thoughts takes a peculiar turn, because, as Seibt reminds us, it is *only possible* that thoughts will turn out to correspond to neurophysiological particles. Then, referencing Sellars' PSIM, we may say that the attempt at reconciling conceptual thinking, and hence sensory consciousness, with neurophysiological entities may lead us to penetrate to the non-particulate level of neurophysiology and see that the 'qualities of sense are a dimension of natural process which occurs only in connection with those complex physical processes which, when 'cut up' into particles in terms of those features which are the least common denominators of physical process [...] become the complex system of particles which, in the current scientific image, is the central nervous system' (PSIM, 37). In other words, we may well find out that the central nervous system is underpinned by singular processes which 'mix' with natural processes and culminate in, for lack of a better term, thoughts. Sellars is aware of the oddity of his solution (SM, 69), and carefully reconstructs a framework to plausibly conceptualise mental activity, but for this framework to be coherent with his existing philosophical positions, it has to operate on two separate but ultimately reconcilable levels: on the one hand, showing how conceptual activity has come to take the form it has, mediated in language, and, on the other hand, leaving open an indefinite investigation into the nature of thoughts. Now, what would make us suspect that thoughts could be specific kinds of processes? Borrowing Jay Rosenberg's words, in some of his more difficult papers, Sellars works out the necessity of postulating the existence of relatively specific kinds of processes, i.e., thoughts, which— given the fact that, in a process metaphysics, perceiving beings are also aggregates of pure processes— would be our only chance to explain the unity of our apperception (Rosenberg, 1998).

Since we opened this discussion on materialism by raising some doubts over Seibt's use of the term, and then tried to refine that use by understanding Seibt's materialism as ontological reductivism, it is fair to conclude by saying something more about Sellars' take on materialism itself. In the introduction to NAO, Sellars shows sympathy for materialism, but also scepticism towards the use of the term and the debates around it, ultimately choosing not to use the label 'until the dust settles' (NAO, 10) around what was at Sellars' time a novel form of materialism. Here we could direct a similar kind of scepticism towards our own contemporary version of

*new materialism*. Between materialism and naturalism, Sellars prefers the second term, as it can be more easily clarified. Now, from where does the confusion around materialism really stem? It would seem to concern the domain of its application. If, by materialism, we mean a strictly epistemological position, then probably Sellars would agree with it. However, materialism cannot be an ontological position, for then we would have to define its all too slippery ontological core, matter. The choice of confining materialism exclusively within an epistemological purview, however, should not prevent us from further speculative work and, in this sense, we can read Sellars' penchant for non-reductive naturalism as the project of a laborious task that could pay off with a final reconciliation of epistemology and ontology, to put it in very general terms, and, to be more specific, with the reconstruction of a natural history of the mind. Once again, here, we are calling back what was said in the introduction, since the natural history of the mind is a Schellingian theme from the first period of his writings on philosophy of nature, wherein Schelling also combines a naturalist cause—albeit one that few contemporary naturalists would recognise as their own—with an unmasked mistrust of materialism (Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, 1803, 171/193).

#### **2.4.b Postulation and observation**

Starting from a rough distinction between the different approaches exemplified by the scientific and the manifest images, indexed respectively as the postulational method and the observational method. That something is postulated means that its existence can only be deduced inferentially, within an established theoretical framework. That the latter is 'established' means that it is positioned somewhere, in a metaphorical way of talking, within linguistically acquired cognitive structures, through which we represent the world to ourselves. Therefore, any theoretical formulation is posed from a relative, observational point of view. That an entity is observational, instead, only means that its existence is known non-inferentially, without recurring to the conceptual web of inferences that supposedly justifies its being such and so. The observation of something is an *implicit act of recognition* that we take to be the case without needing to reconstruct the justification as to why it is the case. We can easily see how the talk of acts we introduced at the beginning of this section is of crucial relevance to the notion of observation. If I am committed to a specific conceptual framework, or it is simply the only one that I have available

through my training, I am already committed to observe certain phenomena. It is from within this framework that I will move on to theorise the existence of entities which appear to be necessary, although un-observable, in order to explain phenomena whose reasons for occurring are inexplicable solely through the entities that we can currently observe (PSIM, 7). An extension in the available inferential net is necessary, an extension which will require a reconfiguration of the existing net. This initial differentiation between inferential, postulated or theoretical knowledge, and non-inferential, observational knowledge, leads us to recognise that the Manifest Image holds epistemological priority over the Scientific one, which is instead invested with ontological priority (O'Shea, 2007, 41-7). As we will later flesh out, the Manifest Image operates synthetically, while the Scientific Image experiments with possible analytic splits, which then have to be confirmed: first, observationally, in the Manifest Image, and, then in the last instance with an ontological proof, the access to which remains in suspension.

Since the notion of observation is key, not only to Sellars but also to the concept of medium that we wish to consider, it is worth spending some time on the relation between observation and theory, as we find them in Sellars' work.

Observational knowledge pertains to an observational entity. Once we theoretically postulate the existence of an entity—in Jones' case, inner episodes—the latter is matched with another entity that we can observe as a component of an already structured system in use, in this case language with its own rules. This matching is such that, eventually, we no longer need to infer the presence of the postulated item by critically reconstructing every time the relation between a postulated entity and the components of the system in which we observe it, we simply operate at the level of observations. Let us begin to imagine what this means. Brandom has described what we have above called 'implicit acts of recognition' as 'reliable differential responsive dispositions', mere signal-like responses, not to physical inputs but, this time, to the application of a *normative* vocabulary, i.e., concepts. 'It is in this sense that we might be said to be able to *hear*, not just the noises someone else makes, but their *words*, and indeed, *what they are saying*' (Brandom, 544, 2002).

The concepts that we formulate in language, which are supposedly our way of knowing inner episodes and observing them—albeit not in themselves, since their existence remains only a postulate—do not result from inferences drawn from

someone's behaviour, for each and every behavioural activity. At least in Jones' mythical tale, they no longer are after a bit of practice at using Jones' theoretical language (EPM, 107). They definitely no longer are for us. Moving at an observational level, in this case, means simply thinking in language, taking it for granted that thoughts are modelled on linguistic episodes, quiet and otherwise. Further, that in which we observe our postulated entity already structures it in its relation to other entities. The structure of observation is the model of what then becomes observable, in the sense that this structure is not equal to what is observable in it, as Sellars warns us (EPM, 102-7), but also in the sense that this structure already organises our access to observation in a relevant and contextual manner, meaning in a manner that could also have been otherwise.

Thoughts are built into our observation of overt behaviour, and our newly discovered capacity to observe them through language eventually extends our observational capacities to non-overt behaviour. This way of speaking of observational entities suits, in different ways, the case of thoughts *in* language, where the former are structured in the conceptual webs illuminated in the latter, as well as exemplar 'scientific' cases such as molecules in gas (EPM, 107) or mu-mesons in specific kinds of vapour trails in experimental chambers, to use Brandom's favoured example (545, 2002).

The commonality among these three examples is symptomatic of another fundamental point, for, as Sellars writes, 'the fact that overt behaviour [that is, verbal behaviour] is evidence for [inner episodes] *is built into the very logic of these concepts*, just as the fact that the observable behaviour of gases is evidence for molecular episodes is built into the very logic of molecule talk' (EPM, 107). That behaviour is evidence for what we postulate as inner episodes, and specifically thoughts, is a consideration built into the logic of the conceptual articulations that, in language, make these episodes knowable, where the notion of concept in language here equates to 'molecule talk' in the context of chemistry. Once again, *we are moving from an inaccessible ontological level, on which we cannot say much at all, to an epistemic level on which, in language and through the deployment of rule bound linguistic episodes—i.e., as according to existing social rules, i.e., concepts—we can say something about thoughts*. This move is made possible by the fact that our postulation, or the theoretical formulation, which initially makes the postulated entity

knowable only inferentially, is instrumental to its eventual observation in language, in gases, and in vapour trails.<sup>32</sup> Clearly the postulation may turn out to be entirely mistaken, in which case we will eventually realise its incoherence, thanks to observational inconsistencies. This is another way to say that, in line with his critique of the logical empiricism of his time, Sellars agrees that there is no ontological distinction between theory and observation (SM, 135-138, see also Brandom, 'Study Guide to EPM'), the difference between the two is purely methodological.<sup>33</sup>

The relation between observation and postulation is somewhat circular, but the hope is that the circle will be virtuous, rather than vicious, and will eventually progress towards increasingly precise observations. That precision will be established on the bases of the degree of explanatory power that a theory has in comparison with another. The goal is for us to be able to produce a language that, having converted all necessary theoretical entities into observational entities, can accurately picture reality.

In other words, the frameworks of common sense discourse and scientific discourse are in continuity with each other (EPM, 94/8). This also means that what the scientist can observe is inscribed in a perspective that is simply more general than the one of common usage. Were postulation (as in the Scientific Image) not tethered to observation (as in the Manifest Image), we would easily fall into a form of 'naïve realism', as Sellars calls it (EPM, 135/7, 'Study Guide to EPM'). At the same time, we should be careful because, if the instrumental dependency of postulation on observation was not simply methodological, we would risk transforming this relation

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<sup>32</sup> To be clear, Sellars is critical of instrumentalism, but still sustains that a theory could be compared to an instrument in a relatively unproblematic way: '[t]he idea that an adequate account of the meaning and truth of theoretical statements will also contain an instrumentalist component should cause no surprise. The fundamental issue in the debate between "instrumentalist" and "realist" is, from this point of view, *not* whether theories can be fruitfully compared to instruments—for this is true even of the conceptual framework of common sense—but whether basic singular statements (in a sense to be defined) in the language of such a theory can meaningfully be said to "correspond" to the world in the "picture" sense of "correspond"' (SM, 136), that is not in the relational sense usually intended in theories of semantics, but in the sense of blocks of perceptions that will be central to the treatment of the theory of predication.

Sellars appears to say that a form of instrumentality is simply part of our theoretical apparatus, but not necessarily of our observations or observational tools, and that this does not mean that a scientific discovery is instrumental in the usually derogatory sense of the term. It simply means that we can observe reality only if we first pass it through *something* that makes it appear to us, and that what we pass it through will always already be arranged for *our* eyes. That arrangement, in the case of language, can be explained through the implementation of linguistic rules, but the whole contraption is ultimately held together by inner episodes, except that the latter are not abstract, but instead can ultimately be naturalistically accounted for.

<sup>33</sup> Rottschaefer (1976) offers a discussion of theory-laden, theory-neutral and theory-free observation within and outside of the context of Sellarsian philosophy.

into an ontological thesis, that sees ““real” existence, meaning and truth [as] limited to objects as conceived at the perceptual level of our current structure’ (SM, 137). Then theories would only output virtual calculations, while observations would be taken as ‘real’ and necessarily ‘true’.

Now, there is one clear difference between Brandom’s example of the mu-mesons in vapour trails, or the one of molecules in gases and the one of thoughts in language, and this goes back to the fact that Jones’ mythical tale is really only a likely tale, to be installed at the mythical origin of our evolution, in order for us to make sense and justify the internalisation of the relations between linguistic and inner episodes, their public and private dimensions. Our observations of the behaviour of gases eventually led us to hypothesise the existence of something like what we now call molecules. The fact that the behaviour of gases is indicative of the existence of molecules is what has made us inferentially define molecules in the way that we do, molecules that we say we are able to observe when a gas changes colour under certain circumstances, for instance, or propagates in space under other circumstances. We can hardly say that the same historical process took place in the case of language, behaviour and thoughts, such that thoughts were postulated as entities somewhat underpinning behaviour that we then access through linguistic articulations, which orientated behaviour in its social-public construction in the first place. Given our position, the rapport thinking/speaking has always and necessarily been taken for granted. As we have tried to show in our reflections on the use of the notion of myth, Jones’ story has the function of opening up a fork and separating what otherwise would not be distinct or that would seem impossible to separate. The myth is invented *a posteriori*, in yet another attempt at undoing a foundational approach. Sellars would seem to hold on to the best of both worlds: showing how thought is one with language, how it appears through language in a manner that the two could not but be *one* and indistinct and, at the same time, advancing a plausible, and hopefully provable, hypothesis that characterises them as *distinct*. By virtue of postulating their separate existence, when we then fictionally imagine them as *mixed*, they acquire their full-blooded dimension: language is not language without thought being infused in it. These three statures, language and thought as *one*, as *separate* and as *mixed*, would seem to identify three moments in the articulation of a common problem, which, for as odd-sounding as they are, can help us to understand the notion of medium. The

appearance of thought, which is to say *how* we know thoughts, matches the first moment. The attempt at justifying the ontological autonomy of thoughts matches the second one. The way in which we usually consider a medium in relation to what it mediates matches the third one. The point we want to stress is that a medium entertains all three of these relations with what it supposedly mediates, at different points in our usual analysis of it.

Now, back to the difference between the case of positing thoughts in language and that of other scientific findings. Albeit that we want to recognise a distinction between these two cases, we also want to stress a fundamental continuity between them, so as to ground another, that between language and technology. Establishing the latter continuity is crucial to this thesis. To be explicit, we can think this continuity by mobilising the example brought up by Brandom (2002), where mu-mesons become observational entities for the sufficiently trained eye thanks to technologies for the observation of vapour trails that, by leveraging the instrumental positing of the entity 'mu-mesons' in relation to specific types of vapour, make the entity 'visible' in the vapour. The core of the argument so far is that a similar case can be made for language and thinking. Bearing this in mind, on the one hand, we confirm the idea, broached in the introduction to this thesis, that the study of language can partly be framed as a study of technology. On the other hand—and this is an aspect of central interest for this research—we can articulate the character of technology vis-à-vis materialism and instrumentalism by further considering the case of language.

Here we clearly owe some clarification of the sense we attribute to instrumentalism, since we have described a methodologically instrumental dependency of postulation on observation. Something is postulated in a manner that then makes it observable. It is a certain way that Jones has of postulating thoughts in rapport with verbal behaviour that makes them observable in language, we said. This does not equate to saying either that something that we name thoughts do not exist and are only instrumentally postulated entities, nor does it mean that thoughts are bound to their linguistic manifestations. It only means that, to observe thoughts in a certain way, we postulate them in a certain way. Language *per se* is not a tool to express thoughts or conceptions—we already touched upon the import of the distinction between act and action in order to state this point—both in the sense that language does not express pre-existing intentions and in the sense that the fact that

language makes thoughts appear for us does not mean that they would not exist otherwise. It only means that thoughts as that which we know, or access, through conception would seem to be bound to language. Conceptions pertain to language in its public dimension, its inherently interpersonal character, but we cannot affirm the same with equal certainty for what we may call thoughts (or any mental episode). Nevertheless, *what makes conception worthy of its name is the fact that we can observe inner episodes thanks to it*. What is being postulated and then observed seems to be the relation between language and thought, and such a relation is postulated on the basis of existing observations, the latter being simply the points—within the linguistic structures that we learn—at which we begin to recognise recurrent patterns as commitments to rules that could be stated. These observations are therefore underpinned by a number of crucial factors: first, by induction into a linguistic community, along with the wiring of experience that synthetically comes with it and that shapes one's transcendental horizon; second, by the fact that this process of induction is, in an ontologically relevant sense, plugged into the wiring of sensations; finally, by the imbrication of this induction with the historical, which is to say, natural-evolutionary dimension of language and language acquisition, and the physiological aspect of our capacities for observation.<sup>34</sup>

As a tentative extension of what we said concerning language, thought and conception to the broader field of technology, we can suggest that technology is also not exactly 'instrumental' to certain activities, nor are the latter strictly bound to specific technological apparatus. Rather, we might suggest that the hypothetical postulation of a certain activity within an available (non-inferentially accessible, observable) system operates such that that system ends up looking *as though* it carried *in* itself the means thanks to which we can access the postulated activity. There is a

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<sup>34</sup> Rottschaefer substantiates the distinction between theory and observation precisely on the basis of the fact that observation is based 'on a physical necessity related to the basic physiological and psychological cognitive structure of the human perceptual apparatus' (Rottschaefer, 1976, 506). Rottschaefer's argument comes as an attempt at reconciling the various debates around the rapport between observation and theory, but it is unclear why the distinction between theory and observation would thus be 'substantial', rather than methodological or ontological. The risk is to end up saying that observation is not epistemological or is somewhat less epistemological than theory, which we do not believe would be sustainable from a Sellarsian perspective. Having said this, we can still affirm that there is an ontologically relevant component to language acquisition and the shaping of cognition, but it is simply not one that draws any direct or necessary link between the two. The physical limitations that human beings as a species *do* have matter for both theory and observation in an equal manner, and these limitations do not dictate straightforward necessities, but rather evolutionarily channel the sensory apparatus and its contribution to our representational level in the synthesis of our perceptual experience.

methodologically instrumental dependency of the postulated activity, or the postulated item, on the observable items in which it becomes apparent. However, this does not mean either that the postulated item is necessarily unreal and only instrumental to the observation, or that the technological apparatus in use during the observation is *per se* only an instrument to make the postulated entity appear. The postulated item neither pertains necessarily to the apparatus of choice, nor is it really *in* it as some either external or fictional entity that, only through its instrumental positing, comes into being to make an observation possible. In our chief test example, we can say that thoughts are *in* language: as soon as they are postulated, they have always already been *in* it, epistemologically internal to language. Similarly, an initial confirmation as to whether the hypothetical postulation of an item in a specific apparatus is correct may come in the form of the functioning of the systemic apparatus as according to the expectations entailed by this postulation. However, an actual *proof* will only come, if and when, we manage to locate the entity initially postulated in a non-correlational manner, that is as displaying a degree of autonomy from what we could have expected solely according to the strictures of its theoretical definition.<sup>35</sup> What is contextually bound to a certain physical counterpart (e.g., sounds and graphemes in language) is the *access* to reality and not, in any linear way, the postulated item itself. In all this, the attempt, for as limited as it may be at this point of the research, to line up language and technology brings to the surface an inherent projective capacity of the species capable of language, a predisposition towards the externalisation of organised intentions and sense.<sup>36</sup> The externalisation that characterises the case of language, as well as any other application, the inherently prosthetic nature of our species, is something we simply *do*. We can remind ourselves here of what was said in terms of functional roles and the opening our eyes to a representational level from within it, when more than one term finds its place in the web that holds them together. The connections internal to the latter draw out the conceptual dimension, which we simply open our eyes to, without voluntarily putting it into place. This dimension gives the shape of *doing* to our *being* perceivers, in the sense of act already discussed.

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<sup>35</sup> Sellars refers to the Manifest Image, the observational image, also as displaying a correlational method (PSIM, 19).

<sup>36</sup> Here, the use of the terms 'intention' and 'sense' should not distract from the core of the debate, and mostly refer to Sellars' careful distinction between the two, where senses are more comprehensive than intentions, as they include terms which cannot in any way be associated with extra-linguistic entities, such as the term 'not'. We are clearly not talking here about senses as 'sensations', but rather about senses in something closer to the Fregean understanding of the term (SM, 64).

Now, if the relation between language and inner episodes, in our example, is not instrumental, nor one of inherent binding, how else can we name it? Seibt again leads our way with a statement that will now become central to our considerations: 'T5: *Language is not the expression but the medium of our conceptualization*' (Seibt, 119). Before going forward expounding our reading of this statement vis-à-vis thought, language and the notion of medium—where we will clearly have to zero in on a solid clarification, considering that the quote talks about conception and not thoughts—we should first give a disclaimer. This research may, from now on, be going after a notion of medium that, albeit inspired by Seibt's fifth thesis on Sellars' philosophy, was not necessarily intended by Seibt herself or by Sellars to have the import that we will try to attribute to it.

## **2.5 An attempt at a positive description of the notion of medium**

### **2.5.a Introduction: *Language is not the expression but the medium of thought***

We have spoken so far of conception as derivative of verbal behaviour and linguistic use. As noted already, it is precisely because we eventually decided to postulate the existence of thoughts as theoretical entities that the linguistic rules we observe—the normative and contentful character of which we have already justified independently of notions of conception—finally assume a conceptual dimension. The latter is the dimension that we (as opposed to the Ryleans) already normally attribute to language, just in a non-inferential manner. At this point, we are authorised to consider language's rapport with thought and thinking *per se* (and not only conception), as neither materialist nor dualist—and, from there, instrumentalist, since our quote from Seibt strikes out the latter option more or less explicitly—and extend this neither/nor character also to the rapport between a more general notion of medium and what it supposedly mediates.

In other words, the above considerations give us enough ground to begin a positive description of the notion of medium that generalises from the case of language (and implicitly its parallels with technology), starting from a more detailed comprehension of the relation between language, occupying the position of the medium-item, and thought, occupying the position of the postulated entity. What we

will now attempt is, rather than a fully encompassing conceptual definition of medium, a description that will bring up specific characters of the notion, revised as according to an analysis of its relation with the term that is postulated and observed *in* it. We will look closer at what we mean by 'in': why has the use of the preposition 'in' become so frequent in our description of observation and postulation? What is *in* what exactly? What does it mean to postulate the existence of or observe something in something else? Is it necessary, or minimally speaking helpful, especially if we consider all the effort that has gone into dismantling the idea of abstract entities, the dualism that comes with it and a dubious way of looking at language as though thinking was an entirely separate entity hidden *inside* it? Since we are still using the preposition 'in' in a similar way, i.e., as a form of hiding inside, there must be something that we are holding on to: can we say more about it?<sup>37</sup>

We postulated thoughts as inner episodes that culminate in verbal behaviour, the inclination towards doing in the world that is orientated and shaped through language acquisition.<sup>38</sup> This move led us to observe thoughts *in* the conceptual webs structured through linguistic use. We indexed this under the epistemological agenda. We have also argued in favour of a non-straightforwardly materialist—or for precision we had better say ontologically non-reductive—reading of the rapport between language and thought. This second point, indexed under the ontological agenda, suggested a disparity between inner episodes and our conceptual access to them. In the last instance, this disparity can be attributed to the process-like ontological nature of thoughts, as according to Sellars' monist ontology. Thoughts are not abstract entities to which we ought to attribute a special nature. Just like everything else, thoughts are concrete particulars and, ultimately, specific process-like entities, and their special epistemic function is only due to the fact that they are *mediated* by

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<sup>37</sup> Here we owe the reader a terminological note: why the insistence on 'in' as opposed to, for instance, 'as', which could probably convey a similar idea? The use is mostly rhetorical: 'in' stresses a specific use of the notion of medium, which appears to be as resilient as it is mistaken. It also highlights that what we are tracing is, in a way, a history of prepositions, and of how utilising a certain preposition or the semantic meaning usually associated with it has led to mistaken conceptions, which nonetheless reveal a structure at work in our understanding of reality.

<sup>38</sup> One may ask at this point: what would the difference be between 'culminating' and 'expressing'? Is it not to saying that one's behaviour is the culmination of one's thoughts not similar to saying that it is its expression? The word choice matters precisely because we are trying to stretch words beyond their capacity, to highlight a type of relation that we usually conceive otherwise, i.e., in terms of expression. A metaphor here may be helpful, to use the verb to 'culminate' is to saying that the rapport between thoughts and behaviour is similar to the one between the regular course of a river and that point where, having grown in strength, it suddenly bursts its banks.

language, that they appear in language. However, from the side of epistemology, *is there a way to describe postulation and observation so that the disparity just mentioned can be intuited and accounted for at the same time?* In other words, can we say something more about the inner quality of inner episodes in a way that would not commit us to either a problematic emergentism or to too much ontological speculation from the side of epistemology? To be clear, emergentism would be problematic only because we would have to explain how something emerges rather than simply acknowledging that it does, in other words, we would have to clarify the specific use of the verb 'to emerge' rather than 'to surge' or merely 'to appear'.

In our attempt at generalising the case of language to the one of medium, we will have to be careful with a number of aspects and one in particular, the forgetting of which could spur concerning amounts of confusion. Coherently with our treatment of linguistic upbringing into a community, to say that thoughts can be observed in language because they are postulated as that of which observable behaviour, orientated through language acquisition, is the culmination, means to say, yet again and in a more complete way, that language is where reality, according to our mode of organising it, our conceptualisation of it, appears to ourselves. We must not forget that this aspect cannot be generalised in any straightforward way to other mediums, meaning that we cannot generalise it to each and every entity in which other entities appear, are postulated and then observed. This is something specific to language, unless we admit that thoughts can be mediated by something other than language, or rather unless we admit that our entire world-view could appear in something other than language (and we will come back to this question before the end of this thesis). This is to say that, although the relation of interest to us here is the one between language and thought, when we are discussing this very relation, what appears is not simply thought, but also its so-called subject matter, since thought—precisely because the form in which thought appears transfers its subject matter from language—relies on its subject matter in a way that would simply make no sense in the case of gases and molecules. We will consider this aspect more closely in section III. For the moment, it is important to flag this, precisely because it emphasises the subject-matter dependence of thought and language in Sellars' epistemology, whereas the ontology would only register particulars, be they thoughts, linguistic utterances, or other worldly stuff.

### 2.5.b Three ways of saying ‘thoughts’: acts, doings, processes

Before plunging into our attempt at positively describing the notion of medium, let us re-consider the notion of thought from the three points of view from which Sellars looks at it.

We have said that from an ontological perspective, thoughts are left deliberately indefinite (Seibt, 131). From an epistemological perspective, instead, the fact that thoughts are postulated as that of which verbal behaviour is a culmination makes it so that they are taken to be already *in* language, for the way we have seen language in its relation to behaviour, and positioned *within* what we have come to call conceptual webs. Just as with the acts which we have been discussing in the first third of this section, what we end up describing as thoughts are already present *in* language. They come neither before nor after language, although, according to Jones’ (and Sellars’) account, we do seem to find them *in* it. As is getting clearer and clearer, thoughts as inner episodes have a whole lot to do with intuition and perception, where both intuition and perception are always already conceptually imbricated (see chapter I, SM). To enrich this consideration, Sellars recovers the notion of act from Scholastic philosophy: thoughts are acts, of the type that can be differentiated from actions, while conception can be described as the web of rules, holding sway and in which a certain intuition is caught. The concepts of act and actuality come to Sellars from a rich set of sources ranging over Aristotelian Scholastic philosophy, early rationalism, Cartesian philosophy, and their bequest to Kantian philosophy (KPKT). Although many differences can be drawn among Sellars’ sources, they share the general trait of adopting an act/content model, in which the act of thinking would be seen as coming with a content. Sellars tries to re-organise this model from an act-content theory of thinking to an adverb-act theory. In the last subsection of the present section, we will try to place Sellars’ adoption and revision of the notions of act and actuality as the cornerstone of his adverbial theory,<sup>39</sup> which will provide us with some answers with regards to our positive description of medium. Indeed, we are now leaving behind the

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<sup>39</sup> Adverbial theory is usually meant in the sense of an adverbial theory of the object of sensation, in the Sellarsian sense of sensation already discussed in Section I. However, what seems important about the theory is that it concerns objects that adverbially come into form. Therefore, we will not consider it only as a theory of sensations, all the more because Sellars openly writes about an adverbial account of thinking in KPKT, and because, in his explicit writings about the adverbial theory of sensations, the issue at stake ends up concerning the general sense in which we take in—i.e., perceive—objects in and through language (ATOS, 1975).

notion of action, after our attempt at differentiating it from the one of act, as we move further into the territory of the latter, which will increasingly be tied to actuality.

From a slightly different terminological point of view, thoughts are also described as doings. We saw in Section I the Sellarsian distinction—epistemological in nature, if we instead take processes to characterise Sellars' ontological monism—between particulars, states and doings, wherein the latter category seems to simply stand for any type of active verbal voice. While particulars are what exists *simpliciter*, states are adverbially connoted, hence, as we will see in the adverbial theory, they could be thoughts as much as sensations. However, Sellars would seem to introduce the category of doings in order to differentiate passive from active states, where sensations would map onto the former and thoughts onto the latter. In other terms, Sellars' use of the word 'doing' highlights a form of activity that affects reality and, in light of this, could be re-connected to the notion of act, which is meant itself to be a doing, just of a type that we would describe as non-deliberated upon and invested with a particular form of intentionality that may not be available to the subject carrying out the activity. Back in the first third of this present section, describing acts as aligned to doings was already a way to explain why, having dismissed the word 'action', we can still plausibly use the word 'act' when talking about pattern-governed rule-complying behaviour. An act is what one does, but not in the sense of actively making, or of voluntarily engaging with the ways in which something is done, and not in the sense that one is deliberately the subject of the corresponding activity. So considered, the notion of act renders the image of an oddly subjective agency, where the subject is unknowingly subject to the rule she unknowingly follows. It would be ambitious (and a theoretical forcing of the hand) to consider it as a form of collective agency in light of the rapport engendered between a language trainee and her community, since no collective body can really be said to have come together to agree on how to *act*. Nevertheless, we could stake out within Sellars' account an intrinsic rapport between acts and the dimension of the social, social reproduction, individual commitments and the responsibility to gain an increasingly aware pictures of reality, and to historically re-configure reality such that our acts within it would radically change.

Finally, within Sellars' monist ontology, thoughts are also processes. 'Inferring is not a *doing* in the conduct sense—which, however, by no means implies that it is not a *process*' (LTC, 513), writes Sellars when explaining the distinction between

ought-to-be and ought-to-do rules. This statement is rather interesting, minimally speaking because it features most of our 'suspect' terms: inferring (or thinking), doing, conduct (or action) and process. It also crosses the line between talk proper to the theory of language and epistemology—inferring, doing, conduct—and talk that pertains to a metaphysical context—processes. Sellars is aware that a reconciliation between the two camps is necessary, and that the point of convergence is to be found in an unfortunately still far from complete image (PSIM). Hence, the postulation of fundamental structures of the world, the 'basic entities of final science' (Seibt, 244), which, bearing in mind contemporary physics, we can model on categories that are already available to us (and to which we can refer) by considering them as analogous to processes (Ibid.). Having said this, it would be ungrounded and crassly mistaken to analogically connect acts, or doings, with the notion of processes, or to justify the use of the term 'act' with the fact that it would seem, on the very surface, to be more reconcilable with the final ontological unit marked by 'process'. As we saw, the advance of our comprehension of reality is necessarily analogical, it works through analogies that underpin our postulations, and then our observations, but a final monist description of reality cannot be straightforwardly based on those analogies.

The point that we are trying to make is precisely that the medium-language stretches over the jump between the ontological and the epistemological dimensions, not in order to overcome it or to reduce it by any means, but because nothing would be accessible to our perception otherwise, that is without the analogical function that is built into our capacity to approach reality. A 'location' of articulation is necessary, something *in* which we postulate the presence of something else, the actual existence of which is a metaphysical problem with no immediate (also in the sense of unmediated) answer, and the only appreciation of which comes through that which commits us to its presence as already structured in a certain manner. This is also to say that the purported existence of what is postulated may be entirely mistaken, or that its structuration within a specific medium of articulation unsuitable.

Hence, there is another sense in which the problematic link between act and process is not entirely crazy, but rather is simply missing several, necessary steps of articulation—rather than merely analogical association—within the complex architecture of Sellarsian philosophy. The attempt at linking the epistemological and the ontological aspects of Sellars' work may be the singularity of Seibt's reading of

Sellars as a naturalist metaphysician. Seibt suggests that the central missing link in this synthetic picture is a proper articulation of Sellars' theory of predication, or rather the theory in which Sellars tries to dismiss the function of predication (Seibt, 137). There, the epistemic dimension of the linguistic signs we use to observe the objects accessible to us is again schematised into particulars—this time enriched by the functional-role that makes *objects* individually perceivable—that can, in turn, be arranged or articulated so as to better picture reality. For this reason, Sellars' theory of predication is also a good place in which to start appreciating the function of language as a more conventional medium, and to suture the gap between our privileged case-study, language, and the more general concept we are pursuing.

### **2.5.c A dismissal of predication**

Here, we will not offer a comprehensive explanation, but simply an overview mostly meant to illustrate how Sellars, after having conceptually enriched language with the postulation of thoughts, strips it down again, so to say, to a system of object-signs, which are then tentatively hooked back up to objects in reality, in a manner coherent with what was said with regards to the theory of semantics in Section I, and with the possible development of a metaphysics that construes properties as processes. This overview will also highlight the structural links between Sellars' theory of predication and his adverbial theory, which will take centre stage in our explanation in both the following sub-section, concerning Sellars' transformation of transcendental idealism, and in our attempt to connect this to the notion of truth in Section III.

As mentioned already, Sellars' theory of predication is, in fact, a theory through which predication is found to be dispensable (NAO, 54). This means that, for Sellars, we do not need a split between subject and object in language to convey that a certain object has certain qualities (NAO, 67). The import of the statement is quite radical. Indeed, any rejection of abstract entities, that is any serious nominalist position, would entail a rejection of the fact that what predicative sentences denote as 'subjects' or 'objects' correspond to any real distinction on the ontological level. However, Sellars seems to go one step further and state that also the distinction proper to predicative sentences in language, let alone the correspondent ontological one, is somewhat unnecessary.

The reference that Seibt makes to Sellars' "Abstract Entities" intuitively sets the stage for the discussion:

[T]he classical problem of universals rests in large part on the fact that in such languages as English and German expressions referring to universals are constructed on an illustrating principle which highlights a design which actually plays a subordinate role and consequently tempts us to cut up such sentences as

triangular(a)

into two parts, one of which has to do with the universal rather than the particular, the other with the particular rather than the universal, and tempts us therefore to construe the statement as asserting a dyadic relation ('exemplification') to obtain between the particular and the universal. (AE, 266)

Sellars attributes the subject/predicate structure to language itself, which tricks us into believing that predicates have value in their own right (Seibt, 168). But there is more to it. There is no reason to sustain that predicates have an indispensable import or, in other words, that it is necessary to say something about something else—that 'something' shall be split into 'some' and 'thing', writes Sellars (NAO, 56). Indeed, Sellars organises his argument for the dispensability of predication in language around the fact that it is not true that for a sentence to be a sentence it ought to consist of more than names of particulars and that, in fact, what we would call predicates are 'non-names', meaning that they do not name anything existing at all (NAO, 59). Only objects exist for Sellars. Here, by object, we ultimately mean concrete particulars that, in terms of our perception of them, we encounter as object-like entities outside of ourselves, initially perceivable in a unified manner, but that we could find out are themselves composed of other objects that we have not yet been able to observe—clearly the term to clarify here is 'perceivable'. To anticipate the direction that we are moving towards, the argument's conclusion is that what we call predication is, in fact, only a way of articulating rapports among particulars, within the holistic context of a sentence, or, to be more exact, of an entire world-view, which the chosen language tries to *picture* rather than relationally identify or name (Seibt, 165).

The pivot move of the argument is that predicative sentences can be rewritten so as to display rapports among objects in a manner that does not require the use of predicates, nor anything that would stand for them. This perspicacious rewriting shows how what were once predicates can now be marked through physical-graphic

signs, as can what were once subjects. For instance, 1) 'a is larger than b', becomes 2) 'a b' (see Seibt's examples, 167, and NAO, 64), where, Sellars sustains, 1) and 2) could be taken to have the exact same 'syntactical form and the same connections with extra-linguistic reality', due to the fact that, ultimately, 'we can *only* say that a is larger than b by placing the names "a" and "b" in a (conventional) dyadic relation' (NAO, 64/5), where the precise shape that this dyadic relation takes can be marked by *any* conventional sign. Importantly, Sellars continues, there is no use in trying to read 2) through 1) and look for something that, in 2), is doing the job of the predicate 'larger than', for we would not find it there. What we would find, instead, is a notation that we can equate with the fact that, in 1), a and b have a 'larger than' between them (NAO, 65). This is to say that 'larger than' in 1) is only a linguistic inscription, '*not a fact*' (NAO, 65), and this combination of terms does not 'name' anything. It is only an auxiliary symbol in the language of choice. To directly cite Sellars' words on the matter:

'[I]f predicates are simply auxiliary symbols, this entails that the connection of a statement with extra-linguistic reality does not directly involve a connection between a predicate and extra-linguistic reality. The presence of the predicate gives the names which occur in the statement a distinctive character by virtue of which *they* are connected with extra-linguistic reality. But the names could have had a distinctive character of equal effectiveness though the statement contained no predicate.' (NAO, 66/7)

The relation between 'a' and 'b' in the sentence above is something that we do not need to mention in terms of an external expression, it can simply be exhibited graphically (Seibt, 166).<sup>40</sup> In this, it is important to appreciate that to say that the connection of the statement with extra-linguistic reality is equally effective in the case where it has a predicative form and in the case where it does not means that what remains invariant is our perception of that which the statement is said to refer to, although the appropriate way of saying this would be 'that which the statement is hooked to', which is to say that which the statement is trying to picture, rather than refer to.

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<sup>40</sup> When we use the term expression here, we should bear in mind that we have rejected a notion of expression that would see language as a tool to express thoughts. Expressions or expression-tokens here are linguistic tokens infused of their conceptual dimension.

Within the larger scope of his project, what Sellars is trying to do is to debunk a resiliently *platonistic* ontology according to which

[A]tomic sentences map objects, by virtue of (a) a *naming* relationship and (b) a principle of mapping according to which

*Concatenations* of names map *exemplifications* of universals by particulars. (NAO, 76)<sup>41</sup>

For Sellars, exemplifications of universals by particulars do not occur: what we are trying to map are particulars themselves. Once again, all there is are particulars, and sentences—or concatenations of names—are ultimately themselves particulars. What we do with language as the language of perception—the system of signs through which we organise reality for ourselves and in which we can observe thinking in act—is to try and hook up sentences, *qua* particulars, with particulars in reality, except that the endeavour is complicated by the fact that these very sentences are *also* what have been moulding our perception of objects in the world. We can describe the process of connection as two-fold. There is first the consolidation of the functional-role of a term or group of terms, which takes into consideration the parts of reality and the other terms that the initial concatenation of words was used in association with—this would be what, after the introduction of thoughts, we may now describe as the terms' *conceptual* meaning—and *then* there is the re-matching (the hooking up) of the term or terms which have now been attributed a role-function, *qua* particular, to the particulars we manage to mark out in the world.

Another, perhaps clearer, way to state this is that Sellars agrees that, bottom line, there must be a real, yet-to-be-specified relation between, for instance, the word 'man' and men in the world, and this relation can be grasped through generalisations specifying uniformities involving expression-tokens and extra-linguistic objects, but the expression-tokens come to us in the form of sentential expressions. We do not separately relate the word 'man' to men, but we learn how to connect sentences that we use and that contain 'man' to men (NAO, 77), because the meaning of the word does not revolve around identifying the predicate as the name of an extra-linguistic

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<sup>41</sup> Here, Sellars critique of 'platonism' is aimed at its standard, or Fregean (that is based on non-objects) version, although Sellars does demonstrate sympathy for Frege's project, and only sees it as unfortunately incomplete (NAO, 77).

entity. If we go by what was said in Section I and in the first third of this Section, the connection thus established revolves around the functional role of the expression-token, around *how* it is used or *acts* in our daily activities, that is to say not in the utilitarian sense of use, but in the act-sense that we have already seen, in which we are already committed to certain perceptive takings as soon as we have them. Once this functional role is somewhat consolidated, it contributes to marking out of reality a perceivable difference, and can simply be written as a perceivable difference, similar to what happened a few paragraphs back with 'a b'. This latter re-writing can then be used to map the portion of reality we are supposedly looking at when saying that the statement so re-written is true. Obviously, crucial to all this, is to remind ourselves of the role of sensing in the constitution of our perceptive faculties and the detection of their possible inconsistencies.

This point on sentential expressions completes and refines the theory of semantics as we presented it in Section I, since what we are clearly going back to is the notion of the dot-quoted term, for which the use of an expression-token constitutes its *conceptual* meaning. In Section I, for simplicity, dot-quoted terms were somewhat misleadingly presented as single terms, but the point we are trying to make here is a more developed presentation of Sellars' theory that the meaning of 'a is red' is •a is red•. This dot-quoted block is used in certain circumstances as opposed to others in a way that is non-incidentally connected to red things, but its use does not separately relate 'red' to red things nor, of course, to redness. The dot-quoted block is itself a concrete particular that, during the process of consolidation of its own functional-role and once that role has been somewhat assigned, shifts and tries to hook up to the reality out there. It does not try to label it. Language as the language of perception is only the more perspicacious version of the sentence-based, predicative structured language we normally use.

One crucial takeaway of the exposition of the theory of predication up to this point is, therefore, that dot-quoted terms/sentences mark reality out for us in a manner that is co-constitutive of our perception of that reality, as according to a process that, *if virtuous*, zeroes in on increasingly refined ways of marking out reality, focussing on more and more of the aspects that make a perceptual difference. This marking out connects role-functions (dot-quoted terms/sentences) to our taking in of reality in a way that thinking of language in terms of predicate function undermines, since the

final goal is to then re-hook the dot-quoted blocks to particulars in the world, and not to name extra-linguistic objects or attributes. In all this, Sellars highlights how the structures of language seem to embed predication in a misleading way that we have to work around. Hence, the language chosen is not a neutral vessel, nor are these same linguistic structures entirely binding. As we have been seeing, we can move from predicative form to a more perspicacious object language. There is a certain amount of leeway between the two.

In a more explicative and perhaps less rigorous way of speaking, we can consider our perception as occurring in blocks, 'perceptive blocks'. With an example, 'this-chair' could be taken as my perceptual taking of the chair that is in front of me, meaning that 'chair' in the standard grammar is what we would predicate of the perceptual taking 'this', which in this case we are not considering as an indexical term. 'This-chair' is not a judgment, although the perception known to me is likely to have been shaped through a predicative sentence in the English language of the form: 'this is a chair'. Each and every term that could spell out what I am perceiving is conceptually positioned vis-à-vis other existing terms, all of which are categorically organisable. However, none of these categorical denominations matches an extra-linguistic entity, in the sense in which their meaning would *correspond* to it. Each and every term marks out something that we have been trained to differentiate—colours, shapes, surfaces, but also proximity and distance, all the way to the notion of physical object itself—and perceptually take in, and that could therefore be more precisely differentiated as according to their correspondent dot-quoted expression. These differentiations could be stated differently in order for me to be able to appreciate them in a manner that does not contradict available sense-inputs and other conceptual facets. Having said this, clearly, when I perceive 'this-chair', the object I am perceiving is, so to say, *gathered* in language. I do not reconstruct the rules and conceptual classifications that commit me to the perception of a chair, and separate the this-part of 'this-chair' from its chair-part. It is the 'block', and *not* its two separate parts, that I take in through my perception, not even if we said that the two parts participated to the taking with shared responsibility. If the conventional structures of language shape our takings, then we can re-write that language from the side of takings, as according to what it is in one's perception that actually *makes a difference*. If we then went on to *analyse* what makes a difference, first, we would compare the rewriting in the more

perspicacious language with what we actually perceive when looking at reality, appreciating that there may be discrepancies, signalled by inconsistencies in the functional-role that the block statement—now positioned as a particular—does embed; second, we would then refine our perceptual takings through the postulation of novel theoretical objects, novel conceptual intersections to match with words that are perhaps already in use but that we did not know the meaning of prior to this point; finally, we would take these words (or group of words), now infused with conceptual meaning as tokens, modify the relevant object-language, and then map it again onto reality. While doing all this, we would also realise that there is no *qualitative* difference between the word 'this' and the word 'chair', only a transferred grammatical one. Language, as with any medium, imposes these distinctions in virtue of established canonisations, but from the perspective of how the perception of reality is mediated, how a certain thought is postulated and observed in the conceptual mesh that linguistically structures it, no word can be qualitatively different from another. When we will analyse my perception 'this-chair', what we will find will be •this chair•, and then •this• and •chair•: the qualitative semantic difference between the three will not be based on a differentiation of predicate and predicated, but rather on their respective role-functions. Then, going by their functional roles, and considering that for Sellars only concrete particulars exist, we could rewrite 'this chair' as 'C' and place this latter concrete particular, the capitalised letter C, on the map of that which we are observing, a process to which we will return in Section III.

As we will see in the last section of this thesis, Sellars' theory of predication is central to his notion of pictorial truth, which is imported, with modifications, from Wittgenstein, and constitutes the rejoining of an otherwise idealist theory of language with a profound commitment to realism.<sup>42</sup> The same can be said of the adverbial theory. In this case, we will also see the attempt at co-implicating the perspicacious language in which our conceptions are structured with that which we perceive, in such a manner that the rapport between the former and the latter can finally be described not in terms of an act-content schema, but as according to an adverbial structure.

#### **2.5.d A reading of Sellars' reading of Kant's transcendental idealism**

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<sup>42</sup> Hopefully, at this point, the reference we made to the tortoise-holding-the-world-on-its-carapace model of epistemology will sound more plausible and especially what we mentioned back then as our specific philosophical interest in the preposition that stands in the middle of the expression.

Sellars' theory of predication follows the directives of the non-relational theory of semantics and expands on the idea that the verb 'to mean' is only a variation of the copula by more explicitly looking at dot-quoted terms in their co-constituting rapport with perceptive takings as expression-tokens that, once formed, are then hooked back up to the portion of reality that we manage to see. Now, the fact that thinking is reconstructed analogically with respect to language entails that the verbs 'to represent' and 'to stand for' are also variations of the copula (SM, 148/9).

Up to this point, we seem to have been speaking in two registers at once. On the one hand, we have been following the parable of 'in', which implicitly reinstates a notion of content. Indeed, while arguing that 'to mean' is a variation of the copula, rather than a relational tie between linguistic and extra-linguistic entities, Sellars also writes that the 'job of contents is to exist [to be] "in" representings' (SM, 89), and effectively nowhere else. We certainly have used the preposition 'in' somewhat metaphorically, but it is a metaphor that we still owe some explanation for. This was a way to describe how acts—and, as we will see again in this coming sub-section, perceptions, intuitions, etc.—are *in* language, *at work* in it. Thoughts are found in language as soon as we position them in it, always in relation to other thoughts and never individually. However, this use of 'in' could be leading us on, beyond permitted boundaries: 'in' encourages us to think in terms of the 'location' of contents in acts of representing (as per Scholastic Aristotelianism), of the location of representeds in representings, of the location of something mediated in what mediates it, ultimately pushing us to characterise thoughts as the content of language, a rather conservative reading of the problem, and one that would contradict the theory of predication as well as what said in Section I. Indeed, on the other hand, we have been following a parable of 'blocks', which simply *are* in the sense of the variation of the copula of which we spoke above, and do not *carry* anything within themselves. Importantly, talking of 'blocks' in the context of the theory of predication has begun to show a difference between language with its grammatical form and language as that through which we perceive.

As we saw, epistemological and ontological dimensions need to remain separate: the fact that we can observe thoughts in language does not actually mean that we find thoughts for what they are in the folds of language. Language has no pockets for some more fundamental dimension of thinking to hide in. However, what

we are interested in showing, with Sellars, is that the structure suggested by the employment of 'in' is useful, for it puts an accent on something that is not irrelevant—as we will see that thoughts appear to us in language and not the other way around, and not in something else—but ought to be explained in a manner that does not contradict our other commitments. We only get to know thoughts in language, however there is a disparity between language and thoughts as well as between linguistic episodes—as framed by verbal behaviourism—and mental episodes, as well as between the sentences we utter according to standard grammar and the perceivings we can be said to take in. *Is there a way to describe the process of postulation and observation such that these disparities can be intuited and accounted for at the same time?* The recognition of this disparity will not necessarily commit us to a positive account of what thoughts really are, their ontology, it will only strengthen, within our epistemology, the conviction that notions of determination and conditioning are not suitable to describe the rapport language/thought.

The movement of analogy, the work of a medium, the structuring function of the model runs in a parallel direction, along the grooves of similarity, as well as a perpendicular direction, across domains, for otherwise nothing could warrant that very similarity. That thoughts are modelled analogically on language does not simply mean that, from our current observational perspective, linguistic and mental entities look like each other, for looking alike is hugely un-indicative without a relevant parameter, and that parameter cannot be some third, extra, and possibly abstract entity. It will still have to be *in language*, in what, in the last instance will be found to be concrete.

In a somewhat underwhelming denouement, the core of this exploration consists in the telling of a very Kantian story, which we will draw out of two sites in Sellars' oeuvre: Chapter III of SM, written in 1966, and misleadingly titled 'The Conceptual and the Real: Intentionality' (misleading because it contains little mention of intentionality), and a 1976 conference paper entitled 'Kant's Transcendental Idealism' (KTI). Additional textual sources will come from Sellars' lectures on Pre-Kantian and Kantian Philosophy (KPKP), held in 1975 and 1976. The telling of this story, mostly centred on Kant's transcendental idealist response to transcendental realism, will highlight Sellars' adverbial theory and more clearly bring to the surface the characteristics that we would like to square with the notion of medium.

One way to follow Sellars' reasoning here is to take a step backward, before we make a few forward, and reconsider how one of the issues at stake in the introduction of inner episodes was indexed as the problem of the one and the many, the fact that the same representation is *in* many representings. In Section I, we brought up the distinction that Sellars insists upon between representing and represented. We can distinguish between what may exist *simpliciter* as so existing, what may exist as representing (effectively a sub-category of the first one), and what may exist as the content of a representing, something that exists *in* a representing as represented (SM, 59). We are now in a better position to comprehend the scope of this notion of representing and, having considered the notion of act, extend it, as Sellars does, to intuitions, which are still not judgments, but ought to be read as fully conceptual. In fact, a careful reading may even show that, from the perspective of the order of the argument, it is Sellars' insistence on the conceptual character of intuition throughout the first chapter of SM that cashes out into the very differentiation between representing and represented, which is internal to the notion of representation, as well as to the one of judging, where perceptual takings or intuitions (or acts) of the type 'this apple', although not themselves judgements, still fall on the side of representings. With an example, 'this is an apple' would be a judgement. It is intentional and, if questioned, one can deploy the linguistic rules, using the Sellarsian apparatus, that commit us to saying that something is an apple or not. The one who is speaking is using the concepts that lead one to say that something is an apple. A perceptual taking of 'this apple', instead, is not a judgement, but, Sellars sustains, it is still a representing, analogically modelled and structured on the linguistic scaffolding of the sentence 'this is an apple'. Echoing what was said above, we take in linguistic synthetic objects, which can be re-connected to the judgement 'this is an apple', but that due to our operating at a know-how level, we simply perceive as 'this apple'.

This point on intuition clearly signals the need for a careful analysis of what a content is supposed to be, or to hold the place of, since intuitions will obviously not be simple 'contents', in the sense commonly associated with the word, but can still be described as representeds in representings. This is to say that any perceptual taking—for instance, 'glass on the table' when seeing that there is a glass on the table—is already an act of representing and is conceptually imbued. Therefore, to say that the

'object'—in the more general sense of the term—that is the glass on the table also qualifies as the represented content of the act is, to say the least, confusing.

However, as mentioned already, Sellars unfolds his argument, departing from a treatment of representings as according to the Aristotelean-Scholastic tradition: a representing is an *act* of representing, a doing, like every verb in the active voice (SM, 73), akin to the notion of *energeia*. Sellars presents a quite extensive treatment of this model in the first third of his lectures on Kant, when introducing Cartesian thought and mapping it onto his adverbial theory of thinking and sensing, and in the lectures on pre-Kantian thinkers, which focusses on the two distinctions concepts/acts and form/content. In this philosophical context, each act of representing supposedly comes with a content. In 'a thinking of Sellars', we have an act of representing, 'thinking', and a content, 'Sellars as contained or as existing *in* the act of thinking' (KPKT, 3/23).

Now, following the trajectory of the one-and-the-many problem, the notion of content or being *in* a representing is borrowed from another mode of being *in*. Repeating a classical philosophical move, we can say that one representation or content is *in* many representings in a manner similar to the way in which many different objects seem to share the same attribute.

The content that is in many representings is the counterpart of something that would seem to be *in* many different objects. Triangularity is something supposedly shared by many objects, it 'exists' in many different objects, which are therefore said to be triangular, and the representation of 'triangularity' exists in many representings as a represented content. The similarity between these two modes of being, the one in many representings and the one in many objects, is not merely incidental, and states how there appears to be a connection between a subjective dimension, proper to the content of representing, and an objective dimension. However, we quickly notice that the fact that multiple representations share in triangularity does not imply by any means that they are, themselves, triangular. The chief problem is that, also going by what was said about the so-far-left-on-hold ontology of thoughts, we can hardly say anything about the way in which contents are in representings. Furthermore, this same parallel elicits a specific Kantian argument, according to which not only do represented objects not exist *per se* in the world, and instead are only manifest as represented in representings, but some (and only some) of them are also to be

described as actual—again a term taken from the same Aristotelean-Scholastic line of thought.

Now, everything suggests that we can also take what we have described as the counterpart of the content present in multiple representings both as a content and as a represented, for instance triangularity as present in multiple triangles. Now, to prevent this clarificatory note from only accruing complications, we can, first, reassure ourselves that probing the notions of represented and content will pay off later on, when their supposed passivity, as opposed to the active character of representings, will be reviewed. Second, we can propose to alter the metaphor that regulates the rapport between representing and content, from 'being in' to 'being of', and say that a represented attribute is the content *of* a representing. The second move is one that we take from Sellars himself, who in turn takes it from Russell and Moore (SM, 62). Switching from 'in' to 'of', we minimally gain in clarity concerning the rapport between, for instance, 'triangularity' as content of representings (previously being 'in' representings) and its counterpart in objects, 'triangular', since from now on we will be speaking of 'representing [as the act representing] *of* triangular things', that is a 'representing of triangles'. In other words, this is a way to pay full tribute to the parallel mentioned above, the connection between the subjective content of a representing, as what is going on in one's mind, and the objective aspect that multiple objects partake to. The downside is precisely that we lose the analytic distinction between the two, which is the bequest that Sellars rediscovers in pre-Kantian philosophy, and, importantly, we lose (and hence we had better silently bear in our minds) the metaphorical link to the question of the one and the many, the fact that representations are present *in* many minds, in many acts of representing. In all this, as we will see, 'of' will also be used only metaphorically, since not only is no spatial location implied in the relation between representing and represented (which was the danger with our metaphorical use of *in*), but neither do we want to imply any notion of simply referential correspondence (a danger we now face with a too literal reading of *of*).<sup>43</sup>

Now, looking closer at KTI, one of the core points that Sellars rightly emphasises in his rendering of Kant's transcendental idealism concerns the ontology of the object of the act of representing, which in our discussion would be the content that a representing is *of*. As is well known, Kant espouses transcendental idealism as

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<sup>43</sup> Sellars offers a diagrammatic rendition of the passage from 'in' to 'of' in SM, 65.

opposed to transcendental realism. For Kant, as well as for Sellars, the this-such which is intuited exists only in the act of thinking or rather only in representings, in the sense that spatial and temporal items exist only in space and time, as opposed to existing in the world in itself and, in return, space and time are not features of what exists in the world. For this reason, when Kant sustains that some of the contents of acts of thinking are also actual, by actual we ought to understand something different from existing in the world. Arguably, what is intuited, as that which a representation is *of*, does not exist in the world as such nor does it exist only in the mind. Indeed, Kant opposes Berkeley's version of dogmatic idealism, for whom to say that the contents of intuitions exist only in space and time equates with saying that they exist only in one's mind (KTI, para. 23/4/5), by somewhat positively affirming the existence of time and space, *qua* time and space in the mind (in Kantian terminology, as *forms of intuition*). If one was to agree with Berkeley, one would risk diluting the distinction between the way in which, for instance, a feeling of pain is simply pain and the way in which the act of thinking of 'a cube' is not itself 'a cube' or thinking of 'pain' is not simply 'pain'—the slippery conflation between the existing 'in' objects and the existing 'in' acts of representing as their content, that eventually led us to the question over the ontology of the objects that one is capable of perceiving.<sup>44</sup> Indeed, the peculiarity of thinking, as opposed to feeling, is precisely the distinction that we ought to make between the act of thinking and its object, that of which a representing is of.

To distinguish what it is to be actual for a material object without really being part of the world out there, Sellars goes on to recapitulate Kant's argument using his own—by now familiar—terminology. According to Sellars, Kant is concerned with introducing the 'rules for generating perceptual takings', where the notion of rule is to be taken, as we have tried to do so far, not as something that one decides to follow, but as the rule that sequences of acts of representings appear to conform to, a rule that may be available 'if one is to recognise that one's acts of representing belong together as an intelligible sequence' (KTI, para. 39). As Sellars rushes to underline, this is not

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<sup>44</sup> In KPKT, as well as EPM. Sellars iterates the point that the logic of 'feelings' or 'looks', i.e., that something looks to me like such and such or feels like such and such, cannot be extended to thoughts, lest we attribute immediacy to thoughts. The issue of the object of perception and how that obtains does not apply to the logic of feelings, nor to the one of looks. Importantly, however, Sellars demonstrates how the logic of looks and feelings is secondary to the one of conceptually imbricated perceivings, that is to thoughts, for the way we know them in language. In this sense, feelings and 'lookings' become more sites of conceptual inconsistency than they are of knowledge, as we will see in the following section, but are nonetheless indispensable to the progressive refinement of our world-view. See the section on Descartes in KPKT and EPM, 32/46.

to say that material represented objects 'consist of rule-conforming sequences of perceptual takings' (KTI, para. 40), but only to show the *co-implication* of intuited objects and the rule one complies to, knowingly or, most of the times, unknowingly.

At this point of the text, both Sellars and Kant proceed through examples and bring up a simple, yet understated consideration, which the distinctions we just dwelled upon can now help us to visualise. Perceptual takings or acts of representing have pervasive features and occur from a point of view. Now, whereas the latter is specified by what we had initially named as its content, the representation in representing, the what-goes-on-in-one's-mind, the former, the material represented object counterpart, is not connoted by a point of view. The example given is again the one of a triangle. When intuiting a triangle, having an act of representing of a triangle may consist in perceiving anything along the lines of what we would then describe as a-triangle-face-up-inclined-by-60-degrees, for example, but the object of representing is simply a triangle. To be more precise, it is in virtue of the fact that the object we perceive is a triangle that we then manage to state our a-triangle-face-up-inclined-by-60-degrees-ly taking. *We will always have to work our way from the side of language, since the side of the contents in representings is barred.* In this, the object of representing is also not 'the sequence of mental acts each of which represent part of a triangle', meaning that the object of representing is 'neither a mental act of representing a triangle', nor the sum of point-of-viewish mental acts, each individually representing a triangle.

Now, the concept of triangle 'must specify in an intelligible way what it means for two representings to be representings of a [...] triangle from different points of view' (KTI, para. 44) as indicated by the content of the representings. This is Sellars' formulation of the Kantian insight that 'in the appearance which contains the condition of this necessary rule of apprehension is the object' (CPR, A191, B236), where 'this necessary rule' is the rule for generating conceptual takings and 'the appearance' is the represented content. As Sellars explains, here Kant is speaking of the 'aspect of the content of the perceptual takings which explains [...] the[ir] belonging together *as state[s] of the perceiver* of certain perceptual takings (apprehendings)' (KTI, para. 48), the fact that one and the same object is being intuited. That aspect, Sellars continues, is simply what is shared among contents that qualify the different points of view on (in our case) the triangle. Significantly, in Kant's formulation, it is the object of

representing that now *contains*—rather than 'being in' as a content—the conditions of the necessary rules. Therefore, the object of representing or perceptible object—meaning that it is representable, it is possible to perceive it at a certain moment in time—is the shared content 'triangle', which *contains* the 'explanation' for the individual contents of point-of-viewish representings. This means that the concept of triangle as perceptible object explains why, from a certain point of view, the content of an individual representing is necessarily such and such. Once again, it is important to appreciate the difference between the concept of house, for instance, as perceptible object, which may explain occurrences of specific contents of representings, and the concept of the *sequence* of perceptual takings. It is equally important to stress the two differences that we have marked already: the one between object of representing and point-of-views of representings, and the one between these two and the concept of the object, where the explanatory role of the latter does not need to be at the forefront of one's mind (or even to be fully known) for its rules to hold sway, but only needs to be in the extended system of representing that we inhabit and populate.

Our explanation up to this point is bound to sound profoundly similar to a standard notion of intentionality and, in many respects, this is what we have been trying to account for: how language, as the medium of conception, that in which we postulate thoughts, furnishes thoughts with intentionality, and how this very aspect, this 'furnishing', is one of the quintessential characteristics of the medium (although clearly not all mediums grant intentionality to what they mediate). However, we have also been trying to emphasise the fact that the reason that the perceptible object is not to be identified with the sum of the perceptual takings that apprehend it is that the perceptible object, or object of representation, is linguistic first and foremost, meaning that it is not made of the same stuff of thoughts, whatever that may be. There is a necessary and ineliminable jump, which ought to be taken into consideration, between the level of thoughts (in the full sense, encompassing their ontological—that is, physical—dimension) and the level of the perceptible object in language. The only way we have to comprehend this jump is by rendering *in* language what we postulate as acts of representing. The notion of 'perceptual takings' is introduced precisely to refer to the linguistic manifestation of acts of representing (which, for as much as we know, is the only form in which they can appear for us). In this way, our postulation of thoughts, which takes place in the relevant medium, i.e., language, also gives us

enough room to account for what we neither know nor *can* know directly about thoughts, their supposed nature, but that we can still describe as being at work, whenever we utter or have the inclination to utter a term. If we try to explain these considerations in terms of the parable of ‘blocks’—that we introduced when talking about predication in the previous subsection and mentioned again in this section as variations of the copula in the Sellarsian theory of language—it would seem as though, the object of perception in language operates as a block that is opaque from the side of language, from the side of its being linguistic, that is pertaining to the medium-language. However, precisely when we consider language and the linguistic blocks in question as a medium, and ask the question ‘a medium of what?’, we can illuminate these blocks from the other side, and appreciate acts of representing in their manifestation as perceptual takings. Alas, these perceptual takings are also linguistic and, when taken themselves as blocks, show the same dialectic of opacity and transparency, where full transparency is never achieved, but only approximated.

So, in all of this, what is to be actual? Actuality pertains to both perceptual takings or acts of representing and material objects, whether they are things or processes, where the actuality of one is logically dependent on the actuality of the other. The criteria for actuality of an object of representation are the perceptual takings, the acts of representing, which the concept of the object contains the explanation for. While, from the other end, we find the concept of the material object that perceptual takings are tied to, the same ones that, if actual, furnish it with actuality.

Now, so far, this is yet another reading of Kant’s argument for transcendental idealism as opposed to other forms of idealism popular in the XVIII century, but what of this argument is significant for our discussion?

The first aspect worthy of attention is the fact that what we have been calling the object of representation of any act of representing is nothing other than the corresponding dot-quoted term: the object of representation of the act of representing a triangle is, in fact, •triangle• (SM, 84/7). The counterpart attributes of the conceptual episodes that we were pursuing, and of the ontology that we wanted to define, are linguistic entities, according to a notion of language in rapport to behaviour, that is of language as thoroughly affected by one’s being immersed in a spatio-temporal system of different entities, among which we find context, the perceiver’s embodiment and

the object perceived. Indeed, that the object of representing is a dot-quoted linguistic item entails that its meaning is its functional-role model within a community's language. Sellars writes: '[o]ur programme [...] is that of construing the counterpart attributes of conceptual episodes, by virtue of which, in their own way, they stand for senses or intensions, on the analogy of whatever it is about linguistic episodes by virtue of which the latter stand for senses or intensions.' (SM, 73) The point that stands out here is the fact that the counterpart attributes are graspable as well as construable in language, and therefore that the analogical procedure moves, *within language*, from linguistic episodes to counterpart attributes to mental episodes.

This aspect reconnects us with the theory of semantics, but with the added value, accumulated over the course of this second section, of establishing a logical link between the meaning of terms and mental episodes, and, in so doing, accounting for the inevitably synthetic character of conception. To say this also equates to recognising, once again, the specificity of the mental episodes named thoughts, as those mental episodes structured and conceptually grasped in language, as well as the specific relation established between language and behaviour. Non-incidentally, this brings us back to the distinction between verbal and logical behaviourism. We distinguished, with Sellars, between the two camps and upheld verbal behaviourism as a methodology that could account for language as well as, effectively, social training. The point of making that distinction, however, was also to give proper consideration to the inner dimension that logical behaviourism decides to leave unexplored and the environmental stimulus that forge one's behaviour with language, and show how the latter becomes a pivot point that co-ordinates one's moving in the world, one's capacities for attributing meaningfulness, contentfulness and intentionality to what we observe in the world. This is to say that the weaving of language and behaviour is something that we established through observation, once again, and not a relation that we can simply take for granted.

Language takes on a comprehensive but not comprehensively determined leading role in relation to behaviour and its more or less co-ordinated manifestations. The fact that certain mental activities are accessible in language is in no way neutral. The undetermined character of this leading role, thanks to dot-quoted terms, warrants the presence of behaviours, which are not yet spelled out in language, as well as, and all the more importantly, of those activities which are non-performative and never will

be performative (SM, 73), that is what is not and will not be observational behaviour. Otherwise we would have to affirm, as the logical behaviourist does, that all there is to inner episodes is linguistic episodes which encompass or could encompass all of our behaviours. With Ryle, we would have to admit that whatever one is doing, in the generic sense of doing for which every verb in the active form is a doing, be it an act or an action, one may as well have the propensity of thinking it out loud.

To make things plainer, we can say that the kinds of distinctions we focused our attention on a few paragraphs back—the one between the content of individual acts of representing and the object of representation, and the one between these two and the concept of the object—are distinctions that we struggled to obtain because they conceptually separate items which are not *actually* separable (SM, 73), and as such these distinctions can hardly be the content of individual intuitings, since the elements being distinguished co-constitute each other. What we can grasp is only a qualitative leap between takings and language, where the set of committing rules that we can express in language are recursive, meaning that we may describe one single perceptual taking, but we would be doing it in language, therefore reproducing the same condition of co-dependency. I call this leap 'qualitative' not to signal some sort of emergent quality, but to account for the fact that the rapport between takings and dot-quoted terms allows the inclusion of all of those aspects that contribute to our perception, but are not effectively performed in any behaviour or linguistic expression (SM, 73) and therefore cannot be observed, but could still be postulated. This activity of postulating and observing, or in slightly different terms, hypothesising, is what we can name the process of mediation.

According to what we said so far, we are reckoning with a double-sided perspective. From the side of perceptual takings or acts of representing or intuitings (whichever of these notions we want to use), the material object can be decomposed into parts. However, the decomposition will never be complete, for this operation relies upon what is available from the side of the material, perceptual object, which cannot itself be decomposed. This is not to say that the perceptual object exists as a unity somehow resistant to decomposition, but rather that decomposition is not a relevant concept from the 'object-side' of this transaction. This double-sidedness extends to the metaphorical use of the preposition 'in', which we dwelled on at the beginning of this sub-section and according to which a content is in a representing or

an attribute is in an object of representation. From the side of point-of-viewish takings, these very takings are simply constitutive building blocks—although never in the sense of linearly adding up to—of the material object that the language-medium actualises, and are not contained in it. Instead, from the side of the linguistic character of the material object, these takings, as formulated in language, could be analysed as though they were contained in the object, although that analysis is always somewhat deficient. This non-correspondence seems to be due to the fact that, in the absence of any direct access to thoughts, we are trying to track or map their presence. One way we have to do so entails working with two shifting perspectives, pointing towards each other but slightly mismatched. Both perspectives are linguistic, since they could not be formulated otherwise. However, from the side of the perceivable object, takings are derivative, while from the side of takings, the perceivable object is derivative. The former side could be described, with an awkward turn of phrase, as properly linguistic, while the latter side constitutes the lynch-pin of our ontological wager, not because takings are not linguistic, but because they leave the door open to further speculations. These takings themselves could then be seen as dot-quoted, as perceivable objects, and further broken down in the attempt to zero in on something that, albeit linguistic, could, far down the line, refine the precision with which we map thoughts.

Therefore, at this point we can say that, for as much as the preposition 'in' is clearly inadequate (SM, 152) (if it were used in a non-metaphorical sense), it nevertheless helps us to visualise the attempt at analytically grasping what Sellars describes as a 'logically synthetic (i.e. subject matter dependent) conceptual truth' (Ibid.), and to speculate over the degree of necessity of the relation between language, conception and thought. Not incidentally, the double-sidedness of the rapport between (one) perceivable object and (many) perceptual takings maps onto the one from which we began to consider it, that between the epistemological and ontological fronts. What we have been trying to show is that, for the way thoughts are postulated, their synthesis not only entails that they have a subject matter, but also specifically that this synthesis occurs in the medium language. The space or location in which the interactive exchange between functional role and perceptual takings takes place, is language.

Going by the considerations made so far, we are well positioned to review the act-of-representing/content model associated with Scholastic theories of thinking. We saw how the act of representing (with its specific point-of-view) is more or less actual

according to its capacity to reference (as its intension or sense) a counterpart material object, the actuality of which is, in return, based on its reference to point-of-viewish acts of representing. Now, we could suggest maintaining the notion of 'act' when speaking of a representing, and seeing 'content', which in its co-actualising rapport with the object of representing constitutes its point of view and its necessary commitments, as the adverb. To be precise, in his 1960s writing (SM 152 marks one of these points, along with all of SM chapter VI, 'Persons'), Sellars expresses perplexity also towards the adverbial model, and begins to speak more simply of an incompleteness of acts or doings, which are necessarily subject dependent. The object is an integral part of the act of representing, but only in the synthetic form in which it is grasped.

We can say that the adverbial theory further articulates the quality of being 'in' of the content, or rather, it finally disassembles it. If, when considered from the side of their material object, point-of viewish takings may be seen as individual adverbs of an act, they simply constitute the act of representing of that object by conjugating it in various directions in accordance with what is actual among a community, the actuality from which their adverbial character (as specific conjugations of the object) can be appreciated. In other words, that their character is adverbial means that they are active modifiers, where the question of what is modifying what has a historical and epistemological character and not an ontological one.

When we try to substitute language, as the system in which dot-quoted terms are formulated, with anything that we currently describe as a medium in the common way of speaking, the notion of content is dispensed with, but in such a manner that the medium-item—the correspondent of the dot-quoted term in language—neither determines nor is determined by what we previously saw as 'contents'. The notions of medium and content can now be reconfigured, such that, from an analytical perspective, we can fictionally try to separate them in order to hypothesise a difference between two patterns that are not necessarily bound to each other. However, the two patterns are not separate in front of our observational capacities. What we see is only a perceiving, which, taken as a whole, constitutes a *perceivable difference* in the space of our experience. Reality would look different to us were the object not there. Nevertheless, for whatever difference it makes, mobilising the adverbial theory we have tried to expose, when I see a wooden chair, I have a wood-chair-perceiving and

not a wood-perceiving plus a chair-perceiving. There is no predicated subject nor predicate, as much as there is no content to be truly differentiated from containing medium-item nor predicable substance to be differentiated from form.

From here we can reach back to what was said concerning predication in the previous sub-section. Sellars highlights how what we call predicates can effectively be accounted for in the object-language as modifiers of terms. This more compact, or as Sellars would have it, more perspicacious language, frees the way to consider groups of terms as portraying objects that we can mark out of the background of reality by infusing them with senses and intensions. In this, the theme previously mentioned that, when we perceive something we perceive it as 'this-such', i.e., "this-chair", is a clarifying, Sellarsian precondition, which fits smoothly with the reading offered in KTI. I perceive the object of perception in front of me not as 'chair', but synthetically in language as 'this-chair'. My intuiting could be put in the form of the judgement 'this is a chair', but this does not have to occur in order for me to correctly (that is *actually*, in respect to my community) take the object in. The same happens when I perceive a red chair as 'this red chair', and certainly not as the sum of 'chair' and 'red'. In fact, it is only upon further analysis that the two terms in their dot-quoted form can be analytically separated, for the sake of conceptual analysis, more than for daily use. We perceive objects in a synthetic-in-language-'this-such' form, which, once translated into a perspicacious object-language, can do away with predication. Hence, we perceive the world in language, where language is that in which the world appears to us, in which it is graspable according to a certain order, we do not say something about something. We organise our perceptions through language blocks—more orthodoxly named sentential forms—and this is an operation we can do only in language, where, precisely owing to the extended definition of language that we provided, these perceptions appear as perceivable objects, observables, while individual perceptual takings are not observed in themselves.

We can now see better how the question of predication relates to our treatment of KTI and, more specifically, how both the adverbial theory and an expanded notion of medium may build on top of it. First of all, the adverbial theory feeds into the anti-predicative project by modifying the account of of acts, which are now understood such that they are actual in—according to the above discussed sense of being 'in'—the relevant medium where they can appear. Further, in the theory of predication, the point

was to move from language to the perceivable object in language, in order to show how language makes appear, as a picturing of the world, what is actual for a community, which is different to what exist in the world, and which will have to be confronted with the latter in order to establish a notion of truth. In our reading of KTI and move towards an adverbial notion, instead, we are going the other way around, from perceivings to the object of perception, in order to see how the two are co-constitutive, and to further highlight how the character of perceivings is that they have a point-of-view that ought to be taken into account in the appearance of the perceivable object in the medium, a point-of-view that is not the *content* of the act, but its *adverbial contributor*. For predication to be done with, we ought to be done with an intricate conceptual web, encompassing the split notions of singular/universal, which language may trick us into believing in, as well as the split model act of representing/content, wherein the object of representation is seen as a separate entity, which is conflated with the predicable object, ultimately justifying the return to a notion akin to substance, that of which something can be predicated. In the sentence 'this is red', 'red' is not the bearer of a universal predicate 'redness' that can be said of 'this'. In the same sentence, however, one may wonder what does 'this' denote? Should we not instead think of the judgement 'this is red' as something which finds its *actuality in language* (the job of 'contents', as we said, is to exist in representings *and nowhere else*), as •this is red•, as a building block of our picture of reality, with which we will then have to compare and contrast it?

We have now produced a plainer description of our capacity to observe thoughts in the web of concepts that language mediates, and at least three prevalent characteristics have emerged. Implicitly, the notion of medium that we have been slowly uncovering matches the one of analogy for which Sellars declares his interest at various points in his work (for instance in LA, see p. 20/2). The three characteristics that we will take up at the beginning of the third section are: first, the synthetic function proper to a medium, which we have tried to explain with our discussion on the double-perspective of the use of the preposition 'in', as well as what we could name unperformative acts still encompassed in the dot-quoted terms; second, actuality; third, observational access.

Before proceeding with that discussion, however, there are at least two interrelated lines of questioning that immediately open up as soon as we try to expand the notion of medium from the specific site of language to any medium. These themes will run through the third section, but for formal completion we shall broach them here as a conclusion to the present section. The first one directly concerns the nature of this expansion: how are we to think of it? What is it of the relation between language and thoughts that we want to extend? The simple answer would be the characteristics that we have just highlighted. However, there is another consideration to make. A medium, as it turns out, is something in which something else can be postulated and in which that something eventually appears. This statement entails various commitments, chiefly to the fact of postulation itself. The relation of mediation between perceptual takings and dot-quoted terms operates as a sort of base case, in the double sense that it will further constitute a general case, and in the sense that each and every medium that we will be able to isolate as a medium will be informed by the language-medium, whereby language is the medium of conception because thoughts, as mental acts, can be postulated *in* it. Therefore, for a more general definition inclusive also of the case of language but not limited to it, a medium is a medium only when it is imbued with a conception and, due to that, something can be postulated *in* it. The notion of medium thus becomes akin to a second-order, conceptual notion. If all that we interact with is mediated through our conception of it, is constructed and appears in language as the actualisation of our perceivings, then a medium is equally something that we construct as that in which we also seemingly perceive something else. Therefore, on the one hand, the notion of medium actively contributes to confirming the non-existence of abstract entities, including contents and predicates, and the existence instead of interacting acts and their variations. On the other hand, a medium subsists within the extent that we recognise its gnoseological function, or we better say its function of making appear, for our observational purposes, what we cannot yet observe. And, more specifically, the way in which this appearing happens, at least for our species, is itself mediated by the medium-language. The notions of gas and molecules, for example, are parts of scientific conceptions formulated in language, which, when coordinated with scientific apparatus of observation, make it possible for us to observe molecules in gases, or have molecules appear in gases. Therefore, all that we have said so far in terms of rules and their working, the non-

necessity of one being aware of them, etc., applies also to this latter type of mediation, and one can expect for it to happen twice, due to the second-order character of mediation. This is a roundabout way of saying that, paradoxically, the notion of medium is both accounting for the structuring of the epistemic level as well as being, itself, a quintessentially epistemic notion.

Picking up on a couple of points proper to this first line of inquiry, we can draw out another. We said that the notion of medium, as with the example of language, participates to the project of disarticulation of abstract entities. However, we have yet to question whether *everything* could be the medium of something else. The issue of the *specificity* of a medium, which is what is at stake in this second line of inquiry, should be understood through a double formulation of the same question. In the first formulation, we ask what is specific about a medium in ontological terms? Why is language and not something else the medium of conception, that in which we observe thoughts and hence, why is language what informs the conceptions of further, 'second-level', mediums? In the second formulation, instead, we ask whether we could observe thoughts, for the way in which we have defined them, *in* something else other than the language/behaviour binomial? I suggest we read the first set of questions in terms of a natural-historical argument, and the second set along the lines of the diatribe between the translatability and specificity of mediums, the latter being a problem close to the heart of media-theoretical work. In so doing, we can see the issues around specificity as revolving around, first, the 'nature' of a medium and, second, around the essential dimension of whatever it is that we deem to be mediated.

For obvious reasons, the first formulation cannot be solved with an appeal to ontological specificity. Sellarsian monism and the metaphysics of pure processes have not ceased to underpin our inquiry. A different version of the same attempted solution could instead appeal to the material qualities of a medium, which would supposedly be 'more material' than what is being mediated, leaving us with the task of fully accounting for the notion of materiality. The work done so far points instead towards a simpler direction, marked by the capacity for observation, one that, it transpires, can help us with the task just spelt out. A medium is a conceptual object that we can access in a particular way. It is co-constituted by adverbially conjugated acts, and in turn makes these very acts actual, that is they become observable differences, they appear. For lack of better terminology, we can say that such observational access is what

warrants our capacity to have a purchase on reality. We will see in the next section that, as could be expected, the crucial lead to follow in order to make up for this terminological insufficiency will be the Janus-faced character of language with which we started our research.

What is remarkable about the Sellarsian theoretical apparatus is the fact that it provides conceptual instruments to first differentiate and recognise this observational access, and then attempt to find a description of it. Now, the fact that we observe  $x$  in  $y$ , and not the other way around is not arbitrary: it has its roots in evolutionary and historical processes. The concretisation of the species may justify the formulation of what we could name medium-series, whereby our line of access to reality moves along the postulation and observation of mediums—at first only as theoretical entities—in other mediums, until the former become mediums for something else. The posit here is that language would *always* stand as the first of the medium-series that our species moves along.

Skipping to the second formulation of the above problem, the one that sees the issue of specificity in relation to the one of translatability, if we bear in mind what was said concerning Sellars' theory being neither materialist nor dualist, the answer to the question as to whether we could postulate and then observe thoughts *in* something other than language remains on hold. On the one hand, we could be tempted to answer: 'yes', seeing as thoughts would not be bound to language, contra the materialist approach. On the other hand, the response would be 'no', lest we rescind the link between language and thought and leave the door open to dualism. This implies two further points. The first one consists in acknowledging the fact that, in virtue of this reasoning, we are mapping the issue of dualism/materialism onto that of translatability/specificity. The second point is that, if Sellars' option offers a way out of the dichotomy between dualism and materialism and so, by derivation, out of the one between translatability and specificity, then we may need to re-articulate the terms that orientate the two dichotomies entirely, as their current arrangement is undermined.

To say that, yes, we could have postulated and then observed thoughts in something other than language seems rather incomplete, since what we would need to migrate is not simply *any* notion of thought, but the whole relation between language and behaviour and how that orientates the apparent majority of our movements in the

world, our ways of giving meaning to the world, in virtue of which we postulate what we then call thoughts the way that Jones does. On the other hand, if we follow Sellars' theory of semantics to the letter, we find the necessity for a *plurality* of mediums, since the theory would not be able to contemplate a notion of meaning without, at the very least, the presence of multiple natural languages. Sure, it is easy to appreciate the continuity between one natural language and another, but, from a finer-grained perspective that takes into consideration also the differences—and not only the physical similarities—among languages, the point remains that a multiplicity of mediums is necessary in order to obtain a notion of meaning. This appears to be a crucial point: multiple mediums are necessary to uphold a notion of meaning qua functional role, rather than as correspondence with extra-linguistic entities. Yet, this reconfiguration of the notion of meaning is at the heart of a project that leads us, on the one hand, to a non-transcendent explanation of the working of abstract entities and, on the other hand, to the mechanism of postulation and observation, which, through the notion of the object of perception, helped us to demarcate the role of language and, per extension, of the medium, without ontological inflations. The notion of translatability is somewhat implicit in the one of medium here advanced through Sellarsian philosophy, although what is being translated are rapports rather than single entities. The rapport between language, behaviour and thought, as we mentioned already, is a sort of pre-postulation necessary for the postulation of the notion of thought.

This point leads us quite smoothly to a final appendix-like issue. So far we have been intentionally vague over what we could call the material uniformity of a medium: how does a medium gain its boundaries, how does something, an object or an apparatus become a medium, how do what we call media concretise as such? Of course, there is a mutual binding between a medium and a mediated entity that is postulated and observed in it and then outputs observable differences. Another quick response could come from the usual route: we demarcate a medium through the conception of a certain medium in language. However, can we say something more on this topic? Let us think through what the notion of analogy and what an analogy is usually taken to be. An analogy requires three elements: two of them are in rapport with each other, while the third one constitutes the regulatory terms of the rapport, the what-does-it-mean for the elements to stand in that very relation with each other. It

would seem as though the boundaries of a medium are drawn when all of the commitments that those regulatory terms imply are exhausted. What to say ... we may find out that some mediums are simply infinite.

### **Section III**

#### **3.1 Introduction to three aspects characterising the notion of medium**

If the preoccupation of Section I was to account for how the notion of normativity develops out of language itself, how the reasons why we attribute validity to a statement can be comprehended by observing human behaviour from the outside, that is without presupposing mental entities, the preoccupation of Section II was to show, once we introduced mental episodes in a manner consistent with these demands, in which way they are co-implicated in linguistic episodes, and what the relation between thought and language is. In the attempt to investigate this rapport we introduced and described the notion of medium.<sup>45</sup> Now, we can recast the medium itself

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<sup>45</sup> In what follows, we will use phrasings like: a medium, the medium, mediums. We will not be paying particular attention to the differences among the three. Generally speaking, we will talk about mediums to suggest the existence of more than one medium, but as according to our definition of the notion and therefore to mark a difference with the conventional ideas that one associates with the

taking stock of what we have seen in the case of language, the fact that it furnishes conception and thought with specific aspects, as well as how it does so.

Our attempt at settling the thought/language rapport unfolded in a manner that could raise objections. Why? We first took care to introduce mental episodes according to a split-form that would separate their ontological dimension from their epistemological one. We stated that little could be said concerning the former, little other than the suppositions we can make along the lines of current neuro-biological researches or the ones we could make holding in sight a future metaphysics of processes. Concerning, instead, the epistemological dimension of thoughts, we stated, with relative easiness of mind, that thoughts can be *known* in language, wherein concepts are mediated. These two positions being in place, we could say that our Sellarsian theory of language was neither dualist nor materialist. However, when we then probed the two statements, we realised that by ‘materialist’ in the above sentence, what we really meant was not the fact that thoughts can be known only in language, whereby materialism would be an epistemological position, but that the philosophy of mind that comes with this theory of language is not ontologically reductive. In other words, by rejecting the materialist option, we rejected the idea that thoughts can be ontologically reduced to language. Therefore, one could say that the ontological position we are developing would supposedly guarantee ontological non-reductivism, while our epistemological position would warrant a non-dualist ontology. Now, this move made room for a possible confusion: when rejecting ontological reductivism, did we also reject the epistemologically materialist position? The answer to this latter question is clearly ‘no’. At this point, we can begin to call back to what was broached in the introduction and at various points over the first two sections. One of our core concerns is the question of naturalisation and the possibility of naturalising thought, in the sense of asking what the nature of thought is. One can run into many mistakes while asking this question, one of them being to assume that we can access thoughts directly without passing through language, and another one being to say that thought necessitates language, committing us to the projection of language onto nature. The route we proposed to follow takes matters from a different perspective, or rather it splits the perspective into two. We have language, something we may say that we

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term media. We will use the expression ‘the medium’ as a shortened version of ‘the notion of medium’.

know, because we use it. Through language we manage to postulate the existence of thoughts, which we can also describe as something that we *know*, because the structures through which we know them are provided by language. Then, as a separate hypothesis, we can hypothesise the existence of something that is present and at work in the world and that we can try to reconcile or re-match with what we have postulated as existing in language. To the question whether the relation between language and thought is one of a necessary tie, we answer: yes, epistemologically, and no, ontologically. The medium is nothing other than the theoretical device through which we have been trying to describe this relation between thought and language, and that we are now extending to any medium and whatever it mediates, whatever it makes appear.

Having said all this, we ought to admit that we did muddle the waters when introducing the theory of predication and further on when discussing Sellars' rendering of Kant's transcendental idealism. In these two set-ups, language was taken in two senses: language in the sense in which we normally use it, and language as that through which we zero in on perceptive takings, as though our epistemological position had a double-bottom. Was the second of the two a dubious use of the only system through which we supposedly know and access thoughts? The answer is again 'no' and the reason as to why the second use of language is still plausible would seem to be, once again, the translatability that is built into the notion of meaning that we have been marshalling.

This theory of language, which effectively tries to show the non-natural aspect of language as what would often be referred to as discourse (if we think for instance about what we said concerning language acquisition), nevertheless does not see language as exhausted by *one kind of discourse*. The point of introducing mental episodes, stressing their private dimension, was to highlight differences in access. For these differences to actually matter and not only remain as abstract postulates, we will have to go all the way and take into consideration the linguistic form that perceivings (mental entities) are formulated in. Once we do that, the way is also open for us to re-write sentences in a manner such that the predicate function could be done away with, because, albeit still from within language, we *can* conceive the absence of predication. Thus re-written, sentences are more clearly recognisable as particulars infused with

role-functions and tentatively paired with the particulars we manage to coherently perceive in the world.

What matters are perceivable differences, in the sense outlined in Section II, the perceptions of which are marked out by correspondent dot-quoted expressions. It is precisely the latter that embed translatability, in the sense that they are founded on the possibility of being translated. What can be translated, in the sense that the conceptual relations in which the entity is caught can be detected and transposed into a different language, is what stands out against the background of reality. Clearly, here, that something is *translatable* from the perspective of the language in which we initially find it does not mean that it is *actually translated* into other languages. It only means that the term is located by identifying that we could locate elsewhere. It is because translatability is embedded in the notion of meaning (as the translatability of rapports and not of entities) that we could use language in the double-way that we did, since, albeit still from within language, we are already acknowledging the existence of a multiplicity of languages that are not entirely reducible to each other. Importantly, the final goal of Sellarsian philosophy is not the establishment of meanings. That would confine the whole project within an idealist sort of corral that impedes the development of a realist picture. Meaning and the theory of language operate as philosophical contraptions that activate the movement of knowledge and, through mediums of various sorts, make candidate real objects appear, the presence of which we will have to further confirm. Using the old-fashioned taste that we have now spruced up, at the bottom of it all, if we want to think of it down below in the sense of concreteness, rather than up above in the sense of abstraction, we will not find universal notions, mostly because there are no notions in the world. We will not find concepts either, but instead real particulars that in one way or another necessitate *this* world and not any other.

One of the chief points of this thesis is perhaps summarised in saying that the rapports to be translated are not simply the ones that instantiate the linguistic web of concepts, in which a certain dot-quoted term is caught. In fact, when we do translate those rapports we ought to remember that they are synthetically instantiated in language, where thoughts (perceptual takings, intuitions) are folded into them, in a manner that cannot be linearly unfolded. The rapports at stake are not *only* between linguistic entities or, in fact, they are between linguistic entities only to the extent that

the latter entail postulated thoughts. Language is one medium, and perhaps even the only one that we have to mediate thoughts, for the way in which we have defined them. It certainly happens to be the privileged medium of *our* species, but there could have been others and it is only within this extent that we can speak of ‘natural’ language, for otherwise there is little that is natural about language.

This short explanation comes not only as a necessary clarification, but also as a way to introduce the task of this present section: discussing the notion of medium while bearing in mind the three central characteristics introduced in the latter segment of the previous section, each of which shows a different guise of the medium. Non-incidentally, translatability is not one of them, for that would require a different set of discussions and considerations from the ones we have made so far, since for us translatability is implicit in the theory of language we have been deploying, although there we spoke of a translatability of rapports (or analogies), rather than of single terms, and therefore of a translatability that stands rather far from simple transposition.

The first characteristic is the one according to which a medium is seen as possessing what we have described as a synthetic character, to be explained through the working of a fictional double perspective that accounts for a peculiar use of the preposition ‘in’. The second central characteristic of the medium hinges on the notion of observational access, and the third characteristic on the one of actuality. Importantly, in this section, we will try to discuss the concept of medium as according to these three characteristics by building on the case of language, which means that whatever we end up saying will still count for the case of language.

Starting with the synthetic character of the notion of medium, the fictional double perspective is the one we so far appreciated from the two sides of the object of perception and the ‘contents’ of acts of perceiving, which we have then tried to consider in terms, respectively, of the side of the medium-item and what we are capable of postulating and observing *in* it.<sup>46</sup> From the side of the former, the latter would look as though it was positioned *in* it, while from the side of the latter, it would look as though it was *constituting* the makeup of the former. The two sides inevitably

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<sup>46</sup> Once again, when using variations on the expression ‘from the side of...’, we do not mean to intentionalise the object of perception. Having said this, the resemblance with the language of phenomenology is not incidental: we are trying to account for takings and the object of representation as formal positions, but what is also implicitly at stake is the question of the subject, which is not simply a formal locus that can be occupied by different tenants at different moments. One of the riddles that we ought to hold at the back of our minds is that of how to account for the notion of the subject in a manner that is neither essentialising nor simplistically eliminative.

imply each other in the constitution of the dot-quoted block, in the example of thought and language. This way of stating the formation of the dot-quoted block may be an alternative way to appreciate Sellars' description of all semantic verbs, such as 'to mean' and 'to refer to', as well as all more explicitly 'epistemic' verbs, such as 'to represent' and 'to stand for', as nothing other than special cases of the copula, different modes of 'to be'. What we ought to stress is the fact that, from an ontological perspective, there is no difference between our two perspectives (in whatever formulation we articulate them). They are respectively assigned only through an *a posteriori* analysis, meaning that it is *because* one postulated entity appears in another that we call the former mediated and the latter medium, but what comes to the surface of appearance are only synthetic units of the same synthetic stuff. In all this, against expectations, calling back to the equation between 'to mean', 'to refer' and 'to be' can help to strengthen the connection between the theories of semantics and predication in Sellarsian philosophy. Indeed, 'to be', for Sellars, is not 'to be something': Sellars would reject the Quinean ontological mantra that 'to be is to be a value of a variable' (Quine, 1953b).

The synthetic character of the units is meant to suggest the fact that they equally entail the specific context in which they appear, i.e., the object of perception or, we may say, the medium, and whatever intuiting that we come to have, what is mediated. Staying with the example of language and thought, the co-constituting process of acts of perception (or intuitings or thinkings) and role-functions that isolates perceivable differences aims at tentatively marking out objects in the reality that we observe, *qua* objects that, on further inquiry, could be decomposed into finer-grained objects, and so on. Eventually, one of these 'objects' may also be thoughts. Now, we ought to imagine the same movement of decomposition being at work for each and every pair that we would describe along the lines of medium and mediated.

As a quick summary, by stressing the notion of a process of co-constitution, we are trying to emphasise three points in particular. The first one is that, still in the example of thought and language, when we say that acts of perception are linguistic, by language we mean something more than a collection of words, graphemes and sounds. The synthetic knot between medium and what is mediated is played out in two frameworks: the one prior to postulation, where, in our other worn out example, we have just gases, and the one after postulation, in which molecules come to appear

in gases, but really the two effectively are of the same theoretical-observational ‘material’, the same synthetic compound, which is now observed in lieu of a certain phenomenon. The second point we are trying to emphasise is that the ‘back and forth’ between perceivings and object of perception takes place in language, language as the medium of conception in which acts of thinking are observable. Third, we should emphasise that in describing this process of synthetic co-constitution, we are trying to encompass and account for both the takings that cash out in behaviours that could be observable or could become observable, and whatever it is that pertains to thoughts but will never be observable *qua* behaviour.

The unit-like character of the above synthetic units is a way to render how, once assembled, the synthetic block is a token, which is itself a particular, that we then match up with the particulars that we perceive in our language-filtered version of reality, keeping track of the inconsistencies that may surface and disprove the postulations that we have made.

This latter point leads to the second characteristic notion of the medium: observational access. Indeed, the medium is an observational mechanism, which grants us knowledge of that which we see it as the medium of, and in which this knowledge of existence is embedded as being *in act*. This last statement, as oblique as it may be, leads us to reflect on the notion of observation itself. The medium is simply, per definition, more observationally efficient than what it supposedly mediates. Now, what makes something more observationally accessible? The evolutionary development of the connection between our sensing and perceiving would seem to be the easier, intuitive option. This is to say that the fact that language is the medium of thinking has a whole lot to do with the side of its Janus face that we have discussed the least: the one for which language is also made of graphemes and sounds, the latter being available in the middle-size physical world, the macro-level of observation or the common-sense framework (SM, 136-7). Clearly, the fact that ‘graphemes’ and ‘sounds’ are themselves concepts, with which we mark out particular objects in reality (vowels, consonants, etc.), orientates our access to these objects, but does not in itself make the objects more or less accessible. One reason that language is the medium of thinking is because, conveniently for us, language is already made up of concrete particulars that we can observe. In fact, it is thanks to the access we have to this macro-size level, Sellars would say, that, via postulation and further observation, we can

break reality down to its composing parts, down to increasingly finer grained levels, the level of micro-physics, where physics should not only be read as referring to the scientific discipline. We begin by matching synthetic units qua particulars to the particulars available at the coarser macro-physical level and then work our way towards more and more precise refinements of our image of reality. Once again, if physics is not to be read here simply as the scientific discipline which bears this name, then it is legitimate to ask: what physics is it that we are talking about? To this question, there is no easy answer, but the direction suggested by a physics of the whole, that merges the boundaries between natural sciences and speculative metaphysics, appears to be an interesting candidate.

To tie things together with what was said so far, here we are appealing to a notion of physical materiality that we have more or less been trying to zero in on since the beginning of this thesis. Knowing that materiality, as well as concreteness, is easy to misplace, a tinge of skepticism towards it is always necessary. If everything is accessed from the epistemological side, then conception infuses materiality as much as it does abstraction. However, it would seem as though, in the case of dot-quoted medium blocks taken as tokens, physical materiality (or concreteness if we wish), the character of being 'natural-linguistic' of a linguistic token, to use Seibt's words, does point towards a difference that can be placed. Linguistic objects are here considered in terms of the physical constraints they imply, the existence of which is not particularly committal to commit to. What we are trying to say here is that under-determined notions such as materiality and concreteness do point towards a character that has a function and can contribute to making useful differentiations. However, being the two concepts left in a certain state of confusions, it may be useful to replace them or to specify them. The notion of observational access here can be helpful: whatever appears to be 'material' or 'concrete' is only more operationally accessible.

By now, it is relatively easy to appreciate in which sense one 'observes' acts of thinking in language, or rather the blocks synthetically constituted in language with mutual entailment of acts of perceiving (or thinkings or intuitings) and objects of perception. It is less clear what observation would mean when considered outside of language, but the suspicion is that the haziness of the topic is due, in fact, to the superficial semantic proximity between observation and perception. To observe is not simply to see or to take into consideration or to acknowledge. That something is

observationally accessible means that we can operate with it and, as we do, activate as *acts* the doings that pertain to what we have postulated as mediated in and through it. In fact, it means that we can do all this without having to infer each and every time what those implicit doings would be. We postulate a notion of energy and, with it, the fact that energetic quantities preserve themselves. We can therefore say that the movement of the water carries a quantity of energy that can, at least in part, be transferred to a mechanism that activates a rotation. However, we do not say, or even re-infer, any of the many complicated passages that go from wind to rotatory mechanism, in our day to day dealings with waterwheels. The doings of something that we call energy are at work in the waterwheel, but we operationally activate the latter not the former. It is the latter that changes landscapes, modes of production and even our definition of ‘picturesque’, and that, *in its own extremely restricted system of signs* articulates what energy is and how it works, in a way similar to the articulation that we said predication actually is, as opposed to being the naming of a universal.<sup>47</sup> However, no waterwheel would have existed, in the form in which they now do, without the initial postulation that, itself, was made on the basis of other observations. One aspect of the articulation of what energy is, in the physical scale that we occupy, proceeds through the composition of postulated activities and waterwheel parts.

This point drives us smoothly to the third characterising notion of the medium that we wish to mobilise: actuality, the medium as that in which what is postulated is actualised and not simply hypothesised, but is really present as active, in *act* as actual. From here, we can think of the notions of history and communication, as well as the canonisation of a medium-object.<sup>48</sup> We have already spoken of how, in the case of language and thought, perceivings and the object of perception provide actuality and actualise each other. We can now stress how a medium-item, the dot-quoted term or the object of perception in our sample case, have a profound role in stabilising uses and preserving structures that, being set-up and then present in the world, can be described as determining. To say this does not commit us to an irreducibly deterministic perspective, but it helps us to acknowledge the inertia that structures at

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<sup>47</sup> Although this thesis does not broach the topic in the slightest, here is the point at which we could appreciate a close sympathy or affinity of intents with parts of Peirce’s semiotics.

<sup>48</sup> Here one could reference Simondon’s process of technological concretisation, something which this thesis is certainly not treating, but that could open further horizons for research (see *On the Mode of Existence of the Technical Object* and *L’individuation à la lumière des notions de forme et d’information*).

work and present in the world that we inhabit exert against any change of representational order. This is one way to introduce a notion of history and the historicity of mediums into our discussion, not in the sense that mediums are in use at a certain moment in time, but in the sense that they contribute to the making of that time, because they contribute to the setting-up of the world. In more general terms, the concept of actuality helps us to comprehend the spatio-temporal horizons of a medium, for insisting on speaking a language that does not ‘fit’ the context in which it is spoken means accepting that the acts at work in that language may crash against the perceivings coming in through the world.

In the present section, we will mobilise these three characterising notions to discuss two matters of importance when it comes to the notion of medium, anticipated by a promissory note. The promissory note will consider the notion of dot-quoted items, but this time in order to highlight what we have just called the inertia effect of a historical medium. This note is included as a way of cashing out an aspect of the medium we have been mentioning at various points, and that will both clarify and complicate the considerations we will make in what follows it. The first discussion will concern the matter of what communication really can be in the Sellarsian model that we have adopted, since the standard notion of communication is largely superfluous to it. The second discussion will look, first, at what it could possibly mean to talk about synthetic units hooking up to the particulars we mark out of reality when the medium we are considering is not language. In this second discussion, we will reflect on how this hooking up of synthetic units as particulars to the particulars in the world shapes a plausible notion of empirical truth. At the tail end of this latter reflection, we will take up the somewhat anticipated idea of considering mediums as arrayed in series, from the more refined, the ones that offer mapping capacities or articulations of higher precision, to the lesser ones.

### **3.2 Preliminary note on the inertia effect of a medium**

Our explanation of Sellars’ theory of language has underlined the existence of two fundamental levels at which language operates: the level of commitments that we take on when acquiring language, and the level of storable rules. Roughly speaking, we could say that the tandem of perceivings and object of perception or correspondent dot-quoted item work across these two levels. As already seen in Section I, we absorb

and commit to linguistic uses, without being able to state them in terms of rules at the beginning, and, crucially, these commitments are not simply to saying things in a certain way, they are commitments to treating reality in a certain way and setting up reality so that it *can* be treated thus (maintained and preserved). Language would only seem to be the easiest way to transmit these commitments, but, as we saw, the language of transmission remains inaccurate and picks matters up from the ‘wrong handle’—as Sellars comments in NAO, stressing that to start talking about language from the perspective of communication risks misunderstanding its role. Language acquisition entails much more than simply learning a language, and the latter is but the driving force of an extensive and expansive process which is effectively akin to the socialisation of a person or, one could say, the making of a person. Now, what we intend to bring back to the fore of the discussion is the role of the implicit commitments that we take—but which are not statable—in the structuring of the dot-quoted item. We described the latter metaphorically as having the shape of a web, which may mistakenly imply some form of flexible mobility. As it turns out, our metaphorical web may be sturdier than expected. The role of implicit commitments is determining, and the social dimension of language acquisition is reflected in the social dimension of the commitments we have.

If we do imagine the dot-quoted item as woven into a web of commitments, implicit commitments will compose the fundamental intersections of the web just as much as as the explicit ones. Incidentally, the former have little to do with the logic of looks or feels that we mentioned in the course of Section II. Their relation is only symptomatic, and nothing justifies positing a linear relation between the feeling of something and an implicit commitment to the same something. Talk of looks or feels, as Sellars expounds in the second myth narrated in EPM, is secondary to existing commitments that fall under the logic of the copula. Sellars demonstrates that the fact that something ‘looks green to me’ is secondary to my having the notion of green, to the fact that I can say that something ‘is green’. Similar arguments could be made for the cases of feeling that something ‘is wet’ or that something ‘is troubling’. The little that the logic of looks or feels may have to do with the implicit commitments that we take on in embracing a certain role-function lies in the impossibility of questioning those same logics, their being impossible to challenge. It is hard to argue against the fact that something may ‘feel wrong to me’, since such a statement, precisely due to

its formulation, is impossible to disprove. Similarly, any commitment that we take without being able to state it in terms of a rule is one that we clearly cannot disprove. Now, the key point is that the entirety of our cognitive structures are riddled with implicit commitments, as we already saw to a certain extent while discussing the notions of know-how and rule transmission. There, we appreciated how not only the language trainee but also the language trainer was somewhat ignorant of the underpinnings of their own instructions, in the sense that they do not know the meta-language of notions of concepts and thoughts.

Going by the considerations restated here, it is easy to see how the revisability of norms, which Sellars frequently flags as a key characteristic of the epistemic level of what ought to be rather than what is, is a qualitative requirement more than an empirical fact. In other words, it is necessary to say that the difference between the epistemic or transcendental level and the empirical one is that the first one could be otherwise, while the second one's mutability is more limited, it is only a matter of event-like processes. However, the changing of one's transcendental horizon does have boundaries, and even when the alteration required takes place far from those boundaries, it does demand more than the simple stating of a rule and checking its accuracy and consistency, more than even *re-stating* the rule and consequently following the new formulation. Indeed, the further re-stating will only address the inconsistencies that we can already see and not the ones that remain implicit, but that are still cornerstones of our conceptual structures. In other words, the changing of rules of use would only constitute the changing of a way of saying. What ought to change is also the implicit commitments that we cannot state as rules, the quiet ways in which we set up reality to then take it in accordingly. Language has a historical dimension not simply because it is in history and changes with the passing of time, but because the commitments we take—which we could recover in the form of linguistic formulations—are not only simply linguistic but also materially historical. More than a direct reference to historical materialism, here we simply mean to differentiate a conception of language that *runs parallel* to history and moves along with it, changing as history changes, from a conception of language that, among other factors, *coordinates* the making of history, considering that our representations of reality set up the world for us to inhabit it. As we will suggest in the following two sections, this way of understanding language and the notion of medium has significant

consequences for the concepts of communication and empirical truth, as well as how a medium constitutes a knot of inertia for the *actualisation* of both.

### 3.3 The problem with communication

We shall tackle the question of communication not because our subject matter, the medium, is usually meant as the media of communication, but for the opposite reason: the theory through which we have been working out a notion of medium is inherently inhospitable for communication, or at least for the conceptions of communication currently available. We spoke of communication as a secondary function of language and just now we highlighted the presence of implicit commitments that one may have unknowingly because they are folded in language but not fully acknowledged. This last point confirms the fact, plenty known and light-heartedly accepted in communication theory—but now, we can say, also accounted for within Sellarsian philosophy of language—that to state that language communicates, not only equates to having an instrumental notion of language, but is also hardly true, considering all that is passed in linguistic interactions without actually being heard. It would appear as though only what is already available can be effectively transmitted, language is not the meeting point of diverging frameworks.

Clearly, Sellars does appreciate the function of communication, and a good place to see the extent to which he does is in one of the explanations Sellars provides for the notion of thinking-out-louds, this time, as free-reined flow of linguistic behaviour (NAO, 121). In this very passage, Sellars is trying to offer a notion of thinking-out-loud that is as comprehensive as possible and, in so doing, goes through three suggested definitions. The first one sees thinking-out-louds as characterised by the fact that they are not brought up on purpose by oneself. However, this may be an incomplete phrasing. As we mentioned, perhaps all too briefly, although the act-form of thinking-out-louds was to us their more interesting aspect, there are also action-forms of thinking-out-louds, the ones that we do bring up on purpose. Further from this, also the second attempted definition remains limited: to say that the free-reinedness of thinking-out-louds is due to the fact that they are not brought about to communicate with an audience is incomplete, for some forms of thinking-out-louds can be ‘governed’ by the intention to be communicated, bearing in mind what will be understood and what will not. However, Sellars insists, even when governed by the

will to communicate, and this would be the third attempt at phrasing a definition, albeit in the negative, thinking-out-louds are ‘not brought about by the intention to communicate such-and-such a specific message’ (NAO, 122). Meaningfulness and intentionality are already in language, before the introduction of private episodes, and the ultimate reason why a communicational model of language will not do is that, if a language communicates anything, it is only itself. This is another way to remind ourselves that the introduction of private episodes is not meant to infuse language with meanings or intentions, but only with a conceptual dimension. What this conceptual dimension does is to explain the inner quality of thoughts, but also their unified/ying character.

Both the prevalent models of linguistic communication, the communication theory model and the personal understanding model—indexed by Kramer (2015, 21 ff) in her more recent work on the notion of medium and communication and attributed respectively to Claude Shannon and Jurgen Habermas—are incompatible with our adoption of Sellarsian philosophy. Albeit in radically different ways, the two models set up language as a vector of interaction, such that anyone who wishes to partake to the exchange will have to get on board with it. The goal is that of mutual understanding, predicated on some imaginary common ground of agreement that a consequent reading of Sellars would find implausible. Sellars’ theory of language is more compatible with a different genealogy of thinkers (and, interestingly, the name of Kittler belongs to this list). Language, like any medium, has the primary function of externalising the formation of the subject, where, since being a subject is nothing natural, its formation can only be external. In return, the interactions among subjects are also necessarily external, although not in any way that warrants linear reconciliation with the diverging paths followed by the prior kind of externalisation of a member of the human species—or a bundle of processes, as Sellars would have it—into a subject.

Not incidentally, this would seem to be the point at which Sellars’ work becomes rather amenable to other philosophical traditions, such as critical theory. For the record, our account of the chief role of language in Sellars also appears to discredit, among other things, a theme of Sellarsian philosophy itself, mostly popularised by Brandom: the notion of the space of reasons, with the corresponding game taking place there of giving and asking for reasons. In their fictional space, reasons are given

and asked for and, indeed, the appeal of reasons as the motor for accruing our knowledge of the world seems to be precisely encompassed by the fact that reasons can be given and asked for. Now, if we go by what was said so far about communication, this mutual exchange looks unlikely. Or rather, the exchange would only be nominal because the reason given should already be had, in a certain form, by the receiver. What one is ‘giving’ is only a clearer explanation of the commitments we already have—what we are already doing. What counts as a reason would only be a better phrasing of the same shared conviction, using a language that has a higher explanatory power and can first pick out of the dot-quoted term more acts and then link them to the ones we already knew. In other words, the space of reasons is ultimately one of clarification, and only one of communication in a contrived sense, the chief problem being the fact that only the ones who are already *using* linguistic expressions in the same way, the ones sharing the same know-hows, will *actually* be heard.

Sellars introduces the notion of the space of reasons in EPM, in order to avoid what he calls the naturalistic fallacy. ‘The essential point is that in characterising an episode or a state as that of *knowing*, we are not giving an empirical description of that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says’ (EPM, 76). However, if we piece together this principle with the ones we saw in Sellars’ inferential theory of meaning, language acquisition and acts, the space of reasons seems to be an optimistic way not to live up to Sellars’ own critical standards.<sup>49</sup> When talking about ought-to-be rules we called them rules of criticism, because they engender criticism, because they could always be otherwise. However, to criticise these rules does not immediately translate into their changing as they clearly already ground our way to interact and ‘communicate’ with fellow humans.<sup>50</sup>

Another way to get at this problem is looking at the use we have made of the verb ‘to warrant’, and its significance in relation to the notion of ‘inference ticket’, popular in the inferentialist philosophy that Sellars is also a proponent of. The

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<sup>49</sup> In relation to this, Brassier has spoken of the fact that Sellars’ work ought to be complemented with critical theory and that, in fact, the latter should constitute the critical consciousness of the former. (Talk at the conference *Sophistry – The Power of the False*, ‘Sophistry, Suspicion and Theory’, June 27-29, 2014)

<sup>50</sup> Scharp, 2003, offers an interesting treatment of Brandom’s inferential notion of meaning, inspired by Sellars in parallel with Habermas’ work.

metaphor of ‘inference ticket’ seems to come from a bureaucratic sounding context where holding the right ticket number authorises someone to do something. In our case it authorises a subject with a certain conceptual structure to make certain inferences. The chief problem is, obviously, with the idea of authorisation and the authority that issues it. What is at stake in our treatment of the issue of communication is still the problem of institution or constitution of the epistemic level, which the inferentialist wishes to label as ‘the space of reasons’. This being the case, why would we use the verb to ‘warrant’ or to ‘authorise’, if the authority we attribute to a statement, the recognition of its validity, is not something that we seek to establish on a solid basis, but something that itself structures the epistemic level? Sellars seems to be all too aware of the issue, when advancing his painful reconstruction of the process of language acquisition. Following that line of inquiry, the problem with the notion of *a* space of reasons is its dangerously trans-historical character, which would seem to be promoted by any notion of norms emptied out of worldly experience and its eminently historical dimension. Minimally speaking, if the concept is to make any sense, we will have to talk about *spaces* of reasons, which can hardly communicate to each other. However, in all this, there is still a way to defend the use of a verb like ‘to warrant’ with reference to inferences, if we rephrase this discussion on normativity in terms of description versus prescription. What Sellarsian philosophy may be seen to be trying to do is to attempt to *describe* the working of norms and rules, with a profound awareness that the sphere of normativity is inherently prescriptive. This descriptive attempt is indispensable, precisely from a political perspective, if we are to even begin to try to change the reality we live in. The impossibility of purity of any historically instantiated political ground is another of the insights we may do justice to in this theoretical effort.

To conclude our brief reflections on communication, we find in Sellars an attempt at seeing language fundamentally as a translation apparatus. The latter admits neither infinite translatability, nor only partial translations, but, in its rapport with inner episodes, grants the possibility of translating different mediums, wherever a similar rapport can be struck. Appropriately, through this route, we finally manage to say that the object of the verb ‘to translate’ in the previous sentence is ‘different mediums’ because, coherent with the fact that synthetic medium-blocks simply *are*—rather than representing or being related to anything extra-linguistic—what is

translatable is each and every medium-block. In light of all this, it would seem as though the move to translation could constitute a feasible technique for enhancing communication: the speaking of someone else's language, within the context in which the order of reality that that language obtains *actually* makes sense.

If we follow this line, the question of instrumentality would seem to come back as an unresolved problem: instrumentality not of language as a communication tool, nor as a tool of expression for thoughts, but in a vaster and more implicit sense of the term that has to do with the setting up of the reality in which we interact with each other. In this respect, the merit of Sellars' work is to show how instrumentality is planted in our normative dimension in a fundamental way that is part of our evolutionary make up. It is because we coat reality with nets of relations that we can make sense of it at a level that goes beyond immediate one-to-one impulse responses and that this new level of sense bears the consequences of those relations. It is because we count causality among those relations that consequences can be conceived. Clearly, were we to repudiate causality—which is itself an epistemic notion—many more commitments than anyone could desire would simply fall apart. It would seem as though to honour this exceptional form of instrumentality, it is useful to make a distinction between instrumentality and functionality, as we have already mentioned, precisely because the notion of instrumentality currently in use would be misleading.

In all this, one question remains on hold and another one is radically transformed. The first concerns in which sense the common conception of mediums as media, that is as mediums *for* the transmission of information, is—or is not—compatible with the description we are constructing? The second question, which is more relevant for us, is, in its original form, whether communicating through a medium other than language would be possible, and what kind of communication that would be? However, in its restated form, this question becomes that as to what other mediums are or could be of the type that they make reality appear to us or, minimally speaking, structure this appearance?

As we are about to see, owing to the way in which we have constructed the notion of medium, starting from the case of language, to hypothesise the possibility of a medium other than language as that in which reality appears to us runs parallel to showing how said medium would also have to be one through which we could establish whether our appearances are accurate, that is to what degree they correspond

to reality. Therefore, before we even begin to approach the above questions, we shall clarify how it may be possible, in language, to establish a notion of empirical truth, especially given that it may seem surprising to bring up the concept of correspondence at this point in Sellarsian philosophy.

### **3.4 Empirical truth, picturing and appearance-reality distinction**

Let us clarify the direction of travel. If there exists a medium other than language in which reality appears to us, in order to qualify for the task, it will need to embed a conception of truth. Why? Because, first of all, we would need to establish, within the framework structured by this medium, a difference between an epistemic level and a real level and then, operating within that epistemic level, we would need to develop criteria that help us differentiate between true and false representations. As we are about to see, truth in language is established as pictorial accuracy, and therefore any other candidate medium will have to display a commensurable pictorial character.

The notion of truth sits uncomfortably in the context of various discourses on medium and mediation. It is precisely because we recognise the existence of a medium that all that we can speak of is validity (epistemological or historical) and, as we saw at the very beginning, validity at most, rather than truth, since even the notion of validity may remain occluded. The specific route we have taken, alongside Sellars, might be incompatible with more reductive perspectives in the field of media, which effectively invalidate the leap we have suggested from language to a more general conception of medium. To be clear, a notion of truth as correspondence with empirical reality seems to be implausible, if not outright contradictory, within the critical framework of media theory, as well as within the one we have been working on. However, I would like to briefly show how we can recover a notion of truth within both the context of Sellarsian philosophy and the theory of mediation and, in fact, how the conception of the medium that we have been developing may be directly mobilised and implicated in this notion of truth. In other words, I would like to reflect on the fact that our access to reality is not simply medium-dependent, but that our capacity to gain a better and better grasp on reality is contingent on the ways in which we ‘deploy’ mediums. This is not to say that one medium is more truthful than another, but that, once again, we have to appreciate the binomial medium-mediated as a complex that

can provide an accurate rendering of empirical reality and, in this, the plausible complexes are neither unlimited nor historically irrelevant.

As we mentioned already, Sellars equates the notion of truth within the theory of language and semantics to the one of assertability in a given language (SM, 88-111). Something is true in a language if it can be stated in that same language. The principle of validity is relative and internal to the language, or medium, of use. Truth is a matter of what can be done, in the act-sense of doing, or, in more contemporary terms, it is a matter of affordability. However, Sellars' work also contemplates a notion of empirical truth, defined as a form of correspondence and derived from Wittgenstein's notion of picturing in the *Tractatus*, although as seen already, Sellars, contra Wittgenstein, sustains that linguistic objects picture objects in reality and not facts about reality. Our considerations on the rapport between empirical truth and the notion of medium departs from Sellars' notion of truth.

Sellars' attempt at recovering a notion of empirical truth is based on the possibility of overcoming coherentist and pragmatist positions, on the one hand, and correspondence theories, on the other. The former set of positions cannot state what the 'meaning' of the concept truth is, because they reject the notion that something 'means' something in the sense of corresponding to something else. They can only affirm, respectively, that something 'coheres' with something else, and as such they will only discuss 'truth' in the context of coherence or in relation to doing in the sense of action, since what is true is only what is instantiated in actions that impact empirical reality (TC, 197, pagination from SPR). On the other hand, correspondence theories would espouse some form of relation of direct correspondence between word-world, however minimal. What Sellars tries to show is that there is a sense of correspondence that does not simply leave us with a semantic theory of correspondence, that is one that hinges on functional roles, but does not cross the line between linguistic and empirical levels, does not reach beyond the linguistic. What Sellars' is thus pursuing is a modified correspondence theory, according to which we can try to move between the linguistic level and empirical reality, and which does not contradict his non-relational theory of language.

Before we get into the details, we would like to draw attention, once again, towards a specific aspect of the discussion. There is a slight difference in emphasis between Sellars' explanation and ours. Sellars is trying to account for a notion of

empirical truth in general, showing what it means to know whether what we think is coherent with empirical truth. In order to do so, Sellars utilises the fact that thought is analogically modelled on language. Therefore, if we account for the way in which we can establish the accuracy of our linguistic activities, whether they grasp the truth of empirical reality or not, we can account for whether our thoughts are accurate (TC, 199). I suggest that we abide to this methodology, but flesh out what I believe to be its further implications, bearing in mind our reflections so far on the notion of medium. Not only *can* the correctness of our thoughts and judgments be established through the adequacy of our language, which will turn out to be a form of pictorial adequacy, but it is also *the only way to do so*, precisely because it is in language that conceptions appear and with them our capacity to organise thoughts into judgments.

To better comprehend how picturing works in Sellars we shall look back at what was said concerning the theory of predication and the hooking up of dot-quoted blocks, as tokens, to the objects we perceive in reality. Due to the way in which a dot-quoted block is co-constituting of perception, it may appear circular to say that the process of re-matching it with objects in reality can return to us an assessment of what is empirically true, since those objects in reality are still only objects of our perception. However, we need to pay attention to two aspects. First, what do we mean by empirical truth? What does the attribute ‘empirical’ actually mean? Second, each and every observation of reality activates a whole complicated machinery that will always have to begin from a middle, but said middle is more equipped with means of verification than we may initially think it is. Starting from the first point, the ‘empirical’ of empirical truth still embeds an epistemic connotation, as it inevitably does, as much as empiricism is fundamentally a theory of knowledge and not of being. Therefore, for as much as Sellars’ theory of truth is pushing out of the boundaries of a self-referential model of language, it is still claiming a notion of truth from *within* an epistemic set-up. The reality that we *actualise* in its full scope is not at stake here, nor is there any idea of a direct insight on reality.

The second aspect leads straight to the heart of the discussion. The point that we want to make is that, with the theory of empirical truth and picturing, Sellars comes back full circle and mobilises the response-to-impulse side of language, only this time applied to natural-objects, graphemes and sounds, which, if we pay critical attention, we can also understand as symbols rather than simple signals. Here, we are calling

back to the notions of signal and symbol already mentioned in Section I. The two concepts are native to communication theory, and are currently in use in the context of the critical analysis of interfaces, but we can easily repurpose them for our discussion.

The theory of picturing suggests that we look at dot-quoted blocks as particular natural-objects that we respond to as though they were signals such that, on the basis of these responses, we may then rearrange them in order to correspond to the portion of reality that we are trying to contemplate (Sellars, NAO, Seibt, 187). This form of correspondence occurs between objects—the natural-linguistic ones, and a portion of reality that is articulated within a certain environment—that, one could say, are not exactly part of the natural order *per se*, but that, using the brief note we made on concreteness and materiality in the introduction to this section, we can commit to as making a difference, impacting our sensations in an ontologically relevant manner. In the context of the theory of picturing, we focus on the more physical than the semantic character of linguistic items. The arrangements of dot-quoted blocks that we make are expected to draw an isomorphic picture of reality, just as if we were producing a map of a room or any space we were moving in. As we compose this picture, the arrangements may show inconsistencies in the usage that we make of the terms themselves, since, we may find that the respective rapports between the dot-quoted blocks placed in our imaginary map and the items that we pick out in the world are not preserved. These inconsistencies will require revision, although, as we saw, this revision will require more a than a simple pragmatist intervention in the language we use.

To say something more about picturing, it is worth directly asking which extended conceptual tools we are mobilising here. To tie back in another aspect mentioned in the introduction to this section, we are calling upon a lack of discursive saturation in the use one can make of a given dot-quoted item, as well as a form of residual causality in the sphere of the normative. The first aspect has to do with the ever-expansive character of the inner commitments that the use of a dot-quoted item implies—something which we have already seen when talking about communication—owing to which the dot-quoted items may simply not line up with their original functional roles once they have been redeployed as building blocks of an isomorphic picture of our image of reality. The second aspect requires more

explanation, since the notion of causality itself, just as much as the one of concreteness and materiality, calls for mild mistrust. Here, by causality, we do not mean anything that has to do with natural necessity, since, standing by the theory of language we have been expounding, causes as such do not exist in nature. Causality is meant, once again, as non-intentionality and non-instrumentality. There exists a way of looking at language that shows it as ‘causally generated’ and ‘functionally used’ (Seibt, 197).

Looking at Sellars’ work, we can already appreciate that causality is talked about in two ways. The first one corresponds to the non-decisional character of one’s association of a term with a certain impulse from the world. The association itself, as said already in other ways, is not something one induces oneself to do. The reasons it is associated with may be normative and socially normative at that, but we certainly do not go through them and confirm their validity when responding to an impulse. Those norms, regardless of our being capable of stating and knowing them, exist in a so to say ‘sunk-in’ form and shape our behaviour without our direct choosing. In order to differentiate this type of non-willed responses to external stimulus from willed ones, we describe the former as causal. The quality of this kind of response is that of a response *to* a signal: the operational level may be meta-linguistic, but we still respond to the signal as we were conditioned to respond, without taking into account the whole layered system of justified (or not) commitments that lie behind that conditioning. This also means that the association of a name to a certain impulse from the world has a causal efficacy, which is binding, and appears to be necessary within the current structuring of reality.

The second type of causality proceeds exactly from this latter point. It is not only the case that a semantic system of *linguistic signs* holistically structures normative functional roles, but also that particular, material characteristics of *the natural-object side of these same signs* respond to limitations that occur when trying to *holistically* picture reality. Just as the former side encounters logical limitations in the functional structuring of a coherent system of norms, the latter side encounters material/causal limitations. In fact, it is precisely because there is an internal limit to the semantic configurations that language can be arranged in, that we are able to be alerted to the limitations on the material object side. This is to say that we are able to appreciate the disparities that obtain between dot-quoted or medium blocks and what we see of reality, through which the dot-quoted blocks are supposedly shaped.

Causality is nothing immutable, nor is it present in the world *as* causality, but it is something which we cannot really conceive the prospect of having decisional capacity over, something that is at work. We only need to discover it, as much as we ought to discover how to possibly change it, and, as we have tried to show, this change cannot only be a change of mind. However, there is no guarantee that the discovery that we make contributes to an advance on our current knowledge. If picturing is founded on the possibility of arranging both natural-linguistic objects and material-objects into homologous set-ups of perceivable differences, then the danger is that the causal rapports latent on both sides of the arrangement, so to speak, misfire in a mutually reinforcing manner, solidifying incorrect judgments and turning a virtuous cycle into a vicious one.

In her explanation, Seibt criticises Sellars' insistence on talking about objects in the world for the reductive effect that the expression may have. Indeed, and Sellars' late work on processes would likely reinforce this point, the Sellarsian adaptation of the notion of picturing in the context of our access to empirical truth hinges on the fact that, so understood, picturing allows us to theorise an incrementally refined observational grasping of the world. The interlocked activities of the postulation of entities and the subsequent observation of them in the medium in which they appear works its way through increasingly precise conceptual assessments of reality, through the appreciation of more and more composing parts of the world that we interact with. The refining of our view on reality is based precisely on the possibility of isolating or rather making appear more and more details in a certain medium.

A simple way to introduce the notion of medium within the context of this notion of empirical truth is to look at one of the examples that Sellars uses to explain how picturing functions: the map. The comparison between a map and a pictorial use of language is based on the comparable importance that the configuration of information has in both contexts. A map is a map not because it names objects, but because it positions names of objects in relation to each other in a physical space. The more the relations with reality are preserved the better the map, which also means that the more relevant details there are, the more precise the map will be. Clearly, when looking at a map we will not mentally separate all of the details, we will simply appreciate their explicit relations and begin to walk. The know-how of map reading is based precisely on one's capacity to translate a change of colour and an isobaric line

into a future object of perception, for instance, the beginning of the slope at the end of the woods. Similarly, a linguistic picture of reality helps one in getting around the world and making practical inferences about it (the sum of all of our activities) and, just as in the case of a map, geographical or otherwise, the names of the objects spelled out in a linguistic picture are configured in relation to each other in a crucially relevant manner. This is also to say that picturing harnesses the multiple aspects that are proper to the writing out, mentally or on a page, of a sentence in the perspicacious language not only the fact that a sign symbol corresponds to a certain object, selected by our perception and picked out from the background of our seamless immersion in reality, but also the features of the sign itself as a natural-linguistic object, i.e., thickness, size or position in relation to other signs. Once again, picturing concerns the way in which we represent reality by taking language as a physically existing set of objects and over and above its role as a conceptually structuring system that consequentially informs our acts and actions, although clearly those objects themselves are infused with a conceptual dimension. This specific way of considering language helps us to track and verify our model of reality because each sign can be written so as to display more than one feature. Therefore, what we would have formerly described as ‘predicates’ can now be appreciated as increasing levels of differentiations, pertaining to both the sign and the object they correspond to in relation to other objects. The more properties we are capable of differentiating in the picture the more precise, it will be.

Circling back to what was said in terms of causality, one of the key aspects of mapping at play here is its bi-dimensionality, that is the fact that an extra-dimension of information is added to the usual conception of language writing as linear. In this extra-dimension, the junctions to adjust may blatantly show the inconsistencies that were already present—if implicit to us—in the linear order. A proposition may seem correct on its own, but not when it is placed in space alongside its neighbouring proposition. Each aspect that we manage to record in language would seem to lose some of its mobility, when we fit it into a picture that needs to consistently use those same terms. It was brought to my attention by a peer (Mr. Matt Hare) that we could borrow a metaphor relevant to our discussion from the field of carpentry. To produce a square with wooden sticks is an easy trick, but one that often goes astray. In order to make the square sturdier and less of a parallelogram, a carpenter can place a diagonal piece to cut across from corner to corner. The way we are thinking about

concepts, here, is somewhat similar. The fact that the same concept can be mobilised in different contexts and according to different discourses does not make it more mobile, but, in fact, more bound, if we demand that its use be consistent in the picturing of the portion of reality that we are looking at.

As Seibt reports, Sellars also recognises a profound dissimilarity between the pictorial character of language and picturing, and the examples used to illustrate this notion. Differently from a map, our projection of reality into a picture composed by our observation language is neither intentional nor instrumental, as it would be in the case of any device or tool, such as a map, that we purposefully build. It is, once again, causal and functional, in the sense of function discussed in Section II, akin to the notion of mathematical function. This seems accurate, but, if we follow our line of reasoning, the one extending the notion of medium beyond human languages, it also sounds incomplete, and this is one of the points we have been working towards for the entire span of this essay. Would it be possible to identify mediums that one acts ‘in’ similarly to the way that we think in language and, if we take the answer to this question to be positive, what would these mediums’ relation to language be?

This question does not come up solely out of curiosity, so we shall clarify the stakes here at play. Reprising what mentioned at the beginning of this sub-section, we are trying to imagine the existence of mediums other than language that nevertheless could make the world appear to us. These would be mediums mediating a world of appearance, where the possibility of distinguishing between true and false assumes specific relevance. If there were other mediums than language that made appearances possible, what would these appearances be, considering that the world of appearance as structured by these other mediums would be radically different from the one that language enables? Bearing in mind the infrastructure of Sellarsian architecture, in which the existence of something is postulated and observed in the relevant medium and then (possibly) verified, what could we possibly find out about the world, which we cannot access directly, and which cannot currently appear in language?

Furthermore, in the general introduction to the thesis, we spoke of the fact that we can take ideas to be the appearing of appearance that never appears. Now, following the trajectory that this research has been on, ideas would equal thoughts, as that which participates, as an active force, to the appearing of something in something else, but without ever itself appearing, remaining impossible to directly access. If we

raise the hypothesis that mediums other than language could structure a world of appearance for us, and do so by generalising the case of language to other mediums, must we also posit, as a requirement for the verification of our hypothesis, the existence of the same, or commensurable, appearings, in order for alternative appearances to appear in our alternative mediums? If the answer to this latter question were positive, then would the fact that other mediums exist at least help us in *locating* these appearings that we cannot perceive?

Last, at various points in the course of this thesis we seemed sceptical as to the possibility of replacing language as the medium of conception, or rather as the medium in which the world appears to us. The scepticism was not articulated in terms of absolute impossibility, but more in terms of an evolutionary perspective on our species, which has developed language more than other mediums as the epistemic structure in which reality appears. If we stand by this position, is it not possible to read the study of the development of language as a medium of appearance, and specifically as the medium in which *our* thoughts appear, as a way to trace the natural history of the mind, the cornerstone project of a philosophy of nature?

### **3.5 Medium series**

This may be a good point at which to sketch the notion of medium-series. To really extend the notion of medium from language to mediums in general, we now have to account for the fact that language infuses conception into all of the other mediums. This is also to say that when we generalise the notion of medium, we have to consider the possibility that mediums other than language could take on a comparable, role, as the first medium in a series of mediums, each having the next one appear in itself. We access reality through the appearance of it in a medium and, to refine the precision of that access, other mediated entities will appear through that medium. In other words, since the synthetic quality of the medium is among the aspects that we have been championing, and we have been constructing the notion of medium itself out of the case of language, then we cannot but expect something proper to the language-medium example to trickle over into the extended case.

Now, following the suggestion broached during our discussion of the second of the questions above, to admit the possibility that a medium different than language

could be the one that initiates our series of mediation we would have to accept that there could exist a non-linguistic, so to say, ‘subject-matter dependent’ medium, in which, just as much as we do with language, we could conceptualise reality, that is we could structure it. Having spent a good part of this thesis discrediting the notion of content, and showing how its structure is *at best* useful for comprehending the function of a medium, to now proclaim the *necessity* for a medium to be subject-matter dependent might seem contradictory. However, what we here mean by ‘subject-matter dependency’ is the instantiation of the synthetic character that we have attributed to the medium, the fact that, from the perspective of the medium, what we appreciate is only the medium itself, while from the side of the mediated—still formulated within the framework of the medium—we appreciate both medium and mediated. More specifically, the subject-matter that this alternative first medium will be dependent on will contribute to the fact that in whichever way the first medium structures reality for us, it does so by sewing that structure to our experience in the world. Clearly, by ‘subject matter dependency’, here, we also do not mean the semantic qualities that we coat reality with, because that is clearly only the form of subject-matter dependency that characterises language. What we rather mean is the experiential apprehension of reality, which language systematises in intensional meanings, but that other mediums could systematise otherwise.

Further along the same trajectory, we may ask whether the first medium of the series will be characterised by the fact that something akin to thought can be postulated in it. It would seem as though the unitary character of thought, as that which centrally organises our apperceptive experience, is the chief aspect we would be importing onto other first mediums, meaning that whatever will be postulated in them will have to have the characteristic of centrally organising our access to reality. Calling back what was said in our reference to Rosenberg in Section II: ‘Sellars argued further that, because the manifest image’s *unitary* perceiving subjects have ontological pluralities as their scientific image counterparts, the fusion of the two images at the point of sensations will in fact require the postulation of further (theoretically) basic entities’ (1998) (emphasis added). The basic entities in question would be thoughts, or whatever else would have to be postulated in the first medium of any medium-series, and the aspect of interest here is the unitary character of perceivings. Something will have to unify the bundle of our apperceptions of reality in order for us to be able to

access it. Or rather, in the notion of medium that we have reconstructed extending out from the case of language, we have to concede that, even in the case that we could imagine language not being the first medium of access to reality, infusing all following mediums with its structure, we will still require that whichever alternative first-medium is chosen can operate as a bundling mechanism for our subjectivities.

This is also to say that imagining other options is not impossible, but that they will require a different restructuring of the notion of medium, one that will not begin its course from the example of the language-medium. This thesis departs from the hypothesis that these other beginnings are not impossible, but that, for the time being, they are foreclosed to our species.

Carrying on with our considerations on what an alternative first medium of a medium series would need to be, the other attributes that we see at play are the ones that we have been trying to differentiate in the previous subsection, with the distinctions between causality and intentionality and between functionality and instrumentality. A first medium of a medium-series will have to be causally generated and functionally used. The two attributes are interrelated. The fact that a first medium structures the web of relations that provides us access to reality implies that our operating within it will occur somewhat non-intentionally. At the same time, our operating within this medium will be functional, in that sense of functionality that we need to keep distinct from instrumentality, because the former corresponds narrowly to the following through of existing commitments, within the remits of the medium, and not to the autonomous setting up of instruments to achieve a goal implied by the latter. Clearly, the mediums appearing within this first medium, could instead be set up intentionally and instrumentally. This also means that only the first medium of the series will have the two modalities of knowing-how and knowing-that, and that if we were to state the function of secondary mediums in terms of provisional norms, we would do so by relying on the knowing-that form of the first medium.

The fact that language is the first medium of our current series points towards its refined expressive capacity, meaning that language appears to have a precision unavailable in other mediums. Mobilising some of the terminology we have been developing, language seems to be the more developed observational medium available to us.

In this respect, we can return to earlier considerations concerning formal languages and technical apparatus, and we may have just enough ground to speak of the two cases at once, considering what was said in terms of the continuity between technology and language in Section II, and about observational access at the beginning of this section. A formal language, as much as a technical apparatus, is filtered through natural language: it is made sense of as language through the language that we speak. This does not mean that our interactions with it cannot be operative and shape our overall interactions with reality even prior to our capacity to read a certain formal language as a language, or to use a technical apparatus according to a certain function. However, those interactions will occur at the level of sensations, and will not be capable of fundamentally restructuring our epistemic purview on reality. This does not exclude that formal languages *could* act as first mediums of a series, but only implies that *currently* they cannot, and that an entirely different reality would probably appear to us if they did. Finally, another position that, consequently, we would find disagreeable would be to reject that technical apparatus can be integrated in organic bodies. We see no hard distinction between the two at an epistemic level. What we do concede is that technical apparatus could be integrated into organisms *only* via a process of wiring that would mesh said apparatus with the structures that embed our organisms in the experience of reality. This wiring process is currently spearheaded by natural languages.

At this point, an all too plausible objection could come from the context of artistic production. To mention two systems usually referred to as mediums and which, just as language, are fitted with canons and historical developments—and are even referred to as languages in common ways of speaking—in which sense are, say, dance or music not already first-mediums of a series? In order to respond to this, we need clarify that the claim that dance and music are not currently first-mediums, equates to claiming that they do not support a know-that form. Indeed, if it is true that gestures may try to imitate reality, and they would do so through the filter of language and conception in language, it is also true that dance-acts participate to a movement that is then coded and referred to within a coherentist system of movements that, without directly going through language, works out a non-relational meaning formally similar to the one we saw in language. However, it is important not to confuse the discursive analysis we may do of dance, in our example, with the structure of

something resembling meaning that occurs in dance, but that we do not ‘talk about’ in a dance-language among ourselves. To make things plainer, it is through the coordinated acquisition of language that we begin to move in space in a certain way, and it will only be in language that we will be able to describe those movements in knowing-that form. Using a slightly different example, it is through language that we isolate the object ‘brush’ and manoeuvre it in a certain way, which, without our even knowing what visual arts are, slowly introduces us to the notion of ‘paint’ and, in rather unconventional and childish manners, to its wonders.

These considerations imply that we do not need to commit to the idea that other mediums, sufficiently developed, mediate *specific* types of thought, such as dance-thought or music-thought. We can certainly postulate acts in these mediums, but we can leave on hold the question as to whether we can consider those acts as forms of thought. Or, rather it is better to say that, if we did that, we would have to admit that dance and music are mediums of dance-conceptions and music-conceptions. However, both kinds of ‘conceptions’ would show features specific enough that to describe them as conception, using the same term we use for that which language mediates, would seem perfunctory. To be clearer, thought would certainly be involved in any act that we postulate in a dance, as one’s activities are holistically coordinated. However, the question is whether it is in virtue of a conception formulated in language that a certain act in dance becomes actual. The answer to this question would seem to be both yes, and no. A certain conception is used to train someone to do a certain movement, however, that acquisition is not based on a linguistic repetition, but on a physical enactment. Surely, more than a series, the figure outlined by these cases is that of parallel mediums, one of which may be structuring reality for the way it appears to us, while the others are making entirely different types of entities appear. This is not incorrect, and the point is not to respond that the music-medium, for instance, does not comprehensively structure reality for us as language does, but to acknowledge that the music-medium may be opening up an entirely different access to reality.

Furthermore, what we are trying to acknowledge here by introducing the notion of medium-series is the possibility for something to appear to something other than our intellect, and for this other receiving ‘organon’ to organise reality accordingly. In this sense, the notion of *sensa* and our insistence on them in Section I comes in handy, as well as, once again, the general distinction between representing and represented.

It would seem as though we return to the fundamental distinction, posed by Sellars, but Spinozist in character: that between -ing and -ed, as the only relevant differentiation between what acts and what can be acted upon.

Our introduction of the medium-series is a way of investigating this distinction on the scale of our species, by asking which of the mediums possibly accessible to us affects more forcefully than the rest of what equally exists. The underpinning tenet of this thesis is that, thought, as it appears in language, can affect more than *sensa*, and that this is the only real difference between the two.

In our treatment of language as a medium, we have tried to point out the evolutionary dimension of the fact that language is the first medium of our series. To hold this evolutionary perspective means to recognise that language is not simply the first medium we have developed, in the temporal sense of first, but also in a logical sense. In fact, that language is the first medium of our series in a logical sense short-circuits its being the first medium in a temporal sense, meaning that the fact that language is the best developed medium in which reality appears to us makes the tracing of its historical development an infinite and impossibly circular task.

Acknowledging this point invalidates any attempt at reconstructing the unfolding of a medium-series in time. The tale of how language comes about can only be mythical. However, is this tale not one that is indispensable to tell? The story we can reconstruct will be far from certain, but could still be likely, a tale that we can believe in and that is indispensable to ground thought not in an immutable origin, but in the middle, where it acts.

## **Conclusion**

By way of conclusion, we should try to recast what we postulated at the beginning of the research from this end of the project and reflect on what we have managed to say.

It all began with trying to account for the way in which we establish the validity of statements, without appealing to conception. In the process of unravelling this issue, we began to show how characteristics usually attributed to thought and conception are, instead, internal to language. Intentionality, the meaningfulness of words, and the distinction between predicates and objects are linguistic, they are derivative of language. Our investigation, however, required considering the role of language acquisition, repositioning the structural function of experience as the fundamental core of linguistic development, and marking out a distinction between a type of activity that is intentional and willed and a type of activity that, albeit constantly at work and shaping the reality we observe, is not necessarily willed by a

subject. This explanatory work was our way into the notion of medium, from two perspectives. First, we suggested since the beginning the possibility of extending the case of language to mediums in general, hence transmuting the considerations made with respect to the former onto the latter, the fact that certain structures are proper to a medium and imported onto what it mediates, and that to understand how a medium may array our perceptual faculties, comprehensively or partially, we ought to show how it is woven together with our sensing of reality, and therefore participates to the structuring of our experience, the whole set of inputs and outputs that we exchange with the world. Second, mobilising Sellars' work, we found ourselves at an impasse of sorts. When trying to describe the rapport between language and thought, we realised that neither an instrumentalist nor a materialist description would work. A different type of relation was at stake, which, taking inspiration from Seibt's commentary on Sellars, we identified as the rapport of mediation. We then proceeded to positively describe that rapport, by bringing to the surface three aspects that appear to characterise it: its synthetic character, observational access and actuality.

One of our goals, alongside a more thorough comprehension of mediation, was to demarcate the notion of medium without claiming any ontological specificity to the medium itself, while still showing how there is a significant difference between something that appears and what appears *in* it. The two can be differentiated according to an operative procedure, although we shall bear in mind that this differentiation is only a tentative wager, awaiting further confirmation.

Now, we may be better equipped to rephrase the type of problem we were working with in our attempt at studying the notion of medium. There exists a sense in which what we call thoughts and language could be entirely unrelated. However, due to our working hypothesis—Jones' hypothesis to be exact, and his behavioural observations—we posit them as related. Off the back of this positing, this postulation that we make, we begin to observe thoughts in language as imbricated in conception. Generalising to the case of any medium, we begin to observe something in something else as though it were its content, while it clearly is not. The structure of said observation can be traced in the medium, and need not to be attributed to what we supposedly observe in it. Now, what we do observe, not only in the sense that we see it, but in the sense that we operate a doing that is implicitly at work in the medium, is a synthetic combination of the observing structure and observed postulated in it. This

synthetic combination is but a block that solidly carries forward, not simply the medium/mediated compound, but also what that compound may hide, what cannot be observed in it. In our chief medium example, we postulate thoughts and observe them *in* the linguistic structures of conception out of wild guessing, since little to nothing can be said about the status of thoughts and our observations will merely be at an epistemic level, the one in which thoughts appear. However, on further analysis, that is when we further break down reality still according to the way that it appears to us, we could establish with increasing precision the location of what we have come to name thoughts. In this, all options are open. We may even find out that they do not exist at all as entities, which would not make their initial postulation any less significant, since it started off the voyage of exploration that we are still on. All this is to say that the problem we have been trying to deal with in this thesis pertains to the crossing of the line between epistemic access and ontology, but with the profound awareness that no real crossing could ever occur. What we could do, instead, is to draw parts of reality out of the hat of what they appear in. This gesture is iterative, and never shows a naked result, only increasingly precise versions (or less precise versions) of what things are, either in confirmation or disproof of our initial guess.

In this process, the notion of medium becomes crucial, and especially the fact that it may warrant the possibility, if not of talking about nature or reality, of at least tracing an evolutionary trajectory of our means of perception that calls into play those concrete elements, that is the ones whose physical efficacy, as we saw, is not particularly committal to commit to.

In the process of our inquiry we have raised several questions and covered vast stretches of ground, so it is worth reminding ourselves of the highlights and curiosities, which, in leaving some questions open, may lead to further research.

At various points, we have brought up a notion of translation that would supposedly ground the one of meaning. Translatability was posed as a building block of Sellars' theory of semantics, since the notion of meaning as functional role appears to require a multiplicity of languages from which and into which to translate. In this vein, translatability was seen as a characteristic that we attribute to concepts, in order to make sense of reality, rather than the symptom of a fundamental common core that concepts are simply coating. Indeed, from an ethical perspective, when we came to talk about communication after having countenanced the available models, a practice

of speaking someone else's language was recommended as an efficacious way to shift one's conceptual framework.

Another aspect of interest was the room for manoeuvre within the epistemic dimension, the aspect according to which, for instance, we recognized the Janus-face character of language, as well as the fact that language operates both according to the rules of grammar and as the language of perception. This consideration grants us the possibility of loosening up the rapport between thought and language and speculating over its necessity, opening the door to the possibility that other mediums could operate, similarly to language, as leading structuring scaffolds of our representations of reality. A different way to state the same point is to say that a medium like language is not saturated by a single discursive dimension and, indeed, it is precisely because of this non-saturation that we can talk about translatability.

Finally, it was within the remits of the same considerations that we could begin to isolate various aspects of a medium, among which are those that are usually described as more concrete and that, instead, we tried to account for as having a better observational access due to the evolutionary and social development of our physical capacities.

Following a similar line of reasoning, we also introduced the idea of the existence of medium-series that could extend the notion of medium, for the way we have tried to explain it, to mediums other than language, positing the fact that mediums develop in series, such that each medium appears in another. To begin to reason over the notion of medium-series and how it can help us to understand the development of an epistemic level in which the world appears to us as a natural history of the mind, we need to settle on a few distinctions that the thesis has posed at its core. The first one is the difference between instrumentality and functionality, which runs parallel to the one between two types of activities, act and action. Second, we find the distinction between acting and being acted upon, which this thesis has tried to comprehend in terms of the passive and active verbal forms –ed and –ing.

As we saw, the notion of functionality marks out a horizon that the current notion of instrumentality may miss. The former hinges precisely on the fact that conceptual functions are anticipated by the structures of the medium in which they are articulated, and that lead us to commitments that are active as acts. Within the scope of functionality, we can nest an instrumental use of terms as well as other prosthetic

entities. The second differentiation, the one between –ed and –ing, is already somewhat implicit in the first one, but moves the focus more specifically onto the level of nature, where there is only a distinction of degree between what is more acting than acted upon, according to the principle of a one world reality. Hence, what is acting will not only be what can think, what can use language to array the world into conceivable functions, but anything that, in its being, can produce a difference, be it perceivable to us or not yet or never.

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