

Referential Zero Point in Philosophy and in Arts

Matjaz Potrc

Touching reality is one of the main preoccupations of both philosophy and of arts. After having provided some preliminary clarification, we present in the first part some ways in which philosophy has attempted to secure the access to reality. In the second part, we provide some illustrations of how arts embrace reality. We claim that the touch with reality succeeds through the phenomenology-consciousness constituted qualitative zero point perspective.

Some preliminary clarifications.

The following exercise is in our recognition of the work by Andrej Medved, a philosopher, specialist in arts and a poet. In his approach he has stressed the real as impossible, as a productive emptiness from which sense makes its appearance. He has as well pointed out the importance of suppression (Verdraengung, refoulement) and of the trace that it leaves as it appears upon the scene in the denial manner. We first take a look at the basic move that introduced analytic philosophy: the explicit denial of the possibility and the implicit suppression of quality or the constitutive phenomenology-consciousness in its effort to seize the reality. This denial, we argue, bounced back as the phenomenology constituted referential zero point. We then point out chromatic illumination and illuminating reasons as the way to proceed in philosophical inquiry and beyond. In the second part, we take a look at some ways in which arts embrace referential zero point in their trials to get to the impossible reality.

Zero point is a phenomenology-consciousness constituted perspectival directedness to one's surrounding. Mach produces a picture of what he sees as he is seated in his comfortable reclining chair. He sees the room and objects in it. He sees his body reposing in the chair, but he does not see his eyes. That's the zero point perspective that allows him to re-present his surroundings, without that he would be able to represent the zero point itself. (Vorstellungsrepraesentanz.) Husserl talks about "das absolute Hier" as the zero point.

In philosophy, zero point is close to the *essential indexical*, which illustrates the difference between third point of view perspective and between the first point of view perspective. Mach again tells a story about his entering a Vienna train and noticing a shabby person looking at him. But then all of sudden he came to realize that the strange looking chap is he himself. As he was shopping in a supermarket Perry noticed that someone is leaving a trail of sugar and decided to alert them. As he made the complete circle around the shelf then he suddenly realized that he himself is making the mess, for the sugar pack that he carried had a tear. The last example of the essential indexical provided here is the fictional story about you receiving a message on your smartphone that a hiker is endangered by a bear. After you suddenly realize though that the endangered hiker in the woods is you yourself, we can bet that your behavior will change.

Essential indexical is an entrance into the zero point perspective. Many times as we look for an objective assessment of reality, we have to realize that *we ourselves* are involved into this

endeavor. This can be shown for both philosophy and arts. At least we believe that to be in value for the segments presented in what follows.

The denial (Verneinung) of the quality-phenomenology in referential trials to assess the real.

Philosophy is perhaps in its best mood as it proceeds in playing manner (jeu, Spiel), as Medved has stressed. There are so many areas and approaches of philosophical inquiry nowadays that it is kind of difficult to assess them. One of the main divides though that an observer will encounter is the one between the so called analytic and continental traditions. This last one includes such people as Heidegger and Derrida, while the first mentioned one invokes Russell or Kripke. There seems to be no relation between these two philosophical brands (although Searle, say, had an interchange with Derrida, while Rorty, Brandom and even Putnam show some continental inclinations). Continental philosophy displays an abundance of style with some organizing skills left wanting, whereas analytic philosophy many times excels in technical wimpiness. How did this divide come upon the scene? In order to answer this question, we turn back to the very beginnings of analytic philosophy.

The beginnings of analytic philosophy can be traced to Russell's *theory of descriptions* and more precisely to his paper *On denoting* (1905). In this paper, Russell proposed an analysis of linguistic expressions, which would allow to counter their misleading implications. In this, Russell follows the tradition of mastering language by such people as Raymundus Lullus, Leibniz and the encyclopedists, but also Frege (Begriffsschrift). This last one tried to produce an artificial, written language designed for reasoning, which would allow to reason without ambiguities and ultimately without spoken language. Two people would perform their reasoning together by tracing the moves of that reasoning upon a two dimensional surface of a page, without the need to talk -- for spoken language would lead to ambiguities, says Frege. So Frege opted for the syntactic mastering of language, and he succeeded to sell this as the predicate logic as we know it today in its many guises, in its difference to the aristotelian subject-predicate logic. Although Frege as well attempted to deal with semantics (Sinn und Bedeutung), it was Russell who tried to master this linguistic segment, by stating what is now known as the wide movement of *analytic philosophy*. Russell's analysis was aimed to expel the misleading semantic or ontological implications that language tempts us with. Take his example of the sentence:

(S) The actual king of France is bald.

The analysis (Sa) of (S) that he proposes recognizes three ingredients:

(Sa) (ai) There exists an actual king of France & (aii) There exists exactly one such king & (aiii) This king is bald.

The analysis recognizes supposition of existence (ai), uniqueness of the affirmed existence (aii) accommodating the definite article "the", and attribution of a property (aiii) to the mentioned entity.

Russell proposed to check in the world for the supposition of existence (ai). Exercising this, we do not find any entity there that was affirmed to exist by (S), and so (S) obtains truth value Falsity. As ingredients of analysis (Sa) come in conjunctive manner, conjunction being true only if all its ingredients are, the proof of (ai) is crucial.

In fact, Russell subscribes to two presuppositions in his analysis proposal:

- (1). The function of language is descriptive.
- (2). Referential relation succeeds without constitutive phenomenology.

While the presupposition (1) is thematized by Russell and the subsequent analytic philosophy, such is not the case with the presupposition (2). It remains the denial (Verneinung) part of the analytic philosophy proposal.

As far as the presupposition (1) goes, it is endorsed by the very name of Russell's approach: theory of definite descriptions. The sociologically important thing is that this theory was embraced by the subsequent analytic philosophers, without being challenged for half a century (as in 1950 P.F. Strawson drew our attention to the referential act). But presupposition (1) continues to be embraced in several areas of analytic philosophy. In moral theory, cognitivists and noncognitivists are separated by either embracing or denying descriptive function of beliefs that they take or not to be the basis of moral judgments, the beliefs being understood as describing some reality. Descriptive presupposition (1) as well happens to be important in determining referential relation.

Frege saw reference to be object out in the world, whereas senses for him are manners to approach the reference. So he gave some weight to the language, with its connotative potential, in semantic matters, all in banning it from reasoning. Russell now banned the power of language from an assessment of referential relation. What he proposed was *direct check-up for the supposed entity in the world*. This is what Russell attempted with his *logical proper name*. Notice that each name for him (such as Bertrand, Matjaz, the present king of France) still has some connotative power, and this in his view could bring havoc into the referential assessment enterprise. So Russell made recourse to the *direct relation to the world* where one *points* to the searched item, using *demonstrative* expression ("this, that"). He calls this relation one of *acquaintance*. Notice now that the demonstrative assessment of the situation in respect to (ai) is a *direct perspectival involvement* of the one checking for referential adequacy, which is a *referential zero point activity*.

The supposition (2) of the Russellian analysis though that started analytic philosophy was not thematized at all. In order to understand this, we have to stress that before his theory of descriptions Russell subscribed to possible objects of the kind that Meinong argued for. Meinong namely allows for the existence of some kind of possible and even impossible, not just of actual objects, such as Little Red Riding Hood or square circle. People interpreted these objects as subsets of the superset containing all the properties, which would then allow to avoid ontological proliferation objection, in an ordered manner. Meinong anyway thought that the objects in question are part of his theory of objects (Gegenstandstheorie).

Now the important thing with all this is that Meinongian objects are *intentional* objects. Brentano was the first to reintroduce intentionality in the modern philosophy, joining medieval

and aristotelian traditions. "In each thought, something is thought about, and in each desire, something is desired", Brentano said. So there is the intentional relation. But people discovered that there are two possibilities of how to interpret directedness: as directedness at the content or at the object (Twardowski). Husserl would claim that I am directed at the content of the cat as I now think about the cat that isn't here. Whereas Meinong would claim that I am directed at the object cat. This object may even be some ideal kind of object, entering into theory of objects overall project.

In his theory of descriptions, according to his thematized presupposition (1), Russell argued against possible objects and thus bought *actualism* (looking in the actual world) in opposition to *possibilism*. But the presupposition (2) of his analysis remained non-thematized, namely denying phenomenological constitution to the referential relation. In order to understand this, we have to take a look at the relation of *directedness* as a *generic* view, so that the *referential* relation is just one of its species, a subspecies indeed. The whole Brentanian school namely took it for granted that *consciousness-phenomenology* is the precondition of *intentional directedness*. Now with presupposition (2), Russell dismissed this basing things on consciousness-phenomenology, all in trying to introduce some kind of entirely objective relation for checking the referential supposition. But we have seen that in doing this, he ended up in embracing the direct involvement of *him himself* in the referential check-up in the world, in the manner of *zero point*. Zero point is of course phenomenologically constituted itself. In this manner the consciousness that was barred from the referential relation assessment came back with vengeance through the zero point. That's a case of suppression (*refoulement*, *Verdreangung*) and of denial (*Verneinung*) that consciousness-phenomenology is important in the basic directedness relation. This has of course its consequences for the whole ensuing analytic philosophy, which in this manner was built upon the denial of consciousness-phenomenology and thus of *quality*, given that phenomenology is recognized as the qualitative what-it's-like experience in a situation at hand. With the appearance of the analytic proposal, if we look at the non thematized presupposition (2), we discover that the ensuing continentals embraced a drunken abundance of consciousness, whereas analytic philosophers many times act like zombies. One would sometimes wish for an aristotelian virtuous balance in these matters.

Anyway, a direct objective assessment of the real proved to be impossible, or at least to touch an impossibility, at the very origin of the analytic-continental split.

The impossibility of an objective reality assessment bounces back: the referential zero point.

In the following, we will take a real quick look at the developments in analytic philosophy in respect to its efforts to catch the referential relation, which proves to be one of its central preoccupations. We will point out the matter that was not thematized: that all of these trials in one or another manner end up by embracing the referential *zero point*.

We have already mentioned Russell's direct check-up of reality with his direct epistemic acquaintance supported logical proper name. We could realize that the situation targeted by Russell was that of the *zero point*: it was a direct perspectival involvement in the world, from

which the language was expelled. But the perspective was subjectively supported and consciousness-phenomenology constituted, as we may presume.

Take a look at Kripke now, who tried to secure referential relation with the causal chain supporting proper name as rigid designator, at the expense of descriptions. What we may call relation of directedness, from our generic perspective, was supposed to extend itself over all possible worlds. And it was anchored in the *original situation* of baptism (name Aristotle then comes to our usage through causal chain stretching itself up to our situation). It is not difficult to see that this causal chain and social transmission supported story is again based in the *zero point* situation of baptism. Rigid designators are supposed to connect with this zero point perspectival and phenomenology constituted situation in the world.

Donnellan distinguished referential and attributive uses of descriptions, using such examples as success of referring to the man in question by providing description "The man drinking bacardi in the corner" despite that there is water in the man's glas. Demonstrative ingredient certainly gets involved into the situation.

Kaplan again dealt with *demonstratives* and with indexical expressions, claiming that these evade classification into the realm of Fregean senses. It is fair to say that demonstratives and indexicals (expressions such as "here", "now", "I" that systematically change reference as depending on context) both are a part of the *zero point* phenomenology constituted relation.

Evans claimed that Fregean senses allow for inclusion of indexicals. In this, he clinged to the informational externalistically inspired relation. This kind of relation again aims at the perspectival and phenomenology constituted zero point.

Putnam as well supported externalist direct relation to the source of natural kinds, such as DNA for some animal, or H₂O for the water, which is available to experts, in opposition to the stereotypes that are a folk psychological manner to approach concepts (drinking, transparent stuff, to be found in seas and lakes as the stereotype for water). The expert relation again ultimately points to the zero point situation into which an expert is involved, that secures the referential claim.

People such as P.F. Strawson invoked communication-intention side of the linguistic pragmatic engagement, the conversational implicatures involved into it (Grice). All these attempts should be evaluated as partial characterizations of the holistic situation supporting the zero point phenomenological constitution.

Truth as direct and as an indirect correspondence.

Ordinary language somehow was not center of the picture though. Tarski for example proposed an approach to truth, which of course is a semantic story. Frege took all true sentences to refer to Truth as an ideal object, whereas all false sentences would refer to Falsity. Tarski again proposed a direct check-up of semantic value in the world, with his formula

(T) 'p' is true iff p.

This means that a proposition in language (this is why there are quote signs around proposition 'p' on the left hand side, "The cat is on the mat") happens to be true just in case there is

correspondence to it in the world (p: the cat really happens to be there in the world, and it is seated upon the mat).

Notice that truth as correspondence again aims at the zero point situation: in order to check up the correspondence assertion value, one has to perspectively take a look at the world and verify assertion. This approach already involves language (as opposed to the earlier logical proper name).

Davidson now took Tarski style approach to truth as correspondence and tried to apply it to natural language, so that *semantics for natural language* would be the outcome. This is curious, for the recipe was now to use artificial language in order to establish semantics of natural language.

As we met truth as correspondence, we could constate that it as well aims at direct relation to the world, according to the referential zero point strategy (the reference now compositionally extending to sentences from the earlier names).

But there are some hurdles around for such truth as direct correspondence approach. Special composition question is the first. Suppose that there are atomic parts in the world, as recognized by the science of physics; call them atoms. The question is then when do these parts form an entity. One answer, promoted by Peter van Inwagen, is that parts mereologically form an entity just in case there is the principle of Life supporting this composition. But if this is true, cars and stones do not ultimately exist. The next problem for truth as direct correspondence is vagueness: if cats are vague, and there is no vagueness in the world (vagueness is then just in language-thought, as these are normatively constituted, as against the world), then there aren't any cats either to which sentences mentioning them would refer. Then we also mention metaphysically lightweight posits, such as universities and symphonies. A Rylean visits university and says "I saw people, students and teachers, buildings and tables and the stuff -- but where the heck is University? I didn't see no University". The sentence

(B) Beethoven's fifth symphony has four movements.

seems to be true. But one can find not movements or symphonies in the world.

Taking into account all of what was just said, one may rather opt for an account of *truth as indirect correspondence* than for the former account of truth as direct correspondence. The truth-maker of sentences would then be the World, in an indirect manner, depending upon the contextual circumstances. Now these contextual circumstances may again point to the phenomenology constituted zero point.

Chromatic illumination and illuminating reasons.

Some of our thoughts may have been negative, in the sense that we have questioned the direct referential approach, substituting it with the generic *directedness* phenomenology constituted zero point setting.

Now, zero point allows for an indirect effectivity in the direct situation that we encounter. One can illustrate this by mentioning a technique that is ubiquitous in paintings: chromatic illumination. We thereby mean that the illumination that is apparent in a painting is not depicted

in respect to its source. The source that illuminates the scene is many times outside of the painting, all in that it conveys its qualitative impact upon that scene, in an indirect manner.

Several times, there are requirements in philosophy to involve reasons in an explicit and direct manner. Or, it is then argued, reasons are not really constitutive if they are not directly involved into the situation at hand. Social intuitionism claims this about moral judgments that according to it are emotionally driven, whereas reasons only come about as post hoc confabulations. As against this one may well affirm that reasons are effective in our moral judgments, but that they illuminate the scene from the background, and not in a direct manner. We think that all this is compatible with the zero point qualitative phenomenology constitution setting.

Referential zero point in the artistic practice.

A look at the zero point setting such as it appears in the artistic practice is now needed. We can provide several illustrations. Our inquiry can be guided by the following questions:

(1') How does artistic practice seize the world, refer to it, is directed at it? Is this relation possible?

(2') How does qualitative phenomenology-consciousness inspire artistic practice?

(3') What does the zero point, one's direct referential involvement into the situation, contribute to this?

Notice that questions (1') and (2') kind of mirror presuppositions (1), (2) of the suppression and denial involving zero point. Question (3') refers to the zero point in a direct manner, aiming at the artistic practice.

References

- Austin, J.L. (1976). *How to do Things with Words*. Oxford UP.
- Brentano, Franz (2008). *Psychologie vom empirischen Standpunkte*. Ontos Verlag.
- Davidson, Donald (2001). *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Donnellan, Keith (1966). Reference and Definite Descriptions. *The Philosophical Review* 75: 281-304.
- Frege, Gottlob (1879). Begriffsschrift: eine der arithmetischen nachgebildete Formelsprache des reinen Denkens. Halle.
- Frege, Gottlob (1892). Ueber Sinn und Bedeutung. *Zeitschrift fuer Philosophie und philosophische Kritik*. NF 100: 25-50.
- Grice, Paul (1975). *Logic and Conversation*. In P. Cole ed. *Syntax and Semantics* 3. New York: Academic Press.
- Horgan, Terry and Nichols, Shaun (2015). *The Zero Point and I*.
- Horgan, Terry and Potrč, Matjaz (2010). The Epistemic Relevance of Morphological Content. *Acta analytica* 25: 155-173.
- Horgan, Terry and Tienson, John (2015). Phenomenal Intentionality and Intentionality Holism.

Horgan, Terry and Tienson, John (2002). The Intentionality of Phenomenology and the Phenomenology of Intentionality. In D. Chalmers ed. *Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings*. OUP.

Husserl, Edmund (1900). *Logische Untersuchungen*.

Kaplan, David (1978). Dthat. In P. Cole ed. *Syntax and Semantics* 9. New York: Academic Press.

Kripke, Saul (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Leibniz, G. W. (1666). *De arte combinatoria*.

Mach Ernst (1905). *Erkenntnis und Irrtum*.

McGinn, Colin (2015). *Philosophy of Language: The Classics Explained*. MIT.

McGinn, Colin (1983). *The Subjective View: Secondary Qualities and Indexical Thoughts*. Clarendon Press.

Meinong, Alexius (1968-78). *Meinong Gesamtausgabe*. Graz: Kindiger.

Perry, John (2000). *The Problem of the Essential Indexical and Other Essays*. Stanford: CSLI Publications.

Potrc, Matjaz (2015). *Dinamicna filozofija*. Zagreb: Lara.

Potrc, Matjaz (1986). *Zapis in govornica*. Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga.

putnam, Hilary (1975). *Mind, Language and Reality. Philosophical Papers* 2. Cambridge UP.

Russell, Bertrand (1905). On denoting. *Mind*. New series. Vol 14. No 56: 479-493.

Searle, John (2015). *Seeing Things as they are: A Theory of Perception*. OUP.

Strawson P.F. (1950). On referring. *Mind*. New series. Vol 59. No 235: 320-344.

Tarski, Alfred (1935). Der Wahrheitsbegriff in den formalisierten Sprachen. *Studie philosophica* 1: 261-405.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig (1953). *Philosophische Untersuchungen*.