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Sharper Distinctions for Debates over »Realism« in German Literature and Theater

Abstract: The concept of »realism« has resurged in contemporary literary debates, driven by calls for literature and theater to engage more deeply with its political responsibilities. Following its prominence in the 1930s and 1960s, the past two decades have seen renewed calls for a more realistic approach in German literature. Authors like Matthias Politycki have advocated for »relevant realism« in novel writing, while Milo Rau has called for »global realism« in theater and Bernd Stegemann has extolled the virtues of realism. But what exactly makes it the case that words and performances can impact or change reality? In these old and new literary debates there is usually no recourse to advanced linguistic theories, no spelling out, at least not in detail, of how the influence of literature or theater on the world and our reality should or is taking place. All these approaches *are*, of course, based on a certain idea of what language is, can, and should be but it remains, in most cases, implicit.

I propose making them explicit and expanding our conceptual repertoire when discussing the relationship between language and reality to better understand how particular authors and theorists believe literature should fulfill its political role. Specifically, I suggest complementing the post-structuralist view of language, which is prevalent in literary theory, with categories from analytic philosophy of language, including the positions of Quine, Davidson, and Rorty. Notably, I introduce the concepts of representationalism, antirepresentationalism, dualism, and holism. These categories, I argue, provide a more effective framework for understanding both post-structural and analytic approaches to the relationship between language and reality. I illustrate my claim by referring to the debate between Searle and Derrida over Derrida's »Il n'y a pas de hors-texte« and the debate in analytic philosophy of language over dualism vs. holism as prominently exposed by Quine, Davidson, and Rorty. Furthermore, employing these categories reveals significant aspects of past and present literary debates that were previously hidden and are worth understanding. I analyze the implicit assumptions about the intersection of language and reality in Bernd Stegemann's approach and in the debate over realism between György Lukács and Bertolt Brecht, to which Stegemann refers. Brecht and Lukács

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differ not only in their interpretations of Marxism and their aesthetic beliefs but also fundamentally in their views on language and its connection to epistemology and political action. Understanding this additional layer of differences offers valuable insights also for contemporary analysis and theory-making.

The primary goal of this article is to uncover perspectives that have been previously obscured in literary debates by applying concepts from analytic philosophy. Importantly, I am not suggesting a direct historical influence or connection between these fields. Rather, I am offering a systematic lens claiming that by using my proposed categories, we can enhance our understanding of the nexus between language and reality at large and improve our ability to critically engage with historical and contemporary literary debates.

Keywords: realism, philosophy of language, Quine, Davidson, Rorty

The term »realism« has re-emerged as a significant concept in contemporary literary debates. Following its prominence in the 1930s and 1960s, the past two decades have seen renewed calls for a more realistic approach in German literature. Authors like Matthias Politycki have advocated for »relevant realism« in novel writing (»relevanten Realismus« [Politycki et al. 2005]), while Milo Rau has called for »global realism« in theater (»globaler Realismus« [Rau 2018]), and Bernd Stegemann has extolled the virtues of realism (»Lob des Realismus« [Stegemann 2015]). In these discussions, »realism« often implies that art should engage more deeply with its political responsibilities, contributing to social justice and fostering social and political change.

But what exactly makes it the case that words and performances can impact or change reality? In these old and new literary debates there is usually no recourse to advanced linguistic theories, no spelling out, at least not in detail, of how the influence of literature or theater on the world and our reality should or is taking place. What exactly is it about literary language that causes social reality to change once something has been spoken, written, read, or performed? Today, as in past literary theory debates, it is just assumed that there *is* this kind of connection between literature and the world, and the questions then revolve around matters of style, on *how* in particular one should go ahead, which forms should be privileged, which textual, literary tradition should be followed, not *whether* language and literature can influence reality at all.

All these approaches are, of course, based on a certain idea of what language is, can, and should be but it remains, in most cases, implicit. Further, the reflections from the side of literary criticism and literary theory on these debates are today often taking for granted the post-structural picture of language, where language

has the capacity to »change to world« because there is no »beyond the text« hence making adjustments somewhere in the web of signifiers, for instance in literature, spreads effects over the whole fabric of signifiers, including social reality.

This article has two primary aims: A, to highlight the lack of investigations into how artistic language fulfills its social and political roles, as called for by authors and theorists, and to make the underlying concepts of language in specific cases explicit; B, to complement the dominant post-structural view of language in literary theory with perspectives from a particular strand of analytic philosophy of language. Together, these aims seek to expand and refine our theoretical concepts, thereby enhancing our understanding of the stakes in these literary debates and improving our capacity to reflect on them within literary theory. For aim A, I will focus on the works of Lukács, Brecht, and Stegemann. For aim B, I will engage with the ideas of Searle, Derrida, Quine, Davidson, and Rorty.

I approach the debates on realism through Stegemann, who argues that the post-structural or »postmodern« concept of language hinders literature and theater from being »realistic« or »realist«, a perspective differing from main-stream literary theory. This allows me to highlight the contrast between various forms of (anti) realism from a single standpoint. I will examine Stegemann's critique of post-structuralism and postmodernism and his proposed alternative. Stegemann seeks to address the current lack of realism, understood as the lack of political impact of art, by drawing on the ideas of György Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, and Markus Gabriel. I will argue that Stegemann's framework is theoretically flawed and I will clarify what Lukács and Brecht, whom Stegemann endorses, actually propose. This will become evident through my analytically refined conceptual tools. Specifically, I will differentiate between representationalism and antirepresentationalism, and between dualism and holism in the relationship between words and the world. I will develop these distinctions by comparing Jacques Derrida's views (highlighting his points of convergence and divergence with John Searle) with those of W.V.O. Quine, Donald Davidson, and Richard Rorty. I will argue that these distinctions provide greater clarity to Stegemann's approach and to the broader debates on realism, enhancing our understanding of the nexus and differences between language or linguistic art and reality in specific authors, literary theory, and philosophy.

In sum, my overall goal is to reveal insights previously obscured in these literary debates by recourse to positions in analytic philosophy of language. Importantly, I am not suggesting a direct historical influence or connection between these fields. Rather, I am offering a systematic lens to enhance our understanding and inform future theory-making.

I proceed as follows: 1, I will first address aim B by briefly recapping the debate between Searle and Derrida over Derrida's famous dictum »Il n'y a pas de hors-texte« with respect to the point that is important for me here alias I will show how

their debate is a debate over representationalism vs. antirepresentationalism with both sides assuming dualism; 2, I will show how to frame the nexus between words and world in a holist manner, drawing insights from Quine, Davidson, and Rorty; 3, I will then address aim A by articulating why the theoretical distinctions explained in steps 1 and 2 help us discern overlooked differences between Brecht and Lukács; 4, I will demonstrate the importance of recognizing these differences by analyzing and identifying flaws in Stegemann's position. However, I argue that my distinctions are useful also beyond the context of Stegemann, who here simply serves as a particularly illustrative example.

1 Representational and Antirepresentational Dualism: Searle and Derrida

The debate between Derrida and Searle is worth examining because it allows to differentiate between representational and antirepresentational dualism – a difference that, as I will demonstrate, is valuable to have.

The controversy ignites over Derrida's appropriation of Austin in his article »Signature Event Context« (Derrida 1977b). In this piece, Derrida praises Austin for moving beyond a purely denotational picture of language but regrets that Austin excluded literary language from his analysis. Derrida also identifies various problems in Austin's account when viewed through his own lens. In »Reiterating the Differences: A Reply to Derrida«, Searle accuses Derrida of misunderstanding Austin, arguing that Derrida's knowledge of philosophy of language remains rooted in a canon considered outdated by the analytic tradition (cf. Searle 1977). Derrida responded in »Limited Inc« (Derrida 1977a), and Searle further replied in *The Construction of Social Reality* (Searle 1995, 159 sq). The debate is filled with subtleties that I will not delve into here. Broadly, the tone and content of this (failed) conversation follow the typical analytic-continental diatribe, with one side accusing the other of intentional obscurity and lack of understanding of the analytic discourse's technical details, while the other side counters that »normalcy« and »rationality« are not givens but are instead instituted and iterated through language – in the very same language that their conversation over language is taking place in. My interest lies not in these well-known rhetorical and subject matter divergences but in the convergences of their respective accounts.

When Searle accuses Derrida of blurring the line between words and the world – a line Searle holds dear – he fails to recognize that Derrida also views this line as firm and significant. My analysis shows that both assume an ontological-metaphysical dualism between words and the world but differ on whether lan-

guage can refer to a stable »beyond language«. They diverge on whether language can represent the world independent of us, our minds, and our language. Consequently, they disagree on the tasks of language and the number of distinct tasks within this dualist framework.

For Searle the tasks of language are two: In *The Construction of Social Reality*, he investigates »How [...] we construct an objective social reality?« while at the same time »defending realism, the idea that there is a real world independent of our thoughts and talk, and [...] defending the correspondence conception of truth« (Searle 1995, xii–xiii). Searle achieves this by distinguishing between »institutional facts« and »brute facts« (ibid., 2). The first are of the sort »that I am a citizen of the United States, that the piece of paper in my pocket is a five dollar bill, that my younger sister got married on December 14« (ibid., 1). These social or institutional facts »contrast with such facts as that Mount Everest has snow and ice near the summit or that hydrogen atoms have one electron, which are facts totally independent of any human opinion« (ibid., 1 sq.). For the first group to come about »there has to be [...] human institution‹, for instance the institution of ›money‹ or ›marriage‹, while ›Brute facts‹ require no human institutions for their existence« (ibid., 2).

So far, so good. The crux lies in language *also* being a social institution, not a brute fact. Searle states: »Of course, in order to *state* a brute fact, we require the institution of language, but the *fact stated* needs to be distinguished from the *statement* of it.« (Ibid.) This is exactly the point that Derrida questions. According to Derrida, language does not have two separate tasks – fact-stating vs. fact-instituting – but rather a singular function. To put it differently, echoing Rorty, there is no definitive way to determine in any given moment whether we are referring to brute reality or social reality through language. Consequently, there is no rigid division between brute facts and social facts because both are articulated within language. Further, for Derrida all our linguistic acts carry an inherent opacity that cannot be fully clarified, nor is it necessary to do so.[1] I will revisit this point later on.

Returning to Searle, he distinguishes between social reality and brute reality based on how their representations function. Social reality representations refer to other representations, whereas brute reality representations refer directly to the objective world, which is independent of our perceptions and representations. In statements about brute reality, it is the world itself that determines the truth of our statements, while in social reality, humans play a role in determining facts (cf. ibid., 193). Statements about brute facts aim to correspond to the world beyond us, whereas statements about social facts correspond to our social institutions and practices (cf. ibid., 166).

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1 According to Judith Butler, our agency lies precisely in this opacity (cf. Butler 1993).

Searle is not a naïve adherent of either naïve realism or the correspondence theory. He acknowledges scheme-relativism and addresses various criticisms aimed at metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory. However, the intricate details of Searle's nuanced responses to these potential criticisms are not the focus here. What's important is that Searle, despite all due complexity, subscribes to ontological dualism and a sophisticated form of semantic representationalism of the correspondence type. For Searle, »there really are nonlinguistic facts in the world and statements are true because they really do stand in certain relations to these facts, relations that we variously describe as fitting, matching, stating, or corresponding to the facts« (ibid., 209).

Searle perceives this stance as threatened by »[s]everal ›postmodernist‹ literary theorists« (ibid., 159) who, in his view, when asserting that our words do not neutrally refer or represent *also* embrace that there is no outer-world beyond our sayings or our mental states. Searle mistakenly conflates antirealism (or more precisely, antirepresentationalism) with idealism: »on the realist view if it turned out that only conscious states exist, then ships and shoes and sealing wax do not exist. […] On the antirealist view, such things if they exist, are necessarily constituted by our representations, and they could not have existed independently of representations.« (Ibid., 157)

Derrida does not fit into Searle's definition of antirealism (and perhaps, aside from Berkeley, no one truly does), although he can be considered an antirealist in how analytic philosophy generally defines the term. It's crucial to clarify some concepts here: According to Searle, neither realism nor antirealism are semantic notions. They do not directly address whether our words refer to external realities – a task Searle assigns to the correspondence theory of truth, which he wholeheartedly embraces. Instead, for Searle, realism and antirealism are metaphysical commitments, leading him to equate antirealism with idealism. In contrast, within the broader analytic tradition during Searle's era, these notions were often understood differently. After the linguistic turn, realism and antirealism *were* discussed as semantic concepts.

As Rorty recalls, in the early days of analytic philosophy (around 1900) the opposite of realism was still idealism. However, by 1990 »discussion has shifted from whether material reality is ›mind-independent‹ to questions about which sorts of statements, if any, stand in representational relations to nonlinguistic items« (Rorty 1991, 2). Today »the opposite of realism is called, simply, ›antirealism‹« (ibid.). This is Michael Dummett's version, who sees realism as »the belief that statements of the disputed class […] are true or false in virtue of a reality existing independently of us. The anti-realist opposes to this the view that statements of the disputed class are to be understood only by reference to the sort of thing which we count as evidence for a statement of that class« (Dummett 1978, 146).

For our purposes here, it is crucial to note that Derrida operates within a dualistic framework, just like Searle. According to Derrida, there is a clear difference between signifiers and a beyond, although unlike Searle, Derrida views this division as unbridgeable. »Il n'y a pas de hors-texte« (Derrida 1997, 227) does *not* imply, contrary to Searle's interpretation, the absence of a Real; rather, it suggests the absence of a direct referent. Derrida contends that we only ever access other interpretations, which never directly point to the Real itself. His argument is not metaphysical; Derrida does not claim that the matter we currently refer to as trees would cease to exist if we did not use the word »tree«. Instead, Derrida posits that our words (or »writings«, in his terms) never provide direct access to the thing itself: »yet if reading must not be content with doubling the text, it cannot legitimately transgress the text toward something other than it, toward a referent (a reality that is metaphysical, historical, psychobiographical, etc.) or toward a signified outside the text whose content could take place, could have taken place outside of language, that is to say, in the sense that we give here to that word, outside of writing in general« (Derrida 1976, 158; »si la lecture ne doit pas se contenter de redoubler le texte, elle ne peut légitimement transgresser le texte vers autre chose que lui, vers un référent (réalité métaphysique, historique, psycho-biographique, etc.) ou vers un signifié hors texte dont le contenu pourrait avoir lieu, aurait pu avoir lieu hors de la langue, c'est-à-dire, au sens que nous donnons ici à ce mot, hors de l'écriture en général« [Derrida 1997, 227]). With respect to Rousseau's life and work, which serves as an example for Derrida, this means:

> the guiding line of the »dangerous supplement«, is that in what one calls the real life of these existences of »flesh and bone«, beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing; there have never been anything but supplements, substitutive significations which could only come forth in a chain of differential references, the »real« supervening, and being added only while taking on meaning from a trace and from an invocation of the supplement, etc. (Derrida 1976, 159; Ce que nous avons tenté de démontrer en suivant le fil conducteur du »supplément dangereux«, c'est que dans ce qu'on appelle la vie réelle de ces existences »en chair et en os«, au-delà de ce qu'on croit pouvoir circonscrire comme l'oeuvre de Rousseau, et derrière elle, il n'y a jamais eu que de l'écriture; Il n'y a jamais eu que des suppléments, des significations substitutives qui n'ont pu surgir que dans une chaîne de renvois différentiels, le »réel« ne survenant, ne s'ajoutant qu'en prenant sens à partir d'une trace et d'un appel de supplément, etc. [Derrida 1997, 228])

The »real« to which we have access is always something that we add in the process of interpretation, constructed from traces and constantly requiring supplementation.

On the one hand, this leaves us with a fervent longing for the *really* Real – in Derrida's terms »presence«, i. e. the thing or state (the Being of the onto-metaphysical tradition) that requires no supplementation: »the desire of presence is […]

born from the abyss (the indefinite multiplication) of representation, from the representation of representation, etc.« (Derrida 1976, 163; »le désir de la présence naît […] de l'abîme de la représentation, de la représentation de la représentation, etc.« [Derrida 1997, 233]). While we may acknowledge the purely (anti)representational nature of our descriptions, the longing for complete unity, for presence and origin, persists and remains unfulfilled. This is evident in Derrida's deconstruction of the primacy of the oral tradition, which presupposes *arché*-writing from the outset. Our belief in the primacy of orality stems from the idea that the world and the whole creation is made by God's words, the *logoi* of being, where instead there is nothing but tradition and hence inheritance of words. These words are not tied to their immediate presence, spoken by a specific voice in a particular moment, but rather to a distancing that enables their transmission precisely because they are not centered on or expressed by a singular concrete subject. The desire for full, un-supplemented meaning is our yearning for origin and unity with the mother, which instead is always already based on *differánce*, thus on *not* being one and the same (cf. Derrida 1982). Nevertheless, the awareness that unity is unattainable precisely because it never existed does not diminish our longing for it.[2]

On the other hand, this approach promises a wealth of possibilities, notably our collaboration on the fabric of signifiers. »Representations« in Derrida are *antirepresentational* because they neither refer nor mirror; they are not proxies for, nor do they have a direct connection with the »really Real«. However, they do connect with the »real« when understood as our spaces of agency. This aspect has long rendered Derrida compelling for literary studies: According to Derrida, we actively participate in shaping the worldview that envelops us, as our descriptions channel our ways of living and interacting. Literature, in particular, serves as a locus where these constructions of ways of living occur. We engage in the formation of »collective imaginaries«, and although our room for maneuver is not boundless, there is space for fine-tuning – something applicable to both authors and readers alike:

> the writer writes *in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system. And the reading must always aim at a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses. This relationship is not a certain quan-

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2 I contend that Markus Gabriel's *New Realism* and similar endeavors, which I will revisit in section 4, are driven by exactly this desire. They attempt to satisfy the desire by merely *stipulating* the existence of the metaphysical real. Although their argument is less complex, they demand a similar »metaphysical article of faith« to the one Quine identified in the empiricists of his time (see section 2): the Real, which we cannot directly grasp without language, is simply posited as a Given.

titative distribution of shadow and light, of weakness or of force, but a signifying structure that critical reading should *produce*. (Derrida 1976, 158; l'écrivain écrit *dans* une langue et *dans* une logique dont, par définition, son discours ne peut dominer absolument le système, les lois et la vie propres. Il ne s'en sert qu'en se laissant d'une certaine manière et jusqu'à un certain point gouverner par le système. Et la lecture doit toujours viser un certain rapport inaperçu de l'écrivain, entre ce qu'il commande et ce qu'il ne command pas des schémas de la langue dont il fait usage. Ce rapport n'est pas une certaine répartition quantitative d'ombre signifiante que la lecture critique doit *produire*. [Derrida 1997, 227])

Each productive act, though not entirely autonomous or undetermined, introduces a variation to the system: »To produce this signifying structure obviously cannot consist of reproducing, by the effaced and respectful doubling of commentary, the conscious, voluntary, intentional relationship that the writer institutes in his exchanges with the history to which he belongs thanks to the element of language.« (Derrida 1976, 158; »Produire cette structure signifiante ne peut évidemment consister à reproduire, par le redoublement effacé et respectueux du commentaire, le rapport conscient, volontaire, intentionnel, que l'écrivain institue dans ses échanges avec l'histoire à laquelle il appartient grâce à l'élément de la langue.« [Derrida 1997, 227]) The language in which we operate is given to us – we are, in the best Heideggerian sense, »thrown into it«. However, our engagement with this language should never be purely passive: through writing and rewriting, we not only reproduce the system but also appropriate it, making it our own and introducing unforeseen differences. To the extent of which our interactions are informed by signifiers, we ourselves produce the framework of possibilities that constrains our actions, albeit not entirely freely.

Here one can clearly see the social constructivist side of post-structuralism: is it not ultimately us, theorists and literary artists, who determine how we want to live by providing the frameworks that underpin our social interactions? This is not the place to evaluate the effectiveness or cogency of this approach. Rather, this is to say: there is a version of *antirepresentationalism* operating within a *dualistic* framework, which includes a specific conception of our agency: the point of intervention lies with signs. While this does not affect the »really Real«, it influences how we treat each other in areas where the really Real is not involved. This perspective is not entirely different from Searle's approach: in the social realm, it is we who institute facts. The difference lies in Searle presuming a second task of language, where we accurately do refer to something beyond us.

To summarize, Derrida does not reject the dualism central to both Searle's representationalism and his own antirepresentationalism. For both Searle and Derrida, words and the empirical world stand in opposition. However, while Searle believes there are ways of talking in which we at least presume to accurately describe things as they are in themselves, Derrida asserts that language *always*

operates antirepresentationally. Our words never refer directly; we always »only« manipulate signs. This is the aspect of post-structuralism and postmodernism that makes Stegemann wary.

2 Antirepresentational Holism: Quine, Davidson, Rorty

There is another way to describe the relationship between words and the world which does not start from a dualist outset and therewith avoids both representationalism and idealism. In my opinion, this approach can help to effectively describe how certain authors view the interaction between their artistic production and reality. Elsewhere, I have called this approach »antirepresentational realism« (Huetter-Almerigi 2020; 2023). The specifics of this philosophical proposal are not important here. What matters is that this holistic approach to the relationship between words and the world allows us to understand literature's interaction with reality without resorting to a form of social constructivism that is completely detached from the really Real (as Derrida suggests) or denying that large parts of the world exist independently of our speech acts (as Searle fears Derrida does).

This analytic approach originates with Quine, Davidson, and Rorty, contrasting with the mainstream analytic philosophy of their time, which predominantly relied on a dualistic framework between words and the world, along with representational accounts of language. These representational accounts varied between realist or antirealist perspectives, depending on whether one believed that words refer directly to the world (realist) or that words only refer to other words or justificatory practices and never directly to the world (antirealist). Quine, Davidson, and Rorty did not take positions in this grid but proposed to dismiss the dualism that produced both realism and antirealism. For Rorty, the shift from realism to antirealism merely changes the answers – from affirmative to negative regarding direct contact, and from correspondence to coherence regarding the theory of truth – while maintaining the underlying representationalist dualist framework. Quine, Davidson, and Rorty argued that it is the foundational dualism that must be discarded, not just the answers within the existing framework.

Some historical context helps clarify what they were challenging and the cultural climate in which they were operating. The same year Derrida published *Of Grammatology* (Derrida [1967] 1997), Rorty edited the influential volume *The Linguistic Turn* (Rorty [1967] 1992), which included contributions from the most prominent analytic philosophers of the time. At the time, Rorty himself was still a celebrated member of the analytic community. Both books, Derrida's and Rorty's,

epitomize the »linguistic turn«, yet their approaches are fundamentally different. This is often overlooked when talking about the »linguistic turn«.

On the continental side, the »linguistic turn« means that the focus is put on the diminishing of foundations beyond language. Conversely, the philosophy of language within the analytic tradition aims to secure knowledge of these foundations by establishing a new access. In the analytic field, the philosophy of the »linguistic turn« is considered *prima philosophia* – first philosophy, the branch that underpins all others. This approach is not due to post-structuralist reasons, where no direct path leads from the signifier to the signified, and certainly not to the Real. Instead, it was believed that focusing on language will subsequently provide access to the foundations of metaphysics and epistemology, that can be analyzed definitively through language. Thus, the traditional analytic enterprise is deterministic, positing that there is something »out there« to be discovered independently of our own creation. This is the line that also Searle is still treasuring.

Reflecting on the analytic linguistic turn a decade later, Rorty wrote that, in his opinion, his discipline became so obsessed with language because first-order analyses of metaphysics and epistemology had encountered unavoidable problems and limitations. There was hope that these issues could be resolved by shifting the focus to language. However, Rorty believed this effort was in vain because, according to him, the problems did not stem from the type of access that could be easily fixed by moving from epistemology to philosophy of language. Instead, the issues were rooted in the dualistic worldview that postulates observers and their objects as clearly separate entities. Rorty argued that the shift away from epistemology and philosophy of mind toward philosophy of language as first philosophy did not address this fundamental dualism. Rather one problem was substituted by another: »[The] dubious epistemological notion of ›direct observational report‹ as the link between man's mind and its object« was substituted with the notion of »reference« (Rorty 1976, 324).

Now, »meaning« had to fulfill the role previously assigned to the »mind«, namely to represent or »mirror« the world.[3] The idea was that if the world is reflected in detail in language, then by carefully analyzing language and meanings, we would arrive at the objects themselves. This is classical semantic representationalism. *In nuce*, representationalism is based on a clear dualism between words and objects, analogous to the ontological dualism of mind and world in metaphysics, and the dualism between observer and object in epistemology. Words are understood to be an exact linguistic image of their respective objects (cf. Rorty 1991, 2). In this sense, words can also be seen as media that mediate between observers and objects.

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3 Hence the title of Rorty's most famous book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Rorty 1979).

Rorty states that »[i]n 1971 my philosophical views were shaken up« (Rorty 1998, 51), when encountering Donald Davidson's essay »On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme« (Davidson 1973). In this essay, Davidson dismantles the dualism just mentioned, which he calls the third dogma of empiricism, i. e. »the dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized« (ibid., 11). Davidson rejects the dualism of language and world in favor of holism. It is important to emphasize that there is nothing mystical about this holism. No subject-object boundaries are transgressed, and world and words are not somehow the same thing. Instead, it is underscored that these categories cannot be thought of or described independently of each other within the space of reasons, where every theory-making process and act of description occurs. The holism is not of metaphysical but of semantic nature: we never get the world without our words *in our descriptions*. However, the corollaries of this semantic holism run deep, as all inquiry and theory-making happen in language.

To avoid falling prey to naïve dreams of immediacy or direct contact with the world, one must – as Rorty, drawing on Sellars, puts it – distinguish between »awareness as discriminative behavior and awareness in the logical space of reasons« (Rorty 1979, 182). Knowledge means to »notice under a description, not just respond discriminately to [stimuli]« (ibid., 183). There is no neutral ground where we can perceive something without a description. The key is to avoid conflating ontology with semantics, or in other words, to not mistake a description for the thing itself. This means dismissing ontology as a category that can be understood without language – not because there are no things beyond our descriptions, but because we never perceive or grasp them without a description. The difference to the Kantian outset lies in the fact that in the Davidsonian framework, this claim also works in reverse: there are no descriptions or words that have not undergone the process of triangulation. This means our words always have a causal relationship with the world, even in the most remote expressions: »[T]he objectivity which thought and language demand depends on the mutual and simultaneous responses of two or more creatures to common distal stimuli and to one another's responses. This three-way relation among two speakers and a common world I call ›triangulation‹« (Davidson 2001, xv). Rorty comments in the later part of his career, pressured by Ramberg:

> The point of this doctrine [meaning: triangulation, Y.H.-A.] is that you cannot get along with just holistic inferential relations between beliefs and statements (as coherence theorists tried to do) nor with atomic relations of being-caused-by (as realists fixated on perception still try to do). You have to play back and forth between causation and inference in a way which does not permit any of the corners of a triangle to be independent of any of the others. (Rorty 2000, 78)

I have argued that this presupposes simultaneity (cf. Huetter-Almerigi 2020; 2022): we do not »play back and forth« in time. We do *not first* play the normative game and *then* the causal game, or the other way around (we do not first forge notions and then see if they work by looking to the world). Rather, *every* successful language exchange, every institution of »meaning«, requires that triangulation has already occurred, incorporating both normative and causal constraints in all our utterings.

Davidson's third dogma complements and is connected to Quine's critique of the first two dogmas of empiricism: reductionism and the distinction between analytic and synthetic judgments. Quine's elaborations on these dogmas were directly inspired by his discussions with Carnap. Carnap believed that while language could be shaped, the world could not, and that the task of linguistic philosophers was to shape language analytically, allowing the world to determine which judgments made within this language were correct. However, Quine argued that the distinction between analytic and synthetic truths is untenable because even the most basic, seemingly analytic judgments and conceptual analyses are based on further judgments and concepts, creating an inescapable circle of mutually dependent concepts and words. The purely analytic is always already synthetically affected, and conversely, the analytic, definitional elements cannot be extracted from the synthetic. Therefore, a clear distinction between analytic and synthetic beyond pragmatic stipulations is not possible.[4]

> It is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. [...] [F]or all its a priori reasonableness, a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith. (Quine 1951, 34)

While Carnap and others advocate empiricism, Quine argues that they still succumb to metaphysical assumptions. In contrast, Quine proposes to illuminate linguistic communication as an interactive empirical phenomenon (cf. Quine 2013). What exactly occurs during speech? What happens when we attempt to understand each other? What role does language serve within the framework of our actions?

According to Quine, language does not represent entities; instead, it facilitates the alignment of our attitudes and intentions through speech acts. For instance, if I ask my partner to »please pass the butter« and my partner actually passes me the butter, then the words »butter«, »please«, and »pass« apparently had the same meaning for both of us. However, this shared meaning does not arise because the word »butter« perfectly mirrors the substance it denotes. Rather, it emerges because

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4 On the legacy of C.I. Lewis here, see Misak 2024.

both of us aim to coordinate our actions within a world that includes butter, and the sequence of sounds »b-u-t-t-e-r« serves as an effective shorthand for this purpose.

According to Rorty, Davidson shares this behaviorism, »which makes language into something people do, rather than something standing between them and something else« (Rorty 1992, 368). After Quine's farewell to the *Two Dogmas of Empricism* (Quine 1951), sentences are »no longer thought of as expressions of experience nor as representations of extra-experiential reality. Rather they were thought of as strings of marks and noises used by human beings in the development and pursuit of social practices – ends which do not include ›representing reality as it is in itself‹« (Rorty 1992, 373). Language is not merely a mirror reflecting reality. Instead, language functions as a tool, arguably our most effective, for coordinating actions within a shared environment. Contrary to Derrida, it provides access to this environment as in language, our inquiries and needs are tightly intertwined with the surrounding reality; they build an inextricable package (cf. Rorty 1982; Huetter-Almerigi 2020; Voparil 2022).

In summary, for Rorty, Quine, and Davidson, language operates in an *antirepresentationalist and holistic* manner. Language does not represent anything because Rorty, Davidson, and Quine reject the notion of a split between ourselves and the world that requires bridging through language. Moreover, our ability to think about objects is inseparable from language, not because objects depend on language for existence, but because our thoughts and expressions about them inherently occur within language. This is why, again with Sellars, »all awareness [...] is a linguistic affair« (Sellars 1997, 63).

This does not imply idealism, as the existence of non-linguistic reality does not hinge on our speech acts or mental states. Instead, it suggests *interactionism*: we engage with the world also linguistically, and language solidifies its structures when our linguistic actions achieve success. When our words cease to be effective, when our speech acts fail to yield the expected results – such as when saying »please pass the butter« no longer results in butter being passed – we will adjust and adapt our language and speech behaviors accordingly.

3 The Debate over »Realism« between György Lukács and Bertolt Brecht

How is this classification into representational dualism, antirepresentational dualism, and antirepresentational holism helpful for understanding what authors and theorists are or were doing? My claim is that this distinction provides a clearer

understanding of the differences between specific authors and can, in a second step, help clarify and refine our theoretic proposals.

Consider the debate over »realism« between György Lukács, Bertolt Brecht, and others in the 1930s – a debate to which Stegemann also returns. What exactly were they debating? The debate occurred in the context of the exile journal *Das Wort* in Moscow. The contributors were numerous, and the questions they addressed were profound: How should one write in the face of the impending horror? Why was it not possible to prevent the Nazis from rising to power? Where are the weaknesses (or even guilt) of the literary field? What strengths can be recruited for the future? The common answer was that »realism« was needed, though the exact meaning or nature of »realism« varied for each proponent.

The debate in *Das Wort* has its roots in, and is an extension of, the earlier debate over Expressionism that began a decade prior. The central questions were: Is there something inherent in Expressionism and the literary avant-garde that made them particularly susceptible to being co-opted by fascist and Nazi ideologies? Is Gottfried Benn, who openly embraced Nazism, an isolated case, or is Expressionism itself suspect, despite its clear origins in the anarchic bohemian and thus rather left-wing milieu, as Lukács suggests (cf. Lukács 1971, 109–150)? An author particularly targeted in this debate was James Joyce. Recall for instances Karl Radek's description of Joyce's poetics as »photographing a pile of dung through a microscope using a film camera« (»einen Misthaufen mit Hilfe eines Filmapparates durch ein Mikroskop zu photographieren« [as cited in Schmitt 1973, 17]). This certainly is a form, and an extreme form, of »realism« but not the form of realism that was needed. Radek asks: »Should we really tell the [...] Soviet artist and the foreign revolutionary artist today: ›Look into your guts!!?‹ – No! We have to tell him: ›Look – a world war is being prepared; Look, the fascists want to suffocate what remains of culture [...].‹« (»Sollen wir denn heute wirklich dem [...] Sowjetkünstler und dem ausländischen revolutionären Künstler sagen: ›Schau in deine Eingeweide!!?‹ – Nein! Wir müssen ihm sagen: ›Schau – ein Weltkrieg wird vorbereitet; schau, die Faschisten wollen die Reste der Kultur ersticken [...].‹« [As cited in Schmitt 1973, 17]) Many agreed. Brecht did not.

Lukács' essay »Es geht um den Realismus« from 1938 (Lukács 1971, 313–344) is commonly understood to have put an end to the debate in the 1930s, and his position is well known: not Joyce but the bourgeois, realistic novel in the style of Thomas Mann is the preferred means. For Lukács, realism involves recognizing the underlying, objective social structures in the world and then shaping the narrative universe accordingly, in congruence with the ideas of German Poetic Realism (cf. ibid., 318–321). Lukács writes: »Why does Thomas Mann remain artistically so ›old-fashioned‹, ›conventional‹, and doesn't pretend to be ›avantgardist‹ when it comes to such modern topics? Precisely because he is a *real* realist [...].« (»Warum

bleibt Thomas Mann bei so modernen Themen künstlerisch doch ›altmodisch‹, ›her-kömmlich‹, gibt sich nicht ›avantgardistisch‹? Eben weil er ein *wirklicher* Realist ist […].« [Ibid., 329, my emphasis]) But what does that mean exactly?

Lukács writes in the tradition of Enlightenment thought: There is a lesson to be »learned« here, a clear message for the »broad masses of the people« (»die breiten Massen des Volkes« [ibid., 341]) who require education, and the message needs to be straightforward and comprehensible. In contrast, to »Joyce or other representatives of ›avant-garde‹ literature [leads] […] only a very narrow gate; you have to possess a certain ›skill‹ in order to understand what is being played there at all« (»Joyce oder zu anderen Vertretern der ›avantgardistischen‹ Literatur […] nur eine ganz enge Pforte [führt]; man muß einen bestimmten ›Kniff heraushaben‹, um überhaupt zu verstehen, was dort gespielt wird« [ibid., 341]). The task, according to Lukács, is »to grasp reality as it actually is, and not simply reproduce what appears immediately« (»Wirklichkeit so zu erfassen, wie sie tatsächlich beschaffen ist, und sich nicht darauf zu beschränken, das wiederzugeben, was unmittelbar erscheint« [ibid., 318]). Here »the problem of the objective totality of reality plays a decisive role« (»spielt das Problem der objektiven Totalität der Wirklichkeit eine entscheidende Rolle« [ibid.]). We need to reach the »deepest, hidden, mediated, directly imperceptible connections of social reality« (»tiefer liegenden, verborgenen, vermittelten, unmittelbar nicht wahrnehmbaren Zusammenhängen der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit« [ibid., 323 sq.]), which then are to be reduced to and represented in »typical« forms.

Brecht famously disagreed with Lukács' dismissal of the avant-gardes and his classical formal demands, although Brecht did partially agree with Lukács' analysis that Expressionism was too abstract and subjective to be politically effective. To avoid weakening the intellectual anti-fascist front with internal theoretical debates, Brecht notably refrained from openly criticizing Lukács in the 1930s (see on this Erpenbeck 1968; Knopf 2016, 231–245; Schmitt 1973, 14, 26). In fact, Brecht's position during the 1930s can only be reconstructed from his notes from that period, which were published in his *Collected Works* in the 1960s.

For Brecht, who was not an orthodox Marxist in this regard, the »objective totality of reality« (»objektive Totalität der Wirklichkeit« [Lukács 1971, 341]) that plays a crucial role for Lukács, should be understood in open historical terms and cannot be grasped through Lukács' transhistorical »typicality«, which presupposes historical closure. For Brecht »The oppressors do not operate in the same way at all times. They cannot be apprehended in the same manner at all times.« (»Die Unter-drücker arbeiten nicht zu allen Zeiten auf die gleiche Art. Sie können nicht zu allen Zeiten in der gleichen Weise dingfest gemacht werden.« [Brecht 1967, 327]) Rather, each time new forms are required, and one must strive »not so much to limit the number and nature of methods as to expand them« (»nicht so sehr darauf aus sein, die Zahl und Art dieser Methoden einzuschränken, als vielmehr darauf aus, sie

zu erweitern« [ibid., 295]). »No realist is content with constantly repeating what everyone already knows; this does not show a living relationship to reality.« (»Kein Realist begnügt sich damit, immerfort zu wiederholen, was man schon weiß; das zeigt keine lebendige Beziehung zur Wirklichkeit.« [Ibid.]) Moreover, for Brecht, the »people« (»das Volk«) are not as »obtuse« (»begriffsstutzig« [ibid., 333]) as Lukács thinks. Based on his experience, Brecht believed they were receptive to advanced formal experiments, including Piscator's »theatrical experiments (and my own)« (»Theaterexperimente [...] (und meine eigenen)« [ibid., 328]).

Though meaning something completely different with the term, Brecht, like Lukács, calls his approach »realism«, specifically »militant realism« (»kämpferischer Realismus« [ibid., 374]). Here is Brecht's definition: »A realistic way of looking at things is one that studies the driving forces, a realistic way of acting is one that sets the driving forces in motion. [...] What matters is that one acts realistically when writing a novel or a play.« (»Eine realistische Betrachtungsweise ist eine solche, welche die treibenden Kräfte studiert, eine realistische Handlungsweise eine solche, welche die treibenden Kräfte in Bewegung setzt. [...] Es kommt darauf an, daß man einen Roman oder ein Stück schreibend, realistisch handelt.« [Ibid., 368])

To me, Brecht and Lukács differ not only in their interpretations of Marxism in terms of philosophy of history or their aesthetic beliefs with respect to continuing or disrupting bourgeois art. They also *fundamentally* diverge in their views on what language is, and how language intersects with epistemology and political reality.

Lukács' position remains firmly within the Enlightenment framework, asserting that deeper, universally true insights must be apprehended through reason and subsequently imparted to the masses through education. This perspective posits a *dualism* between knowing subjects and the external world they represent. Literature, especially the literature of bourgeois realism which acts as a model, reflects and shall reflect the transtemporal structures of the historical-material becoming (»Werden«) within time, hence Lukács' insistence on »types« and »typicality«. Authors gain knowledge of the world and *represent* this knowledge in the mode of »narration« rather than mere »description«. »Narration«, in this context, elucidates how elements are interconnected, thereby offering readers a deeper comprehension of the world (cf. Lukács 1971, 197–242). Readers are expected to grasp and internalize these typical forms and structures from the text, enabling them to perceive reality as it truly is and subsequently act accordingly. For Lukács, therefore, »realism« primarily signifies a style of writing rather than a methodological approach. Literature's role is to narrate the mechanisms of materialist-historical dialectics. The dialectical processes of history are to be comprehended as outcomes, forming the content of knowledge. The means of implementation are the one's of classical education (»Bildung«), which underscores Lukács' advocacy for novels in general and *Bildungsromane* within the realist tradition in particular.

Brecht, in contrast, adopts an *interactionist* model that aligns more closely with Rorty's holistic antirepresentationalism. In this model, writing is not a means to inform future action based on the reader's apprehension of the representational content of what is written and read. Rather, *writing, reading, staging, and acting are already forms of action* – directly, without the intermediary step of representing something external, some propositional content or knowledge that the reader first needs to understand or apprehend and then use as a maxim for action. Understanding and acting are fused into a single process for Brecht. Thus, Brecht's »militant realism« is as an active method for transforming and shaping reality, rather than being merely a stylistic aspect of texts.[5] While in this model we still *react* to something objective (we do not engage only with signs but we are hitting against and enmeshed in actual material reality), the model does not assume a strict dualism between language and the world. There is no representation of knowledge, staging, description, or narration of outcomes; instead, through literature and theater, there is *direct interaction with* reality itself, rather than a narrative representation of it. Literature and theater, in Brecht's view, do not aim to represent historical-materialist dialectics but rather stand in a dialectical relationship with reality, actively shaping and being shaped by it.

4 Stegemann's »Realism«

My analysis of Stegemann's position highlights that he remains entangled in the dualist vs. idealist debate, as outlined via Searle in section 1. Stegemann aims to remedy the potential pitfalls of postmodernist art and post-structural philosophy, particularly their alleged absence of an »outside of the text«, by reverting to a sane dualism. While Stegemann invokes Brecht as an ally, his actual aspiration aligns more closely with Lukács' representational stance.

I am taking Stegemann's intervention seriously as a theoretical proposal. Some might argue this is a category mistake, suggesting that Stegemann's work belongs more in the literary realm where performative evaluation outweighs theoretical coherence. I am willing to embrace this risk. Others have already aptly analyzed Stegemann's intervention from literary and performative perspectives (see Fiorentino 2024). My aim is to critically evaluate and refine its potential theoretical core.

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5 The »Stil vs. Methode«-distinction is a commonplace in Brecht-Lukács scholarship. I am not claiming to have been the first to see this; rather, I am asserting that there is a linguistic aspect to it that deserves more attention.

This approach is justified because the positions Stegemann engages with are widely discussed in serious terms. By examining Stegemann's work, I can also provide brief commentary on other significant interventions in the wider cultural context, particularly Markus Gabriel's. Furthermore, I argue that my proposed framework, which distinguishes between representational and antirepresentational dualism and holism, has broad applicability beyond Stegemann. Stegemann serves as a case study for this framework, regardless of his intentions.

What is Stegemann challenging? His avowed adversary is postmodernism, where someone could be lauded as a great philosopher for asserting, »a statement like ›The Gulf War is not happening‹«[6] (»man mit einer Aussage wie ›Der Golfkrieg findet nicht statt‹ als großer Philosoph galt« [Stegemann 2015, 7]). Stegemann takes pleasure in noting that »Reality has been coming back forcefully for a few years now. The end of history seems to be over and questions are being asked again that seek to generate a realistic picture of society.« (»Die Realität meldet sich seit einigen Jahren mit Gewalt zurück. Das Ende der Geschichte scheint vorbei zu sein und es werden wieder Fragen gestellt, die ein realistisches Bild der Gesellschaft hervorbringen wollen.« [Ibid.]) But what philosophical stance does this »picture of society« presuppose? Does it lean towards representationalism or anti-representationalism, dualism or holism, and why should we care?

Stegemann indirectly alludes to the 1930s debate between realism and expressionism mentioned earlier, viewing post-structuralism and postmodernity as an exacerbation of the abstract and subjective excesses diagnosed by Lukács for expressionism. In the postmodern age, according to Stegemann »The abstract image [...] becomes the realistic expression of the free and self-determined subject.« (»Das abstrakte Bild [...] [wird] zum realistischen Ausdruck des freien und selbstbestimmten Subjekts.« [Ibid., 9]) The problem with this absolutization, Stegemann argues, is that »It is no longer possible to determine what is realistic art and what is not, because it is no longer possible to judge whether something is being represented or whether the representation has become its own content.« (»Es lässt sich nicht mehr bestimmen, was realistische Kunst ist und was gerade nicht, denn es lässt sich nicht mehr beurteilen, ob etwas dargestellt wird oder die Darstellung ihr eigener Inhalt geworden ist.« [Ibid., 8])

Therefore, Stegemann advocates moving beyond ready-mades and pure Malevich-style abstraction, both of which collapse the dualism between art or representation and reality. Following Florian Malzacher's call to »›[p]ut [...] the Urinal back in the Restroom‹« (Stegemann 2015, 7; Malzacher 2014), Stegemann argues that this subjectivist-abstract approach to art unwittingly serves capitalism's interests.

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6 Obviously, Stegemann refers to Baudrillard.

To counteract this, and to liberate art from its entanglement in capitalist dynamics, Stegemann contends that »realistic art [...] must first be freed from its postmodern captivity. Realism here [in Stegemann's text, Y.H.-A.] should not mean everything that somehow produces its own reality or is capable of producing the effect of such a reality. Realism here always means a dialectical art that provokes a shared experience of reality.« (»realistischer Kunst [...] zuerst aus seiner postmodernen Gefangenschaft befreit werden. Realismus soll hier nicht all das heißen, was irgendwie eine eigene Realität hervorbringt oder den Effekt einer solchen hervorzurufen vermag. Mit Realismus ist hier immer eine dialektische Kunst gemeint, die eine gemeinsame Erfahrung von Realität provoziert.« [Stegemann 2015, 11])

However, this shared experience of reality appears hindered by the outcome-oriented logic reminiscent of Lukács, despite Stegemann's use of terms like »provoking« instead of »describing« or »narrating«. Stegemann invokes Brecht and asserts that Brecht always pondered the question »by what means could theater give a realistic *picture of its present*« (»mit welchen Mitteln das Theater ein realistisches *Bild seiner Gegenwart* geben könnte« [ibid., 43, my emphasis]). As previously discussed, in my analysis, Brecht did not aim to depict anything. There seems to be a confusion or conflation of Brecht's and Lukács' views on language in Stegemann's stance. To adhere to the terminology used in this essay: Stegemann seeks to remedy our era's anti-representational dualism, which sees the political stakes entirely on the side of signs, by returning to what has been identified here as Lukácsian representational dualism, although Stegemann mistakenly attributes this position to Brecht.

In more detail, Stegemann contends that where Duchamp's conceptual art was purely subjectivist, today's postmodern documentary theater, exemplified by figures like Milo Rau, is purely pseudo-objectivist. Both artistic forms share a commonality in their dissolution of the dualistic separation that Stegemann insists must be preserved. This argument echoes themes seen earlier in the expressionism debate: »Naturalism is one of the first attempts at avant-garde art in that it no longer wanted to mediate the relationship between art and reality through mimesis. This type of transformation was replaced in naturalism by documentation, which demanded a direct relationship between artwork and material.« (»Beim Naturalismus handelt es sich insofern um einen der ersten Versuche von Avantgardekunst, da er das Verhältnis von Kunst und Realität nicht mehr durch Mimesis vermitteln wollte. An die Stelle dieser Art der Transformation trat im Naturalismus die Dokumentation, die ein unmittelbares Verhältnis von Kunstwerk und Material forderte.« [Ibid., 47]) According to Stegemann, this parallels today's documentary theater, which he argues stays on the surface. This stance echoes the criticism of Joyce by Radek, who likened Joyce's approach to »photographing a pile of dung through a microscope«, suggesting it captures only surface-level realities rather than anything truly substantial.

Stegemann identifies a similar aesthetic approach in the documentary theater typical of the post-war period. According to Stegemann, this theater responded to a »historically concrete problem of representation« (»historisch konkretes Darstellungsproblem« [ibid., 49]), namely how to represent Auschwitz. The unrepresentable had to »show« itself: »›It should show itself‹ because no ›I‹ can show it anymore.« (»›Es soll sich zeigen‹, weil kein ›Ich‹ es mehr zeigen kann.« [Ibid., 52])[7] What was deemed necessary then, argues Stegemann, has now become a mere facade: the ostensibly »objective« is merely an empty gesture devoid of dialectical depth. In contemporary theater, there exists no longer a dualism between real and fictional (since, on Rau's stage, everything is real), nor between world and art (since, with Duchamp, everything is art), hence no »realism as a method« in Stegemann's terms.

To cure this loss of real reality, which can come in the flavor of no (Duchamp) viz. too much reality (Rau), Stegemann proposes a return to mimicking the deep structure of reality. However, as should be clear now, this position diverges from Brecht, whose approach to art was not rooted in a dualistic-representational model but rather in a holistic-interactional, anti-representational framework. Brecht aimed not to describe the world; he wanted to change it militantly – not through what we learn from what is represented, but directly in the process of interaction that his type of art entertains with the world. Stegemann, on the other hand, seeks to revert to a pre-Brechtian approach, even if he mistakenly attributes his views to Brecht. He aims to rescue us from the crisis attributed to postmodernists and post-structuralists by advocating dualistic representationalism over dualistic anti-representationalism, thereby attempting to restore what Derrida positioned in the realm of desire – the really Real.

My main invitation in this article is that, instead of simply rejecting anti-representationalism, one might consider dismissing the dualism that underpins the problems discussed earlier by Rorty and others – a dualism also present in Stegemann's work. Stegemann approvingly cites Markus Gabriel's »New Realism« (Gabriel 2014) which rests on the same dualism that Quine criticized as unscientific in the 1950s. Quine argued that the notion of accessing things through language-independent means is an »unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith« (Quine 1951, 34). We cannot access things in themselves without words; we only apprehend them as described in language. However, starting from a non-dualist perspective does not preclude a causal relationship with the world. As discussed in section 2, this causal connection is always already factored in.

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7 See Hanuschek 1993 for an alternative interpretation. Hanuschek emphasizes that post-World War II documentary theater, contrary to Stegemann's description, did not aim to put »objective reality« on the stage. Instead, it recognized that the very act of selecting documents was an intervention in reality, thus creating a new reality rather than merely representing it.

Stegemann justifies his leap of faith by invoking Kleist's Kant crisis (cf. Stegemann 2015, 57). In Stegemann's empathic terms: we need to move beyond Kant's categorical perspectivism, which posits that the things in themselves are beyond our reach. Just because we perceive the world through our own concepts does not mean that the world does not exist.[8] In Gabriel's version, which Stegemann acclaims, the argument goes: Just because we »see« the world with our brains does not mean that there are only brain images. Obviously, this is trivially true. However, from the trivial metaphysical existence of the world beyond ourselves does *not* follow that we have epistemological or semantic access to it *without* having to use our brains and our language. Of course, we still need our brains and our language to apprehend and express what we get in contact with, and this is the point that led Quine (and, albeit in a different way, Derrida) to say that the difference between language and the world is a metaphysical fact, but epistemologically and semantically uncapturable.

Stegemann, somewhat paradoxically, asserts that not »everything is mere interpretation« (nicht »alles nur Interpretation« [ibid., 59]), and that »reality exists, it just presents itself differently to different perspectives« (»Realität existiert, sie stellt sich den verschiedenen Perspektiven nur unterschiedlich dar« [ibid., 58]). Ironically, this aligns closely with both Kant's and Derrida's perspectives, where reality exists independently of signs or categories but remains accessible only through our categories or interpretations. Rather than securing direct access to the really Real, which Stegemann stipulates simply exists but can only be seen through diverse perspectives, this formulation seems to inadvertently invite the specter of relativism – exactly what Stegemann aimed to dispel.

To sum up, Stegemann's model of »realism« consists of »[1] interest in reality as something that exists independently of the subject. [2] This leads to the possibility of describing reality as something that exists independently of the subject. [3] This leads to the possibility of describing reality as a society structured by hierarchically organized contradictions.« (»Interesse an der Realität als einer unabhängig vom Subjekt bestehenden Wirklichkeit. Daraus folgt die Möglichkeit einer Beschreibung der Realität als einer unabhängig vom Subjekt bestehenden Wirklichkeit. Daraus folgt die Möglichkeit einer Beschreibung der Realität als einer von hierarchisch organisierten Widersprüchen bestimmten Gesellschaft.« [Ibid., 202])

It's unlikely that anyone would deny (1), including Derrida or Rorty, who agree that there exists a world beyond ourselves that functions independently of us and our descriptions. Further, (2) does not logically follow from (1). One can remedy by treating (2) and (3) as fictional claims. However, treating these possibilities as

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8 I hope it is clear that this never was Kant's point. Stegemann (and Gabriel) are conflating epistemology (questions of access and knowledge) and metaphysics (questions about what exists).

merely fictional (a hypothetical scenario where we assume we can access the world without language or categories, and then assume our descriptions are accurate and »true to the facts« despite our inevitable reliance on language) or as wishes without theoretical consequences raises questions about their utility. To me it is not clear what work the bare version of »reality beyond all our descriptions and cognitions« does for us, other than function as an empty signifier for a community of people who think it is important to constantly publicly profess their belief in a world beyond human touch, a belief few rational people will doubt anyway. Further, this perspective notably falls behind Brecht's more nuanced approach, where realism operates not merely as a method of representation but as a dynamic system of interaction. In Stegemann's framework, realism tends to appear once again as a mechanism of representation and thus ultimately as a style rather than a method, especially given the reliance on a »perspectival« version of the connection between representation and object.

My intent was to suggest that a closer examination of positions in philosophy of language can reveal insights previously obscured in these literary debates. Perhaps in calling for »realism« in the future, it would be more fruitful to ask specifically what should be dispensed with – dualism, representationalism, antirepresentationalism, and in what particular form? This essay aimed to highlight these distinctions, inviting consideration of additional points on where to apply the theoretical lever, and namely to differentiate between dualist and holistic approaches.

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