Subjectivity as a Tool – Advocating Strong Notions of Individual Subjectivity in Rorty

Yvonne Huetter-Almerigi, Università di Bologna

Abstract:

There is a well-known tension in Rorty when it comes to our linguistic agency. Famously, Rorty follows Wittgenstein, Quine, Davidson and others in that there are no private languages. However, in Rorty, the innovator of our language is an individual - the "strong poet" - who Brandom calls Rorty's "genius self". This tension in Rorty is well described and has been problematized many times and from various angles. Going against the common compulsion to mitigate Rorty's commitment to individuality and normative detachment, this article provides a rationale for what I will call Rorty's "vocabulary of rupture" which follows a) from fully implementing Rorty's particular version of antirepresentationalism and b) from taking temporality into account. Concerning a) once we embrace that words and theories do not represent the world as it is in itself but rather function to serve particular aims, there are contexts in which insisting on the possibility of normative detachment becomes interesting and worth pursuing. This is the case when the aim of writing is to motivate people to engage in democratic practices and embark on creative endeavors. As for b) once we bring temporality into play, we can switch between the Davidsonian perspectives of triangulation and radical interpretation and freely choose which perspective to favor for describing the moment of emergence of new vocabularies – that is either the first or the third-person account of meaning.

Introduction

This article investigates Rorty's use of individual subjectivity and the possibility of normative rupture in the various contexts of his writings. In particular, the article addresses a critique that has often been given of Rorty's account, namely that his position in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989, from here on CIS) and beyond commits the romantic pitfall of championing autonomous self-creation (Hampe 2006) because individuals seem to have the power to detach themselves from the normative constraint of the public domain. This critique comes in various flavors, the most prominent of which

are political (e.g. Fraser 1999) and semantic (e.g. Ramberg 2011), with both lines highlighting that radical normative detachment from the linguistic or socio-political community is untenable.

The political version of the discussion centers around Rorty's private-public-distinction in CIS and has produced a large body of scholarship. The usual technique employed by Rorty-defenders in the political discussion is to try to give a version of his account that either weakens the private-public distinction by retranslating his individualistic version of vocabularies into a community first approach or to distinguish between the differing ends of the two spheres but to insist that "what can be considered their enemy (egotism) and the method of redemption (self–enlargement) are akin in character" (Llanera 2016: 334). An example of the former approach is Leypoldt defending Rorty from Shusterman's attacks by stating that "[…] it is hard to see why Rorty would have to be told […] that firm public-private distinctions are 'untenable because the private self and the language it builds upon in self-creation are always already socially constituted and structured by a common field.'" (Leypoldt 2008: 150, cit. Shusterman 1992: 259)[1] The latter approach is Tracy Llanera's sophisticated proposal.

The semantic discussion is less well researched and is connected to the political debate insofar as, for Rorty, the private and public sphere are cashed out in terms of two different vocabularies. However, the semantic discussion is not about Rorty's particular formulation of the private-public distinction in CIS but about Rorty's shifting between insisting on the primacy of the first-person stance and the primacy of the third-person stance when it comes to meanings and minds in general. In this line of critique, Ramberg problematizes Rorty's use of the "final" vocabulary metaphor in CIS against the background of his positions in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979, from here on PMN) (Ramberg 2011). In the same vein, Brandom criticizes Rorty's "genius self" – a critique to which Rorty seems to succumb in a late discussion when he admits that one "can never do more than invent some variations on old themes, give the language of the tribe some new twists." (Rorty 2000: 188)

This article is a contribution to this second debate. Going against the grain, I will *insist* on Rorty's "genius self" and the possibility of normative closure of vocabularies by giving a rationale for why Rorty stresses this possibility and what he needs it for. The move centers around two key-assumptions: a) that Rorty needs to be read as a Rortyan, i.e. that also the language of his own books follows the Rortyan logic of being a move in Cultural Politics (hence Rorty is not representing but taking linguistic action); and b) that the dimension of temporality is paramount when talking about meaning and meaning-change.

---

[1] See further e.g. Curtis 2015, Kremer 2009, Müller 2014, Rodeiro 2018, who " hopes to definitively dismiss the strict interpretation [i.e. the sharp distinction between private and public domain] as being wholly inconsistent with Rorty's own views and overall philosophical project" 2018: 2. Kremer stresses that Rorty "emphasizes the distinction only on a theoretic level" (2009 195). I intend to reclaim the sharp distinction, for strategic reasons. On Rorty's political theory more largely see e.g. Bacon 2007, Bacon&Dianda 2021, Chin 2018, Dielemann 2019, Voparil 2006.

The upshot is that, within a Rortyan antirepresentational framework and when temporality is taken into account, one can go *both ways*; namely one can insist on either continuity or rupture with public norms when describing the change of vocabularies. Further, Rorty *did* go both ways: he insisted on continuity with the normative realm when writing in the genre of semantics and he insisted on rupture when writing in the genre of political theory. To have this flexibility of focus and narrative is a corollary of Rorty's "Politics first!"-credo or his belief that there is no non-value-laden inquiry and no purely descriptive theory. For Rorty, language is a tool not a medium of representation: theories and language serve certain goals, and it is the usefulness to these goals that determines the validity of the respective theory or the adequacy of a particular language.

There is a historical trajectory to the strategic-operative dimension of Rorty's writings. In his piece "Recent metaphilosophy" from 1961 Rorty defined philosophy as:

> "the greatest game of all precisely because it is the game of 'changing the rules'. This game can be won by attending to the patterns by which these rules can be changed, and formulating rules in terms of which to judge changes of rules. […] Since any metaphysical, epistemological, or axiological arguments can be defeated by redefinition, nothing remains but to make a virtue of necessity and to study this process of redefinition itself. […] (Rorty 1961: 301)

As Ramberg and Huetter-Almerigi have recently argued, Rorty took a more engaged approach to the process of redefinition in later years, looking to *bring about* change in certain directions rather than to merely *study it*. In short, Rorty switched from being a philosophy scholar to being a philosophical activist (Huetter & Ramberg 2022). Pushing this line of thought further, I am arguing here that insisting on a strong concept of subjectivity in CIS – his "genius self", his insistence on the metaphor of "final" vocabularies – was Rorty's way of ensuring the possibility of *radical* change by keeping people's motivation to embark on creative and socially disruptive endeavors high. To put it in a catchphrase: Don't think about what subjectivity *is*! Think about what "subjectivity"-talk *lets you do*!

The outline of the article is as follows: I will, first, (1) recap the general problem with subjectivity and the final vocabulary-metaphor (= the rupture-view) in semantic terms in Rorty by detailing Bjørn Ramberg's critique. Second, (2), I will try to give a Rortyan answer to this critique by: (2.1) insisting on the importance of purposes for the evaluation of language and theory in light of what Brandom has called Rorty's "vocabulary-vocabulary", i.e. Rorty's successor notion to the language-theory-distinction, and by sketching how this connects to what is now known as "conceptual engineering"; (2.2) differentiating between Ramberg's and Rorty's varying purposes and showing how their language choice relates to their agendas; (2.3) giving a picture of Rorty's version of language and theory-change that takes the key notion of temporality into account and follows the logic of continuity and rupture. (2.4) provides a rationale to Rorty's language-choice by insisting on the motivational character of

individual agency in western, liberal contexts; (2.5) strengthens this position by giving another example – this time not in political theory, but in philosophy of mind – where Rorty endorsed the possibility of theory-reduction, providing therewith a blueprint for my further developing of this possibility in this article, namely the possibility of anomalous supervenience of vocabularies.

In sum, the article makes a case for why what I intend to call the "vocabulary of rupture" – i.e. Rorty's strong notion of subjectivity and the possibility of normative detachment – is a convenient tool, showing what its theoretical underpinnings are and how it is connected with the "vocabularies of continuity" which Rorty's critics favor.

1. Subjectivity as intersubjective pattern – Ramberg's critique

It is well known that Rorty subscribed to what Ramberg calls "Davidson's revolution", i.e. that subjectivity and rationality are both intersubjective categories. This includes the "fundamental commitment to the priority of the third-person stance in philosophical accounts of meaning and mind." (Ramberg 2011: 47) "*Contents*, whether of sentences expressed or of thoughts entertained or of action-explaining attitudes, have their identities settled by their location in patterns of such contents that are fixed in *radical interpretation*." (Ramberg 2011: 47)

Radical interpretation is Davidson's account of how meaning gets (temporarily) fixed. Building on Quine's concept of radical translation from *Word and Object* (1960), radical interpretation takes place between two or more speakers in a common environment and is not restricted to the idealized situation of the field linguist trying to deal with an agent who speaks a radically unknown idiom. Rather, radical interpretation is how communication always works - also inside the same speech community. According to Rorty, Davidson's stance is that communication always depends on converging passing theories regarding what the other speaker might have meant and our continuous adaptive actions with respect to these supposed and constantly re-interpreted meanings.

Davidson enlarged and slightly changed the focus of his concept of radical interpretation when transiting to the concept of triangulation. For Davidson:

> "[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 2001a, xv).

While the metaphor of "radical interpretation" still calls to mind a picture of distinct entities – different speakers and their environment – the gap between which needs to be bridged by (at least temporary convergence in) meaning, the metaphor of the "triangle" focuses on the relation between the various speakers and their environment. The three-way relation expressed in the metaphor of "triangulation" is explanatorily primary to the three single corners which constitute the triangle when it comes to

4

describing what meaning is. This is what Ramberg, as cited above, called the "fundamental […] priority of the third-person stance in a philosophical account of meaning and mind." (Ramberg 2011: 47)

No ontological or metaphysical commitments can be gleaned from this third-person-first-account of meaning and minds as Davidson's concept of triangulation does not start from and explain how independently given, distinct speakers and their environment are subsequently put in connection via linguistic action. Rather, Davidson sustains that only by presupposing and starting from communication, do rationality and subjectivity become interesting categories for investigation in the first place.[2]

Rorty follows Davidson here: when Rorty talks about minds and subjects in PMN the question is not of the existential or metaphysical sort. Like in Davidson, in Rorty "the subjective […] is a perspective on the world characterized by a particular set of propositional attitudes, expressed in speech and other actions as these are construed by principles of rationality." (Ramberg 2011: 49) According to Ramberg, in PMN Rorty naturalized the subject by dismissing the "classically conceived" notion of the individual subject. Rorty's subject is no "experience receiving representor" but a "tissue of beliefs and desires", "narrating and re-narrating a self, that is a mind in so far as it is an organism with language." (Ramberg 2011: 49) Put another way, Rorty's subject in PMN is not an entity that *has* the potential to assume mental states and use and alter vocabularies. Rather, for Rorty the subjective *is* its vocabulary and intentional states. In CIS, Rorty recaps this point succinctly by marking the difference to the "traditional picture of the human situation" where "human beings are not simply networks of beliefs and desires but rather beings which *have* those beliefs and desires. The traditional view is that there is a core self which can look at, decide among, use, and express itself by means of, such beliefs and desires."(CIS: 10) In contrast, Ramberg states that Rorty's subject is a node in a web, existing "only in so far as there are language-using creatures interacting to create the pattern that makes locations for individual perspectives available at all."[3] (Ramberg 2011: 49)

According to Ramberg, problems arise when Rorty introduces the concept of "final vocabulary" in CIS because the "final" in "final vocabulary" seems to let the first-person stance back in through the backdoor. In accordance with his position in PMN, Rorty dedicates the first chapter of CIS to spelling out the contingency of language, selves, and communities, and defines the self as "*centerless* web of beliefs and desires" (CIS: 88, my emphasis). However, he then insists that what distinguishes the

---

[2] See e.g.: "In the end, the idea is as simple as that of ostensive learning, but with an insistence that triangulation is not a matter of one person grasping a meaning already there, but a performance that (when fully fleshed out) bestows a content on language." (Davidson 2001a: xv).

[3] In line with what I want to sustain in the following, one could add that as a trained Rortyan re-describer one could work to undo this pattern which produces subjective nodes. One could use this ladder called "subjectivity" to overcome subjectivity and substitute it with something else. However, this is not what Rorty did, and I will provide further arguments as to why. It is, however, exactly what certain philosophers in the continental tradition are currently doing. I will come back to this below.

diverse nodes in the intersubjective web is their *final* vocabulary. Ramberg thinks that: "Against this background [that subjects are nodes in a web], it is easy to think of a *final vocabulary* precisely as what marks the characteristic normative profile of some particular perspective, what identifies a node (or a family of nodes) in the pattern as just the node that it is – the characteristic normative boundary of a specific subjectivity." (Ramberg 2011: 49)

There would be no problem with this approach if the nodes were still to be understood simply as necessary angles of the primary concept of triangulation, and, therewith, always in the context of *public* meaning. However, Ramberg maintains, and I think rightly so, that Rorty's definition of final vocabularies is open to more radical readings, where the "final" gets in the way of the "centerless". How far can "the characteristic normative boundary of a specific subjectivity", as Ramberg calls it, be pushed in Rorty? Ramberg thinks the boundary can be pushed at least up to the point where the "final" in final vocabularies means potentially normatively (up to completely) distinct from other nodes. Then, the individual subject in a strong, community-detached sense would be back, freed from normative pressure outside themselves – a clear step back from "Davidson's revolution" as described above and more in line with the classical picture, where nodes are first and relations between them play a role only on a secondary level.

Ramberg fears that - to some - this might sound like opening the door to "arbitrary individualism" and leaving us with no possibility to supply norms with authority (2011: 45). Therefore, Ramberg strives for "a significant reinterpretation of Rorty's notion of a final vocabulary" (Ramberg 2011: 59). Parallel to dissolving the subjective as potentially normatively enclosed, Ramberg wants to dismiss the final-vocabulary-metaphor and draws on Gadamer and the hermeneutic tradition:

> "Heeding the hermeneutic emphasis on the generation of authority as a process in which the subject is engaged through a capacity for appropriate response rather than through (self) assertion, we recognize the individualistic conception of a final vocabulary as a distortion. […] A final vocabulary, then, is not final at all. Rather, it is the momentary shape of our rational responsiveness to the world and our dynamic ability to engage the world, and to be engaged by it, as thinking and thus ever changing agents." (Ramberg 2011: 59)

Ramberg intends to *use and change* Rorty's concept of redescription[4]. Ramberg thinks "That redescription alters the patterns of our engagement with the world we live in is hardly a controversial point. What may provoke is the subjectivist spin Rorty […] seems to put on it; it seems to suggest that we may simply tailor our descriptions to suit our preferences, apparently leaving us with no constraint on permissible desire but our own lack of inventiveness." (Ramberg 2011: 55) Ramberg then goes on to use Rortyan redescription "with the specific end in view of altering the terms we make use of in this

---

[4] "Redescription" is Rorty's word for meaning/theory-change: by describing something differently we change how we interact with it.

very process" (Ramberg 2011: 54). Ramberg's purpose is to allow for richer descriptions of subjectivity which are neither "purely mechanical (non-interest-guided) nor inherently propositional" (Ramberg 2011: 58) and which allow for a broader spectrum to describe ourselves and others on naturalist grounds. In Ramberg's proposal:

> "Final vocabularies […] are […] something we as thinking agents operate in and through. They are not objects of reflective awareness to be endorsed or rejected or explicitly compared one with another. *Reasoned modification* of final vocabularies happens not through choice, nor through analysis, but through the judicious, careful and tentative *application* of vocabularies, as something that we as thinking creatures *are engaged in and engaged by*, in new ways, or in places where we have not before been." (Ramberg 2011: 58f)

Put in the terms of this article, Ramberg argues for a translation of Rorty's rupture view into a vocabulary that stresses continuity with the larger normative realm. I think Ramberg is right in pointing to the theoretical possibility of (up to complete) normative detachment from the larger pattern in Rorty and that leaving space for this possibility is, at first glance, at odds with Rorty's overall Davidsonian picture as it has been described so far. What I intend to do in the rest of the paper is to supply a rationale that renders Rorty's seemingly incoherent point strategically necessary and theoretically possible within the Rortyan project.

2. Individual subjectivity as tool – a Rortyan response

In my opinion, Rorty's "individualistic conception of a final vocabulary" in CIS is not "a distortion" (Ramberg 2011: 59) but needs to be understood as a "strategically placed lever" (Rorty CIS: 176).[5] I think this can be stated when taking account of the different target audiences and topics of PMN and CIS (i.e. philosophers of mind and language for PMN vs. political theorists in the liberal tradition for CIS) and when insisting that the overall antirepresentational outlook of Rorty's idea of what language is necessarily comprises the language of his own books. This means that when language is understood not as neutrally describing but as actively guiding our interaction with the world, the language Rorty employs needs to be read as in the service of his agenda. Put differently, Rorty's individualistic conceptions of a "final vocabulary" and the figure of the "strong poet" in CIS served operative not descriptive goals insofar as it is possible to make a meaningful distinction between operationality and descriptiveness inside a Rortyan, antirepresentational picture of language (2.1). The subsequent sections spell out what this means with respect to Ramberg's and Rorty's agendas (2.2); show how temporality is the key to integrating the metaphors of "rupture" and "continuity" (2.3); insist on the

---

[5] Rorty uses this notion to characterize Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*.

motivational character of vocabularies of rupture in the western liberal societies which were the target audience of Rorty's CIS (2.4); and further strengthen the strategic utility and theoretic possibility of the vocabulary of rupture by reconsidering Rorty's endorsement of Davidson's anomalous monism in light of Ramberg's interpretation from 2000 (2.5).

2.1 Antirepresentationalism, the "vocabulary-vocabulary", and the purposes we serve

Brandom describes Rorty's picture of language very powerfully in his contribution to *Rorty and his critics* (2000) where he insists both on the radicality of Rorty's approach and on the problems that this radicality entails. In Brandom's narration, Carnap and Kant distinguished between meaning as a priori and beliefs as a posteriori; then Quine in *Two Dogmas* removed the distinction and insisted instead on a "continuous dimension" (Brandom 2000: 156), "For we simply do not see sharp differences between changes of meaning and changes of belief of the sort that model predicts." (Brandom 2000: 156) Rorty writes that "Quine's suggestion that the difference between a priori and empirical truth is merely that between the relatively difficult to give up and the relatively easy brings in its train the notion that there is no clear distinction to be drawn between questions of meaning and questions of fact." (Rorty 1982: 5) Famously, Rorty endorses this dismissal of the language-theory-distinction in the most radical way. However, how can we speak about language and theory having dismissed the distinction? According to Brandom, Rorty's metaphor of the "vocabulary" is a "suggestion for a successor notion" (2000: 157); a notion that encompasses both meaning and belief, language and theory, and where every change of meaning is always also a change of belief and the other way around (Brandom 2000: 157).[6] Helpfully, Brandom further suggests - and Rorty embraces this (Rorty 2000a) - distinguishing between what he calls "the vocabulary-vocabulary" and particular vocabularies. The "vocabulary-vocabulary" is the successor notion for the highest order language-theory-package; it "replaces meaningbelief talk" (Brandom 2000: 177), whereas particular vocabularies are the particular packages of meanings and beliefs that we use to make sense of our lives or certain practices.

Redescription, then, is the way to change vocabularies. How this change occurs is the point of controversy between Ramberg, Brandom, and Rorty that I am addressing in this paper: Ramberg and Brandom suggest we change vocabularies in passing – it "happens not through choice" (Ramberg 2011: 58), the "tribe" not particular "genius selves" are the motor of renovation (Brandom 2000) –, whereas Rorty wants to change them consciously, attributing the power to do so to every single one of us. Ramberg and Brandom stress the continuity of the process; Rorty insists on punctual ruptures.

---

[6] In Brandom's eyes, Quine (and Rorty) were "overdoing" (156) it because distinguishing between belief and meaning is something that Brandom still thinks is worth preserving. In the same train of thought, Brandom still famously insists on the concept of "representation", though in what he thinks to be a sanitized version of the term.

The point of this article is that, once we embrace Rorty's picture of language, the adequacy of descriptions is determined by the degree of compliance with what we want the description to do. The evaluation is intrinsically connected with our goals. This brings Rorty nearer to certain current strands in analytic philosophy which run under the heading of "conceptual engineering".[7] The term covers a multitude of divers projects, ranging from conceptual analysis in the Wiener Kreis tradition to projects of more constructivist flavor in conceptual revision, with the line between the two unclear.[8] Forerunners of the term "conceptual engineering" come from the pragmatist tradition (Blackburn 1999, Brandom 2001) but the more pronounced philosophical project in conceptual revision that is pertinent to the endeavor of this article is Sally Haslanger's ameliorative approach (e.g. 2012). In her famous paper "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" (2000) she shifts the philosophical task from asking "What is X?" to "What is the concept of X for?" The evaluative criteria for successful theories and concepts for social or political ameliorative projects are determined by the answers to the questions "What is the point of having this concept? What work do we want this concept to do for us? (Haslanger 2000: 33)

This is also the background against which Rorty's "strong poet" and his final-vocabulary metaphor should be evaluated. This is not to say that Rorty was a "conceptual engineer" in the sense the word now assumes. Rather, it is to say that, today, there is a strand in analytic philosophy that seems potentially more hospitable to Rorty's ideas than the field was in his own days.

For Haslanger, "theorizing is a practice that has goals or purposes. What counts as a reason within the practice depends on its rules and norms. The practice itself – its ends and what it employs as means – is also open to critique." (2016: 142) Without pushing the parallel too far, there is congruency between Haslanger's approach and Rorty's overall project when it comes to insisting on the pragmatist theme that theory and practice are inextricably entrenched. Rortyan redescription can be seen as a project of amelioration, though not the amelioration of "concepts", as in Haslanger's case, but more generally of our engagement with others and our environment via linguistic means.

A major difference between Haslanger and Rorty is that Haslanger, though she also embraces Quine's *Two Dogmas* paper in her introduction to *Resisting Reality* (2012: 13), ultimately remains - as she herself underlines (2012: 14) - inside a representationalist picture of language insofar as she divides between meaning and belief, language and theory, scheme and content. In contrast, Rorty's version of antirepresentationalism allows for a *strategic* distinction of degree between semantics and epistemology when it comes to defining the subject matter and core questions of certain disciplines, but no *clear-cut*-distinction of kind between language and theory, meaning and belief. Here, what Brandom termed Rorty's "vocabulary-vocabulary" kicks in and, on the first order level regarding

---

[7] Or "conceptual ethics", see e.g. Burgess&Plunkett 2013ab, Burgess et.al. 2020.
[8] See e.g. Dutilh Novaes 2020, also Haslanger 2016: 143 fn 7.

particular practical domains, "redescription", or what Rorty later calls "Cultural Politics", is the "only game in town" (Rorty 2007a: 8).[9]

2.2 Ramberg's agenda vs. Rorty's agenda

If the adequacy of descriptions is determined by the degree of compliance with what we want the descriptions to do for us, then the context of application and the aims pursued are of major importance. Therefore, what were Ramberg's and Rorty's agendas in their respective pieces?

Ramberg's agenda was (a) to supply an ampler notion of the subjective in order to not leave us with the threat of irrational individualism, and (b) to allow for a conceptualization of experiences which are of non-linguistic nature (2011). Ramberg's agenda is a Rortyan agenda insofar as Ramberg's aim is to enrich our vocabularies. Ramberg wanted to open new fields of application and experience to which we had been previously blind and numb (e.g. animal subjectivity) because the tools to even see or feel them were lacking.[10] Ramberg pursues this agenda by opening the normative borders of the subjective, which he individuated in Rorty's account in CIS, towards the outside by further dissolving the node in the web. Ramberg's critique of Rorty needs to be read against the goal of his article, which was to make space for the concept of animal agency. Insisting on *normative continuity* with the environment and other nodes, as well as dismissing Rorty's final-vocabulary metaphor, served Ramberg's goals.

This is much in line with an overall Rortyan approach but Rorty's *particular* aim in CIS was a different one. In CIS, Rorty did not want to make space for animals in the realm of agency. Rorty's self-declared agenda in CIS was to give "an improved self-description" "of liberal culture" (CIS: 52) and, in my opinion, Rorty thought that insisting on "no constraints" and radical "inventiveness" – the possibility to detach oneself from the normative pressure of the group – served exactly this agenda.

CIS, followed by *Achieving Our Country* (1998b), is commonly understood to be Rorty's "political theory" but one needs to be cautious with the term "theory" here. Rorty's "improved self-description" of liberalism (CIS: 52) is a *Rortyan re-description* - a move in Cultural Politics. Rorty is not representing; he is taking linguistic action. Therefore, his theory needs to be evaluated against the background of inner coherence *and* with respect to its presumed real-world impact. I assume that his plea for rupture is theoretically coherent (2.3) *and* politically motivated (2.4).

2.3 Taking temporality into account: The importance of continuity *and* rupture

Rorty starts CIS by recapping his antirepresentational and antifoundational positions of PMN which he declines for the purposes of CIS. To recapitulate Davidson, meaning is only ever temporarily

---

[9] On the transition from "redefinition" to "redescription" and "Cultural Politics" see Voparil 2011. On Rorty's varying use of the notion "Cultural Politics" see Wortmann 2022 (ms).

[10] See also Fricker 2007; see further Dieleman 2017 and Penelas 2019 on how to entrench Rorty with Fricker.

established in actual communicative practices with our fellow speakers (CIS 14-16). This is the key-point Ramberg stresses in his critique: we do not have all strings in our hands; we are also played by others and need to go with the game. Thus far, Rorty's view in CIS is in line with his views in PMN and elsewhere as outlined in 1. This is the continuity-view.

In short, the continuity-view stresses that meaning is constrained by public norms. Our utterances – in order to *be* utterances and not just noise (Rorty 1991) – need to make sense in their target discursive environment and this means that at least some of the norms of the discourse need to be met. As Brandom would put it, "Pacta sunt servanda" (Rorty 2000a). Transposed from meaning to selves, the continuity-view holds that the individual self has no center and no fixed boundaries towards the rest of the net. This is what Rorty spells out in much detail in the chapter on Freud (Chapter 2 of CIS). The I has many voices that speak inside herself: the self insofar as it *is* its vocabulary is polyphonic. No *clear* boundary can be set towards the outside, though one can stress different equilibria or what Dennett would call centers of narrative gravity. All of this is much in line with PMN.

The specificity of CIS is that this continuity view is complemented by the rupture-view, which Ramberg and Brandom criticize. As spelled out above, Rorty, though in large parts following the Davidsonian picture, *also* seems to make space for private languages: he insists (in the eyes of his critics too much) on the possibility to detach ourselves from the group; to have our *own* vocabulary. Instead of trying to mitigate this view, I think Rorty really *did* contemplate this possibility in the strong sense which has been the target of much polemic, with the restriction that, when spelled out in semantic terms, these at their moment of emergence private languages *count as* languages only once they have been taken up. What comes into being privately – detached from other nodes – can only be classified *as* language retrospectively once the vocabulary has spread over the system, that is to say once it has accomplished having more than one speaker. To put it succinctly, rupture needs continuity, *if* one wants to persist over time. For Rorty:

> "the difference between genius and fantasy is not the difference between impresses which lock on to something universal, some antecedent reality out there in the world or deep within the self, and those which do not. Rather, it is the difference between idiosyncrasies which just happen to catch on with other people - happen because of the contingencies of some historical situation, some particular need which a given community happens to have at a given time."
> (CIS 37)

Leaving aside the larger topic of antifoundationalism that Rorty is championing here,[11] what Rorty calls catching "on with other people" and their concerns semantically speaking means uptake. In the moment of emergence, the strong poet is no different from an idiosyncratic person or a fool. What

---

[11] Which is the target of much polemic, but for different reasons.

transforms the eccentric individual into a "strong poet", once retrospection is available, is having had impact and legacy.

> „[S]trength is thus the line between using language which is familiar and universal and producing language which, though initially unfamiliar and idiosyncratic, somehow makes tangible the blind impress all one's behavings bear. With luck - the sort of luck which makes the difference between genius and eccentricity - that language will also strike the next generation as inevitable. Their behavings will bear that impress" (CIS 29).

What the strong poet is for selves, metaphor is for language. Metaphors mark the moment of rupture and detachment from the rest of the normative universe that allows for radical novelty and which – to be perceived *as* novelty instead of as folly or nonsense – needs to find a way to reconnect with the language in place. Following Wittgenstein and Davidson, for Rorty "To have a meaning is to have a place in a language game. Metaphors, by definition, do not." (CIS 18).

> "But this is not to say that it may not, in time, *become* a truth-value candidate. If it *is* savored rather than spat out, the sentence may be repeated, caught up, bandied about. Then it will gradually require a habitual use, a familiar place in a language game. It will thereby have ceased to be a metaphor – or, if you like, it will have become what most sentences of our language are, a dead metaphor." (CIS 18).

As metaphors are, by definition, not determined by the normative realm they subsequently enter when dying, they are described in causal vocabulary. Metaphors are "producing effects" rather than "conveying a message" (CIS 18). Still, metaphors are conceivable only against a background of "normal", passing-theory rule-following languages which are bound by the process of triangulation as described in 1 and, therewith, ultimately and in retrospective, follow the primacy of the third-person stance:

> "The strong poet's fear of death as the fear of incompletion is a function of the fact that no project of describing the world or the past, no project of self-creation through imposition of one's own idiosyncratic metaphoric, can avoid being marginal and parasitic. Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are possible only against the background of other old words which are used in old familiar ways. A language which was 'all metaphor' would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble. For even if we agree that languages are not media of representation or expression, they will remain media of communication, tools for social interaction, ways of tying oneself up with other human beings." (CIS 41)

To not deliver "babble", to "tie" himself up with others, and to facilitate uptake, Rorty, in my opinion, decided to mainly speak the language of the group he was intending to contribute to. For CIS this was declaredly "liberal culture" (CIS 53), which operates with a strong notion of the individual subject. I will

address this point in the following section.[12] My point in this section is that Rorty, given his overall theoretical outset, could have gone both ways - speak rupture or continuity - when it comes to the normative determination of meaning and selves. Further, my point is that Rorty *did* go both ways, adapting his utterances to the different contexts he was talking in. He stressed continuity in PMN in contexts of semantics and epistemology and he stressed rupture in CIS in contexts of political theory. This can be brought in line with the Davidsonian picture. The third-person stance is primary when we are talking about meaning once it is temporarily established: there simply is no meaning without all three angles of the triangle. The view through the lens of "triangulation" is one of simultaneousness; triangulation provides a snapshot from outside time. However, it depends on which question one asks: if we want to look at *what meaning is*, in Davidson we *necessarily* need to take the third-person-first look. Every time we encounter meaning, triangulation has already happened. As an alternative, if we want to look at *how meaning gets established in time*, a version of radical interpretation which underwent the further demystifying purification of triangulation suits best: we do have angles which *act separately in time*, yet these angles are not to be understood as separate ontological givens but as nodes in a pattern, the positions of which are assigned through the very same process of meaning-determination. Here the first (and second)-person-view take precedence.[13]

On purely theoretic grounds, continuity and rupture do not contradict each other because rupture, when it does not embrace nonsense or social suicide, needs to find its way into continuity. In this sense, Ramberg and Brandom are right when insisting on the "tribe". We do not have all of the cards in our hands. We need others to change vocabularies. But one can shift the emphasis and ask what happens in the exact moment of emergence – who is proposing new meanings and shifts, and how important are these proposals or how important do we want them to be?

2.4 Individual subjectivity's motivational character and radical novelty

In my opinion, Rorty's insistence on rupture and individual subjectivity in CIS has to do with what I want to call, borrowing from Huw Price, the "motivational character" (Price: 185) of rupture and individuality in the western liberal contexts in which Rorty was writing. Price uses this strategy to make his case for the concept of "truth" by insisting on the functions it serves. He asks what the term enables us to do and how a world without the notion of "truth" would look. Price thinks that without the concept of truth people would not be *motivated* to embark on projects of investigation; they would

---

[12] This is not to negate the fact that Rorty also had an idiosyncratic preference for vocabularies of rupture. Rorty described himself as a romantic, not just for the antirepresentational and antiauthoritarian reasons he gives in many places (see e.g. 2007a, 2007b) but presumably also due to completely accidental, existential selective affinity (Rorty 1999).

[13] See e.g. Davidson 2001b, where he stresses that "speaking a language […] does not depend on two or more speakers speaking in the same way; it merely requires that each speaker intentionally make himself interpretable to the other" in an actual conversation (2001b: 115). See also Davidson 2001c.

not go the extra mile that drives research beyond the state of the art but remain satisfied with simply some opinion (Price).

I would like to ask in analogy how our current western, democratic, liberal societies would look once we dismiss the strong concept of individual agency. Is this really a workable option given our conceptual history and our current educational, political, and legal system? Would we be *motivated* to engage in political or any other creative practices? The anthropologist and cultural theorist Arjun Appadurai has recently noted that in our current post-enlightenment setting in the West, the individual seems to be the "invisible condition of possibility for all political, economic, and moral thought" (Appadurai: 102). What do we do with such a constatation?

Obviously, in a Rortyan setting, one could work to weaken this condition, to stress the deep existential, semantic, and socio-political entanglement of the self with others – to insist on continuity instead of on rupture and that is what many theorists in the continental tradition are currently doing.[14] However, there is another option available and this is the one, I believe, Rorty was choosing: given that we *already have* this strong notion of the individual and given that it performs exactly the important functions Appadurai states, why not put the concept to work for our purposes? As has been spelled out above, this proposal is not necessarily at odds with other proposals (e.g. that of Appadurai, or Ramberg or Brandom) but can be understood as a complementary enterprise; which vocabulary one employs depends on which purposes one wants to further.[15]

Rorty starts his chapter on the "The contingency of selfhood" in CIS by citing a poem by Philip Larkin wherein the lyrical I is expressing his "fear of dying, of extinction" (CIS 23). Rorty comments: "What he fears will be extinguished is his idiosyncratic lading list, his individual sense of what was possible and important. That is what made his I different from all the other I's. To lose that difference is, I take it, what any poet – any maker, anyone who hopes to create something new – fears." (CIS 23)

Rorty is making an existential point[16] which he is complementing with a semantic one:

> "[…] that fear blends into the fear that, even if they are preserved and noticed, nobody will find anything distinctive in them. The words (or shapes, or theorems, or models of physical nature) marshaled to one's command may seem merely stock items, rearranged in routine ways. One will not have impressed one's mark on the language but, rather, will have spent one's life shoving about already coined pieces. So one will not really have had an I at all. One's

---

[14] See e.g., Appadurai, Raunig, Stratherns, who are all trying, from different perspectives and with different aims in mind, to develop concepts of agency that are not predicated upon the in-dividual but upon the Deleuze-inspired dividual.

[15] E.g., Appadurai is trying to forge conceptual tools which allow for a new management of financial flows that distributes risks beyond the individual level; here the dividual seems apt. In contrast, Rorty is trying to raise democratic engagement and here the individual in a rather strong sense is better suited to do the job.

[16] For further brilliant investigations of the existential dimension of our vocabularies see, e.g. Penelas 2022 and Santelli 2020.

creations, and one's self, will just be better or worse instances of familiar types. This is what Harold Bloom calls "The strong poet's anxiety of influence his "horror of finding himself to be only a copy or a replica.'" "(CIS 24)

Rorty plays our Freudian urges: we may well describe ourselves as "centerless webs of beliefs and desires" (CIS 88), alias the continuity view, but:

> "We shall see the conscious need of the strong poet to *demonstrate* that he is not a copy or replica as merely a special form of an unconscious need everyone has: the need to come to terms with the blind impress which chance has given him, to make a self for himself by redescribing that impress in terms which are, if only marginally, his own." (CIS 43).

This need might well be the product of our upbringing in societies which underwent the contingent conceptual genealogy that gave us a strong notion of individual subjectivity and agency in the first place, but that does not make the urge any less pressing. It is rupture that makes us "distinctive" (CIS 24) and "different from all the other I's" (CIS 23). The strong poet yields to create her own final vocabulary which distinguishes her as a node. "Thus I willed it!" This is what the strong poet, echoing Nietzsche and Bloom, wants to proclaim (CIS 29ff).

For this maneuver to succeed, conscious choice, endorsement, and sometimes also closure – the finality of final vocabularies – are needed, which is exactly what Ramberg and Brandom criticize. For Ramberg:

> "Final vocabularies […] are […] something we as thinking agents operate in and through. They are not objects of reflective awareness to be endorsed or rejected or explicitly compared one with another." (Ramberg 2011: 34)

Similarly, for Brandom: "To use a vocabulary is to change it. This is what distinguishes vocabularies from other tools." (2000: 177) Novelty occurs in passing: "*Every* use of a vocabulary, every application of a concept in making a claim, *both* is answerable to norms implicit in communal practice […] *and* transforms those norms by its novelty" (179). As said above, this is compatible with Rorty's view. No self without the group; no meaning without public norms. In this regard, Rorty's concession to Brandom to let go of the "genius self" is a cheap one because it adds nothing to how Rorty had already described his own view in CIS when, for instance, framing Bloom's and Freud's positions as "needed corrective to Nietzsche's attempt to divinize the poet" (CIS 41), and when insisting, as I described above, that rupture needs to find its way back into continuity.

And still, Rorty wanted to shift emphasis and narrate change as starting with the *radically* novel intuition of a single individual, openly embracing incommensurability, which then, *if* it is taken up, engenders change. Ramberg and Brandom underline the second part; Rorty the first.

When played in the political register, the vocabulary of rupture offers us agency; it offers us the possibility to leave a trace, and this is appealing! Ramberg's fear in accounts of epistemology and

semantics is the fear of irrational, "arbitrary individualism" (2011: 45). Rorty's fear in the political context of the 1980s is the fear of lethargy and disinterest. The insistence on the first-person-stance and final vocabularies allow for a narration of *genuine* novelty and a strong concept of *individual* agency. In Rorty's version every single individual has the power to change the world – *if* she manages to forge an alliance. Otherwise, her noise will be canceled out of history. However, the focus is on the single, individual reader of CIS and on what she can do.

To forestall a potential criticism: this is not to say that Rorty was a cynic selling fictions, i.e. that he insisted on individual agency for instrumental reasons even though there is not any. This is not the case: first, because once we embrace antirepresentationalism of the Rortyan sort the real/fictional-distinction becomes secondary;[17] and second, because Rorty's move is not only of instrumental nature. As Brandom rightly states, for Rorty "vocabularies can do more than just help us get what we already want. They also make it possible to frame and formulate new ends." (Brandom 2000: 170) But how should understand the adjective "new" here? If we stress continuity, then "new" can never mean more than "variations on old themes" (Rorty 2000: 188). Is this what the word expresses, or what we want it to express? If "new" only means "old in new cloth", then a whole set of notions would drop out of our vocabulary including one of Rorty's favorites: "revolution".

To allow for a more radical meaning of "novelty", rupture with the normative realm is needed. Chris Voparil has stressed that Rorty was enthusiastic about the literary genre of the novel not only due to its role in sentimental education but also because the genre has the potential to put us in touch with *genuine* novelty (Voparil 2012). This is what, for Voparil, differentiates Rorty's and Nussbaum's take on literature: in Nussbaum, literature helps us to get in tune with the rational moral laws in place; in Rorty, literature can exceed the realm of the rational insofar as it can exceed what we have already made sense of. It is open to voices from beyond the current rational realm – this is the novel's ethical power (Voparil 2012). However, there is more to this than ethics: as seen above (2.3), for genuine novelty to emerge in semantics, the causal friction of metaphor – of something which is *not* already part of the normative realm – is needed.[18] This is the difference between revolution and reform, and to account for this difference – if we want there to be a difference (and Rorty wanted this) – we need to allow for the possibility of rupture and incommensurability, otherwise the revolutionary maneuver cannot be performed.

2.5 Philosophy's interest in the distinctiveness of vocabularies and their anomalous supervenience

[17] On how this is not in conflict with causal constraint and, therewith, not in conflict with the notion to "get things right" see Huetter-Almerigi 2020. Further, Rorty as a person deeply cared about these issues, as people who knew him relate (e.g. Richard Bernstein in a personal conversation in XX).
[18] For a proposal for rational conceptual change compatible with Rorty see Shields 2021.

Let me now make my point again from a slightly different perspective which also allows to describe how the vocabulary of rupture and the vocabulary of continuity are connected and illustrates why we need both. Take this as a different entry to the same rationale.

In 2000, in a different debate published in Brandom's aforementioned work, *Rorty and his critics*, Ramberg convinced Rorty to embrace a distinction which he had always previously negated by showing Rorty that he - in rejecting the distinction - was not Rortyan enough (Ramberg 2000, Rorty 2000b). The distinction Rorty embraced after his debate with Ramberg was the distinctiveness of the intentional vocabulary as spelled out by Davidson in his concept of anomalous monism (Davidson 1970) and as reinterpreted by Ramberg in 2000. The reason why Rorty finally overcame his fierce resistance and agreed was that Ramberg showed Rorty, among other things, that in Davidson the physical and the intentional vocabulary serve different needs, and that to insist on the distinctiveness (instead of mere difference) of the intentional vocabulary means "to preserve our sense of ourselves as creatures with purposes that are not exhausted by prediction and control." (Ramberg 2000: 368) In parallel, I want to state that Rorty's "final-vocabulary"-vocabulary – which I, enlarging the topic, have called the vocabulary of rupture – preserves *our sense of ourselves as creatures capable of shaping our own destiny*.

To briefly recap the background of the discussion in 2000, Rorty never accepted Quine's distinction between the underdetermination of theories and the (irreducible) indeterminacy of meaning because for him this meant that Quine took a step back from *Two Dogmas*. [19] Ramberg in 2000 makes a point in Davidson-exegesis when showing Rorty that Davidson's appropriation of Quine does not trade on Quine's ontological gap between the facts of the matter and the rest – the reason why Rorty always rejected Quine's distinction. The interpretation Ramberg gives of Davidson's version is "post-ontological" in this respect. Therefore, Ramberg mitigated Rorty's theoretical reservations. Further, Ramberg showed Rorty that Rorty's own conception of "the interest of philosophy" was too narrow because it induced in "him a general skepticism toward the very idea of philosophically interesting differences between vocabularies." (Ramberg 2000: 353) Ramberg insists that "it must be possible to criticize the idea that exploration of the possibility of conceptual or nomological reduction is a metaphysical tool, without having to claim that reductive efforts *cannot* be of philosophical interest. […] [T]he right thing to say about this question, it seems to me, is 'that just depends – show me the context and the stakes'." (Ramberg 2000: 365)

---

[19] "[C]riticizing Quine's claim that the indeterminacy of translation was different from the ordinary underdetermination of empirical theories, I argued that Quine had never given a satisfactory sense to the term 'fact of the matter', and that the contrast he invoked between the factual and the non-factual seemed to be the same contrast that he had been concerned to blur in the concluding paragraphs of 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'." (Rorty 1998a: 52)

For Ramberg there is a better version of the conception of "philosophical interest" available: Rorty's "vocabulary-vocabulary is itself a tool, a tool of philosophy, whereby we precisely reflect on the nature of our tools and the purpose they serve." (Ramberg 2000: 365) In certain contexts the screwdriver is better, in others the hammer. The same is true for vocabularies. If we want to predict the behavior of certain objects in nature, the physical vocabulary of scientific explanation, where strict laws apply, is apt. In contrast, the vocabulary of agency is distinct "not simply because we want to predict certain things (people as opposed to electrons), but also by virtue of features that are not merely predictive." (Ramberg 2000: 366)

Therefore, Ramberg insists that switching between explanatory vocabularies and the vocabulary of intentional attitude-ascription equals a "change of subject" (Ramberg 2000: 359). The vocabulary of agency has "unique features" (359) that allow us to speak about ourselves without presuming to ever find strict laws. Strict laws just are not the topic we address in intentional vocabulary. Therefore, the "unique features" of the vocabulary of agency have no correspondence in the physical vocabulary, nor can they be reduced to it. However, the vocabulary of agency supervenes on the physical vocabulary in this famous anomalous way where monism[20] does not equal reducibility of descriptions. This makes the vocabulary of agency distinct and not just different, and in this sense of irreducibility we need "to distinguish the interests that intentional-language vocabulary serves from those interests that vocabularies of scientific explanation serve." (Ramberg 2000: 366)

The same move can be made when it comes to Rorty's notions of the "final vocabulary" and the "strong poet": while acknowledging the primacy of the third-person-stance in contexts of theoretic semantics, the first-person-stance in its final-vocabulary-version has unique features that account for its distinctiveness. When Rorty switches from the vocabulary of continuity to the vocabulary of rupture we see a change of subject of the sort just described, and the unique features the vocabulary of rupture allows us to account for - when spelled out in terms of selves and meaning - are the importance of every single, *individual* voice *in its difference*. This might seem a minor point but, in my opinion, this is still a feature of major importance both for our self-understanding and the functioning of our current western, democratic societies.

Conclusion

In this article I have made a case for what I have called Rorty's *vocabulary of rupture*. I argued that Rorty thought that insisting on rupture, revolution, distinct selves and radical novelty furthered his cause of getting people involved in political practices and creative efforts more largely. Drawing on our

---

[20] Where ontology means nothing more than the realm of strict law in the Davidsonian sense: all mental states are physical states and physical states are what we determine to fall under strict law without presuming to ever find these strict laws once and for all (the physical supervenience base is non-reductive in this sense).

conceptual history and speaking from within and at the same time transforming our vocabulary in the West, he gave space to our urges to leave a trace and our need to believe that radical change is possible.

To sustain this claim, the temporal perspective is paramount: the attribute "novel" instead of "nonsensical" – words bearing this latter attribute at the moment of emergence are equally not part of the normative realm – can be given only ex post, once rupture has managed to enter continuity. This is why we need to forge an alliance with others and why the advocates of the continuity-view are *also* right. Temporal scaling provides a limit to the "subjectivist spin" in Rorty because if we want our utterances to persist, we cannot state whatever we please and we cannot use whatever words we want. We need to follow at least *some* of the norms in place[21] and be open to the responses of our fellow human beings. Nevertheless, as the integration into a continuum is not necessary for the moment of emergence – though it *is necessary in time* – one can always ask the Rorty-question: "'Why do you talk that way?'" (CIS 51) What does it achieve for you? And does it really further your cause? Should we really always insist on continuity or is there not also something about rupture that is worth saving?

As said above, Brandom rightly states that for Rorty "vocabularies can do more than just help us get what we already want. They also make it possible to frame and formulate new ends." (Brandom 2000: 170) But the question remains: *who* is doing this and *how new* are these ends, or how new do we want them to be? Rorty's answer would be: *radically* new and *every single one of us*. In order to narrate radical change, final vocabularies are needed to perform the revolutionary maneuver. There is no revolution in continuity but only reform. Therefore, the possibility of rupture and novelty is what accounts for the distinctiveness of the final-vocabulary-vocabulary and this is why philosophy should continue to have an interest in it.[22]

Cited works

- Appadurai, A. 2016: *Banking on words. The failure of language in the age of derivative finance*. Chicago/London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bacon, M. 2007: Richard Rorty: Pragmatism and Political Liberalism. Lexington Books.

---

[21] *How many* rules or conventions are needed is an interesting question: If one follows Davidson's take on Mrs. Malaprop - not too many (Davidson 2005).

[22] The continental tradition – e.g., Heidegger, Foucault, or Derrida – does not need to be convinced of the importance of rupture (see. e.g., Iyer 2014), though they use rupture for other purposes and (but this would need further investigation) are less flexible with respect to switching between continuity and rupture-talk. For a first assessment of the difference between Rorty and Derrida, see e.g., Staten, and for a response to Staten, Huetter 2015: 127-8.

- Bacon, M., & Dianda, A. 2021. Rorty's Political Philosophy. In D. Rondel (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Richard Rorty* Cambridge University Press.

- Blackburn, S. 1999: Think. A Compelling Introduction to Philosophy. Oxford University Press.

- Brandom, Robert B. 2000. "Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism." *Rorty and His Critics.* Robert B. Brandom (ed.), Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 156-182.

- Brandom, Robert 2001: Modality, Normativity, and Intentionality*. Philosophy and Phenomenological* Research Vol LXVIII, no. 3.

- Burgess, A., Plunkett D. 2013a: Coneptual Ethics I. Philosophy Compass 8 (12):1091–1101

- Burgess A., Plunkett D. 2013b: Conceptual Ethics II. Philosophy Compass 8 (12): 1102-1110

- Burgess, A., Cappelen H., Plunkett D. (ed.) 2020: Conceptual Engineering and Conceptual Ethics. Oxford University Press.

- Chin, C. 2018: Richard Rorty between Pragmatism and Continental Thought. Columbia University Press.

- Curtis, William M. 2015. *Defending Rorty. Pragmatism and Liberal Virtue*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press

- Davidson, D. 1970, Mental Events, reprinted in Id 1980/2000: Essays on Actions and Events. Oxford University Press

- Davidson, D. 2001a, Introduction. In: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Donald Davidson. Oxford, Clarendon Press. Xiii-xviii.

- Davidson, D. 2001b: The second person. In: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Donald Davidson. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 107-121.

- Davidson, D. 2001c, Three Varieties of Knowledge. In: *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. Donald Davidson. Oxford, Clarendon Press. 205-220.

- Davidson, Donald 2005: A nice derangement of Epitaphs. In: *Truth, Language, and History*. Oxford University Press: 89-107

- Dieleman, S. 2017, "Realism, Pragmatism and Critical Social Epistemology". In Susan Dieleman, David Rondel and Christopher Voparil (eds.) *Pragmatism and Justice* (129-143), New York: Oxford University Press.

- Dieleman, S. 2019: Class Politics and Cultural Politics. Pragmatism Today 10, 1, 23-36.

- Dutilh Novaes, C. (2020): Carnap meets Foucault: conceptual engineering and genealogical investigations, Inquiry, DOI: 10.1080/0020174X.2020.1860122

- Fraser, N., 1990, *Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty between Romanticism and Technocracy*, in: Malachowski, A. (ed.), 1990, *Reading Rorty, Critical Responses to* Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature *(and Beyond)*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 303-321

- Fricker, M. 2009: *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing*. Oxford University Press

- Hampe, M., 2006, *Erkenntnis und Praxis, Zur Philosophie des Pragmatismus*, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp.

- Haslanger, S. 2000. "Gender and Race: (What) Are They? (What) Do We Want Them to Be?" *Nous* 34 (1): 31–55.

- Haslanger, S. 2012. Resisting Reality. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Haslanger, S. 2016 "Theorizing with a Purpose: The Many Kinds of Sex". In: Kendig, C. (ed.): Natural Kinds and Classification in Scientific Practice. Routledge.

- Huetter, Y. 2015: Emancipation from Rationality – Richard Rorty's attempt to enlighten the enlightenment from the spirit of Romantic Hermeneutics. In: *Trópos. Journal of Hermeneutics and Philosophical Criticism* (ed. Gaetano Chiurazzi and Gianni Vattimo) VIII, No. 1, 2015: 111-131.

- Huetter-Almerigi, Y. 2020: Two forms of realism. *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* XI-2

- Huetter, Y. & Ramberg, B. 2022 forth, Analytic Philosophy of Language (Wittgenstein, Sellars, Quine, Kuhn, Davidson). In: Martin Müller (ed.): Richard Rorty Handbuch. Springer 2022

- Iyer, Arun 2014: *Towards an Epistemology of Ruptures: The Case of Heidegger and Foucault*, Bloomsbury

- Kremer, A. 2009: Richard Rorty's interpretation of selfhood. In: Kremer, A., Ryder, J. (eds): *Self and Society*. Rodopi: 191-199.

- Leypoldt, G., 2008, *Uses of Metaphor: Richard Rorty's Literary Criticism and the Poetics of World-Making*, "New Literary History", 39, n. 1, pp. 145-163.

- Llanera, T., 2016, "Redeeming Rorty's Private-Public Distinction," *Contemporary Pragmatism* 13, 3: 319-340

- Müller, M., 2014, *Private Romantik, öffentlicher Pragmatismus?: Richard Rortys transformative Neubeschreibung des Liberalismus*, Bielefeld, Transcript.

- Penelas, F. 2019, "Rorty on Hermeneutical Injustice, liberal Redescription, and Utopian Imagination". Endoxa (43), 313–334.

- Penelas F. 2022 (ms): The Importance of Words, Ironism, liberalism, and the Private/Public Distinction. To be published in Dieleman, S. , McClean, D., Showler, P.: The Ethics of Richard Rorty: Moral Communities, Self-transformation, and Imagination. Routledge.

- Price, H. (2010), "Truth as Convenient Friction," *in* Mario De Caro & David Macarthur (eds.), *Naturalism and Normativity*, New York, Columbia University Press, 229-52.

- Quine, Willard Van Orman. 1960. *Word and Object*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

- Ramberg, B. 2000, "Post-ontological Philosophy of Mind: Rorty versus Davidson" *Rorty and His Critics.* Robert B. Brandom (ed.), Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 351-370.

- Ramberg, B., 2011, *Turning to Hermeneutics: On Pragmatism's Struggle with Subjectivity*, in: Buschmeier, M., Hammer, E. (eds.), 2011, *Pragmatische Hermeneutik. Beiträge zu Richard Rortys Kulturpolitik. Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, Sonderheft 11. Berlin, Felix Meiner, pp. 43-59.

- Raunig, Gerald 2016. Dividuum. Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution. Semiotexte, MIT Press

- Rodeiro, M. 2018: Rorty's Private-Public Distinction as a pragmatic tool. CONTEMPORARY PRAGMATISM 15 (2018) 1-28

- Rorty. R., 1961, Recent Metaphilosophy, *Review of Metaphysics*, 15 (2): 299-318.

- Rorty, R., 1979, (PMN) *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature,* Princeton, Princeton University Press.

- Rorty, Richard. 1982. The World Well Lost. In *Consequences of Pragmatism. Essays: 1972-1980*, 1-18. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Rorty, R., 1989, (CIS) *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

- Rorty, Richard. 1991. Unfamiliar Noises. Hesse and Davidson on Metaphor. In *Objectivity, relativism, and truth. Philosophical Papers Vol. I*, 162-172. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rorty, R. 2007a: Cultural Politics and the question of the existence of God. In: Rorty, R: Philosophy and Cultural Politics. *Philosophical Papers Vol. IV*, 1-26. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rorty, R. 2007b: Pragmatism as romantic polytheism. In: : Rorty, R: Philosophy and Cultural Politics. *Philosophical Papers Vol. IV*, 27-41. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rorty, R. 2007c: Pragmatism and Romanticism. In: : Rorty, R: Philosophy and Cultural Politics. *Philosophical Papers Vol. IV*, 105-119. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Rorty, Richard. 1998a: Davidson between Tarski and Wittgenstein*. Crítica: Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, 30 (88): 49-71.

- Rorty, R. 1998b: Achieving our Country. Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America. Harvard University Press.

- Rorty, R. 1999: Trotzky and Wild Orchids. In: Rorty, R: Philosophy and Social Hope. Penguin Books. 3-20.

- Rorty, Richard 2000a. "Response to Brandom." *Rorty and His Critics.* Robert B. Brandom (ed.), Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 183-190

- Rorty, Richard 2000b. "Response to Ramberg." *Rorty and His Critics.* Robert B. Brandom (ed.), Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, pp. 370-377.

- Santelli, M. 2020: "Redescribing Final Vocabularies", *European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy* [Online], XII-1 | 2020, Online since 16 June 2020, connection on 03 January 2022. URL: http://journals.openedition.org/ejpap/1887; DOI: https://doi.org/10.4000/ejpap.1887

- Santarelli, M. 2022 (ms): Improving our Concepts, Reshaping Our Values. Pragmatism and Ameliorative Projects.

- Shields, Matthew 2021, Conceptual Change and Future Paths for Pragmatism. *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 59 (3): 405-434.

- SHUSTERMAN, R., 1992, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art*, London, Blackwell. 259.

- Staten, H., 1986, *Rorty's Circumvention of Derrida*, "Critical Inquiry", 12, n. 2, pp. 453-461.

- Strathern, Marylin 2020: *Relations: An Anthropological Account*. Duke University Press, Durham

- Voparil, C. 2006: *Richard Rorty: Politics and Vision.* 20th Century Political Thinkers Series. Langham, M.D.: Rowman and Littlefield Press, 2006.

- Voparil, C. 2011: "Rorty and Brandom: Pragmatism and the Ontological Priority of the Social." *Pragmatism Today,* vol. 2, no. 1 (2011): 133-143.

- Voparil, C. 2012: Rorty and the Democratic Power of the Novel," *Kritika & Kontext,* vol. 16, no. 44 (2012): 126-133.

- Wortmann, K. 2022 (ms): Philosophie als Kulturpolitik. To be published in: Martin Müller (ed.): Richard Rorty Handbuch. Springer 2022