

as if

(Radical Objectivism)

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Change lists so there are ; not ,

Abstract

The paper presents the notion that we discuss the world in a metaphor that works precisely because it prevents us from having any contact with that world. Therefore that world may only be assumed. It is to be talked of as if. If as we talk of it we wish to progress, we need, it is argued, means for establishing agreements and a belief that that allows us to act as if we shared understandings. If as we share understandings we come to believe that these understandings hold for us and need no (further) substantiation—substantiation that is not anyhow possible—we are acting as if there existed that world that our metaphor prevents us from accessing (whether or not it is there): that is, we are talking as if there are Objects. If as there are Objects, in this metaphor, we are talking radically about objectivism. It is as if there were Objects: radical objectivism. If as this metaphor we are talking in is as if, this paper is thus this metaphor, is as if.

Introduction: the Problem.

This paper is set against the background of the ascent into the new orthodoxy of constructivist philosophy (especially in its radical form) in Cybernetics¹. In this context, Cybernetics is seen, always, as being the Cybernetics of Cybernetics (or the new or second-order cybernetics) that has changed and validated the basis for Cybernetics as a mode of thinking that has flowed into the understandings of so many fields in the past 20 years.

(Radical) Constructivism is a philosophy that has many appealing characteristics. To me, the greatest are that it accepts individuality, freedom of action, and responsibility and the libertarian, anarchic, free, and non-mechanistic. It dignifies the human(e) and being human².

But it is ungainly, even unmanageable. Constructivism, through its reflexivity and its unwillingness to pay obeisance to the notion of an objective world, makes everything impossibly long-winded. We recognise this in ordinary experience, and we denote it when we use (and then forget) the phrase as if.

In the text that follows I attempt to find a way of accommodating the as if, of making a truly radical objectivism that may support constructivism, enriching it and adding further to its value.

I have not defined my terms. They change (as does the writing style) in the progress of the argument. The change is intentional³. Meanings are made by readers, not writers⁴.

Prelude

Before we make experience we are in the void, we are the void, there is no us. In making us, we destroy the void. The void is what we call that which is before us, that which we cannot know, that which is (for the us we are always becoming until we reach the unknowable) the unknowable. It is that from which we come, and that to which we may, eventually, return.

To be is to continue becoming. Through becoming, always, I am. But, through becoming, I distinguish myself into becoming, and thus from all else: you, and the distinguishing.

DISCOURSE

What we have is our experience

That is to say, we are as we feel and as we make sense of what we feel; and we are as we sense and as we make sense of what we sense: that to be is to experience and to experience is to be. To think is to experience. To dream is to experience. To explain is to experience. To say is to experience. Not the experience of, but experience. For each action, each particular of being, each distinction is experience and is experienced⁵.

To utter (this) is to assume much of what is to come. We utter to make sense of feeling and assume sensation and (and in) our senses. We utter to utter. We utter of meanings without communicating them. We must utter of that which is to come to utter what is not to utter that we can utter. We utter to explain utterance, but also to let it be. We utter to explain, for utterance is explanation and explanation is needed for utterance.

Experience of is not experience. To utter an explanation is an experience (of uttering), but is not an experience of that which is explained. When we utter an experience, it is without conjunction: with conjunction it is no longer experience, it is explanation. In these dualities and (paradoxically) co-existent meanings lies the subtlety.

We inhabit our experience, which is our reality

That within which we are, that we inhabit, is our experience. It is our experience as and how we construct (make) it, as we grow it^{6,7}. We are in our experience and our experience is us. We are that experience which we construct; hence we construct ourselves. We may call this our world, we may call it our reality. It is real to us, for it is all we are and all we have. That is why it is real for us (our world). That is how it is real for us.

Our reality is our construction

We construct our reality⁸. (Without us there is no our.)

Our reality is not given. Without us, we have no reality, for that reality is our experience and our experience requires our presence and our acting. Nor do we take our reality: there is nothing to take. We make—construct.

We recognise our experience through making it, and through making it as experience (making it experience) we experience. If we do not make experience of it, it is a phantom, it is not ours, it is not (of) us. Experience is not given nor is it taken, it is constructed: and

without constructing it, it is no experience and hence (in our terms, that is in terms of our experience) is not.

We construct experience by distinguishing it⁵. That makes it both distinct as its self, and distinct as (an) experience. (It appears, afterwards, to be around, but which cannot be around until it has distinguished—constructed—)

That is, our reality is ours and is not another's. Our reality requires us: our presence. We do the construction: it is of us and not of another. Hence, it is unique. It is ours and not another's. It requires us because we construct it.

Thus, our reality is our construction, and our reality is our construction.

To know we are, we construct (with) others

How can I believe I am, that I may construct? How did I become so that I can construct⁹?

To be is to continue to become to be¹⁰. To be is continuous, it is the construction and the construction again (and the construction of the identity that is the construction of the equality of the two constructions, the construction and the construction again).

I become into being. I am, continuing (to be). I become, continuing, to be.

But to know that I am requires more: to know, and that it is I that I know, it is not enough that I continue becoming: I need to become by contrast to what is not me (for otherwise the construction of the identity is only a construction of the continuity, a construction and (then) another construction: identity needs the possibility of difference: to be, to be something, requires the possibility of being not that something).

That is, to be me is to not be not-me and to not be the difference (that makes a difference)^{11,12} between (also not-me) me and not-me. That which distinguishes me does so by distinguishing itself from me and from what is not-me. It collapses its own logic.

To be me requires that that identity which is to be constructed might be not-me: it requires you—the not-me that makes its own identity. And it requires the means of differentiation that is also not-me (and/but is not-you). To make the difference (that makes a difference) I need me and you and that which makes the difference (here there is a triad¹⁰)—each a role, for each I take to be, to be distinct, and thus to have that-which-makes-the-difference and that-which-is-separate but might-be-me.

And yet to know that it is me requires not only that I construct me and you and the difference, but that you do so, too: me as a you to you, me as me to me, and me as an assumed me to you (an other, which cannot be experienced as a self)—as you assume I have a you that is you to me: a reciprocation that makes both you and me to each and both of us. For each of us as our own I.

It is this reciprocation that makes construction, by me and by you possible (by us).

We each observe differently

Our constructions, which, when we wish to seem to be looking outwards at what, we call our observations, are ours and only ours: each of us observes differently, cannot observe the same as any other. To observe is to be distinct, and to be present: there is no observation,

(there is no construction) without the constructor.

As each observer is separate, distinct, (mutually) constructed, each observation and each construction is separate, distinct, unique, and of the constructor. Because we are different and because we cannot avoid our presence in observing, in constructing, we must have different views^{9,13}.

We cannot remove ourselves from our observations and from the responsibilities they (come to) entail. We are alone. There is not a reality we can examine “out there” because there is no reality without me (so there is no objective reality), all realities are constructed (hence, inside), and we cannot approach whatever might be out there, or know of it, without being present and making it ours, within.

Our realities are ours.

Thus, to know ourselves is to know another is to communicate

To have you (that you are), to have me (that I am), is still not to know. For me to know me (to know that me) is to know another, and to know that the other knows me. To do this requires communication: you and I acknowledge each other and acknowledge both this acknowledgement and that each is acknowledging¹⁴.

What we utter is not what is

We take what is as experience.

We utter. Our utterances we take as referring—to that we wish to communicate. What we utter is not what is: there is the experience and there is the utterance, and there is the putting together of the two in a relationship we assume to indicate identity. (If we utter about other utterances, then these other utterances take the place of that which is—our experience— and the utterances about them are the utterances.) An utterance can be—perhaps must be—an experience. But it is experienced as an utterance in identity with that which is uttered (about). The explanation is not the experience, although the explanation can (must) be an experience, in and of itself.

What is uttered, while it is, is not that which is to be communicated: although uttering has being, its role as uttering is to transcend that being, to let it stand for another being^{15,16}. (The situation may be reversed so that the other being stands for it, when the other being becomes the utterance. This reciprocation and symmetry is essential¹⁴.) Thus, to re-present something is to present it: for to re-present something is to present it (again?)¹⁷.

We communicate by conversation

Communication is (through) a reciprocation. The reciprocation of being (I and you), the reciprocation of presentation.

There is another reciprocation, that of the conversation.

When I utter, I identify two experiences and use one to communicate the other to you—an other. Thus, one experience explains (describes, presents) the other. The identity is in and of my construction: relationship enters in my constructing.

What I utter to you, you construct in your own way. But to know you have done this requires

that you utter, in response. For the construction of the identity is mine, and not of the experience. Communication depends upon the ability of both to construct an (acceptable) identity. For me to know I have communicated requires that you utter your identity in return to me, and for me to construct for myself your identity, so that I make both your and my identity the same: that is, I identify the identity I first made with the identity I construct from the utterance (I believe) you made from the identity (I believe) you made in response to my original utterance of the identity. If I find I cannot make an identity of my utterance from your utterance returned to me with my (original) utterance, I have to utter anew until I have an utterance in response with which I can make such an identity. (This is the circular form of the negotiatory feedback of the conversation.)

This process of identification is the basis of semiotics¹⁵. The process of identifying the identifications is the basis of conversation^{18,19,20}. A conversation is a negotiation.

We cannot observe what is

My utterance consists in my identifying two constructions, two distinctions, two experiences, such that one may stand for the other. In doing this, it is possible for me to use the one to stand for the experience that I wish to communicate.

This does not mean I can ever observe what you observe, experience what you experience: these are ours (yours and mine) and cannot be either ___given or taken.

Nor can we observe an is without our constructing it as an is. There is no is without us to construct it as being.

A metaphor: it is **as if** we look at a screen on which there are shapes in silhouette dancing. We see the silhouettes and we believe there is something behind them that causes them to dance—some puppet (and puppeteer) and some light that casts the silhouette we see (This is the Wayang Theatre of Java). But we cannot (and must not) see behind the screen: and our vision is formed and made possible because of the screen. This is what we have invented, what we have constructed. Our way of looking, which makes communication possible, makes contact with the supposed puppet behind the supposed screen impossible. And, if we cannot look beyond the screen, we have no way to know what is there, whether there is anything at all, or even if there is a behind.

We cannot determine whether there is a reality “out there”

Our experience may never be taken to be of things. Our experience is constructed as we distinguish^{1,5}. When we distinguish, we may think of (or even call) that which we have distinguished a thing, give it a name (make an utterance that expresses an identity). Whether or not there are what we (popularly) refer to as things in the real world is beyond our competence, in this understanding. There is no is until we distinguish it, and whatever we may wish to utter as being is only our construction. To talk of an “out there” reality is to exceed the scope of our competence. We cannot determine it: that is, we cannot claim it exists or that it does not, and it should not concern us¹⁶. We have a reality, if we want, in our experience¹, but we have no recourse to an external and objective existence, free from our

involvement. That objective world we have traded in is figment and fallacy.

But that such things have a semblance we deny at our peril, even if to discuss is beyond the scope of this paper.

We communicate in conversations

We believe that we can communicate with and can understand each other. We believe that we don't always need to take so long, to negotiate all that we wish to discuss. The convolutions of the conversation's negotiatory feedback are not always or even often needed. In practice, we (believe we) do communicate, and communicate quite well. We do this by directing the feedback so that we reduce errors, rather than by just randomly trying again. To direct the feedback, we must talk of understandings **as if** they were shared.

We make meanings

What I propose you construct in your own way. You make your meaning. To ask whether your meaning and mine are the same is pointless, without meaning. There is no way to compare meanings because they can only be examined through the utterances from which we generate them (and not in themselves), because they only exist in the context of our making, and because each meaning is made privately by, for, within each of us.

Meanings are never open to examination^{4,15}. To attempt to examine them is to misunderstand them^{1,4}.

We share

Yet there are times when we believe we do share, and such is the appearance that we can forget how we construct and utter, and believe there is a reality "out there". Such times as when we consider that we recognise the same value, for instance in judging art. There are many explanations for this, many constructions. But these do not affect the feelings. And we do, no matter how improperly, treat such recognition **as if** it were of some thing (eg, a quality). We talk of sharing this thing. We talk **as if**.

A conversation is not enough

When we think of the conversation, we talk of conversation about. About indicates that there is an agreed stratum on which the conversation develops conversation is not enough²¹.

We utter as if of things

There is a wish and a tendency to treat the word as the concept (its meaning), to identify utterance with experience: to treat utterance **as if** it were experience. Utterance can be experienced, but it is not experience, or, at least, it is not the experience that is being uttered about. When the utterance is the experience, it is no longer the utterance in question, used as the experience. (There is another triad here: the two identifieds and the identifying.)

We seem to have a sense of reality—a common experience. This experience is not to be denied. An explanation of it is not central, here. But, as a note, that reality is what we experience and how we feel in that experience, right now: reality is our awareness of the instant. Reality is what we are (honestly) feeling, now, -this -instant. A therapist's reality!

We talk **as if**: **as if** the utterance were the experience. It is not. But it is convenient to treat it **as if**. Thus we utter **as if** of things.

There is a wish and a tendency to treat the (constructed) experience **as if** shared. It is not, in the strictest sense, shared. What we may take as an isomorphism is created by each participant, accepted as adequate, and distinguished as experience. We then claim that the experiences are the same, although they cannot be. We talk **as if**.

Our reality is our construction

We face a difficulty with our constructing, a difficulty that is found in common expression. The difficulty is that of the metaphor of the Wayang Theatre. We have a screen, but the screen is only a screen and the silhouette only a silhouette when we assume the puppets and lights (and puppeteer), and the behind. And we do assume them, to make our metaphor(s) work, and to assist us in working more pragmatically and more effectively.

We describe a world of **as if**: and we forget that it is **as if**, and contrarily treat it as is.

But we need (and we appreciate) the **as if**. And so we need to add to our construction of how we construct, so that we postulate such entities: entities that explain and let be, without confounding the constructive world, that permit, in their invention, that we can believe **as if** they exist as common reference points which yet can support the difference in view that we all have—not just as a matter of the choice of a form of description, but structurally, as a matter of the necessity of their functioning, reflecting our presence in their functioning, just as we are needed to (and cannot escape from) construct(ing) our realities.

Such entities have been designed and formulated. They are called Objects^{9,14,22}. This is not the place to do more than introduce them and to assert that they answer these requirements.

Acceptance of them is the acceptance of a radical objectivism: an objectivism that is fuelled by the **as if**, which supports construction and constructivism, but which marries with our common experience and with the pragmatics of convenience. It may be indicated as objective in the sense that it is made of Objects, and it is radical in the sense that the Objects (and the objectiveness) are constructive and have history on their side.

Final Words

In becoming simpler, clearer in English towards the end, I hope the process of the creation of an **as if** world of radical Objects, the construction of a radical objectivism, is paralleled in the benefits that accrue from its construction.

I don't personally mind about the nature of the world, the direction (or directions) of its projection, its object and (its objects), whether it is real or ideal.

I care that I (we) can communicate, that I can believe I am and that I am distinct (or unique). And, in fact, I need to communicate to be able to believe that.

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