Nothing to Say but the Unsayable:
How Locke's Linguistic Functionalism Turned into Leopardi's Analogical Language

Abstract: This article explores the so-far-uncharted filiation of Leopardi's understanding of language from Locke's linguistic theory outlined in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In following Kristeva's belief that language theories are predicated upon theories of the subject and Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the communicative power of the body, the article looks at the reverberations that Leopardi's *teoria del piacere* (understood as an anthropological system) exerts on his theory of language and builds a neck-to-neck comparison with Locke's linguistic functionalism. In underlining Locke's important role for Leopardi's theory of language, this work shows how the latter distances himself from the functionalism of *An Essay* by theorizing a language built on semantic vagueness and indefiniteness. This language is based on the epistemological conviction that ideas do not exist as immaterial products of the mind but rather are always incarnate in the physicality of language. In defining this kind of language as analogical, the article argues that for Leopardi the linguistic act takes the shape of a bodily gesture: language, then, is not just the concrete translation of a mental process, but the movement of an embodied mind. In this sense, rather than expressing the mathematical coincidence of signifier and signified of a *langue des calculs*, Leopardi's language voices the leftovers of expression, the semantic excess that Locke's functionalism generally considers to be an error of an unsuccessful communicative act.

Keywords: Giacomo Leopardi, John Locke, *langue des calculs*, theory of pleasure, analogy

1. If it is true, as Kristeva maintains, that "every language theory is predicated upon a conception of the subject that it explicitly posits, implies, or tries to deny," (Kristeva 124)[1] one might also say that every conception of the subject surfaces linguistically and is articulated through waves that strike the body and its circumstantial perceptual field. Insofar as Giacomo Leopardi's *teoria del piacere*[2] has been read as a relatively stable anthropological system,[3] the conception of the subject it encapsulates is radically germane to the linguistic theory that the author never ceases to elaborate throughout his production. In this sense, how does a subject defined by a desire for pleasure inhabit the world? How does he gesture at things through language? As Gensini remarks, Leopardi's interest in language does not simply have aesthetic roots, but it represents a concern of philosophical nature because it ties "in un unico nesso la natura antropologica dell'uomo, la sua vita sociale, il concetto stesso di nazione" ("Leopardi filosofo" 182; in a single link the anthropological nature of man, his social life, the very concept of nation). It is the same Gensini that poignantly underlines the fundamental role of Locke for the constitution of Leopardi's linguistic thought: "l'autore che più sembra aver contribuito a formare l'orizzonte della linguistica teorica leopardiana è John Locke, studiato nel compendio del Winnie, tradotto e commentato dal padre Francesco Soave. Ma dire Soave, è ricollegare la riflessione leopardiana al recente movimento culturale degli *idéologues* che […] aveva trovato in Italia una rapida accoglienza e, nel citato studioso gesuita, un attento mediatore e divulgatore" (*Linguistica Leopardiana* 28; the author who most seems to have contributed to forming the horizon of Leopardian theoretical linguistics is John Locke, studied in Winnie's compendium, translated and commented by the father Francesco Soave. But to say Soave, is to reconnect Leopardi's reflection to the recent cultural movement of the *Idéologues* that [...] had found in Italy a rapid acceptance and, in the aforementioned Jesuit scholar, a careful mediator and popularizer). Here, the literary critic briefly mentions Locke just to redirect his analysis to the work of French intellectuals via Soave's mediation.[4] However, the relationship of influence between Leopardi and Soave is far from being linear. Suffice it to recall the critique that Leopardi expresses with regard to Soave's formulation of a *lingua caratteristica*, a hypothesis clearly inspired by Condillac's mathematicised understanding of language. Leopardi's objection to a generally understood *langue des calculs* hinges precisely on the role

of imagination and, more significantly, on his (anthropological) theory of pleasure.[5] And yet, Gensini's correctly highlights the dependence of Leopardi on Locke with regard to the crucial nature, role and function of language.[6] Such filiation, however, is not exempt from a rebellious originality on the part of Leopardi: indeed, while for Locke the affection of the mind and ideas are expressed through language only when the subject means to communicate the immaterial and hidden ideas that exist "all within his own Breast" (Locke 405),[7] for Leopardi's philosophical and aesthetic posture "tutto è materiale nella nostra mente e facoltà. L'intelletto non potrebbe niente senza la favella, perchè la parola è quasi il corpo dell'idea la più astratta" (*Zib*., 1657.1; "Everything in our minds and faculties is material. The intellect could nothing without speech, because the word is almost the body of the most abstract idea"). In this context, then, the independent existence of Locke's ideas rediscovers, through Leopardi's radical materialism, an ultimate dependence on the necessary physicality of language. The analysis of Leopardi's original linguistic posture developed in this article, then, will have to take Locke's linguistic theory into account. In this respect, after analyzing Locke's theoretical conviction about language as articulated in Book III of *An Essay*, I will address Leopardi's position in a threefold manner: by emphasizing desire as core anthropological concept of *teoria del piacere* and looking at the linguistic repercussions of such a theory; by analyzing how the human subject emerging from *teoria del piacere* expresses itself by means of the pluridiscursive tool of *parole*; and by consequently delineating the analogical language[8] that is inhabited by such a subject and that stands as corrective contrast to Locke's treatment of language.

2. In *Linguistica Leopardiana,* Gensini puts his finger on the essentially anthropological foundation of Leopardi's linguistic theory in order to emphasize the author's original position within the contemporary Italian milieu. While the overly determining *questione della lingua* dominated the general orientation of linguistic assessments, Leopardi confers a broader European breadth to his analysis and inscribes it within a "storia filosofica del genere umano" (Gensini, *Linguistica Leopardiana* 41; philosophical history of mankind). As Gensini observes, the tight relationship that Leopardi establishes between society, language and culture represents his original contribution to the canonical analyses on language featuring in Italy at that time. Indeed, even in those cases "in cui era riuscita ad ampliare l'orizzonte [the Italian linguistic discourse] aveva tuttavia mostrato una irresistibile tendenza a circoscrivere la portata di tale innovazione, riducendo il discorso a un problema di cauta riforma del linguaggio scritto letterario" (Gensini, *Linguistica Leopardiana* 41; in which it managed to broaden the horizon the Italian linguistic discourse had nevertheless shown an irresistible tendency to limit the scope of this innovation, reducing the discourse to a problem of cautious reform of literary written language). Even if the scope of Leopardi's linguistic reflections might recall some of the arguments brought to the forth by the *Idéologues*,[9] his attention is not focused on the "metafisici interrogativi sulla nascita del linguaggio nella primitiva società umana, e non è dato di reperire […] echi del vario dibattito che, apertosi per merito di Condillac nell'*Essai*, aveva suscitato l'appassionata replica di Rousseau, e quindi […] aveva trovato una intelligente soluzione nel saggio di Herder *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*" (Gensini, *Linguistica Leopardiana* 41; metaphysical questions about the birth of language in primitive human society, and it is not possible to find [...] echoes of the debate that, started by Condillac in the *Essai*, had aroused the passionate reply of Rousseau, and then [...] had found an intelligent solution in Herder's essay *Über den Ursprung der Sprache*). While Gensini relapses into looking at contemporary French and Italian intellectuals to display Leopardi's innovations, I believe that the fresh character of Leopardi's philosophical approach to language lies precisely in the disassociation from the speculations of metaphysical sort dear to the *Idéologues*. Such epistemological position allows Leopardi to situate the linguistic issue at the intersection between anthropology, aesthetics, and a philosophical attitude that is rooted in a materialism certainly spawned from European Sensationalism but, more specifically,

drawn from his knowledge and radicalization of Locke's empiricism. It is necessary, then, to turn the attention to Locke's linguistic theory.[10] However, rather than inserting myself into the debate as to whether Locke's view of linguistic signification represents a theory of meaning or a differently characterized semantic systematization,[11] the reflections of *An Essay* will function here as a source material and litmus paper for the investigation of Leopardi's unique theory of language.

As Ott observes, Locke's work on the nature and function of language does not represent a merely abstract speculation and or a "disinterested inquiry" (2). Indeed, the paragraph that closes the book dedicated to the exploration of ideas (Book II) addresses the necessity of what Losonsky identifies with a linguistic turn:[12] "Upon a nearer approach, I find, that there is so close a connexion between *Ideas* and Words, and our abstract *Ideas*, and general words, have so constant a relation one to another, that it is impossible to speak clearly and distinctly of our Knowledge [to which Locke will devote Book IV], without considering, first, the Nature, Use, and Signification of Language" (Locke 401).[13] The postponement of the writing of Book IV, then, exhibits the unavoidable epistemological role that language plays within a study on the ways humans acquire knowledge of reality and themselves. The assumptive premise to the analysis carried on in Book III is that language is given to humans as complementary to and strengthening of their natural inclination toward forming social environments. However, the biological predisposition that allows to articulate sounds does not represents a specific human character; Locke, indeed, remarks the necessary ability "*to use these Sounds, as Signs of Internal Conceptions*; and make them stand as marks for the *Ideas* within his own Mind, whereby they might be made known to others, and the Thoughts of Men's Mind be conveyed from one to another" (402). In arguing against those theories that identified a natural relation between language and reality, Locke maintains that the primary meaning of linguistic signs strictly coincides with the ideas that form in the mind of the user: "*Words in their primary or immediate Signification, stand for nothing, but the* Ideas *in the Mind of him that uses them*" (405). Such a direct connection, however, does not sufficiently insures the radical communicative character of language: insofar as reality is composed by particular and unrelated – though naturally assimilable – existences, the attribution of a particular word to each one of the particular ideas engendered by particular existences in particular silent minds could potentially hamper the communicative exchange. In this regard, Locke underlines the essential role of the abstracting power of language: "Language had yet a farther improvement in the use of general Terms, whereby one word was made to mark a multitude of particular existences" (402). Set up with this premise and conceiving of language as "subservient to Instruction and Knowledge" (Locke 404), Locke organizes Book III on two main trajectories, exploring, on the one hand, the immediate meaning of words and, on the other, the species of things for which general names stand. These trajectories eventually lead Locke to a critique of language and its imperfections, along with the regulatory formulation of possible remedies. As Ott observes, Locke's "philosophy of language has a normative force: he wishes to explore not only *how* language is used but also how it *should* be used" (2).

As scholars have emphasized, Locke attributes language a recording and communicative function, the latter taking functional precedency over the former:[14] language is the means by which humans undergo some form of exchange, one that could be quantifiable and practical (a "Profit") (Locke 404) or not (when the product is "Delight") (Locke 405). Within such communicative economy, the sensible marks that constitute language turn the private and hidden dimension of "invisible *Ideas*" (Locke 405) into a content that can be consumed by the public. The public divulgation of the mind's private understanding, however, comes with a caveat: convention. According to Locke, the linguistic external signs are directly assigned to ideas – and only indirectly to real existences – by a "voluntary Imposition, whereby such a Word is made arbitrarily the Mark of such an *Idea*" (405). In representing a prerequisite for linguistic communication, the conventional character of language emphasized by Locke signals the presence of an artificial dimension of procedural sharedness within

the linguistic exchange. As Ott remarks, "to say that words are conventional signs is just to say that the signification relation in their case is dependent upon their role in an artificial, shared convention rather than in a natural relation" (25). The artificiality of the shared linguistic dominion, in turn, is contingent on the norms of habit and common usage that always precede the speaker (the speaker is always born into and surrounded by a world that is already worded). As Locke will more precisely repeat in Book IV, "Words, by their immediate Operation on us, cause no other *Ideas*, but of their natural Sounds: and 'tis by the Custom of using them for Signs, that they excite, and revive in our Minds latent *Ideas*; but yet only such *Ideas*, as were there before. For Words seen or heard, re-call to our Thoughts those *Ideas* only, which to us they have been wont to be Signs of: But cannot introduce any perfectly new and formerly unknown simple *Idea*" (689). The conventional and normative character of language, then, is directly connected to its cognitive basis for

> words being voluntary Signs, they cannot be voluntary Signs imposed by him on Things he knows not. That would be to make them Signs of nothing, Sounds without Signification. A Man cannot make his Words the Signs either of Qualities in Things or of Conceptions in the Mind of another, whereof he has none in his own. Till he has some *Ideas* of his own, he cannot suppose them to correspond with the Conceptions of another Man; nor can he use any Signs for them: For thus they would be the Signs of the knows not what, which is Truth to be Signs of nothing. (Locke 406)

The direct, univocal, and personalized relationship that words entertain with ideas discloses also a kind of democratizing character of language: in this respect, "the Knowing, and the Ignorant; the Learned, and the Unlearned" (Locke 406) use language in a like manner, that is by always representing the ideas that exist in their mind by means of attaching linguistic signs to them. According to Locke, the misapprehension of this dynamic leads to two main mistakes: the conjecture that the ideas in the mind of the speaker are the same of those in the mind of the hearer, and the supposition that words stand for realities, for factual things in the external world. To be sure, the epistemological blunder is caused by the "long and familiar use" (Locke 408), which "by a tacit [I read it here to signify 'unreflective'] Consent, appropriates certain Sounds to certain *Ideas*" (Locke 408.), in this way engendering the misconception of a natural connection between language and reality, as well as the illusion of a shared character of ideas. The whole book is then devoted to arguing for a theory of language that, implicitly and explicitly, corrects the aforementioned misconceptions. By differentiating between nominal and real essences, Locke maps out the degree of knowability of both and, in following the arrangement used in Book II, he explores the relationship between language and different kinds of ideas. Within this context, human understanding is endowed with the great responsibility to organize an itemized reality, which remains linguistically unreachable in itself, and to affix upon it relations that naturally do not exist among particulars. In this regard, Losonsky offers a phenomenological reading of Locke and maintains that "it is Locke's fundamental view that our access to nature apart from us is indirect, mediated by our ideas […]. If we take this view seriously, then what our mind encounters primarily and immediately are phenomena. I do not perceive the sun itself, but the sun-as-I-experience-it […]. So when I use language to refer to what I experience, I refer to phenomena" (311). What might sound like a compelling phenomenological approach *ante litteram*, however, is re-inscribed by Locke himself within a practical linguistic functionalism in the last three chapters of Book III. Indeed, it is when *An Essay* addresses the structural imperfections of language and common linguistic abuses, as well as the remedies proposed to amend such misuses and defects, that Locke's normative attitude and radical communicative perspective emerge with more evidence. In emphasizing the importance of exactness for the primarily communicative function of language (cf. Locke 476), Locke corrects the communicative economy outlined at the outset of the book and denies delight – and consequently

imagination – any relevant and constructive role within the linguistic exchange. Furthermore, inasmuch as the theoretical assemble of delight and uneasiness represents the motive for any human action in Book II, the exclusion of pleasure from any discourse on language seems to result into the attribution of an indeterminate state to the linguistic act, making it partly belonging to and partly banned from human intentional activity. In this regard, Locke writes:

> Since Wit and Fancy finds easier entertainment in the World, than dry Truth and real Knowledge, *figurative Speeches*, and allusion in Language, will hardly be admitted, as *an* imperfection or *abuse* of it. I confess, in Discourses, where we seek rather Pleasure and Delight, than Information and Improvement, such Ornaments as are borrowed from them, can scarce pass for Faults. But yet, if we would speak of Things as they are, we must allow, that all the Art of Rhetorick, besides Order and Clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of Words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *Ideas*, move the Passions, and thereby mislead the Judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheat; […] and where Truth and Knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, ether of the Language or Person that makes use of them. (Locke 508)

3. Now, these last remarks represent precisely one of the most significant points of contrast between Leopardi and Locke's theories of language. As already mentioned, here I analyze their divergent positions by focusing, firstly, on the fundamental role of *teoria del piacere* as a theoretical tool that, in shaping Leopardi's conception of the subjects, subtracts the linguistic phenomenon from Locke's communicative functionalism. Even if communication remains a part of the linguistic act, the main articulation of language for Leopardi lies in the expression of the dyscrasia (cf. Folin 106) between desire and infinite pleasure or, put in other words, the verification of the expressibility of desire. Secondly, I address the declensions of such expressibility by looking at the distinction that Leopardi draws between *termini* and *parole*. While in *An Essay* words appear to coincide with subsidiary and inert linguistic units, whose imperfection is rooted in the ideas they should stand for rather than on an actual faultiness of language,[15] Leopardi repositions the physical materiality of the word at the center of the linguist act. Lastly, I argue that the language that develops from Leopardi's theoretical speculations is one that I define analogical, constituted by metaphorical tensions: a language of excess. In a way, Leopardi's linguistic theory shows that "beneath the conceptual signification of words, [there is] an existential signification that is not simply translated by them, but that inhabits them and is inseparable from them" (Merleau-Ponty 188). Methodologically, I look at these three aspects in an orderly manner, although cognizant of the fact that, as it often happens with *Zibaldone*, remarks on *teoria del piacere*, the distinction between *termini* and *parole*, the physicality of the linguistic act and of its elements, as well as the kind of language that emerges from these speculations generally intersect, often simultaneously find their place on the same page.

As it has been observed, *teoria del piacere* represents Leopardi's most homogenous theoretical elaboration, a philosophical background on which his entire poetics would hinge. Indeed, "seppure precocemente elaborata, questa teoria non verrà mai smentita o accantonata da Leopardi, che tenderà piuttosto ad approfondirla, a radicalizzarla, fino a trarne le implicazioni più estreme e apparentemente contraddittorie" (Aloisi 15; although precociously elaborated, this theory will never be denied or set aside by Leopardi, who will rather tend to deepen it, to radicalize it, to draw the most extreme and apparently contradictory implications from it). The very pages that contain an early formulation (i.e. *Zibaldone* 165-183) witness precisely to the array of implications that Leopardi attaches to such a theory and exhibit his awareness in relation to the intersectionality that defines a discourse on pleasure and desire in the nineteenth century.[16] Indeed, *teoria del piacere* could be seen as Leopardi's point of

departure for reflections that often trespass into domains pertaining to different epistemological fields, such as aesthetics, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, morality, metaphysics, anatomy, and music. With these implications in mind, Leopardi begins his theory in 1820 by writing:

> Il sentimento della nullità di tutte le cose, la insufficienza di tutti i piaceri a riempierci l'animo, e la tendenza nostra verso un infinito che non comprendiamo, forse proviene da una cagione semplicissima, e più materiale che spirituale. L'anima umana (e così tutti gli esseri viventi) desidera sempre essenzialmente, e mira unicamente, benchè sotto mille aspetti, al piacere, ossia alla felicità, che […] è tutt'uno col piacere. Questo desiderio e questa tendenza non ha limiti, perch'è ingenita o congenita coll'esistenza, e perciò non può aver fine in questo o quel piacere che non può essere infinito, ma solamente termina colla vita. E non ha limiti 1. nè per durata, 2. nè per estensione. […] Il detto desiderio del piacere non ha limiti per durata, perchè […] non finisce se non coll'esistenza, e quindi l'uomo non esisterebbe se non provasse questo desiderio. Non ha limiti per estensione perch'è sostanziale in noi, non come desiderio di uno o più piaceri, ma come desiderio *del* piacere. Ora una tal natura porta con se materialmente l'infinità, perchè ogni piacere è circoscritto, ma non il piacere la cui estensione è indeterminata, e l'anima amando sostanzialmente *il* piacere, abbraccia tutta l'estensione immaginabile di questo sentimento, senza poterla neppur concepire, perchè non si può formare idea chiara di una cosa ch'ella desidera illimitata (*Zib*., 165; "The sense of the nothingness of all things, the inadequacy of each and every pleasure to fill our spirit, and our tendency toward an infinite that we do not understand comes perhaps from a very simple cause, one that is more material than spiritual. The human soul (and likewise all living beings) always essentially desires, and focuses only (though in many different forms), on pleasure, or happiness, which […] is the same thing. This desire and this tendency has no limits, because it is […] born along with existence itself, and so cannot reach its end in this or that pleasure, which cannot be infinite but will end only when life ends. And it has no limits (1) either in duration (2) or in extent. […] The desire for pleasure has no limits of duration, because […] it ends only with existence, and so human beings would not exist of they did not feel this desire. It has no limits of extent because it belongs to the substance of ourselves, not as the desire for one or more pleasures but as the desire *for* pleasure. Now, such a nature carries infinity materially within it, for every single pleasure is circumscribed, but pleasure itself, whose extent is indeterminate, and the soul, which loves *pleasure* substantially, embraces the whole imaginable extent of this feeling, without being able even to conceive of its extent, because it is not possible to form a clear idea of something desired without limits.").

This first page of *teoria del piacere* already contains the theoretical kernel of Leopardi's understanding of the relationship between desire and pleasure. The sensation of dissatisfaction is caused by the presence of an essential tendency that structurally defines the human condition (as well as every living being): an unlimited desire that, in spite of resting on particular pleasures, unconditionally yearns for *the* pleasure that coincides with happiness. The presence of this fundamental desire, moreover, is not only understood as the causal prerequisite that induces human beings to experiencing dissatisfaction; it also explains why the human is defined by a natural protention toward that infinite that is crucially characterized by a high degree of unknowability. In these first pages, then, Leopardi already establishes infinity as a central ingredient of both the innate tendency

that defines human existence and the experience that is meant to represent the content of such an experience. Additionally, the limitlessness of desire cannot be mistaken for a spiritual dimension; rather, it is the very material rootedness of desire that entails infinity. The infinity of desire is so drastically ingrained into the fabric of human experience that it comes to coincide with the very duration and extension of existence: not only can desire not be considered as a faculty learned after coming into existence, but it represents the foundations of existence itself for it "nasce e muore con il vivente" (Prete 1998, 89; is born and dies with the living). Desire's material infinity, furthermore, cannot be pared to a product of a mathematical procedure, on account that the infinite pleasure that one seeks after – i.e. the content of desire – is not a mere result of an *ad infinitum* multiplication of particular pleasures, but rather coincides with *the* unconceivable pleasure. In this context, "il desiderio viene […] concepito come una *forza immanente alla vita stessa*, che spinge l'essere vivente sempre più avanti nella ricerca del piacere o della felicità" (Aloisi 17; desire is [...] conceived as an *immanent force to life itself*, which pushes the living being further and further in search for pleasure or happiness).

The consequences of this understanding of desire are immediately clear when Leopardi states that "quando l'anima desidera una cosa piacevole, desidera la soddisfazione di un suo desiderio infinito, desidera veramente *il* piacere, e non un tal piacere; […] l'anima […] cerca avidamente quello che non può trovare, cioè una infinità di piacere, […] la soddisfazione di un desiderio illimitato" (*Zib.*, 166-7; "When the soul desires a pleasurable thing, […] it desires the satisfaction of an infinite desire, it really desires *pleasure*, and not a particular pleasure; […] the soul […] is desperately searching for something it cannot find, that is, an infinity of pleasure, […] the satisfaction of an unlimited desire."). This passage clearly exhibits Leopardi's original thought vis-à-vis other hedonistic eighteenth-century theories: while the *Idéologues* were interested in establishing the functioning operations of the *homme machine* (cf. Folin 103) according to a mechanistic understanding of the human, Leopardi steers clear of the "binomio stimolo-risposta entro cui l'indagine dei sensisti è imprigionata" (Folin 103; stimulus-response couple within which the investigation of the sensationalist is imprisoned). In his exposition, the emphasis is placed on what Folin calls a "forza desiderante" (Folin 103; desiring force), which both represents the motive for every human action and implies a constant washout, on account that the goal of every human action coincides with the unreachable pleasure. In *teoria del piacere*, every tasted pleasure is but a trace of *the* actually desired pleasure, which would constitute real fulfillment if were not for the in-existence that characterizes it. The attainment of what Leopardi will later call particular pleasures is already and always structured on a loss or a failure, for the temporary satisfaction that the subject undergoes readily wears out and shows itself to be but a reminder of an incommensurable desire condemned to only exist in a state of perpetually bare protension. In this regard, Aloisi notices that "se nella maggior parte delle teorie settecentesche, di matrice sensista, il piacere e il dolore erano gli opposti irriducibili in funzione dei quali pensare il desiderio, in Leopardi è invece a partire da una preliminare definizione della natura del desiderio – inteso come tendenza innata e inseparabile dalla vita stessa – che viene ripensata la stessa opposizione tra piacere e dolore" (41; if in most of the eighteenth-century theories, of sensist matrix, pleasure and pain were the irreducible opposites according to which to think of desire, in Leopardi the same opposition between pleasure and pain is rethought, instead, by starting from a preliminary definition of the nature of desire – understood as an innate tendency and inseparable from life itself). For Leopardi, pleasure does not coincide with the ridding of pain; in his theoretical elaboration, pleasure and pain can and do coexist, inhabiting the same subject's experience without any dialectical resolution (i.e. either elimination of pleasure by means of a prevaricating pain, or the removal of pain and the consequent rise of pleasure). This dynamic, which I would define not only as unresolved but as a-dialectical, is theoretically justified by the infinity that ironically ties the existing desire together with *the* inexistent pleasure. Leopardi's novelty with respect to eighteenth-century hedonism, then, consists in an a-dialectical insight into the

dynamic of desire, pleasure and pain: desire, whose infinity belongs to the real experience, coexists with *the* infinite pleasure that does not reside in experientable reality and the pain caused by such separateness. One might speak about a genetic difference between desire and both particular pleasures and *the* pleasure. Such a difference is exhibited, on the one hand, by the finite nature of those particular and real objects that cannot be sublated into the infinite desire inasmuch as they belong to a *genus* that shares nothing with the one associated to desire. On the other hand, the essential difference that saturates desire is enunciated by the very infinity of *the* longed-for pleasure, which does not exist and, hence, cannot be materially assimilated through the experience of satisfaction. In this case, the genetic disparity between desire and *the* pleasure hinges on the fact that the former inhabits existence while the latter takes up residence in in-existence. Admittedly, there is one point of contact that might justify an analogical commonality between desire and *the* pleasure, namely their infinity. However, these two infinites pertain to two different typologies, one material and the other not. To desire, for Leopardi, means to perceive the absolute alterity that founds the subject's relationship with both the world of particular, existing objects and *the* desired, inexistent object – i.e. the infinite pleasure that cannot be found due to its perpetual latency. Then, the absolute otherness that desire has to face while searching for satisfaction points toward a condition of structural irreconcilability, for no encounter between desire, pleasures, and *the* pleasure is ever possible.

Then, what can humans do before the inexistence of the only object that would bring satisfaction? In this sense, it is important to realize that it is not that the infinite pleasure is-not, but that it participates in the domain of in-existence, of an existence that belongs to a different order than the one that constitutes the material here and now. Granted, this in-existence is never given to the existence of the *hic et nunc* and, consequently, the existing infinite desire and the infinite pleasure will never meet insofar as the belong to two skew plains of existence. However, the fact that, for Leopardi, fulfillment does not occur altogether, does not mean that the infinite desire stops stretching itself outwardly toward *the* infinite pleasure. The a-dialectical phenomenology of desire, in fact, finds its expression in an unceasing protension whose intentional object is meant to 'in-exist.' In this context, the imaginative faculty, as Leopardi understands it, counteracts the pain caused by the unfulfilled desire by stereoscopically[17] multiplying and making indeterminate the material fabric that constitutes reality. As Leopardi writes in *Zibaldone*:

> All'uomo sensibile e immaginoso […] il mondo e gli oggetti sono in certo modo doppi. Egli vedrà cogli occhi una torre, una campagna; udrà cogli orecchi un suono d'una campana; e nel tempo stesso coll'immaginazione vedrà un'altra torre, un'altra campagna, udrà un altro suono. In questo secondo genere di obbietti sta tutto il bello e il piacevole delle cose. Trista quella vita […] che non vede, non ode, non sente se non che oggetti semplici, quelli soli di cui gli occhi, gli orecchi e gli altri sentimenti ricevono la sensazione" (*Zib.*, 4418.1; "To a sensitive and imaginative man […] the world and its objects are in a certain respect double. With his eyes he will see a tower, a landscape; with his ears he will hear the sound of a bell; and at the same time with his imagination he will see another tower, another landscape, he will hear another sound. The whole beauty and pleasure of things lies in this second kind of objects. Sad is that life […] which sees, hears, feels only simple objects, only those objects perceived by the eyes, the years, and the other senses.").

With reference to the pertinence of imagination to the phenomenon of pleasure, Folin argues that "la 'teoria del piacere' da teoresi metafisica volta a dimostrare l'inconsistenza del *teismo creazionista* diviene argomento di estetica. […] La teoria della indeterminatezza e della lontananza […] si fonda su ragioni

filosofiche prima ancora che poetiche, nelle quali l'eudemonismo sensistico […] si dissolve per dar luogo a una interrogazione forte sul senso dell'essere di cui il 'desiderio illimitato' è diretta espressione" (109-110; the 'theory of pleasure' from metaphysical theoresis aimed at demonstrating the inconsistency of *creationist theisms* becomes the subject of aesthetics. [...] The theory of indeterminacy and distance [...] is based on philosophical reasons even before poetic ones, in which the sensationalistic eudemonism [...] dissolves to give rise to a strong question on the meaning of being of which the 'unlimited desire' is a direct expression). However, insofar as limitedness cannot literally be spoken about, it is the allusive, metaphorical, and iconic forms that become the linguistic *locus* in which Leopardi's theory of pleasure concretizes (cf. Folin 109-110).

4. At this point, Leopardi's understanding of language and the linguistic repercussions of *teoria del piacere* could be re-read in light of the last quote taken from *An Essay* (cf. Locke 508). As I have explained, Leopardi conceives of language not only as representation of the inexperientiable infinite pleasure, but also as an attempt to give voice to the dialogue between infinite desire and infinite pleasure. Linguistic experience, for Leopardi, could be identified with a sensible place wherein the existing desire and the inexistent pleasure may find a shared location of verbalization and dialogically occur at the same time, albeit without ever being dialectically consummated. In this sense, Leopardi's extended considerations on language restore radical importance precisely to those words that stand for vague ideas and that Locke identifies with emptied signs, or marks of nothing. The kind of language that embodies[18] the human experience of the desire for pleasure represents an example of such a dynamic: those words that are meant to evoke – or allude, as Locke phrases it – the brief and fleeting experience of the infinite are precisely identified with linguistic marks of nothing, or better, as signs of something that cannot be known for it inhabits inexistence. In this sense, the originality of Leopardi's anthropology of desire vis-à-vis Locke's interpretation of the same phenomenon, along with the essential expressibility of such a desire, determine the significant divergence of Leopardi's theory of language from the one of Locke. Indeed, were language only to have a communicative and recording function, how could one speak about something that does not exist, something that does not fall under the senses, something that can be experienced as a lack only through the protention of desire? As Gensini notes, "ci si potrebbe […] arrischiare a dire che [Leopardi] sta tematizzando il ruolo non solo strumentale, ma costitutivo, che il linguaggio verbale svolge in rapporto alla mente; […] saggiando, per certi versi, le soglie dell'*esprimibilità* (ovvero dell'apertura semantica delle lingue)" ("Materia, Mente e Linguaggio" 200; one could [...] risk saying that [Leopardi] is thematizing not only the instrumental role that verbal language plays in relation to the mind, but also its constitutive one; [...] testing, in some ways, the thresholds *of expressibility* – that is, the semantic openness of languages). One may observe how the most essential concern that occupies Leopardi's theoretical and literary efforts is precisely the expressibility of the sole innate dimension that constitutes the human being: desire. Moreover, with relation to desire (and *noia* as its pure state), cognition and analytical thinking acquire a different meaning through and through. Rather than being articulated according to the combinatory methodology employed by Locke and his followers (a procedure that Leopardi in part shares),[19] the cognition attached to desire is defined by an imaginative synthetic capacity. As Leopardi writes in *Zibaldone*, "Chiunque esamina la natura delle cose colla pura ragione, senz'aiutarsi dell'immaginazione nè del sentimento, […] potrà ben quello che suona il vocabolo *analizzare*, cioè risolvere e disfar la natura, ma e' non potrà mai ricomporla, […] non potrà mai dalle sue osservazioni e dalla sua analisi tirare una grande e generale conseguenza, nè stringere e condurre le dette osservazioni in un gran risultato" (*Zib.*, 3237-8; "Whoever examines the nature of things using pure reason, and without the help of imagination of feelings […] will certainly be capable of doing what the meaning of the word *to analyze* involves, that is, to resolve and undo nature, but they will never be

able to recompose it […] to draw great or general consequences from their observations and analysis, nor […] reduce them and bring them to some great and general conclusion"). According to Leopardi, the cognitive import conveyed by imagination is identified with the analogical structure of reality, i.e. the intrinsic relationality that binds together the elements that constitute the real. As he puts it, "immaginazione continuamente fresca ed operante si richiede a poter *saisir* i rapporti, le affinità, le somiglianze ec. ec. o vere, o apparenti, poetiche ec. degli oggetti e delle cose tra loro, o a scoprire questi rapporti, o ad inventarli ec. cose che bisogna continuamente fare volendo parlar metaforico e figurato" (*Zib.*, 3717-8; "Imagination which is continually fresh and at work is needed to be able to *saisir* (grasp) the links, the affinities, the similarities, etc. either real, or apparent, poetic, etc. of objects and things between themselves, or to discover these links, or to invent them, etc., and this must be done continually if one wishes to talk metaphorically ad figuratively.") In this sense, then, the analogical move that shapes the imaginative act, the associated language and the passions that it raises cannot be simply reduced to a cognitive error or a misled judgment, as Locke would want. This is already clear in 1821 when Leopardi writes:

> Quanto l'immaginazione contribuisca alla filosofia (ch'è pur sua nemica), e quanto sia vero che il gran poeta in diverse circostanze avria potuto essere un gran filosofo, promotore di quella ragione ch'è micidiale al genere da lui professato, e viceversa il filosofo, gran poeta, osserviamo. Proprietà del vero poeta è la facoltà e la vena delle similitudini. […] L'animo in entusiasmo, nel caldo della passione qualunque […] discopre vivissime somiglianze fra le cose. Un vigore anche passeggero del corpo, che influisca sullo spirito, gli fa vedere dei rapporti fra cose disparatissime, trovare dei paragoni, delle similitudini astrusissime e ingegnosissime […] gli mostra delle relazioni a cui egli non aveva mai pensato, gli dà insomma una facilità mirabile di ravvicinare e rassomigliare gli oggetti delle specie le più distinte, come l'ideale col più puro materiale, d'incorporare vivissimamente il pensiero il più astratto, di ridur tutto ad immagine, e crearne delle più nuove e vive che si possa credere. […]. Tutte facoltà del gran poeta, e tutte contenute e derivanti dalla facoltà di scoprire i rapporti delle cose, anche i menomi, e più lontani, anche delle cose che paiono le meno analoghe. Or questo è tutto il filosofo: facoltà di scoprire e conoscere i rapporti, di legare insieme i particolari, e di generalizzare (*Zib.*, 1650; "Let us observe how much imagination contributes to philosophy (which yet is its enemy), and how true it is that in different circumstances the great poet could have been a great philosopher, promoter of that reason which is lethal to the genre professed by him, and how, […] a philosopher could have been a great poet. The ability to mine a rich vein of similes is proper of the true poet […]. In a state of enthusiasm […] the mind discovers most vivid resemblances between things. Even the most fleeting vigor in the body, if it exerts some influence upon the spirit, causes it so see relationships between very disparate things, to find comparisons, extremely abstruse and ingenious similes […], shows it relations it had never thought of, in short gives it a marvelous facility to draw together and compare objects of the most distinct kinds, such as the ideal with the most purely material, to embody in a very vivid manner the most abstract thought, to reduce everything to image, and to create from it some of the most novel and vivid images you could think of. […] All faculties of a great poet, and all contained in and deriving from the ability to discover relations between things, even the most minimal, and distant, even between things that appear the least analogous. Now this is the philosopher through and through: the

> faculty of discovering and recognizing relations, of binding particulars together, and of generalizing").

Gensini, in this regard, underlines the fundamental specular correspondence between language and every phase of cognition.[20] Indeed, what kind of language does Leopardi associate to a cognitive process whose content is generated by imagination and is to be found in the interlocking dialogical relations that constitute the elements of reality? For Leopardi, imagination represents the most natural among the faculties, i.e. the one that more closely discloses the human being's kinship with the biological sphere of existence, representing the intertwining relationship between the material structure of existence and the mediating forces of culture and history. In this sense, "il radicamento dell'attività immaginativa nel fondale antropologico dell'umanità si coglie con perfetta evidenza a proposito di quella tensione al piacere che Leopardi ritiene caratteristica della specie vivente" (Gensini, *Linguistica Leopardiana* 110; the rooting of imaginative activity in the anthropological background of humanity is captured with perfect evidence with relation to that tension toward pleasure that Leopardi considers characteristic of the living species). It is because desire is meant to remain dissatisfied and pleasure unreachable that "l'anima supplisce in parte grazie alla particolare organizzazione delle sue facoltà psicologiche. Si aggancia qui il ruolo dell'immaginazione e [since imagination, like the ideas, cannot but be incarnate in language] si prepara cosí […] lo spazio conoscitivo della 'parola'" (Gensini 1984, 110; the soul makes up for it in part thanks to the particular organization of its psychological faculties. The role of imagination starts here and [since imagination, like the ideas, cannot but be incarnate in language] the cognitive space of the 'word' is thus prepared). Imagination, therefore, represents a mental human faculty inasmuch as the mind shares in the biological constitution of the body.[21] However, Leopardi's understanding of imagination can be ascribed neither to the idea of an utterly creative power proper to the Romantics nor to the auxiliary role of a faculty mediating between the senses and the intellect. Imagination, according to Leopardi, should be identified with a posture of attunement toward the "basi naturali" (Gensini, "Il Pellegrino e le Metafore" 146; natural bases) that characterize the human. Now, the position that signals such a "accordo biologico con la natura" (Gensini, "Il Pellegrino e le Metafore" 146; biological agreement with nature) coincides with the structural desire that defines the human. In spite of all its dramatic and expected dissatisfaction, the state of desire that was effortlessly lived by the ancient still allows the modern to attentively become attuned to "quel 'sistema del bello' […] che consiste nella sostanziale unitarietà delle operazioni cognitive umane e nella loro disposizione […] a cogliere la rete di analogie che governa la natura. Se le illusioni, parto dell'immaginazione primitiva, sono per sempre perdute, viva è pur sempre la sostanza desiderante dell'essere umano, di cui l'immaginazione […] è insieme l'espressione e il veicolo" (Gensini, "Il Pellegrino e le Metafore" 146; that 'system of beauty' [...] which consists in the substantial unity of human cognitive operations and in their disposition [...] to grasp the network of analogies that governs nature. If illusions, born out of primitive imagination, are forever lost, alive is still the desiring substance of the human being, of which the imagination [...] is both the expression and the vehicle).

In this context, the general and fundamental principle according to which "la storia di ciascuna lingua è la storia di quelli che la parlano o la parlarono, e la storia delle lingue è la storia della mente umana" (*Zib.*, 2591.1; "The history of every language is the history of those who spoke or speak it, and the history of languages is the history of the human mind"), is crystallized in a series of interlocking entries through which Leopardi radicalizes Locke's materialistic outlook and with which he theorizes, as Versace argues (cf. Versace, 109-132), the analogy between body and language. In these entries Leopardi recognizes the existence of a tight intersection between the impossibility to think beyond matter, the consequent and primary assignation of material names to abstract concepts, as well as the analogical basis of human cognition and of the formation of the ideas as Locke describes them (i.e. engendered through either sensation or the reflection of the mind upon itself).[22] Leopardi even seems

to echo *An Essay* when he establishes a logical dependence of the linguistic act on the cognitive process:

> Tale è la natura e l'andamento dello spirito umano. Egli non ha mai potuto formarsi un'idea totalmente chiara di una cosa non affatto sensibile, se non ravvicinandola, paragonandola, rassomigliandola alle sensibili, e così, per certo modo, incorporandola. Quindi egli non ha mai potuto esprimere immediatamente nessuna di tali idee con una parola affatto sua propria, e il fondamento e il tipo del cui significato non fosse in una cosa sensibile. Espresse poi, e stabilite e determinate queste simili idee mediante parole di tal natura, l'uomo gradatamente ha potuto elevarsi fino a concepire prima confusamente, poi chiara- mente, poi esprimere e fissare con parole, altre idee prima un poco più lontane dal puro senso, poi alquanto più, e finalmente affatto metafisiche, e astratte (*Zib.*, 1389; "Such is the nature and condition of the human mind. It has never managed to form a wholly clear idea of a thing that was not wholly perceptible except by contrasting, comparing, and likening it to perceptible things, and thus in some way embodying it. Therefore it has never been able to express directly any such ideas with a word that is entirely their own, and the foundation and model of whose meaning was not in a perceptible thing. Suchlike ideas having then been expressed and fixed and defined by means of words of such kind, man by degrees has been able to rise up high enough, first to conceive confusedly, and then clearly, then to express and fix with words some other ideas that were at first a little further from pure sense-perception, but somewhat further still, and finally, entirely metaphysical and abstract").

Differently from Locke, however, Leopardi identifies the specific procedure of naming with the metaphorical process.[23] By emphasizing the metaphorical or analogical[24] phenomenology of that which for Locke is a derivative linguistic operation, Leopardi indirectly reveals the same structural dynamism operating in the mind. In other words, if the linguistic act, in mirroring cognition, operates analogically, then cognition must be organized on an analogical structure liable to be mirrored by language. In investigating the inflections of analogy in *Zibaldone*, Versace maintains that Leopardi's ontogenetic and phylogenetic[25] reading of human experience shows how "l'analogia non è solo *nel* linguaggio ma anche *prima* di esso, cioè nelle facoltà logico-cognitive" (Versace 14; analogy is not only *in* language but also *before* it, that is, in the logical-cognitive faculties). Even if Leopardi does not formally formulate a theory of analogy and devotes his reflections more to the neighboring rhetorical figure of metaphor, one might say that "l'analogia […] costituisca, più che un tema, un'invariante del suo riflettere, connessa com'è a tutte le sue più importanti speculazioni, oltre che ai fondamenti del suo sistema" (Versace 45; analogy [...] constitutes, more than a theme, an invariant of his reflection, connected as it is to all his most important speculations, as well as to the foundations of his system). Inasmuch as it represents "il più forte argomento di cognizione concesso all'uomo" (*Zib*., 3649; "The strongest argument in knowledge granted to man"), by admission of the same Leopardi, analogy should be identified more with a pre-linguistic human behavior, a specific mode of understanding, a manner of interpreting the subject, reality and their relationship before turning into a rhetorical tool or an executive rendering of stylistic strategies (cf. Versace 29). Indeed, as Cecilia Gazzeri points out with regard to such an issue, for Leopardi "le metafore, lungi dall'essere dei puri ornamenti retorici, rivestono un ruolo fondamentale nel processo di appercezione del reale" (119; metaphors, far from being pure rhetorical ornaments, play a fundamental role in the process of the apperception of reality) and shed a new light on the process of the constitution of meaning.

In this context, one may observe how Leopardi does not yet differ much from Locke's discourse; indeed, for the English empiricist too the drawing of relations between things, as well as their sorting out and assembling under certain general categories, is a task assigned to the a-verbal human understanding which arbitrarily affixes such connections: "*General and Universal*, belong not to the real existence of Things; but *are the Inventions and Creatures of the Understanding*, made by it for its own use, *and concern only Signs*, whether Words, of *Ideas*" (cf. Locke 414-415). However, Leopardi never passively assimilates his sources and here his originality lies, on the one hand, in the identification of the pre-linguistic state with the dimension of perception, with the pre-rational beholding that is primarily related to sensation, and, on the other, in the phenomenological precedency that the constitutive infinite desire has over cognition for human experience (even though one should not forget that desire and *noia* do entail a certain degree and a specific kind of cognitive import). In this sense, the analogical movement that characterizes language and rhetoric is meant to verbalize, or mirror, the very fundamental dimension of desire rather than logic and cognition, as Versace holds. Within the Leopardian system, then, the analogical structure that is detectable in his language is anticipated by and in the anthropologically prelinguistic dimension of desire for pleasure. In a certain sense, the very dynamism of desire – i.e. as ceaseless protension toward something that inhabits inexistence – displays an analogical structure. But how can desire be analogical?

4. Here, I intend analogy to be a comparative interaction between elements belonging to different domains of experience and bound to each other by an incessantly differential relationship, which is in turn built on a dialogical and unresolved contrast.[26] In this context, the analogical behavior of desire might come clearer if the two elements of the description are replaced with infinite desire and infinite pleasure: indeed, what does desire do besides comparatively interacting with infinite pleasure and balancing its own infinity in order to amount to the one defining pleasure for the purpose of experiencing some degree of satisfaction, only to invariably realize that the two infinities pertain to two radically different spheres of experience (existence and in-existence)? And what is *noia* if not the state brought forth by such realization, yet still characterized by an attentive protention toward that which is known to be unreachable? Then, the attribution of a fundamental analogical quality to the essential and silent experience of desire represents one of the original contributions of Leopardi's work vis-à-vis other intellectuals, particularly those who walked in the footsteps of Locke. Indeed, as Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca observe, "the empiricist […] for the most part look on analogy as a resemblance of quite minor importance because of its weak and uncertain character. It is more or less explicitly accepted that analogy constitutes the least significant member of the series identity-resemblance-analogy. Its sole value is that it makes it possible to formulate a hypothesis for verification by induction" (Perelman, Olbrechts-Tyteca 372). Contrastingly, Leopardi writes: "l'analogia è uno de' fondamenti della filosofia moderna e anche della stessa nostra cognizione e discorso" (*Zib*., 66; "Analogy is one of the foundations of modern philosophy and of our own knowledge and discourse").

Additionally, not only do language and the prelinguistic dimension (desire or cognition) work similarly and are structured on the same analogical dynamism; for Leopardi, ideas cannot stand and even exist without language: in a way, then, there is not such a thing as silent thought or a mute inner life. In this regard, Leopardi uproots and flips Locke's order of precedency on its head: while for the latter silent ideas represent the pivotal and principal element of cognition, Leopardi believes that a tongue-tied idea would be tantamount to an immaterial entity and, hence, relapse into the metaphysical spiritualism to which he, as it is known, tries to find a valid alternative. As he writes in *Zibaldone*, "È cosa osservata che l'uomo non pensa se non parlando fra se, e col mezzo di una lingua; che le idee sono attaccate alle parole; che quasi niuna idea sarebbe o è stabile e chiara se l'uomo non avesse […] la parola […], e che insomma l'uomo non concepisce quasi idea chiara e durevole se non per mezzo della parola corrispondente, nè arriva mai a perfettamente e distintamente concepire un'idea, […]

finch'egli non ha trovato il vocabolo con cui possa significar questa idea, quasi legandola e incastonandola" (*Zib*., 2948-9; "It has been observed that man only thinks by talking with himself and using language; that ideas are attached to words; that virtually no idea would be or is stable and clear if man did not have […] the word […]; and in short that man barely conceives any clear and lasting ideas save by means of the corresponding word. Nor does he ever manage to achieve a perfect and distinct conception of an idea […] until he has found the word with which he can signify this idea, as it were, mounting the idea and setting it in the word").[27] In this regard, for the Leopardian speaker "speech does not translate a ready-made thought" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 183); indeed, "speech and thought […] are enveloped in each other; sense is caught in speech, and speech is the external existence of sense" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 187). The epistemological conviction that ideas do not exist as immaterial products of the operations of the mind and that they need the physicality of language finds its reason in the radical materialism that Leopardi expresses in a passage written in 1821:

> Tutto è materiale nella nostra mente e facoltà. L'intelletto non potrebbe niente senza la favella, perchè la parola è quasi il corpo dell'idea la più astratta. Ella è infatti cosa materiale, e l'idea legata e immedesimata nella parola, è quasi materializzata. […] Tutte le nostre facoltà mentali […] non concepiscono esattamente nulla, se non riducendo ogni cosa a materia […] ed attaccandosi sempre alla materia quanto è possibile; e legando l'ideale col sensibile; e notandone i rapporti più o meno lontani, e servendosi di questi alla meglio (*Zib*, 1657-1658; "Everything in our minds and faculties is material. The intellect could do nothing without speech, because the word is almost the body of the most abstract idea. It is, in fact, a material thing and an idea tied to and identified with a word is made almost material. […] All of our mental faculties […] do not conceive of anything at all, except by turning everything into matter, […] and by attaching itself as far as possible to matter, and by tying the ideas to the sensory, and by observing its more or less distant relationships with it, and using these the best we can").

In this regard, the decisive dependence of the mind (ideas) on words leads to an understanding of language as a bodily gesture: indeed, speech (and writing) is not just the physical translation of a mental process, but it is the movement of an embodied mind. Coincidentally, Leopardi writes in *Zibaldone* that "ciascun vocabolo anche semplicemente considerato nella sua profferenza, […] ha tanto corpo […] e tanta consistenza, che basta a ferire i sensi, e quindi essere ritenuto nella memoria, e distinto col pensiero dagli altri vocaboli" (*Zib*., 2953-2954; "Any word even when simply considered in its pronunciation, […] has sufficient body […] and sufficient consistency, to strike the senses, and hence to be retained in the memory, and distinguished from other words"). For Leopardi's linguistic theory "word and speech […] cease to be a manner of designating the object or the thought [and] become the presence of this thought in the sensible world, […] its emblem or its body" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 187).[28] It would not come as a surprise, then, if Leopardi defined "un'ombra di lingua" (*Zib*., 3254; "a shadow of a language") the strictly communicative role that Locke – and with him others – assigns to language and its subservient dependence from ideas, an understanding that results in a regulated universal linguistic act whose content is to be identified with the mathematical correspondence between ideas and signs that constitutes understanding (even with all the caveats expressed in *An Essay*).

At this point of the analysis, Merleau-Ponty's work on language comes as surprisingly useful to shed an interesting light on Leopardi's linguistic theory. Even if the French philosopher never explicitly mentions Locke, in *The Prose of the World* he seems to directly tackle the argument of *An Essay*

when maintaining that "science attaches clear and precise significations to fixed signs. It fixes a certain number of transparent relations and […] it establishes symbols which in themselves are meaningless and can therefore never say more than they mean conventionally" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 4). Merleau-Ponty identifies the project of a universal language with the institution of an algorithmic (or mathematical, as Leopardi would define it) language system: the linguistic act expresses nothing but the flat (and to an extent, already pre-determined) coincidence between the signifier and the signified. Here, "expression leaves nothing more to be desired, contains nothing which it does not reveal" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 4) and the speaker "never means to say more than one does say and no more is said than one means" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 5). Merleau-Ponty further argues that "the project of a universal language is a revolt against language in its existing state [i.e. a present and alive language] and a refusal to depend upon the confusion of everyday language" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 5), which is dialogical and hence disorienting, imprecise and usually says or means more than just the perfection of a mathematically understood linguistic sign. Furthermore, this kind of universal and algorithmic language "is an attempt to […] tear speech out of history" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 5) as Merleau-Ponty observes. In this light, one may see how the linguistic theory devised by Locke could coincide with an active dehistoricizing maneuver that engenders a system where the "sign remains a simple abbreviation of a thought" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 5). Conversely, Leopardi deems language and the speech act to be profoundly historical for they occur only through a specific mark that the body traces onto the present time and onto the other's body, a singular and unrepeatable gesture that expresses and mirrors the historical state of the desire for pleasure. While in *An Essay*, to borrow Merleau-Ponty's words, "the person speaking is coding his thought [and] replaces his thought with a visible or sonorous pattern which is nothing but sounds in the air or ink spots on the paper" (*The Prose*, 7), the kind of language that Leopardi tries to formulate is historically overdetermined and hence dialogical, i.e., compromised with the actual experience of the present and everyday moments. It is a language that touches upon the desire for the infinite and expresses the historicity of such a desire.

5. Then, if the primary goal of language is not to communicate the clear pouring of ideas into linguistic signs, what does language do? Rather than communicating the mathematical exactness of a semiotic coincidence, Leopardi's language attempts to mean the leftovers of expression, the semantic excess that Locke's functionalism generally considers to be an error or a source of confusion for the communicative act. As Ponzio correctly argues, in the linguistic system hypothesized by Leopardi "i significanti non sono al servizio di un'idea precisa e distinta: essi alludono piuttosto che dire direttamente, destano l'immagine dell'oggetto anziché definirlo, presentano un di più, un di troppo rispetto al nudo significato, un'eccedenza delle forma sul contenuto […] si realizza un gioco di rinvii, di differimenti che è ben diverso dalla comunicazione funzionalizzata alla trasmissione e rivelazione di un'idea" (41; the signifiers are not at the service of a precise and distinct idea: they allude rather than saying directly, they awaken the image of the object instead of defining it, they present a surplus, an overabundance with respect to the naked meaning, an excess of the form on the content [...] a game of deferments, of deferrals that is very different from communication functionalized to the transmission and revelation of an idea). The linguistic excess of expression cannot be defined or named, by virtue of the fact that it exceeds the confines of expression. Gensini observes how Leopardi draws the idea of a present and yet undefinable dimension of language from Montesquieu's *Essai sur le Goût*, where linguistic grace and elegance are identified with the cognitive category of the *nescio quid*.[29] Given the contemporaneous formulation of *teoria del piacere* and Leopardi's observations on language, the critic observes that this undefinable linguistic excess "così sfuggente alle categorie psicologiche care agli *idéologues* […] è l'espressione immediata dell'*immaginazione* umana nel senso anti-intellettualistico teorizzato dal Leopardi: […] *organon* della natura desiderativa dell'animale umano" (Gensini, "Il Pellegrino e le Metafore" 136; so elusive to the psychological categories dear to *the*

Idéologues [...] is the immediate expression of human *imagination* in the anti-intellectualistic sense theorized by Leopardi: [...] *organon* of the desiring nature of the human animal). Once again, by conveying a remainder of meaning that cannot be fully named and by being charged of an extra-semantic dimension that remains present yet silent, language repeats the excessive linguistic content, i.e. the infinity of the desire for pleasure. In this sense, while the metaphorical behavior of language – the fact that words, even the most abstract ones, find their origin in the attempt to express concrete things – might have been taken from Locke and his work, the *nescio quid* complicates the metaphorical understanding of language and marks the distance from Locke, for whom it would represent an inexactness that hinders the functional use of language and the related communicative effectiveness.[30]

The expression of such inexpressible excess of experience, rather than turning speech into an incomprehensible act and thwarting communication altogether, becomes the condition of possibility for a real dialogue. In this regard, speech becomes the bodily act that guarantees the extroversion[31] of the most private human dimension (the yearning of desire) into the public sphere. As Merleau-Ponty writes, "the radical awareness of subjectivity [that is represented by the desire for pleasure in Leopardi] enables me to rediscover other subjectivities" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 25) and hence to turn language into a dialogical event. Inasmuch as language is primarily dialogical, and not communicative, there cannot be a definite expression, a final predicament that says it all once and for all: in other words, the predicaments of the speaker need to leave room for an answer on the part of the hearer. In this sense, Leopardi's conception of language as necessary embodiment of the desire for pleasure turns the informational character of a functional understanding of language into a petitionary one: speech here is an entreaty, a verbal initiative that entails and asks for a responsive act from the hearer.

This desire-based structure of Leopardi's linguistic system is built around the concepts of vagueness and imprecision, which feature as prominent ideas since the first pages of *Zibaldone*.[32] Dialogical words, in this sense, acquire a vague, imprecise, indefinite character and are defined by the semantic multiplication of the signifieds, which Leopardi identifies with accessory ideas (*idee accessorie*) or concomitant ideas (*idee concomitanti*). In referring to the concepts of plurilingualism and pluridiscursivity, Ponzio argues that Leopardi's semantic theory anticipates both C. S. Peirce and Bakhtin, insofar as it posits that "ciò che caratterizza […] soprattutto il segno verbale è una sorta di alone semantico più o meno ampio, entro il quale ci si orienta non in base a coordinate interne al segno stesso bensì al suo rinvio ad altri segni – che costituiscono i suoi possibili interpretanti – in una catena mai definita una volta per tutte, né chiusa" (Ponzio 40; what characterizes [...] espeially the verbal sign is a sort of, more or less wide, semantic halo, within which one orients oneself not on the basis of coordinates internal to the sign itself, but because of the sign's reference to other signs – which constitute its possible interpreters – in a chain never defined once and for all, nor closed). Faithful to the radical materialism that defines the unity between ideas, desire and linguistic sign, Leopardi emphasizes the necessity of a language properly apt to express the vagueness of the semantic halo that surrounds the ideal constellations. It is here, then, that the contrast between precise ideas and concomitant ideas is reflected and exhibited by the difference between *termini* and *parole*: "Le parole come osserva il Beccaria […] non presentano la sola idea dell'oggetto significato, ma […] immagini accessorie. Ed è pregio sommo della lingua l'aver di queste parole. Le voci scientifiche presentano la nuda e circoscritta idea di quel tale oggetto, e perciò si chiamano termini perchè determinano e definiscono la cosa da tutte le parti" (*Zib*., 109-110; "Words, as Beccaria observes […], present not just the idea of the object they signify but also accessory images […]. And this is the most precious gift of a language to have these words. Scientific words present the bare and circumscribed idea of an object, and that's why they're called terms, because they determinate and define the things from all sides").[33] Leopardi continues by comparing imagination with the use of *parole*: "la forza e l'evidenza consiste nel destar l'immagine dell'oggetto, e non mica nel definirlo dialetticamente, come fanno quelle parole trasportate nella nostra lingua. Le metafore d'ogni sorta sono adattatissime per

questa cagione alla bellezza *naturale* e al colorito del discorso" (*Zib*., 111; "Strength and clarity [proper of *parole*] consist in awakening an image of the object and not at all in defining it dialectically, as those words do when they are brought into language. This is why metaphors of every kind are perfectly suited to the *natural* beauty and color of discourse"). Interestingly, Gensini comments on these observations as follows: "la distinzione [tra *termini* e *parole*] che Leopardi cominciava così a rendere operante come vettore di una personalissima inchiesta […] poteva ormai considerarsi canonica nel pensiero linguistico europeo, dove, a partire almeno da Locke, il rapporto tra idee principali e idee accessorie, era stato una costante sia dell'analisi dei fatti di lingua, sia, più al fondo, della investigazione delle facoltà conoscitive" (Gensini, *Linguistica Leopardiana* 104; the distinction [between *terms* and *words*] that Leopardi thus began to make operative as a vector of a very personal investigation [...] could by now be considered canonical in European linguistic thought, where, starting at least from Locke, the relationship between main ideas and accessory ideas, had been a constant both of the analysis of the facts of language, and, more deeply, of the investigation on cognitive faculties). While these remarks are useful for the contextualization they offer of Locke's relevance as to the relationship between words and ideas within Leopardi's linguistic theory, they neglect to observe that Leopardi soon leaves behind the hierarchical mental structure of the canonical European linguistic schools and replaces with a preferred 'concomitance' the accessory character that ideas hold in *An Essay*. This terminological variation marks another nuance of Leopardi's originality with respect to the intellectuals that precede him: in this regard, the previous structural hierarchy of the mind is superseded by a contemporaneity that defines those ideas evoked by *parole* and assembled into analogical constellations whence they beckon to each other. Leopardi's philosophical enfranchisement is made explicit in a long and important passage in *Zibaldone*, where he contrasts *idee concomitanti* to the isolation of the ideas engendered by the combinatory epistemologies of Locke and Tracy:

> L'analisi delle cose è la morte della bellezza o della grandezza loro, e la morte della poesia. Così l'analisi delle idee, il risolverle nelle loro parti ed elementi, e il presentare nude e isolate e senza veruno accompagnamento d'idee concomitanti, le dette parti o elementi d'idee. Questo appunto è ciò che fanno i *termini* […]. Ma come è già stabilito dagl'ideologi che il progresso delle cognizioni umane consiste nel conoscere che un'idea ne contiene un'altra (così Locke, Tracy ec.), e questa un'altra ec.; nell'avvicinarsi sempre più agli elementi delle cose, e decomporre sempre più le nostre idee, per iscoprire e determinare le sostanze […] semplici e universali che le compongono […] così la massima parte di dette voci, non fa altro che esprimere idee già contenute nelle idee antiche, ma ora separate dalle altre parti delle idee madri, mediante l'analisi […], risolvendole nelle loro parti […]; e distinguendo l'una parte dall'altra, con dare a ciascuna parte distinta il suo nome, e formarne un'idea separata, laddove gli antichi confondevano le dette parti, o idee suddivise […] in un'idea sola. Quindi la secchezza che risulta dall'uso de' termini, i quali ci destano un'idea quanto più si possa scompagnata, solitaria e circoscritta; laddove la bellezza del discorso e della poesia consiste nel destarci gruppi d'idee, e nel fare errare la nostra mente nella moltitudine delle concezioni, e nel loro vago, confuso, indeterminato, incircoscritto. Il che si ottiene colle parole proprie, ch'esprimono un'idea composta di molte parti, e legata con molte idee concomitanti" (*Zib*., 1234-1236; "The analysis of things spells the death of their beauty or greatness and the death of poetry. Soo too with the analysis of ideas, resolving them into their parts and elements and presenting these parts or elements in isolation, bare, without any accompaniment of concomitant ideas. This is precisely what *terms* do […]. But the progress of human knowledge consists, as the ideologues

> have already established, in knowing that one idea contains another (thus Locke, Tracy, etc.) and this one yet another, etc., and consists in drawing ever nearer to the elements of things and in breaking our ideas down ever further so as to discover and define the simple and universal substances […] of which they are made up […]. Thus the majority of these words simply express ideas already contained in ancient ideas, but ones that are now separated from the other parts of the original ideas by means of the analysis […], resolving them into their parts, […] distinguishing one part form the other, giving each distinct part its own name and forming a separate idea of it, whereas the ancient merged these parts, or subdivisions of ideas […] into a single idea. Hence the aridity that stems from the use of terms, which awakens in us an idea that is separated, solitary, and circumscribed as possible, whereas the beauty of discourse and poetry lies in its awakening groups of ideas in us, and causing our minds to wander through a host of concepts, and all that is vague, confuse, indeterminate, an uncircumscribed about them. This is achieved by means of appropriate words that express an idea composed of many parts, bound up with many concomitant ideas"). [34]

As noted earlier, the proliferation of meaning produced by vague words – which constitute one semiotic unity with their content, i.e. desire – enables the dialogical openness of the linguistic act and the consequent possibility for such an act to be indefinitely welcomed, i.e. interpreted by the hearer or reader. In this regard, *parole* acquire a fundamental role within Leopardi's conception of language for they represent entities whose indeterminate semantic values and open power of signification are amplified by use, tradition, individual and collective experience (cf. Gensini, "Leopardi filosofo" 192). It is Leopardi himself who confirms this idea when he writes that "è certo che le dette idee concomitanti intorno ad una stessa parola, ed alle menome parti del suo stesso significato, variano secondo gl'individui: e quindi non c'è forse un uomo a cui una parola medesima […] produca una concezione precisamente identica a quella di un altro" (*Zib.*, 1705-6; "It is certain that these concomitant ideas surrounding a single word, and the tiniest parts of its actual meaning, vary according to the individual. And so there probably isn't anybody in whom the same word […] produces an idea that is exactly the same as one that is produced in someone else"). The dialogical ground established by *parole*, then, assigns the hearer/reader a fundamental epistemological role, in that it creates the possibility for interpretation and, hence, for an open and free response. It is in this sense that the already mentioned petitionary character of Leopardi's language is revealed. Here, the speech act of the speaker/writer does not asks for its meanings to be exhausted (it does not lack any consummation) but, rather, appeals for a responsive accompaniment: what language asks from its receiver is to be interpreted, that is to be doubled through the emergence of a dialogical relationship. While Locke struggles to establish the highest degree of exactness for linguistic communication and to emend the diversity of ideas in the minds of the speakers, Leopardi welcomes the irresolute analogical contrast embodied by *parole* and engendered by ideas belonging to different minds, life experiences and memories. Concomitant ideas, then, are to be understood as those ideas evoked by *parole*, which contemporaneously inhabit the mind of the speaker but, simultaneously and differently, that of hearer, and of all the hearers that welcome, have welcomed and will welcome the speech act. Language structured on *parole*, in a sense, becomes the frictional crossroads between the writer/speaker and the reader/hearer's worlds.[35] As Leopardi writes, "l'effetto d'una stessa poesia, orazione, verso, frase, espressione […] è […] infinitamente vario, secondo gli uditori o lettori, e secondo le occasioni e circostanze […] in cui ciascuno di questi si trova. Perocchè quelle idee concomitanti […] sono differentissime per mille rispetti, secondo le dette differenze appartenenti alle persone. Siccome anche gli effetti poetici ec. di mille altre cose, anzi forse di tutte le cose, variano infinitamente secondo la

varietà e delle persone e delle circostanze loro, abituali o passeggere o qualunque" (*Zib.*, 3952; "The effect of the same poem, oration, verse, phrase, expression […] is […] infinitely varied, according to the listeners or readers and the occasions and circumstances in which each of them find themselves […]. For those concomitant ideas […] are very different in a thousand respects according to the differences in persons. As the poetic effects, etc., of a thousand other things as well, perhaps indeed all things, are infinitely varies according to the variety of both persona and their circumstances, whether habitual or transitory"). The Lockean hierarchical organization of ideas, again, turns into an a-dialectical co-presence of ideas that kaleidoscopically proliferate and that do not contend for the highest semiotic exactitude. In order to co-exist within a relational context, these simultaneous ideas are never subsumed into one another but exists analogically, i.e. in reciprocal and constant contrast – according to the conviction that "tutto è animato dal contrasto, e langue senza di esso" (*Zib.*, 2156; "everything is enlivened by contrast, an is dull without it"). Once again, Merleau-Ponty can help describe the phenomenology of such an understanding of language; in borrowing from his reflections, for Leopardi "words carry the speaker and the listener into a common universe by drawing both toward a new signification through the power to designate in excess of their accepted definition or the usual signification that is deposited in them from the life they have had together in us" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 87). This is how Leopardi's reflections on language stand in opposition to the mathematical universality of a *langue des calculs*, where the definiteness and finality that characterize the signifier/signified relationship prevent any epistemological intervention on part of the receiver of the expressive act.

The resulting characters of vagueness that define Leopardi's linguistic theory signal the presence of the linguistic remainder, i.e. the excess that cannot be expressed but through the silence indefiniteness of the linguistic sign. In Merleau-Ponty's words, "expression is never absolutely expression, what is expressed is never completely expressed. It is as essential to language that the logic of its construction never be of a kind that can be put into concepts as it is to truth never to be possessed" (*The Prose*, 37). Within the dialogical confabulation, the excessive *nescio quid* is alluded to both as a leftover of expression and as physicality of the body as speech act. As opposed to what happens for Locke, the very analytical ambiguity of vague words is what voices the moment of awareness embodied by desire, which is, in and of itself, an excess of life, awareness, perception, attention. Language here is not only devoted to communication or to the delivery of knowledge, but it dares to say more than just a verbal exchange, it dares to speak about what cannot – and perhaps should not – be spoken of. For Leopardi one could say that "language is not the servant of meaning and does not govern meaning. There is no subordination […]. In speaking or writing, we do not refer to some *thing to say* which is before us, distinct from any speech. What we have to say is only the excess of what we live over what has already been said" (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose* 111).

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[1] Here, I utilize Kristeva's statement as an *auctoritas*, i.e., an authoritative springboard to set the stage for my argument rather than as a theoretical reference. The methodological approach of this article is actually drawn from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology. Rather than treating Merleau-Ponty's work as an explicit commentary on the issues analyzed, I use it as a subterranean source that informs my reading. Therefore, I do not necessary find any parallel between him and Leopardi; rather, the French philosopher's work has shaped the thinking frame through which I generally interpret literary and philosophical objects. The instances where I explicitly mention Merleau-Ponty are mostly related to a specific reading of the kind of mathematical language Locke proposes, rather than being specifically about Leopardi. Here, then, Merleau-Ponty helps counterbalance the limitations of Locke's Empiricism, by allowing me to interpret Leopardi's Sensationalism through an understanding of the body conceived of as already laden with meaning and charged with communicative power.

[2] I use Leopardi Giacomo, *Tutte le Poesie, Tutte le Prose e lo Zibaldone*, ed. by Felici Lucio, (Roma, Newton & Compton, 2010). However, when citing *Zibaldone* I will refer to the pages of the actual manuscript preceded by *Zib.*

The translation is taken from Leopardi Giacomo, *Zibaldone*, ed. by Michael Caesar and Franco D'Intino (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2015) and the pages from the translation coincide with those in the manuscript.

[3] The legitimacy of *teoria del piacere* as an actual philosophical theory has been frequently addressed and either confirmed or denied, depending on the inclination of the scholarship. See, for example, Prete 1980, 13 ff.; Folin 2001; Derla 1972; and Aloisi 2014.

[4] Elsewhere I examined in detail the textual intersections between Leopardi's reflection and Locke's *An Essay* in *Zibaldone* during the crucial period of theoretical systematization that spans from 1818 to 1822, as well as the role played by Francesco Soave's edition for Leopardi's assimilation of Locke. By also analyzing the important role of mediation that some of the French *Idéologues* played for the circulation of Locke's ideas throughout Europe (specifically Diderot, D'Alembert, La Mettrie, Condillac, Fontenelle, Cabanis, Destutt de Tracy, D'Holbach, Buffon and Voltaire), one observes that only the direct reading of D'Holbach, Buffon and Voltaire chronologically precedes a first-hand perusal of the *Essay* in Leopardi's *Zibaldone*, *Catalogo della Biblioteca Leopardiana, Elenchi di Letture,* and *Disegni Letterari*. Differently from what scholarship usually maintains, the French intellectuals at large solely represent a marginal influence with consideration to the development of Leopardi's anti-Innatism and materialist Sensationalism (at least for the 1818-1822 period). Indeed, the sway that the Idéologues hold onto the development of Leopardi's materialism is rooted in their adaptation of a Lockean doctrine. Moreover, Leopardi's interpretation of Locke's work is original and autonomous, in spite of the role that the *Idéologues* generally played for the transmission of Locke. It is, then, necessary to reestablish the significance of Locke's influence for the formation of Leopardi's anti-innatist Materialism and, when addressing those *Idéologues* whose presence precedes the intellectual encounter with the British philosopher, emphasize the importance of their common filiation and approval of Locke's work.

[5] Cf. Gensini: "Il segno linguistico, secondo Condillac e gli ideologi […] fornendo un supporto fisico all'idea, ne rende più facile la definizione e l'immagazzinamento […]. In tal senso le lingue appaiono vocazionalmente destinate al ragionamento […]. Alla luce di queste coordinate, la vecchia concezione del francese come lingua tendenzialmente 'universale' si era saldata al miraggio di una *langue des calculs* insieme fondamento e finalità della conoscenza umana. L'obiezione leopardiana a queste idee parte proprio dal […] concetto di 'immaginazione,' e dalla revisione che la teoria del piacere suggeriva del suo funzionamento. […] Il poetico, prima di esistere nei versi di uno scrittore, sorge nelle attitudini psicologiche dell'uomo qualunque, in quell''abisso di pensieri indeterminati, de' quali non sa vedere il fondo né i contorni […] che forma […] il contributo dell'immaginazione alla umana ricerca […] di un piacere senza confini. […] Il punto di connessione [tra immaginazione e intelletto] è proprio quella capacità 'sintetica' dell'immaginazione che aveva attirato le riserve dei sensisti" ("Leopardi filosofo" 186-187).

[6] I contend that Leopardi's appropriation of Locke does not represent a mere derivative filiation. Despite following Locke's rejection of Innatism and his support of the Sensationalistic generation of the ideas, Leopardi drastically opposes the utilitarian rationalization of language, the reduction of it to mere human communication, and the exactitude or convergence of nominal and real essence proposed by the axis Locke-Condillac-Tracy. For Leopardi, in fact, there exist a region of experience – i.e. the infinitude of the human desire for pleasure – that can only be alluded to by means of purposefully vague words, word-similes (as Cesare Galimberti defines them in "Leopardi: Meditazione e Canto," in Giacomo Leopardi, *Poesie e Prose*, vol. I, ed. by Mario Andrea Rigoni. Milan: Mondadori, 2011), words that evoke and recall groups of ideas and multitude of conceptions, remembrances and sentiments, that cannot be deduced from or reduced to utilitarian language.

[7] From now on I will refer to Locke's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* as *An Essay*.

[8] Despite the complex rhetorical nature and history of analogy, my intention with this article is not to philologically parcel out all the nuanced occurrences of the term "analogy" in Leopardi's work (Stefano Versace has already done this with success). My speculation, rather, attempts to show that, prior to a strictly rhetorical analogy, Leopardi's thought is defined by a pre-linguistic analogical structure. This stems from a specific understanding that Leopardi holds with regard to philosophy and the synthetic cognitive capacity that characterizes such a discipline. This does not mean that the two dimensions do not interact, but, here, I mainly want to emphasize the "conception of the subject" on which every language is predicated. Then, more than looking at the historical sources that might have engendered Leopardi's interest in the phenomenon of analogy, I focus on the fact that such an analogical cognitive dimension, first and foremost, exists and represents a token of originality with respect to Locke (even though Locke still figures as an important source for Leopardi's understanding of analogy). As to the definition of analogy and a possible confusion with the plethora of its satellite meanings, cf. here p. 10.

[9] In another essay Gensini observes that "ciò che […] differenzia radicalmente il Leopardi dal paesaggio filologico-linguistico dell'Italia del suo tempo, è l'aver ricondotto la riflessione sul linguaggio e le lingue alle acquisizioni teoriche della filosofia sei-settecentesca, e in particolare agli interrogativi ch'essa aveva posto riguardo al funzionamento della mente nell'articolazione del pensiero e nella genesi della società." (Gensini, "Leopardi filosofo" 186; what [...] radically differentiates Leopardi from the philological-linguistic landscape of Italy of his time, is the

fact that he has brought back the reflection on language and languages to the theoretical findings of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, and in particular to the questions that this philosophy had asked regarding the functioning of the mind in the articulation of thought and in the genesis of society).

[10] Besides the theoretical nexus between an anthropological understanding and the issue of language exposed in the main text, a detailed perusal through the *Zibaldone* entries that directly refer to the edition of *An Essay* available to Leopardi (specifically pp. 807, 1028, 1054, 1055, and 3254-5) shows that the thematic field on which the Italian author focused his attention, when reading Locke, is the one principally pertaining the discourse on language.

[11] For the aforementioned debate, see the account about the different positions held by Mill, W.P. Alston, Kretzmann, and Hacking in Losonsky 286-312. See also Ott 2004.

[12] Losonsky remarks that the term 'linguistic turn' is actually taken from Rorty 1967.

[13] Locke reiterates these considerations in Book III, when speaking of the imperfection of words in ix.21: "I must confess then, that when I first began this Discourse of the Understanding […] I had not the least Thought, that any Consideration of Words was at all necessary to it. But when having passed over the Original and Composition of our *Ideas* […] I found it had so near a connexion with Words, that unless their force and manner of Signification were first well observed, there could be very little said clearly and pertinently concerning Knowledge" (Locke 488).

[14] I am stretching here the interpretation: recording thoughts and experiences in fact is a very important procedure for Locke: "The use Men have of these Marks, being either to record their own Thoughts for the Assistance of their own Memory; or as it were, to bring out their *Ideas*, and lay them before the view of others" (Locke 405). I partially overlook the recording purpose of language since my approach to language mostly derives from Merleau-Ponty's interpretation of the linguistic phenomenon expressed in *The Prose of the World*: "In a sense, language never has anything to do with anything but itself. In the internal monologue, as in the dialogue, there are no 'thoughts.' It is words that words arouse and, to the degree that we 'think' more fully, words so precisely fill our minds that they leave no empty corner for pure thoughts or for significations that are not the work of language" (Merleau-Ponty 115). In reading Locke through Merleau-Ponty, the ability of language to record thoughts is invalidated: in this regard, the monological internal dialogue that the act of recording represents does not leave room for any irrelated and independent thought. According to this reading, within the dialogical exchange (both the public and the solitary one) thoughts cannot exist in their silent hidden privacy.

[15] The chapter "Imperfection of Words" in Book III seems to privilege ideas and relegate words to a secondary role within the sphere of communication. In this sense, Locke writes: "The chief End of Language in Communication being to be understood, Words serve not well for that end, neither in civil, nor in philosophical Discourse, when any Word does not excite in the Hearer, the same *Idea* which it stands for in the Mind of the Speaker. Now since Sounds have no natural connexion with our *Ideas*, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of Men, the *doubtfulness* and uncertainty *of their signification*, which *is the imperfection* we here are speaking of, has its cause more in the *Ideas* they stand for, than in any incapacity there is in one Sound […] to signify any *Idea*: For in that regard, they are all equally perfect" (Locke 476-7).

[16] In this regard, Prete maintains that with *teoria del piacere* "sembra […] prendere atto di un processo già avviato nella cultura illuministica: isolare le riflessioni sul piacere dalle effusive e variopinte riflessioni sul *bonheur*, […]; cancellare le tracce di ottimismo, sia naturalistico che spiritualistico; riportare un tema, caratteristico della 'filosofia morale' nella topica del corpo; congiungere un'analisi, propria dell'area sensistica dell'illuminismo, con la filosofia antica" (*Il Pensiero Poetante* 13).

[17] This qualification is taken from Harrison 188.

[18] The idea that *teoria del piacere* almost takes on a flesh is Folin's. Cf. Folin 109-110.

[19] Leopardi's conception of language as radically material and necessary embodiment of ideas affects also the combinatory logic of cognition that he shares with Locke and the empiricists. The fact that language has the same procedural structure of every natural element (which comes into existence by virtue of modification, composition, or reassembling of the same elements) sheds a new light on the materiality of language, which takes on an almost organic and biological character. In this regard, Leopardi writes: "La conclusione è che bisogna a tutti i patti […] riassumer l'uso di spiegar le nuove idee col comporre, derivare, e formare nuove parole dalle radici della propria lingua; essendo questo, per natura delle cose […] l'unico, proprio, ed assoluto mezzo di rendere una lingua sufficiente ed uguale a qualunque numero d'idee, ed a qualunque novità d'idee; e renderla tale non accidentalmente ma per propria essenza" (*Zib*., 2448.1; "It is necessary at all costs […] to resume the practice of explaining new ideas by forming compounds, derivatives, and new words from the roots of our own language. This by nature of things […] is the only, correct, and absolute method of making a language sufficient and equal to any number of ideas, and to any new ideas, and making it such not haphazardly but through its own essence").

[20] "Importante è […] che a ogni fase della conoscenza corrisponda specularmente una forma di linguaggio" (Gensini 1984, 107).

[21] In *Zibaldone*, when formulating his *teoria del piacere* for the first time, Leopardi considers reason to be a material process par excellence: "non c'è cosa più spirituale del sentimento nè più materiale della ragione, giacchè il raziocinio è un'operazione matematica dell'intelletto, e materializza e geometrizza anche le nozioni più astratte" (*Zib*., 181; "there is nothing more spiritual than feelings and more material than reason, for reasoning is a mathematical operation of the intellect that materializes and geometricizes even the most abstract notions").

[22] Cf. *Zibaldone* 1262: "A quello che ho detto altrove della impossibilità di formarsi idea veruna al di là della materia, e del nome materiale imposto allo stesso spirito e all'anima, aggiungete che noi non possiamo concepire verun affetto dell'animo nostro se non sotto forme o simiglianze materiali, nè dargli ad intendere se non per via di traslati presi dalla materia (sebbene alle volte abbiano perduto col tempo il significato proprio e primitivo per ritenere il metaforico)"; "To what I have said elsewhere about the impossibility of forming any idea beyond matter, and beyond the material name imposed on spirit itself and the soul, add that we cannot conceive of any affect in our mind other than in the guise of material forms or resemblances, nor make it understood except by way of metaphors drawn from matter (although sometimes with […] time they have lost the proper and original meaning and retained the metaphoric one)."

[23] The beginning of the previous entry actually starts off with this concept: "Chiunque potesse attentamente osservare e scoprire le origini ultime delle parole in qualsivoglia lingua, vedrebbe che non v'è azione o idea umana, o cosa veruna la quale non cada precisamente sotto i sensi, che sia stata espressa con parola originariamente applicata a lei stessa, e ideata per lei. Tutte simili cose, […] non hanno ricevuto il nome se non mediante metafore, similitudini ec. prese dalle cose affatto sensibili, i cui nomi hanno servito in qualunque modo, e con qualsivoglia modificazione di significato o di forma, ad esprimere le cose non sensibili" (*Zib*., 1388; "Anyone who could carefully observe and uncover the ultimate origins of words, in any language, would see that there is no human action or idea, nor any thing – unless it is precisely perceptible to the senses – that is expressed by a word originally designed for it and applied to it. All such things […] only received their names through metaphors, similes, etc., drawn from wholly perceptible things, whose names have served in whatever way, and with whatever modification in meaning or in form, to express things that are not perceptible").

[24] In following Versace, I use metaphor and analogy (with their derivatives) as synonyms. Especially in the first two chapters of his *Leopardi e l'Analogia*, the critic shows the instability of the limit separating analogy and neighboring rhetorical figures.

[25] As Versace argues, "La teoria del linguaggio restituisce quindi anche un'immagine del soggetto: in particolare le riflessioni che Leopardi conduce sulle lingue seguono alcune direttrici fondamentali: 1) la descrizione dei processi di 'accrescimento' delle lingue come processi metaforici […]; 2) la descrizione dei processi astrattivi della mente come anch'essi metaforici; 3) l'idea che ciò che è poetico nelle lingue […] derivi dal contrasto […] (in quest'ultimo caso si presuppone la facoltà mentale di percepire il contrasto essere una facoltà analogica, per il semplice motivo che il contrasto è riconducibile alla forma di una comparazione che attesti una differenza). In queste tre direttrici fondamentali si può riconoscere che l'analogia, perlomeno nelle sue vesti più elementari di principio comparativo profondamente insito nella cognizione umana, appartiene all'uomo fin dall'infanzia (e Leopardi intende questa in senso sia ontogenetico che filogenetico)" (66).

[26] Cf. "Un'espressione linguistica dalla forma A : B = C : D è un'analogia solo se i termini A e B non appartengono allo stesso dominio semantico di C e D. […] Quanto più i due domini, quello cioè di (A) e (B) e quello di (C) e (D) sono lontani, e, insieme, quanto più le proprietà strutturali che l'analogia proietta da un dominio all'altro sono in qualche rispetto simili, tanto più l'analogia sarà informativa" (Versace 13-14).

[27] The idea that humans think by talking is not new and emerges even at the very beginning of *Zibaldone*: "Noi pensiamo parlando. […] Un'idea senza parola o modo di esprimerla, ci sfugge, o ci erra nel pensiero come indefinita e mal nota a noi mede- simi che l'abbiamo concepita. Colla parola prende corpo, e quasi forma visibile, e sensibile, e circoscritta" (*Zib*., 94-95; "It is through speech that we think. […] An idea without a word or a way to express it is lost to us, or roams about undefined in our thoughts, and is imperfectly understood by we who have conceived it. With the word, it takes on body and almost visible, tangible, and distinct form").

[28] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 187.

[29] The discourse related to the concept of *nescio quid* or *je-ne-sais-quoi* has a long, interesting, and complicated history. My reading of Leopardi's understanding of human desire as experiential residue of meaning – or linguistic excess – aligns with Richard Scholar's *The* Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi *in Early Modern Europe.* In his book, Scholar compellingly gives a both historical and theoretical account of *je-ne-sais-quoi*, in this way trying to correct the more traditionally literary and aesthetical interpretation of Croce, Spingarn and Borgerhoff, as well as simultaneously to reassess Jankélévitch's transhistorical take on the subject. Skeptical about reductive genealogies, Scholar refrains from a forced teleological reading of *je-ne-sais-quoi* and, therefore, does not limit its significance by identifying it with a conceptual precursor of the sublime (be it Kantian or Burkean). Instead, by retracing the emergence of the concept in

the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe (first in France with Pascal and Montaigne, then in England with Shakespeare), Scholar rigorously delves both in the historical and metahistorical dimensions wherein the *je-ne-sais-quoi* moves, acquiring the character of a pre-linguistic category that, firstly, defines human subjective experience within the realms of nature, passions and culture and that, secondly, supersedes (though encouraging) linguistic encapsulations. As Scholar states in the introduction, "The book […], ultimately, […] attempts to rescue the *je-ne-sais-quoi* from its history by showing that it remains capable, now as then, of tracing first-person experiences that elude explanation" (Scholar 3).

[30] Gensini notes that with his linguistic theory Leopardi "prendeva posto in una linea di riflessione sul linguaggio e le lingue alternativa al percorso seguito, lungo il Settecento, dalla filosofia linguistica illuminista di ambito francese. Nelle sue diramazioni principali, quella che dalla *Grammaire* di Port-Royal conduce alle voci della grande *Encyclopédie* […], e quella, sensistica, che da Condiallac porta agli *Eléments d'Idéologie* di Destutt de Tracy, essa aveva esibito un'impostazione del problema linguaggio/conoscenza di tipo […] 'razionalistico.' Come tale, questo modello teorico parte, pur nelle dovute differenze, da un'ipotesi universalistica […] e approda a una prospettiva calcolistica: la lingua come simulacro della *raison* e dell'analisi, riferita, nel suo funzionamento ottimale, all'esempio del linguaggio geometrico o matematico. La varietà semantica, […] le oscillazioni del valore delle parole nell'uso sarebbero […] da considerarsi deviazioni" (Gensini 1989, 194).

[31] The term is taken from Roberto Esposito: "la riflessione italiana si presenta rovesciata, e come estroflessa, nel mondo della vita storica e politica" (Esposito 12). Here, I adopt Esposito's term and apply it to the more quotidian experience of dialogue. This does not mean that the instant is deprived of a historical or political dimension, but rather that these two perspectives are 'Levinasianly' and experientially preceded by the face-to-face encounter that catches the subject in every-day life.

[32] Cf. for example *Zib*., 26.

[33] Muñiz Muñiz underlines that Giorgio Panizza correctly confirms that the origin for the differentiation between *termini* and *parole* is not Leopardi's reading of Beccaria's treatise, but rather "una recensione del trattato […]: un lungo articolo che ne parafrasava il contenuto, apparso sugli «Annali di Scienze e Lettere», I, 1810, pp. 72-85; cfr. "Letture di un momento. Un'indagine su Leopardi e i giornali letterari," in «Archivi del nuovo», 3 (1998), pp. 9-19" (Muñiz Muñiz 28).

[34] Leopardi, however, does not depreciate *termini* vis-à-vis *parole*; he rather advocates in favor of linguistic propriety, contextuality and proportionality among words: "La filosofia […] è scienza. Tutte le scienze giunte ad un certo grado di formazione e di stabilità hanno sempre avuto i loro termini, ossia la loro propria nomenclatura, e così propria, che volendola cambiare, si sarebbe cambiato faccia a quella tale scienza […] Se dunque l'odierna filosofia […] ha e deve avere i suoi termini costanti, ed uniformi in qualunque luogo ella è trattata, noi dobbiamo adottarli ed usarli" (*Zib*. 1219-1223; "Philosophy […] is science. All sciences, once they have attained an adequate level of development and stability, have always had their own terms, that is their own terminology, so much their own that if one wished to change it one would change the face of the science. […] If, therefore, modern philosophy […] is and must be consistent and uniform in its terms whenever its practiced, we must accept them and use them").

[35] With the term "world" I here mean the active attribution of meaning and signification. Language does imply – to an extent – the focusing of the subject's attention on specific details (the use of one word instead of another; the linguistic emphasis on one object/concept instead of another; the choice of one word-meaning instead of another; etc.). The concept of *parole*, then, synthesizes all these choices: Leopardi's *parole* are an emphasis, a selecting focusing of meaning, a concentration of meaning into fewer details (comparatively with the resto of details that make up the whole of reality). This distilling of meaning into a selection of chosen details is what makes up the speaker and hearer's world.

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