

MISSION TO BRAZIL¹

W.V. QUINE

In 1938 I was teaching philosophy, logic, and set theory in the departments of philosophy and mathematics at Harvard. I was granted a duty-free semester to finish my work in progress, *Mathematical Logic*. In those days I was too eager a traveler to abide a free semester on home ground. Latin atmosphere, Romance language, and cheap living beckoned. A prudent further desideratum was isolation from other lands, lest I be lured unduly from my labors. So I embarked for the Azores, with my wife and infant daughters. It was there in Ponta Delgada, in odd hours over the next four or five months, that I acquired the rudiments of Portuguese.

Several years later I learned that our Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs, in Washington, was prepared to send a visiting philosopher to Brazil. I successfully applied. I was advised that French would be more widely understood than English, but I waived the compromise and resolved on Portuguese. In preparation I attended the second-year Portuguese class at Harvard, and I tuned in on short-wave radio from Brazil. In May, 1942, I flew to Rio on my four-month mission.

I gave a well-attended lecture at the União Cultural Brasil-Estados Unidos in São Paulo on "Os Estados Unidos e o ressurgimento da lógica", subsequently published in their annual volume. But my main responsibility in Brazil was a logic course in the Escola Livre de Sociologia e Política of the Universidade de São Paulo. Ideas in logic and adjacent fringes of philosophy had been striking my mind for a year past and now came welling forth and flowing into place. The course organized itself with new angles and shortcuts that pleased me as I surveyed them. Content was ready and waiting; expression was the task outstanding. It was expected that I would lecture in English, but I would not.

I explained how to extract the logical forms of sentences and test them for validity or deduce them one from another. I handled set theory with help of what I called the virtual theory of classes and relations, which was a partial simulation of set theory within the innocent logic of truth functions

¹I have cribbed major portions of this paper from pp. 170–175 of *The Time of My Life*, M.I.T. Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1985, with permission.

and quantification. I went on to distinguish between referential positions, where terms of like reference are interchangeable, and positions where they are not. Frege had anticipated me here, but I went beyond him in challenging quantification into non-referential positions. I thus questioned, in particular, the coherence of quantifying into contexts governed by modal operators of necessity and possibility. Eager to put these bits before English readers, I dictated a translation of some of my Portuguese to an English stenographer in São Paulo under the title "Notes on existence and necessity" (*Journal of Philosophy*, 1943).

One of my students in the Escola Livre was the young philosopher Vicente Ferreira da Silva, who served as my assistant. I had known of him a year earlier, having reviewed his brief *Elementos da lógica matemática* for the *Journal of Symbolic Logic*. Conversation was an art much practised and admired in the cafés, and Vicente was adept at it. In subsequent years he gained recognition in Brazil, writing in an existentialist vein. A volume of his collected works appeared after his untimely death.

I had a solicitous and informative colleague in Donald Pierson of Chicago, the only professor in Brazil whose chair accounted for his full time and income. He had established Brazil's first graduate work in the social sciences, and was training his students by supervised field work. He wrote volumes on Brazilian society along a thousand miles of the Rio São Francisco.

São Paulo had sprouted some middling skyscrapers. Cocks crew in their shadow. In the middle of the city there was an inconsiderable depression that was the valley of the rivulet Anhangabaú. Planners evidently felt that a city needs a river, if not a harbor, as a focus; so they honored the modest depression with a handsome viaduct, the Viaducto do Chá (of the Tea). It was the proud promenade into the heart of the great city.

A sparkling underground art museum of ultramodern design next to the viaduct displayed paintings that were mostly modern to match and reflected the spirit of my new circle of friends. A pivotal couple were Luís Martins and Tarsila do Amaral, he a music critic and she a painter. Her work fell into three phases, ranging from the surrealistic *Antropófago* movement to a studied naïveté, a delicate angelic spirituality, tongue palpably in cheek. A bronze Brancusi head lolled on a sofa cushion in their flat. Other members of the group were the writer Sergio Milliet and the Russian painter Lasar Segall, a realist partial to grim refugee themes. The evident leader was the mulatto Mario de Andrade, a music critic, poet, and novelist.

An eccentric painter, writer, and architect, Flavio de Carvalho, wrote a book, *Experimento No. 2*, reporting his bold experiment of not removing his hat when a religious procession was passing. The crowd chased him. He took refuge in a building and was besieged for hours. One of his paintings, "Man smoking in the dark", is a red dot on a black canvas. He built one

house in the shape of an airplane, another in the shape of a boat. I was one of three guests at his house in the coffee country near Campinas for a weekend of riding and lively talk.

The communist novelist Oswaldo de Andrade called me [ka:in]. He knew enough about English for my '-ine' but not enough for my 'qu-'. When I departed from a gathering at his house, he said "*Apareça, Kain!*" I admired the succinctness of Brazilian exclamations. *Apareça!*, literally "appear" in the polite imperative, meant "Drop around any time." *Pode!*, literally "He can", meant "And well he might." *Custou!*, "It cost", meant "That sure took you a while."

I was writing out my lectures for my logic course in full, in my faulty Portuguese, and delivering them without help of a native editor. I probably committed howlers, but people were kind and kept straight faces. I departed from my text and extemporized a good deal, as indeed I had to do in responding to questions, but I kept on writing the lectures. I was getting portions mimeographed so that my students could study them. I resolved to leave my lectures in Brazil as a book so as to have more impact than through a small group in the classroom. So I was embarked on my fourth book, *O sentido da nova lógica*.

Vicente collaborated with me in converting the faulty Portuguese of my lectures into what we would like to see in print. Whenever he improved the language to the detriment of the thought, I intervened and we forged a third phrasing that was acceptable on both counts.

I was determined to have the whole thing off my hands on leaving Brazil, so as to turn single-mindedly to my war work; for I had agreed to be commissioned as a naval officer as soon as I got back home. I finished the book even to preface, bibliography, correction of typescript, and printer's instructions, before flying on September 11. In those last weeks it meant working until three in the morning and resuming at about eight. Besides the burden of writing a serious book and the burden of a foreign language, there was secretarial trouble. A typist at the Escola Livre was charged with typing the book, but what with holidays and other diversions I had to recruit supplementary help. Words were misspelled, paragraphs skipped, formulas scrambled. I hewed out a passable printer's copy with eraser, knife, and pen. I was thankful for Brazil's quick stand-up snacks.

I saw *O sentido* not only as a way of planting something in Brazil that might grow, but also as my farewell to philosophy and abstract science for the foreseeable future in any language. I would have dropped it if I had foreseen the toil and frustration in Brazil and the frustration afterward. The publisher, Livraria Martins, required a subsidy. This was to be provided by the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs in an advance purchase of five hundred copies for distribution to Brazilian libraries. But Robert Spiers Benjamin, of the Coordinator's office, demanded expert opinion as to the

competence of the book. Whom would I cite? Some recognized northern logician who reads Portuguese? Find one! I put the absurd matter to Henry Allen Moe and he enlightened Benjamin. By then it was October and I was a naval officer. Benjamin then negotiated with the American Council of Learned Societies for a grant to cover the five hundred copies —a mere three hundred dollars. A letter of a certain pattern was needed from the publisher for this purpose, and it took three months.

Further delays ensued, and it was 1944 before I saw proofs. The book came out on September 29, 1944, so Pierson reported, but on the title page there was an error so ghastly that he forbore to describe it. It was corrected, and in 1945 I saw the book.

When I returned to logic and philosophy after the war, thoughts in *O sentido* carried over and further evolved in new contexts. Hence I was not impelled to translate the book into English. But Mario Bunge brought out a Spanish translation in 1956.

I did not know whether my book was having any impact in Brazil, nor whether it was out of print. I observed only that its paper, poor in quality, turned yellow and brittle down the decades. More than half a century had passed when, to my astonishment and delight, Professors Marcelo Tsuji and Newton da Costa conceived the project of a reprint edition. Professor da Costa, Brazil's most eminent logician down the years, wrote me that *O sentido* was what inducted him to the profession. The attractive new edition, on good paper, was published in 1996 by the Universidade Federal do Paraná. It is a glorious fulfillment.