

The Vertigo of Reference. On Paulo Arantes' Formação e Desconstrução and the critique of "French Ideology"¹

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Abstract

While not delving directly with Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus*, "The Vertigo of Reference" examines one recently published book by an important Brazilian philosopher that proposes to offer an intellectual history and a critique of Post-Structuralism and its dissemination in France, Germany, and the United States. As elsewhere in Paulo Arantes' oeuvre, the standpoint of the periphery is the point of view methodologically adopted in this book that was written in the 90s and was only published in 2021. The paper proposes to be an immanent critique of Arantes' critique, trying to offer a structural reading of the Brazilian philosopher's method, and reflecting on its limitations. By the end, some pointers about the theory of organization influenced by Rodrigo Nunes' appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari's thought are offered as a possible counterpoint to Arantes' conclusions.

Tendances au maquillage
Un regard désabusé
Qui cache l'écran ténébreux

"Ersatz" by Guerre Froide

I.

"We need to find out the real issue at stake." (Arantes 2021: 167) This is how Paulo Arantes responds to an intervention by Bento Prado Jr., the transcript of which is included in *Formação e Desconstrução*. Prado's text proposed an examination of a contemporary debate around the problem of relativism in philosophy, approached in its historical aspect through an interpretation of Protagoras, its contemporary reappropriation by Richard Rorty, and a counterattack by the so-called "universalist" field in the figure of Karl-Otto Apel. More on this below, but what is worth emphasizing in this initial moment is the central character of the question asked by Arantes for the book project as a whole: *we need to discover the real issue at stake*. A question that stresses precisely the already tense

¹ Text originally published in Portuguese in *Estilhaco* (January 2023) and available online at <https://www.xn--estilhao-y0a.com.br/vertigensdareferencia>.

dialogue presented by Prado between two *philosophical forms* of relativism and universalism respectively. Arantes' approach here intends to introduce a point of view that is somewhat *external to the* philosophical immanences in question, dealing with the socio-historical constraints of the philosophical solutions proposed and examined in Bento Prado's intervention. Giovanni Zannotti comments in the afterword of the book about the period of Paulo Arantes's intellectual production to which this book belongs.

The protagonists of the chapters in this book - which include, in addition to the French, their German and North American opponents and/or colleagues - not only subsequently undergo a partial rectification of judgments about them, but also tend to disappear from the surface of Arantes' tracings of the present, without their descendants occupying the same positions; and this could reflect nothing less than a 'change in structure and function' of ideology, as one of them would have said in other times. (Zanotti 2021: 282)

Zanotti refers to the relative disappearance of *contemporary ideas as an object* of Arantes' analyses after *O fio da meada*, the period to which, strictly speaking, the articles that make up *Formação e Desconstrução* belong. This first observation introduces a grain of salt to what we will have to say about it below, which will recover some proper *philosophical problems* with the *method*- pardon the heretical expression in the case of Arantes- in this and in some other writings by the Brazilian author. But we will do so in the hope of not falling into a "diversionism" the guarantor of which would be the division of labor from which the "professional discipline of philosophy" arises according to Arantes himself, but rather as a defense of a certain set of conceptions that, we believe, can be retrieved from the examination of the successes and shortcomings of the book, and reactivated in other sectors of experience beyond theory.

II.

Formação e desconstrução appears, therefore, late after its actual writing, and was received with relative silence. One wonders about the reasons for this silence. Those who visited a certain social network even before its launch saw a ripple of indignation at the announced "attack" on the strongholds of so-called post-structuralist French thought promoted by the book. This could indicate to the "Arantian" camp an important factor in our intellectual universe: that the delay of the book ends up being, still, a hit in the historical alignment, in some sense vindicating the central thesis that Paulo Arantes has been defending for decades, which was taken from Roberto Schwarz and Antonio Candido, explicitly: the delay in the adoption of foreign ideas in the national territory, make them doubly *out of place*, eliciting behavior that has a *doubly* distorted relation to their real content.

In the expression “distorted in relation to its real content” one may already encounter some important determinations. First, that ideas should supposedly have a ballast, a real social influence, an idea that Arantes recovers in *Ressentimento da Dialética* from the moment of XIXth century German Left Hegelianism in its ambition to reform social and political life. But at the same time, the impulse to reform *through ideas* is itself the result of a practical-political failure, of the lack of real social influence on the part of intellectuals, whose compensatory impulse takes the form of an attribution of power of social transformation to ideas themselves. That is, the very concept of the philosophical idea would not have lived up to itself once it failed to be brought to effectivity, thereby becoming an effigy without coin, an ideology with a compensatory function. Transplanted to the periphery, the falsification is doubled: if the claim to the effectiveness of ideas was already an ideological fabrication in its original form, in the periphery the ideological character of ideas is redoubled, as it becomes a symbol of the social status of a class that does not even intend to bring them to reality.

In the specific case of the “French Ideology”, as the book abundantly insists, its reception was already, in a certain sense, prepared by the previous acclimatization of the French structural method of philosophical reading, particularly at the University of São Paulo, as documented in the classic *Um departamento francês de ultramar*. At the same time, the very delay in the consumption of the latest philosophical fads coming from the center would produce a certain lack of continuity in the unfolding of these same ideas in the periphery, always open to the adoption of the latest paradigm to compensate for its colonial complex. A discontinuity that, according to Arantes, was favored here by the content in question, in the supposedly ahistorical insistence present in that same French Ideology (from here on the FI) – belonging to the object itself the ability to be integrated without cumbersome adaptations to this historical discontinuity characteristic of the unfolding of ideas in the periphery.

This analysis of the turns and translations of ideas in a tense relationship with the social base that sustains/pretends to sustain them provides an approximative model of the work of Paulo Arantes in the phase in which the writing of these essays belongs. A model that stresses the search for a *real referent* corresponding to the discourses that acquire ideological guise at the very moment when their claim to truth seeks to establish itself directly. Hence the methodology itself is indirect, seeking to find the real ballast of discourse not in its direct content, but in the function they acquire when orienting social behaviors, clearly understanding “orienting” here not as the effective realization of the enunciated content, but as an *influence, including in a sense opposed to its literal meaning, of the enunciated content over a real social sphere*. Operation for which the theoretical figure of the “intellectual” is central.

The wager was as follows. I needed to show that Hegelianism had a foothold in reality, that the Hegelian system had a referent. This referent is what every materialist program, a program for criticizing philosophy or ideology, must have, otherwise, you

are not a Marxist beyond mere methodological interventions. The link I needed to move from the system to reality was this *mix*: the figure of the intellectual, a thinking sociological entity who formulated sentences. (Arantes 2021b: 12)

This is how the movements of the FI are followed in the book, particularly in the first essay “Tentativa de identificação da Ideologia Francesa” (“Attempt to identify the French Ideology”), from its beginnings in the Structuralist phase, maturation around the thinkers that followed May 68, and final transplantation to the North American intellectual milieu in the 80s and 90s, a moment that is taken as the terminal phase of FI by our author at the time he writes these texts (the early to mid 90s). As Arantes says:

Well then: one of the biggest commonplaces in the interpretation of the first chapter of the French Ideology, Structuralism, tends to associate it with the great modernizing wave of the Gaullist Fifth Republic, when contemporary capitalism finally arrives in France and with it the torpor of the society of consumption. In internal politics, the lull that follows the end of the Algerian War will accelerate the building of the new Welfare State, while in the international sphere, the conjuncture of *détente* and economic expansion, in addition to contributing to unblocking a country that has been stuck for centuries, will reinforce ideologically the impression that History had finally evaporated. As for this last mental construction, let's say that it was the projection of a feeling with strong local support, the feeling that the more the country recycled itself the less the gestures of the Gaullist grandeur *managed* to mask its gradual dwarfing in the planetary circle of big Capital. Hence the shortening of perspective noted above, and which manifests itself, among so many other signs, in the replacement of the philosophizing writer, spokesman of the world's conscience, by teachers, more precisely, by specialists in “human sciences”. (Arantes 2021a: 16)

Several historical lines pursued by Arantes in this, and other essays intersect in this appreciation. Many appear in the book, which begins by monitoring the three trends - French, German, and North American - the story of which conditions the final format that the French ideology will take in its American reception. This is followed by a redefinition of scope in chapter 2 that introduces the Brazilian point of view (a point of view “from the periphery”) on this process, which is followed, in turn, in chapter 3, by an outline of the US-Brazilian parallax regarding the reception of French ideas, exemplified by the figures of Rorty and Bento Prado. Parallax that reveals a common background to the tendencies examined in the book in the “demiurgic” centrality, as Arantes following Perry Anderson would say, given to language, and that finally leads to the debate between Prado and our author, with which we begin our review. This debate, almost a *mise en abîme* of the book's general debate, also occupies an architecturally central position in the arrangement of the different chapters, ending part I of the book. From there, in parts II and III, which are shorter, Arantes proceeds to an examination of the Hegelian and anti-Hegelian adventures, on the one hand of Gérard Lebrun (part II) and on the other hand, of the

period immediately prior to the emergence of Structuralism in France, with chapters on Kojève's and Lacan's readings of Hegel (part III).

In what follows, we intend to make some critical considerations about the kind of criticism operated by Paulo Arantes, trying to recover what we could defend as a *methodological dimension* (against the author himself) of his thought. This examination of an Arantian methodology will make clear the relationship between two planes: the *plane of construction* of the concepts themselves (often concealed by Arantes) and the *plane of the situation* of the social function of *ideas* in their societal context (which the author assumes), a difference that could begin to be outlined through the examination of the dialogue between Bento Prado and Arantes.

III.

The core of Bento Prado's article, "O relativismo como contraponto" ("Relativism as a Counterpoint"), is occupied by a debate between Rorty and Apel, resumed in Arantes' reply, only with Apel replaced by Habermas, as the representative of the universalist pole against relativism. After a technical approach to a possible Protagorean reply to the problem of the *peritropé*, which cannot be rehearsed here, Prado draws a contrast between the ethical consequences of Protagoras' sophistic thought, which he identifies as a *polycentrism*, against the *polis-centrism* of Socrates and Plato. The distinction covers the assumption of a *cosmopolitanism* of the Sophist, against a localism of the philosophers in their attachment to the law of the *Polis*. Prado thus emphasizes a certain universalism of the Protagorean position, inverting the signals that would traditionally associate universalism and localism respectively with philosophy and sophistic. "As if Protagoras, a foreigner who knew exile in Athens, could say, anticipating the exiled Latin poet: *Barbarus hic ego sum*. Indeed, for the foreigner and exiled, the *external place* reveals the relativity of space and culture, as well as the breadth of the world." (Prado Jr. 2021: 146) In contrast, the contemporary Rortyan position is unapologetically ethnocentric. For Protagoras, the geographic range of the various forms of life pluralizes reason and law, emphasizing their *conventional* character. For Rorty, the absence of trans-local ("universal") reasons to break ties within conflicts over forms of life makes it such that in the absence of a trans-local criterion, one is left with one's own cultural criterion, ratifying one's *self-centrism*.

Mentioning Rorty's criticism of the idea of philosophy as being necessary for ongoing political debates, Bento Prado is already sailing in Arantian waters, by relating this problem to the planetary unity of a "globalized economy":

What this disqualification of "social theory" misses, beneath the local diversity of political and cultural forms (through willful ethnocentrism), is the global unity within which they are combined and which carries them all into a single movement. The very contemporary swarm of reinvigorated nationalisms and racisms seems to be the

symptom (even if going against the current) of this process of unification that is not purely economic. It is not a question here of putting together a complicated theory of Reason or of truth with a cross-cultural reach or of building a metaphysics of the social. It is a *fact* - the globalized economy ignores cultural borders and governs the different *Lebensformen* - and to discover that, it is enough to read the daily news. (Ibid.: 151)

To this question posed by the concrete conditions, an answer is given and commented by Prado in the figure of Apel's universalist ethics: the proposal of an ethics that, while universally sustainable, respects local differences. This is not the place to criticize or praise the solutions proposed by Apel, but rather to highlight a difference in the formulations that animated Prado's intervention (even though he was closer to the Arantian framework than the authors discussed in his intervention) and the question cited at the beginning by Arantes: what is the *real subject matter of the debate around relativism?*

If Prado's question appeared as a *problem* to be *solved* by a specific theoretical approach (exemplified in the second part of his article by a presentation and critique of Apel's proposal), that is, the "glue" that would bring together the forms of life, currently forcibly related by the hands of an international division of labor operated in a world-economy would be "philosophical", putting forward the need for a *social theory* attuned to the political problems of the day; for Arantes, the *real issue is less the directly thematized problem- the theoretical* object of relativism and its discontents- and more its *conditions*, that which gives rise to the various masking operations- diversionist strategies- that philosophy provides. Therefore, two *types of answers* to the question: for Prado, capitalism is a problem that can properly receive a philosophical *answer*; for Arantes, the *philosophical answer* is a *reaction* to another problem that remains unspoken. Therefore, it *masks the true subject matter*. In one case, *a response* (Prado), in another, *a symptom* (Arantes).

Putting it more simply, Arantes locates a common background under the apparent antagonism between relativism and universalism - first in the very "conversational" character of the philosophy practiced by both contenders, Rorty and Habermas. But a conversational character that has a non-philosophical background: the normalization of capitalism over the background of its management by the national State in the post-war period.

Our two antagonists in Bento Prado Jr's exposition, the two antagonistic philosophical positions, in fact, converge in the same pragmatic-linguistic paradigm to show in what way we can coexist or in what way we can manage something that they are assuming as already established, the normality of capitalism that is here to stay. (Arantes 2021a: 176)

IV.

It is not uncommon for Arantes to be asked to explain his method or his categorical or ontological basis. This is how he interprets the criticism made by Vladimir Safatle in *Dar corpo ao impossível*, that not only would there be, but that *there would have to be* an “implicit philosophy” in Arantes' procedure. Some interesting points emerge from the problem.

Like a Moebius strip, the time of contemporary philosophy, with its triad of contemporary French philosophy, German neopragmatism, and Anglo-Saxon linguistic turn, would enter the tracks of historical repetition, of a succession of impassés already lived and about which there would be not much to add. Hence the sovereign way in which Arantes dispatches them all to the recesses of empty phraseology (one of those gestures that will necessarily bear a price to pay). (Safatle 2019: 255)

The Moebius strip is an interesting image to conceptualize the balance of solutions as Bento Prado defends it: “relativism as a counterpoint” to absolutism, the latter identified with philosophy, in the mutual passage from one to the other as necessary moments not only to the external identification of each pole but of the very self-determination of each one that passes through the other. Arantes's attempt to find what motivates this balance could be thought of as, precisely, a way out of the strip, a point of view external to the ideal dialectic thus assembled.

For Safatle, the Arantian discourse would work from a set of presuppositions that refuse to be explicitly stated. Otherwise, there would be no criterion by which he could guide himself in the ideological denunciation of the mystifying discourses of the intellectual class. The question seems to be: from what *theoretical* point of view is it possible to make the critique that Arantes makes if the point of view is not made explicit in the critique itself? We will have an answer of our own below. For Safatle, the problem effectively assumes at first the appearance of a performative contradiction. At the same time, *positing*, clearly enunciating these presuppositions, would incur a betrayal of their truth content, insofar as “in certain situations, positing a concept directly is the best way to annul it”.

In the same way that keeping the cake and eating it at the same time is not exactly an obvious operation, refusing that dialectics is yet another pathology of intellectuals, and leaving philosophy is something that has not yet been seen in this world. Therefore, I would insist that there is an “implicit philosophy” in Paulo Arantes, a philosophy that, for reasons that we will see later, believes should remain implicit in order not to be annulled. (Ibid.: 259)

Crossing this diagnosis with the image already used by Safatle of the “Moebius strip” that links the various philosophical “solutions” criticized to “impasses already experienced”, constituting an eternal return of the Same, it could be said that non-enunciation is a way of safeguarding the concept that is not yet mature for effectiveness. However, a problem creeps in here. If the linguistic turn is the course that is taken by the French, Anglo-Saxon, and German tendencies examined according to Arantes, another presupposition animates the specifically French tendency, which explains in turn its eventual assimilation to the linguistic turn itself: avant-garde artistic modernism. If the avant-garde and the linguistic turn are united in the French *literary absolute* criticized by Arantes, we propose two lines of treatment of these two elements respectively in what follows, and which would bring critical consequences for Arantes's positions.

V.

On the return of North American philosophy to pragmatism after the post-positivist cycle, Arantes comments:

Therefore, the reunion I spoke of just now was ripe through the following interpretation. Everything happens as if “logical analysis”, turning back on itself (in the best continental “reflexive” tradition), thanks in particular to the pragmatics of the second Wittgenstein, to Quine's critique of Carnap's semantics, to the demolition of the empiricist myth of the “Given” by Sellars, added to the holism of Davidson, to the “historicism” of Kuhn, etc., etc., have finally shelved the phraseology of the Plato-Kant canon (as it is said in the current *lingua franca*) about the final authority of philosophy as an autonomous discipline which object is the meaning and rationality of our assertions and actions. (Arantes 2021a: 105)

Within the family album assembled by Arantes there is a forgetfulness of one aspect of these ancestors of the Rortyan position- the latest widely commented on by our author. He mentions *en passant* one of them, Sellars, in the above passage, as one of the guarantors of the liquidation of the authority of “traditional” philosophy in the North American context. By “traditional philosophy” we could say that Arantes already refers to what comes after the Kantian line of influence, which, for him, grounds a “professional philosophy” that deals not with the things of the world, but with the conditions for thinking the things of the world- inaugurating epistemology as a discipline that guarantees for the philosophical domain the last word on any subject matter. But a guarantee that comes with the emptying out of its object. This first step towards the constitution of a self-referentiality of philosophy prepares, in the North American context through the post-positivist development in the lineage of Kantianism and in the French

context through the discipline of the History of Philosophy in the molds of the structural reading of Martial Gueroult, among others, the arrival of the French Ideology, mediated by the recollection, in the case of the United States, of its pragmatist past. The Rortyan step appears as a contender, internal to the North American reception of the FI, to its direct transplantation to the discipline of literary criticism in that country- aiming at maintaining some relevance to philosophy as a public discipline, despite Rorty's own anti philosophical tendencies. The search for a neo-pragmatist lineage internal to the very development of analytic philosophy would be part of his program set out in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, where Wittgenstein, Sellars and Dewey feature prominently.

However, an important distinction must be made here between the Rortyan reading and the letter of the aforementioned "critique of the Given" by Sellars. It is the *realist* element of Sellarsian philosophy, which is conveniently forgotten by Rorty, a forgetfulness that is inherited, albeit justifiably, by the Arantian reading, insofar as its subject is the reception of the FI in the USA, which leads to the specific form with which Rorty reads also the recent history of analytic philosophy. But recovering the realist side of Sellars' philosophy may help to express something about Arantes' position.

The Sellarsian critique of the Given is not a demolition of philosophy or of its *referential claims*. It is a critique of the idea that there would be something like content "given" to consciousness in an unmediated way. This idea, according to some approaches, would guarantee a foundation for the empiricist philosophical edifice. Sellars' critique is not aimed at questioning the representational capacities of thought, as much as just at undoing a specific understanding of how these are actualized. The quickest and most concise way to recover the critique of the Given for our purposes is the formula employed by Willem deVries to describe it: "The given is epistemically independent, that is, whatever positive epistemic status our cognitive encounter with the object has, it does not depend on the epistemic status of any other cognitive state. [...] It is epistemically efficacious, that is, it can transmit positive epistemic status to other cognitive states of ours." (deVries 2005: 98-99)

This means that the Given, in this critical sense, should be able to do two incompatible jobs. It should be experienced content acquired independently of any previous state of knowledge or conceptualization, and at the same time be able to *justify* other contents. If the Given is epistemically independent, it is not in the justificatory network - it is not epistemically efficacious - if it is epistemically efficacious, it is not epistemically independent. Sellars solves the problem by separating the *causal sphere, independent of any epistemic state, and the justificatory sphere*, which depends on a coherentist network of justifications that would compose the *space of reasons*.² Thus, between the content of experience and the concept there is *non-identity* (the Adornian gloss is intentional here): the concept is a candidate to subsume the content of experience, only insofar as this is

² John McDowell offers an alternative outlook of the relationship between the space of reasons and the causal sphere which, while building upon the Sellarsian approach, is critical of it. See McDowell (1994).

related to other contents in an interrelation that thinking tries to replicate in the order of reasons. This is also how Sellars arrives at a historical concept of reason as an unfolding transformation of different frames of reference, Images-of-man-in-the-world, which accompanies the development of scientific frameworks in their successful or unsuccessful conceptualizations. But the referent is not thereby eliminated. These are different approaches to a real referent tending towards greater adequacy insofar as the compositions in the horizontal dimension – inferential links between concepts – augment the capacity for the explanation of the vertical dimension – relationships from concept to thing. A difference that can be mapped onto the Wittgensteinian distinction between *seeing* (simple sensible contact with the object) and *seeing-as* (conceptualized sensible contact, in which the thing is seen-as-“something”, understanding “something” here as a concept with categorical-justificatory traction: a “this-such”).

But if the idea of *seeings-as* seems to recover a constitutive subjective character of phenomena, repeating the Kantian gesture that is being criticized by Arantes, we can recover it in a materialist key in terms of an *appearing-as*. The idea is familiar to Marx and covers his critical conception of commodity fetishism: the way in which social relations of production *appear-as* relations between commodities. The theoretical work of recovering the circuits of commodity and commodity-fetishism operated by the critique of political economy would be able to pierce through this, by offering an alternative image with greater explanatory power. At the same time, a danger lurks here of falling back into a form of the Given once one is supposed to have “reached the bedrock, and my spade is turned” (Wittgenstein 1986: §217) in the description of the mode of production and its determinative circuits. The shovel does not bend because one finds a positive foundation, “given” by the *framework* of the critique of political economy or any other, but, precisely, by finding a facticity that cannot positively ground the *seeings-as*, even if it conditions them. But a facticity that appears negatively as the impossibility of absolutely grounding, and not as a positive grounding. This does not authorize the “frictionless spinning in a void” (McDowell), that the Arantian critique seems to attribute to contemporary philosophy. It just means that every explanatory apparatus, no matter how close it intends to be to its object, has a *thrust* from the conceptual constellation that it manages to elaborate between the two poles, that of the immanence and that of the conceptual transcendence to the object.

The critique of the Given, therefore, intends to support both simultaneously, the pole of the self-referentiality of discourse as a *specific form of appearing mediated (non-exclusively) by the very concepts that make up the expressive linguistic medium at a given moment*; and that of the referent that *appears* within the discourse thus constituted, that imposes constraints on its conformation within this conceptual space. The separation between the poles gave rise to the division between left-wing Sellarsians (those who

began to develop the logical space of reasons)³ and right-wing Sellarsians – the distinction has nothing to do with politics- who began to develop the frames of reference and scientific means by which the manifest image of man can be denounced and debunked in the name of an Outside recoverable by scientific practice.⁴

VI.

We could ask here: isn't it exactly what Arantes is doing, debunking the manifest image produced by discursive self-conceptions, by tracing the circuits that run *underneath* ideologies? There is even a *materialist* version of the variation of seeings-as proposed by our author: precisely the mobilization of the *periphery* in the description of the processes of Capital. It is a *seeing-as*, because it mobilizes a distinction of visibility: what is available to be seen of the world from the center is different from what is available to be seen from the periphery. It is *materialist*, because the points of view are situated entirely within a world-system determined by the international division of labor in the context of uneven and combined development. Thus, it is not a theoretical apparatus that makes one see the difference, but the very material situation of the one doing the seeing. One part of the world sees the whole differently from another part of the same world.

But describing it in this way represses the *vocabulary*: Capital, commodity, international division of labor, periphery-center, etc. A batch of concepts that manage *to make* the difference between the *appearances* of the world of Capital from the point of view of the center to the point of view of the periphery. It is here that an internal distinction within the space of reasons is articulated: in addition to the framing given by the concrete position from which one looks, the frame of reference of *logical categories* employed - which is not directly deduced from the concrete position, being able to vary independently of it - allows the description of an interaction between the system of references and the logical system of categories that track those references. An internal difference that is also expressed in the materialist point of view: a point of view locally situated in the social totality, but equipped with specific concepts that provide cognitive friction. The necessary cognitive *friction*, codified precisely in the *non-identity between object and concept*, which causes movements of adjustment and maladjustment that provide information about the systems of concepts and of objects thereby intertwined. A maladjustment that appears *for us within* the conceptual system- as shortcomings in theorization. This is the distinction alluded to earlier between a *plan of situation*, from

³ Even if they do not allow themselves to be reduced to the thesis of redescription in the Rortyan way. Brandom and McDowell have their ways of safeguarding representational success within their left Sellarsian positions.

⁴ This division is based on the dialectic between the “manifest image”, phenomenologically available, and the “scientific image”, theoretically elaborated and conceptually *incompatible* with the manifest image – as presented in Sellars (1963).

which a vision of the whole is envisaged, and through which a problem posed by the historical conjuncture is highlighted, and a *plan of construction*, through which the internal history of concepts is called upon to pronounce on the situation.

Here we can give our answer to the “price paid” by Arantes for the implicitness of his methodological position. If Safatle supposed that the implicitness of Arantes’ position would result from the need to keep in a state of latency what is immature to come to effectivity, there is in our view an internal division in the very materialist maneuver employed by the author regarding one part of the world seeing the other part of the world: the one pertaining to the constructive plan of the vocabulary used, which should be submitted, like it or not, to the same type of critical discipline that Arantes directs at other vocabularies. Being in the periphery position is a *fact* but acquired through the transduction of a practical-material set of consequences to an explanatory frame of reference, for which the set of concepts employed is not an inessential part. Thus, the materialist *appearing-as maneuver*, as we call it, *without explicitness* runs two risks: a lesser risk of *flattening* the various dimensions that compose the dialectics to a base understood as “given” insofar as the logical vocabulary that theoretically constitutes it isn’t explicitly posited. And a greater risk of hardening the procedure into a fixed *maxim*, according to which philosophies never say what they mean. Here, what was an important distrust of the philosophical pretensions of having an *immediate political valence* in *Ressentimento da Dialética* becomes a fixed doctrinal element and, therefore, instead of uncovering the “true subject matter” of the discourses, *dissolves* them in their *effects*, retrieved, as described according to the lower risk mentioned above, from a unique and never explicitly posited point of view. Effects verified in the exclusive tracking of the behavior of the operational figure of the *intellectual*. But, in doing so, “subject matter” is reduced to an effect on, or of, behavior, a procedure that brings with it as a consequence an *a priori* irrelevance of the specific philosophy being addressed by Arantes.

Note that the criticism is not of a supposed performative contradiction that Arantes incurs. It is directed at the possible *loss of expressive capacity* of the model itself by not taking into account the conceptual and not just the material moment of *appearing-as*, which runs the risk (not always in Arantes, but often in *Formação e Desconstrução*) of flattening the dialectic which consists of not perceiving the emancipatory moment in discourses that are preemptively considered as ideological.

This reductionism seems to be applied without further ado to the whole of the so-called “French Ideology”. Despite the reservations made by Zanotti in the afterword to the book, that some judgments would have to be reconsidered after the writing of these essays, what one sees in them specifically about the content of the works of Foucault, Deleuze, Derrida, and co. is a disavowal made from the standpoint of a different theoretical basis. That is, it is immanent critique (from the point of view of Capital and its effects on discourse), but not immanent critique from the standpoint of *the philosophical object in question*. This justifies the wave of indignation mentioned in our subtopic II and the

accusations that Arantes “haven’t read” the authors in question. We did not want to follow this path of external critique of Arantes but rather try to justify as much as possible the Arantian method in its virtues and affordances before being able to effectively show *where* the accusation that *he did not read* could have relevance.

VII.

To understand this insufficiency, it may be useful to return to the second line of influence on the FI mentioned in the book, that of the artistic avant-garde. If the Arantian method, as we said, consists of using the difference between one part of the world and another to extract information about the whole, could a part of the world in a different sense, here not understood in the sense of the geographical-economical periphery, but in the sense of a specific practice *among* practices, do the same operation? The question has to do with the possibility of an *immanent* point of view not only existing in a geographic place in the topos of international capitalism but in a *specific form of practice* that follows an immanent logic, which may be able to extract information about the whole.

It is a turn of such a nature that Sérgio Ferro's thought performs with the visual arts, not falling back on denouncing the particular as false for being contradicted by the whole, but defending the determined negation that the particular exerts in relation to the tendency of the whole. The question is relevant to think about a possible emancipatory valence for the thesis of the “literary absolute” that Paulo Arantes intends to trace from the avant-garde to the FI.

For Ferro, the plastic arts are the only *material activity* that *resists* its subordination to Capital, not by discourse, but by proposing a form of action that exemplifies, albeit in a *limited way*, from the Renaissance to the outbreak of the First World War, where his analysis ends, what “free” labor would mean in the context of capitalism.

Despite taking place in a secondary province of social production, the leap is symbolically immense. The confrontation overflows the localized dispute, it overcomes the narrow particularity. If the language continues to be that of an isolated craft, what it says has general reach [...] What they do can be considered as a reduced, schematic model of a socially valid response. More precisely as an example (in the sense of containing in itself what it exemplifies, as proposed by the American philosopher Nelson Goodman) of non-subordinate labor. (Ferro 2015: 11)

The central point of Ferro's argument is that the history of certain procedures in art since the Renaissance is the history of determined negations operated by *artistic procedures* to avoid integration into manual labor that is fully subordinated to Capital. This evasion would depend on the rise of the visual arts to the status of liberal arts, wherein the amount or the importance of the manual labor involved should be concealed.

A search, therefore, for social *status* within the system. But, in the wake of this search for status, something different begins to appear. By seeking to differentiate itself through determined negations of subordinate handicraft procedures, the visual arts would carve out a negative space of freedom. The opposite movement to that of Arantes, which consists of finding the ideological moment in what is claimed to have emancipatory traction, here it is a question of recovering a real movement of denial in the practice of the self-interested artist. A point that is already illustrated on the first page of Ferro's two volumes:

At a time when the craftsman who produces images still dines in the kitchen, the "kitchen" of manual crafts constitutes an apparently definitive obstacle to promotion. It cannot be avoided, otherwise, there is no work. But it must be hidden, otherwise, the intended *status* will never be achieved. The solution to the impasse must deal with this antinomy.

Several solutions are tested. I quote three. *Virtuosity*, which seeks to compensate for the lack of prestige of the hardworking hand with the sophistication of the productive gesture. *Denegation* – which I will call the "smooth" style -, which eliminates its traces. These two have an apparent defect: they require redoubled artisan application. The third is worthy of the impasse: it shows the labor – but a labor opposed, point by point, to that of the contemporary craftsman, its determined negation. In this sense, the most outstanding figures are the *sprezzatura* and the *non finito*. [...] The artisanal tradition aims at ensuring the pre-established operational correctness; the new artistic plasticism, to possible discoveries, thanks to the openness to productive dynamism. (Ibid: 1-2)

The approach is not unrelated to Adorno's procedure of defending in the monadic nature of the work of art the critical distance that allows the critique of the social whole through the treatment of the material understood as social matter sedimented in the work. In Ferro, however, this criticism is not retrieved through the examination of the finished product, but in the procedures adopted by artists who deny the work ethic present in other material productions of society.

But the point that touches us directly, that of the avant-garde, is addressed only in the final chapter of Ferro's two volumes, and in the specific manifestation of Abstract Cubism. Following the direction given by Ferro, the trajectory of negations of the visual arts throughout the two volumes: after the three logical moments of negation of subordinate labor embodied in its exacerbation (*virtuosity*), denial (*smooth*), and assumption (demonstration of the traces of confection in the finished result, as in the *sprezzatura* and voluntary unfinishedness of the work, as in the *non finito*), one arrives at the passage to Modernism, where the *idea* represented becomes the object of negations - first in Manet's dynamic plasticity without an external model object, passing through the *systems* from Van Gogh and Gauguin, arriving at Abstract Cubism, which *avows the* essential flatness of

pictorial art. A thesis familiar to Clement Greenberg's readers, but that in Ferro's hands is an example of labor (step 1) that denies the hegemonic type of labor (step 2).

This radical unveiling obliges us to recognize that art is also labor, perhaps above all labor, like the others – but free. This would also oblige us to recognize the counterpart: other types of labor - or at least many - could, in the same way, be art - if they were free. But this built-in consequence deeply displeases Capital's minions and assistants when they sense it. So goes the common phrase of spite: Anyone can do it. (Ibid.: 23)

Here, a gap seems to open between the vision defended by Sérgio Ferro, of an impulse for emancipation present in the avant-garde gesture of *non-differentiation* between work and its exterior, which stands in agreement with Peter Bürger; and a positioning that sees in this *negative exemplarity* of the work the need for an aesthetic distance guaranteed by the autonomy of art, as defended by Adorno. “Here we are faced with what could be called with a touch of provocation Adorno's anti-avant-gardism. I am referring to his attitude of refusal in the face of the attempt undertaken by the avant-garde to dissolve art in everyday life.” (Bürger 1990: 189) Anti-vanguardism quoted approvingly by Arantes:

For this very reason, nothing could be more instructive than the comparison between this apotheosis without atmosphere – hence the superlative emphasis that distinguishes it – and the sober Adornian balance of the aging of the modern, even more revealing since resulting from an “aesthetic theory” of the same thematic-conceptual progression as the process of de-aestheticization of art reflected by itself since its inception. Not to mention Adorno's peculiar anti-avant-gardism, more than the disgust we can imagine, also a point of view on the surrealist aftermath of post-structuralism, armed, so to speak, *avant la lettre*. (Arantes 2021a: 47)

What seems strange in Arantes' approval of Adornian diagnoses is that, if on the one hand Adorno insists on the character of the autonomous *artwork* (its *heterotopia*) resistant to the disintegrating attempt exemplified by the avant-garde, on the other hand, it is precisely in the character of *separation from the outside introduced by self-referentiality*, in the heterotopic moment of the FI- that Arantes will find the avant-gardist element. Heterotopia that functions on the one hand (in the work of art) as a critical safeguard, on the other (in the FI) as false consciousness. A false paradox that explains itself: the opening of the aesthetic form present in the avant-garde has as a corollary the taking of itself as thematic content. Self-referentiality distorts the character of aesthetic appearance, displaying it as labor amongst labors, as Ferro wants. Thus, the *formal* openness to its exterior- the indifference to the outside- is directly proportional to the doubling of itself as *content* – *art about artmaking*. This doubling, while illustrating an emancipatory tendency insofar as it sustains the moment of *heteronomy* (art is labor between labors) of the *heterotopia* (art is free labor, detached from other labor) present

in the work; is also what maintains the exemplifying character of the individual work (there must be a “work”), which imprisons, therefore, the avant-garde in a concept from which it intends to escape. Hence its failure (Adorno) or its modification (Bürger) from a self-critical moment of art as a whole to a local transformation of the artwork concept.

An important issue would be to trace, accepting the proposed link between the avant-garde and the FI, how this paradoxical-exemplifying character of the avant-garde is transplanted to the position of theoretical production in the FI, which Arantes doesn't explain. For Ferro, the heterotopia proposed by the avant-garde has an emancipatory vector insofar as the visual arts seek to generalize their specific condition of *free labor* to all the arts. But it encounters a real obstacle, which depends on the concrete conditions of labor under capitalism. Free labor *must* become widespread or instead pay the price of remaining a privilege reserved for the few. This deadlock ends up placing the artist in contradiction with the position of the common laborer.

Perhaps here a critique of the comfort of an avant-garde aesthetic position is possible, but not simply because of a *referential deficit* of the discourses, but of their inability to universalize the emancipatory impulse that is their own. This makes the repetition of the avant-garde gesture in theory the prerogative of the disengaged intellectual, as commented on several occasions by Arantes. But deciding on this issue is not so simple.

VIII.

Let's do a brief retrospective. From an approach to the Prado-Arantes debate, we arrive at a formulation of the Arantian position as the search for an external determinant of the “Moebius strip” of philosophy and its subject matter. This model presupposes a difference between the material basis and the way it appears *to theoretical thought* - that is, a difference between symptom and response. Arantes seeks to leave theoretical immanence behind through a materialist anchoring of his theoretical perspective: this perspective coincides with a point of view *within* the world-system, which shows what another point of view, also within the world-system, does not see. This standpoint of the periphery displays the symptoms of the formations of the center. But the symptom itself is approached from a set of concepts taken from the critique of political economy. The *appearing-as* of the formations of capitalism is mediated by the (“materialist”) difference between center and periphery and by the *seeings-as* determined by the logical-conceptual apparatus in use.

Safatle's criticism of the concealment of the “implicit philosophy” takes on by this token the less generous appearance of an attempt by Arantes not to expose oneself to the same criticism leveled at others. This may be, as Arantes said at the launch of Safatle's book (Arantes; Chauj; Safatle 2019), a performative contradiction, but being a performative contradiction is not the heart of the matter. The core is that the appearance of leaving the

discursive universe is guaranteed by a denial of the conceptual aspect. In addition, the lack of explanation of the apparatus imply an impoverishment of the possible relationships to be drawn between the dynamics of the material base and the possibility of variation of the explanatory *frameworks*, a discussion that Arantes consistently refuses, which would condense, in the worst cases, in a flattening of the different moments of dialectic and a stiffening of the point of view. According to this flat point of view, philosophy/theory is always suspicious in advance, as its subject matter is never the subject matter it declares to be its own, but always the subject matter determined by the Arantian point of view. As Safatle said:

We will be forced to accept a strategy that will see, in the end, all production of the idea in its philosophical nudity as a simple compensatory realization of the impotence of social life, as a “mere idea” that hides its empty spinning. Disqualified in its force of inducing events, philosophy will be relegated at most to an implicit discourse, since its explanation in current conditions can only lead to its reduction to the condition of ideology. (Safatle 2019: 268)

In this context, the phenomenon of the French Ideology fits like a glove to confirm the model - having as confirmers the double determination of the *linguistic turn*, which supposedly removes it from the universe of material effects and the *affiliation to the artistic avant-garde*, a conjunction that leads to the recovery of the thesis of the *literary absolute*, which would enclose the FI in an aesthetic effect without a referential converse.

Ultimately, the issue boils down to the question: Is *discursive self-referentiality* the name *for what* in the context of poststructuralism? *We need to find out the real issue at stake.*

To respond, we must return to our distinction between response and symptom taken from the conversation between Bento Prado and Paulo Arantes. Against the discursive “glue” provided by the intellectuals, which Prado comments on, Arantes understands them as a set of diversionary strategies in relation to the true glue that produces history, not theoretical discourse, but the real movement of the dominant and dominated classes. But what our passage through the realistic moment of the critique of the Given reveals is the role not of the constituted theory that seeks to provide unity where there is none, but of the *vocabularies* that appear in the context of both the real movement and the theories that think it. It is about sustaining a more immanent imbrication of discourse and action, also conditioned by the *appearances-as* of impasses in a social reality for which we have no determined answer. Another concept surreptitiously appears here, which, in some sense, unites *response and symptom*, which is that of *adaptation*.

Adaptation can be something, according to Lampedusa 's formula, that promotes change to leave everything as it is. The best example is capitalism itself, in its accommodating transformations in the relations between Capital and labor. But adaptation can also be a tactical replication, which creates a space of homogeneity

between the environment and the action that transforms it. This tactical replication needs to be adapted to the *form* and *scale* of phenomena in which it manages to act. Something that, in Rodrigo Nunes' vocabulary, appears as *fitness*, and which is well illustrated in the space of indifference between artistic practice and material practice, as shown by Sérgio Ferro. About *fitness* in this sense, Nunes says:

If it is to work, an inflection introduced into a situation must be sufficiently compatible with it. That is, it must be materially feasible, it must be comprehensible and desirable to a large enough number of people that it can produce the desired effects, and so on. This condition establishes a superior threshold: a modulation of collective or aggregate behaviour cannot be too discontinuous with existing conditions, or it will not be viable; if it is too different from the situation it is in, it cannot transform it. The lesson here is simple: not everything is possible at any given time. (Nunes 2021: 234)

Or, as Sérgio Ferro says, it is because plastic art is labor that it can be *free labor*. Its operability is predicated on the negative adaptation to the context. But while in art and in theoretical practice there is always an irreducible heterogeneity with respect to social reality, which dislocates them into the terrain of exemplification or analogy, organizational adaptation to context in the movement of real politics is *sine qua non* for real change - even if it does not *guarantee it*.

It is in this context that perhaps we can, considering the type of thinking offered by Paulo Arantes, provide a more charitable vision of its targets. In this sense, the change commented by Arantes, inherited from Perry Anderson's previous criticism of the structuralist and post-structuralist arc, is less a change in *attitude* than a transformation in the *actual political referent itself*. Contradicting this hypothesis, Arantes' formulation, reiterating Castoriadis' judgments, which appears at the beginning of the book, is as follows:

While the weakened “main ideology” of the dominant system would undertake the routine task, and today quite discredited, of persuading individuals that the problem of society as such has no place or is being solved by the hegemonic bloc on duty, the deviant discourse of the *maitres-à-penser*, amplified by the educational apparatus, the media, etc., would assume proportions of a true diversionary maneuver, aborting the gestation of pertinent ideas about pertinent questions. With each new figure, this cutting-edge phraseology would resume its exclusive “complementary ideology” role. In other words, in the ideology of our time, the false consciousness of the ruling classes is not reflected, by an innumerable number of truncated ideas, but by the variable diagram of a pseudo-alternative of global subversion. (Arantes 2021a: 13)

According to Perry Anderson, the hegemony of Structuralist and Post-Structuralist thought would have aborted the possibility of a new cycle of unity between theory and praxis in the countries of Latin Europe. This is because, despite the success of

Structuralism being explained by its attempt to solve a problem left open by Marxism, namely, that of the relationship between Subject and Structure, the former propagated a philosophy out of place in relation to political collective praxis, without penetration within organized movements. This evaluation calls into question the centrality that these forms of thought would assume to understand the moment of 1968 in France, Italy, and Latin Europe as a whole, a moment valued by Anderson in his reading of this theoretical arc. The question that is posed acutely then is that of the *role* of theory and its relationship with *praxis*.

Kristin Ross adds to the criticism of the understanding of May 68 derived from the pantheon of post-structuralism:

A new renegade historical practice could continue the desire of '68 to give voice to the "voiceless", to contest the domain of the experts. While the theories that would come to dominate the 1970s—structuralism and post-structuralism—carried out what Fredric Jameson has called their "relentless search-and-destroy mission against the diachronic", another kind of work, deriving directly from the experience of '68, was being carried on within and on the outskirts of the discipline of "official history." It is here that we should look, rather than to the sociologists, or to the philosophers of Desire like Lyotard or Deleuze frequently summoned up to embody the legacy of May within intellectual production, to find some of the most interesting and radical political experiments around the question of equality. (Ross 2002: 116)

Contrary to Ross and Anderson/Arantes, it is not a question here of recovering Deleuze and Lyotard to speak of May, but of speaking of May to recover Deleuze and Lyotard. For example, the insistence on becoming-minority and the role of desire against the representative striated space of democracy and inclusion in the Communist Party reflect the organizational practice that Ross herself comments on. As the events of May respond, among other things, to situations outside French territory, particularly the repercussions of the wars in Algeria and Vietnam, to which the French Communist Party reacts in a moderate way, the dimension of the lock-in into representation by the centrally controlled organization becomes thinkable. To the extent that May 1968 was also characterized by the pursuit of the *question of equality* as a critique of *specialization* - the movement included students, factory workers, and non-aligned groups - an attempt was made to criticize the distinction between manual and intellectual labor. The movement thus tested new organizational forms, across the boundaries of these constituted social groups, in a practice of *assembly* of heterogeneous elements as advocated in the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and resistance to disciplinary power, as thought, among others, by Michel Foucault.

Regarding the organizational forms of the moment, Ross contrasts a *Leninist perspective* with a *Luxemburgist perspective* on the actual organizations of 68.

The distinction I am making can perhaps be illustrated by comparing a Leninist tendency to one deriving from the theories of Rosa Luxemburg. Both tendencies share, as did all the radical groups in '68, an anticapitalist goal. But a Leninist party is in essence a radical intelligentsia that says we have the right to rule. Their goal of “seizing power” is as much determined by that objective as it is by the adversary it confronts: the bourgeois state. In the hope of conquering that adversary, the party borrows the adversary’s own arms and methods; in a kind of underanalyzed fascination, it imitates the enemy’s organization down to the last detail. And it becomes its faithful replica, particularly in the hierarchical relation between militants and the working masses, reproducing the social division that is the very foundation of the existence of the state. But a dominant aspect of May—closer to Luxemburg than to Lenin—focused instead on that social division, on avoiding the hierarchy inherent in Leninism, and as such produced organizations that were an effect of the struggle. (Ibid.: 75)

The paragraph is very important, as it weaves many tense relationships with what this section is about to show. First, it illustrates a phenomenon of adaptation – but with the aim of criticizing it. When Ross speaks of the imitation by a Party of the State that it purports to overthrow, she is referring to one of these phenomena. At the same time, opposing it to a less hierarchical form of organization, presented here as influenced by Luxemburg, non-adaptability is seen as in some sense a virtue, as it runs less the risk of assimilation, while the dimension of *immanent* organization is an example, or a *pre-figuration* of the practices that one wants to embrace. An opposition that poses a problem that underlies the criticism, both by Arantes and Anderson, of Structuralism and Post-Structuralism as, to some extent, losing sight of the real struggle of the subaltern classes in favor of pseudo-revolutionary dandyism that, by the end of the day, ends up reiterating the enemy's individualized and atomized form of action. Regarding this hypothesis of assimilation, it is something to be decided by the observation of the *conjuncture*, and not a conclusion inscribed in the theoretical apparatus itself.

IX.

We had mentioned that, if the criterion used by Arantes to read the FI is *political*, proposing this arc of thought as *diversionary par rapport* to more politically realistic practices, it is worth asking what practices these would be. The question positions Arantes' thinking as oscillating between two forms of action that Rodrigo Nunes mentions in a paragraph that we have already quoted, that of *collective action* and that of *aggregate action*: “a modulation of collective or aggregate behaviour cannot be too discontinuous with existing conditions, or it will not be viable; if it is too different from the situation it is in, it cannot transform it.” This distinction seems to be at stake in the accusation against the FI, as Perry Anderson says, “the reunification of Marxist theory and popular practice

in a mass revolutionary movement signally failed to materialize. The intellectual consequence of this failure was, logically and fatally, the general death of real strategical thinking on the Left in the advanced countries - that is, an elaboration of a concrete or plausible perspective for a transition beyond capitalist democracy to a socialist democracy.” (Anderson 1984: 27)

An underlying question arises, which is: to what extent does Arantes subscribe to the importance assumed by Anderson for the influence of the theoretical arc in question - *as a theory*, not just as an ideological effect? A question that brings with it the distinction already mentioned. Would the importance of theory be predicated on its ability to directly *guide* collective actions (in the sense of Nunes) in the figure of a form of unity of theory and praxis, as Anderson wanted? Or would it be something more diffuse, in the form of an aggregated action, where, in the absence of an effective tissue between the intellectuality and a mass movement, wage on incremental effects at a distance?

Citing an answer that Deleuze and Guattari give to the question about what could be an example of the *molecular revolution* propagated by both, Nunes proposes their distinction:

Thus, for instance, the sexual revolution, a good example of the type of process that Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari described as ‘molecular revolutions’. A farreaching, ever-unfolding transformation of gender relations and social mores, it produced rapid and fundamental changes in a relatively short period of time between the late 1950s, when the contraceptive pill started becoming widely available, and the mid 1970s. The various modifications that make up this broader shift, happening at various scales at once, often required no collective deliberation, no planning or coming together. They rippled across different societies without anyone taking the time, let alone being able, to direct or oversee them. The sexual revolution can thus be described for the most part as the aggregate result of these manifold small changes, and therefore as an example of the aggregate action of large numbers of individuals.

By contrast, collective action properly speaking would refer to those cases in which people not only perceive themselves as participating in a broader common identity – that is, as belonging to a collective subject – but also intentionally come together and engage in processes of deliberation, planning, assessing, intervening, and so forth. (Nunes 2021: 23)

Further theorizing the combined action of collective behavior and aggregated behavior, Nunes proposes the idea of *distributed action*: “the common space in which collective and aggregate action combine, communicate, relate and establish positive and negative feedback loops with one another.” (Ibid.: 26)

Here a way out of the problem is suggested: if the political obstacle encountered at that moment is objective, the emphasis on tactics is also objective, under the condition that a bet is placed on a distributed form of *action*, in which theoretical practice participates, that *paves the way* in the midst of the current fragmentation to more collective forms of

action. Distributed action that, from being *a problem*, becomes a *solution*, as it appears as the only possible form of action in the absence of an organized social base. The same wager on the aggregate action can be seen in the context of artistic action, as presented by Ferro: if art does not directly mobilize politics as a *mass organization*, it contributes with its own internal politics in an *ecosystem* of distributed actions with different media and long-term effects on the organization of sensibility and on the possibility of a political movement to come. If this is the case for art and if the aggregate influence that a field such as philosophy can play is unpredictable, it becomes plausible that, even if we grant the precedence of political practice over theory, its products may be recovered by that same practice, thus participating in organizational ecology through aggregate action, and not only through the collective action claimed by Anderson.

In this regard, it is unclear in what sense Arantes could consider the thinking coming from post-structuralism to be *a diversionary maneuver*. One who talks about *diversionism* is presupposing something that would *not be it*. We have encountered this something before: the search for the “real referent”. But whoever talks about diversionism is not just talking about a theoretical error, but about a distraction from *what should be done*: instead of doing what should be done, diversionism orients towards the mistake, disperses energies; deceives by presenting a *simulacrum as if it were the real thing*. The relationship between theory and praxis is posited, therefore, by the thesis of diversionism. However, unlike Anderson, Arantes does not explicitly appeal to a missed opportunity for the reunification of revolutionary theory and practice at the 1968 moment, moving away from an expectation, we would dare to say, that Arantes would consider “naive” of a collective action, concentrating, on the contrary, in the properly intra-theoretical denunciation, of a *masking of the real conditions* that would have been imposed on the figure of the intellectual in the period of the FI. Thus, if it is not a question of appealing to what should be done, but what should be *thought*, the previously proposed problem of the lack of explicitness of the conceptual apparatus is acutely present, insofar as the criterion of the adequacy of the theory to the real remains concealed, a criterion whose presence shows the prevalence not only of the *appearing-as* in a materialist sense, but of *seeing-as* determined by the logic employed. The frame of reference of the FI according to Arantes would not allow us to see what there is to see.

But seeing is not necessarily *acting*. If Arantes does not endorse the thesis of the reunification of theoretical practice and political practice in the form of collective action at the very moment in which this possibility is blocked, his position becomes a kind of well-meaning critique of the *status quo*. A critique that, as such, could be assimilated as much as the FI to the immobilist position of the intellectual who performs it, in this case, Arantes himself. But if there is a way to defend FI, there is a way to defend Arantes- and since this way ends up being the *same* in both cases, it is worth asking, apart from the use of different theoretical apparatuses, and which gives rise to a properly theoretical discussion about them, which is effectively the type of action required by Arantes and

which is also not required by the FI. This is a problem of *participation* in political processes at times of real blockage of the mass movement. Participation that tends to resolve itself into forms of *aggregate action*.

Content which in the case of FI is duplicated in practice, therefore to the extent that the tactical dimension prevails in the critique of centralized forms of control, the strategic dimension remains suspended; this relationship of theory to the tactical dimension is replicated in practice by the fragmentation of the social base that consumes this literature. Thus, according to the hypothesis advanced, we could read the emphasis on the micropolitical, tactical, and *pre-figurative dimension* present in post-structuralism, even with all its limits and exaggerations, as not necessarily a diversion, but an attempt to gain agency at a time when the global transformation of the productive system is at a standstill. Its formal experimentation with theoretical writing would seek to carve out spaces of freedom *by example*, while its thematic emphasis on the molecular versus the molar, on difference versus identity, thematizes this movement of *local constitution* of spaces of freedom that does not necessarily *mask* a condition, as much as *adapts* to it, facing the inevitable risk of assimilation. But this risk is also present in centralized organizing, as Ross comments. Its *one-sidedness* in favor of tactics is effectively a limit, but it is not evident that it is a limit decided within the theory.

If the hypothesis that the problem with the FI is not so much one of compensatory delusion as of an adaptive development is correct, the complaint appears as a complaint against an adaptation that is, nonetheless, objective. The denouncement would surreptitiously make a demand for a form of action that would not be possible in the conjuncture, perhaps making the demand, itself, into an ideological demand.

X.

I conclude with an anecdote. One of many times I have been to a seminar of Deleuzians, after listening to a long presentation on the shortcomings of the molar, and on the subversive capacity of the molecular present in artistic productions, I raise my hand and ask about whether this approach contemplates the possibility of the global transformation of the productive system. To which I was answered almost aggressively about how I was bringing back the molar and identity and... Hegel in my question. And how, according to their apparatus, it was instead a matter of resisting locally and drawing lines of flight. I replied with another question: *isn't that a bit of a "scab" attitude?*

Discourse is indeed suspect. But not because it is always masking something else, but because it does not clearly *differentiate between the generalized adoption of a position (sometimes just because of its seductive character) and the discursive adaptation* to the real context and, in the second case, between the affirmative endorsement of the current situation and the calculated homogeneity between the current means and the

construction of the new. This is evident in many discourses that come from the so-called FI. The question I asked about the scab-like character of the speaker's intervention has the same two sides. Am I demanding something objective in terms of *available action*, but which is being ignored by my opponent due to the seduction of a philosophy, or am I taken by a fantasy of transformation *unavailable* on the real horizon?

A third possibility is suggested by the admission of this impossibility itself as an element of the theory. And, in this context, the philosophical discourse of the FI would acquire the features of a denial *not of the possibilities, but of the impossibilities* on the horizon. A disenchanting attitude that has always been a hallmark of Paulo Arantes' thinking. A disenchantment that, on the one hand, distrusts the affirmative emphasis on the local dimension present in the thoughts arising from the arc of the French Ideology, on the other hand, it is equally suspicious of "Leninist" solutions destined to take control of the repressed energy of the subordinate classes. This poses an oscillation between two extremes that alternate as opponents of Arantian thought: distributed localism and centralist universalism. The twofold negation that balances itself between the poles becomes relatively clear: the support of an implicit impetus towards an unnamed transformation. It was Safatle's hypothesis that there was a critique of finitude that must remain implicit in Arantes. And that it also paid the price of renouncing the theoretical means of putting this negativity into action, transitioning from resentful anomie to the emergence of new conditions. Conditions which, if are not to be the result of a pure accident (which is not excluded in advance) need to be *thought through*. Negative position, which in its anti-theoretical acumen overlooks a subtle difference between the Leninist *plan* and the explanatory *vocabulary underlying both plan and localism* which increases the understanding of the processes in the fabrication of *seeings-as* in contact with the real dynamics of exploitation.

Here it is revealed, amid the negative equilibrium that has just been shown, that is, the support of the negative, a further consequence: the denial of the role of the explanatory framework, duplicated in the emphasis on the purely negative that presents itself as *without form, as formless*, as that which is yet to come. The hypothesis of the concealed logical frame of reference reveals here another path that critical theory could take: the point of view of the search for the complex *forms that this informal* can take. But, if according to Safatle, the "true nihilism" proposed by Arantes is the one that "implies taking a position that leads the finite to implode" (Safatle 2019: 265), and, with it, the categories of thought already determined within the grammar of finitude, paraphrasing Pierre Boulez who by in turn paraphrased Antonin Artaud saying that he had learned to "organize the delirium" (Boulez 1966), we say: it is necessary *to organize nihilism*. Finding the *zooming* levels from which the field that is complexly *shaped* by the prevailing social formations, reveals its secrets and opens itself up to intervention. If discourse can always mask, it is at the same time, inevitable. If there is no more specific form that political action *should* take, it is not about determining it in advance, but about finding vocabularies, in

connection with effective practices, that provide the means of increasing understanding in a way that favors the emergence of the new.

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