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MALTA CONTEMPORARY ART

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FOREWARD

Eduarda Neves

CORRESPONDENCES is a project linking the programme of an International Colloquium [Unknown Recipient], held at Casa das Artes, Oporto, with nine exhibitions presented in Portugal, Spain, Germany and Malta, from 2015 to 2017 > (I) CAAA - Centro para os Assuntos da Arte e da Arquitectura | Guimarães; (II) Casa das Artes | Oporto; (III) Museu das Comunicações | Lisbon; (IV) Galeria NovaOgiva | Óbidos; (V) SALA X | Pontevedra; (VI) Museu de Faro | Faro; (VII) Galeria Escudeiros | Beja; and, within the scope of DGArtes - Portuguese Ministry of Culture internationalization of the arts funding > (VIII) Rosalux | Berlin [31.03 until 21.04.2017] and (IX) Malta Contemporary Art | La Valletta [23.06 until 30.07.2017].

CORRESPONDENCES is materialised in three publications > Red Notebook includes the papers presented at the “Unknown Recipient” International Colloquium > Yellow Notebook covers the exhibitions held in Portugal and Spain > Blue Notebook presents the exhibitions held in Berlin and La Valletta.

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Fernando José Pereira | Monica Coralli and Arthur Vido |
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CORRESPONDENCES

Eduarda Neves

In a letter excerpt dated June 5 1977, included in *LA CARTE POSTALE*, Jacques Derrida says: “What I like most about postcards is that we do not know what is in front and what is in back, here or there, near or far, Plato or Socrates, face or reverse. Nor what is more important - the image or the text or, within the text, the message, the caption or the address.” This fragment is taken as a reference for the CORRESPONDENCES project.

Published in 1980 in France, *LA CARTE POSTALE* falls within the author’s critique of the Western philosophical tradition. Despite its markedly intertextual and meta-literary character, this text is, however, not dissociated from a political stance. As Derrida rightly said, without “logoi” (concepts) there is no special class of connections that is particularly “logic”. It becomes imperative to force language, to break it, to disfigure it, to force concepts to say something else.

In this movement against the origin, establishing the conditions of its impossibility, we adopt the postcard as an open letter, with no secrets, no face or reverse, a figure operating in speech.

In the context of the exhibition project, we see the postcard as producer of subjectivity, process and life experience, itself an agencement of CORRESPON-

DENCES. We do not only intend to explore its linguistic, grammatical and rhetorical character, but also the use value it can acquire when integrated within a chain of possible situations. A metaphor for equality, with no face or reverse, here or there, image or text, the postcard exists in this traffic of sent, received, registered, circumvented, returned, stolen, lost, anonymous, confidential, inviolable correspondence. Correspondence also refers to connection, communication, relation, path, journey, route, complementariness, reciprocity. Multiple forms, multiple uses. We wish to set ambivalences in motion, to break with directions, departure and arrival, beginning and end, artwork and space, signified and signifier.

We still consider, in a Derridean way, that the unique right to secrecy is a political right: communication and its opposite, the Other and the Same, CORRESPONDENCES. In a time in which clarity is claimed for the sake of communication, where secrecy has no place when it is forced to yield to the totalitarianism of the public space, to the excess of public confession, we claim for incommunicability as a tool of resistance.

Just as in previous projects, in view of the singularity of each exhibition space, understood as a space of freedom, we wish that both the interpretative framework and the critical strategy summon speculative dialogues and horizons that are more symptomatic than ontological. We propose that the depth of space be shaped as a surface, be transformed into width, as Deleuze said about Lewis Carroll (explaining the reasons why the writer had changed the initial title *Alice's Adventures Under Ground*

to *Through the Looking-Glass*). Thus, Deleuze invites us to rethink the concepts of depth and surface:

One could say that the old depth having been spread out became width. The becoming unlimited is maintained entirely within the inverted width. 'Depth' is no longer a compliment (...) no longer to sink, but to slide the whole length in such a way that the old depth no longer exists at all, having been reduced to the opposite side of the surface. By sliding, one passes to the other side, since the other side is nothing but the opposite direction. If there is nothing to see behind the curtain, it is because everything is visible, or rather all possible science is along the length of the curtain (...) It is not therefore a question of *the adventures* of Alice, but of Alice's *adventure*: her climb to the surface, her disavowal of false depth and her discovery that everything happens at the border¹.

It is no longer about the relationship between essence-appearance, model-copy, self-other, for this distinction works in the domain of representation. Neither the model of the Other, nor the search for the origin.

In CORRESPONDENCES, and following Deleuzian thought, we propose that no model resists the vertigo of the simulacrum and that there is no possible hierarchy. Similarity persists but is produced as an external effect of the simulacrum, is built upon the divergent series, making them echo. Thus, identity is also produced as the law that complicates all series, making them all return in each one in the course of forced movement.

Experience of *difference in itself*, which is opposed to classic representation. The latter, sustained in identity, subjects *difference* to the principles of iden-

1. Gilles DELEUZE - *Lógica do Sentido*. São Paulo: Editora Perspectiva, 1998, p.10.

tity and similarity. Now, this *pure difference* is the object of thought, not of representation. Difference lies at the centre of *Being* itself. The multiple in each one. The singular as collective. *Being* is regularity and becoming, actuality and virtuality, difference is its own repetition.

We will follow the wandering, with no beginning or end. Chaos without a centre, potency of the simulacrum.

In these territories, the reasons of History, filiations, classifications, counter-narratives and resistances get muddled. Memory and the writing of History will give a body to time. We do not seek modernism's salvation economy, which has been gaining followers. Those efforts alternate between the Astuteness of Reason and the search for the Subject of History. If we have never been modern, that illusion is not a problem. The ism became irresistible. Like positivism. Modernism alternates between the return to an idyllic vocation of art (in a kind of *second life*) and the pragmatical conception of capital. Hegel's End of History seems to become the drama of contemporaneity. Time has become a lifestyle. Western culture, having lost direction, is increasingly trying to catch its own tail. *I'm out of air*, Nietzsche would say.

Likewise, the dominant ideology according to which the economic crisis fuels unique moments for reinventing and producing new subjectivation modes, is, for us, only one more tool for reproducing that kind of diffuse, apparently virtuous, universal into which the discourse around the crisis has become.

The relationship between the crisis and the prom-

ise of a better world seems completely aligned with the ideological programme that has usually, and over the centuries, accompanied the West. The naturalization of the crisis in everyday life, its rhetorical and colonizing dimension, expands into the territory of art, revealing that it is economic value that continues to frame artistic practice and to qualify it as such. In claiming for an aesthetic of precariousness, either the dynamics of capitalism are reproduced or that claim does not always follow the assumptions of a genuine artistic programme. On the contrary, it perpetuates the capitalist ideology of austerity and its geopolitical imperatives.

CORRESPONDENCES seeks, like a postcard, to make discourse live outside any binary form, any labelled artistic forms. It is about thinking without a precise direction, without defending an absolute Other, without a nationality. To act like Art, like an Equal.

It is in that path that we discover ourselves, in that journey directed towards an Unknown Recipient.

PRESENCE HAS NO SIGN

Alberto Ruiz de Samaniego

In his book about Nietzsche, Heidegger unexpectedly defends Kant over Nietzsche. The question revolves around the controversial idea of aesthetic disinterest – the Kantian notion of disinterested pleasure that Nietzsche violently attacked, as is known. According to Heidegger, Nietzsche’s reading is mistaken since it confuses disinterest with indifference and, furthermore, does not understand the essence of interest. Interest, defends Heidegger, is the desire to appropriate, which always implies taking and representing the object of interest “with something else in mind”. Nietzsche, in turn, does not understand that, on the contrary, disinterest consists in *letting-be* and *letting happen* the object. It would then be about letting the object be produced from itself, purely and as itself, in its own range and dignity. Kant calls this behaviour the “free favour” (*die freie Gunst*). Through that “free favour”, Heidegger says, “we have to let what comes our way reach us purely as itself, in its own range and dignity. We should not consider it beforehand with something else in mind, our aims and purposes”¹.

If we understand him well, then it’s not that disinterest withdraws from, or adds to, the object in indifference, as Nietzsche thought, but rather that it

1. Heidegger, M.,
Nietzsche, I, Destino,
Barcelona, 2000, p.
111.

would open the possibility of its opposite: the fact of one being able to relate *essentially* to it. Here Heidegger's words are important because they even give us a definition of what he understands by beauty. He says: "The misinterpretation of 'interest' leads to the erroneous opinion that with the exclusion of interest every essential relation to the object is suppressed. The opposite is the case. Precisely by means of the 'devoid of interest' [*das ohne Interesse*], the essential relation to the object itself comes into play. The misinterpretation fails to see that now for the first time the object comes to the fore as pure object, and that such coming forward into appearance is beautiful. The word 'beautiful' means appearing in the radiance of such coming to the fore"².

That this is not a trivial matter for Heidegger is clear in the sense that in it we touch on the very centre of his conception of the work of art, just as the following excerpt of his famous "The origin of the work of art" shows. He says: "In the work, on the other hand, the fact that it is as such a thing, is what is unusual [*das Ungewöhnliche*]. The happening of its createdness does not simply reverberate through the work; rather, the work casts before itself the eventful fact [*Ereignis*] that, as a work, this work is, and exhibits this fact constantly.

The more essentially the work opens itself, the more luminous [*leuchtend*] becomes the uniqueness of the fact that it is rather than is not. The more essentially this thrust comes into the open, the stranger [*befremdlich*] and more solitary the work becomes. In the bringing forth [*Hervorbringen*] of the work there

2. *Ibid.*

lies the offering forth of the “that it is”.

The more solitary the work, fixed in the figure [*festgestellt in die Gestalt*], stands within itself, the more purely it seems to sever all ties to human beings, then the more simply does the thrust that such a work is step into the open, and the more essentially the extraordinary [*das Ungeheuere*] is thrust to the surface and the long-familiar thrust down.”³

For Heidegger, beauty would be this thrusting to the surface, the evidence or presence of the thrust allowing something to be, to be fully. It is not possible to analyse here in detail the extremely rich semantic field Heidegger left us: to become luminous or step into the open, isolation and strangeness of the work in its solitude, fixing in the figure, the thrust of the extraordinary, etc. We will be content with the idea that, by placing ourselves within the radius from where the work is thrust, a radius that would delimit what we understand as beauty, our usual relations with the world will change. In fact, as is known, Heidegger believes that it is in that disposition that one would be able to “restrain [*ansichhalten*] all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to dwell within the truth that is happening in the work”.⁴

Therefore, if we follow Heidegger, what is characteristic of aesthetic behaviour – although not in the somewhat pejorative sense in which he understood the term – would be *to present* or *make present* an artwork, but in an essential, absolute way (and here, unfortunately, we cannot stop to look at the influence of its isolation and solitude, its being fixed in the figure,

3. Heidegger, M., “El origen de la obra de arte”, in *Caminos de bosque*, Alianza, Madrid, 1998, pp. 47-48.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

like the philosopher said). However, and this is very important, the presentation of the work is done to a previously existing one that *opens up* in it and with it. And, therefore, is also *presented*, is *made present* in an essential, absolute way. It also *happens*, so to speak.

In this way, each work puts us in the presence of the unique. A uniqueness that, in fact, does not follow any previous pattern, is no more than a sign of itself and cannot be repeated. Art, said Paul Klee, “gives no example”.

The artwork thus brings these two together; these two instances - subject and object -, in this sense, always unpredictable, always singular, unique. Bataille, a reader of Heidegger, said it his own way: “The endless carnival of artworks is there to show that a triumph (...) is promised to anyone who leaps into the irresolution of the instant”⁵. That leap can only be an anguished one, since what happens there is thrust to the surface devoid of any familiarity, strange and retracted from us.

All this leads us to somewhat disturbing proposals. For example: there never is, nor can there be, acquired experience neither in the artist nor in the artwork visitor, in the sense that, let us say it with *Derridean* words, each time the work is unique, the beginning and end of a world in time. It gives itself in the form of a clarification, a presenting of presence itself as *insigne*⁶ truth. By *insigne* we want to allude, for example, to an extreme until now not known or measurable in any way. Not signed: *insigne*. The work is there: fixed in the figure, absolute, absolved, the ties or bonds with human beings severed, with which humans try to

5. Cit. by Jean-Luc Nancy, in *Un pensamiento finito*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 2002, p. 67.

6. T. N. In the name of precision and in view of the lack of a word in English that will convey the double meaning of *insigne* (“distinguished” but also “not signed”, i.e. “not bearing a sign”), the Spanish was retained in the text in italics.

make it familiar, to tame it or dominate it.

On the other hand, that the work is only a sign of itself also means that the work of art is no longer, as Hegel wanted, the sensitive realization of an idea. But rather: donation, presence making itself: event: *Ereignis*. It is, in fact, the *opening up*: it opens in itself and to itself. For the open is no more than the place of meaning and, from this point of view, meaning threatens to be an infinite transparency. Where it leads to, to what thrust to the surface of meaning, is the problem; in the sense that this transparency can well be meaning spilling into an unarrestable *difference/différance*. As if, again with Derrida, we would prove that with this happening what actually takes place is an infinite retreat of meaning, a retreat, however, through which each existence exists, precisely.

So nothing can be decided beforehand concerning this exercise – that should be infinite – of appropriating a meaning; there where it is about the movement of a thought and of the gestures – to a large extent secret and unknown even to oneself – of its decision. For this very reason, thought in its decision is not that which undertakes to found being and to found itself with it, but rather and only the decision that ventures – in which it ventures – and that affirms the existence *about its own absence of foundation*. Existence, in the end, has no essence. Essence is found here, in the possibility that is each time adventurous, each time unique and possible in its extreme singularity for thought.

In any case, this relationship also determines that its receiver *continues open* – dwells in the dwelling – to its opening. The opening is, surely, nothing. It

is the being-open of being, or, furthermore: its being suspended, *to come*. However, in suspension, by definition, the decision escapes, does not take place, can never take place. In fact, the activity and authority implied by the decision are closely linked to the passiveness and abandon of the opening. All this in the sense that the decision will fade away to the benefit of the *Ereignis*, the happening. Moreover, if existence is this being open to being as a suspended opening, we will be able to conclude the lack of basis, the absence of ground, of a foundation or of reason, upon which we can continue existing. From it we can only conclude the following: our continuing in existence lacks, all in all, stability, consistency and security and we would even say that the process of that opening cannot clearly be a *self-opening* but only an *onto-opening*.

Therefore, in both cases, work and subject, there are no preconditions. This is why the event is *insigne*. Henri Maldiney said: “Insigne is what carries in it its distinctive sign. Not conferred by any other. It is through this distinctive sign that the sensitive acquires meaning, carrying itself to a level of excellence that it inaugurates.”⁷ What counts here, then, is what does not lend itself to univocality, or for that matter to plurivocality, but that makes the same load of meaning waver, permanently bringing it into crisis, into question, into unbalance. It is not by chance that Heidegger, speaking of the setting to work of truth through art, calls it something like “the essential sacrifice”, as one of the forms of this setting to work concentrates on art. Elsewhere in that same text on the origin of the work of art, he had deemed it necessary to count “the

⁷ Maldiney, H., “Originalidad de la obra de arte”, *El arte no es la política. La política no es el arte*, Ed. Bru-maria, Madrid, 2015, p. 380.

gifts and sacrifices” at the core of the being open to the clarification of being.

There is something sinister about all this, as probably already noticed. Something that links the sinister, Heidegger’s extraordinary - or the inhospitable - with Freud and Schelling: das *Un-heimlich*. It is important here to recall how the *Kantian sublime* was produced in a “sacrifice” of the imagination that “plunges into itself and, by doing so, is submerged into a moving satisfaction”⁸. And how the program of modern poetry is, so to say, presented in a note by Novalis for *Enrique de Ofterdingen*: “Dissolution of a poet in his song – he will be sacrificed among savages”. Where we see that the sublime is the offering, including as the destiny of the art of our time. To round off with this, let us say with Bataille: “Poetry (...) is the sacrifice in which words are victims (...). Neither can we do without the efficacious relations words introduce between men and things. But we tear words from these links in a delirium”⁹.

Art would thus be the ecstatic opening of the sensitive. Not of the immediate or formed or familiarized sensitive – this would be the *mere world*, if we are allowed this negligent expression, bearing in mind that we only know what we have assigned a meaning to –, but of the sensitive in its *putting itself to truth*, in its essential disclosing. But this is, of course, what cannot be decreed beforehand by the artist, in the form of a prior decision, or of a *performative* declaration, characteristic, for example, of the work of a conceptual: *this is art*. The opening, in fact, is not the result of any decree. Here is the trivial – and, deep down, sterile –

8. *Crítica del juicio*, Consideraciones generales sobre la exposición de los juicios estéticos reflexivos, y &26.

9. Cit. por Jean-Luc Nancy, *Un pensamiento finito*, Anthropos, Barcelona, 2002, p. 67.

tautology in which conceptual art moves: a work of art is what makes an artist, and: what makes an artist is a work of art.

All this becomes problematic in the sense that, if the work is not a delegation of anything, not even a sign, whatever it may be, but only the *installation for the happening of being*, in the precise and unique form of its being-work, of its *insigne* sensitive dimension, then it is also not possible to judge it. Since to judge it would be to separate it, as from outside its own donation – the donation or presence that it is and summons – from this donation of its. It would be like elevating above it to qualify it, evaluate it, measure it or judge it from norms that in fact do not belong to it. As we have said: the work is in its opening and only in it, therefore it has no more norm than that which it establishes, each time unique. Each work is in itself the genesis of its own norm. It is, hence, in the first and last instance, that which decides its being-work. Not the viewer, not the artist. The existence of the work becomes, in this way, transcendent. Its existence transcends the power of its author, not only that of the receiver.

Let us return to Maldiney: “According to conceptual art, the idea of art is the immanent cause of works. ‘It’s art!’: the artist proclaims and at the same time records the presence, in a work, of art itself... because it decides so by pronouncing it in it. It’s an ontological pronouncement that decrees the identity between the idea of art and art itself. That said, to be precise, a work is not a work of art if it does not attack that confused identity as a falsehood, just as the opposite statement, which identifies art as the cultural promotion of

a certain trendy production.”¹⁰

The work is isolated, sovereignly isolated, we can now state, considering what we have seen until here. That the work is isolated is very closely linked to this aspect we have just commented on, even if this is not very apparent. The work is always isolated, it gleams in its solitude, because it is the palpable evidence, the patency – more than the demonstration – that it establishes its own, unprecedented, unique norm and that, in its thrust to the surface, shows precisely the difference between *knowing how to produce a work* – the art, we would say, of producing an artistic object – and the *being work* of a work of art. Art is immanent by being the product of the work, its event. It does not rest upon any other prior or higher, ideal or empirical, reality. That is why the work is the continuous happening of its opening, a ceaseless origin and offering. *Werk ist Weg*: work is way, said Paul Klee.

All this, we say, is problematic. Since, if so, if the work is clearly not a translation of an ideal scheme or model, but determines the dimension according to which it is formed, then an artwork is incomparable. Its norm is only valid and operational with regard to itself. Therefore, not only is the work not the image of anything but, inclusively, and in it lies the *extraordinariness* it incorporates, it doesn't even offer the image of itself. Which is why we have to dwell in it, listen to it and inhabit it time and again. Each time offering us a perhaps different possibility, each time being unique, the work and us in that instant of our mutual co-happening. This is the event: the event of an appropriation each time singular and each time modalized

10. Maldiney, *cit.*, p. 388.

in a singular way.

In closing, we deal with drawing near the supreme moment that marks the autogenetic process of the work and the *apertural* instant of an us in it. This requires a leap into the irresolution of the instant that Bataille spoke of. An instant in which one *decides* in the anguish and joy of existing as if without a foundation, not expecting anything in return. A decision, however, or a *being decided* that are not, cannot be, neither attributes nor actions of the existing subject, except that in which, to start with, existence is made existence, opens up to its own being. And all that without an aesthetic judgment, which would be like wanting to regulate – a posteriori – an event, a presence, an existence. Art is not an object of representation, but precisely that: an existence. It is not something merely put in sight, disclosed, but something that *allows to see* and *to be*. A form of presence, and presence has no sign.

That is why in this relationship established by the work of art we can also cipher the *absolute sovereign* of all relations. For example, that between subject and object. This is a relation in which none of the participants previously exist. None of them is *given beforehand*, expected, predetermined: signed. Subject and object are completely, portentously *made unfamiliar* in that unprecedented relation. A relationship, furthermore, whose time is uncertain and clearly not assignable but that, on the other hand, if we wish, is of the utmost intensity. A *face-to-face* relationship, we could say; a full relationship. In which both sides give themselves to each other, opening up truly and totally.

Now, here, there, the subject will divest himself of any and all intentionality, of all intention of subjectivity. His behaviour will be limited to, if possible, to be or try to be in the disposition, in the spacing and installation that the object, the work, makes available. And the work is, in turn, will be, in its strict sense, object, full: presence, made present in its splendour. Hence, there can be no judgment, but rather a coming together. The work puts two beings face-to-face and alone.

It is in that sense also that the relationship established by the work can be defined, again, as being *sinister*: through it I lose myself to the world, I cease to be me, I no longer have marks or territories. As in an act of magic, I was deprived of native soil, of *heim*, of a home, of a family. I entered the domain of its alterity. I was torn from my knowledge and my power. In the same way that, we could conclude, the work used, utilized, helped itself of the instrumental knowledge and power of the artist, in order to elevate him above himself up until his opening path.

In any case, the work seems to exist, escaping any authority. *Ereignis*: event. Happening. Happening of a presence that now co-belongs to us and to which we co-belong. Having disappeared as projects of the world and the world itself as something to be projected. Disappearance in the open that, in time and through it, *opens up* in us. That work reveals us in a dimension in which we did not know ourselves, we do not know ourselves. Exposed to ourselves in it, then *we exist*. We are likely to be at a level of ourselves of which a priori we knew nothing and whose revelation shares the age and origin with the work. All the potential of

our existence therefore implies, opens up and intersects through the work of art. There, during that time, that duration, we recognised ourselves strangely, very strangely. We recognised ourselves as something that is not the same as ourselves but, we will say it a bit in Lacan's way, is perhaps *more me than myself*, displacing ourselves: opening a schist: *extimacy*.

THE TRAP OF LIGHT

Fernando José Pereira

1.

“At a formal dinner once a professor of some science or other, wanting to make small talk, had pointed out a few insects gyrating above the candelabra. He had told her that it was the visual impression of an even deeper darkness beyond the light that drew them in. Even though they might be eaten, they had to obey the instinct that made them seek out the darkest place, on the far side of the light - and in this case it was an illusion.”

Ian McEwan

We know, since Marx, that capitalism holds the supreme temptation of total expansion. We are faced with it in our contemporaneity. However, if we turn to Godel, we also know that that very system necessarily goes into crisis for lack of exteriority. We live with the latter.

This kind of inevitability is materialised according to a deterministic order of space occupation: that conveyed by the entire paraphernalia of seduction phenomena, today improved into surprising performance levels.

Psychoanalytic theory calls those empty signifiers asserting a place of attraction nodal points. A particular type of signifier that, in view of its emptying, is

forged as an approach to an abstraction – in the same way that gold, although being a particular value in use, also takes on the condition of representing the notion of value in general: that which tries to contain in itself the significant absence of a totality, i.e. a hegemonic place.

However, a place can only be materialised if its limits are named and these truly state the essence of empty signifiers.

Limits only exist when differences are actively established. However, on the other hand, interior and exterior are first and foremost structured, they too, according to sets of differential identities, which is why it is impossible to establish a set of differences that constitutes internality and externality. Defining the limit can only happen, then, according to another perspective: that which clearly assumes the notion of antagonism. Real limits can never be neutral. They always imply the idea of exclusion, i.e. a signifier that completely cancels all difference.

Thus, we are faced with an apparent paradox: a system's conditions of possibility are also the conditions of its impossibility. This is quite an important realization since all the desiring constructions derive from it.

The hegemonic place exudes seduction, hence the impossible neutrality of limits but also the ample power of propagation. A brightness so strong that it turns into blindness. An impossibility to see that re-sizes the exclusion towards a desiring power, which aspires, above all, to meet the real, though this is obviously impossible.

The symbolic loading of constructed reality – that which is possible – determines all the possible combinations for linking up an aim, whether in skilful semantic constructions of an impossible dualized mapping, or in complex networks of interdependence that attempt to materialise the possibility of impossibility, i.e. the utopia of visibility on the far side of blindness.

Before such a state of compulsive centralisation (based, however, on the notion of difference!), it might be possible to metaphorically express a possibility of chaotic ordering – the strange attractor – as catalysing what Deleuze termed diagrammatic reality, that is, smooth space within the striated. This attractor never takes the shape of a point. Instead, it materialises in a set of lines entangled in one another and inside a circle distorted anamorphically.

The most interesting aspect of this formal peculiarity is expressed in the possibility of the apparent impossibility – vision after blindness – through the 360° sight range. The nodal point always asserts its existence through the seductive character it exudes. Its lure determines the exclusion of anamorphic vision, which naturally makes the correct understanding of contemporary spatiality more difficult. In his seminal essay on the cultural logic of late capitalism, Fredric Jameson refers, by way of conclusion:

“The new political art (if it is possible at all) will have to hold to the truth of postmodernism, that is to say, to its fundamental object – the world space of multinational capital – at the same time at which it achieves a breakthrough to some as yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last, in which we may

again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion. The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping, on a social as well as a spatial scale.”

2.

From the mid-1990s, my work as an artist has tried to embody my concerns with issues around refugee flows, which have always existed and today are reaching yet one more peak of intensity.

The main point, here too, is the formalization of things in terms of artistic practices. Many dangers threaten the label of “political art”, which I have always refused, though they also threaten its opposite: the hermitism of some practices covered in such ambiguity that they no longer make sense, whatever sense we may want to assign them. Aware of these problems, over the last twenty years I have made many artworks that more or less explicitly deal with this issue. Above all, at a time like the one we are living today, this practice gives me the confidence to be able to look back and say things without giving in to the “opportunism” of trendy or contemporary topics.

The trap of light mentioned in the title is a metaphor born out of reading a novel by Ian McEwan and served as the motto for an exhibition held in 2002 where, among other works, I exhibited a large-format photograph with a black background and a strong light at its centre. A planet? The moon? A lamp? Any

of these but, above all, the metaphor for the illusory relationship that the “light” emitted from Europe produces in its neighbouring peoples. In his 1979 book, “Cybernetics of Cybernetics”, Heinz von Foerster already said, regarding the relationship humankind was beginning to establish with the new digital technologies, “we do not see that we have a blind spot. In other words, we do not see that we do not see.”, in a powerful allusion to the necessary discernment before the dazzle massively produced in us by digital technology. The same might then be said of the waves of migrants and refugees. The huge illusion and dazzle is one of the only plausible reasons for their quest for the right to a better life, which is however quickly thwarted at their arrival to the “old continent”. The friendly side of the reception is also pure illusion. In 1998 I made a video installation that stood out because of the simplicity of the images it presented: an iron gate continually opening and closing, accompanied by the powerful sound of its metal hitting the metal of the square. A small detail made all the difference. It was a right-angled double projection where one of the images was slowed down a few frames in relation to the other. The rhythm of both gates opening was temporally changed by the mismatch in the time of each film, creating a change in the viewer’s relationship with the piece: at some point, every time one of the gates was opened, the other would immediately close until there came a time when it was absolutely impossible to go in. Every now and then, the images of both projections would darken and a geographic coordinate would appear. It was the coordinate of the Tarifa beach in the south of Spain, a

favoured place for the arrival of migrants and refugees and, as such, intensely patrolled. Nothing was said, however. As Jacques Derrida stated, the interactivity that matters is the deferred one. In this way, those interested could later find out what place it was: if they searched in a deferred way. Besides this, a computer placed in front of the projections allowed the viewer to play a popular game at the time: Tetris. Here the player was asked to build a wall until the limit of the image. The player building the highest wall would win...

And, however, the walls became increasingly invisible but stronger and more difficult to climb over. In 2005, an invitation for an exhibition in Rua de Ceuta in Porto, allowed me, once again, to take this subject as the starting point for my work. As is known, Ceuta is the place where almost all African migrants trying to get to Europe converge. An installation titled “apparently nothing is going on” sought to question the way in which the means of border control began to be dematerialised so as to be much more effective. On one hand, the almost romantic naivety of wanting to cross the strait in the Mediterranean at night to decisively take advantage of its darkness; on the other, a new technology coldly perfecting the technical capacities to detect heat or, said more clearly, a number of infrared cameras placed on high aerial towers and turned to the sea in order to map the entire surface, in an invisible – cowardly? – way and, like this, know the exact number of people crossing the sea. Apparently nothing is going on and, however, all the surveillance systems are fully functioning with one interest alone: to arrest people.

The possibility of building a feasible reality for all requires an adjustment with the idea of impossibility. The Derridean notion of im-possibility transforms the negativity of the notion into another possibility, now with a positive sign. It is that im-possibility that is in direct confrontation with the constant, exponential migrations of the last years, of refugees and migrants seeking a better life or simply to escape death.

Some years ago I made a video installation from a description given by a Beirut inhabitant of the Israeli bombings while these were taking place. In it, constant running was interrupted by the sound of sirens announcing the imminent bombings. In the words of the anonymous Beirut inhabitant, he was a kind of infinitude temporally lying between the signal emitted by the sirens announcing the air strikes and the echo caused by the explosion of bombs. It was, in his words, a void that seemed unbearable. The video was called "suspended time". The im-possibility refers to this suspended time. To a new positive possibility to press ahead. Even if that implies that all naiveties – and, why not, utopias – surface in an attempt to embody the exit.

And, however, we know well where the materialised impositions of utopias led us and we know even better what was gradually passed down to us by the Reason reigning in Europe ever since Enlightenment – the trap of light, again – up until our days. A Spanish philosopher, who unfortunately died too soon, Luis Castro Nogueira, formulated a notion of the utmost interest: why are utopias always of Reason and never of reasons? Everything changes with this new proposi-

tion. For the better. To understand utopia outside the realm of Reason and to direct it towards reasons is a crucial change to grasp the apparently near-suicidal movements of refugees. This is no longer a grand accomplishment but rather a desiring gesture. An action that, in a way and abusively, we will also be able to integrate into artistic practice. At least into that which, as a matter of principle, does not want to be framed within the spiral of trade and consumerism into which its mainstream - if we want, its light - has become. A light that knows how to set its traps perfectly...

THE TOFFINU AND THE LEBU: halfway between indigenous narrative and spatial resistance

Monica Coralli and Arthur Vido

The history of a place very often includes intentional added parts and inaccuracies. These ‘inventions’ have in general and above all the purpose of adding value to the origins of a people, of a group, of a family and consequently of the place that offers them shelter. The identity construction starts from this narrative, made up of fragments of true history, enriched with ‘pieces’ borrowed from legends or from the imagination of the individuals in charge of passing them on. Oral tradition makes any changes in this assemblage easier and conveys a certain flexibility to the narrative. It happens that this narrative, which includes signifying symbols at the time of its drafting, loses its meaning later on, becoming sometimes obscure and difficult to interpret. The process it generates opens in turn way to new versions.

In general, the potentialities of a place form the basis of credibility upon which oral history stands, in order to appear plausible. The geographical situation, favorable to human settlement and strategic for commerce, and the wealth of available resources are, in particular, elements which contribute to its elaboration. Author names are given when they are authoritative or add to the glorification of the people and of

the place, but mostly they remain unknown: reflection of a collective appropriation, history becomes shared memory. This shared memory includes, however, different versions which appeared at unclear times, but preserves some invariables, a sort of landmarks and their frequency enables you to recognize the global permanence of history. This way, the least credible versions will continue to be told but more like anecdotes. To appeal to the identity linked to a territory seems pertinent from the moment a narrative will have permitted to establish common references which make sense to a specific community and create a unifying consensus amongst its members. This is the case with Toffinu and Lebu groups.

The two communities we propose to study have formulated similar narratives in spite of the distance separating them (several thousand kilometers), the linguistic differences (Toffinu speak Toffingbè, Lebu speak Wolof) and their ways of building and inhabiting their dwellings so as to legitimize their presence in a given place and maintain their supremacy thereon. The narrative each of the two communities has elaborated has gained ground by acquiring force of truth and its own legitimacy. In this way, the originality and the challenge of this subject of research lie, in our opinion, in the new approximation of the two peoples and of their respective histories, as well as in the identification of the ties that sustain «the words and the things» (Foucault, 1966), that is to say the narratives and the spatial forms they build and inhabit.

Our interest in a comparative study of the Lebu and Toffinu groups derives primarily from the construction of the narrative of their origins. In both cases, an artifice arisen from the slow transformation of true history has partially erased their warrior and nomadic past in order to value their fishing activities and, in general, their relation with water and their relatively sedentary character. Their present image has hidden away their traces: nowadays they are considered «natives», «indigenous» from the territories they occupy and regard themselves as rural proprietors. Also, when considering the etymology of their respective names, their naming does not give an account of their history.

The common, identifiable elements between the two communities, namely in the causes for their withdrawal, and then retreat to water territories, do not make it easy to decrypt the reasons for their different destinies. In our study, combining the historical and the socio-anthropological approaches, we will question certain architectural forms and specific choices in terms of materials in order to explain the reasons for their evolutions which, in their essential, are the work of their dwellers.¹

This research is just beginning. We are presenting here the first results, which are still provisional.

In Senegal, field work started in 2015, at the time an urban project workshop on social housing was taking place. In fact, reflecting on this subject in Africa, in Dakar in particular, and on the meticulous observation of the transformations operated by its inhabitants

1. In order to decrypt these transformations, our approach will follow afterwards with a retrospective, exhaustive study of the different living patterns which will complement our data.

during half a century in the dwellings² they beneficiary, has led us to look into 'traditional' forms of housing. Maybe they would probably make us understand better the transformations in more recent housing, of modernist influence, proposing a new life pattern, diametrically opposed to the lifestyles characteristic to the majority of the population.³ In Benin, the elements presented here are based on secondary sources, relatively dated, except for one work, yet unpublished, the result of a study conducted between 2011 and 2012 by the archeologist Orazio Patti on the Aguégués.⁴

TWO NARRATIVES, SEVERAL RECURRENCES

The different founding narratives on the rooting feeling of the Toffinu as Lebu, contribute to explain the links between past and present and allow us to understand the reasons for maintaining a certain form of housing and of inhabiting, as well as their own transformation, in spite of the advance of the real estate development. Our purpose will be to intersect these narratives with the specific and evolving spatial forms they produce. Their housing is, in our opinion, a remarkable example of resistance to globalizing forms of urbanization.

Resisting

This capacity to resist is, in our opinion, the proof that the Lebu have a strong identity linked to a given territory, through a narrative built to proclaim and reinforce their presence which continues to be influenced by external factors, by political and economic games of investors and by international partners,

2. Reference is made to the programs launched during '50s for the building of social lodgings in the Cap-Vert peninsula between 1950 and 1980.

3. The international workshops in Dakar are organized within the frame of the ENSA Paris La Villette's Master 1 urban project course, «Détour(s). L'infraordinaire des métropoles », coordinated by Olivier Boucheron.

4. The *Aguégués* are group of lands situated above water level, that are partially flooded, situated in the vicinity of Porto-Novo. The inhabiting communities live both on the river-lake lagoon waters and on the Oueme delta lands, as their activities are rhythmmed by the rise and fall of water levels.

imposing attitudes different from those pertaining to their culture. The Toffinu living on the shores of Lake Nokoué in Benin, in a territory situated between Cotonou and Porto-Novo, and the Lebu from Cap-Vert peninsula in Senegal have developed specific forms of resistance that have more to do with spatial and material form related to a specific location near water, inside water or between land and water⁵. With the Lebu, this is also combined with a very structured socio-political, religious organization.⁶ «The contact with the Europeans [tells us Bourgoignie about the Toffinu, author's note], could have made them parachute in an intoxicating world and history made of the commerce of guns and mirrors, of precious fabrics, of *multifiori* (pearls in Venetian molten glass), and of alcohol which might have put an end to a development in autonomy.» The Lebu have traded with the Europeans and made their permanence possible on the peninsula but, in fact, both the Toffinu and Lebu knew how to preserve their autonomy and, even today, any decision pertaining to land cannot be taken without their consent; in this sense, they continue to be the «town makers»⁷.

Building nativeness

The 'Building' of the autonomy has made essential, in both cases, a first oblivion to hide the fact that they have not been the first dwellers on the sites they occupy at present. In fact, we know that they have settled in successive migrant flows which explains, among other things, their persistent ties to the land, when they call themselves «water people», following the etymology of their naming. In the social construc-

5. This choice to live on marshlands, halfway between land and water, according to seasons, led O. Patti to create a neologism to refer to them. The term *terreaux* (*landwaters*) precisely indicates this adaptation of their lives and of their activities following the seasonal periods of the year.

6. We will not be able to develop here the different entities that organize the Lebu Republics.

7. This expression is very often used by all those interested in village manufacturing putting in the first place the creative dimension of the dwellers. We refer to, among others, the works of Pedrazzini, Bolay, Bassand (1996), Dorier-Apprill, Gervais-Lambony (2007), Paquot (2010).

tion of their communities, collective memory voluntarily detaches itself from real history in order to retain only the elements around which history left for posterity is then forged. Strictly speaking, there is no founding myth.

Three points seem to us essential in their comparison:

The first point is that in both cases they are fleeing warriors coming from the inland and forced to settle down on the shores (of rivers, of lagoons or of the sea). The second point has to do with the close relationship progressively established with water: inhabited at first as a refuge, it becomes a resource later on. Finally, the third and last point has to do with the sense of belonging: in both cases, they are an heterogeneous group made of several ethnic groups who entered into contact at successive periods.

HISTORICAL NARRATIVE AND THE BUILDING OF THE TOFFINU AND THE LEBU FOUNDING MYTHS

The Toffinu are called «Water people». /*To*/ means a body of water, /*fin*/ expresses the action of stealing, taking away, or monopolizing and /*nu*/ designates whom does it belong to. *Toffinu* literally means «people monopolized by water» (Bourgoignie, 1972). They fled from the Danhomey *razzias* and chose the marshlands as a refuge to settle down. Afterwards, they spread all along the shores of Lake Nokoué, of the Zou Valley and of Porto-Novo Lagoon. Some of them migrated towards Badagri (nowadays Nigeria), in the vicinity of Lagos Lagoon, in search for waters richer in fish, at the time fishing went down in Nokoué. In the sixties, the pop-

ulations once called Toffinu coast people, left the old lake villages of Awansouri and Afotonou⁸, respectively destroyed in 1910 and 1923. However, the Toffinu kingdom also includes lands not flooded all year round or not flooded for long periods of the year. The history of the Toffinu plants its roots into the past of the city of Tado. Like all other peoples from South Benin, they consider this town as their original cradle. Three brothers, Gangbo, Hunsu, and Ejè, from the Ajawa clan had to leave Tado and made a stop at Adja-Honhué which means «refuge home for Adja fugitives». This place is situated to the West of Lake Ahémé, some kilometers South of Bopa, almost facing the village of Dodomè (nowadays Tokpadomè village) on the Eastern shore of the lake, one of the stopping places of the Agasuvi migration (Mondjannagni, 1963). Not feeling completely safe, they continued roaming until they ended up at a marshy place which they reckoned to be sufficiently distant and safe. They named it *Ahuansè* which literally means «the war has ended» (*Ahuan*, war ; *sè-si*, to end), from where the name Ahuansori (Awansouri) derives. This was how the Ahuansori village was founded during the second half of the seventeenth century, on the South shore of Lake Nokoué, next to the lands already occupied by a *xwla* population from Djèken-Godomè.

The Toffinu were tormented for more than half a century by repeated attacks from Goun soldiers (Dunglas, 1967). It was only gradually that they started to co-operate with the men from the different plateaus around them. Nowadays, this community shares these lands not only with the Wémènu but also with the Gun,

8. According to Prudencio (1969), *Afotonou* means «on water where feet cannot step anymore».

the Yoruba and the Aizo. The village toponyms evoke the wars (or their end), in contrast, their names evoke water, in their case a synonym of restored peace, because of the shelter it provides. The connection with fishing is evident, though not explicit. But they continue to be, depending on the times of year, stockbreeders and farmers.

The Lebu would be «reclusive, particularistic, coherent people», as in their description by Balandier and Mercier (1946, p. 11) who conducted an investigation within the Lebu fishermen in 1946.⁹ Were they a population of fishermen since the very beginning? They doubt it:

«(...) did they already have this character before settling down in Cap-Vert and Petite Côte? Legends offer some contradiction on this matter. One of them, apparently more recent, is about a fish-woman, captured by a brave, sea fishing pioneer who, once brought in among men, would have taught them the fishing techniques and religious practices, and would have united with them. A legend that tends to attribute to a marine inheritance the qualities of the Lebu fishermen.» (*idem*: p. 17)¹⁰

The connection attributed to large Lebu families and marine creatures in different versions of their history allows us to date far back in time the moment when they learned fishing. Also,

«Traditions speak about their relationship with the *Tyubalo*, fishermen native from the river (...). These *Tyubalo* are Toucouleur elements, not a people but a caste of fishermen. They would have been the masters of the Lebu in the art of fishing. (...) This way, the Lebu would have made their

9. This study represents for its authors the first contact with Black Africa and «living» sociology. Our interest in the unknown forms of resistance they have developed corresponds to (and finds confirmation in) the interest these authors have already lent to this community because of its fighting back external influences. They have studied their reactions to the contact with Islam and with two important urban centers, Dakar and Rufisque. Nowadays the Lebu interest us because the territories of certain villages, such as Yoff or old Ouakam, resist to the absorption by the Dakar urban area, and their *penc* are key elements of their social and spatial organization.

10. For a detailed presentation of the different myths and legends, we refer to Mercier and Balandier text (1946).

apprenticeship as fishermen on the banks of the Senegal river. Fishing practice in these regions must date back to a very remote period: the remnants of fishing engines, collected from the middle of the Sahara and used during the pre-desert age, can prove it. Would the Lebu be linked to these populations of archaic fishermen? Has the name Lebu always designated a population of identical composition? (...) The Lebu are Wolof, the Lebu are Sérère, the Lebu are Sossé (Mandinka)». These different answers, given full of confidence by the Lebu themselves and by their neighbors, «would suffice to prove the mixture in their present population.» (*idem*, p. 18-19)

Where do they come from? If the last stages of their migrations can be clearly identified, their ancient past raises numerous uncertainties. The Lebu are described by Cheikh Anta Diop (1967, p. 271) as «hordes of Barbarians who swept across the coasts of Africa » and were forced to flee towards the West into present Libya - of which they would come to be the founders - by the Egyptians of the Nineteenth Dynasty at the time of the Indo-European invasions in the second millennium,¹¹. This «wild country» they occupied was called *rebu*, and *lebu* would be one variant thereof. C. A. Diop tells us further down that «the main concern of these hordes (...) was hunting» (*idem*). In fact, he drew very eloquent correspondences between Egyptian and Wolof languages, in particular */reb/* means «hunting », « hunter » or « to hunt » and */rebu/* indicates the «place where to hunt» or the «hunting country». The word *lébu* would mean «challenge, warrior», *lubu* «aggressive warrior». This etymology is contradicted by another version, also accepted by the Lebu: their name could derive from *lebe* «to tell, to tell a tale», in

11. Sylla (1992, p. 7 ff) states that the Lebu would have come from India and would have spent some time in Arabia before reaching the Mediterranean coasts. He also draws striking comparisons between Dravidian and Wolof languages. The similarities are surprising.

the sense of «cunning», they would be then those who conceal their thoughts.

The Lebu settlement on Cap-Vert peninsula would be the result of migration flows coming from Eastern Africa between the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries or could have stemmed from the displacements of Black populations occupying present Mauritania from where they were progressively chased out between the tenth and thirteenth centuries. In any event, not enduring any sort of domination, they went through numerous displacements and, after a rebellion in the eighteenth century, they were able to found a Republic, the first one to have contact with Europeans. They were recognized by the Cayor authorities, other inhabitants of the peninsula, and by those on Gorée Island (French settlers) before the end of the eighteenth century. From then on, the notion of Republic reflects a unity feeling around the Lebu identity. Being a mixed group, it could have disintegrated when in contact with the European populations. But all the sources agree in the definition of their tenacious character, which will rebel against any form of colonization (be it religious, cultural, economic, political...).

These two case studies prove once again that it is not only possible but also necessary to revisit history, to adjust our look thereon, to «reconsider the Grand Narrative of the development of Western civilization, a triumphant celebration of the achievements accomplished by the West» (Burke 1998, cited by Goody 2006). This cultural superiority of Europe, of Western eyes who imposed their reading on the rest of the

world, has neglected these groups who are hardly ever mentioned in the official written history transmitted in handbooks. Presented as 'marginals' and 'minorities', their destiny would be doomed to disappear. If the history of the human settlements in these territories was to be rewritten, they would have a relevant place. According to the European-centered vision, whenever they are «given value», this happens within the frame of tourist circuits offering 'experienced' visitors a detour «tradition», facing large urban conglomerations associated to the image of the Western metropolises or, in particular, to other models from China, from Dubai...

This journey back to the past of the Toffinu and Lebu opens line of thought which will be further developed shortly: the one dealing with the spatial solutions adopted, which could derive directly from mental representations, namely their past of warriors, provides us with the information about forms and modes of resistance set up because of the new water environment; the other dealing with practices which also cannot be explained, without knowledge of the past. In Toffinu environment, for example, the ancient connection to land is restored at the end of life when, at the time of the burial, the choice is systematically to bury the dead on dry land.

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CORRECTLY POLITICAL

Nuno Faleiro Rodrigues

Although with variable visibility, the politically correct (PC) increasingly occupies our everyday life, being used in various, more or less, formalised contexts of interaction between individuals. In normal circumstances of collective life, the politically incorrect (PI) is less and less accepted, and to successfully navigate in the complex world of social interaction – for example, in the labyrinthic field of codes associated with work relations – requires a reasonable command of the rules adhering to the PC norm. In certain “sensitive” contexts, the predominance of the PC position reveals all its splendour. We are referring to particularly delicate situations in which the PI is tolerated because it is PI to reprimand the use of PI language. In particular circumstances, a child, a disabled person or someone belonging to an ethnic, religious or cultural minority is allowed to use language conforming less to the procedures imposed by the PC. As long as the informal, as well as the formal, rules of PC are correctly followed, it is irrelevant to know whether the content of our thoughts is adequate or, on the contrary, opposed to the way our actions are perceived. To be accused of hypocrisy or cynicism regarding PC only happens when the cleavage between our actions and

our thoughts is manifested in the former. One of the most common forms of hypocrisy associated with the PC discourse comes from the paternalism expressed through a manifestly exaggerated approach. The ability and autonomy of a subject or group of subjects can be brought into question by the overzealous way in which we follow the rules of political correctness. In that case, the PC becomes a tool to express PI thoughts. In this context, therefore, there is no room to make visible the contradiction between what is said and what is done; there is only the possibility of contradicting what is said by the way it is said. In other words, what is done is what is said.

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Political correctness: the avoidance of forms of expression or action that are perceived to exclude, marginalize, or insult groups of people who are socially disadvantaged or discriminated against.

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The PC discourse aims to avoid offending individuals belonging to the more vulnerable layers of society. One of the most common criticisms made to the PC is that it restricts people's ability to express themselves in a society that aspires to be free, rendering it as a kind of dictatorship of the offended against the remaining members. Bearing in mind that political correctness works by anticipating a potential offence, in order to avoid it beforehand, we can say that the "dictatorship of the offended" unfolds retroactively, from a position situated in a future to escape, i.e., it positions itself from the point of view of the potential offended (who should not be offended). However, this gesture

of anticipation tells us that we can only conceive the retroactive position of the offended through the corresponding projective position of the potential offender. For the offence not to take place, a potential offender is enough – one that, through the preventive gesture, identifies a possible offended susceptible of being offended by a certain potential offence. Therefore, the dictatorship of the offended originates in the anticipatory self-positioning of the potential offender, following a logic as virtual as it is circular. The offended, in turn, is caught in the net of the offence to be avoided and has little room to find another position outside this circle: either she was not offended because the mechanism of anticipation and prevention worked effectively (although not escaping from the stigma of the virtual offence); or she took offence for the opposite reasons. There is, in fact, a small subversion allowed to the offended: to not be offended by the offence directed at her. But this narrow opening of freedom will always be dependent on the dominant position of the potential offender. Regardless of the numerous constraints this circularity may bring to the potential offender, it gives access to a discursive territory that belongs to him. It is up to the person with the power to speak to identify his interlocutor as potentially offended, i.e. as someone particularly vulnerable, and prevent the offence from being directed at her. Whether the offence took place or not, the offended is invariably integrated within a social group perceived by the majority of potential offenders as being particularly vulnerable. According to the logic underlying the PC discourse, this group is entitled to not being offended insofar as it is deprived

of a voice. Through the preventive act, the offender, who did not become one, is integrated, in turn, within the majority with access to speech. That not said that could have been said belongs to him alone. This way, he is simultaneously the emitter and addressee of the offence that must not take place. The prevention of the offence is directed, therefore, not so much at the potential offended but to the fraternal community of potential offenders. It functions as a cue between peers and, unlike what is often defended, does not aim to structure a more inclusive discourse. It is important to bear in mind that the community of potential offenders does not need to be physically present in a certain discursive situation; what matters is that, even when absent, it makes itself present. More than the numerical criterion, what defines the majority is precisely its ability to be present, even when absent. In the limits established between potential offender and offended, the PC discourse draws a territory of access and visibility regarding speech. Strictly speaking, the preventive gesture does not take us to the virtual plane of the possible – what can but should not be said – but to the actual manifestation of what was not said through what is said. Within the PC logic, it is not enough to anticipate and prevent the occurrence of the offence; it is essential, through the use of manifestly non-offensive language, to make that preventive gesture perceptible to the remaining potential offenders. The PC mechanism strives, as it were, to make that absence visible.

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Therefore, the PC discourse implies the identification of groups in society that, according to the of-

fender, are more exposed to acts of discrimination and prejudice. Without a particular target, the PC position lacks direction and intentionality. In its relation to the offence that will not come, political correctness situates itself between two sociocultural phenomena that are not extraneous to it. On one side, it can be seen merely as a particular variant, perhaps an intensified form, of politeness cemented among members of a society that strives to be civilized and regards gratuitous offences unjustified. As much as PC critics stress its overzealous control over the use of speech, they are always in a weak position when their critique is advanced through the relativization of the content of the offence. The offence is always relative, and against a general perception among the potential offenders about what is offensive or not there is not much that can be done. On the other side, the PC discourse finds its limit in the growing terminological sanitation pervading the contemporary institutional world, from the state machine to labour relations management. The hygienization of language is expressed in multiple processes of life management. It assumes, nonetheless, two distinct facets: a commercial and a bureaucratic dimension. On the one hand, we face a “softer” sanitary inclination, manifested in euphemistic processes of concealment of the violence intrinsic to the commercialisation of everyday life, particularly in labour relations. In this regard, note how deregulated and low paid work is increasingly performed by “technicians, collaborators and consultants” of all sorts who, more often than not, carry out repetitive, menial, low-skilled tasks. On the other hand, we face a “strong” bureau-

cratic sterilization of language that does not intend to terminologically soften a given reality, but expresses a position of power according to the cruel refinements of the world of administration. In this case, the terminological arbitrariness reflects the violence resulting from the arbitrariness inherent in the state's position of maximal power, hence its typical penchant for strong irony, or even sadism. It is precisely such position of strength that surfaces in such type of terminological dissonance. To refer to torture as "Enhanced Interrogation Techniques" or to designate significant cuts in pensions "Extraordinary Solidarity Contribution" are examples of the sadistic-bureaucratic strand. In this manner, the PC discourse is enclosed by three distinct domains: underneath, and in a more diffuse way, by the "civic politeness" required when dealing with the more vulnerable groups of society; laterally, and in a more specific way, by the two mechanisms of linguistic deflection of violence that colonize our lives. In the latter case, political correctness is situated between the informal, but direct, concealment pertaining to the usual linguistic softening of the violence of the commodification of everyday life, and the formal, but indirect, uncovering, manifest in the bureaucratic marking of state force. As a generic and preliminary hypothesis, we can consider that political correctness performs a double discursive operation, being positioned between the informal direct concealing and the formal indirect uncovering of economic-bureaucratic violence.

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On a first level, the effectiveness of the PC dis-

course results from the normative intersection between what is said and the contextual situation (using the right words in the right place). Linguistic form and content are far from irrelevant, but are clearly insufficient to clarify the stages resulting from the discursive process. Furthermore, the interpretation of what is said requires a first, usually unconscious, reading of the discursive situation that, as we have seen, cannot be reduced to the identification of the potential offended by the potential offender. The direction and intention we attribute to the PC are, thus, the result of a subterranean interpretative movement that conjures up a situation, summoning potential offended individuals and the community of potential offenders (that makes itself present, even if absent). Before being a cause, the use of the PC speech is the effect of a number of preceding topical norms and readings. Of course, this is a generic requirement for any communicative practice, but nonetheless necessary for PC to unfold between the contextual reading, the manifestation of the prevention of the offence and its actual perception. In the normative position it produces regarding what should, or should not, be said and heard, the PC mechanism establishes a practical relation with the available linguistic instruments, being a kind of manual on how to use language in particular contexts. Its robustness results, in this sense, from the consistency formed between norm and “use”. Insofar as it manifests a set of communication rules that regulate our discursive actions, the PC discourse takes the structure of a practice that acquires the predominant form of a practice of speech.

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In what sense can we state that the PC discourse is primarily a practice, if we position it as a set of partially latent norms or rules? Is it a code of social conduct or its practice? A box of discursive tools or a pre-established set of rules? Norms and actions can be interdependent but they are not the same thing. When we suggested that the PC discourse operates as a mode of use of language, we should bear in mind that “mode” and “use” are structured by practice. There is no form independent of practice and practice is the main formalizer and formatter of the PC discursive “tool”; it is the agent that joins norm and action. In this regard, one should bear in mind that the formal deployment of PC terminology in the world of administration does not require a set of previously established rules (even if sometimes, and increasingly so, the right to non-offence is justified and grounded according to the letter of the law and the Constitution). Since it is not necessary to formalize the form via bureaucratic or legal means, it is not possible to make reference to a code of conduct without the manifestation, through “use”, of its conformation. Some norms can be inferred from their practice (such as, for example, the greater tolerance towards political incorrectness when voiced by a member of the target group of PC discourse) and, at a second stage, conclude that they gain a life of their own within the legal and pseudo-legalistic spheres. But no rules survive irrespective of their use. Practice produces norms that, in turn, condition practice. This perspective presents the PC discourse as naturally resulting from the consolidation of habits and a “world

view” common to the society from which it stems. Here, we face an organic image of the relationship between mode and use that is, in effect, (re)produced by practice. Taking such path does not allow us to reduce the discursive practices associated with the PC to a specific mode of use of language, since the former are also a “mode of production” of a certain perception of discourse. Practice produces the surface through which the apparent natural and organic dimensions of discourse shine.

*

The practical relationship between mode and use brings us to the core of a second question that should not be neglected: the PC discourse operates on the surface of perception. We had already suggested that, within the PC mechanism, the presence of a cleavage or disagreement between action and thought is not relevant since its effectiveness requires the conformity between action and normative procedures, validated through the perception of third parties (potential offenders). Therefore, it is meaningless to conceive the PC discourse in terms of action, if by action we mean an individual response to (external and internal) given stimuli, irrespective of their intersubjective visibility. The hypocrisy associated with political correctness does not only emerge when the dissonance between PC action and PI thought becomes visible; it emerges also through the fissure that can be opened between visible PC actions and imperceptible PI actions, that is, amid the visibility and opacity of what is said and done. The PC discourse requires the perception of others to exist but it is not completely transparent. The speaker

may be aware that it is acceptable to say x in context a, but unacceptable to say it in context b, without being able to clearly distinguish the line separating one situation from the other. The same individual might know perfectly well that it is possible to say x in a certain way (for example, in an ironic or cynical way), but inadmissible to say it in a different manner, without being able to determine the conditions that make it sayable or hearable. The lack of subjective perception and reflexivity concerning the rules of the PC is not only associated with variations relative to external circumstances or changes in performance. It is, first and foremost, a necessary condition for the natural operation of the PC discourse. When the subject is too aware of the procedures conditioning his speech, it becomes quite difficult to smoothly follow the normative guidelines. The uneasiness associated with becoming aware of a delicate situation is an inexhaustible source of humour precisely because, in normal circumstances, PC discursive spontaneity should prevail. On the other hand, the reflection about the conditions that delimit political correctness does not always result in the disclosure of its unfathomable mysteries. In this framework, discomfort and knowledge do not coincide. Accordingly, the organic internalization of political correctness presupposes a certain degree of invisibility and structural latency so that the discourse can be exerted in a “natural” way, so that one acts without thinking. The discomfort originated by the PC is usually aroused when one becomes aware that something inappropriate regarding that context was said or heard or when one becomes previously conscious

of a particularly delicate situation, where the offence is already present, even before any word is uttered (usually situations where the disadvantageous or vulnerable position of the potential offended is patent). In some cases, the degree of perception of the discursive situation can be intensified but the very mechanism that makes the offence possible, and avoidable, remains resolutely latent. For example, it is not unusual to recognise the potential offended and corresponding offence, but we rarely are aware that the offence directed at the offended, is addressed, as an offence to be avoided, to the community of potential offenders. Becoming aware creates obstacles to the smooth unfolding of the PC discourse but it does not bring into question its underlying functioning mechanisms. We can place the PC within our culture if we take culture as the intersection of two contradictory processes: the cementing of actions into social customs and the spontaneous emergence of behavioural patterns. We all follow the PC conduct because we have done it until now and it is the natural thing to do. This is the position of PC “cultural naturalization”, which is no more than the symptomatic mark of its latency. It is essential for the PC discourse to appear, but only partially, as the way it manifests itself is precisely the means through which the elements of its mode of operation remain subterranean. Taking into account that the visibility of the PC is related to its particular uses, we have to consider that action or, in a more consistent way, practice, is simultaneously a means of making it partially visible and partially invisible. We can claim, therefore, that practice informs the regime of visibility of the discursive

sive process.

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Generally, the structure of the system of visibility of the PC discourse insists in the need for occultation, articulating structural concealment through partial uncovering. Reduced to this simple scheme, it remains, however, abstracted from the social field. But even within such structural depuration, the question of invisibility indicates its inscription within a certain sociocultural territory. The image of the community of potential offenders that we derived from the abstract positions of the potential offender and the potential offended signals precisely the unfolding of the internal structure over the slippery world of intersubjective interaction. In the double “social” and “structural” dimension, the inscription of the invisibility of the PC discourse direct us towards a somewhat contradictory process of concealment. On one hand, the invisibility inherent in political correctness is orchestrated through the perception of the action, which directs our attention to the avoided offence, maintaining the structural and functional principles of the discursive mechanism underground; on the other hand, it is the action itself that, inscribed in the imperceptible surface of everyday life experience, has to support the appearance of occurring naturally and spontaneously. Occupying part of the indistinct plane of everyday life, political correctness is nowhere. In this way, the PC discourse has to be simultaneously visible at the level of the gesture and imperceptible as an action belonging to everyday life. From the subjective viewpoint, the double process of invisibility is sustained by two

mechanisms of occupation of a specific spatial-temporal territory, forming, in this manner, a topographic model for the colonization of a place. Locked into specific words or terminology, and anchored in a certain discursive gesture, the PC discourse emerges topologically within a particular discursive situation. The process of punctual anchorage is followed, in turn, by a dissolution of the gesture in the indistinct sea of the countless actions and experiences composing the naturalized experience of everyday life, extending until it disappears. According to this model, it is essential that the PC mechanism appears delimited, fragmented and isolated and, at the same time, diffuse and indistinct. Between natural, diffuse appearance and functional concealing, a distinction is drawn between what is not visible and what is latent. In order to function, the PC discourse has to remain partially invisible, outside the reach of our consciousness, but this degree of invisibility is already a product of its internal latency, that is, of the mechanisms that, while remaining invisible, make it operative. Through the “topographic” and subjective model of the regime of visibility, we approach a thesis dear to psychoanalysis: what we do not see is not only due to a cognitive limitation of ours, as if marking an excess belonging to reality, but passively waiting for our conscious and reflexive unveiling; it produces a reality as latent as active, which only sustains its operative power by hiding behind the curtains.

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In this brief text, we advance mere preliminary notes seeking to analyse the PC discourse as an ideological mechanism; the way it shapes a certain prac-

tice and how that practice produces a system of visibility. As an ideological phenomenon, its function has yet to be clarified. Above, we situated the operative reach of the PC discourse between a double discursive deflection: the bureaucratic and market driven distortion of the violence that permeates our everyday life. This is a good starting point, since it allows us to delineate an area of convergence between the potential offended and the actual subject to violence. To convert the actual sufferer of violence into the target of a verbal offence therefore seems to be the first ideological function of political correctness. Through this transformation, which is generated at the level of perception, we place ourselves within a perverse circularity where the vulnerability of the “more vulnerable” groups of society does not result from uneven power relations, based on coercion and exploitation, but is seen as a consequence of the verbal externalization of an incorrect subjective and cultural identification, based on stereotype and prejudice. For the circular movement between the vulnerability of the minority and the prejudice of the majority to be closed, the conversion of the subjected to violence into the subjected to offence has to tend towards the reduction of the former to the latter. Inside such ideological field, members belonging to particularly vulnerable groups, such as women or black people, are essentially victims of prejudice. Here, discrimination is not a consequence of antagonistic relations between classes or social groups, but the result of a distorted representation based on preconceived ideas. The movement of reduction goes from prejudice as a cause to offence as an effect. Accordingly, the

dominant class is transformed into a diffuse majority defined as the social group that perceives poorly and hastily. When its protocol is not properly observed, the operation of reduction performed by the PC discourse becomes particularly patent. In such cases where the PI emerges, the offender is “naturally” taken as the subject of violence since the verbal offence of racist or sexist content is automatically attributed to the racist or sexist. Here, is not possible to see a chance of redemption for the offender or to consider racism or sexism outside the frame of the offence. The mechanism of reduction makes the offence the irrefutable evidence of the prejudiced character of the offender and, more importantly, demonstrates the beautiful nature of those who know how to say the right words to the right people. According to such circular logic, the racist or sexist is the one who offends. Conversely, there is no racism without a racist offence, nor a patriarchal society without a sexist offence. Following a certain theoretical tradition, the twofold mechanism of conversion and reduction is called fetishism. The double articulation of PC fetishism makes us reformulate the economy established between everyday (omni)presence (naturalization and invisibility) and topological manifestation (linkage and vanishing). Through the double process of conversion and reduction, the PC discourse is not partially invisible because it is present everywhere or because it is manifested within a certain discursive situation, but because it takes the part for the whole. In other words, the cultural naturalization of political correctness does not imply its diffuse extension across our everyday life, but the fixation of certain discursive

phenomena that, when inscribed within a given situation, occupy a predominant position in our everyday life. Hence the importance of terminology within the PC discourse, linking discursive “good practice” to the correct use of the right term for a given situation. The term performs here the role of condensation point, that is, of fetish. In a sense, the ideological efficacy of the PC depends more on the invisible occupation of a given discursive space than on its illusory character (conversion of violence into offence). Doing away with class antagonisms and relations of violence performed at the level of linguistic content plays a crucial role, but it is of little worth if that exclusion does not also occur through the domination of the space where that content is voiced. Ideology follows the maxim “if you repeat a lie often enough, it becomes the truth”, because its “truth” is forged in the space occupied by repetitive utterance. What is more, the assaults aimed at the PC discourse prove its predominant position within a given discursive space. The most common criticisms made to the PC, usually coming from the liberal right, accuse the guardians of political correctness of being a kind of “language police” (usually belonging to the liberal left), that seriously hinders freedom of expression. No matter how pertinent this debate is, it boils down to the right to offend or not to be offended within liberal societies, excluding the possibility of considering a subject of violence beyond the subject of the offence. The premises of the debates around political correctness are, from the start, informed by the territory occupied by the PC discourse within the public space. In this sense, they are an instrument for its

reproduction. Likewise, we should not consider political incorrectness as opposed to political correctness, but as a deviation from the norm that keeps it alive. Thus, the occupation of a discursive space does not result from the slow, natural cementing of acquired habits, small rituals and ways of interacting; it requires persistent and active reiteration, which cannot be carried out without a whole material apparatus of circulation, dissemination and resonance, that is, without a full media and communication machine that produces, reproduces and amplifies it. Therefore, the topographic model mentioned before to does not function solely within the subjective field, since it is enveloped by a material, objective apparatus that ultimately gives it a body and a soul.

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