



Foucault's statement in context: opacity of discourses to conceptual determination

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ABSTRACT. The significance of negativity as a way for conceptual determination in Hegelian dialectics is well-known. Authors such as Gilles Deleuze have underlined, on the other hand, how this notion of (dialectical) negativity is incompatible with a Nietzschean perspective of interplay of forces and affirmation of difference. There is here a real distension (rather than a distinction) — a fissure enabling one to think what connects and inevitably dissociates rational and deconstructive philosophical perspectives on language. In this fissure it is constituted, for instance, the space of dispersion of the so-called Foucaultian statements (*énoncés*), the focus of his archeology. This essay addresses the context in which the Foucaultian notion of *énoncé* emerges. It does so by criticizing first the dialectical notion of negativity. It then considers some semiological notions used by post-structuralist authors, such as plethora of signs and floating signifier. In a third moment, examples are taken from a literary work, Vitor Ramil's *Pequod*, in order to illustrate more concretely our discussion.

Keywords: Michel Foucault, Vitor Ramil, literary criticism, philosophy, deconstruction.

O Enunciado Foucaultiano em contexto: a opacidade dos discursos à determinação conceitual

RESUMO. A importância da negatividade como forma de determinação conceitual na dialética hegeliana é bem conhecida. Autores como Gilles Deleuze têm sublinhado, por outro lado, como essa noção de negatividade (dialética) é incompatível com a perspectiva nietzschiana de jogo de forças e afirmação da diferença. Há aqui uma verdadeira 'distensão' (mais do que uma distinção) — uma fissura que permite pensar aquilo que liga e inevitavelmente separa perspectivas filosóficas racionalistas e perspectivas filosóficas mais desconstrutivas sobre a linguagem. Nela se constitui, por exemplo, o espaço de dispersão dos chamados enunciados foucaultianos, foco de estudo da sua arqueologia. Este artigo contextualiza a noção foucaultiana de enunciado, a partir de uma crítica à noção dialética de negatividade, e considerando também o uso que fazem autores pós-estruturalistas de noções oriundas ainda da linguística, como pletora de significado e significante flutuante. Em um terceiro momento, exemplos tirados de uma obra literária, o *Pequod* de Vitor Ramil, são analisados no intuito de conferir um caráter mais concreto à nossa discussão.

Palavras-chave: Michel Foucault, Vitor Ramil, crítica literária, filosofia, desconstrução.

Introduction: dialectics and deconstruction

In a book such as *Pequod*, as well as in our experience, it is possible, at least apparently, to distinguish among different characters, the situations they must deal with, the places where they live and roam: the narrator, Ahab, his father, a blue rubber ball, Montevideo and Satolep, the rain, a child that jumps through the window, spiders and cockroaches.

The distinctions appear and reappear, repeat themselves, structured through the text and its statements. It is possible to approach them from the point of view of their conceptual determination, as it is the case in more traditional philosophical

approaches, among which Hegelian dialectics is included.

But there are other more deconstructive ways to consider these distinctions. One might argue that, in the history of philosophy, such perspectives were proposed by authors related to traditions that are rather literary, figurative, iconic, than philosophical. An example would be Nietzsche, who was originally educated as philologist.

In this sense, in his book about the German philosopher-philologist, Gilles Deleuze reminds us the following:

The pluralism [of Nietzschean forces] seems sometimes similar to dialectics; however, it is its

more ingrained enemy; its only deep enemy. That is why we should take seriously the firmly anti-dialectical character of Nietzsche's philosophy (DELEUZE, 2010, p. 9)¹.

Even if we name 'philosophy' what is done by Nietzsche (and Deleuze uses that label), it is necessary to recognize that his thought goes against the most typical currents of the philosophical tradition, such as Hegelian dialectics.

What matters for us here is to understand where and how this division takes place – a division frequently characterized as a fissure deeply and completely undermining philosophical systems such as the one proposed by Hegel. The division itself refuses merely conceptual determination.

Conceptual determination is here understood as a mental process of abstraction that is at the roots of the postulation of philosophical notions such as the Cartesian cogito and negativity, or the 'labor of the negative' [*Arbeit des Negativen*] in Hegel (1987).

Descartes arrives at the formulation of the cogito by abstracting, by putting in doubt, denying, in principle, anything that might exist in current reality. That is how he ends up confronting himself with the indubitable character of doubt itself, which enables him to acknowledge the reality of thought.

It is possible to say that it is through a similar process that Hegel gets ahead in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Hegel calls 'negative in general' [*das Negative überhaupt*] the inequality [*Ungleichheit*] between the 'self' and that which appears as its 'object' [*Gegenstand*] in consciousness. It is an ongoing process of reciprocal mediation of this negativity, that is, of its conceptual restatement on each side of the relation, that makes possible the idea of an "[...] absolute spirit" (*Geist*) (HEGEL, 1987, p. 35).

In the case of Nietzsche's philosophy, one does not think the differences there are among things in terms of an abstract and reversible relation between subject and object, as given in consciousness. A force that imposes itself on another force, affirms its own difference. It keeps that difference without suppressing the other, absorbing the other in itself or becoming equivalent to the other. There is a permanent tension here, which cannot be fully mediated neither conceptually resolved. It is like the celebrate spinning of a Möbius strip, in which the residue formed by the mismatch of the two tips can never be eliminated.

Moreover, one should avoid reducing to a simple dichotomy the very difference there is between

authors such as Nietzsche and Hegel. In relation to this point, Julia Kristeva reminds us that Hegel is himself confronted with a problem similar to that of Nietzsche, when he speaks of force in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: the characterization of a force in terms of the spread or proliferation of independent self-sufficient materials [*Ausbreitung der selbständigen Materien in ihrem Sein*] should not be taking literally, because "[...] the force itself" [*die eigentliche Kraft*] retreats from and remains alien to this kind of formulation (KRISTEVA, 1974, p. 105-106; HEGEL, 1987, p. 106)².

Authors such as Foucault are inheritors of tensions such as these which arise from within the limits of Hegel's own dialectical thought, and also between the thought of a Hegel and a Nietzsche. The heritage is not direct. It depended upon Heidegger's understanding of these problems, and upon the reflections of a select and, at the same time, peripheral group of writers and literary critics, who were eager readers of philosophy: Maurice Blanchot, Georges Bataille and Pierre Klossowski. These writers were avidly read by Foucault, and their overwhelming influence both on structuralism (Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan) and on post-structuralism (Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Julia Kristeva) is well known.

Criticism of the Dialectical Notion of Negativity

In a famous essay in which he develops an immanent analysis of the discourse of Sade, Blanchot follows the unfolding of a kind of dialectical negativity (not at all different from the Hegelian), which ruins itself, to the point of absurdity:

What was sought by [Sade] is sovereignty, pursued through the spirit of negation carried to the extreme. In turn, he used men, God, nature as a way to experiment with this negation. Men, God, Nature, each one of these notions—in the moment that denial passes through them—seems to acquire some value; however, if we consider the entire experience, these moments lose all their reality, since the core of the experience consists precisely in ruining and cancelling one for another (BLANCHOT, 1963, p. 42).

Sade understood perfectly well that the sovereignty of the energetic man – as he conquers things, identifying himself with the spirit of negation – is a paradoxical state. The man who asserts himself completely, in its entirety, is also completely

¹ Translations are made by the author of the article, and the original text follows in notes. *Le pluralisme a parfois des apparences dialectiques; il en est l'ennemi le plus farouche, le seul ennemi profond. C'est pourquoi nous devons prendre en sérieux le caractère résolument anti-dialectique de la philosophie de Nietzsche.*

² In the reading she makes of the psychoanalytic tradition, Kristeva enables us also to understand in terms of 'rejet' what I earlier called "residue" (1974, p. 133-34). In a similar perspective, Derrida (1978) will speak of 'remains' [reste]. In what matters the difficulty and necessity of separating oneself from the Hegelian tradition, see Foucault (1971).

destroyed [...] [finds] apathy (BLANCHOT, 1963, p. 44)³.

In this passage, the labor of the negative is unveiled as a process of abstract determination, which establishes and ruins the logic of concepts. The labor of the negative is traversed from head to tail by a sort of 'existential' – as this notion is understood by Heidegger, in a tradition which goes back to authors such as Schelling (and differs radically from the phenomenological interpretation of existentialism, as proposed by Sartre).

In his analysis of Sade, Blanchot activates, in an unusual way, a perspective of understanding language (and the relation of language to reality) already shared by authors such as Schelling and Heidegger (and also others, such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche). It is exactly the same perspective that, in the previous section, we saw as deviating from Hegel. The perspective is faithful to certain Kantian, pre-Hegelian ideas, such as the notion of the irreducibility of the forms of sensibility, of schematism, and of imagination to the categories and concepts generated by the understanding (the problem of amphibolies) (ROBERTS, 1988).

There is here a criticism of modern philosophical epistemological approaches that start from consciousness, that ground on consciousness the possibility of experience and knowledge of the real world. One crosses over the Cartesian cogito (DELEUZE, 1968; FOUCAULT, 1971). The criticism appears not only in Heidegger, but also, for example, in psychoanalysis, and both perspectives influence authors such as Foucault (in parallel with the work of Blanchot himself). Such perspectives, while differing deeply from Hegelian dialectics, do not fail to echo more marginal and forgotten problems of the history of philosophy. Notions such as that existence precedes essence (and accordingly cannot be conceptually determined) go back, in a way, to medieval authors such as Thomas Aquinas (ROBERTS, 1988).

Linguistics and semiology

With the help of notions originating from linguistics and structuralist semiology, it is possible to restate in a fairly accurate way the same problems that we analyzed so far: linguistic systems only seem

to be composed of positive units fully identifiable (they are not equivalent to nomenclatures, i.e. lists of terms corresponding to certain things). A language is a system of "[...] pure values, not determined by anything independently of the momentary states of its terms" (SAUSSURE, 1976, p. 116)⁴.

What defines a sign in linguistic terms depends not only on the vertical relation between a signifier and its meaning [*signifié*], but also on the relation of this sign with other signs in different linguistic chains. One thing affects the other. Thus, if someone, in a French lecture, repeats many times the term '*messieurs!*', we have in the repetitions not just one and the same connection of a signifier and its meaning [*signifié*], but different connections varying through the sequence as one succeeds the other. Something similar occurs with the words 'adopter' and 'fleur' in the following expressions: "adopter une mode", 'adopter un enfant'; '*la fleur du pommier*', '*la fleur de la noblesse*'" (SAUSSURE, 1976, p. 150-151). The given connection between a signifier and its meaning [*signifié*] is modified in each of them by the relations established with the other signs of the expression⁵.

The identity of signs is always relational. The meaning of the expression 'bus from Pelotas to Porto Alegre, 2:00 pm' depends on all the circumstances that distinguish this bus from other buses. The bus is not what is there materialized, although it has to be somewhat materialized. The same can be said of a horse in a game of chess. We are dealing not with well-defined things, but with values, whose identity is given in the relations they establish with other values in systems of which they are part, and with respect to a given configuration.

The connection of a signifier and its meaning in a sign demarcates them in relation to other signifiers and meanings in other signs. With regard to the formation of a national language, Saussure gives the examples of *mouton* in French and *sheep* in English. Their overall meaning cannot be the same, because the French term includes, in its concept, both the animal and the meat, while in English the meaning of the meat is given by other sign (*mutton*). Saussure (1976, p. 160) says that in one language "[...] all the words expressing close ideas are reciprocally demarcated"⁶. The same occurs in the level of

³ Ce qu'il a poursuivi, c'est la souveraineté à travers l'esprit de négation poussé à son point extrême. Cette négation tour à tour il s'est servi des hommes, de Dieu, de la nature, pour l'éprouver. Hommes, Dieu, nature, chacune de ces notions, au moment où la négation la traverse, paraît recevoir une certaine valeur, mais si l'on prend l'expérience dans son ensemble, ces moments n'ont plus la moindre réalité, car le propre de l'expérience consiste justement à les ruiner et à les annuler les uns par les autres. [...] Sade a parfaitement compris que la souveraineté de l'homme énérgique, telle que celui-ci la conquiert en s'identifiant avec l'esprit de négation, est un état paradoxal. L'homme intégral, qui s'affirme entièrement, est aussi entièrement détruit... l'apathie...

⁴ [...] la langue est un système de pures valeurs que rien ne détermine en dehors de l'état momentané de ses termes.

⁵ In relation to this point, Giorgio Agamben (2011) says that signs as understood in modern semiology live up to the way they were previously understood in more obscure periods of the Western tradition – in part as a symbol that unites, but also as a diabolio that separates.

⁶ [...] tous les mots qui expriment des idées voisines se limitent réciproquement: des synonymes come redouter, caindre, avoir peur n'ont de valeur propre que

acoustic images. From this point of view, “[...] what matters in a word is not the sound in itself, but phonetic [one should read *phonological*] differences enabling the distinction of that word from all others” (SAUSSURE, 1976, p. 163)⁷.

Saussure concludes: “[...] a linguistic system is a series of differences of sounds combined with a series of differences of ideas” (SAUSSURE, 1976, p. 166)⁸. This combination produces values that it is possible to consider positive units only to the extent that they enable a coordination of these differences (DERRIDA, 1967). The instability of the relation between signifier and meaning unveils language as an ‘unstable plethora of signs’, always swept by ‘floating signifiers’, which can be only circumstantially stabilized in the form of transcendental meanings. Stabilization is always a sort of illusory adjustment (LÉVI-STRAUSS, 1966).

The understanding of linguistic and semiological systems as unstable plethoras of signs, with the associated notion of a floating signifier, seems to be an assumption common to structuralist and poststructuralist approaches (along which we include the Foucauldian notion of *énoncé*). Nevertheless, much depends on the understanding we have of these terms and on how we use them. A key problem here is metaphysical infinitism. Instead of taking the instability of the interplay of forces shaping language as something definitive—given once for all (in a Nietzschean, genealogical, deconstructionist perspective)—, people might abstract from it, and project it into the future, through a linear chronology. The floating signifier appears then as nothing but a function allowing us to operate with the instability of language systems by submitting this instability – endlessly – to an alleged transcendental meaning. Structuralism is then tied down to traditional perspectives such as dialectics, hermeneutics, and phenomenology.

It is in this sense (and only in this sense) that Michel Foucault opposes structuralism (to the same extent that he opposes hermeneutics and phenomenology). This is the only reason why, in a book such as *Archaeology of Knowledge*, he criticizes more classical linguistic and semiotic notions of statement. He then proposes to investigate series of signs and their relations beyond ‘homogeneous systems’ set in ‘a well-defined spatial-temporal domain’, as that of traditional historical narratives. Going beyond Saussure (but without completely

abandoning what Saussure had correctly pointed out—notions such as value and difference), Foucault (1969, p. 18-19) tries to formulate the idea of a “[...] picture frame”, the idea of a “[...] space of dispersion”, in which an interplay of ‘correlations’, an interplay of ‘dominations’, emerging among series of signs, would originate different “[...] displacements and ‘temporalities’”. In the documents from historical archives with which he works, Foucault selects exactly the statements that are like indeterminable residual elements for a logical and/or grammatical analysis. He wants to work with things that are the most opaque and intractable from the perspective of logic and linguistics. As he says in *The Order of Discourse*, he is interested in what is prior to the conceptual determination of discourses by a “[...] will to truth” (FOUCAULT, 1971, p. 21).

Moby-Dick and the Darkness of Memory: Back to *Pequod*

It is easier to understand this Foucauldian perspective by applying it to a concrete analysis. In this sense, I suggest getting back to *Pequod*. In this book there are blocks of text, paragraphs isolated by blank spaces, which seem able to separate to the reader, as a will to truth, the different planes or moments of the story: the different periods, the different languages, what is real and what is dreamlike, what was imagined and what was lived, the religious and the profane, the literary. These blocks would demarcate the history of the family, the history of things, animals, spiders, elements (water, fire), utensils, furniture, names, biblical names, topological names, equations. But the series crisscross one another, and the crossings are not submitted to the ordering of the blocks of text.

Let us take an example:

‘What color do I want to my new room? Black!’ It would be green. When she was called, my mother came across the backyard only to be amused by the burlesque interpretation that the painter, at the top of the stairs, was giving to the answer of her youngest. The ink poisoned the insect on the footer. ‘Black!’ she repeated. On that day, all the insects in the freshly-painted rooms died. When the paint dried out, others came and bred (RAMIL, 1999, p. 11).

There are several times in this passage, and their arrange does not follow the linear order of the sentences: the time of the boy/narrator choosing the color of his room; the time of the mother who came to check the work of the painter (as an answer to the boy’s will, previously announced); the time of the paint and of the insects (that die or reproduce in the paint). Much later on, for instance, in the end of the book, the time when the color was chosen will

par leur opposition; si redouter n’existait pas, tout son contenu irait à ses concurrents.

⁷ [...] ce qui importe dans le mot, ce n’est pas le son lui-même, mais les différences phoniques qui permettent de distinguer ce mot de tout les autres.

⁸ [...] un système linguistique est une série de différences de sons combinées avec une série de différences d’idées [concepts].

suddenly pop up again in an unexpected way, linked once more to the time of the insects: “I keep laying down on this floor of dry insects”, he told me. ‘Why have you painted all in black?’, he asked. ‘I just wanted to please you, Ahab’” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 101). We are facing a picture frame very similar to those which Foucault seeks to identify in his archive analysis: a picture frame made of different temporalities that span and intersect creating reciprocal lags – each temporality can be seen as “[...] a duration that does not belong to us” (FOUCAULT, 1971, p. 10), for they cannot be levelled.

Another example: “Cale Asêncio. All the movement and all the colors of Montevideo in that ‘blue ball’ with which Ahab plays on the sidewalk while going to the barber shop [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 13, our underline). Quietly receding from the narrator’s spotlight and being forgotten by the reader, the same blue ball pops up again a few paragraphs ahead, but already in another situation, in another location (the pocket). Nobody sees the gesture that brought it there: “*No quiero más aquella fotografía en la pared!*” Clasp the blue ball firmly, he goes up to his room [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 14, our underline). Under the narrative focus, and coexisting with it in tension, there is a specific temporality.

One final, complex example, within a single block (paragraph):

‘Paolo Uccello died alone, of starvation, in a house filled up with spider webs similar to this one...’ Ahab caught me by the arm and brought me near the web. Then he gently blew the spider that was standing in its center. The web swung. The spider performed a quick movement and went back to stillness. ‘Now, observe: this small *Argiobe argentata* built quickly and alone this master piece, with the finest silk, produced also by herself... This is where the small *Argiobe argentata* feeds, lives, builds a cocoon to house her eggs...’ Ahab then turned in my direction. ‘What do you think?’ I glanced at his eyes and turned back to the spider, nervous. He continued to look at me. ‘Already an old man, Paolo Uccello kept working in the masterpiece that absorbed him for years and which he hid from everybody... He then sent for his friend Donatello to see it. And what have Donatello seen?’ An insect was caught in the web. The spider threw itself over it. Ahab did not take his eyes from me. ‘Donatello saw a confusion of lines!... Do you know what Uccello means? [...] It means bird... There are spiders that feed on small birds...’ (RAMIL, 1999, p. 23-25).

In this passage, many temporalities intervene: the time of Paolo Uccello, the time of his work and of his death – all referred to as past history. There is also the time of the concrete spider in the web—present, making itself visible. And there is the

abstract time of the spider as *Argiobe argentata*, a specimen of scientific taxonomy.

A key feature of *Pequod*, allowing us to understand perspectives such as the one envisaged by Foucault, are the passages in which memory quite explicitly crosses the narrator’s consciousness: “And with my eyes I followed each of the steps of the stair that led Dr. Fiss to the second floor of the house [...] ‘The door at the top is open, the key in the lock on the outside’ [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 48, our underline). It is necessary to notice that, so far, the narrator had not yet gone up. Therefore, he will only later discover about the key (chronologically speaking, and in terms of his intentional, conscious action). However, the narrative establishes itself as a retroactive projection. That is, memory structures the narrative in a free and fragmentary process of reconstruction that subverts and deconstructs the chronology of consciousness. Another example:

I’m running out of time. My footsteps fade into the background of time. The prow of the ship is disappearing. I sink. The shells hurt my feet. I do not see the figure of Ahab. ‘Ahab!’, I scream again. And what come to me are my grandfather’s papers, spread, brought by the wind [...] (RAMIL, 1999, p. 66).

Where do these papers come from? Are they also metaphors and dreams (as it seems to be case with the steps of the character, mixed up in a vision of the ship sinking deeply into the sand)? The distinction is relative and, anyways, it comes only later on: the papers would be real. Ahab had dropped them against the wind, because they meant nothing to him.

The unity of the book (and the distinction between author and characters) is itself crossed over in the writing process. On the one hand, Ahab, the father of the narrator, writes in the narrative a “[...] quasi-poem or a poem written not to be read, but to be impaired; a poem written to be fragmented, dispersed [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 79). Ahab’s idea would be

[...] to write poems, to submit them to a dismantling, and to build a structure with their words distributed and glued over the pages of the bound books... the process would enable one to visualize the poems together with the text of each one of the one thousand and four hundred books on the bookshelf, keeping their memory alive. This operation should be endlessly repeated [...] A web! (RAMIL, 1999, p. 85).

But it is also the author of the book himself, Vitor Ramil (1999, p. 121), who admits in the postscript that “*Pequod*... was becoming [the book itself, to the author] a web of several books [...]”.

Still in the postscript (which we know was written in a bus trip), Vitor Ramil asks himself:

Would the water dripping over the two soaked and immobile Ahabs—one on his chair screwed to the floor, the other on his armchair – belong to that unintentional web? [...] ‘I shall not send the punishment during your lifetime, but in the days of your son I shall bring the catastrophe over the house’. I must have read this passage of the *Bible* several years before reading *Moby-Dick*... The web is very subtle and never ends [...] (RAMIL, 1999, p. 122, our underline).

What chair is this, screwed to the floor? A bus chair? And what about the two Ahabs? Father and son, one of them – but to what measure – Ramil himself?

As Foucault would say, the danger here lies always in postulating a transcendental meaning (about the author, about the characters, instituting them as well-defined units). Ramil seems, in fact, to slip into the trap: “[...] Ahab will be going through a web of human language and literature, a web of thought that transcends and comprises his individuality [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 89). And it is at this very moment that the labor of the negative, in its most abstract and nihilist dimension, appears in *Pequod*:

What place would be this, where others do not exist? For what well-defined universe he prepares himself? Is there a place where *chance* does not exist? Why not rebel by putting a bullet fairly and squarely into his head? [...] only by returning to the primeval moment, ‘before the appearance of the first man’, could the suicidal man be sure that his death was the ‘result of a personal deliberation’ [...] ‘It is a preparation for death! [...] death’s perfect mirror [...] ‘to match his form to the form of death – an open and consummate form’ [...]. He pretends to be able to anticipate his death, when it comes[...]’ (RAMIL, 1999, p. 89-90, our underline).

In the postscript, there is a moment in which the notion of a true floating signifier appears, rising up with its correspondent illusion of unity:

[...] ‘to name’ the character. ‘The name’s’ importance was paramount [...] because its meaning should say about the character all that the vagueness and concision of the book would not, and also, because it would be ‘the decisive expression of the distance established in the relation between father and son’ [castration]. I started by leaving gaps in the places where the name was supposed to be. Then, limiting myself to the instant I needed to lay the pen down to the paper, I thought quickly and wrote: *Ahab* (RAMIL, 1999, p. 117).

Besides being apparently effective in closing the gaps, the floating signifier is also paradoxically similar to something that Ramil found in Melville’s

Moby-Dick—a gold doubloon riveted to a pole. We are told that “[...] if all mankind were to pass right away in front [of it]... signs would not cease to be revealed!” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 124). That is, ‘exactly because of its profusion’, the doubloon connects everybody, but also deceptively – through nothing else but a methodic, ritualistic recitation of grammar: “I look, you look, he looks; we look, ye look, they look [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 124; MELVILLE, 2012, p. 499-505).

There is something, however, that ultimately frees *Pequod* from transcendental illusions and entitles one to link it to a Foucauldian perspective. *Pequod*’s literary experience happens among several texts (*Moby-Dick*, the *Pequod* itself, memories and dreams), and Ramil recognizes, accordingly, that his book is traversed from head to tail by a memory that is not merely psychological. This memory, no matter how much it is idealized, breaks the self-referential transparency of consciousness, and blurs distinctions as those between the lived and the imagined (or read). The point comes up explicitly in a passage in which Ramil (1999, p. 120) mentions an

[...] idealized form of memory, with its surfaces and its depths, its capacity for providing pleasure and instilling terror, its luminous and its absolutely dark regions.

Such a memory resembles “[...] the form of the sea” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 120). And Ramil concludes: “[...] *Moby-Dick* was in my memory as something I lived” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 121). At the beginning of the book, Ahab had already realized: “Paolo Uccello died alone, of starvation, in a house full of spider webs similar to this one” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 23).

Final remarks

It is possible to think that *Pequod* constitutes indeed a space, a *tableau*, in which the narrator, the characters and possibly the writer and the reader do not exactly die but are traversed by transverse series, by other temporalities: the temporalities of spiders, spider webs, hidden portraits, cirrus, wall tiles, stuccos – the temporalities of a wall clock, a faceless mannequin, Galicia. We have also monkeys screaming in the square (*Cebus apella*), Satolep’s leaks and flooding, the bust of Nefertiti, children out of control, cockroaches running “[...] from the flames under the desk [...]” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 95), and an open drawer out of which “[...] a tarantula was slowly moving” (RAMIL, 1999, p. 98). To the extent that they coexist all in tension and out of step, these different temporalities constitute statements as they were understood by Foucault (in opposition to more traditional perspectives in linguistics and philosophy, but without necessarily denying the

most interesting conclusions attained by authors such as Nietzsche or Saussure).

There is a passage in which Ahab disappears into things, going beyond then, being crossed over: "[...] he was dragged on into things in a vision, and these moments increasingly and indefinitely repeated themselves [...]. Ahab was taken into and beyond things!" (RAMIL, 1999, p. 50). And then, also, on the other hand, the sight of the character—rendered sensitive in its own immobility – traverses things (a reference to the book cover):

[...] a look in which immobility and torment, fused together, were crossing the minute interval, the lens, the photographer, the years, the glossy paper, and the glass in the photo frame (RAMIL, 1999, p. 53).

The most significant passage in this sense concerns the bellboy at the hotel in Uruguay:

[...] a boy carrying our bag led us to the elevator, 'which swallowed us and carried us with clatter'. Florida Hotel 'was alive'. The boy, in dark uniform, 'was a mobile part of that intricate structure, as was the elevator'; we were being observed by the corners, by the angles of the columns, 'by the doors'. 'A 'Diloboderus abderus', said Ahab [...]. The dark boy laughed too. 'His voice sounded like hardware', his teeth shined like the glass in the skylight... Inside the lock, the 'key said clank'. The room 'was already waiting for us [...]' (RAMIL, 1999, p. 61, our underline).

This passage would take us to the end, in which the narrator (a boy) identifies himself not exactly with this other boy, neither with the beetle, which appears so abruptly. The identification occurs in relation to the phonetic unfolding of the beetle in its neutral, scientific designation – the word unfolded as meaningless but singular sound:

The Hotel hardly breathes. The only movement besides mine: *Di-lo-bo-de-rus ab-de-rus*—a little spook on the carpet... I walk on the smooth and shiny stones as if I were walking on the back of the bug [...]. (RAMIL, 1999, p. 67, our underline).

Here there is literally a statement blurring the distinction between a signifier and its meaning (*signifié*). Its tactile and audible specificity does not disappear in its own difference, but retains a singular immanent temporality – its phonetic unfolding in tension with the other temporalities of the book. It is not the subject (that is, the subject of the sentence, the character of the story, the narrator of the story, the author and/or the reader) who takes the floor. He is allowed to "[...] slide surreptitiously", to be encapsulated (FOUCAULT, 1971, p. 7)⁹. To the

extent that it is impossible to subsume this statement under a transcendental meaning, it does justice and helps us to understand certain peculiar conceptions of language and of the relation between language and reality, which are dear to authors such as Foucault. The statement and the conceptions belong all to the same context: one that emerges within the limits of philosophy, and whose specificity is perhaps more literary, figurative, and iconic than philosophical.

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