Digital confinement: on the hidden oppression in digital interfaces

Confinamento digital: sobre a opressão oculta nas interfaces digitais

Mario Furtado Fontanive[I] (iD)

RESUMO

This essay aims to show a path that starts with slavery, to which many workers were subjected before the Industrial Revolution, goes through the Industrial Revolution, showing how the violence to which enslaved people were subjected is transferred to an alienated form of work, and reaches current digital technologies. It proposes that digital technological devices have incorporated alienating structures arising from old forms of worker submission. The text begins by proposing that current sophisticated technologies are developed to solve demands that have no connection with the real needs of a large part of the population, and is concluded with the discussion about how a new form of attention towards marginalized populations can encourage emancipatory practices.

Keywords: Technology. Big tech. Slavery. Social design.

ABSTRACT

Este ensaio pretende mostrar um caminho que vai da escravidão, à qual foram sujeitos muitos trabalhadores desde antes da Revolução Industrial, passando pela Revolução Industrial, quando a violência a que eram submetidos os escravizados foi transferida para uma forma alienada do trabalho, até chegar às tecnologias digitais atuais. Propõe que os dispositivos tecnológicos digitais incorporaram estruturas alienantes advindas das antigas formas de submissão do trabalhador. O texto inicia falando sobre como as sofisticadas tecnologias atuais são desenvolvidas para resolver demandas que não têm ligação com as reais necessidades de grande parte da população e finaliza discorrendo sobre como uma nova forma de atenção para com populações marginalizadas pode incitar práticas emancipadoras.

Palavras-chave: Tecnologia. Big tech*. Escravidão.* Design *social.*

[I]Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul – Porto Alegre (RS), Brazil. E-mail: mariofff@gmail.com

THE SOCIETY OF CONTROL

In Porto Alegre, I go into a territory where low-income people live in and greet one of the men who control the access of strangers. This place has only one point of access — this condition is an advantage for the defense against the invasion of a group from elsewhere. The hand of the man I greet at my arrival is calloused, typical of a person who does hard work. He is very much likely discriminated; for being poor and black, he is probably often treated as a drug dealer or mugger, and most people – including myself – have no idea about the difficulties he goes through. The community he is a part of belongs to a conglomerate of many villages in the middle of Porto Alegre. The population of this group of villages is of almost 200 thousand residents.

In a different occasion, visiting the same place, I talk to Bia and Paula; the winter is severe, and they try to come up with a way to produce blankets to warm the community's population. I listen to their conversation. After a while, they define the material to fill the blankets: straw. I look at them, amazed, and ask them if they couldn't think of something better; aren't there any chicken coops in the Village? Couldn't the filling be made of feathers? They both laugh very loud. The feeling I have is that the knowledge design provides me does not consider the needs and problems resulting from the circumstances most of the Brazilian population is subjected to.

Places like Vila Cruzeiro are considered by many as irregular occupations, not integrated to what we may name as citizenship. Most of those who live there are under poor work conditions and, besides, the community is poorly assisted by the State, or even totally neglected.

Another point of view about this place is that most residents are black. So, the irregular occupation and precariousness relate to a historical condition of race discrimination. In this brief text, I will try to show that servitude and many of its disguises still underlie the technical progress of the contemporary world. For Marcuse (1973, p. 155):

> The incessant dynamics of technical progress have become permeated with political content and the Logos of technology has been transformed into the Logos of continuous servitude. The liberating force of technology — the instrumentalization of things — becomes the shackle of liberation: the instrumentalization of man.

It is possible to think that the emancipation of subjects is given by the free action that materializes their own subjectivity through work. An enslaved subject does not have access to that possibility; a slave would be one who does not have control over their own actions.

Despite the precarity and the non-integration as a citizen, a situation that embarrasses this peripheral population, this same population is integrated to another regime — an exogenous one — of social structure, which takes place through portable communication devices of high technological development. Cell phones integrate this group through the social media that collects data that can monitor

information from each individual, such as: daily commutes; friends' network; types of relationship; way of consumption; and many other behavioral aspects. Owning such data, large social media companies can induce the behavior of each person with the subliminal influence of the very own social media that surrounds them.

An experiment conducted by Facebook that has been made public manipulated the state of spirit of a community composed of 700 thousand people. It was observed that users used positive or negative words, which ranged according to the content to which they were exposed in the social media. This experience proved that "emotional states can be transferred to others through emotional contagion, leading people to try the same emotions unconsciously" (France Presse, 2014).

Deleuze (1992) mentioned this new form of control. He established a distinction regarding the disciplinary society defined by Foucault, in which the omnipresent eye of the power established the order. In the disciplinary or confinement society, the *panopticon* is the architectural system in which Foucault materializes the concept. This building is constituted by the architecture of a prison, where the center irradiates a series of hallways, and this enables to observe the entire cell complex simultaneously. Deleuze (1992, p. 219) summed it up: "Foucault analyzed the ideal project of means of confinement very well, which is visible especially in the factory: to concentrate; to distribute in space; to order in time; to compose, in space-time, a productive force whose effect should be superior to the sum of elementary forces".

The *panopticon* was conceived by the English philosopher and social theorist Jeremy Bentham, in the XVIII century (Foucault, 1987). The correspondence between factory and prison is interesting. Based on that, it is possible to establish an originating relationship connected with the worker servitude.

In 1990, before the dissemination of the internet, in the text called "Postscript on the society of control", Gilles Deleuze (1992) already observed that the society of confinement was making room to another type of domination, which he called society of control. He wrote:

> We don't have to stray into science fiction to find a control mechanism that can fix the position of any element at any given moment - an animal in a game reserve, a man in a business (electronic tagging). [...] It doesn't depend on the barrier but on the computer that is making sure everyone is in a permissible place, and effecting a universal modulation (Deleuze, 1992, p. 226).

The form of domain of society which currently operates is based on concepts and techniques that structure the actions without the need to determine a fixed place. The desires — if what technology instills can be called desire — are monitored and have little connection with the places where they are located. Evgeny Morozov (2018, p. 41) understands that "we create applications to solve problems applications can solve — instead of actually facing the problems that need to be solved".

Technology is a historical-social project and embeds archaic structures that perpetuate themselves and insidiously interfere in all spheres of culture. Marshall Mcluhan (1974) already prophesized this in 1964: "All technological

extensions of ourselves are subliminal, numbing; if it were different, we would not stand the action that such an extension has on us" (Mcluhan, 1974, p. 339).

Nowadays, most of the information about culture, politics and economy is accessed through social media platforms. The world of ultrastability of these means of interaction aims that nothing can disturb the system. At the same time, it facilitates and makes actions more comfortable, controls and determines the readings, which become restricted to specific patterns regulated for each person, in a sort of informational confinement.

TECHIQUE AND SERVITUDE

A way to define slavery is the dehumanization of subjects, in which people become merchandise that can be sold or discarded. Until the XIV century, there were remnants of slavery among Europeans. While being dehumanized, every slave suffers a lot of violence. Thomas Piketty (2020) quotes a saying from monk Guillaume de Jumièges. This monk talks about an uprising that took place in Normandy in the XI century:

> Without waiting for the orders, count Raoul immediately took all the peasants into custody, had their hands and feet cut off and returned them, powerless, to their families... The peasants, taught by experience and forgetting about their assemblies, hurried back to their plows (Piketty, 2020, p. 76).

It is to be imagined that the illustration and deepening of the Enlightenment thought should inhibit violence and oppose any form of slavery. Shortly before the Industrial Revolution, John Locke stated: "Slavery is so vile and miserable an estate of man, so directly opposite to the generous temper and courage of our nation; that it is hardly to be conceived, that an Englishman, much less a gentleman, should plead for it" (Locke, 1998 *apud* Buck-Morss, 2017, p. 44).

However, Locke was a shareholder at the Royal African Company; "involved in the American colonial politics in the Province of Carolina, Locke certainly considered the black man's slavery a justifiable institution" (Buck-Morss, 2017, p. 45). In the book titled Politiques of Enmity, Achille Mbembe (2020) establishes a difference between slavery inflicted by dominant countries in western capitalism and the native slavery in Africa, previous to colonization. He states that the surplus value extracted from the enslaved in western countries was incomparably higher than in African countries.

In the book Hegel and Haiti, Susan Buck-Morss (2017) shows that Enlightenment philosophers did not go deep in the matter of slavery, even when it became central in the European economic development. She describes:

> One would think that, surely, no rational, "enlightened" thinker could have failed to notice. But such was not the case. The exploitation of millions of colonial slave laborers was accepted as part of the given world by the very thinkers who proclaimed freedom to be man's natural state and inalienable right. (Buck-Morss, 2017, p. 33).

We can observe similarities of treatment in violent control forms to which a mass of laborers is submitted, even when the work regime is not called slavery. Virginia Woolf (2013), in a text from 1930 called "Memoirs of a Working Women's Guild", reported:

> Mrs. Burrow, for example, had worked the swamps of Lincolnshire at the age of eight, with forty or fifty other kids, and an old man who accompanied the group holding a long whip, 'which he did not forget to use'[…] They had seen women nearly starving to death waiting in line to receive payment for matchboxes while smelling the meat roasting for the master's dinner coming from inside (Woolf, 2013, p. 83).

The situation described by Virginia Woolf (2013) takes place between the late XIX century and the early XX century. At that time, the condition of servitude described in the text began to be replaced by the scientification or rationalization of work. What changes with such a rationalization? Herbert Marcuse (1973, p. 45) considers that:

> Now, the increasingly complete mechanization of labor in developed capitalism, while maintaining exploitation, modifies the attitude and condition of the exploited. Within the technological whole, mechanized labor in which automatic and semi-automatic reactions fill most (if not all) of the working time remains, as a lifelong occupation, an exhausting, numbing, inhuman slavery — even more exhausting due to the increase in work speed, control of machine operators (instead of the product), and the isolation of workers from each other [...] "technology has replaced muscular fatigue with mental tension and(or) effort".

To understand about the workers' condition in France, Simone Weil (1996) worked for a year — between 1934 and 1935 — in a Renault factory. In the book *A condição operária e outros estudos sobre a opressão*, she writes about a condition considered to be very similar to that of servitude:

> In the end, this system contains the essence of what is today called rationalization. Egyptian foremen had whips to drive workers to produce; Taylor replaced the whip with offices and laboratories, under the guise of science. [...] Ford's rationalization consists not in working better, but in making people work more. In short, management discovered that there is a better way to exploit the workforce than by extending the working day (Weil, 1996, p. 145).

In the book The Anatomy of Work: Labor, Leisure, and the Implications of Automation, George Friedmann (1972) wrote about what Taylor desired: "What I ask of him," observed Taylor, "is not that he produces more on his own initiative, but that he executes the given orders (emphasis is Taylor's) down to the smallest detail'" (Friedmann, 1972, p. 134). For Taylor, the worker should behave like a gear component.

In the beginning of industrialization, one of the main changes is that of the relationship between worker and machine. Before, the artisan was free to adjust to the way of using the instruments according to what he found in the object for production. Then, there could be a control in the way Foucault (1987) referred to the

Disciplinary Society, but this was an external control. With the Industrial Revolution, who worked became an attachment of the machine, even when there was no machine at all, as was the case of cattle slaughter in Chicago — in the XIX century —, in which only machete and other simple tools were used. The extreme division of labor determined a series of precise gestures that each worker should execute; the gestures were internalized by the worker. With the Industrial Revolution, workers saw a significant reduction in their control over their actions. It is plausible to think about that as scientifically controlled servitude. In the book called Mechanization Takes Command, Siegfried Giedion (1978), mentioning the work after the Industrial Revolution, considers that:

> Never before has humanity possessed so many instruments to abolish slavery, yet the promises of a better life remain unfulfilled. What we can demonstrate to this day is a deeply disturbing inability to organize the world, and even to organize ourselves. Future generations may well label this period as an era of mechanized barbarism, perhaps the most repulsive form of all barbarisms[1] (Giedion, 1978, p. 714).

A technique that can exemplify the notion of progressive control is that of drawing and its history of representation change since the Middle Ages. The evolution of precision in technical drawings occurred gradually. Initially, these drawings merely conveyed the author's fundamental intentions, providing readers with ample room for interpretation and active participation in authorship. In the Renaissance, Brunelleschi introduced an innovation by anticipating his works through perspective visualization, thereby expanding the capacity for control over the process.

Throughout the 18th century, there was a gradual adoption of scales in technical drawings, and by the 19th century, representations became standardized, allowing for uniform interpretation by those familiar with standardized codes. From this point on, the insertion of subjectivity in interpreting drawings became practically impossible. Drawings became records of strict guidelines, transforming into directives to be strictly followed.

It's important to emphasize that the purpose of using technical drawings is not necessarily linked to the quality of the product, as corporate practices were rigorous and detailed. What impacts the trajectory of drawing is the unequal division of labor that separates creators from producers. This development leads to precision in drawings that does not tolerate unexpected modes of interpretation. Uncertainties are eliminated, and the presence of chance, a distinctive characteristic in medieval architecture, disappears.

At this point, it's interesting to address the utopian dimension that this text is taking. It may sound unrealistic to critique techniques and established action structures, such as technical drawing, for example. What I critique is based on very

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[1]   In the original: "Nunca ha poseído la humanidad tantos instrumentos para abolir la esclavitud, pero las promesas de una vida mejor no han sido mantenidas. Cuanto podemos mostrar hasta hoy es una incapacidad muy inquietante en cuanto organizar el mundo, e incluso como organizar a nosotros mismos. Es posible que las generaciones futuras designen a este período como una época de barbarie mecanizada, que es la más repulsiva de todas las barbaries."

consolidated practices, which leads to considering them realistic. The argument I can present in defense of what I'm proposing is: that thought that works solely based on what is immediate and standardized will always appear positive, but it won't be capable of dealing with contradictions. However, by acting this way, it closes itself off and doesn't allow itself to be disturbed, ceasing to be practical. Here, we can refer to Marcuse (1973, p. 173):

> But this radical acceptance of the empirical violates the empirical itself, because within it speaks the mutilated, "abstract" individual who only experiences (and expresses) what is given to them (given in the literal sense), who has access only to facts and not to factors, whose behavior is one-dimensional and manipulated. Due to real repression, the world experienced is the result of restricted experience, and the positivist cleansing of the mind aligns it with this restricted experience.

We become subjects through the recognition of the other. However, if we enslave the other, if we reduce them to the status of a mere thing, we equally lose our subjecthood due to the erasure of mutual gaze and recognition.

This structure that closes in on itself and is unaffected by what is external reduces everything to its own one-dimensionality and alienates itself from reality. Violence is subsumed by the technical structure. According to Theodor Adorno and Horkheimer (1985, p. 36-37):

> The more the process of self-preservation is ensured by the bourgeois division of labor, the more it forces the self-alienation of individuals, who must shape themselves in body and soul according to technical apparatus. [...] The technical process, in which the subject has objectified itself after the elimination of consciousness, is free from the plurality of mythical thought as well as from all significance in general, because reason itself has become a mere adjunct of the economic apparatus that encompasses everything.

THE OPAQUE WORLD

In the book entitled *Work and the Power to Act*, psychologist Yves Clot (2010) quotes Espinoza, for whom: "The effort to develop the power to act is inseparable from an effort to elevate, to the highest degree, the power to be affected" (Clot, 2010, p. 31). Clot also considers that healthy work is one in which the individual can have "experiences of contradiction" and, in encountering these, have the freedom to act. When faced with something unexpected, the individual needs to dissolve the habitual structure of actions and rearrange them in a new, perhaps more complex way.

Yves Clot (2010) discusses the "modular" and "hierarchical" nature of skill. According to him, skills are developed by incorporating previously acquired units of action into a broader unit, which then becomes part of a higher-level unit. A broader perspective, with a more comprehensive goal, takes control of the acts that form the new module. With a broader perspective, it is plausible to think that the potential radiative power of the activity increases.

Some habits offer the possibility of expressing subjectivity. According to Darcy Ribeiro (2012, p. 10), an Amerindian who crafted a basket in a village was both a

producer and a consumer. Therefore, they put great effort into making the object to be recognized by the community they were part of. In a preface to a book by Gui Bonsiepe (2012), Ribeiro wrote: "That basket weaver puts so much effort into making their basket because they know that they are entirely reflected in it" (Ribeiro, 2012, p. 10).

It's important to remember that a characteristic of slavery is the lack of control over one's own actions. Those in a state of enslavement cannot achieve recognition of their subjectivity through work. How would social recognition occur in today's society of control?

According to Donald Norman (2010), what is expected of good design is that "natural signs inform without disturbing, providing a continuous natural awareness, non-intrusive, non-irritating, of what happens around us (Norman, 2010, p. 56). Norman (2010) hopes that we won't have to think about dealing with devices. He expects that the changes brought by new technologies will be assimilated and become a habit without any disruption, without the contradictions that Yves Clot (2010) discusses.

Most of the time, the influence of technology alters our consciousness subliminally, without us realizing it. We have few defenses against the changes that technology imposes on our perception. Neuroscientist Eric Kandel (2009, p. 152) asserts that:

> Although experiences modify our perceptual and motor skills, they are virtually inaccessible to conscious recall. For instance, once a person learns to ride a bicycle, they simply do it... In fact, constant repetition can transform explicit memory into implicit memory. Learning to ride a bicycle initially involves our conscious attention to our body and the bike, but it eventually becomes a motor activity and unconscious. [...] Unconscious memories are generally inaccessible to consciousness, yet they still exert powerful effects on behavior.

Building on Norman's proposition (2010) and Kandel's observation (2009), we can deduce that technical devices can interfere with our behavior without us having the opportunity to reflect on the change itself. A technical change is an external change that is incorporated and becomes an internal change. After a certain period of living with a new technology, we alter how we react to certain events. For example, the mode of transportation that a person usually has available becomes a kind of capacity that defines a way of reacting to certain situations. As I become the owner of a car, the possibility of mobility that opens up with this condition is incorporated into my way of thinking. I start structuring my actions and my thoughts according to the possibilities that the car offers. However, from this condition of internalizing technical order, it is also possible to deduce that thinking becomes restricted to mechanisms limited by the habits associated with such devices.

António Damásio (2018) argues that subjectivity manifests more prominently when we interact with a pliable medium, one that allows for diverse approaches in the interpretation of events. He explores the influence of the medium's working time, highlighting this dynamic by comparing cinema and literature. Damásio (2018) suggests that when interacting with literature, our subjectivity is amplified because

we have the ability to impose a rhythm on the acquisition and mental translation of events. In his words, "we can give whatever rhythm we want to the acquisition and mental translation" (Damásio, 2018, p. 172). He emphatically concludes: "If you desire true freedom, choose literature" (Damásio, 2018, p. 172). This stance by Damásio (2018) seems to refer to the construction of consciousness and the freedom necessary to establish an enriching interaction with what we could call the external world.

In the book *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms: Language*, Ernst Cassirer (2001) explains the intrinsic connection between gestures, hands, words, and intellect. For Cassirer (2001), the fundamental role of movement and action in the structure of consciousness is evident, emphasizing that "all psychic reality consists of processes and transformations, whereas the fixation on states of consciousness represents a subsequent work of abstraction and analysis" (Cassirer, 2001, p. 176). Knowledge, therefore, demands anchoring and structuring through the codes of signs, but these codes must also possess the flexibility to be influenced by the uncoded. Memories of actions have the potential to become elements in the combination of ideas, contributing to the institution and expansion of concepts. Just as it occurs in the formation of subjectivity, the construction of meaning, the object of language, takes place in the dynamics and exchanges with the real. For Jean Piaget and Inhelder (1975, p. 15):

> ...it is not enough for such operative schemes to correspond to connections pre-registered in the surrounding language to ensure their immediate assimilation; their understanding and use, on the contrary, presuppose a structuring and even a series of restructurings resulting from logical mechanisms that are not transmitted just like that, but, in fact, necessarily rely on the activities of the subject.

However, in the factory, any manifestation not previously established, that is, those that can cause disturbances, is segregated from the processes. Those involved in the work have few opportunities to experience the process in the way that production is structured.

Vaucanson's loom[2] only required someone to turn a crank. The person operating it became an appendage of production, behaving like a mechanism. According to Vaucanson (Doyon; Liaigre, 1966 as cited in Jacomy, 2004, p. 48), the loom "is a machine with which a horse, an ox, a donkey produces fabrics much more beautiful and perfect than the most skilled silk artisans".

It is valid to assert that the aim embedded in the organization of work since the Industrial Revolution has been the eradication of contradictory experiences and the control of actions. One of the techniques that is significantly changing contemporary society is the accumulation of behavioral data. Large companies such as Google and Meta have access to vast amounts of data through smartphones. The idea is that, through behavioral analysis based on massive data accumulation, it becomes possible to have more certainty in the decisions made regarding a particular society and specific behaviors.

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2   Jacques Vaucanson, a French mechanic, created the first fully automated loom in 1745.

Various types of applications are being created to define what would be optimal for certain behaviors. For instance, there's BillGuard, which notifies us when we exceed a reasonable spending limit. Evgeny Morozov (2018) also discusses another app, Glow:

> Max Levchin, one of the founders of PayPal, aims to leverage machine learning and data mining to address healthcare issues. "Healthcare is a big informational problem that will benefit from data analytics and wearable sensors," he said while announcing Glow, an app designed to assist women in conceiving. Glow tracks a woman's sexual activity (including positions), menstrual cycles, and sends various alerts ("Fertile window starting!" or "Wow! You're ovulating!") (Morozov, 2018, p. 110).

Morozov (2018) is describing a condition of abdicating the need for reflection. For him, the path of action is already subsumed in the operational structure of digital interfaces.

Hannah Arendt (2008) already anticipated this condition. In an article from 1954, she discusses the impoverishment of our capacity for understanding, referring to the "loss of the pursuit of meaning and the need for comprehension" (Arendt, 2008, p. 340). She observes: "The degree to which clichés have permeated our language and daily discussions reveals how much we have deprived ourselves of discursive faculty" (Arendt, 2008, p. 331). The term "cliché," originating from printing techniques as a matrix for printing images and texts, has come to represent that which is repeated until it becomes predictable and compulsory. It seems that industrialization has overflowed, invading and standardizing our dialogues, compromising the authenticity of communication and the depth of understanding.

To say that clichés have permeated language is not a rhetorical statement; the gesturality of manuscript writing was initially replaced by the clichés of the typewriter. Thus, the connection with corporeality was lost, the individual gesturality of each writer was erased. Even the signature, which represented an embodiment of language unique to each person, is being replaced by passwords or biometric readings.

In 1964, Herbert Marcuse (1973) published the book *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. In one of its chapters titled "The Closing of the Universe of Discourse," he highlights the influence of the rationality of industrial society on language. When discussing the functionalization of language, Marcuse (1973) argues that in this administered form, concepts become synonymous with a specific set of operations, limited to inducing predictable and standardized behaviors. This reveals a technological reasoning that tends to categorize objects and their functions.

For Marcuse (1973), this type of reasoning not only indicates the functionality of things, but also defines them, restricting their meaning and excluding other possibilities of functioning. Thus, the ritualized concept would result in immunity against contradictions. He emphasizes that functional language is radically anti-historical, as the recollection of the past can trigger dangerous introspections, something that established society appears to fear given the subversive contents of memory.

This reduction of concepts to restricted sets of operations leads to the impoverishment of language and paves the way for mechanized thinking. Artificial Intelligence also relies on the massive apprehension of data. To develop texts, AI is based on the observation of relationships between words supported by an immense amount of texts. The model is exposed to large quantities of textual data and learns to predict the next word in a sequence of words. This helps the system simulate an understanding of the structure and relationships between words in different contexts.

Hannah Arendt (2008) wrote about the impoverishment of language related to the rationality of production:

> Here, the truth becomes what some logicians say it is, that is, simple coherence, with the caveat that this identification implies, in reality, the denial of the existence of the truth. This is because the truth is always supposed to reveal something, whereas coherence is merely a way of linking assertions and, as such, lacks the power of revelation (Arendt, 2008, p. 340).

Even in the production of AI, the exploitation of labor is present. A report by the English newspaper *The Guardian* states that in Nairobi, Kenya, people are employed to read texts with probable violent content (Rowe, 2023). They feed a kind of ethical consciousness into AI. These workers report having to read about 700 texts per day, are poorly paid, and live in constant fear of being fired at any moment. Many are suffering from psychological issues due to continuous exposure to violent content.

It is feasible to derive that the structure of servitude materialized in the machines of the Industrial Revolution has been subsumed into the technologies linked to the control society defined by Deleuze (1992). A positivist mindset fueled by massive quantities of data induces standardized behaviors determined as ideal.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the book *The Unnamable*, Samuel Beckett (1989) writes about a consciousness that only relates to itself and devours itself. He describes how self-reference, individuality, and the lack of the other are impoverishing. Words are born from action, and action demands the analysis of encounters that encompass various qualities, complexities, and distinctions between different affections. Even actions considered conscious are permeated by unspoken reactions, intertwining with an inner language, somatic reactions, noises, and even traumas. Words are like receptacles that encompass actions and attentions. The transition to languages occurs as a consequence of this involvement in a world of responses that are simultaneously habitual and potentially rich due to being engaged in various forms of action. Perceptions are structured based on learning and stories. These stories are integrated with the environments in which each individual lives. Geography, culture, time, and chance all influence the development of the interpretations we make of the world.

Currently, artificial intelligences are providing translations in such a way that two people speaking different languages can talk in real-time. The massive production of data leads us to a kind of meta-language that hovers absolutely above all

other languages, erasing differences, connotations, and histories. Heidegger (2003) mentions that in the book *Path to Language*:

> Currently, the target increasingly aimed at by scientific and philosophical investigation of languages is the production of what is called 'metalanguage'. Taking the production of this supra-language as a starting point, scientific philosophy consequently understands itself as metalinguistic. This sounds like metaphysics. In fact, it not only sounds like metaphysics, it is metaphysics. Metalinguistics is the metaphysics of the continuous technicization of all languages, aiming to turn them into mere instruments of information capable of functioning interplanetarily, that is, globally (Heidegger, 2003, p. 122).

Heidegger (2003) mentions that "we become aware of language 'where we do not find the right word to say what concerns us, what provokes us, oppresses us, or excites us" (Heidegger, 2003, p. 123). It is possible to say that technical means dominate our actions and the way we communicate so much that they no longer leave room for us to have the experience of lacking words. For current information technologies, there will always be an exact word for every situation.

How to get out of this "iron cage"?

For Achille Mbembe (2020, p. 211), "We will need a language that incessantly penetrates, drills, and excavates like a drill, capable of becoming a projectile, a kind of absolute solid, of a will that ceaselessly probes the real".

In a conversation in the *podcast* Sentipensante (2021), the University of North Carolina professor Lesley-Ann Noel said that she visited a series of places that are not normally served by designers. Places comparable with Vila Cruzeiro, mentioned in the beginning of this article as a peripheral place to the system of recognition of citizenship. During these visits, she concluded there is no method that can handle, at first, how the approximation of the designer with any community should be. The notion of a neutral subject, capable of absolute distancing regarding the object, is ideological. To escape from this, dialogues require the "communication of the differentiated". For Theodor Adorno (2009, p. 126-127):

> Dialectics is not a method at all: for the reconciled thing, which precisely lacks the identity that thought substitutes, is full of contradictions and opposes every attempt to interpret it in a univocal manner. It is the thing itself, and not the impulse toward organization proper to thought, that provokes dialectics.

An example of what I'm talking about is the German architect Anna Heringer (2021), who works with impoverished communities and has a philosophy of using existing resources in the places where she builds. She extensively uses clay — an abundant material that does not harm the environment. She considers that if the building is dismantled, it will be possible to plant with the leftovers. Additionally, she aims to employ local labor to ensure that resources remain within the community itself.

From this example, we can return to the beginning of the text and observe that working with straw, understanding the ways in which the material can be

crafted, looking at what is at hand can be a very rich way to promote integration between design and communities typically not served by disciplines bound to ready-made solutions.

If the field of Design wishes to maintain a relationship with the new, it necessarily has to deal with differences among the various fields of knowledge with which it engages. Only those who perceive the contradictions imposed by the various fields of thought on the object can achieve the new. For this, an external position to these established disciplines is necessary. That order that the subject imposed on the object is something external to it. To address this violence, paradoxical as it may seem, criticism must also be made from outside, from a place external to the various fields of knowledge, where we can perceive the particular, the unique, that which is not reducible to a rule. For Simone Weil (1996, p. 113):

> ...what matters in a human life are not the events that dominate the course of years — or even months — or even days. It is the way in which one minute is linked to the next, and what each minute costs, in one's body, in one's heart, in one's soul — and above all, in the exercise of one's faculty of attention — to achieve this linking minute by minute.

Weil (1996) talks about modes of action that are not completely determined — she even states that 'the same machine should have multiple, very varied uses, if possible, and even, to a certain extent, indeterminate' (Weil, 1996, p. 424). This indeterminacy, the lack of ultra-stability, can enhance our capacity for attention. I think that because design is a field where various knowledges come together for the creation of a new object, it can explicitly highlight the limits of each discipline. When I refer to the new, it is not the novelty that market procedures impose daily. New presupposes difference, something not determined by processes aimed at pure repetition of controlled phenomena. This is a field where design needs to work, where the perspective of each science appears partial, and where we must establish ephemeral methodologies in a place of conflict that always eludes definition.

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About the author

Mário Furtado Fontanive: PhD in Theory, History and Art Criticism Instituto de Artes of Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul.

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