Against the abstract connectionism: a reply to André Lemos

Contra o conexionismo abstrato: réplica a André Lemos

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ABSTRACT
André Lemos has published an article in this journal in which he attempts to invalidate the epistemic claims of critical thinking about technology and cyberculture, accusing it of essentialism. This article challenges this judgment, drawing attention to three types of issues. The first is a lack of academic references and, with this, of a deeper and well-informed understanding about what is proper to critical reason. The second is the author's performative contradiction of questioning the critique using the same line of thought that he opposes to instead of the one he advocates. The third is an uncritical endorsement of ideas that, separated from the research practice that can developed from them, promote a crude hyper-empiricism of little epistemic content.
Keywords: André Lemos, critical reason, actor-network theory

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RESUMO
André Lemos atacou em número anterior desta revista as pretensões epistêmicas do pensamento crítico a respeito da técnica e da cibercultura, acusando-o de essencialista. O presente artigo contesta esse juízo, chamando atenção para três tipos de problemas. O primeiro é a carência de erudição e a falta de um entendimento mais profundo e esclarecido acerca do que é próprio da razão crítica. O segundo é a contradição performativa que o artigo incide ao jogar contra a crítica a linha de raciocínio à qual se opõe em vez da que preconiza. O terceiro é o endosso acrítico de uma corrente de ideias que, separando-se da prática de pesquisa que pode desenvolver, promove abstratamente um hiperempirismo de pouco alcance epistêmico.
Palavras-chave: André Lemos, razão crítica, teoria ator-rede

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I N THE PREVIOUS ISSUE of this journal, André Lemos attacks the critique of the technique he calls essentialist, to point its abuses and, above all, the little epistemic scope, in the moment it is used to address the *digital culture* that he himself addresses in his works. According to the colleague, in the case, we are before a notoriously mistaken manner of analyzing the subject and that, therefore, must be set aside in favor of another, more enlightened and productive, such as, according to him, the actor-network *theory* of Bruno Latour.

We appreciate the author, especially as a person, and admire him as, perhaps, the main researcher of the digital media phenomena in Brazil. However, does his analysis, in the aforementioned article, accomplish the purpose? We think it does not, as will be argued hereafter.

Lemos (2015) argues against the theoricist and generic approach to cyberculture, but in fact his article has a more specific scope, focusing fire on the essentialist critique of the technique, if not in the figure of critique itself, since – although he uses the term in the title of the article and, therein, slightly references the propagandistic discourse opposed to it and to which he himself contributed in his collaboration with Pierre Lévy (Lemos; Lévy, 2012) – it is that figure, the critique, that the author attacks and concerning which establishes his cause in the field of media and cyberculture studies.

Authors such as Morozov, Keen and Lanier enter the argument just as contemporary sectoral examples of a line of thought that has been established much longer, as he makes clear, tracing its origins back to Plato and Aristotle, and which had already had a marked influence on media studies, via the Frankfurt School, also mentioned by our colleague in "A crítica da crítica essencialista da cibercultura" ["The critique of the essentialist critique of cyberculture"].

Based on Latour, he affirms that, as enthusiasts, the critics of technique and cyberculture blot or treat rushedly the reality of the sociotechnical networks and the variety of their actors, to, dichotomously, address the subject in a single block and postulate abstractly its meaning in substantialist terms (Lemos, 2015: 46). To that author, let us remember, the critique leads us to a bad way, by taking us away from the facts, rather than getting us closer to them: it prevents us from giving new life to an empiricism with which we could free ourselves from the modern epistemology and its dichotomies (Latour, 2004).

André Lemos endorses this point of view; he goes advantageously beyond, however, pointing out some of those who are guilty for this error and commenting on their theses, as all this would present in the fields that study the technique and cyberculture. In the article cited, Latour presents his arguments against the critique, making reference to it in the caricature eventually

borrowed from Jean Baudrillard. He has a hostile reaction to the illusion of common sense denounced by Bourdieu, but, as far as we know, he does not analyze his writings. He ridicules the thesis of power as recycler of capitalism, but does not examine the arguments and evidence of Chiapello and Boltanski (Latour, 2004).

Lemos does not only generically accuse the "critical barbarism", as the other says, of those facing technology intellectually, glossing ideas with greater variety and detail. To Heidegger, for example, is attributed the prominence given to the essentialist conception of the technique and its identification as a way of unveiling the man in the world. The technique would be the essence of modern times. Science, its hidden engine. The whole process is a threat to nature and, thus, to our future, renewing the prospect of subjugation of the first that would have started with the Greeks.

In Jacques Ellul, the sin would be the corroboration of the Heideggerian thesis, in the sense that, it is affirmed the creation, by the technique, of a world in which, instead of man, the technique tends to occupy the dominant position. Either in one or the other, Lemos comments, man would be isolated and put in the situation of victim. His enslavement and casting into decay by a technology that if not born, became infernal, is mistakenly denounced. Writing in defense, both introduce us man as a value to be preserved from the danger that the advancement of technique would represent.

The Frankfurt School also appears in the article, serving to bring the argument developed in it to the field of communication. The exposition of the respective ideas follows the convention: that school created theories that focus on the capacity of manipulating the masses through media artifacts and systems. Their power would have, in their view, contributed to the formation "a society dominated by cultural homogeneity, by the flattening of values by commodification of culture and the trivialization of communicational exchanges" (Lemos, 2015: 36).

Although possibly relevant, the author tells us, these critical views are ultimately, "beliefs" that ignore the "true reality" (Ibid.: 44), "crude simplification", which failed dismally, in postulating an essence of negative sign for technology and its influence on culture (Ibid.: 37). They all failed by not seeing that the technique exists only in association with other factors, it is a vector of transformations, instead of an entity of single and linear meaning, be it repressive or emancipating. Theories that confer a single and, therefore, substantial sense to the technique and the media are mistaken, in addressing lightly "the deviations and the real associations which are put into practice in mediations exactly between the media, technology and culture" (Lemos, 2015: 37).

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Cyberculture theorists would follow the same line, in reducing the plurality of phenomena and the erratic movement of the rhizome in which technology happens by a single factor and in a single sense. The variety of sociotechnical networks and their multiple action plans is something that typically eludes their attention, as they are blinded by a theoretical bias that rusted (Lemos, 2015: 39). The spokesmen renew, but in their discourse all would have been given beforehand by the essential nature of the artifacts: none of their theories deals specifically with the phenomena and their articulations, due to the global and unilateral approach.

To remove us from this quagmire, overcome the postulation of substances, including the games with their dichotomous oppositions, however, we have at hand the actor-network theory, in which the social, rather than its supposed essence, emerges from the connection between various types of entities, from their hybridity. Notwithstanding, we can set aside the pure and simple decision of the subject as well as the supposed logic that transcends it, postulated by the view of the matter according to modern thinkers. Instead, from the point of view of that first theory, it concerns following the trail and observing the connections between the data that are revealed to the experience. Only then we will know "what really happens in the associations between humans and non-humans" (Ibid.: 40) that, in fact, define the field of technology and cyberculture.

Social life, rather than a totality structured in levels with a dominant, is a process of assembling and reassembling of situations involving human and non-human actors; it is a network of heterogeneous connections, in which the technique presents itself specifically and erratically, each time differently (Ibid.: 42). The critical view transgresses by hiding it, in purifying the process by establishing discourses of a single sense about it, which separate it from immediate data. The power that the technique assumes, whether positive or negative, only takes place in this discourse, because, even if hidden, it, the technique, is always merged, hybridized with the rest, connecting the social pluralistically. The *Homo faber* on behalf of which, for good or bad, the essentialists weave a discourse and to which abstractly bind the technique and its power is not its subject nor object, but a rhetoric illusion that hides the zigzag forming the social (Ibid.: 42-43).

Apparently, all this sounds convincing, but is it really? According to Lemos, the sin of the critique, briefly, would reside in its empirical deficit, it would be in the fact that, with it, "we lose the possibility of describing the associations that empirically compose the social" (Lemos, 2015: 30). That this is the case most of the time, we do not question. It turns out that one has to ask if what Lemos impugns concerning them was the objective of their spokesmen

and what can and should be expected from the critical reflection as such, not to mention the pure and simple philosophy of the technique or of the rushed essayism about cyberculture. That one or another of the thinkers cited in his text may have declared what the author claims is something that can be researched in documents, on a case-by-case basis.

Adorno wrote monographs in which, regardless of the merit contained in the results, he analyzes in detail a NBC radio program (Adorno, 2008: 163-215) and the horoscope column of the Los Angeles Times (Adorno, [1957] 2009), not limited to illustrating his theories. In general, we could affirm, however, that this is not the case for most technology critique, for the simple reason that, as a rule, its subjects are philosophers or thinkers (see Cooper, 2002). Jacques Ellul, often quoted in the text, is one of the thinkers who exemplified his own theses the most – but his works should not be taken as historical monographs or reports of social research on the subject (see Ellul, [1954] 1968, 1962).

We mean by this that there is an unbridgeable chasm separating the critical activity from the various sectors of experience, or that an enormous wall protects it from any and all objections that might come from another type of discourse aspiring to know? Certainly not. It means that the commentator in focus errs in presenting what is proper of this activity and, thus, is not only mistaken in judging the status of the critique in the media and cyberculture studies, but develops a practical and theoretical misunderstanding concerning the very task undertaken in his article and, perhaps, in his research.

André Lemos may have not noticed, but he presents a very poor – if not mistaken – understanding concerning the nature of the critique, in its most ambitious and demanding historical and philosophical proposition, mistaking it with opposition. In his article, the term is framed in the philosophy of values and treated as a sort of partisanship, given its opposition to the discourse of technophiles. Apparently, there is in the text a complete ignorance of what is most particular of this tradition of thought, beginning with Kant, encompassing Marx and finally the Frankfurt School and Foucault, to mention only its greatest reflective milestones (see Foucault 1997; Benhabib,1986; Honneth, 1991; Vandenberghe, 1997).

That the critical activity, often times, understands itself poorly and goes beyond its limits, assuming a total, essentialist character, which deprives it of its very basis, is not discussed, we agree – but this is examined case by case, and not by lumping together indiscriminately a handful of very diverse thinkers and philosophers without a detailed documental analysis of and due foundation on the specialized literature. Who knows if the separation, for the technique, of an essential and decisive space, whose axiological sign is nega-

tive, applies to Ellul, but is valid, let us say, for Adorno? Considering the references to the term in *The capital*, would it be valid for Marx, the denounce of his substantialist treatment?

Failing to proceed with this care, the opponent of essentialism succumbs to another, in which the entire history of criticism is, by summary order, monochromatically reduced to a single and substantial principle, as the critique would supposedly do with concepts such as domination or cultural industry. The worst, however, is observed at the moment when the critique of the metaphysical essentialism of the philosophy of technique and theories of cyberculture, rather than applying the principles of research that are professed, contrasts to them abstractly a metaphysics of the diverse and unique even more empty and indeterminate.

Blinded by admiration, my colleague does not notice the trap in which Latour fell in *Reassembling the social* ([2005] 2012) and, more recently, in *An inquiry into modes of existence* ([2012] 2013), in systematizing in discourse a method justified by the results of research and analysis of materials, if not, which is the case of the second text, outlining a system of concepts that, stipulating the modes of existence and their possibilities of combination inevitably leads to ontology – the opposite of the critique in Adorno, the building whose destruction is taken as a task by Heidegger.

In the case of knowledge, let us observe, it is appropriate to distinguish between the work of theoretical reflection upon experience transmitted and elaborated from the work of research and analysis with new and original matter, even though we should not ignore its transitions and dialectic. The syntheses between them only represent a breakthrough when one goes beyond the application of the first in the second and results are obtained that matter as for difference with regard the known.

Certainly, theories and perspectives can be confronted, criticized abstractly concerning their limits and inconsistencies, as we are doing in this retort – but that is, at most, a reflective mediation of an activity which, from the viewpoint of totalization of knowledge, is only truly decided in the practice of research aimed at the new and, therefore, facing the unknown.

Bruno Latour gives us example of that in at least three important works: Laboratory life; Aramis, or the love of technology; and Pasteur: guerre et paix des microbes (Latour, Woolgar [1986] 1997; Latour [1993] 1996; 2001); and not in his treatises of metaphysics, very poorly disguised as theoretical and epistemological reflection (Latour, 2012; 2013). Reason is in the presence, in those first ones, of specific analyses and results that, because of that, can be confronted and discussed in reference to data and documentation whose ac-

cess is public, the extension can be checked and nobody has sovereignty -unlike the other texts cited.

However, contrary to what is suggested in the article under analysis, this property is not a privilege or advantage of the studies that use the so-called Actor-Network Theory (ANT). Richard Barbrook (2009) and Thomas Streeter (2010) in the field of cybercultural studies, as David Noble (1984) and David Gartman (1999) in the field of technology studies, just to name a few examples, show that, despite the philosophical status, the critique is also able to intervene creatively in historical and sociological research, regardless of the assessment that can be conducted concerning the results.

Our colleague addresses it lightly and, thus, conveys to the reader an account at least misleading of what he is treating, by suggesting that, while the actor-network approach would be, in itself, complex, differentiated and open, the critique would inevitably transgress by repeating a linear, monotonous, and hidebound discourse. They ignore that the concepts of network and actant are not formally more dense and varied than those of subject and capital, although these still have a historical and, perhaps, ontological weight much greater on the current episteme.

In the article, the intention is to assert the superiority of a sociological empiricism over the criticism cunningly reduced to its reflective interface. The main argument employed against the point of view confronted is, however, paradoxically abstract and philosophical. Instead, being possible, in subjecting the critique to analysis in terms of the actor-network scheme, as would be coherent, the worst methods of that first one are adopted to try to invalidate it.

The result is a performative contradiction, the attack on the critique by employing the argumentative procedures that negatively characterize it. It is said that the critique of culture and the philosophy of technique are, no matter the bias, essentialist. The analytical principles of the actor-network scheme, however, do not intervene in the analysis. The whole account is characterized by the more traditional philosophical exposition, as becomes increasingly clear at every step taken in reading the article.

To the barbarism of a critical theory that supposedly died without knowing an accusatory and programmatic rhetoric is opposed, whose problems are also reflected in the exposition of ideas in the article. Lemos, for example, deals with Heidegger as essentialist, similarly to the neo-Marxist Feenberg (1999: 183-199). One and the other, however, treat lightly the fact that, in the work of that thinker, essence is understood as sense, and sense is not synonymous with content, but the very being of the multiple entities that enter the world. To him, let us remember, "philosophy and worldview are absolutely

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incomparable", since the first understands "as foundation of the truth of the being one's very origin; one must always recover oneself from that on which one is founded and build solely from there [that is: the being]" (Heidegger, [1936/1938-1989] 2003: 48).

In Heidegger, Ge-Stell is not a mere entity, but a name given to an interpellation of existence. That it arises from the being is something that we discuss in our book on the subject (Rüdiger 2014). However, to argue, we do not need to go that far. We just have to remember that Heidegger speaks based on the history of the being, instead of assuming the discourse of one or another entity, and, therefore, it is preposterous to accuse him of essentialist, at least in the way our colleague does, that is, as substance. Unless, of course, if there is something without being…

Maybe André Lemos has a hidden thesis, that Heidegger is not critical of metaphysics, which the philosopher took as a cause to destroy reflexively, but a greater metaphysical, who surpassed all the others. It would be interesting to know and discuss this thesis, but, until it is revealed, it is advisable to conserve what is established. Heidegger always remarked that, in his writings, he was not talking about technique, but about how the technique came to be a force forming the world and object of discourse, including in the writings of the author on which we are commenting.

About the scarecrow of the early 1980s that he calls into question with the name of Frankfurt School, we believe any comment to be unnecessary. The lack of information about the specialized literature emerged since then[1] speaks for itself about a topic that would not even have to be in the article to keep it standing, even though riddled with problems.

For Lemos, the alternative to the essentialist understanding of technique, which sees it as isolated factor of causal nature, is to work it as mediation, regarding which any reasonable dialectical thinker will agree, but, in this case, the sense of the term is another. Based on the Latourian view that it implies, mediation means a "movement of composition of humans and non-humans, in which subject and object mutually compose themselves" (Lemos, 2015: 30). Who does not see, however, that this, as others we will point out, is an essentially abstract and substantialist statement?

Latour (2012) tells us that the ANT aims to put aside the dramatic and ideological concepts, to study how human and non-human actants are placed and remade locally, through the reconstruction of movements that cut and paste them from one point to another. The quest for the sense of all this, whether by categorical abstraction or by invoking one or more subjects, took us away from its knowledge, by reducing its complexity. Therefore, now would

1. See, only as examples, Cook, 1996; Paddison 1996; Apostolidis, 2000; Witkin 2003; Prokop, 2003; Rüdiger 2004; Gunster 2004; Jenemann, 2007; Hiver, 2010; Hullot-Kentor, 2010; Voirol, 2011; Quartana, 2011.

be the time to explore or describe in detail how the world forms and unforms, to treat everything possible as agency.

For us, the result of this discourse is the creation of a new metaphysics, in which everything is translation and is always irreducible; in which the entities merely connect, to be again projected, as we can well appreciate in the second part, constructive, of the article of André Lemos. The author desires to escape the generalizing and reducing visions denounced by him in the first, invoking a connectionism between human and non-human actors that, regardless of intentions, however, reifies these categories, by working them as data, instead of following them historically and hermeneutically in its being, as it is revealed through language.

Intoxicated by a subservient reading of the writings of Latour, the author does not perceive that not even what is or is not human is something clear beforehand and, therefore, cannot be reported objectively as data between things, an actor among others, needing to be followed historically not only in its connection but above all in its being, as it is a function of the history of the latter, as taught by Heidegger.

Alberto Magno, convinced of being successor of Adam, created in the image and likeness of God, considered the Pygmies, who did not see themselves as humans, an animal species. Charles White, a man of the Enlightenment, attributed such a difference to the Hottentots that "considered them more closely related to apes". In the 19th century, the indigenous Australians were considered tailless monkeys by many, and killing them was not a crime. For the Nazis, the Jews were subhumans, because not everyone who appears to be human are humans, according to them, though their victims were certain they had such condition, although attributed by a god Almighty. The allies went on to fight the Nazis without mercy or clemency, accusing them of being inhumane, although the Nazis considered themselves scientifically at the top of or, perhaps, beyond humanity (Übermensch) (see Fernandez-Armesto, 2007; Livingstone, 2011).

The author thinks that, researching the objective and specific connections that weave the social network, one can "escape the generalist and ineffective visions that make expendable, incredible as it seems when it comes to human sciences, the views as to relations, to the traces of the actions under consideration" (Lemos, 2015: 44). After all, whenever we start from the premise that everything would be given in the essences, in substance, little would be left to discover in what is actually happening in the associations. Only by revealing these latter we would advance in knowledge.

Let us answer the question by the way the social forms, reproduces and transforms reporting how everything that we can find ahead relates to ev-

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2. See different axes applicable to the issue at hand in this article in, for example, Steinert (2003) and Lovink (2012). Broader discussion on the situation and perspectives of the critique are found in Eagleton (1991), McCarthy and Hoy (1994), Trivinho (2001) and Boltanski (2009).
3. Latour reports that, ten times a day, for 20 years, he was forced, due to a failure in the design of his desk, to being only able to open a drawer if the other two were carefully and completely closed. The example is an attempt to illustrate the thesis that objects have a moral: "I was 'forced' to obey the inconvenient moral law, since I was not 'allowed' to leave the three drawers open at the same time" (Latour, 2002: 255). To the chair on which he sat as he did it, he should apologize for pushing its back, or thank it for the opportunity of resting his body, if not both at the same time? During childhood, we tend to give human intentionality to that which later, if our education is secular and rational, shows to be otherwise, less anthropomorphic. The fact that the pace of modern life and the profusion of objects that life, sustained by the technique and the capital, makes available to us lead us, despite the publicity, to lose sight of its uniqueness and differences is accepted. That fools claim to have the power of rescuing them with the preaching based on examples taken from conversations while drinking in a pub is a sign of the stupidity that pervades a significant part of the Humanities nowadays, as can be observed in the response given by some of their spokesmen to the critique – usually scathing – that to their mystifications addressed Alain Sokal and Jean Bricmond.

erything else; that is, following the trail of connections, despite what it can mean to the participants or to the ideal community to which the investigator is headed – it seems something doable and that can, to some audience, have its interest, though not free of issues.

In the case, occurs, however, the recollection that traces and associations are, in principle, open to endless description, though they can be determined at every moment. Whence arises not only the problem to know with what criteria one can assess the property and relevance of those that are identified but, especially, why should one prefer this errant and unlimited empiricism instead of an hermeneutics able to lead the experiments and materials under analysis to dialogue with a broader and more meaningful reflection theme according to the researcher's point of view[2].

Choosing doctrinally the first alternative, instead of showing knowledge in the field of Cyberculture studies with the indication of case studies well informed by empirical research or broad and detailed history, the author recommends a line of study that can succumb into truism and, among its originators, sometimes comes close to a compliment of idiocy, under the pretext of introducing humor in the argument[3].

Of the epistemic irrelevance that the actor-network scheme can assume, we have the author's example in his latest book, in the chapter with the analysis of the role of social networks and digital communication apparatus in the so-called Arab Spring. The conclusion is that, although it was not a revolution caused by them, nor was it a revolution in which these actant were absent: "It is a revolution in which the media and social networks had the roles of mediators, translators, actants, important for the associations that conducted it. They did not extend it, they mediated and translated it" (Lemos, 2012: 172).

It is convenient to ask, however, if not just them, but everything that can be cited regarding the case – cars, clothes, watches, water bottles, etc. -, do not also have the same role, that is, as actants, translators and mediators in any other event at their time. That, of course, it is not the same mode in each case, means that they always matter and should be tracked, or it is decided amidst open reflection about their influence on the event, the relevance that attributed to them the subjects and the objectives and study questions of the researcher?

Pascal attributed the end of the Roman Republic to the nose of Cleopatra, that seduced Marcus Antonius, without arousing the senses of Augustus. It was considered a breakthrough in the knowledge when it started to be explained, for example, by the inability of the aristocracy in transferring to itself the popular support that, with demagogy, had conquered the Caesarism. It is known, straight to the point, that the handling of a telegram precipitated the

Franco-Prussian War of 1870. What is the weight and relevance that should be given to it, when it comes to analyzing this last event?

Wehler (1985) addresses the fact lightly, situating the war, among other aspects, in relation to the project of national economic and political power that articulated unevenly the interests of the junkers, industrial businessmen and factory workers in an international context marked by the imperialist competition. Latour and his advocates would analyze the route that the telegrams followed, the methods for transmitting the papers, the way words were abbreviated, the errors of the system, the manuals for translation of German into French used by the Havas Agency, the precision with which the document was cut by the scissors of Bismarck, the way the information reached the troops and the people, etc.

Could it be that the Humanities despise the objects subject to objective description in favor of substantialist abstractions or, in the most enlightened examples, moved to issues that, at their time and under conditions which not chosen, proved to be more meaningful to their subjects? Marx spoke broadly and ostensibly about the money, the currency, its scriptural records in banks, companies and offices, emphasizing, however, its character of immediate and objective mediation of capital, in his conceptual analysis of the various forms and contradictions, movements and reactions of modern economics. In relation to it, Latour would describe the processes of designing and manufacturing currency paper, the reconnections that imply the collection and distribution of bills, the way the bills reach the pockets of workers, of the spaces intended for each one in the drawer of the cash register and how they return or not to banks[4].

With not much importance as to disadvantage, we can – logically – choose one or another means of reporting, according to that to which we want to call attention with the rationally-oriented empirical or documentary research[5]. Based on this point of view, which can be demanded from its practitioners, whenever there is responsibility, its activity is only maintaining consistency of reasoning and managing proofs, as taught by Max Weber ([1922] 1973).

He one also knew, however, about the demonic character of existence and that, because of it, the scientific rationalism is usually merged with various other influences. In our context, it means that, although logically they have the same value, the epistemic options chosen by us will always be reason for dispute and will suffer the interference of circumstances in which we are stuck.

A question decided by the correlation of forces of those involved in the discussion? Yes, but only in part. There will always be those who, without bad conscience, will season and modify it with the force of argument. Taking this principle into account, there remains what to say about the article under consideration.

4. Even if we do well in calling the attention of the reflective consciousness of philosophers and social scientists to the obvious, i.e., that our activities and relationships are structured by material conditions that escape our choice and are supported by the intermediation of all kinds of objects, starting with the body itself, it is noteworthy that their analysis is not in any way something new, not needing to be restricted to the Marxist school to document it. In historical studies, it is present since, at least, Max Weber, as indicated by his *Roman agrarian history* (1891).

5. Langdon Winner outlines a synthesis between Marxism as a theory of class struggle and the constructivist bias that echoes in the early writings of Latour in *Do artifacts have politics?* (Winner, 1986). The problems he finds in that bias are examined by him in *Social constructivism: Opening the blackbox and finding it empty* (Winner, 1993). Philip Brey evaluates and counters his critiques and objections from the point of view questioned in *Social Constructivism for Philosophers of Technology* ([1997] 2009).

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The proposal presented in it is, in short, to relaunch the media and cyber-culture studies valuing the variety of experience and the richness of its connections, but what is delivered is a new discourse of method, totally abstract and formal, which, If I am not mistaken, would apply to any and all situations[6]. The possibilities of revelation that it would have dissolve in the exposition of a game of metaphysical categories, in which the singular experience, necessarily mediated by tradition, instead of well-determined critical reflection, is replaced by the methodological formula.

To us, this means the emergence of a new metaphysics, in which transformation can replace the figure of the becoming, the trajectory is synonymous to the subject, and the network can be a supreme entity. The metaphysics of immutable essences, of substantialist character, is sidelined by another, formalist (methodological), in which a world is affirmed where there is nothing but "adjustments, corrections, appropriations, deviations, bends and couplings" (Lemos, 2015: 45).

The researcher who employs the actor-network scheme wishes to reveal to us the richness and variety of his topics of study, escape the essentialism that simplifies and reduces them to a single signification. The lack of empirically well-determined provisions implies, however, that instead of a heuristic repertoire, there is, in the article, a new form of transcendental knowledge. After being of service to the specialized research, the concepts that were articulated in it or, even, emerged from it, coalesce in an abstract system, into which every situation can, without much effort, be inserted.

The route prescribed encompasses all directions, the map designed provides for no limits, since, in the context, everything can be connected to the rest, there seems to be nothing that cannot turn into something else. "The translation (another name for mediation) is an interesting methodological resource for always resulting in transformation of the actors in a given association" (Lemos, 2015: 44, emphasis added).

With his text, Lemos wants to help us shun the essentialist circle of the critique. In lacking criticism, however, he embraces metaphysics obliviously. In his article, the term network summarizes a category complex that works as a replacement for the ancient concept of nature. There was, perhaps, a fiction that convinced us to think one could postulate essences to the existing. Now, there is another, with similar intent, inspired by the Deleuzian rhizome and according to which we have to think of an "ontology of beings" (Lemos, 2015: 41).

Based on it, let us follow, the intention is to take from the technique the substantiality that it would have amongst the advocates of an essentialist vision which, we saw, would cross the Western story, but was never able to positively define it. According to Lemos, in short, the time has come to "emptying

6. Examples thereof are not lacking in the text under analysis, as evidenced by this excerpt: "The disconnection is that which *leads to do*, which mobilizes the action plans and causes the transformations in space, in time and in the types of actors (actants mobilizing metamorphoses and reproductions)" (Lemos, 2015: 46). The word *disconnection* (*desengate* in Portuguese) can be replaced, with no loss of meaning for the phrase, by a very large range of nouns, abstract or concrete, it makes no difference, the reader must only test it.

the beings of technique of their reality" (Ibid.: 43). The alternative proposed to treat the subject, however, does not seem better to us. Supported by the doctrines of his guru (Latour, 2012), our colleague takes advantage of the repertoire of modes of existence which that one took from nowhere to convert the technique into an abstract and transcendental category, which manifests empirically in multiple *beings*.

It means that the technique becomes real through others, if it is not a vector of its transformations.

> Thus, the technique cannot be designated as an object, a thing, a device. Rather, it is a trajectory of the *being while another*, it is always a transformation of a being into another. Every object is only a temporary mark of a trajectory (Lemos, 2015: 44, emphasis in the original).

Which changes are in hypothesis determined by it, however, is not known, and thus it, the technique, can, in theory, be arbitrary and abstractly invoked in all, even because, except for the judgement or argument constructed ad hoc by the researcher, nothing determines or identifies it as such. Desiring to shun the substantialism in relation to the theme, one falls into its abstract and empty definition as a mode of existence that no one, except for the will of the creator of the idea, knows where it came from and what justifies it – as occurs in relation to other topics in the article under discussion.

At one point, for example, it is stated that the technique "is the result of a movement that takes from the inert and living a moment of metamorphosis and reproduction and persists in the transformation" (Ibid.: 45). Nevertheless, what kind of argument is this? How does one know all this? Is there something more than an arbitrary definition? What justification can he have? Is it positive to defend the empiricism by renewing the speculative and abstract discourse? The proposition is clearly not originated from the objective research that the text so much advocates, nor from the elaboration of any objectively determined historical assumption.

If he had read Adorno instead of repeating clichés and stereotypes about his work, reflected with the Canon of good critique instead of mechanically and abstractly counteracting criticism and empirical data, Lemos would realize that the substantialist and simplifying critique is no mere object of his article, but an aspect which is intrinsic to the construction of the same, since, without mediation, the author contrasts in block the ANT to all the other lines of study of technique and cyberculture, to point out the successes of the first and only the errors of the second.

The colleague wants to criticize the essentialism, but considering the lack of dialectics mediated by self-reflection, it is observed in his text that the modern binarism denounced by him is even present in his own reasoning. The critique that he stirs to contest the substantialism of others is blind to the dependency of his procedure in relation to the dichotomies on which that substantialism is based. The contest of the subject does not take advantage of the reference that is proclaimed as being the most advantageous but, rather, of the means that the first, as understood, seems to have transmitted to it.

Thus, it is no surprise that, as it progresses from the accusatory to the propositional section, the text re-inserts in the approach that it intends to defend the substantialism which it intended to discard. We point out, among so many, just two evidences of that. It is affirmed that "the sociotechnical networks are forms of describing the heterogeneity of the material devices we have available in each situation" (Lemos, 2015: 41). In another point, the words of Latour are resorted to: "The techniques have meanings, but they produce such meanings through a special means of articulation that crosses the boundaries of common sense between signs and things" (Ibid.: 44). What statute has these statements, if not the essentialist?

Furthermore, the author argues against the essentialism from critics, accusing them of promoting a "gross simplification of reality", without noticing that, this way, not just he claims the privilege of having access to it, but assumes the position of universal demiurge, who already knows what it is beforehand, defining it as "a set that is stabilized based on mediation, translation, network, black box, delegation, inscription, deviation" (Ibid.: 42). It can be said that this definition, as the ones mentioned just above, is purely methodological, but then the question for the conditions of its own genesis is irrelevant, since it is all arbitrary artifice, devised solely for the purpose of specific study – and all generic cause that is constructed on the argument will be taken, as a matter of principle, as unsustainable.

Someone thinks he may have found the key to the real and now thinks he can manage it in a free and sovereign manner, to give us its true knowledge. Everything acts since they are, at least potentially, connectable. Nothing else escapes the sociotechnical networks, since nobody knows anymore what would not be actant. Instead of essences, it is affirmed that there are only hybrids (Lemos, 2015: 41). It turns out that if everything is hybrid, hybrid is the name of the being; the essences are illusion; and, thus, we are back to metaphysics. Again it is time, where there is force, to actuate the critique. M

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